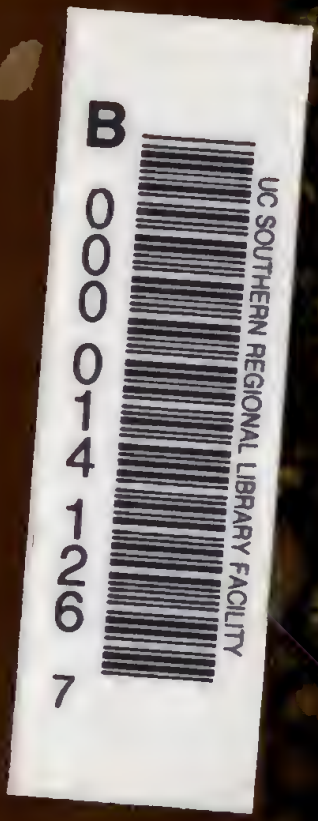

THE STILLWATER TRAGEDY.

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BY

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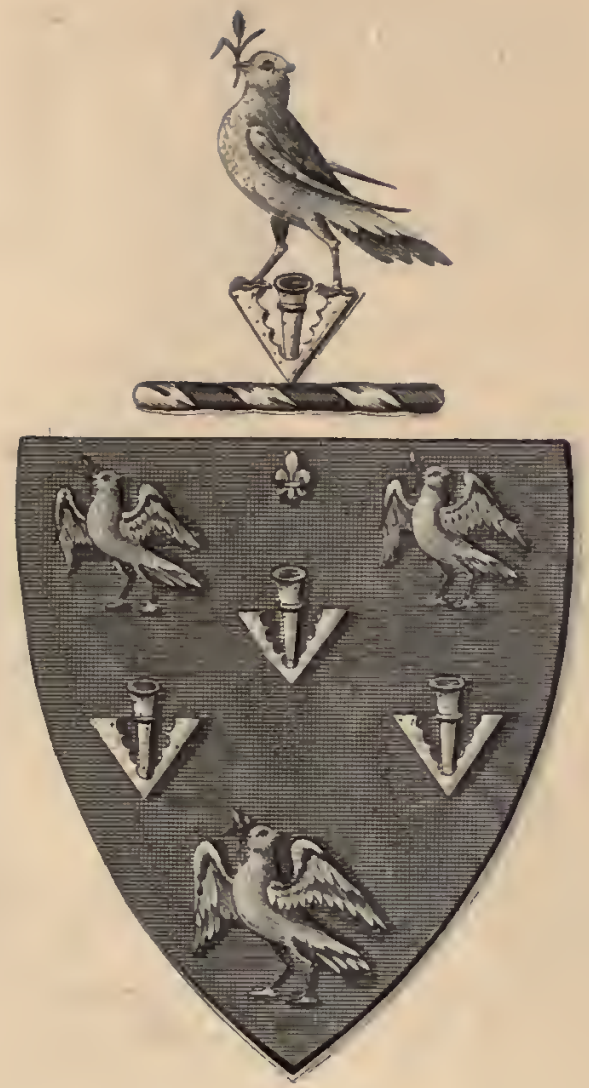

Frederic Ernest Allsopp.

THE STILLWATER TRAGEDY.

I.

IT is close upon daybreak. The great wall of pines and hemlocks that keep off the east wind from Stillwater stretches black and indeterminate against the sky. At intervals a dull, metallic sound, like the guttural twang of a violin string, rises from the frog-infested swamp skirting the highway. Suddenly the birds stir in their nests over there in the woodland, and break into that wild jargoning chorus with which they herald the advent of a new day. In the apple-orchards and among the plum-trees of the few gardens in Stillwater, the wrens, and the robins and the blue-jays, catch up the crystal crescendo, and what a melodious racket they make of it with their fifes and flutes and flageolets!

The village lies in a trance like death. Possibly not a soul hears this music, unless it is the watchers at the bedside of Mr. Leonard Tappleton, the richest man in town, who has lain dying these three days, and cannot last till sunrise. Or perhaps some mother, drowsily hushing her wakeful baby, pauses a moment and listens vacantly to the birds singing. But who else?

The hubbub suddenly ceases,—ceases as suddenly as it began,—and all is still again in the woodland. But it is not so dark as before. A faint glow of white light is discernible behind the ragged line of the tree-tops. The deluge of darkness is receding from the face of the earth, as the mighty waters receded of old.

The roofs and tall factory chimneys of Stillwater are slowly taking shape in the gloom. Is that a cemetery coming into view yonder, with its ghostly architecture of obelisks and broken columns and huddled headstones? No, that is only Slocum's Marble Yard, with the finished and unfinished work heaped up like snowdrifts,—a cemetery in embryo. Here and there in an outlying farm a lantern glimmers in

the barn-yard: the cattle are having their fodder betimes. Scarlet-capped chanticleer gets himself on the nearest rail-fence, and lifts up his rancorous voice like some irate old cardinal launching the curse of Rome. Something crawls swiftly along the grey of the serpentine turnpike,—a cart, with the driver lashing a jaded horse. A quick wind goes shivering by, and is lost in the forest.

Now a narrow strip of two-coloured gold stretches along the horizon.

Stillwater is gradually coming to its senses. The sun has begun to twinkle on the gilt cross of the Catholic chapel and make itself known to the doves in the stone belfry of the South Church. The patches of cobweb that here and there cling tremulously to the coarse grass of the inundated meadows have turned into silver nets, and the mill-pond—it will be steel-blue later—is as smooth and white as if it had been paved with one vast unbroken slab out of Slocum's Marble Yard. Through a row of button-woods on the northern skirt of the village is seen a square, lap-streaked building, painted a disagreeable brown, and surrounded on three sides by a platform,—one of seven or eight similar stations strung like

Indian beads on a branch thread of the Great Sagamore Railway.

Listen! That is the jingle of the bells on the baker's cart as it begins its rounds. From innumerable chimneys the curdled smoke gives evidence that the thrifty housewife—or, what is rarer in Stillwater, the hired girl—has lighted the kitchen fire.

The chimney-stack of one house at the end of a small court—the last house on the easterly edge of the village, and standing quite alone—sends up no smoke. Yet the carefully trained ivy over the porch, and the lemon verbena in a tub at the foot of the steps, intimate that the place is not unoccupied. Moreover, the little schooner which acts as weather-cock on one of the gables, and is now heading due west, has a new top-sail. It is a story-and-a-half cottage, with a large expanse of roof, which, covered with porous, unpainted shingles, seems to repel the sunshine that now strikes full upon it. The upper and lower blinds on the main building, as well as those on the extensions, are tightly closed. The sun appears to beat in vain at the casements of this silent house, which has a curiously sullen and defiant air, as if it had desper-

ately and successfully barricaded itself against the approach of morning; yet if one were standing in the room that leads from the bedchamber on the ground-floor—the room with the latticed window—one would see a ray of light thrust through a chink of the shutters, and pointing like a human finger at an object which lies by the hearth.

This finger, gleaming, motionless, and awful in its precision, points to the body of old Mr. Lemuel Shackford, who lies there dead in his night-dress, with a gash across his forehead.

In the darkness of that summer night a deed darker than the night itself had been done in Stillwater.

II.

THAT morning, when Michael Hennessey's girl Mary—a girl sixteen years old—carried the can of milk to the rear door of the silent house, she was nearly a quarter of an hour later than usual, and looked forward to being soundly rated.

"He 's up and been waiting for it," she said to herself, observing the scullery door ajar. "Won't I ketch it! It 's him for growling and snapping at a body, and it 's me for always being before or behind time, bad luck to me. There 's no plazing him."

Mary pushed back the door and passed through the kitchen, nerving herself all the while to meet the objurgations which she supposed were lying in wait for her. The sunshine was blinding without, but sifted through the green jalousies, it made a grey crepuscular light within. As the girl approached the table, on which a plate with

knife and fork had been laid for breakfast, she noticed, somewhat indistinctly at first, a thin red line running obliquely across the floor from the direction of the sitting-room and ending near the stove, where it had formed a small pool. Mary stopped short, scarcely conscious why, and peered instinctively into the adjoining apartment. Then, with a smothered cry, she let fall the milk-can, and a dozen white rivulets, in strange contrast to that one dark red line which first startled her, went meandering over the kitchen floor. With her eyes riveted upon some object in the next room, the girl retreated backward slowly and heavily dragging one foot after the other, until she reached the scullery door; then she turned swiftly, and plunged into the street.

Twenty minutes later, every man, woman, and child in Stillwater knew that old Mr. Shackford had been murdered.

Mary Hennessey had to tell her story a hundred times during the morning, for each minute brought to Michael's tenement a fresh listener hungry for the details at first hand.

"How was it, Molly? Tell a body, dear!"

"Don't be asking me!" cried Molly,

pressing her palms to her eyes as if to shut out the sight, but taking all the while a secret creepy satisfaction in living the scene over again. "It was kinder dark in the other room, and there he was, laying in his night-gownd, with his face turned towards me, so, looking mighty severe-like, jest as if he was agoing to say, 'It 's late with the milk ye are, ye hussy!'—a way he had of spaking."

"But he didn't spake, Molly darlin'?"

"Niver a word. He was stone dead, don't you see. It was that still you could hear me heart beat, saving there wasn't a drop of beat in it. I let go the can, sure, and then I backed out, with me eye on 'im all the while, afeard to death that he would up and spake them words."

"The pore child! for the likes of her to be wakin' up a murthered man in the mornin'!"

There was little or no work done that day in Stillwater outside the mills, and they were not running full handed. A number of men from the Miantowona Iron Works and Slocum's Yard—Slocum employed some seventy or eighty hands—lounged about the streets in their blouses, or stood in knots in front of the tavern, smoking short

clay pipes. Not an urchin put in an appearance at the small red brick building on the turnpike. Mr. Pinkham, the schoolmaster, waited an hour for the recusants, then turned the key in the lock and went home.

Draggled-looking women, with dishcloth or dust-pan in hand, stood in doorways or leaned from windows, talking in subdued voices with neighbours on the curb-stone. In a hundred far-away cities the news of the suburban tragedy had already been read and forgotten; but here the horror stayed.

There was a constantly changing crowd gathered in front of the house in Welch's Court. An inquest was being held in the room adjoining the kitchen. The court, which ended at the gate of the cottage, was fringed for several yards on each side by rows of squalid, wondering children, who understood it that Coroner Whidden was literally to sit on the dead body,—Mr. Whidden, a limp, inoffensive little man, who would not have dared to sit down on a fly. He had passed, pallid and perspiring, to the scene of his perfunctory duties.

The result of the investigation was awaited

with feverish impatience by the people outside. Mr. Shackford had not been a popular man; he had been a hard, avaricious, passionate man, holding his own way remorselessly. He had been the reverse of popular, but he had long been a prominent character in Stillwater, because of his wealth, his endless lawsuits, and his eccentricity, an illustration of which was his persistence in living entirely alone in the isolated and dreary old house, that was henceforth to be inhabited by his shadow. Not his shadow alone, however, for it was now remembered that the premises were already held in fee by another phantasmal tenant. At a period long anterior to this, one Lydia Sloper, a widow, had died an unexplained death under that same roof. The coincidence struck deeply into the imaginative portion of Stillwater. "The widow Sloper and old Shackford have made a match of it," remarked a local humourist, in a grimmer vein than customary. Two ghosts had now set up housekeeping, as it were, in the stricken mansion, and what might not be looked for in the way of spectral progeny!

It appeared to the crowd in the lane that the jury were unconscionably long in arriv-

ing at a decision ; and when the decision was at length reached, it gave but moderate satisfaction. After a spendthrift waste of judicial mind, the jury had decided that "the death of Lemuel Shackford was caused by a blow on the left temple, inflicted with some instrument not discoverable, in the hands of some person or persons unknown."

"We knew that before," grumbled a voice in the crowd, when, to relieve public suspense, Lawyer Perkins—a long, lank man, with stringy black hair—announced the verdict from the doorstep.

The theory of suicide had obtained momentary credence early in the morning, and one or two still clung to it with the tenacity that characterises persons who entertain few ideas. To accept this theory it was necessary to believe that Mr. Shackford had ingeniously hidden the weapon after striking himself dead with a single blow. No, it was not suicide. So far from intending to take his own life, Mr. Shackford, it appeared, had made rather careful preparations to live that day. The breakfast table had been laid overnight, the coals left ready for kindling in the Franklin stove, and a kettle, filled with water to be

heated for his tea or coffee, stood on the hearth.

Two facts had sharply demonstrated themselves: first, that Mr. Shackford had been murdered; and, second, that the spur to the crime had been the possession of a sum of money, which the deceased was supposed to keep in a strong-box in his bedroom. The padlock had been wrenched open, and the less valuable contents of the chest, chiefly papers, scattered over the carpet. A memorandum among the papers seemed to specify the respective sums in notes and gold that had been deposited in the box. A document of some kind had been torn into minute pieces and thrown into the waste-basket. On close scrutiny a word or two here and there revealed the fact that the document was of a legal character. The fragments were put into an envelope and given in charge of Mr. Shackford's lawyer, who placed seals on that and on the drawers of an escritoire which stood in the corner and contained other manuscript.

The instrument with which the fatal blow had been dealt—for the autopsy showed that there had been but one blow—was not only not discoverable, but the fashion of it defied

conjecture. The shape of the wound did not indicate the use of any implement known to the jurors, several of whom were skilled machinists. The wound was an inch and three-quarters in length, and very deep at the extremities; in the middle it scarcely penetrated to the cranium. So peculiar a cut could not have been produced with the claw part of a hammer, because the claw is always curved, and the incision was straight. A flat claw, such as is used in opening packing-cases, was suggested. A collection of the several sizes manufactured was procured, but none corresponded with the wound; they were either too wide or too narrow. Moreover, the cut was as thin as the blade of a case-knife.

"That was never done by any tool in these parts," declared Stevens, the foreman of the finishing shop at Slocum's.

The assassin or assassins had entered by the scullery door, the simple fastening of which, a hook and staple, had been broken. There were footprints in the soft clay path leading from the side gate to the stone step; but Mary Hennessey had so confused and obliterated the outlines that now it was impossible accurately to measure them. A half-

burned match was found under the sink,—evidently thrown there by the burglars. It was of a kind known as the safety-match, which can be ignited only by friction on a strip of chemically prepared paper glued to the box. As no box of this description was discovered, and as all the other matches in the house were of a different make, the charred splinter was preserved. The most minute examination failed to show more than this. The last time Mr. Shackford had been seen alive was at six o'clock the previous evening.

Who had done the deed?

Tramps! answered Stillwater, with one voice, though Stillwater lay somewhat out of the natural highway, and the tramp—that bitter blossom of civilisation whose seed was blown to us from over seas—was not then so common by the New England roadsides as he became five or six years later. But it was intolerable not to have a theory; it was that or none, for conjecture turned to no one in the village. To be sure, Mr. Shackford had been in litigation with several of the corporations, and had had legal quarrels with more than one of his neighbours; but Mr. Shackford had never been victorious in

any of these contests, and the incentive of revenge was wanting to explain the crime. Besides, it was so clearly robbery.

Though the gathering around the Shackford house had reduced itself to half a dozen idlers, and the less frequented streets had resumed their normal aspect of dulness, there was a strange, electric quality in the atmosphere. The community was in that state of suppressed agitation and suspicion which no word adequately describes. The slightest circumstance would have swayed it to the belief in any man's guilt; and, indeed, there were men in Stillwater quite capable of disposing of a fellow-creature for a much smaller reward than Mr. Shackford had held out. In spite of the tramp theory, a harmless tin-pedlar, who had not passed through the place for weeks, was dragged from his glittering cart that afternoon, as he drove smilingly into town, and would have been roughly handled if Mr. Richard Shackford, a cousin of the deceased, had not interfered.

As the day wore on, the excitement deepened in intensity, though the expression of it became nearly reticent. It was noticed that the lamps throughout the village were

lighted an hour earlier than usual. A sense of insecurity settled upon Stillwater with the falling twilight,—that nameless apprehension which is possibly more trying to the nerves than tangible danger. When a man is smitten inexplicably, as if by a bodiless hand stretched out of a cloud,—when the red slayer vanishes like a mist and leaves no faintest trace of his identity,—the mystery shrouding the deed presently becomes more appalling than the deed itself. There is something paralysing in the thought of an invisible hand somewhere ready to strike at your life, or at some life dearer than your own. Whose hand, and where is it? Perhaps it passes you your coffee at breakfast; perhaps you have hired it to shovel the snow off your sidewalk; perhaps it has brushed against you in the crowd; or may be you have dropped a coin into the fearful palm at a street corner. Ah, the terrible unseen hand that stabs your imagination,—this immortal part of you which is a hundred times more sensitive than your poor perishable body!

In the midst of situations the most solemn and tragic there often falls a light purely farcical in its incongruity. Such a gleam

was unconsciously projected upon the present crisis by Mr. Bodge, better known in the village as Father Bodge. Mr. Bodge was stone deaf, naturally stupid, and had been nearly moribund for thirty years with asthma. Just before nightfall he had crawled, in his bewildered, wheezy fashion, down to the tavern, where he found a sombre crowd in the bar-room. Mr. Bodge ordered his mug of beer, and sat sipping it, glancing meditatively from time to time over the pewter rim at the mute assembly. Suddenly he broke out: "S'pose you've heerd that old Shackford 's ben murdered?"

So the sun went down on Stillwater. Again the great wall of pines and hemlocks made a gloom against the sky. The moon rose from behind the tree-tops, frosting their ragged edges, and then sweeping up the zenith hung serenely above the world, as if there were never a crime, or a tear, or a heart-break in it all.

III.

ON the afternoon of the following day Mr. Shackford was duly buried. The funeral, under the direction of Mr. Richard Shackford, who acted as chief mourner, and was sole mourner by right of kinship, took place in profound silence. The carpenters, who had lost a day on Bishop's new stables, intermitted their sawing and hammering while the services were in progress; the steam was shut off in the iron-mills, and no clinking of the chisel was heard in the marble yard for an hour, during which many of the shops had their shutters up. Then, when all was over, the imprisoned fiend in the boilers gave a piercing shriek, the leather bands slipped on the revolving drums, the spindles leaped into life again, and the old order of things was reinstated, —outwardly, but not in effect.

In general, when the grave closes over a

man his career is ended. But Mr. Shackford was never so much alive as after they had buried him. Never before had he filled so large a place in the public eye. Though invisible, he sat at every fireside. Until the manner of his death had been made clear, his ubiquitous presence was not to be exorcised. On the morning of the memorable day a reward of one hundred dollars—afterwards increased to five hundred, at the instance of Mr. Shackford's cousin—had been offered by the board of selectmen for the arrest and conviction of the guilty party. Beyond this and the unsatisfactory inquest, the authorities had done nothing, and were plainly not equal to the situation.

When it was stated, the night of the funeral, that a professional person was coming to Stillwater to look into the case, the announcement was received with a breath of relief.

The person thus vaguely described appeared on the spot the next morning. To mention the name of Edward Taggett is to mention a name well known to the detective force of the great city lying sixty miles south-west of Stillwater. Mr. Taggett's

arrival sent such a thrill of expectancy through the village that Mr. Leonard Tappleton, whose obsequies occurred this day, made his exit nearly unobserved. Yet there was little in Mr. Taggett's physical aspect calculated to stir either expectation or enthusiasm: a slender man of about twenty-six, but not looking it, with overhanging brown moustache, sparse side-whiskers, eyes of no definite colour, and faintly accentuated eyebrows. He spoke precisely, and with a certain unembarrassed hesitation, as persons do who have two thoughts to one word,—if there are such persons. You might have taken him for a physician, or a journalist, or the secretary of an insurance company; but you would never have supposed him the man who had disentangled the complicated threads of the great Barnabee Bank defalcation.

Stillwater's confidence, which had risen into the nineties, fell to zero at sight of him. "Is *that* Taggett?" they asked. That was Taggett; and presently his influence began to be felt like a sea-turn. The three Dogberrys of the watch were despatched on secret missions, and within an hour it was ferreted out that a man in a cart had been

seen driving furiously up the turnpike the morning after the murder. This was an agricultural district, the road led to a market town, and teams going by in the early dawn were the rule and not the exception: but on that especial morning a furiously driven cart was significant. Jonathan Beers, who farmed the Jenks land, had heard the wheels and caught an indistinct glimpse of the vehicle as he was feeding the cattle, but with a reticence purely rustic had not been moved to mention the circumstance before.

"Taggett has got a clue," said Stillwater under its breath.

By noon Taggett had got the man, cart and all. But it was only Blufton's son Tom, of South Millville, who had started in hot haste that particular morning to secure medical service for his wife, of which she had sorely stood in need, as two tiny girls in a willow cradle in South Millville now bore testimony.

"I haven't been cutting down the population *much*," said Blufton, with his wholesome laugh.

Thomas Blufton was well known and esteemed in Stillwater, but if the crime had

fastened itself upon him it would have given something like popular satisfaction.

In the course of the ensuing forty-eight hours four or five tramps were overhauled as having been in the neighbourhood at the time of the tragedy; but they each had a clean story, and were let go. Then one Durgin, a workman at Slocum's Yard, was called upon to explain some half-washed-out red stains on his overalls, which he did. He had tightened the hoops on a salt-pork barrel for Mr. Shackford several days previous; the red paint on the head of the barrel was fresh, and had come off on his clothes. Dr. Weld examined the spots under a microscope, and pronounced them paint. It was manifest that Mr. Taggett meant to go to the bottom of things.

The bar-room of the Stillwater hotel was a centre of interest these nights; not only the bar-room proper, but the adjoining apartment, where the more exclusive guests took their seltzer-water and looked over the metropolitan newspapers. Twice a week a social club met here, having among its members Mr. Craggie, the postmaster, who was supposed to have a great political future, Mr. Pinkham, Lawyer Perkins, Mr.

Whidden, and other respectable persons. The room was at all times in some sense private, with a separate entrance from the street, though another door, which usually stood open, connected it with the main saloon. In this was a long mahogany counter, one section of which was covered with a sheet of zinc perforated like a sieve, and kept constantly bright by restless caravans of lager-beer glasses. Directly behind that end of the counter stood a Gothic brass-mounted beer-pump, at whose faucets Mr. Snelling, the landlord, flooded you five or six mugs in the twinkling of an eye, and raised the vague expectation that he was about to grind out some popular operatic air. At the left of the pump stretched a narrow mirror, reflecting the gaily-coloured wine-glasses and decanters which stood on each other's shoulders, and held up lemons, and performed various acrobatic feats on a shelf in front of it.

The fourth night after the funeral of Mr. Shackford, a dismal south-east storm caused an unusual influx of idlers in both rooms. With the rain splashing against the casements and the wind slamming the blinds, the respective groups sat discussing in a

desultory way the only topic which could be discussed at present. There had been a general strike among the workmen a fortnight before; but even that had grown cold as a topic.

"That was hard on Tom Blufton," said Stevens, emptying the ashes out of his long-stemmed clay pipe, and refilling the bowl with cut cavendish from a jar on a shelf over his head.

Michael Hennessey set down his beer-mug with an air of argumentative disgust, and drew one sleeve across his glistening beard.

"Stavens, you 've as many minds as a weather-cock, jist! Didn't ye say yerself it looked mighty black for the lad when he was took?"

"I might have said something of the sort," Stevens admitted reluctantly, after a pause. "His driving round at daybreak with an empty cart did have an ugly look at first."

"Indade, then."

"Not to anybody who knew Tom Blufton," interrupted Samuel Piggott, Blufton's brother-in-law. "The boy hasn't a bad streak in him. It was an outrage.

Might as well have suspected Parson Langly or Father O'Meara."

"If this kind of thing goes on," remarked a man in the corner with a patch over one eye, "both of them reverend gents will be hauled up, I shouldn't wonder."

"That 's so, Mr. Peters," responded Durgin. "If my respectability didn't save me, who 's safe?"

"Durgin is talking about his respectability! He 's joking."

"Look here, Dexter," said Durgin, turning quickly on the speaker, "when I want to joke, I talk about your intelligence."

"What kind of man is Taggett, anyhow?" asked Piggott. "You saw him, Durgin."

"I believe he was at Justice Beemis's office the day Blufton and I was there; but I didn't make him out in the crowd. Shouldn't know him from Adam."

"Stillwater 's a healthy place for tramps jest about this time," suggested somebody. "Three on 'em snaked in to-day."

"I think, gentlemen, that Mr. Taggett is on the right track there," observed Mr. Snelling, in the act of mixing another Old Holland for Mr. Peters. "Not too sweet, you said? I feel it in my bones that it was

a tramp, and that Mr. Taggett will bring him yet."

"He won't find him on the highway yonder," said a tall, swarthy man named Torrini, an Italian. Nationalities clash in Stillwater. "That tramp is a thousand miles from here."

"So he is if he has any brains under his hat," returned Snelling. "But they 're on the lookout for him. The minute he pawns anything, he 's gone."

"Can't put up greenbacks or gold, can he? He didn't take nothing else," interposed Bishop, the veterinary surgeon.

"No jewelry nor nothing?"

"There wasn't none, as I understand it," said Bishop, "except a silver watch. That was all snug under the old man's piller."

"Wanter know!" ejaculated Jonathan Beers.

"I opine, Mr. Craggie," said the schoolmaster, standing in the inner room with a rolled-up file of the *Daily Advertiser* in his hand, "that the person who—who removed our worthy townsman will never be discovered."

"I shouldn't like to go quite so far as that, sir," answered Mr. Craggie, with that

diplomatic suavity which leads to post-masterships and seats in the General Court, and has even been known to oil a dull fellow's way into Congress. "I cannot take quite so hopeless a view of it. There are difficulties, but they must be overcome, Mr. Pinkham, and I think they will be."

"Indeed, I hope so," returned the schoolmaster. "But there are cases—are there not?—in which the—the problem, if I may so designate it, has never been elucidated, and the persons who undertook it have been obliged to go to the foot, so to speak."

"Ah, yes, there are such cases, certainly. There was the Burdell mystery in New York, and, later, the Nathan affair—— By the way, I've satisfactory theories of my own touching both. The police were baffled, and remain so. But, my *dear* sir, observe for a moment the difference."

Mr. Pinkham rested one finger on the edge of a little round table, and leaned forward in a respectful attitude to observe the difference.

"Those crimes were committed in a vast metropolis affording a thousand chances for escape, as well as offering a thousand temptations to the lawless. But we are a limited

community. We have no professional murderers among us. The deed which has stirred society to its utmost depths was plainly done by some wayfaring amateur. Remorse has already seized upon him, if the police haven't. For the time being he escapes; but he is bound to betray himself sooner or later. If the right steps are taken,—and I have myself the greatest confidence in Mr. Taggett,—the guilty party can scarcely fail to be brought to the bar of justice, if he doesn't bring himself there."

"Indeed, indeed, I hope so," repeated Mr. Pinkham.

"The investigation is being carried on very closely."

"Too closely," suggested the schoolmaster.

"Oh dear, no," murmured Mr. Craggie. "The strictest secrecy is necessary in affairs of this delicate nature. If Tom, Dick, and Harry were taken behind the scenes," he added, with the air of not wishing to say too much, "the bottom would drop out of everything."

Mr. Pinkham shrunk from commenting on a disaster like that, and relapsed into silence. Mr. Craggie, with his thumbs in the arm-

holes of his waistcoat, and his legs crossed in an easy, senatorial fashion, leaned back in the chair and smiled blandly.

"I don't suppose there 's nothing new, boys!" exclaimed a fat, florid man, bustling in good-naturedly at the public entrance, and leaving a straight wet trail on the sanded floor from the threshold to the polished mahogany counter. Mr. Willson was a local humourist of the Falstaffian stripe, though not so much witty in himself as the cause of wit in others.

"No, Jemmy, there isn't anything new," responded Dexter.

"I suppose you didn't hear that the ole man done somethin' handsome for me in his last will and testyment."

"No, Jemmy, I don't think he has made any provision whatever for an almshouse."

"Sorry to hear that, Dexter," said Willson, absorbedly chasing a bit of lemon peel in his glass with the spoon handle, "for there isn't room for us all up at the town-farm. How 's your grandmother? Finds it tol'rably comfortable?"

They are a primitive, candid people in their hours of unlaced social intercourse in Stillwater. This delicate *tu quoque* was so

far from wounding Dexter that he replied carelessly—

"Well, only so so. The old woman complains of too much chicken-sallid, and hot-house grapes all the year round."

"Mr. Shackford must have left a large property," observed Mr. Ward, of the firm of Ward & Lock, glancing up from the columns of the *Stillwater Gazette*. The remark was addressed to Lawyer Perkins, who had just joined the group in the reading-room.

"Fairly large," replied that gentleman crisply.

"Any public bequests?"

"None to speak of."

Mr. Craggie smiled vaguely.

"You see," said Lawyer Perkins, "there 's a will and no will,—that is to say, the fragments of what is supposed to be a will were found, and we are trying to put the pieces together. It is doubtful if we can do it; it is doubtful if we can decipher it after we have done it; and if we decipher it, it is a question whether the document is valid or not."

"That is a masterly exposition of the dilemma, Mr. Perkins," said the schoolmaster warmly.

Mr. Perkins had spoken in his court-room tone of voice, with one hand thrust into his frilled shirt-bosom. He removed this hand for a second, as he gravely bowed to Mr. Pinkham.

"Nothing could be clearer," said Mr. Ward. "In case the paper is worthless, what then? I am not asking you in your professional capacity," he added hastily; for Lawyer Perkins had been known to send in a bill on as slight a provocation as Mr. Ward's.

"That's a point. The next of kin has his claims."

"My friend Shackford, of course," broke in Mr. Craggie. "Admirable young man! —one of my warmest supporters."

"He is the only heir at law so far as we know," said Mr. Perkins.

"Oh," said Mr. Craggie, reflecting. "The late Mr. Shackford might have had a family in Timbuctoo or the Sandwich Islands."

"That's another point."

"The fact would be a deuced unpleasant point for young Shackford to run against," said Mr. Ward.

"Exactly."

"If Mr. Lemuel Shackford," remarked Coroner Whidden, softly joining the conversation, to which he had been listening in his timorous, apologetic manner, "had chanced, in the course of his early seafaring days, to form any ties of an unhappy complexion——"

"Complexion is good," murmured Mr. Craggie. "Some Hawaiian lady!"

"——perhaps that would be a branch of the case worth investigating in connection with the homicide. A discarded wife, or a disowned son, burning with a sense of wrong——"

"Really, Mr. Whidden!" interrupted Lawyer Perkins witheringly, "it is bad enough for my client to lose his life, without having his reputation filched away from him."

"I—I will explain! I was merely supposing——"

"The law never supposes, sir!"

This threw Mr. Whidden into great mental confusion. As coroner was he not an integral part of the law, and when, in his official character, he supposed anything, was not that a legal supposition? But was he in his official character now, sitting with

a glass of lemonade at his elbow in the reading-room of the Stillwater hotel? Was he, or was he not, a coroner all the time? Mr. Whidden stroked an isolated tuft of hair growing low on the middle of his forehead, and glared mildly at Mr. Perkins.

"Young Shackford has gone to New York, I understand," said Mr. Ward, breaking the silence.

Mr. Perkins nodded. "Went this morning to look after the real-estate interests there. It will probably keep him a couple of weeks,—the longer the better. He was of no use here. Lemuel's death was a great shock to him, or rather the manner of it was."

"That shocked every one. They were first cousins, weren't they?" Mr. Ward was a comparatively new resident in Stillwater.

"First cousins," replied Lawyer Perkins; "but they were never very intimate, you know."

"I imagine nobody was ever very intimate with Mr. Shackford."

"My client was somewhat peculiar in his friendships."

This was stating it charitably, for Mr.

Perkins knew, and every one present knew, that Lemuel Shackford had not had the shadow of a friend in Stillwater, unless it was his cousin Richard.

A cloud of mist and rain was blown into the bar-room as the street door stood open for a second to admit a dripping figure from the outside darkness.

"*What's* blowed down?" asked Durgin, turning round on his stool and sending up a ring of smoke which uncurled itself with difficulty in the dense atmosphere.

"It 's only some of Jeff Stavers's nonsense."

"No nonsense at all," said the new-comer, as he shook the heavy beads of rain from his felt hat. "I was passing by Welch's Court—it 's as black as pitch out, fellows—when slap went something against my shoulder, something like wet wings. Well, I was scared. It 's a bat, says I. But the thing didn't fly off; it was still clawing at my shoulder. I put up my hand, and I 'll be shot if it wasn't the foremast, jib-sheet and all, of the old weather-cock on the north gable of the Shackford house! Here you are!" and the speaker tossed the broken mast, with the mimic sails dangling from it, into Durgin's lap.

A dead silence followed, for there was felt to be something weirdly significant in the incident.

"That 's kinder omernous," said Mr. Peters interrogatively.

"Ominous of what?" asked Durgin, lifting the wet mass from his knees and dropping it on the floor.

"Well, sorter queer, then."

"Where does the queer come in?" inquired Stevens gravely. "I don't know; but I 'm hit by it."

"Come, boys, don't crowd a feller," said Mr. Peters, getting restive. "I don't take the contract to explain the thing. But it does seem some way droll that the old schooner should be wrecked so soon after what has happened to the old skipper. If you don't see it, or sense it, I don't insist. What 's yours, Denyven?"

The person addressed as Denyven promptly replied, with a fine sonorous English accent, "A mug of 'alf an' 'alf,—with a head on it, Snelling."

At the same moment Mr. Craggie, in the inner room, was saying to the schoolmaster—

"I must really take issue with you there,

Mr. Pinkham. I admit there 's a good deal in spiritualism which we haven't got at yet; the science is in its infancy; it is still attached to the bosom of speculation. It is a beautiful science, that of psychological phenomena, and the spiritualists will yet become an influential class of "—Mr. Craggie was going to say voters, but glided over it —" persons. I believe in clairvoyance myself to a large extent. Before my appointment to the post-office I had it very strong. I've no doubt that in the far future this mysterious factor will be made great use of in criminal cases; but at present I should resort to it only in the last extremity,—the very last extremity, Mr. Pinkham!"

"Oh, of course," said the schoolmaster deprecatingly. "I threw it out only as the merest suggestion. I shouldn't think of—of—you understand me?"

"Is it beyond the dreams of probability," said Mr. Craggie, appealing to Lawyer Perkins, "that clairvoyants may eventually be introduced into cases in our courts?"

"They are now," said Mr. Perkins, with a snort,—"the police bring 'em in."

Mr. Craggie finished the remainder of his glass of sherry in silence, and presently rose

to go. Coroner Whidden and Mr. Ward had already gone. The guests in the public room were thinning out; a gloom, indefinable and shapeless like the night, seemed to have fallen upon the few that lingered. At a somewhat earlier hour than usual the gas was shut off in the Stillwater hotel.

In the lonely house in Welch's Court a light was still burning.

IV.

A SORELY perplexed man sat there, bending over his papers by the lamplight. Mr. Taggett had established himself at the Shackford house on his arrival, preferring it to the hotel, where he would have been subjected to the curiosity of the guests and to endless annoyances. Up to this moment, perhaps not a dozen persons in the place had had more than a passing glimpse of him. He was a very busy man, working at his desk from morning until night, and then taking only a brief walk, for exercise, in some unfrequented street. His meals were sent in from the hotel to the Shackford house, where the constables reported to him, and where he held protracted conferences with Justice Beemis, Coroner Whidden, Lawyer Perkins, and a few others, and declined to be interviewed by the local editor.

To the outside eye that weatherstained,

faded old house appeared a throbbing seat of esoteric intelligence. It was as if a hundred invisible magnetic threads converged to a focus under that roof and incessantly clicked out the most startling information, —information which was never by any chance allowed to pass beyond the charmed circle. As nothing came of it all, this secrecy grew exasperating. The pile of letters which the mail brought to Mr. Taggett every morning — chiefly anonymous suggestions, and offers of assistance from lunatics in remote cities—was enough in itself to exasperate a community.

Covertly at first, and then openly, Stillwater began seriously to question Mr. Taggett's method of working up the case. The *Gazette*, in a double-leaded leader, went so far as to compare him to a bird with fine feathers and no song, and to suggest that perhaps the bird might have sung if the inducement offered had been more substantial. A singer of Mr. Taggett's plumage was not to be caught by such chaff as five hundred dollars. Having killed his man, the editor proceeded to remark that he would suspend judgment until next week.

As if to make perfect the bird comparison,

Mr. Taggett, after keeping the public in suspense for six days and nights, abruptly flew away, with all the little shreds and straws of evidence he had picked up, to build his speculative nest elsewhere.

The defection of Mr. Taggett caused a mild panic among a certain portion of the inhabitants who were not reassured by the statement in the *Gazette* that the case would now be placed in the proper hands,—the hands of the county constabulary. "Within a few days," said the editor in conclusion, "the matter will undoubtedly be cleared up. At present we cannot say more;" and it would have puzzled him very much to do so.

A week passed, and no fresh light was thrown upon the catastrophe, nor did anything occur to ruffle the usual surface of life in the village. A man—it was Torrini, the Italian—got hurt in Dana's iron-foundry; one of Blufton's twin girls died; and Mr. Slocum took on a new hand from out of town. That was all. Stillwater was the Stillwater of a year ago, with always the exception of that shadow lying upon it, and the fact that small boys who had kindling to get in were careful to get it in before night-

fall. It would appear that the late Mr. Shackford had acquired a habit of lingering around wood-piles after dark, and also of stealing into bedchambers, where little children were obliged to draw the sheets over their heads in order not to see him.

The action of the county constabulary had proved quite as mysterious and quite as barren of result as Mr. Taggett's had been. They had worn his mantle of secrecy, and arrested his tramps over again.

Another week dragged by, and the editorial prediction seemed as far as ever from fulfilment. But on the afternoon which closed that fortnight a very singular thing did happen. Mr. Slocum was sitting alone in his office, which occupied the whole of a small building at the right of the main gate to the marble works, when the door behind him softly opened and a young man, whose dress covered with stone dust indicated his vocation, appeared on the threshold. He hesitated a second, and then stepped into the room. Mr. Slocum turned round with a swift, apprehensive air.

"You gave me a start! I believe I haven't any nerves left. Well?"

"Mr. Slocum, I have found the man."

The proprietor of the marble yard half rose from the desk in his agitation.

"Who is it?" he asked beneath his breath.

The same doubt or irresolution which had checked the workman at the threshold seemed again to have taken possession of him. It was fully a moment before he gained the mastery over himself; but the mastery was complete, for he leaned forward gravely, almost coldly, and pronounced two words. A quick pallor overspread Mr. Slocum's features.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, sinking back into the chair. "Are you mad!"

V.

THE humblest painter of real life, if he could have his desire, would select a picturesque background for his figures; but events have an inexorable fashion of choosing their own landscape. In the present instance it is reluctantly conceded that there are few uglier or more commonplace towns in New England than Stillwater,—a straggling, overgrown village, with whose rural aspects are curiously blended something of the grimness and squalor of certain shabby city neighbourhoods. Being of comparatively recent date, the place has none of those colonial associations which, like sprigs of lavender in an old chest of drawers, are a saving grace to other quite as dreary nooks and corners.

Here and there at what is termed the West End is a neat brick mansion with garden attached, where Nature asserts her-

self in dahlias and China-asters; but the houses are mostly frame houses that have taken a prevailing dingy tint from the breath of the tall chimneys which dominate the village. The sidewalks in the more aristocratic quarter are covered with a thin elastic paste of asphalte, worn down to the gravel in patches, and emitting in the heat of the day an astringent, bituminous odour. The population is chiefly of the rougher sort, such as breeds in the shadow of foundries and factories; and if the Protestant pastor and the fatherly Catholic priest, whose respective lots are cast there, have sometimes the sense of being missionaries dropped in the midst of a purely savage community, the delusion is not wholly unreasonable.

The irregular heaps of scoria that have accumulated in the vicinity of the iron-works give the place an illusive air of antiquity; but it is neither ancient nor picturesque. The oldest and most pictorial thing in Stillwater is probably the marble yard, around three sides of which the village may be said to have sprouted up rankly, bearing here and there an industrial blossom in the shape of an iron-mill or a cardigan-jacket manufactory. Roland Slocum, a man

of considerable refinement, great kindness of heart, and no force, inherited the yard from his father, and at the period this narrative opens (the summer of 187—) was its sole proprietor and nominal manager, the actual manager being Richard Shackford, a prospective partner in the business, and the betrothed of Mr. Slocum's daughter Margaret.

Forty years ago every tenth person in Stillwater was either a Shackford or a Slocum. Twenty years later both names were nearly extinct there. That fatality which seems to attend certain New England families had stripped every leaf but two from the Shackford branch. These were Lemuel Shackford, then about forty-six, and Richard Shackford, aged four. Lemuel Shackford had laid up a competency as shipmaster in the New York and Calcutta trade, and in 1852 had returned to his native village, where he found his name and stock represented only by little Dick, a very cheerful orphan, who stared complacently with big blue eyes at fate, and made mud-pies in the lane whenever he could elude the vigilance of the kindly old woman who had taken him under her roof. This atom

of humanity, by some strange miscalculation of nature, was his cousin.

The strict devotion to his personal interests which had enabled Mr. Shackford to acquire a fortune thus early caused him to look askance at a penniless young kinsman with stockings down at heel, and a straw hat three sizes too large for him set on the back of his head. But Mr. Shackford was ashamed to leave little Dick a burden upon the hands of a poor woman of no relationship whatever to the child; so little Dick was transferred to that dejected house which has already been described, and was then known as the Sloper house.

Here, for three or four years, Dick grew up, as neglected as a weed, and every inch as happy. It should be mentioned that for the first year or so a shock-headed Cicely from the town-farm had apparently been hired not to take care of him. But Dick asked nothing better than to be left to his own devices, which, moreover, were innocent enough. He would sit all day in the lane at the front gate pottering with a bit of twig or a case-knife in the soft clay. From time to time passers-by observed that the child was not making mud-pies, but

tracing figures, comic or grotesque as might happen, and always quite wonderful for their lack of resemblance to anything human. That patch of reddish-brown clay was his sole resource, his slate, his drawing-book, and woe to anybody who chanced to walk over little Dick's arabesques. Patient and gentle in his acceptance of the world's rebuffs, this he would not endure. He was afraid of Mr. Shackford; yet one day, when the preoccupied man happened to trample on a newly executed hieroglyphic, the child rose to his feet white with rage, his fingers clenched, and such a blue fire flashing in his eyes that Mr. Shackford drew back aghast.

"Why, it 's a little devil!"

While Shackford junior was amusing himself with his primitive bas-reliefs, Shackford senior amused himself with his lawsuits. From the hour when he returned to the town until the end of his days Mr. Shackford was up to his neck in legal difficulties. Now he resisted a betterment assessment, and fought the town; now he secured an injunction on the Miantowona Iron-Works, and fought the corporation. He was understood to have a perpetual case in equity before the Marine Court in New York, to

which city he made frequent and unannounced journeys. His immediate neighbours stood in terror of him. He was like a duellist, on the alert to twist the slightest thing into a *casus belli.* The law was his rapier, his recreation, and he was willing to bleed for it.

Meanwhile that fairy world of which every baby becomes a Columbus so soon as it is able to walk remained an undiscovered continent to little Dick. Grim life looked in upon him as he lay in the cradle. The common joys of childhood were a sealed volume to him. A single incident of those years lights up the whole situation. A vague rumour had been blown to Dick of a practice of hanging up stockings at Christmas. It struck his materialistic mind as rather a senseless thing to do; but nevertheless he resolved to try it one Christmas Eve. He lay awake a long while in the frosty darkness, sceptically waiting for something remarkable to happen; once he crawled out of the cot-bed and groped his way to the chimney-place. The next morning he was scarcely disappointed at finding nothing in the piteous little stocking, except the original holes.

The years that stole silently over the

heads of the old man and the young child in Welch's Court brought a period of wild prosperity to Stillwater. The breath of war blew the forges to a white heat, and the baffling problem of the mediæval alchemists was solved. The baser metals were transmuted into gold. A disastrous, prosperous time, with the air rent periodically by the cries of newsboys as battles were fought, and by the roll of the drum in the busy streets as fresh recruits were wanted. Glory and death to the Southward, and at the North pale women in black.

All which interested Dick mighty little. After he had learned to read at the district school, he escaped into another world. Two lights were now generally seen burning of a night in the Shackford house: one on the ground-floor, where Mr. Shackford sat mouthing his contracts and mortgages, and weaving his webs like a great, lean, grey spider; and the other in the north gable, where Dick hung over a tattered copy of *Robinson Crusoe* by the flicker of the candle-ends which he had captured during the day.

Little Dick was little Dick no more: a tall, heavily built blond boy, with a quiet, sweet disposition, that at first offered tempta-

tions to the despots of the playground ; but a sudden flaring up once or twice of that unexpected spirit which had broken out in his babyhood brought him immunity from serious persecution.

The boy's home-life at this time would have seemed pathetic to an observer,—the more pathetic, perhaps, in that Dick himself was not aware of its exceptional barrenness. The holidays that bring new brightness to the eyes of happier children were to him simply days when he did not go to school, and was expected to provide an extra quantity of kindling wood. He was housed, and fed, and clothed, after a fashion, but not loved. Mr. Shackford did not ill-treat the lad, in the sense of beating him ; he merely neglected him. Every year the man became more absorbed in his law-cases and his money, which accumulated magically. He dwelt in a cloud of calculations. Though all his interests attached him to the material world, his dry, attenuated body seemed scarcely a part of it.

"Shackford, what are you going to do with that scapegrace of yours?"

It was Mr. Leonard Tappleton who ventured the question. Few persons dared to

interrogate Mr. Shackford on his private affairs.

"I am going to make a lawyer of him," said Mr. Shackford, crackling his finger-joints like stiff parchment.

"You couldn't do better. You *ought* to have an attorney in the family."

"Just so," assented Mr. Shackford dryly. "I could throw a bit of business in his way now and then,—eh?"

"You could make his fortune, Shackford. I don't see but you might employ him all the time. When he was not fighting the corporations, you might keep him at it suing you for his fees."

"Very good, very good indeed," responded Mr. Shackford, with a smile in which his eyes took no share, it was merely a momentary curling up of crisp wrinkles. He did not usually smile at other people's pleasantries; but when a person worth three or four hundred thousand dollars condescends to indulge a joke, it is not to be passed over like that of a poor relation. "Yes, yes," muttered the old man, as he stooped and picked up a pin, adding it to a row of similarly acquired pins which gave the left lapel of his threadbare coat the

appearance of a miniature harp, "I shall make a lawyer of him."

It had long been settled in Mr. Shackford's mind that Richard, as soon as he had finished his studies, should enter the law-office of Brandmann & Sharpe, a firm of rather sinister reputation in South Millville.

At fourteen Richard's eyes had begun to open on the situation; at fifteen he saw very clearly; and one day, without much preliminary formulating of his plan, he decided on a step that had been taken by every male Shackford as far back as tradition preserves the record of the family.

A friendship had sprung up between Richard and one William Durgin, a schoolmate. This Durgin was a sallow, brooding boy, a year older than himself. The two lads were antipodal in disposition, intelligence, and social standing; for though Richard went poorly clad, the reflection of his cousin's wealth gilded him. Durgin was the son of a washerwoman. An intimacy between the two would perhaps have been unlikely but for one fact: it was Durgin's mother who had given little Dick a shelter at the period of his parents' death. Though the circumstance did not lie within the pale

of Richard's personal memory, he acknowledged the debt by rather insisting on Durgin's friendship. It was William Durgin, therefore, who was elected to wait upon Mr. Shackford on a certain morning which found that gentleman greatly disturbed by an unprecedented occurrence,—Richard had slept out of the house the previous night.

Durgin was the bearer of a note which Mr. Shackford received in some astonishment, and read deliberately, blinking with weak eyes behind his glasses. Having torn off the blank page and laid it aside for his own more economical correspondence (the rascal had actually used a whole sheet to write ten words !), Mr. Shackford turned, and, with the absorbed air of a naturalist studying some abnormal bug, gazed over the steel bow of his spectacles at Durgin.

"Skit !"

Durgin hastily retreated.

"There 's a poor lawyer saved," muttered the old man, taking down his overcoat from a peg behind the door, and snapping off a shred of lint on the collar with his lean forefinger. Then his face relaxed, and an odd grin diffused a kind of wintry glow over it.

Richard had run away to sea.

VI.

AFTER a lapse of four years, during which he had as completely vanished out of the memory of Stillwater as if he had been lying all the while in the crowded family tomb behind the South Church, Richard Shackford reappeared one summer morning at the door of his cousin's house in Welch's Court. Mr. Shackford was absent at the moment, and Mrs. Morganson, an elderly deaf woman, who came in for a few hours every day to do the housework, was busy in the extension. Without announcing himself, Richard stalked upstairs to the chamber in the gable, and went directly to a little shelf in one corner, upon which lay the dog's-eared copy of *Robinson Crusoe* just as he had left it, save the four years' accumulation of dust. Richard took the book fiercely in both hands, and with a single mighty tug tore it from top to

bottom, and threw the fragments into the fire-place.

A moment later, on the way downstairs, he encountered his kinsman ascending.

"Ah, you have come back!" was Mr. Shackford's grim greeting after a second's hesitation.

"Yes," said Richard, with embarrassment, though he had made up his mind not to be embarrassed by his cousin.

"I can't say I was looking for you. You might have dropped me a line; you were politer when you left. Why do you come back, and why did you go away?" demanded the old man, with abrupt fierceness. The last four years had bleached him and bent him, and made him look very old.

"I didn't like the idea of Blandmann & Sharpe, for one thing," said Richard, "and I thought I liked the sea."

"And did you?"

"No, sir! I enjoyed seeing foreign parts, and all that."

"Quite the young gentleman on his travels. But the sea didn't agree with you, and now you like the idea of Blandmann & Sharpe?"

"Not the least in the world, I assure

you!" cried Richard. "I take to it as little as ever I did."

"Perhaps that is fortunate. But it's going to be rather difficult to suit your tastes. What *do* you like?"

"I like you, cousin Lemuel; you have always been kind to me—in your way," said poor Richard, yearning for a glimmer of human warmth and sympathy, and forgetting all the dreariness of his uncared-for childhood. He had been out in the world, and had found it even harder-hearted than his own home, which now he idealised in the first flush of returning to it. Again he saw himself, a blond-headed little fellow with stocking down at heel, climbing the steep staircase, or digging in the clay at the front gate with the air full of the breath of lilacs. That same penetrating perfume, blown through the open hall-door as he spoke, nearly brought the tears to his eyes. He had looked forward for years to this coming back to Stillwater. Many a time, as he wandered along the streets of some foreign sea-port, the rich architecture and the bright costumes had faded out before him, and given place to the fat grey belfrey and slim red chimneys of the humble New

England village where he was born. He had learned to love it after losing it; and now he had struggled back through countless trials and disasters to find no welcome.

"Cousin Lemuel," said Richard gently, "only just us two are left, and we ought to be good friends at least."

"We are good enough friends," mumbled Mr. Shackford, who could not evade taking the hand which Richard had forlornly reached out to him, "but that needn't prevent us understanding each other like rational creatures. I don't care for a great deal of fine sentiment in people who run away without saying so much as thank 'e."

"I was all wrong!"

"That 's what folks always say, with the delusion that it makes everything all right."

"Surely it helps,—to admit it."

"That depends; it generally doesn't. What do you propose to do?"

"I hardly know at the moment; my plans are quite in the air."

"In the air!" repeated Mr. Shackford. "I fancy that describes them. Your father's plans were always in the air too, and he never got any of them down."

"I intend to get mine down."

"Have you saved by anything?"

"Not a cent."

"I thought as much."

"I had a couple of hundred dollars in my sea-chest; but I was shipwrecked, and lost it. I barely saved myself. When Robinson Crusoe——"

"Damn Robinson Crusoe!" snapped Mr. Shackford.

"That 's what I say," returned Richard gravely. "When Robinson Crusoe was cast on an uninhabited island, shrimps and soft-shell crabs and all sorts of delicious mollusks —ready boiled, I 've no doubt—crawled up the beach, and begged him to eat them; but *I* nearly starved to death."

"Of course. You will always be shipwrecked, and always be starved to death; you are one of that kind. I don't believe you are a Shackford at all. When they were not anything else they were good sailors. If you only had a drop of *his* blood in your veins!" and Mr. Shackford waved his hands towards a faded portrait of a youngish, florid gentleman with banged hair and high coat-collar, which hung against the wall half-way up the staircase. This was the counterfeit presentiment of Lemuel

Shackford's father seated with his back at an open window, through which was seen a ship under full canvas with the union-jack standing out straight in the wrong direction. "But what are you going to do for yourself? You can't start a subscription paper, and play the shipwrecked mariner, you know."

"No, I hardly care to do that," said Richard, with a good-natured laugh, "though no poor devil ever had a better outfit for the character."

"What *are* you calculated for?"

Richard was painfully conscious of his unfitness for many things; but he felt there was nothing in life to which he was so ill adapted as his present position. Yet, until he could look about him, he must needs eat his kinsman's reluctant bread, or starve. The world was younger and more unsophisticated when manna dropped from the clouds.

Mr. Shackford stood with his neck craned over the frayed edge of his satin stock and one hand resting indecisively on the banister, and Richard on the step above, leaning his back against the blighted flowers of the wall-paper. From an oval window at the

head of the stairs the summer sunshine streamed upon them, and illuminated the high-shouldered clock which, ensconced in an alcove, seemed to be listening to the conversation.

"There 's no chance for you in the law," said Mr. Shackford, after a long pause. "Sharpe's nephew has the berth. A while ago I might have got you into the Miantowona Iron-Works; but the rascally directors are trying to ruin me now. There 's the Union Store, if they happen to want a clerk. I suppose you would be about as handy behind a counter as a hippopotamus. I have no business of my own to train you to. You are not good for the sea, and the sea has probably spoiled you for anything else. A drop of salt water just poisons a landsman. I am sure I don't know what to do with you."

"Don't bother yourself about it at all," said Richard cheerfully. "You are going back on the whole family, ancestors and posterity, by suggesting that I can't make my own living. I only want a little time to take breath, don't you see, and a crust and a bed for a few days, such as you might give any wayfarer. Meanwhile, I will look after

things around the place. I fancy I was never an idler here since the day I learnt to split kindling."

"There's your old bed in the north chamber," said Mr. Shackford, wrinkling his forehead helplessly. "According to my notion, it is not so good as a bunk, or a hammock slung in a tidy forecastle, but it's at your service, and Mrs. Morganson, I dare say, can lay an extra plate at table."

With which gracious acceptance of Richard's proposition, Mr. Shackford resumed his way upstairs, and the young man thoughtfully descended to the hall door and thence into the street, to take a general survey of the commercial capabilities of Stillwater.

The outlook was not inspiring. A machinist, or a mechanic, or a day labourer might have found a foothold. A man without handicraft was not in request in Stillwater. "What is your trade?" was the staggering question that met Richard at the threshold. He went from workshop to workshop, confidently and cheerfully at first, whistling softly between whiles; but at every turn the question confronted him. In some places, where he was recognised with thinly veiled

surprise as that boy of Shackford's, he was kindly put off; in others he received only a stare or a brutal No.

By noon he had exhausted the leading shops and offices in the village, and was so disheartened that he began to dread the thought of returning home to dinner. Clearly, he was a superfluous person in Stillwater. A mortar-splashed hod carrier, who had seated himself on a pile of brick, and was eating his noonday rations from a tin can just brought to him by a slatternly girl, gave Richard a spasm of envy. Here was a man who had found his place, and was establishing—what Richard did not seem able to establish in his own case—a right to exist.

At supper Mr. Shackford refrained from examining Richard on his day's employment, for which reserve, or indifference, the boy was grateful. When the silent meal was over the old man went to his papers, and Richard withdrew to his room in the gable. He had neglected to provide himself with a candle. However, there was nothing to read, for in destroying *Robinson Crusoe* he had destroyed his entire library; so he sat and brooded in the moonlight, casting a look

of disgust now and then at the mutilated volume on the hearth. That lying romance! It had been, indirectly, the cause of all his woe, filling his boyish brain with visions of picturesque adventure, and sending him off to sea, where he had lost four precious years of his life.

"If I had stuck to my studies," reflected Richard while undressing, "I might have made something of myself. He's a great fraud, Robinson Crusoe."

Richard fell asleep with as much bitterness in his bosom against Defoe's ingenious hero as if Robinson had been a living person instead of a living fiction, and out of this animosity grew a dream so fantastic and comical that Richard awoke himself with a bewildered laugh just as the sunrise reddened the panes of his chamber window. In this dream somebody came to Richard and asked him if he had heard of that dreadful thing about young Crusoe.

"No, confound him!" said Richard, "what is it?"

"It has been ascertained," said somebody, who seemed to Richard at once an intimate friend and an utter stranger,—"It has been ascertained beyond a doubt that the man

Friday was not a man Friday at all, but a light-minded young princess from one of the neighbouring islands who had fallen in love with Robinson. Her real name was Saturday."

"Why, that's scandalous!" cried Richard, with heat. "Think of the admiration and sympathy the world has been lavishing on this precious pair! Robinson Crusoe and his girl Saturday! That puts a different face on it."

"Another great moral character exploded," murmured the shadowy shape, mixing itself up with the motes of a sunbeam and drifting out through the window. Then Richard fell to laughing in his sleep, and so awoke. He was still confused with the dream as he sat on the edge of the bed, pulling himself together in the broad daylight.

"Well," he muttered at length, "I shouldn't wonder! There's nothing too bad to be believed of that man."

VII.

RICHARD made an early start that morning in search of employment, and duplicated the failure of the previous day. Nobody wanted him. If nobody wanted him in the village where he was born and bred, a village of counting-rooms and workshops, was any other place likely to need him? He had only one hope, if it could be called a hope; at any rate, he had treated it tenderly as such and kept it for the last. He would apply to Rowland Slocum. Long ago, when Richard was an urchin making pot-hooks in the lane, the man used occasionally to pat him on the head and give him pennies. This was not a foundation on which to rear a very lofty castle; but this was all he had.

It was noon when Richard approached the marble yard, and the men were pouring out into the street through the wide gate in the

rough deal fence which enclosed the works, —heavy, brawny men, covered with fine white dust, who shouldered each other like cattle, and took the sidewalk to themselves. Richard stepped aside to let them pass, eyeing them curiously as possible comrades. Suddenly a slim dark fellow, who had retained his paper cap and leather apron, halted and thrust forth a horny hand. The others went on.

"Hullo, Dick Shackford!"

"What, is that you, Will? *You* here?"

"Been here two years now. One of Slocum's apprentices," added Durgin, with an air of easy grandeur.

"Two years? How time flies—when it doesn't crawl! Do you like it?"

"My time will be out next—— Oh, the work? Well, yes; it's not bad, and there's a jolly set in the yard. But how about you? I heard last night you'd got home. Been everywhere, and come back wealthy? The boys used to say you was off pirating."

"No such luck," answered Richard, with a smile. "I didn't prey on the high seas, —quite the contrary. The high sea captured my kit and four years' savings. I will tell

you about it some day. If I have a limb to my name and a breath left in my body, it is no thanks to the Indian Ocean. That is all I have got, Will, and I am looking around for bread and butter,—literally bread and butter."

"No? and the old gentleman so rich!"

Durgin said this with sincere indignation, and was perhaps unconscious himself of experiencing that nameless, shadowy satisfaction which Rochefoucauld says we find in the adversity of our best friends. Certainly Richard looked very seedy in his suit of slop-shop clothes.

"I was on my way to Mr. Slocum's to see if I could do anything with him," Richard continued.

"To get a job, do you mean?"

"Yes, to get work,—to learn *how* to work; to master a trade, in short."

"You can't be an apprentice, you know," said Durgin.

"Why not?"

"Slocum has two."

"Suppose he should happen to want another? He might."

"The Association wouldn't allow it."

"What association?"

"The Marble Workers' Association, of course."

"*They* wouldn't allow it! How is that?"

"This is the way of it. Slocum is free to take on two apprentices every year, but no more. That prevents workmen increasing too fast, and so keeps up wages. The Marble Workers' Association is a very neat thing, I can tell you."

"But doesn't Mr. Slocum own the yard? I thought he did."

"Yes, he owns the yard."

"If he wished to extend the business, couldn't he employ more hands?"

"As many as he could get,—skilled workmen; but not apprentices."

"And Mr. Slocum agrees to that?" inquired Richard.

"He does."

"And likes it?"

"Not he,—he hates it; but he can't help himself."

"Upon my soul, I don't see what prevents him taking on as many apprentices as he wants to."

"Why, the Association, to be sure," returned Durgin, glancing at the town clock, which marked seven minutes past the hour.

"But how could they stop him?"

"In plenty of ways. Suppose Slocum has a lot of unfinished contracts on hand,—he always has fat contracts,—and the men was to knock off work. That would be kind of awkward, wouldn't it?"

"For a day or two, yes. He could send out of town for hands," suggested Richard.

"And they wouldn't come, if the Association said 'Stay where you are.' They are mostly in the ring. Some outsiders might come, though."

"Then what?"

"Why, then the boys would make it pretty hot for them in Stillwater. Don't you notice?"

"I notice there is not much chance for me," said Richard despondingly. "Isn't that so?"

"Can't say. Better talk with Slocum. But I must get along; I have to be back sharp at one. I want to hear about your knocking around the worst kind. Can't we meet somewhere to-night,—at the tavern?"

"The tavern? That didn't use to be a quiet place."

"It isn't quiet now, but there's nowhere else to go of a night. It's a comfortable

den, and there 's always some capital fellows dropping in. A glass of lager with a mate is not a bad thing after a hard day's work."

"Both are good things when they are of the right sort."

"That 's like saying I 'm not the right sort, isn't it?"

"I meant nothing of the kind. But I don't take to the tavern. Not that I 'm squeamish; I have lived four years among sailors, and have been in rougher places than you ever dreamed of; but all the same I am afraid of the tavern. I 've seen many a brave fellow wrecked on that reef."

"You always was a bit stuck up," said Durgin candidly.

"Not an inch. I never had much reason to be; and less now than ever, when I can scarcely afford to drink water, let alone beer. I will drop round to your mother's some evening,—I hope she 's well,—and tell you of my ups and downs. That will be pleasanter for all hands."

"Oh, as you like."

"Now for Mr. Slocum, though you have taken the wind out of me."

The two separated, Durgin with a half smile on his lip, and Richard in a melan-

cholly frame of mind. He passed from the grass-fringed street into the deserted marble yard, where it seemed as if the green summer had suddenly turned into white winter, and threading his way between the huge drifts of snowy stone, knocked at the door of Mr. Slocum's private office.

William Durgin had summed up the case fairly enough as it stood between the Marble Workers' Association and Rowland Slocum. The system of this branch of the trades-union kept trained workmen comparatively scarce, and enabled them to command regular and even advanced prices at periods when other trades were depressed. The older hands looked upon a fresh apprentice in the yard with much the same favour as working men of the era of Jacquard looked upon the introduction of a new piece of machinery. Unless the apprentice had exceptional tact, he underwent a rough novitiate. In any case, he served a term of social ostracism before he was admitted to full comradeship. Mr. Slocum could easily have found openings each year for a dozen learners, had the matter been under his control; but it was not. "I am the master of each man individually," he declared, "but collectively

they are my master." So his business, instead of naturally spreading and becoming a benefit to the many, was kept carefully pruned down for the benefit of the few. He was often forced to decline important contracts, the filling of which would have resulted to the advantage of every person in the village.

Mr. Slocum recognised Richard at once, and listened kindly to his story. It was Mr. Slocum's way to listen kindly to every one; but he was impressed with Richard's intelligence and manner, and became desirous, for several reasons, to assist him. In the first place, there was room in the shops for another apprentice; experienced hands were on jobs that could have been as well done by beginners; and, in the second place, Mr. Slocum had an intuition that Lemuel Shackford was not treating the lad fairly, though Richard had said nothing to this effect. Now Mr. Slocum and Mr. Shackford were just then at swords' points.

"I don't suppose I could annoy Shackford more," was Mr. Slocum's reflection, "than by doing something for this boy, whom he has always shamelessly neglected."

The motive was not a high one; but

Richard would have been well satisfied with it, if he could have divined it. He did divine that Mr. Slocum was favourably inclined towards him, and stood watching that gentleman's face with hopeful anxiety.

"I have my regulation number of young men, Richard," said Mr. Slocum, "and there will be no vacancy until autumn. If you could wait a few months."

Richard's head drooped.

"Can't do that? You write a good hand, you say. Perhaps you could assist the book-keeper until there 's a chance for you in the yard."

"I think I could, sir," said Richard eagerly.

"If you were only a draughtsman, now, I could do something much better for you. I intend to set up a shop for ornamental carving, and I want some one to draw patterns. If you had a knack at designing, if you could draw at all——"

Richard's face lighted up.

"Perhaps you *have* a turn that way. I remember the queer things you used to scratch in the mud in the court, when you were a little shaver. Can you draw?'

"Why, that is the one thing I can do!'

cried Richard,—"in a rough fashion, of course," he added, fearing he had overstated it.

"It is a rough fashion that will serve. You must let me see some of your sketches."

"I haven't any, sir. I had a hundred in my sea-chest, but that was lost,—pencillings of old archways, cathedral spires, bits of frieze, and such odds and ends as took my fancy in the ports we touched at. I recollect one bit. I think I could do it for you now. Shall I?"

Mr. Slocum nodded assent, smiling at the young fellow's enthusiasm, and only partially suspecting his necessity. Richard picked up a pen and began scratching on a letter sheet which lay on the desk. He was five or six minutes at the work, during which the elder man watched him with an amused expression.

"It's a section of cornice on the façade of the Hindoo College at Calcutta," said Richard, handing him the paper,—"no, it's the custom-house. I forget which; but it doesn't matter."

The amused look gradually passed out of Mr. Slocum's countenance as he examined the sketch. It was roughly but clearly

drawn, and full of facility. "Why, that is very clever!" he said, holding it at arms' length; and then, with great gravity, "I hope you are not a genius, Richard; that would be too much of a fine thing. If you are not, you can be of service to me in my plans."

Richard laughingly made haste to declare that to the best of his knowledge and belief he was not a genius, and it was decided on the spot that Richard should assist Mr. Simms, the book-keeper, and presently try his hand at designing ornamental patterns for the carvers, Mr. Slocum allowing him apprentice wages until the quality of his work should be ascertained.

"It is very little," said Mr. Slocum, "but it will pay your board, if you do not live at home."

"I shall not remain at my cousin's," Richard replied, "if you call that home."

"I can imagine it is not much of a home. Your cousin, not to put too fine a point on it, is a wretch."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, sir; he 's my only living kinsman."

"You are fortunate in having but one, then. However, I am wrong to abuse him

to you; but I cannot speak of him with moderation, he has just played me such a despicable trick. Look here."

Mr. Slocum led Richard to the door, and pointing to a row of new workshops which extended the entire length of one side of the marble yard, said—

"I built these last spring. After the shingles were on we discovered that the rear partition, for a distance of seventy-five feet, overlapped two inches on Shackford's meadow. I was ready to drop when I saw it, your cousin is such an unmanageable old fiend. Of course I went to him immediately, and what do you think? He demanded five hundred dollars for that strip of land! Five hundred dollars for a few inches of swamp meadow not worth ten dollars the acre! 'Then take your disreputable old mill off my property!' says Shackford,—he called it a disreputable old mill! I was hasty, perhaps, and I told him to go to the devil. He said he would, and he did; for he went to Blandmann. When the lawyers got hold of it, they bothered the life out of me; so I just moved the building forward two inches, at an expense of seven hundred dollars. Then what does the demon do but board up

all my windows opening on the meadow! Richard, I make it a condition that you shall not lodge at Shackford's."

"Nothing could induce me to live another day in the same house with him, sir," answered Richard, suppressing an inclination to smile; and then seriously, "His bread is bitter."

Richard went back with a light heart to Welch's Court. At the gate of the marble yard he met William Durgin returning to work. The steam-whistle had sounded the call, and there was no time for exchange of words; so Richard gave his comrade a bright nod and passed by. Durgin turned and stared after him.

"Looks as if Slocum had taken him on; but it never can be as apprentice; he wouldn't dare do it."

Mr. Shackford had nearly finished his frugal dinner when Richard entered. "If you can't hit it to be in at your meals," said Mr. Shackford, helping himself absently to the remaining chop, "perhaps you had better stop away altogether."

"I can do that now, cousin," replied Richard sunnily. "I have engaged with Slocum."

The old man laid down his knife and fork.

"With Slocum! A Shackford a miserable marble-chipper!"

There was so little hint of the aristocrat in Lemuel Shackford's sordid life and person that no one suspected him of even self-esteem. He went as meanly dressed as a tramp, and as careless of contemporary criticism; yet clear down in his liver, or somewhere in his anatomy, he nourished an odd abstract pride in the family Shackford. Heaven knows why! To be sure, it dated far back; its women had always been virtuous, and its men, if not always virtuous, had always been ship-captains. But beyond this the family had never amounted to anything, and now there was so very little left of it. For Richard as Richard Lemuel cared nothing; for Richard as a Shackford he had a chaotic feeling that defied analysis, and had never before risen to the surface. It was therefore with a disgust entirely apart from hatred of Slocum or regard for Richard that the old man exclaimed, "A Shackford a miserable marble-chipper!"

"That is better than hanging around the village with my hands in my pockets. Isn't it?"

"I don't know that anybody has demanded that you should hang around the village."

"I ought to go away, you mean? But I have found work here, and I might not find it elsewhere."

"Stillwater is not the place to begin life in. It's the place to go away from, and come back to."

"Well, I have come back."

"And how? With one shirt and a lot of bad sailor habits."

"My one shirt is my only very bad habit," said Richard, with a laugh,—he could laugh now,—"and I mean to get rid of that."

Mr. Shackford snapped his fingers disdainfully.

"You ought to have stuck to the sea; that's respectable. In ten years you might have risen to be master of a bark; that would have been honourable. You might have gone down in a gale,—you probably would,—and that would have been fortunate. But a stone-cutter! You can understand," growled Mr. Shackford, reaching out for his straw hat, which he put on and crushed over his brows, "I don't keep a boarding-house for Slocum's hands."

"Oh, I'm far from asking it!" cried

Richard. "I am thankful for the two nights' shelter I have had."

"That 's some of your sarcasm, I suppose," said Mr. Shackford, half turning, with his hand on the door-knob.

"No, it is some of my sincerity. I am really obliged to you. You weren't very cordial, to be sure, but I did not deserve cordiality."

"You have figured that out correctly."

"I want to begin over again, you see, and start fair."

"Then begin by dropping Slocum."

"You have not given me a chance to tell you what the arrangement is. However, it 's irrevocable."

"I don't want to hear. I don't care a curse, so long as it is an arrangement," and Mr. Shackford hurried out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Then Richard, quite undisturbed by his cousin's unreasonableness, sat himself down to eat the last meal he was ever to eat under that roof,—a feat which his cousin's appetite had rendered comparatively easy.

While engaged in this, Richard revolved in his mind several questions as to his future abode. He could not reconcile his thought

to any of the working-men's boarding-houses, of which there were five or six in the slums of the village, where the doorways were greasy, and women flitted about in the hottest weather with thick woollen shawls over their heads. Yet his finances did not permit him to aspire to lodgings much more decent. If he could only secure a small room somewhere in a quiet neighbourhood. Possibly Mrs. Durgin would let him have a chamber in her cottage. He was beginning life over again, and it struck him as nearly an ideal plan to begin it on the identical spot where he had, in a manner, made his first start. Besides, there was William Durgin for company, when the long nights of the New England winter set in. This idea smiled so pleasantly in Richard's fancy that he pushed the plate away from him impatiently, and picked up his hat which lay on the floor beside the chair.

That evening he moved from the Shackford house to Mrs. Durgin's cottage in Cross Street. It was not an imposing ceremony. With a small brown-paper parcel under his arm, he walked from one threshold to the other, and the thing was done.

VIII.

THE six months which followed Richard's instalment in the office at Slocum's Yard were so crowded with novel experience that he scarcely noted their flight. The room at the Durgin's, as will presently appear, turned out an unfortunate arrangement; but everything else had prospered. Richard proved an efficient aid to Mr. Simms, who quietly shifted the pay-roll to the younger man's shoulders. This was a very complicated account to keep, involving as it did a separate record of each employee's time and special work. An ancient book-keeper parts lightly with such trifles when he has a capable assistant. It also fell to Richard's lot to pay the hands on Saturdays. William Durgin blinked his surprise on the first occasion, as he filed in with the others and saw Richard posted at the desk, with the pay-roll in his hand and the pile of greenbacks lying in front of him.

"I suppose you 'll be proprietor next," remarked Durgin, that evening, at the supper table.

"When I am, Will," answered Richard cheerily, "you shall be on the road to foreman of the finishing shop."

"Thank you," said Durgin, not too graciously. It grated on him to play the part of foreman, even in imagination, with Dick Shackford as proprietor. Durgin could not disconnect his friend from that seedy, half-crestfallen figure to whom, a few months before, he had given elementary instruction on the Marble Workers' Association.

Richard did not find his old schoolmate so companionable as memory and anticipation had painted him. The two young men moved on different levels. Richard's sea life, now that he had got at a sufficient distance from it, was a perspective full of pleasant colour; he had a taste for reading, a thirst to know things, and his world was not wholly shut in by the Stillwater horizon. It was still a pitifully narrow world, but wide compared with Durgin's, which extended no appreciable distance in any direction from the Stillwater hotel. He spent his evenings chiefly there, returning home

late at night, and often in so noisy a mood as to disturb Richard, who slept in an adjoining apartment. This was an annoyance; and it was an annoyance to have Mrs. Durgin coming to him with complaints of William. Other matters irritated Richard. He had contrived to replenish his wardrobe, and the sunburn was disappearing from his hands, which the nature of his occupation left soft and unscarred. Durgin was disposed at times to be sarcastic on these changes, but always stopped short of actual offence; for he remembered that Shackford when a boy, amiable and patient as he was, had had a tiger's temper at bottom. Durgin had seen it roused once or twice, and even received a chance sweep of the paw. Richard liked Durgin's rough wit as little as Durgin relished Richard's good-natured bluntness. It was a mistake, that trying to pick up the dropped thread of old acquaintance.

As soon as the permanency of his position was assured, and his means warranted the step, Richard transported himself and his effects to a comfortable chamber in the same house with Mr. Pinkham, the schoolmaster, the perpetual falsetto of whose flute

was positively soothing after four months of William Durgin's bass. Mr. Pinkham having but one lung, and that defective, played on the flute.

"You see what you 've gone and done, William," remarked Mrs. Durgin plaintively, "with your ways. There goes the quietest young man in Stillwater, and four dollars a week!"

"There goes a swell, you 'd better say. He was always a proud beggar; nobody was ever good enough for him."

"You shouldn't say that, William. I could cry, to lose him and his cheerfulness out of the house," and Mrs. Durgin began to whimper.

"Wait till he 's out of luck again, and he 'll come back to us fast enough. That 's when his kind remembers their friends. Blast him! he can't even take a drop of beer with a chum at the tavern."

"And right, too. There 's beer enough taken at the tavern without him."

"If you mean me, mother, I 'll get drunk to-night."

"No, no!" cried Mrs. Durgin pleadingly, "I didn't mean you, William, but Peters and that set."

"I thought you couldn't mean me," said William, thrusting his hands into the pockets of his monkey-jacket, and sauntering off in the direction of the Stillwater hotel, where there was a choice company gathered, it being Saturday night, and the monthly meeting of the Union.

Mr. Slocum had wasted no time in organising a shop for his experiment in ornamental carving. Five or six men, who had worked elsewhere at this branch, were turned over to the new department, with Stevens as foreman and Richard as designer. Very shortly Richard had as much as he could do to furnish the patterns required. These consisted mostly of scrolls, wreaths, and mortuary dove-wings for head-stones. Fortunately for Richard he had no genius, but plenty of a kind of talent just abreast with Mr. Slocum's purpose. As the carvers became interested in their work, they began to show Richard the respect and goodwill which at first had been withheld, for they had not quite liked being under the supervision of one who had not served at the trade. His youth had also told against him; but Richard's pleasant off-hand manner quickly won them. He had come in contact with

rough men on shipboard; he had studied their ways, and he knew that with all their roughness there is no class so sensitive. This insight was of great service to him. Stevens, who had perhaps been the least disposed to accept Richard, was soon his warm ally.

"See what a smooth fist the lad has!" he said one day, holding up a new drawing to the shop. "A man with a wreath of them acorns on his head-stone oughter be perfectly happy, damn him!"

It was, however, an anchor with a broken chain pendent—a design for a monument to the late Captain Septimus Salter, who had parted his cable at sea—which settled Richard's status with Stevens.

"Boys, that Shackford is what I call a born genei."

After all, is not the one-eyed man who is king among the blind the most fortunate of monarchs? Your little talent in a provincial village looms a great deal taller than your mighty genius in a city. Richard Shackford working for Rowland Slocum at Stillwater was happier than Michael Angelo in Rome with Pope Julius II. at his back. And Richard was the better paid, too!

One day he picked up a useful hint from a celebrated sculptor, who had come to the village in search of marble for the base of a soldiers' monument. Richard was laboriously copying a spray of fern, the delicacy of which eluded his pencil. The sculptor stood a moment silently observing him.

"Why do you spend an hour doing only passably well what you could do perfectly in ten minutes."

"I suppose it is because I am stupid, sir," said Richard.

"No stupid man ever suspected himself of being anything but clever. You draw capitally; but Nature beats you out and out at designing ferns. Just ask her to make you a facsimile in plaster, and see how handily she will lend herself to the job. Of course you must help her a little."

"Oh, I am not above giving Nature a lift," said Richard modestly.

"Lay a cloth on your table, place the fern on the cloth, and pour a thin paste of plaster-of-Paris over the leaf,—do that gently, so as not to disarrange the spray. When the plaster is set, there's your mould; remove the leaf, oil the matrix, and pour in fresh plaster. When that is set, cut away the

mould carefully, and there 's your spray of fern, as graceful and perfect as if Nature had done it all by herself. You get the very texture of the leaf by this process."

After that, Richard made casts instead of drawings for the carvers, and fancied he was doing a new thing, until he visited some marble-works in the great city.

At this period, whatever change subsequently took place in his feeling, Richard was desirous of establishing friendly relations with his cousin. The young fellow's sense of kinship was singularly strong, and it was only after several repulses at the door of the Shackford house and on the street that he relinquished the hope of placating the sour old man. At times Richard was moved almost to pity him. Every day Mr. Shackford seemed to grow shabbier and more spectral. He was a grotesque figure now, in his napless hat and broken-down stock. The metal button-moulds on his ancient waistcoat had worn their way through the satin coverings, leaving here and there a sparse fringe around the edges, and somehow suggesting little bald heads. Looking at him, you felt that the inner man was as threadbare and dilapidated as his

outside ; but in his lonely old age he asked for no human sympathy or companionship, and, in fact, stood in no need of either. With one devouring passion he set the world at defiance. He loved his gold,—the metal itself, the weight and colour and touch of it. In his bedroom on the ground-floor Mr. Shackford kept a small iron-clamped box filled to the lid with bright yellow coins. Often, at the dead of night, with door bolted and curtain down, he would spread out the glittering pieces on the table, and bend over them with an amorous glow in his faded eyes. These were his blonde mistresses ; he took a fearful joy in listening to their rustling, muffled laughter as he drew them towards him with eager hands. If at that instant a blind chanced to slam, or a footfall to echo in the lonely court, then the withered old sultan would hurry his slaves back into their iron-bound seraglio, and extinguish the light. It would have been a wasted tenderness to pity him. He was very happy in his own way, that Lemuel Shackford.

IX.

TOWARDS the close of his second year with Mr. Slocum, Richard was assigned a work-room by himself, and relieved of his accountant's duties. His undivided energies were demanded by the carving department, which had proved a lucrative success.

The rear of the lot on which Mr. Slocum's house stood was shut off from the marble yard by a high brick wall pierced with a private door for Mr. Slocum's convenience. Over the kitchen in the extension, which reached within a few feet of the wall, was a disused chamber, approachable on the outside by a flight of steps leading to a veranda. To this room Richard and his traps were removed. With a round table standing in the centre, with the plaster models arranged on shelves and sketches in pencil and crayon tacked against the whitewashed walls, the apartment was transformed into a delightful

atelier. An open fire-place, with a brace of antiquated iron-dogs straddling the red brick hearth, gave the finishing touch. The occupant was in easy communication with the yard, from which the busy din of clinking chisels came up musically to his ear, and was still beyond the reach of unnecessary interruption. Richard saw clearly all the advantages of this transfer, but he was far from having any intimation that he had made the most important move of his life.

The room had two doors : one opened on the veranda, and the other into a narrow hall connecting the extension with the main building. Frequently, that first week after taking possession, Richard detected the sweep of a broom and the rustle of drapery in this passage-way, the sound sometimes hushing itself quite close to the door, as if some one had paused a moment just outside. He wondered whether it was the servant-maid or Margaret Slocum, whom he knew very well by sight. It was, in fact, Margaret, who was dying with the curiosity of fourteen to peep into the studio, so carefully locked whenever the young man left it,— dying with curiosity to see the workshop,

and standing in rather great awe of the workman.

In the home circle her father had a habit of speaking with deep respect of young Shackford's ability, and once she had seen him at their table,—at a Thanksgiving. On this occasion Richard had appalled her by the solemnity of his shyness,—poor Richard, who was so unused to the amenities of a handsomely served dinner, that the chill which came over him cooled the Thanksgiving turkey on his palate.

When it had been decided that he was to have the spare room for his workshop, Margaret, with womanly officiousness, had swept it and dusted it and demolished the cobwebs; but since then she had not been able to obtain so much as a glimpse of the interior. A ten minutes sweeping had sufficed for the chamber, but the passage-way seemed in quite an irreclaimable state, judging by the number of times it was necessary to sweep it in the course of a few days. Now Margaret was not an unusual mixture of timidity and daring; so one morning, about a week after Richard was settled, she walked with quaking heart up to the door of the studio, and knocked as bold as brass.

Richard opened the door, and smiled pleasantly at Margaret standing on the threshold with an expression of demure defiance in her face. Did Mr. Shackford want anything more in the way of pans and pails for his plaster? No, Mr. Shackford had everything he required of the kind. But would not Miss Margaret walk in? Yes, she would step in for a moment, but with a good deal of indifference, though, giving an air of chance to her settled determination to examine that room from top to bottom.

Richard showed her his drawings and casts, and enlightened her on all the simple mysteries of his craft. Margaret, of whom he was a trifle afraid at first, amused him with her candour and sedateness, seeming now a mere child, and now an elderly person gravely inspecting matters. The frankness and simplicity were hers by nature, and the oldish ways—notably her self-possession, so quick to assert itself after an instant's forgetfulness—came perhaps of losing her mother in early childhood, and the premature duties which that misfortune entailed. She amused him, for she was only fourteen; but she impressed him also, for she was Mr. Slocum's daughter. Yet it was

not her lightness, but her gravity, that made Richard smile to himself.

"I am not interrupting you?" she asked presently.

"Not in the least," said Richard. "I am waiting for these moulds to harden. I cannot do anything until then."

"Papa says you are very clever," remarked Margaret, turning her wide black eyes full upon him. "*Are* you?"

"Far from it," replied Richard, laughing to veil his confusion, "but I am glad your father thinks so."

"You should not be glad to have him think so," returned Margaret reprovingly, "if you are not clever. I suppose you are, though. Tell the truth, now."

"It is not fair to force a fellow into praising himself."

"You are trying to creep out!"

"Well, then, there are many cleverer persons than I in the world, and a few not so clever."

"That won't do," said Margaret positively.

"I don't understand what you mean by cleverness, Miss Margaret. There are a great many kinds and degrees. I can make

fairly honest patterns for the men to work by; but I am not an artist, if you mean that."

"You are not an artist?"

"No; an artist creates, and I only copy, and that in a small way. Any one can learn to prepare casts; but to create a bust or a statue—that is to say, a fine one—a man must have genius."

"You have no genius?"

"Not a grain."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Margaret, with a disappointed look. "But perhaps it will come," she added encouragingly. "I have read that nearly all great artists and poets are almost always modest. They know better than anybody else how far they fall short of what they intend, and so they don't put on airs. You don't, either. I like that in you. May be you have genius without knowing it, Mr. Shackford."

"It is quite without knowing it, I assure you!" protested Richard, with suppressed merriment. "What an odd girl!" he thought. "She is actually talking to me like a mother!"

The twinkling light in the young man's eyes, or something that jarred in his

manner, caused Margaret at once to withdraw into herself. She went silently about the room, examining the tools and patterns; then, nearing the door, suddenly dropped Richard a quaint little courtesy and was gone.

This was the colourless beginning of a friendship that was destined speedily to be full of tender lights and shadows, and to flow on with unsuspected depth. For several days Richard saw nothing more of Margaret, and scarcely thought of her. The strange little figure was fading out of his mind, when, one afternoon, it again appeared at his door. This time Margaret had left something of her sedateness behind; she struck Richard as being both less ripe and less immature than he had fancied; she interested rather than amused him. Perhaps he had been partially insulated by his own shyness on the first occasion, and had caught only a confused and inaccurate impression of Margaret's personality. She remained half an hour in the workshop, and at her departure omitted the formal courtesy.

After this, Margaret seldom let a week slip without tapping once or twice at the

studio, at first with some pretext or other, and then with no pretence whatever. When Margaret had disburdened herself of excuses for dropping in to watch Richard mould his leaves and flowers, she came oftener, and Richard insensibly drifted into the habit of expecting her on certain days, and was disappointed when she failed to appear. His industry had saved him, until now, from discovering how solitary his life really was; for his life was as solitary—as solitary as that of Margaret, who lived in the great house with only her father, the two servants, and an episodical aunt. The mother was long ago dead; Margaret could not recollect when that grey head-stone, with blotches of rusty-green moss breaking out over the lettering, was not in the churchyard; and there never had been any brothers or sisters.

To Margaret Richard's installation in the empty room, where as a child she had always been afraid to go, was the single important break she could remember in the monotony of her existence; and now a vague yearning for companionship, the blind sense of the plant reaching towards the sunshine, drew her there. The tacitly prescribed half-

hour often lengthened to an hour. Sometimes Margaret brought a book with her, or a piece of embroidery, and the two spoke scarcely ten words, Richard giving her a smile now and then, and she returning a sympathetic nod as the cast came out successfully.

Margaret at fifteen—she was fifteen now—was not a beauty. There is the loveliness of the bud and the loveliness of the full-blown flower; but Margaret as a blossom was not pretty. She was awkward and angular, with prominent shoulder-blades, and no soft curves anywhere in her slimness; only her black hair, growing low on the forehead, and her eyes were fine. Her profile, indeed, with the narrow forehead and the sensitive upper lip, might fairly have suggested the mask of Clytie which Richard had bought of an itinerant image-dealer, and fixed on a bracket over the mantel-shelf. But her eyes were her specialty, if one may say that. They were fringed with such heavy lashes that the girl seemed always to be in half-mourning. Her smile was singularly sweet and bright, perhaps because it broke through so much sombre colouring.

If there was a latent spark of sentiment

between Richard and Margaret in those earlier days, neither was conscious of it; they had seemingly begun where happy lovers generally end,—by being dear comrades. He liked to have Margaret sitting there, with her needle flashing in the sunlight, or her eyelashes making a rich gloom above the book as she read aloud. It was so agreeable to look up from his work, and not be alone. He had been alone so much. And Margaret found nothing in the world pleasanter than to sit there and watch Richard making his winter garden, as she called it. By and by it became her custom to pass every Saturday afternoon in that employment.

Margaret was not content to be merely a visitor; she took a housewifely care of the workshop, resolutely straightening out its chronic disorder at unexpected moments, and fighting the white dust that settled upon everything. The green-paper shade, which did not roll up very well, at the west window was of her devising. An empty camphor vial on Richard's desk had always a clove pink, or a pansy, or a rose, stuck into it, according to the season. She hid herself away and peeped out in a hun-

dred feminine things in the room. Sometimes she was a bit of crochet-work left on a chair, and sometimes she was only a hair-pin, which Richard gravely picked up and put on the mantel-piece.

Mr. Slocum threw no obstacles in the path of this idyllic friendship; possibly he did not observe it. In his eyes Margaret was still a child,—a point of view that necessarily excluded any consideration of Richard. Perhaps, however, if Mr. Slocum could have assisted invisibly at a pretty little scene which took place in the studio one day, some twelve or eighteen months after Margaret's first visit to it, he might have found food for reflection.

It was a Saturday afternoon. Margaret had come into the workshop with her sewing, as usual. The papers on the round table had been neatly cleared away, and Richard was standing by the window, indolently drumming on the glass with a palette-knife.

"Not at work this afternoon?"

"I was waiting for you."

"That is no excuse at all," said Margaret, sweeping across the room with a curious air of self-consciousness, and arranging her

drapery with infinite pains as she seated herself.

Richard looked puzzled for a moment, and then exclaimed, "Margaret, you have got on a long dress!"

"Yes," said Margaret, with dignity. "Do you like it,—the train?"

"That 's a train?"

"Yes," said Margaret, standing up and glancing over her left shoulder at the soft folds of maroon-coloured stuff, which, with a mysterious feminine movement of the foot, she caused to untwist itself and flow out gracefully behind her. There was really something very pretty in the hesitating lines of the tall, slender figure, as she leaned back that way. Certain unsuspected points emphasised themselves so cunningly.

"I never saw anything finer," declared Richard. "It was worth waiting for."

"But you shouldn't have waited," said Margaret, with a gratified flush, settling herself into the chair again. "It was understood that you were never to let me interfere with your work."

"You see you have, by being twenty minutes late. I've finished that acorn border for Stevens's capitals, and there 's

nothing more to do for the yard. I am going to make something for myself, and I want you to lend me a hand."

"How can I help you, Richard?" Margaret asked, promptly stopping the needle in the hem.

"I need a paper-weight to keep my sketches from being blown about, and I wish you literally to lend me a hand,—a hand to take a cast of."

"Really?"

"I think that little white claw would make a very neat paper-weight," said Richard.

Margaret gravely rolled up her sleeve to the elbow, and contemplated the hand and wrist critically.

"It is like a claw, isn't it? I think you can find something better than that."

"No; that is what I want, and nothing else. That, or no paper-weight for me."

"Very well, just as you choose. It will be a fright."

The other hand, please."

"I gave you the left because I 've a ring on this one."

"You can take off the ring, I suppose."

"Of course I can take it off."

"Well, then, do."

"Richard," said Margaret severely, "I hope you are not a fidget."

"A what?"

"A fuss, then,—a person who always wants everything some other way, and makes just twice as much trouble as anybody else."

"No, Margaret, I am not that. I prefer your right hand because the left is next to the heart, and the evaporation of the water in the plaster turns it as cold as snow. Your arm will be chilled to the shoulder. We don't want to do anything to hurt the good little heart, you know."

"Certainly not," said Margaret. "There!" and she rested her right arm on the table, while Richard placed the hand in the desired position on a fresh napkin which he had folded for the purpose.

"Let your hand lie flexible, please. Hold it naturally. Why do you stiffen the fingers so?"

"I don't; they stiffen themselves, Richard. They know they are going to have their photograph taken, and can't look natural. Who ever does?"

After a minute the fingers relaxed, and set-

tled of their own accord into an easy pose. Richard laid his hand softly on her wrist.

"Don't move now."

"I'll be as quiet as a mouse," said Margaret, giving a sudden queer little glance at his face.

Richard emptied a paper of white powder into a great yellow bowl half filled with water, and fell to stirring it vigorously, like a pastry-cook beating eggs. When the plaster was of the proper consistency he began building it up around the hand, pouring on a spoonful at a time, here and there, carefully. In a minute or two the inert white fingers were completely buried. Margaret made a comical grimace.

"Is it cold?"

"Ice," said Margaret, shutting her eyes involuntarily.

"If it is too disagreeable we can give it up," suggested Richard.

"No, don't touch it!" she cried, waving him back with her free arm. "I don't mind; but it's as cold as so much snow. How curious! What does it?"

"I suppose a scientific fellow could explain the matter to you easily enough. When the water evaporates a kind of congealing

process sets in,—a sort of atmospherical change, don't you know? The sudden precipitation of the—the——"

"You're as good as Tyndall on *Heat*," said Margaret demurely.

"Oh, Tyndall is well enough in his way," returned Richard, "but of course he doesn't go into things so deeply as I do."

"The idea of telling me that 'a congealing process sets in,' when I am nearly frozen to death!" cried Margaret, bowing her head over the imprisoned arm.

"Your unseemly levity, Margaret, makes it necessary for me to defer my remarks on natural phenomena until some more fitting occasion."

"O Richard, don't let an atmospherical change come over *you!*"

"When you knocked at my door, months ago," said Richard, "I didn't dream you were such a satirical little piece, or may be you wouldn't have got in. You stood there as meek as Moses, with your frock reaching only to the tops of your boots. You were a deception, Margaret."

"I was dreadfully afraid of you, Richard."

"You are not afraid of me nowadays."

"Not a bit."

"You are showing your true colours. That long dress, too! I believe the train has turned your head."

"But just now you said you admired it."

"So I did, and do. It makes you look quite like a woman, though."

"I want to be a woman. I would like to be as old—as old as Mrs. Methuselah. Was there a Mrs. Methuselah?"

"I really forget," replied Richard, considering. "But there must have been. The old gentleman had time enough to have several. I believe, however, that history is rather silent about his domestic affairs."

"Well, then," said Margaret, after thinking it over, "I would like to be as old as the youngest Mrs. Methuselah."

"That was probably the last one," remarked Richard, with great profundity. "She was probably some giddy young thing of seventy or eighty. Those old widowers never take a wife of their own age. I shouldn't want you to be seventy, Margaret,—or even eighty."

"On the whole, perhaps, I shouldn't fancy it myself. Do you approve of persons marrying twice?"

"N—o, not at the same time."

"Of course I didn't mean that," said Margaret, with asperity. "How provoking you can be!"

"But they used to,—in the olden time, don't you know?"

"No, I don't."

Richard burst out laughing. "Imagine him," he cried,—"imagine Methuselah in his eight or nine hundredth year, dressed in his customary bridal suit, with a sprig of century-plant stuck in his button-hole!"

"Richard," said Margaret solemnly, "you shouldn't speak jestingly of a Scriptural character."

At this Richard broke out again. "But gracious me!" he exclaimed, suddenly checking himself. "I am forgetting you all this while!"

Richard hurriedly reversed the mass of plaster on the table, and released Margaret's half-petrified fingers. They were shrivelled and colourless with the cold.

"There isn't any feeling in it whatever," said Margaret, holding up her hand helplessly, like a wounded wing.

Richard took the fingers between his palms, and chafed them smartly for a

moment or two to restore the suspended circulation.

"There, that will do," said Margaret, withdrawing her hand.

"Are you all right now?"

"Yes, thanks;" and then she added, smiling, "I suppose a scientific fellow could explain why my fingers seem to be full of hot pins and needles shooting in every direction."

"Tyndall 's your man—Tyndall on *Heat*," answered Richard, with a laugh, turning to examine the result of his work. "The mould is perfect, Margaret. You were a good girl to keep so still."

Richard then proceeded to make the cast, which was soon placed on the window ledge to harden in the sun. When the plaster was set, he cautiously chipped off the shell with a chisel, Margaret leaning over his shoulder to watch the operation,—and there was the little white claw, which ever after took such dainty care of his papers, and ultimately became so precious to him as a part of Margaret's very self, that he would not have exchanged it for the Venus of Milo.

But as yet Richard was far enough from all that.

X.

THREE years glided by with Richard Shackford as swiftly as those periods of time which are imagined to elapse between the acts of a play. They were eventless, untroubled years, and have no history. Nevertheless, certain changes had taken place. Little by little Mr. Slocum had relinquished the supervision of the workshops to Richard until now the affairs of the yard rested chiefly on his shoulders. It was like a dream to him when he looked directly back to his humble beginning, though as he reflected upon it, and retraced his progress step by step, he saw there was nothing illogical or astonishing in his good fortune. He had won it by downright hard work and the faithful exercise of a sufficing talent.

In his relations with Margaret, Richard's attitude had undergone no appreciable

change. Her chance visits to the studio through the week, and those pleasant, half-idle Saturday afternoons, had become to both Richard and Margaret a matter of course, like the sunlight, or the air they breathed.

To Richard, Margaret Slocum at nineteen was simply a charming, frank girl,—a type of gracious young womanhood. He was conscious of her influence; he was very fond of Margaret; but she had not yet taken on for him that magic individuality which makes a woman the one woman in the world to her lover. Though Richard had scant experience in such matters, he was not wrong in accepting Margaret as the type of a class of New England girls, which, fortunately for New England, is not a small class. These young women for the most part lead quiet and restricted lives so far as the actualities are concerned, but very deep and full lives in the world of books and imagination, to which they make early escapes. They have the high instincts that come of good blood, the physique that naturally fits fine manners; and when chance takes one of these maidens from her inland country home or from some sleepy town on

the seaboard, and sets her amid the complications of city existence, she is an unabashed and unassuming lady. If in Paris, she differs from the Parisiennes only in the greater delicacy of her lithe beauty, her innocence which is not ignorance, and her French pronunciation; if in London, she differs from English girls only in the matter of rosy cheeks and the rising inflection. Should none of these fortunate transplantings befall her, she always merits them by adorning with grace and industry and intelligence the narrower sphere to which destiny has assigned her.

Destiny had assigned Margaret Slocum to a very narrow sphere; it had shut her up in an obscure New England manufacturing village, with no society, strictly speaking, and no outlets whatever to large experiences. To her father's affection, Richard's friendship, and her household duties she was forced to look for her happiness. If life held wider possibilities for her, she had not dreamed of them. She looked up to Richard with respect,—perhaps with a dash of sentiment in the respect; there was something at once gentle and virile in his character which she admired and leaned upon; in his

presence the small housekeeping troubles always slipped from her; but her heart, to use a pretty French phrase, had not consciously spoken,—possibly it had murmured a little, incoherently, to itself, but it had not spoken out aloud, as perhaps it would have done long ago if an impediment had been placed in the way of their intimacy. With all her subtler intuitions, Margaret was as far as Richard from suspecting the strength and direction of the current with which they were drifting. Freedom, habit, and the nature of their environment conspired to prolong this mutual lack of perception. The hour had sounded, however, when these two were to see each other in a different light.

One Monday morning in March, at the close of the three years in question, as Richard mounted the outside staircase leading to his studio in the extension, the servant-maid beckoned to him from the kitchen window.

Margaret had failed to come to the studio the previous Saturday afternoon. Richard had worked at cross-purposes and returned to his boarding-house vaguely dissatisfied, as always happened to him on those rare

occasions when she missed the appointment; but he had thought little of the circumstance. Nor had he been disturbed on Sunday at seeing the Slocum pew vacant during both services. The heavy snow-storm which had begun the night before accounted for at least Margaret's absence.

"Mr. Slocum told me to tell you that he shouldn't be in the yard to-day," said the girl. "Miss Margaret is very ill."

"Ill!" Richard repeated, and the smile with which he had leaned over the rail towards the window went out instantly on his lip.

"Dr. Weld was up with her until five o'clock this morning," said the girl, fingering the corner of her apron. "She 's that low."

"What is the matter?"

"It 's a fever."

"What kind of fever?"

"I don't mind me what the doctor called it. He thinks it come from something wrong with the drains."

"He didn't say typhoid?"

"Yes, that 's the name of it."

Richard ascended the stairs with a slow step, and a moment afterwards stood stupidly

in the middle of the workshop. "Margaret is going to die," he said to himself, giving voice to the dark foreboding that had instantly seized upon him, and in a swift vision he saw the end of all that simple, fortunate existence which he had lived without once reflecting it could ever end. He mechanically picked up a tool from the table, and laid it down again. Then he seated himself on the low bench between the windows. It was Margaret's favourite place; it was not four days since she sat there reading to him. Already it appeared long ago,—years and years ago. He could hardly remember when he did not have this heavy weight on his heart. His life of yesterday abruptly presented itself to him as a reminiscence; he saw now how happy that life had been, and how lightly he had accepted it. It took to itself all that precious quality of things irrevocably lost.

The clamour of the bell in the South Church striking noon, and the shrilling of the steam-whistles softened by the thick-falling snow, roused Richard from his abstraction. He was surprised that it was noon. He rose from the bench and went home through the storm, scarcely heeding

the sleet that snapped in his face like whip-lashes. Margaret was going to die!

For four or five weeks the world was nearly a blank to Richard Shackford. The insidious fever that came and went, bringing alternate despair and hope to the watchers in the hushed room, was in his veins also. He passed the days between his lonely lodgings in Lime Street and the studio, doing nothing, restless and apathetic by turns, but with always a poignant sense of anxiety. He ceased to take any distinct measurement of time further than to note that an interval of months seemed to separate Monday from Monday. Meanwhile, if new patterns had been required by the men, the work in the carving departments would have come to a dead lock.

At length the shadow lifted, and there fell a day of soft May weather when Margaret, muffled in shawls and as white as death, was seated once more in her accustomed corner by the west window. She had insisted on being brought there the first practicable moment; nowhere else in the house was such sunshine, and Mr. Slocum himself had brought her in his arms. She leaned back against the pillows, smiling faintly. Her

fingers lay locked on her lap, and the sunlight showed through the narrow transparent palms. It was as if her hands were full of blush-roses.

Richard breathed again, but not with so free a heart as before. What if she had died? He felt an immense pity for himself when he thought of that, and he thought of it continually as the days wore on.

Either a great alteration had wrought itself in Margaret, or Richard beheld her through a clearer medium during the weeks of convalescence that followed. Was this the slight, sharp-faced girl he used to know? The eyes and the hair were the same; but the smile was deeper, and the pliant figure had lost its extreme slimness without a sacrifice to its delicacy. The spring air was filling her veins with abundant health, and mantling her cheeks with a richer duskiness than they had ever worn. Margaret was positively handsome. Her beauty had come all in a single morning, like the crocuses. This beauty began to awe Richard; it had the effect of seeming to remove her further and further from him. He grew moody and restless when they were together, and was wretched alone. His constraint did not

escape Margaret. She watched him, and wondered at his inexplicable depression when every one in the household was rejoicing in her recovery. By and by this depression wounded her, but she was too spirited to show the hurt. She always brought a book with her now, in her visits to the studio; it was less awkward to read than to sit silent and unspoken to over a piece of needlework.

"How very odd you are!" said Margaret, one afternoon, closing the volume which she had held mutely for several minutes, waiting for Richard to grasp the fact that she had ceased reading aloud.

"I odd!" protested Richard, breaking with a jerk from one of his long reveries. "In what way?"

"As if I could explain—when you put the question suddenly, like that."

"I didn't intend to be abrupt. I was curious to know. And then the charge itself was a trifle unexpected, if you will look at it. But never mind," he added, with a smile; "think it over, and tell me to-morrow."

"No, I will tell you now, since you are willing to wait."

"I wasn't really willing to wait, but I knew if I didn't pretend to be I should never get it out of you."

"Very well, then; your duplicity is successful. Richard, I am puzzled where to begin with your oddities."

"Begin at the beginning."

"No, I will take the nearest. When a young lady is affable enough to read aloud to you, the least you can do is to listen to her. That is a deference you owe to the author, when it happens to be Hawthorne, to say nothing of the young lady."

"But I *have* been listening, Margaret. Every word!"

"Where did I leave off?"

"It was where—where the"—and Richard knitted his brows in the vain effort to remember—"where the young daguerreotypist, what's-his-name, took up his residence in the House of the Seven Gables."

"No, sir! You stand convicted. It was ten pages further on. The last words were,"—and Margaret read from the book—

"'Good night, cousin,' said Phœbe, strangely affected by Hepzibah's manner. 'If you begin to love me, I am glad.'"

"There, sir! what do you say to that?"

Richard did not say anything, but he gave a guilty start, and shot a rapid glance at Margaret coolly enjoying her triumph.

"In the next place," she continued soberly, after a pause, "I think it very odd in you not to reply to me,—oh, not now, for of course you are without a word of justification; but at other times. Frequently, when I speak to you, you look at me so," making a vacant little face, "and then suddenly disappear,—I don't mean bodily, but mentally."

"I am no great talker at best," said Richard, with a helpless air. "I seldom speak, unless I have something to say."

"But other people do. I, for instance."

"Oh, you, Margaret; that is different. When you talk I don't much mind what you are talking about."

"I like a neat, delicate compliment like that!"

"What a perverse girl you are to-day!" cried Richard. "You won't understand me. I mean that your words and your voice are so pleasant they make anything interesting, whether it 's important or not."

"If no one were to speak until he had something important to communicate," ob-

served Margaret, "conversation in this world would come to a general stop." Then she added, with a little ironical smile, "Even you, Richard, wouldn't be talking all the time."

Formerly Margaret's light sarcasms, even when they struck him point-blank, used to amuse Richard; but now he winced at being merely grazed.

Margaret went on: "But it's not a bit necessary to be oracular or instructive—with me. I am interested in trivial matters,—in the weather, in my spring hat, in what you are going to do next, and the like. One must occupy one's-self with something. But you, Richard, nowadays you seem interested in nothing, and have nothing whatever to say."

Poor Richard! He had a great deal to say, but he did not know how, nor if it were wise to breathe it. Just three little words, murmured or whispered, and the whole conditions would be changed. With those fateful words uttered, what would be Margaret's probable attitude, and what Mr. Slocum's? Though the line which formerly drew itself between employer and employee had grown faint with time, it still existed

in Richard's mind, and now came to the surface with great distinctness, like a word written in sympathetic ink. If he spoke, and Margaret was startled or offended, then there was an end to their free, unembarrassed intercourse,—perhaps an end to all intercourse. By keeping his secret locked in his breast he at least secured the present. But that was to risk everything. Any day somebody might come and carry Margaret off under his very eyes. As he reflected on this, the shadow of John Dana, the son of the rich iron-manufacturer, etched itself sharply upon Richard's imagination. Within the week young Dana had declared in the presence of Richard that "Margaret Slocum was an awfully nice little thing," and the Othello in Richard's blood had been set seething. Then his thought glanced from John Dana to Mr. Pinkham and the Rev. Arthur Langly, both of whom were assiduous visitors at the house. The former had lately taken to accompanying Margaret on the piano with his dismal little flute, and the latter was perpetually making a moth of himself about her class at Sunday-school.

Richard stood with the edge of his chisel resting idly upon the plaster mould in front

of him, pondering these things. Presently he heard Margaret's voice, as if somewhere in the distance, saying—

"I have not finished yet, Richard."

"Go on," said Richard, falling to work again with a kind of galvanic action. "Go on, please."

"I have a serious grievance. Frankly, I am hurt by your preoccupation and indifference, your want of openness or cordiality, —I don't know how to name it. You are the only person who seems to be unaware that I escaped a great danger a month ago. I am obliged to remember all the agreeable hours I have spent in the studio to keep off the impression that during my illness you got used to not seeing me, and that now my presence somehow obstructs your work and annoys you."

Richard threw his chisel on the bench, and crossed over to the window where Margaret sat.

"You are as wrong as you can be," he said, looking down on her half-lifted face, from which a quick wave of colour was subsiding; for the abruptness of Richard's movement had startled her.

"I am glad if I am wrong."

"It is nearly an unforgivable thing to be as wide of the mark as you are. O Margaret, if you had died that time!"

"You would have been very sorry?"

"Sorry? No. That doesn't express it; one outlives mere sorrow. If anything had happened to you, I should never have got over it. You don't know what those five weeks were to me. It was a kind of death to come to this room day after day, and not find you."

Margaret rested her eyes thoughtfully on the space occupied by Richard rather than on Richard himself, seeming to look through and beyond him, as if he were incorporeal.

"You missed me like that?" she said slowly.

"I missed you like that."

Margaret meditated a moment. "In the first days of my illness I wondered if you didn't miss me a little; afterwards everything was confused in my mind. When I tried to think, I seemed to be somebody else, I seemed to be *you* waiting for me here in the studio. Wasn't that singular? But when I recovered, and returned to my old place, I began to suspect I had been bearing your anxiety,—that I had been dis-

tressed by the absence to which you had grown accustomed."

"I never got used to it, Margaret. It became more and more unendurable. This workshop was full of—of your absence. There wasn't a sketch or a cast or an object in the room that didn't remind me of you, and seem to mock at me for having let the most precious moments of my life slip away unheeded. That bit of geranium in the glass yonder seemed to say with its dying breath, 'You have cared for neither of us as you ought to have cared; my scent and her goodness have been all one to you,—things to take or to leave. It was for no merit of yours that she was always planning something to make life smoother and brighter for you. What had you done to deserve it? How unselfish and generous and good she has been to you for years and years! What would have become of you without her? She left me here on purpose'—it's the geranium leaf that is speaking all the while, Margaret—'to say this to you, and to tell you that she was not half appreciated; and now you have lost her!'"

As she leaned forward listening, with her lips slightly parted, Margaret gave an un-

conscious little approbative nod of the head. Richard's fanciful accusation of himself caused her a singular thrill of pleasure. He had never before spoken to her in just this fashion; the subterfuge which his tenderness had employed, the little detour it had made in order to get at her, was a novel species of flattery. She recognised the ring of a distinctly new note in his voice; but, strangely enough, the note lost its unfamiliarity in an instant. Margaret recognised that fact also, and as she swiftly speculated on the phenomenon her pulse went one or two strokes faster.

"O you poor boy!" she said, looking up with a laugh and a flush so interfused that they seemed one, "that geranium took a great deal upon itself. It went quite beyond its instructions, which were simply to remind you of me now and then. One day, while you were out,—the day before I was taken ill,—I placed the flowers on the desk there, perhaps with a kind of premonition that I was going away from you for a time."

"What if you had never come back!"

"I wouldn't think of that if I were you," said Margaret softly.

"But it haunts me—that thought. Sometimes of a morning, after I unlock the workshop door, I stand hesitating, with my hand on the latch, as one might hesitate a few seconds before stepping into a tomb. There were days last month, Margaret, when this chamber did appear to me like a tomb. All that was happy in my past seemed to lie buried here; it was something visible and tangible; I used to steal in and look upon it."

"O Richard!"

"If you only knew what a life I led as a boy in my cousin's house, and what a doleful existence for years afterwards, until I found you, perhaps you would understand my despair when I saw everything suddenly slipping away from me. Margaret! the day your father brought you in here, I had all I could do not to kneel down at your feet——" Richard stopped short. "I didn't mean to tell you that," he added, turning towards the work-table. Then he checked himself, and came and stood in front of her again. He had gone too far not to go further. "While you were ill I made a great discovery."

"What was that, Richard?"

"I discovered that I had been blind for two or three years."

"Blind?" repeated Margaret.

"Stone-blind. I discovered it by suddenly seeing—by seeing that I had loved you all the while, Margaret! Are you offended?"

"No," said Margaret slowly; she was a moment finding her voice to say it. "I—ought I to be offended?"

"Not if you are not!" said Richard.

"Then I am not. I—I've made little discoveries myself," murmured Margaret, going into full mourning with her eyelashes.

But it was only for an instant. She refused to take her happiness shyly or insincerely; it was something too sacred. She was a trifle appalled by it, if the truth must be told. If Richard had scattered his love-making through the month of her convalescence, or if he had made his avowal in a different mood, perhaps Margaret might have met him with some natural coquetry. But Richard's tone and manner had been such as to suppress any instinct of the kind. His declaration, moreover, had amazed her. Margaret's own feelings had been more or less plain to her that past month, and she

had diligently disciplined herself to accept Richard's friendship, since it seemed all he had to give. Indeed, it had seemed at times as if he had not even that.

When Margaret lifted her eyes to him, a second after her confession, they were full of a sweet seriousness, and she had no thought of withdrawing the hands which Richard had taken, and was holding lightly, that she might withdraw them if she willed. She felt no impulse to do so, though as Margaret looked up she saw her father standing a few paces behind Richard.

With an occult sense of another presence in the room, Richard turned at the same instant.

Mr. Slocum had advanced two steps into the apartment, and had been brought to a dead halt by the surprising tableau in the embrasure of the window. He stood motionless, with an account-book under his arm, while a dozen expressions chased each other over his countenance.

"Mr. Slocum," said Richard, who saw that only one course lay open to him, "I love Margaret, and I have been telling her."

At that the flitting shadows on Mr. Slocum's face settled into one grave look.

He did not reply immediately, but let his glance wander from Margaret to Richard, and back again to Margaret, slowly digesting the fact. It was evident he had not relished it. Meanwhile the girl had risen from the chair and was moving towards her father.

"This strikes me as very extraordinary," he said at last. "You have never given any intimation that such a feeling existed. How long has this been going on?"

"I have always been fond of Margaret, sir; but I was not aware of the strength of the attachment until the time of her illness, when I—that is, we—came so near losing her."

"And you, Margaret?"

As Mr. Slocum spoke he instinctively put one arm around Margaret, who had crept closely to his side.

"I don't know when I began to love Richard," said Margaret simply.

"You don't know!"

"Perhaps it was while I was ill; perhaps it was long before that; may be my liking for him commenced as far back as the time he made the cast of my hand. How can I tell, papa? I don't know."

"There appears to be an amazing diffusion of ignorance here!"

Margaret bit her lip, and kept still. Her father was taking it a great deal more seriously than she had expected. A long, awkward silence ensued. Richard broke it at last by remarking uneasily, "Nothing has been or was to be concealed from you. Before going to sleep to-night Margaret would have told you all I've said to her."

"You should have consulted with me before saying anything."

"I intended to do so, but my words got away from me. I hope you will overlook it, sir, and not oppose my loving Margaret, though I see as plainly as you do that I am not worthy of her."

"I have not said that. I base my disapproval on entirely different ground. Margaret is too young. A girl of seventeen or eighteen——"

"Nineteen," said Margaret parenthetically.

"Of nineteen, then,—has no business to bother her head with such matters. Only yesterday she was a child!"

Richard glanced across at Margaret, and

endeavoured to recall her as she impressed him that first afternoon, when she knocked defiantly at the workshop door to inquire if he wanted any pans and pails; but he was totally unable to reconstruct that crude little figure with the glossy black head, all eyes and beak, like a young hawk's.

"My objection is impersonal," continued Mr. Slocum. "I object to the idea. I wish this had not happened. I might not have disliked it—years hence; I don't say; but I dislike it now."

Richard's face brightened. "It will be years hence in a few years!"

Mr. Slocum replied with a slow, grave smile, "I am not going to be unreasonable in a matter where I find Margaret's happiness concerned; and yours Richard, I care for that too; but I'll have no entanglements. You and she are to be good friends, and nothing beyond. I prefer that Margaret should not come to the studio so often; you shall see her whenever you like at our fireside, of an evening. I don't think the conditions hard."

Mr. Slocum had dictated terms, but it was virtually a surrender. Margaret listened to him with her cheek resting against his arm,

and a warm light nestled down deep under her eyelids.

Mr. Slocum drew a half-pathetic sigh. "I presume I have not done wisely. Every one bullies me. The Marble Workers' Association runs my yard for me, and now my daughter is taken off my hands. By the way, Richard," he said, interrupting himself brusquely, and with an air of dismissing the subject, "I forgot what I came for. I 've been thinking over Torrini's case, and have concluded that you had better make up his account and discharge him."

"Certainly, sir," replied Richard, with a shadow of dissent in his manner, "if you wish it."

"He causes a deal of trouble in the yard."

"I am afraid he does. Such a clean workman when he 's sober."

"But he is never sober."

"He has been in a bad way lately, I admit."

"His example demoralises the men. I can see it day by day."

"I wish he were not so necessary at this moment," observed Richard. "I don't know who else could be trusted with the frieze for the Soldiers' Monument. I 'd like

to keep him on a week or ten days longer. Suppose I have a plain talk with Torrini?"

"Surely we have enough good hands to stand the loss of one."

"For a special kind of work there is nobody in the yard like Torrini. That is one reason why I want to hold on to him for a while, and there are other reasons."

"Such as what?"

"Well, I think it would not be wholly politic to break with him just now."

"Why not now as well as any time?"

"He has lately been elected secretary of the Association."

"What of that?"

"He has a great deal of influence there."

"If we put him out of the works, it seems to me he would lose his importance, if he really has any to speak of."

"You are mistaken if you doubt it. His position gives him a chance to do much mischief, and he would avail himself of it very adroitly, if he had a personal grievance."

"I believe you are actually afraid of the fellow."

Richard smiled, "No, I am not afraid of him, but I don't underrate him. The men look up to Torrini as a sort of leader; he's

an effective speaker, and knows very well how to fan a dissatisfaction. Either he or some other disturbing element has recently been at work among the men. There 's considerable grumbling in the yard."

"They are always grumbling, aren't they?"

"Most always, but this is more serious than usual; there appears to be a general stir among the trades in the village. I don't understand it clearly. The marble workers have been holding secret meetings."

"They mean business, you think?"

"They mean increased wages, perhaps."

"But we are now paying from five to ten per cent. more than any trade in the place. What are they after?"

"So far as I can gather, sir, the finishers and the slab-sawyers want an advance,—I don't know how much. Then there 's some talk about having the yard closed an hour earlier on Saturdays. All this is merely rumour; but I am sure there is something in it."

"Confound the whole lot! If we can t discharge a drunken hand without raising the pay of all the rest, we had better turn

over the entire business to the Association. But do as you like, Richard. You see how I am bullied, Margaret. He runs everything! Come, dear."

And Mr. Slocum quitted the workshop, taking Margaret with him. Richard remained standing a while by the table, in a deep study, with his eyes fixed on the floor. He thought of his early days in the sepulchral house in Welch's Court, of his wanderings abroad, his long years of toil since then, of this sudden blissful love that had come to him, and Mr. Slocum's generosity. Then he thought of Torrini, and went down into the yard gently to admonish the man, for Richard's heart that hour was full of kindness for all the world.

XI.

IN spite of Mr. Slocum's stipulations respecting the frequency of Margaret's visits to the studio, she was free to come and go as she liked. It was easy for him to say, Be good friends, and nothing beyond; but after that day in the workshop it was impossible for Richard and Margaret to be anything but lovers. The hollowness of pretending otherwise was clear even to Mr. Slocum. In the love of a father for a daughter there is always a vague jealousy which refuses to render a coherent explanation of itself. Mr. Slocum did not escape this, but he managed, nevertheless, to accept the inevitable with very fair grace, and presently to confess to himself that the occurrence which had at first taken him aback was the most natural in the world. That Margaret and Richard, thrown together as they had been, should end by

falling in love with each other was not a result to justify much surprise. Indeed, there was a special propriety in their doing so. The Shackfords had always been reputable people in the village, — down to Lemuel Shackford, who of course was an old musk-rat. The family attributes of amiability and honesty had skipped him, but they had reappeared in Richard. It was through his foresight and personal energy that the most lucrative branch of the trade had been established. His services entitled him to a future interest in the business, and Mr. Slocum had intended he should have it. Mr. Slocum had not dreamed of throwing in Margaret also; but since that addition had suggested itself, it seemed to him one of the happy features of the arrangement. Richard would thus be doubly identified with the yard, to which, in fact, he had become more necessary than Mr. Slocum himself.

"He has more backbone with the men than I have," acknowledged Mr. Slocum. "He knows how to manage them and I don't."

As soft as Slocum was a Stillwater proverb. Richard certainly had plenty of back-

bone; it was his only capital. In Mr. Slocum's estimation it was sufficient capital. But Lemuel Shackford was a very rich man, and Mr. Slocum could not avoid seeing that it would be decent in Richard's only surviving relative if, at this juncture, he were to display a little interest in the young fellow's welfare.

"If he would only offer to advance a few thousand dollars for Richard," said Mr. Slocum, one evening, to Margaret, with whom he had been talking over the future, —"the property must all come to him some time,—it would be a vast satisfaction to me to tell the old man that we can get along without any of his ill-gotten gains. He made the bulk of his fortune during the war, you know. The old sea-serpent," continued Mr. Slocum, with hopeless confusion of metaphor, "had a hand in fitting out more than one blockade-runner. They used to talk of a ship that got away from Charleston with a cargo of cotton that netted the shareholders upwards of two hundred thousand dollars. He denies it now, but everybody knows Shackford. He'd betray his country for fifty cents in postage-stamps."

"O papa! you are too hard on him."

In words dropped cursorily from time to time, Margaret imparted to Richard the substance of her father's speech, and it set Richard reflecting. It was not among the probabilities that Lemuel Shackford would advance a dollar to establish Richard, but if he could induce his cousin even to take the matter into consideration, Richard felt that it would be a kind of moral support to him circumstanced as he was. His pride revolted at the idea of coming quite unbacked and disowned, as well as empty-handed to Mr. Slocum.

For the last twelve months there had been a cessation of ordinary courtesies between the two cousins. They now passed each other on the street without recognition. A year previously Mr. Shackford had fallen ill, and Richard, aware of the inefficient domestic arrangements in Welch's Court, had gone to the house out of sheer pity. The old man was in bed, and weak with fever, but at seeing Richard he managed to raise himself on one elbow.

"Oh, it 's you!" he exclaimed mockingly. "When a rich man is sick the anxious heirs crowd around him; but they 're twice as honestly anxious when he is perfectly well."

"I came to see if I could do anything for you!" cried Richard, with a ferocious glare, and in a tone that went curiously with his words, and shook to the foundations his character of Good Samaritan.

"The only thing you can do for me is to go away."

"I'll do that with pleasure," retorted Richard bitterly.

And Richard went, vowing he would never set foot across the threshold again. He could not help having ugly thoughts. Why should all the efforts to bring about a reconciliation and all the forbearance be on his side? Thenceforth the crabbed old man might go to perdition if he wanted to.

And now here was Richard meditating a visit to that same house to beg a favour!

Nothing but his love for Margaret could have dragged him to such a banquet of humble-pie as he knew was spread for his delectation the morning he passed up the main street of Stillwater and turned into Welch's Court.

As Richard laid his hand on the latch of the gate, Mr. Shackford, who was digging in the front garden, looked up and saw him. Without paying any heed to Richard's

amicable salutation, the old man left the shovel sticking in the sod, and walked stiffly into the house. At another moment this would have amused Richard, but now he gravely followed his kinsman, and overtook him at the foot of the staircase.

"Cousin Shackford, can you spare me five or ten minutes?"

"Don't know as I can," said Mr. Shackford, with one foot on the lower stair. "Time is valuable. What do you want? You want something."

"Certainly, or I wouldn't think of trespassing on your time."

"Has Slocum thrown you over?" inquired the old man, turning quickly. A straw which he held between his thin lips helped to give him a singularly alert expression.

"No; Mr. Slocum and I agree the best in the world. I want to talk with you briefly on certain matters; I want to be on decent terms with you, if you will let me."

"Decent terms means money, doesn't it?" asked Mr. Shackford, with a face as wary and lean as a shark's.

"I do wish to talk about money, among other things," returned Richard, whom this

brutal directness disconcerted a little,— "money on satisfactory security."

"You can get it anywhere with that."

"So I might, and be asking no favour; but I would rather get it of you, and consider it an obligation."

"I would rather you wouldn't."

"Listen to me a moment."

"Well, I 'm listening."

Mr. Shackford stood in an attitude of attention, with his head canted on one side, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and the straw between his teeth tilted up at an angle of forty degrees.

"I have, as you know, worked my way in the marble yard to the position of general manager," began Richard.

"I didn't know," said Mr. Shackford, "but I understand. You 're a sort of head grave-stone maker."

"That is taking rather a gloomy view of it," said Richard, "but no matter. The point is, I hold a responsible position, and I now have a chance to purchase a share in the works."

"Slocum is willing to take you in, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then the concern is hit."

"Hit?"

"Slocum is going into bankruptcy."

"You are wrong there. The yard was never so prosperous; the coming year we shall coin money like a mint."

"You ought to know," said Mr. Shackford ruminatively. "A thing as good as a mint must be a good thing."

"If I were a partner in the business, I could marry Margaret."

"Who 's Margaret?"

"Mr. Slocum's daughter."

"That 's where the wind is? Now how much capital would it take to do all that?" inquired Mr. Shackford, with an air of affable speculation.

"Three or four thousand dollars,—perhaps less."

"Well, I wouldn't give three or four cents to have you marry Slocum's daughter. Richard, you can't pull any chestnuts out of the fire with my paw."

Mr. Shackford's interrogations and his more than usual conciliatory manner had lighted a hope which Richard had not brought with him. Its sudden extinguishment was in consequence doubly aggravating.

"Slocum's daughter!" repeated Mr. Shackford. "I'd as soon you would marry Crazy Nan up at the workhouse."

The association of Crazy Nan with Margaret sent a red flush into Richard's cheek. He turned angrily towards the door, and then halted, recollecting the resolves he had made not to lose his temper, come what would. If the interview was to end there it had better not have taken place.

"I had no expectation that you would assist me pecuniarily," said Richard, after a moment. "Let us drop the money question; it shouldn't have come up between us. I want you to aid me, not by lending me money, but by giving me your countenance as the head of the family,—by showing a natural interest in my affairs, and seeming disposed to promote them."

"By just seeming?"

"That is really all I desire. If you were to propose to put capital into the concern, Mr. Slocum would refuse it."

"Slocum would refuse it! Why in the devil should he refuse it?"

"Because"—Richard hesitated, finding himself unexpectedly on delicate ground—"because he would not care to enter into

business relations with you, under the circumstances."

Mr. Shackford removed the straw from his mouth, and holding it between his thumb and forefinger peered steadily through his half-closed eyelids at Richard.

"I don't understand you."

"The dispute you had long ago, over the piece of meadow-land behind the marble yard. Mr. Slocum felt that you bore on him rather heavily in that matter, and has not quite forgiven you for forcing him to rebuild the sheds."

"Bother Slocum and his sheds! I understand him. What I don't understand is *you*. I am to offer Slocum three or four thousand dollars to set you up, and he is to decline to take it. Is that it?"

"That is not it at all," returned Richard. "My statement was this: If you were to propose purchasing a share for me in the works, Mr. Slocum would not entertain the proposition, thinking—as I don't think—that he would mortify you by the refusal of your money."

"The only way Slocum could mortify me would be by getting hold of it. But what are you driving at, anyhow? In one breath

you demand several thousand dollars, and in the next breath you tell me that nobody expects it, or wants it, or could be induced to have it on any terms. Perhaps you will inform me what you are here for."

"That is what you will never discover!" cried Richard. "It is not in you to comprehend the ties of sympathy that ought to hold between two persons situated as we are. In most families this sympathy binds closely at times,—at christenings, or burials, or when some member is about to take an important step in life. Generally speaking, blood is thicker than water; but your blood, cousin Shackford, seems to be a good deal thinner. I came here to consult with you as my sole remaining kinsman, as one authorised by years and position to give me wise counsel and kindly encouragement at the turning-point in my fortune. I didn't wish to go among those people like a tramp, with neither kith nor kin to say a word for me. Of course you don't understand that. How should you? A sentiment of that kind is something quite beyond your conception."

Richard's words went into one ear and out the other, without seeming for an instant to arrest Mr. Shackford's attention. The idea

of Slocum not accepting money—anybody's money—presented itself to Mr. Shackford in so facetious a light as nearly to throw him into good humour. His foot was on the first step of the staircase, which he now began slowly to mount, giving vent, as he ascended, to a series of indescribable chuckles. At the top of the landing he halted, and leaned over the rail.

"To think of Slocum refusing,—that 's a good one!"

In the midst of his jocularity a sudden thought seemed to strike Mr. Shackford; his features underwent a swift transformation, and as he grasped the rail in front of him with both hands a malicious cunning writhed and squirmed in every wrinkle of his face.

"Sir!" he shrieked, "it was a trap! Slocum would have taken it! If I had been ass enough to make any such offer, he would have jumped at it. What do you and Slocum take me for? You 're a pair of rascals!"

Richard staggered back, bewildered and blinded, as if he had received a blow in the eyes.

"No," continued Mr. Shackford, with a

gesture of intense contempt, "you are less than rascals. You are fools. A rascal has to have brains!"

"You shameless old man!" cried Richard, as soon as he could get his voice.

To do Mr. Shackford justice, he was thoroughly convinced that Richard had lent himself to a preposterous attempt to obtain money from him. The absence of ordinary shrewdness in the method stamped it at once as belonging to Slocum, of whose mental calibre Mr. Shackford entertained no flattering estimate.

"Slocum!" he muttered, grinding the word between his teeth. "Family ties!" he cried, hurling the words scornfully over the banister as he disappeared into one of the upper chambers.

Richard stood with one hand on the newel-post, white at the lip with rage. For a second he had a wild impulse to spring up the staircase, but, controlling this, he turned and hurried out of the house.

At the gate he brushed roughly against a girl, who halted and stared. It was a strange thing to see Mr. Richard Shackford, who always had a pleasant word for a body,

go by in that blind, excited fashion, striking one fist into the palm of the other hand, and talking to his own self! Mary Hennessey watched him until he wheeled out of Welch's Court, and then picking up her basket, which she had rested on the fence, went her way.

XII.

AT the main entrance to the marble works Richard nearly walked over a man who was coming out, intently mopping his forehead with a very dirty calico handkerchief. It was an English stone-dresser named Denyven. Richard did not recognise him at first.

"That you, Denyven! . . . what has happened?"

"I 've 'ad a bit of a scrimmage, sir."

"A scrimmage in the yard, in work-hours!"

The man nodded.

"With whom?"

"Torrini, sir,—he 's awful bad this day."

"Torrini,—it is always Torrini! It seems odd that one man should be everlastingly at the bottom of everything wrong. How did it happen? Give it to me straight, Denyven; I don't want a crooked story.

This thing has got to stop in Slocum's Yard."

"The way of it was this, sir: Torrini wasn't at the shop the morning. He 'ad a day off."

"I know."

"But about one o'clock, sir, he come in the yard. He 'ad been at the public-'ouse, sir, and he was hummin'. First he went among the carvers, talking Hitalian to 'em and making 'em laugh, though he was in a precious bad humour hisself. By and by he come over to where me and my mates was, and began chaffin' us, which we didn't mind it, seeing he was 'eavy in the 'ead. He was as clear as a fog-'orn all the same. But when he took to banging the tools on the blocks, I sings out, ''Ands off!' and then he fetched me a clip. I was never looking for nothing less than that he'd hit me. I was a smiling at the hinstant."

"He must be drunker than usual."

"Hevidently, sir. I went down between two slabs as soft as you please. When I got on my pins, I was for choking him a bit, but my mates hauled us apart. That 's the 'ole of it, sir. They 'll tell you the same within."

"Are you hurt, Denyven?"

"Only a bit of a scratch over the heye, sir,—and the nose," and the man began mopping his brow tenderly. "I'd like to 'ave that Hitalian for about ten minutes, some day when he's sober, over yonder on the green."

"I'm afraid he would make the ten minutes seem long to you."

"Well, sir, I'd willingly let him try his 'and."

"How is it, Denyven," said Richard, "that you, and sensible working men like you, have permitted such a quarrelsome and irresponsible fellow to become a leader in the Association? He's secretary, or something, isn't he?"

"Well, sir, he writes an uncommonly clean fist, and then he's a born horator. He's up to all the parli'mentary dodges. Must 'ave 'ad no end of hexperience in them sort of things on the other side."

"No doubt,—and that accounts for him being over here."

"As for horganising a meeting, sir——"

"I know. Torrini has a great deal of that kind of ability; perhaps a trifle too much for his own good or anybody else's.

There was never any trouble to speak of among the trades in Stillwater till he and two or three others came here with foreign grievances. These men get three times the pay they ever received in their own land, and are treated like human beings for the first time in their lives. But what do they do? They squander a quarter of their week's wages at the tavern,—no rich man could afford to put a fourth of his income into drink,—and make windy speeches at the Union. I don't say all of them, but too many of them. The other night, I understand, Torrini compared Mr. Slocum to Nero, —Mr. Slocum, the fairest and gentlest man that ever breathed! What rubbish!"

"It wasn't just that way, sir. His words was, and I 'eard him,—'from Nero down to Slocum.'"

"It amounts to the same thing, and is enough to make one laugh, if it didn't make one want to swear. I hear that that was a very lively meeting the other night. What was that nonsense about 'the privileged class'?"

"Well, there is a privileged class in the States."

"So there is, but it's a large class,

Denyven. Every soul of us has the privilege of bettering our condition if we have the brain and the industry to do it. Energy and intelligence come to the front, and have the right to be there. A skilful workman gets double the pay of a bungler, and deserves it. Of course there will always be rich and poor, and sick and sound, and I don't see how that can be changed. But no door is shut against ability, black or white. Before the year 2400 we shall have a chrome-yellow president and a black-and-tan secretary of the treasury. But, seriously, Denyven, whoever talks about privileged classes here does it to make mischief. There are certain small politicians who reap their harvest in times of public confusion, just as pickpockets do. Nobody can play the tyrant or the bully in this country, —not even a working man. Here 's the Association dead against an employer who, two years ago, ran his yard full-handed for a twelvemonth at a loss, rather than shut down, as every other mill and factory in Stillwater did. For years and years the Association has prevented this employer from training more than two apprentices annually. The result is, eighty hands find work,

instead of a hundred and eighty. Now, that can't last."

"It keeps wages fixed in Stillwater, sir."

"It keeps out a hundred workmen. It sends away capital."

"Torrini says, sir——"

"Steer clear of Torrini and what he says. He's a dangerous fellow—for his friends. It is handsome in you, Denyven, to speak up for him—with that eye of yours."

"Oh, I don't love the man, when it comes to that; but there's no denying he's right smart," replied Denyven, who occasionally marred his vernacular with Americanisms. "The Association couldn't do without him."

"But Slocum's Yard can," said Richard, irritated to observe the influence Torrini exerted on even such men as Denyven.

"That's between you and him, sir, of course, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, sir, I can't say hexactly; but if I was you I would bide a bit."

"No, I think Torrini's time has come."

"I don't make bold to advise you, sir. I merely throws out the hobservation."

With that Denyven departed to apply to

his bruises such herbs and simples as a long experience had taught him to be efficacious.

He had gone only a few rods, however, when it occurred to him that there were probabilities of a stormy scene in the yard; so he turned on his tracks, and followed Richard Shackford.

Torrini was a Neapolitan, who had come to this country seven or eight years before. He was a man above the average intelligence of his class; a marble worker by trade, but he had been a fisherman, a mountain guide among the Abruzzi, a soldier in the papal guard, and what not, and had contrived to pick up two or three languages, among the rest English, which he spoke with purity. His lingual gift was one of his misfortunes.

Among the exotics in Stillwater, which even boasted a featureless Celestial, who had unobtrusively extinguished himself with a stove-pipe hat, Torrini was the only figure that approached picturesqueness. With his swarthy complexion and large, indolent eyes, in which a southern ferocity slept lightly, he seemed to Richard a piece out of his own foreign experience. To him Torrini was the crystallisation of Italy, or so much of that Italy as Richard had caught a glimpse of

at Genoa. To the town-folks Torrini perhaps vaguely suggested hand-organs and eleemosynary pennies; but Richard never looked at the straight-limbed, handsome fellow without recalling the Phrygian-capped sailors of the Mediterranean. On this account, and for other reasons, Richard had taken a great fancy to the man. Torrini had worked in the ornamental department from the first, and was a rapid and expert carver when he chose. He had carried himself steadily enough in the beginning, but in these later days, as Mr. Slocum had stated, he was scarcely ever sober. Richard had stood between him and his discharge on several occasions, partly because he was so skilful a workman, and partly through pity for his wife and children, who were unable to speak a word of English. But Torrini's influence on the men in the yard,—especially on the younger hands, who needed quite other influences,—and his intemperate speeches at the trades-union, where he had recently gained a kind of ascendency by his daring, were producing the worst effects.

At another hour Richard might have been inclined to condone this last offence, as he had condoned others; but when he parted

from Denyven, Richard's heart was still hot with his cousin's insult. As he turned into the yard, not with his usual swinging gait, but with a quick, wide step, there was an unpleasant dilation about young Shackford's nostrils.

Torrini was seated on a block of granite in front of the upper sheds, flourishing a small chisel in one hand and addressing the men, a number of whom had stopped work to listen to him. At sight of Richard they made a show of handling their tools, but it was so clear something grave was going to happen that the pretence fell through. They remained motionless, resting on their mallets, with their eyes turned towards Richard. Torrini followed the general glance, and paused in his harangue.

"Talk of the devil!" he muttered, and then, apparently continuing the thread of his discourse, broke into a strain of noisy declamation.

Richard walked up to him quietly.

"Torrini," he said, "you can't be allowed to speak here, you know."

"I can speak where I like," replied Torrini gravely. He was drunk, but the intoxication was not in his tongue. His head, as

Denyven had asserted, was as clear as a foghorn.

"When you are sober, you can come to the desk and get your pay and your kit. You are discharged from the yard."

Richard was standing within two paces of the man, who looked up with an uncertain smile, as if he had not quite taken in the sense of the words. Then, suddenly straightening himself, he exclaimed—

"Slocum don't dare do it!"

"But I do."

"You!"

"When I do a thing Mr. Slocum backs me."

"But who backs Slocum,—the Association, may be?"

"Certainly the Association ought to. I want you to leave the yard now."

"He backs Slocum," said Torrini, settling himself on the block again, "and Slocum backs down," at which there was a laugh among the men.

Richard made a step forward.

"Hands off!" cried a voice from under the sheds.

"Who said that?" demanded Richard, wheeling around. No one answered, but

Richard had recognised Durgin's voice. "Torrini, if you don't quit the yard in two minutes by the clock yonder, I shall put you out by the neck. Do you understand?"

Torrini glared about him confusedly for a moment, and broke into voluble Italian; then, without a warning gesture, sprung to his feet and struck at Richard. A straight red line, running vertically the length of his cheek, showed where the chisel had grazed him. The shops were instantly in a tumult, the men dropping their tools and stumbling over the blocks, with cries of "Keep them apart!" "Shame on you!" "Look out, Mr. Shackford!"

"Is it mad ye are, Torrany!" cried Michael Hennessey, hurrying from the saw-bench. Durgin held him back by the shoulders.

"Let them alone," said Durgin.

The flat steel flashed again in the sunlight, but fell harmlessly, and before the blow could be repeated Richard had knitted his fingers in Torrini's neckerchief and twisted it so tightly that the man gasped. Holding him by this, Richard dragged Torrini across the yard, and let him drop on the sidewalk

outside the gate, where he lay in a heap, inert.

"That was nate," said Michael Hennessey sententiously.

Richard stood leaning on the gate-post to recover his breath. His face was colourless, and the crimson line defined itself sharply against the pallor; but the rage was dead within him. It had been one of his own kind of rages,—like lightning out of a blue sky. As he stood there a smile was slowly gathering on his lip.

A score or two of the men had followed him, and now lounged in a half-circle a few paces in the rear. When Richard was aware of their presence, the glow came into his eyes again.

"Who ordered you to knock off work?"

"That was a foul blow of Torrini's, sir," said Stevens, stepping forward, "and I for one come to see fair play."

"Give us your 'and, mate!" cried Denyven; "there 's a pair of us."

"Thanks," said Richard, softening at once, "but there 's no need. Every man can go to his job. Denyven may stay, if he likes."

The men lingered a moment, irresolute, and returned to the sheds in silence.

Presently Torrini stretched out one leg, then the other, and slowly rose to his feet, giving a stupid glance at his empty hands as he did so.

"Here 's your tool," said Richard, stirring the chisel with the toe of his boot, if that 's what you 're looking for."

Torrini advanced a step as if to pick it up, then appeared to alter his mind, hesitated perhaps a dozen seconds, and turning abruptly on his heel walked down the street without a stagger.

"I think his legs is shut off from the rest of his body by water-tight compartments," remarked Denyven, regarding Torrini's steady gait with mingled amusement and envy. "Are you hurt, sir?"

"Only a bit of a scratch over the heye," replied Richard, with a laugh.

"As I hobserved just now to Mr. Stevens, sir, there 's a pair of us!"

XIII.

AFTER a turn through the shops to assure himself that order was restored, Richard withdrew in the direction of his studio. Margaret was standing at the head of the stairs, half hidden by the scarlet creeper which draped that end of the veranda.

"What are you doing there?" said Richard, looking up with a bright smile.

"O Richard, I saw it all!"

"You didn't see anything worth having white cheeks about."

"But he struck you . . . with the knife, did he not?" said Margaret, clinging to his arm anxiously.

"He didn't have a knife, dear; only a small chisel, which couldn't hurt any one. See for yourself; it is merely a cat-scratch."

Margaret satisfied herself that it was

nothing more ; but she nevertheless insisted on leading Richard into the workshop, and soothing the slight inflammation with her handkerchief dipped in arnica and water. The elusive faint fragrance of Margaret's hair as she busied herself about him would of itself have consoled Richard for a deep wound. All this pretty solicitude and ministration was new and sweet to him, and when the arnica turned out to be cologne, and scorched his cheek, Margaret's remorse was so delicious that Richard half wished the mixture had been aquafortis.

"You shouldn't have been looking into the yard," he said. "If I had known that you were watching us it would have distracted me. When I am thinking of you I cannot think of anything else, and I had need of my wits for a moment."

"I happened to be on the veranda, and was too frightened to go away. Why did you quarrel?"

In giving Margaret an account of the matter, Richard refrained from any mention of his humiliating visit to Welch's Court that morning. He could neither speak of it nor reflect upon it with composure. The cloud which shadowed his features from

time to time was attributed by Margaret to the affair in the yard.

"But this is the end of it, is it not?" she asked, with troubled eyes. "You will not have any further words with him?"

"You needn't worry. If Torrini had not been drinking he would never have lifted his hand against me. When he comes out of his present state, he will be heartily ashamed of himself. His tongue is the only malicious part of him. If he hadn't a taste for drink and oratory,—if he was not 'a born horator,' as Denyven calls him,—he would do well enough."

"No, Richard, he's a dreadful man. I shall never forget his face,—it was some wild animal's. And you, Richard," added Margaret softly, "it grieved me to see you look like that."

"I was wolfish for a moment, I suppose. Things had gone wrong generally. But if you are going to scold me, Margaret, I would rather have some more—arnica."

"I am not going to scold; but while you stood there, so white and terrible,—so unlike yourself,—I felt that I did not know you, Richard. Of course you had to defend

yourself when the man attacked you, but I thought for an instant you would kill him."

"Not I," said Richard uneasily, dreading anything like a rebuke from Margaret. "I am mortified that I gave up to my anger. There was no occasion."

"If an intoxicated person were to wander into the yard, papa would send for a constable, and have the person removed."

"Your father is an elderly man," returned Richard, not relishing this oblique criticism of his own simpler method. "What would be proper in his case would be considered cowardly in mine. It was my duty to discharge the fellow, and not let him dispute my authority. I ought to have been cooler, of course. But I should have lost caste and influence with the men if I had shown the least personal fear of Torrini,—if, for example, I had summoned somebody else to do what I didn't dare do myself. I was brought up in the yard, remember, and to a certain extent I have to submit to being weighed in the yard's own scales."

"But a thing cannot be weighed in a scale incapable of containing it," answered Margaret. "The judgment of these rough, un-

instructed men is too narrow for such as you. They quarrel and fight among themselves, and have their ideas of daring; but there is a higher sort of bravery, the bravery of self-control, which I fancy they do not understand very well; so their opinion of it is not worth considering. However, you know better than I."

"No, I do not," said Richard. "Your instinct is finer than my reason. But you *are* scolding me, Margaret."

"No, I am loving you," she said softly. "How can I do that more faithfully than by being dissatisfied with anything but the best in you?"

"I wasn't at my best a while ago?"

"No, Richard."

"I can never hope to be worthy of you."

But Margaret protested against that. Having forced him to look at his action through her eyes, she outdid him in humility, and then the conversation drifted off into half-breathed nothings, which, though they were satisfactory enough to these two, would have made a third person yawn.

The occurrence at Slocum's Yard was hotly discussed that night at the Stillwater

hotel. Discussions in that long, low bar-room, where the latest village scandal always came to receive the finishing gloss, were apt to be hot. In their criticism of outside men and measures, as well as in their mutual vivisections, there was an unflinching directness among Mr. Snelling's guests which is not to be found in more artificial grades of society. The popular verdict on young Shackford's conduct was, as might not have been predicted, strongly in his favour. He had displayed pluck, and pluck of the tougher fibre was a quality held in so high esteem in Stillwater that any manifestation of it commanded respect. And young Shackford had shown a great deal; he had made short work of the most formidable man in the yard, and given the rest to understand that he was not to be tampered with. This had taken many by surprise, for hitherto an imperturbable amiability had been the leading characteristic of Slocum's manager.

"I didn't think he had it in him," declared Dexter.

"Well, ye might," replied Michael Hennessey. "Look at the lad's eye, and the muscles of him. He stands on his two legs like a monumint, so he does."

"Never saw a monument with two legs, Mike."

"Didn't ye? Wait till ye 're layin' at the foot of one. But ye 'll wait many a day, me boy. Ye 'll be lucky if ye 're supploid with a head-stone made out of a dale-board."

"Couldn't get a wooden head-stone short of Ireland, Mike," retorted Dexter, with a laugh. "You 'd have to import it."

"An' so I will; but it won't be got over in time, if ye go on interruptin' gintlemen when they 're discoorsin'. What was I sayin', any way, when the blackguard chipped in?" continued Mr. Hennessey, appealing to the company, as he emptied the ashes from his pipe by knocking the bowl on the side of his chair.

"You was talking of Dick Shackford's muscle," said Durgin, "and you never talked wider of the mark. It doesn't take much muscle, or much courage either, to knock a man about when he 's in liquor. The two wasn't fairly matched."

"You are right there, Durgin," said Stevens, laying down his newspaper. "They weren't fairly matched. Both men have the same pounds and inches, but Torrini had a weapon, and that mad strength

that comes to some folks with drink. If Shackford hadn't taken a neat twist on the neckcloth, he wouldn't have got off with a scratch."

"Shackford had no call to lay hands on him."

"There you are wrong, Durgin," replied Stevens. "Torrini had no call in the yard; he was making a nuisance of himself. Shackford spoke to him fair, and told him to go, and when he didn't go Shackford put him out; and he put him out handsomely,—'with neatness and despatch,' as Slocum's prospectuses has it."

"He was right all the time," said Piggott. "He didn't strike Torrini before or after he was down, and stood at the gate like a gentleman, ready to give Torrini his change if he wanted it."

"Torrini didn't want it," observed Jemmy Willson. "Ther' isn't nothing mean about Torrini."

"But he 'ad a dozen minds about coming back," said Denyven.

"We ought to have got him out of the place quietly," said Jeff Stavers; "that was our end of the mistake. He is not a bad fellow, but he shouldn't drink."

"He was crazy to come to the yard."

"When a man 'as a day off," observed Denyven, "and the beer isn't narsty, he 'ad better stick to the public-'ouse."

"Oh, you!" exclaimed Durgin. "Your opinion don't weigh. You took a black eye of him."

"Yes, I took a black heye,—and I can give one, in a hemergency. Yes, I gives and takes."

"That 's where we differ," returned Durgin. "I do a more genteel business; I give; and don't take."

"Unless you 're uncommon careful," said Denyven, pulling away at his pipe, "you 'll find yourself some day henlarging your business."

Durgin pushed back his stool.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" interposed Mr. Snelling, appearing from behind the bar with a lemon-squeezer in his hand, "we 'll have no black eyes here that wasn't born so. I am partial to them myself when Nature gives them; and I propose the health of Miss Molly Hennessey," with a sly glance at Durgin, who coloured, "to be drunk at the expense of the house. Name your taps, gentlemen."

"Snelling, me boy, ye 'd win the bird from the bush with yer beguilin' ways. Ye 've brought proud tears to the eyes of an aged parent, and I 'll take a sup out of that high-showldered bottle which you kape under the counter for the gentlefolks in the other room."

A general laugh greeted Mr. Hennessey's selection, and peace was restored; but the majority of those present were workmen from Slocum's, and the event of the afternoon remained the uppermost theme.

"Shackford is a different build from Slocum," said Piggott.

"I guess the yard will find that out when he gets to be proprietor," rejoined Durgin, clicking his spoon against the empty glass to attract Snelling's attention.

"Going to be proprietor, is he?"

"Some day or other," answered Durgin. "First he 'll step into the business, and then into the family. He 's had his eye on Slocum's girl these four or five years. Got a cast of her fist up in his workshop. Leave Dick Shackford alone for lining his nest and making it soft all round."

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Stevens. "He deserves a good girl, and there 's none

better. If sickness or any sort of trouble comes to a poor man's door, she 's never far off with her kind words and them things the rich have when they are laid up."

"Oh, the girl is well enough."

"You couldn't say less. Before your mother died,"—Mrs. Durgin had died the previous autumn,—"I see that angil going to your house many a day with a little basket of comforts tucked under her wing. But she 's too good to be praised in such a place as this," added Stevens. After a pause he inquired, "What makes you down on Shackford? He has always been a friend to you."

"One of those friends who walk over your head," replied Durgin. "I was in the yard two years before him, and see where he is."

"Lord love you," said Stevens, leaning back in his chair and contemplating Durgin thoughtfully, "there is marble and marble; some is Carrara marble, and some isn't. The fine grain takes a polish you can't get on to the other."

"Of course, he is statuary marble, and I 'm full of seams and felspar."

"You are like the most of us,—not the

kind that can be worked up into anything very ornamental."

"Thank you for nothing," said Durgin, turning away. "I came from as good a quarry as ever Dick Shackford. Where 's Torrini to-night?"

"Nobody has seen him since the difficulty," said Dexter, "except Peters. Torrini sent for him after supper."

As Dexter spoke, the door opened and Peters entered. He went directly to the group composed chiefly of Slocum's men, and without making any remark began to distribute among them certain small blue tickets, which they pocketed in silence. Glancing carelessly at his piece of cardboard, Durgin said to Peters—

"Then it 's decided?"

Peters nodded.

"How 's Torrini?"

"He 's all right."

"What does he say?"

"Nothing in perticular," responded Peters, "and nothing at all about his little skylark with Shackford."

"He 's a cool one!" exclaimed Durgin.

Though the slips of blue pasteboard had been delivered and accepted without com-

ment, it was known in a second through the bar-room that a special meeting had been convened for the next night by the officers of the Marble Workers' Association.

END OF VOL. I.

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