

PART VIII.

OCTOBER.

ONE SHILLING.

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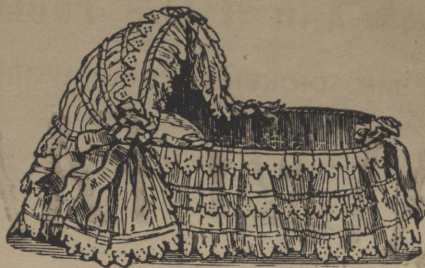
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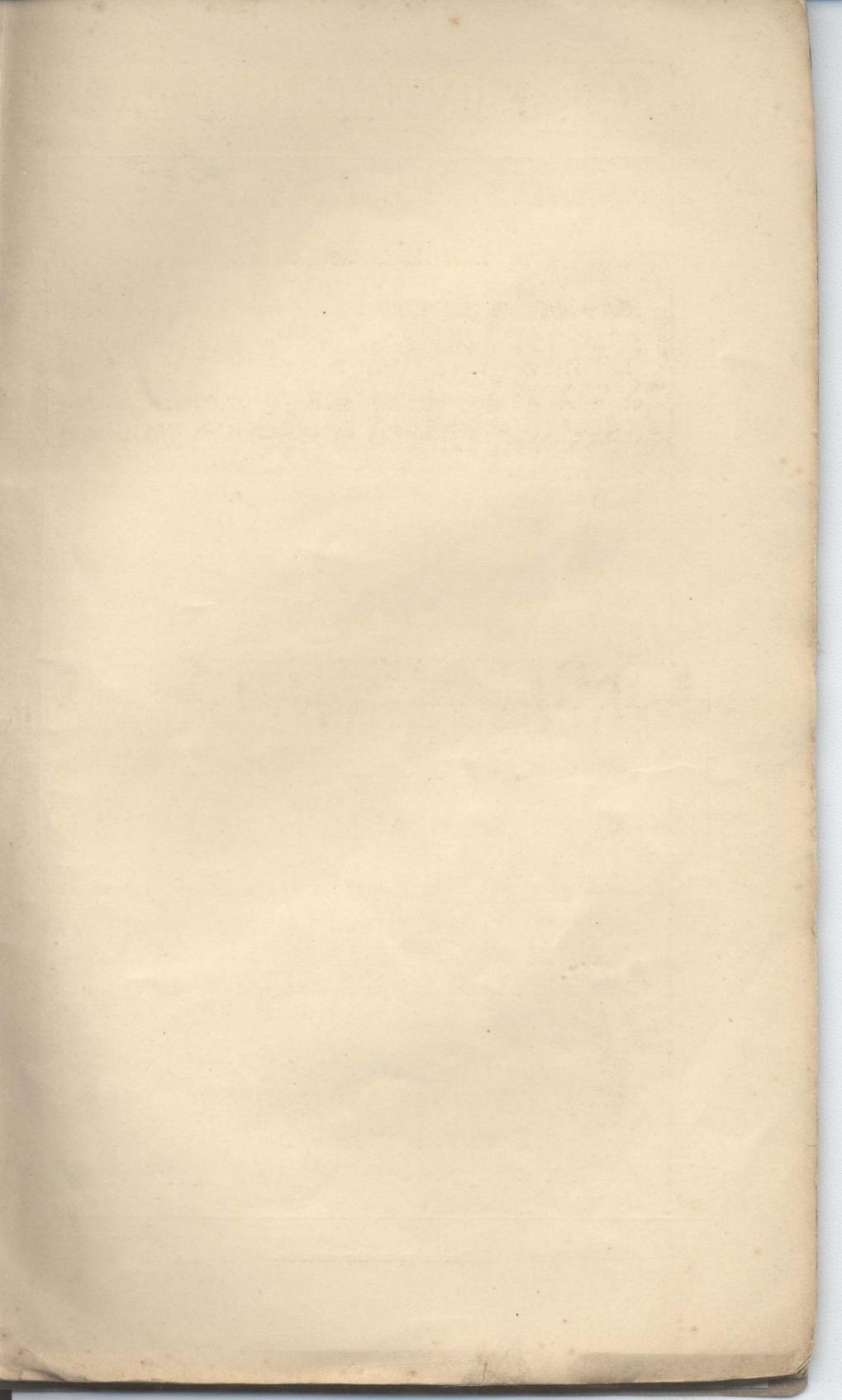
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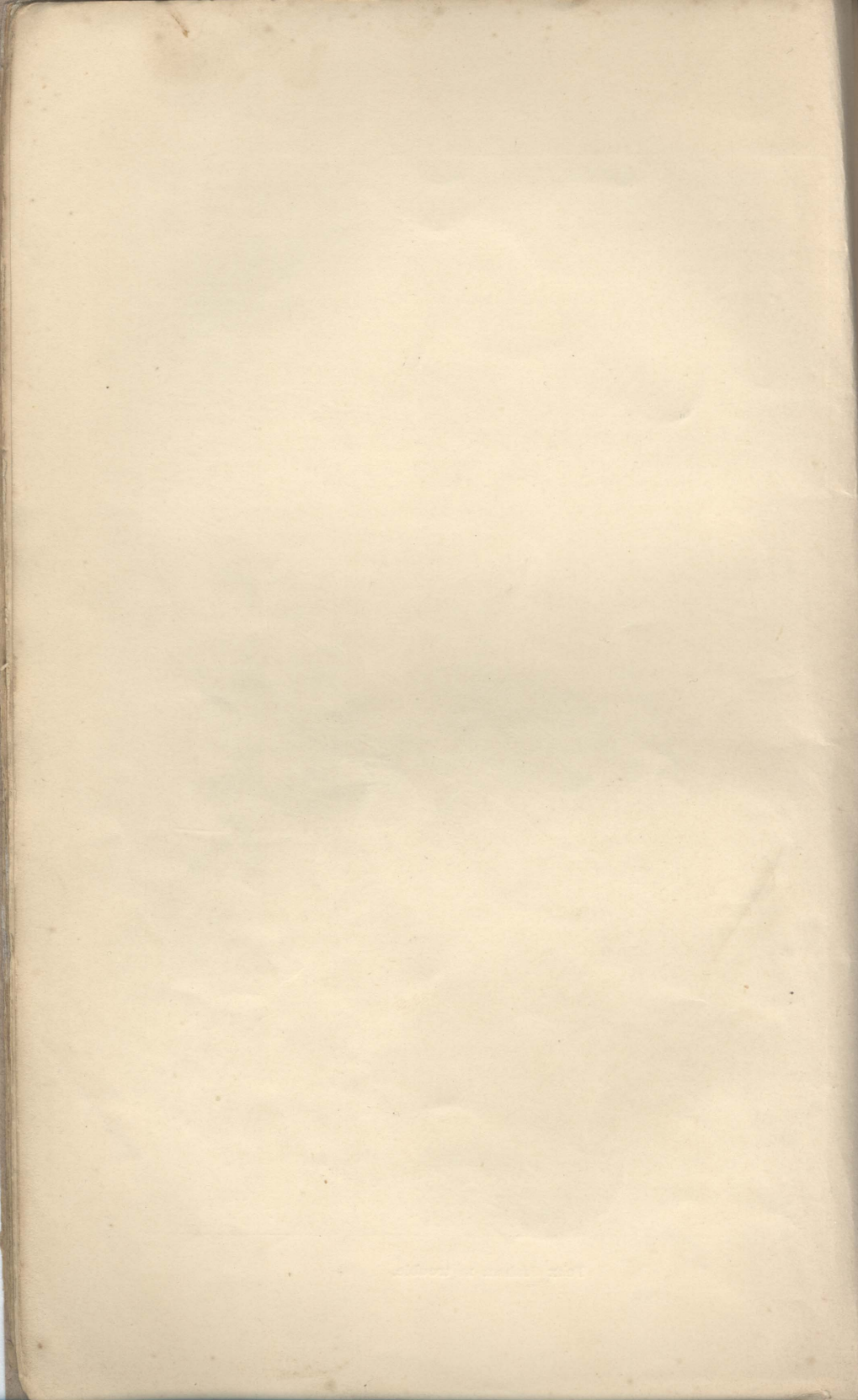




Footsteps in the corridor.



Felix Graham in trouble.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### BREAKING COVERT.

'THERE'S a double ditch and bank that will do as well,' Miss Tristram had said when she was informed that there was no gate out of the wood at the side on which the fox had broken. The gentleman who had tendered the information might as well have held his tongue, for Miss Tristram knew the wood intimately, was acquainted with the locality of all its gates, and was acquainted also with the points at which it might be left, without the assistance of any gate at all, by those who were well mounted and could ride their horses. Therefore she had thus replied, 'There's a double ditch and bank that will do as well.' And for the double ditch and bank at the end of one of the grassy roadways Miss Tristram at once prepared herself.

'That's the gap where Grubbles broke his horse's back,' said a man in a red coat to Peregrine Orme, and so saying he made up his wavering mind and galloped away as fast as his nag could carry him. But Peregrine Orme would not avoid a fence at which a lady was not afraid to ride; and Felix Graham, knowing little but fearing nothing, followed Peregrine Orme.

At the end of the roadway, in the middle of the track, there was the gap. For a footman it was doubtless the easiest way over the fence, for the ditch on that side was half filled up, and there was space enough left of the half-broken bank for a man's scrambling feet; but Miss Tristram at once knew that it was a bad place for a horse. The second or further ditch was the really difficult obstacle, and there was no footing in the gap from which a horse could take his leap. To the right of this the fence was large and required a good horse, but Miss Tristram knew her animal and was accustomed to large fences. The trained beast went well across on to the bank, poised himself there for a moment, and taking a second spring carried his mistress across into the further field apparently with ease. In that field the dogs were now running, altogether, so that a sheet might have covered them; and Miss Tristram, exulting within her heart and holding in her horse, knew that she had got away uncommonly well.

Peregrine Orme followed,—a little to the right of the lady's passage, so that he might have room for himself, and do no mischief in the event of Miss Tristram or her horse making any mistake at

the leap. He also got well over. But, alas! in spite of such early success he was destined to see nothing of the hunt that day! Felix Graham, thinking that he would obey instructions by letting his horse do as he pleased, permitted the beast to come close upon Orme's track, and to make his jump before Orme's horse had taken his second spring.

'Have a care,' said Peregrine, feeling that the two were together on the bank, 'or you'll shove me into the ditch.' He however got well over.

Felix, attempting to 'have a care' just when his doing so could be of no avail, gave his horse a pull with the curb as he was preparing for his second spring. The outside ditch was broad and deep and well banked up, and required that an animal should have all his power. It was at such a moment as this that he should have been left to do his work without injudicious impediment from his rider. But poor Graham was thinking only of Orme's caution, and attempted to stop the beast when any positive and absolute stop was out of the question. The horse made his jump, and, crippled as he was, jumped short. He came with his knees against the further bank, threw his rider, and then in his struggle to right himself rolled over him.

Felix felt at once that he was much hurt—that he had indeed come to grief; but still he was not stunned nor did he lose his presence of mind. The horse succeeded in gaining his feet, and then Felix also jumped up and even walked a step or two towards the head of the animal with the object of taking the reins. But he found that he could not raise his arm, and he found also that he could hardly breathe.

Both Peregrine and Miss Tristram looked back. 'There's nothing wroeng I hope,' said the lady; and then she rode on. And let it be understood that in hunting those who are in advance generally do ride on. The lame and the halt and the wounded, if they cannot pick themselves up, have to be picked up by those who come after them. But Peregrine saw that there was no one else coming that way. The memory of young Grubbles' fate had placed an interdict on that pass out of the wood, which nothing short of the pluck and science of Miss Tristram was able to disregard. Two cavaliers she had carried with her. One she had led on to instant slaughter, and the other remained to look after his fallen brother-in-arms. Miss Tristram in the mean time was in the next field and had settled well down to her work.

'Are you hurt, old fellow?' said Peregrine, turning back his horse, but still not dismounting.

'Not much, I think,' said Graham, smiling. 'There's something wrong about my arm,—but don't you wait.' And then he found that he spoke with difficulty.



‘Can you mount again?’

‘I don’t think I’ll mind that. Perhaps I’d better sit down.’ Then Peregrine Orme knew that Graham was hurt, and jumping off his own horse he gave up all hope of the hunt.

‘Here, you fellow, come and hold these horses.’ So invoked a boy who in following the sport had got as far as this ditch did as he was bid, and scrambled over. ‘Sit down, Graham; there; I’m afraid you are hurt. Did he roll on you?’ But Felix merely looked up into his face,—still smiling. He was now very pale, and for the moment could not speak. Peregrine came close to him, and gently attempted to raise the wounded limb; whereupon Graham shuddered, and shook his head.

‘I fear it is broken,’ said Peregrine. Graham nodded his head, and raised his left hand to his breast; and Peregrine then knew that something else was amiss also.

I don’t know any feeling more disagreeable than that produced by being left alone in a field, when out hunting, with a man who has been very much hurt and who is incapable of riding or walking. The hurt man himself has the privilege of his infirmities and may remain quiescent; but you, as his only attendant, must do something. You must for the moment do all, and if you do wrong the whole responsibility lies on your shoulders. If you leave a wounded man on the damp ground, in the middle of winter, while you run away, five miles perhaps, to the next doctor, he may not improbably—as you then think—be dead before you come back. You don’t know the way; you are heavy yourself, and your boots are very heavy. You must stay therefore; but as you are no doctor you don’t in the least know what is the amount of the injury. In your great trouble you begin to roar for assistance; but the woods re-echo your words, and the distant sound of the huntsman’s horn, as he summons his hounds at a check, only mocks your agony.

But Peregrine had a boy with him. ‘Get upon that horse,’ he said at last; ‘ride round to Farmer Griggs, and tell them to send somebody here with a spring cart. He has got a spring cart I know;—and a mattress in it.’

‘But I haint no gude at roiding like,’ said the boy, looking with dismay at Orme’s big horse.

‘Then run; that will be better, for you can go through the wood. You know where Farmer Griggs lives. The first farm the other side of the Grange.’

‘Ay, ay, I knows where Farmer Griggs lives well enough.’

‘Run then; and if the cart is here in half an hour I’ll give you a sovereign.’

Inspired by the hopes of such wealth, golden wealth, wealth for a lifetime, the boy was quickly back over the fence, and Pere-

grine was left alone with Felix Graham. He was now sitting down, with his feet hanging into the ditch, and Peregrine was kneeling behind him. 'I am sorry I can do nothing more,' said he; 'but I fear we must remain here till the cart comes.'

'I am—so—vexed—about your hunt,' said Felix, gasping as he spoke. He had in fact broken his right arm which had been twisted under him as the horse rolled, and two of his ribs had been staved in by the pommel of his saddle. Many men have been worse hurt and have hunted again before the end of the season, but the fracture of three bones does make a man uncomfortable for the time. 'Now the cart—is—sent for, couldn't you—go on?' But it was not likely that Peregrine Orme would do that. 'Never mind me,' he said. 'When a fellow is hurt he has always to do as he's told. You'd better have a drop of sherry. Look here: I've got a flask at my saddle. There; you can support yourself with that arm a moment. Did you ever see horses stand so quiet. I've got hold of yours, and now I'll fasten them together. I say, Whitefoot, you don't kick, do you?' And then he contrived to picket the horses to two branches, and having got out his case of sherry, poured a small modicum into the silver mug which was attached to the apparatus, and again supported Graham while he drank. 'You'll be as right as a trivet by-and-by; only you'll have to make Noningsby your head-quarters for the next six weeks.' And then the same idea passed through the mind of each of them;—how little a man need be pitied for such a misfortune if Madeline Staveley would consent to be his nurse.

No man could have less surgical knowledge than Peregrine Orme, but nevertheless he was such a man as one would like to have with him if one came to grief in such a way. He was cheery and up-hearted, but at the same time gentle and even thoughtful. His voice was pleasant and his touch could be soft. For many years afterwards Felix remembered how that sherry had been held to his lips, and how the young heir of The Cleeve had knelt behind him in his red coat, supporting him as he became weary with waiting, and saying pleasant words to him through the whole. Felix Graham was a man who would remember such things.

In running through the wood the boy first encountered three horsemen. They were the judge, with his daughter Madeline and Miss Furnival. 'There be a mon there who be a'most dead,' said the boy, hardly able to speak from want of breath. 'I be agoing for Farmer Griggs' cart.' And then they stopped him a moment to ask for some description, but the boy could tell them nothing to indicate that the wounded man was one of their friends. It might however be Augustus, and so the three rode on quickly towards the fence, knowing nothing of the circumstances of the ditches which would make it out of their power to get to the fallen sportsman.

But Peregrine heard the sound of the horses and the voices of the horsemen. 'By Jove, there's a lot of them coming down here,' said he. 'It's the judge and two of the girls. Oh, Miss Staveley, I'm so glad you've come. Graham has had a bad fall and hurt himself. You haven't a shawl, have you? the ground is so wet under him.'

'It doesn't signify at all,' said Felix, looking round and seeing the faces of his friends on the other side of the bank.

Madeline Staveley gave a slight shriek which her father did not notice, but which Miss Furnival heard very plainly. 'Oh papa,' she said, 'cannot you get over to him?' And then she began to bethink herself whether it were possible that she should give up something of her dress to protect the man who was hurt from the damp muddy ground on which he lay.

'Can you hold my horse, dear,' said the judge, slowly dismounting; for the judge, though he rode every day on sanitary considerations, had not a sportsman's celerity in leaving and recovering his saddle. But he did get down, and burdened as he was with a great-coat, he did succeed in crossing that accursed fence. Accursed it was from henceforward in the annals of the H. H., and none would ride it but dare-devils who professed themselves willing to go at anything. Miss Tristram, however, always declared that there was nothing in it—though she avoided it herself, whispering to her friends that she had led others to grief there, and might possibly do so again if she persevered.

'Could you hold the horse?' said Madeline to Miss Furnival; 'and I will go for a shawl to the carriage.' Miss Furnival declared that to the best of her belief she could not, but nevertheless the animal was left with her, and Madeline turned round and galloped back towards the carriage. She made her horse do his best though her eyes were nearly blinded with tears, and went straight on for the carriage, though she would have given much for a moment to hide those tears before she reached it.

'Oh, mamma! give me a thick shawl; Mr. Graham has hurt himself in the field, and is lying on the grass.' And then in some incoherent and quick manner she had to explain what she knew of the accident before she could get a carriage-cloak out of the carriage. This, however, she did succeed in doing, and in some manner, very unintelligible to herself afterwards, she did gallop back with her burden. She passed the cloak over to Peregrine, who clambered up the bank to get it, while the judge remained on the ground, supporting the young barrister. Felix Graham, though he was weak, was not stunned or senseless, and he knew well who it was that had procured for him that comfort.

And then the carriage followed Madeline, and there was quite a concourse of servants and horses and ladies on the inside of the

fence. But the wounded man was still unfortunately on the other side. No cart from Farmer Griggs made its appearance, though it was now more than half an hour since the boy had gone. Carts, when they are wanted in such sudden haste, do not make their appearance. It was two miles through the wood to Mr. Griggs's farm-yard, and more than three miles back by any route which the cart could take. And then it might be more than probable that in Farmer Griggs's establishment there was not always a horse ready in harness, or a groom at hand prepared to yoke him. Peregrine had become very impatient, and had more than once invoked a silent anathema on the farmer's head; but nevertheless there was no appearance of the cart.

'We must get him across the ditches into the carriage,' said the judge.

'If Lady Staveley will let us do that,' said Peregrine.

'The difficulty is not with Lady Staveley but with these nasty ditches,' said the judge, for he had been up to his knees in one of them, and the water had penetrated his boots. But the task was at last done. Mrs. Arbutnot stood up on the back seat of the carriage so that she might hold the horses, and the coachman and footman got across into the field. 'It would be better to let me lie here all day,' said Felix, as three of them struggled back with their burden, the judge bringing up the rear with two hunting-whips and Peregrine's cap. 'How on earth any one would think of riding over such a place as that!' said the judge. But then, when he had been a young man it had not been the custom for barristers to go out hunting.

Madeline, as she saw the wounded man carefully laid on the back seat of the carriage, almost wished that she could have her mother's place that she might support him. Would they be careful enough with him? Would they remember how terrible must be the pain of that motion to one so hurt as he was? And then she looked into his face as he was made to lean back, and she saw that he still smiled. Felix Graham was by no means a handsome man; I should hardly sin against the truth if I were to say that he was ugly. But Madeline, as she looked at him now, lying there utterly without colour but always with that smile on his countenance, thought that no face to her liking had ever been more gracious. She still rode close to them as they went down the grassy road, saying never a word. And Miss Furnival rode there also, somewhat in the rear, condoling with the judge as to his wet feet.

'Miss Furnival,' he said, 'when a judge forgets himself and goes out hunting he has no right to expect anything better. What would your father have said had he seen me clambering up the bank with young Orme's hunting-cap between my teeth? I positively did.'

'He would have rushed to assist you,' said Miss Furnival, with

a little burst of enthusiasm which was hardly needed on the occasion. And then Peregrine came after them leading Graham's horse. He had been compelled to return to the field and ride both the horses back into the wood, one after the other, while the footman held them. That riding back over fences in cold blood is the work that really tries a man's nerve. And a man has to do it too when no one is looking on. How he does crane and falter and look about for an easy place at such a moment as that! But when the blood is cold no places are easy.

The procession got back to Noningsby without adventure, and Graham as a matter of course was taken up to his bed. One of the servants had been despatched to Alston for a surgeon, and in an hour or two the extent of the misfortune was known. The right arm was broken—'very favourably,' as the doctor observed. But two ribs were broken—'rather unfavourably.' There was some talk of hæmorrhage and inward wounds, and Sir Jacob from Saville Row was suggested by Lady Staveley. But the judge, knowing the extent of Graham's means, made some further preliminary inquiries, and it was considered that Sir Jacob would not be needed—at any rate not as yet.

'Why don't they send for him?' said Madeline to her mother with rather more than her wonted energy.

'Your papa does not think it necessary, my dear. It would be very expensive, you know.'

'But, mamma, would you let a man die because it would cost a few pounds to cure him?'

'My dear, we all hope that Mr. Graham won't die—at any rate not at present. If there be any danger you may be sure that your papa will send for the best advice.'

But Madeline was by no means satisfied. She could not understand economy in a matter of life and death. If Sir Jacob's coming would have cost fifty pounds, or a hundred, what would that have signified, weighed in such a balance? Such a sum would be nothing to her father. Had Augustus fallen and broken his arm all the Sir Jacobs in London would not have been considered too costly could their joint coming have mitigated any danger. She did not however dare to speak to her mother again, so she said a word or two to Peregrine Orme, who was constant in his attendance on Felix. Peregrine had been very kind, and she had seen it, and her heart therefore warmed towards him.

'Don't you think he ought to have more advice, Mr. Orme?'

'Well, no; I don't know. He's very jolly, you know; only he can't talk. One of the bones ran into him, but I believe he's all right.'

'Oh, but that is so frightful!' and the tears were again in her eyes.

'If I were him I should think one doctor enough. But it's easy enough having a fellow down from London, you know, if you like it.'

'If he should get worse, Mr. Orme——.' And then Peregrine made her a sort of promise, but in doing so an idea shot through his poor heart of what the truth might really be. He went back and looked at Felix who was sleeping. 'If it is so I must bear it,' he said to himself; 'but I'll fight it on;' and a quick thought ran through his brain of his own deficiencies. He knew that he was not clever and bright in talk like Felix Graham. He could not say the right thing at the right moment without forethought. How he wished that he could! But still he would fight it on, as he would have done any losing match,—to the last. And then he sat down by Felix's head, and resolved that he would be loyal to his new friend all the same—loyal in all things needful. But still he would fight it on.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### ANOTHER FALL.

FELIX GRAHAM had plenty of nurses, but Madeline was not one of them. Augustus Staveley came home while the Alston doctor was still busy at the broken bones, and of course he would not leave his friend. He was one of those who had succeeded in the hunt, and consequently had heard nothing of the accident till the end of it. Miss Tristram had been the first to tell him that Mr. Graham had fallen in leaving the covert, but having seen him rise to his legs she had not thought he was seriously hurt.

'I do not know much about your friend,' she had said; 'but I think I may comfort you by an assurance that your horse is none the worse. I could see as much as that.'

'Poor Felix!' said Staveley. 'He has lost a magnificent run. I suppose we are nine or ten miles from Monkton Grange now?'

'Eleven if we are a yard,' said the lady. 'It was an ugly country, but the pace was nothing wonderful.' And then others dropped in, and at last came tidings about Graham. At first there was a whisper that he was dead. He had ridden over Orme, it was said; had nearly killed him, and had quite killed himself. Then the report became less fatal. Both horses were dead, but Graham was still living though with most of his bones broken.

'Don't believe it,' said Miss Tristram. 'In what condition Mr. Graham may be I won't say; but that your horse was safe and sound after he got over the fence, of that you may take my word.'

And thus, in a state of uncertainty, obtaining fresh rumours from every person he passed, Staveley hurried home. 'Right arm and two ribs,' Peregrine said to him, as he met him in the hall. 'Is that all?' said Augustus. It was clear therefore that he did not think so much about it as his sister.

'If you'd let her have her head she'd never have come down like that,' Augustus said, as he sat that evening by his friend's bedside.

'But he pulled off, I fancy, to avoid riding over me,' said Peregrine.

'Then he must have come too quick at his leap,' said Augustus. 'You should have steadied him as he came to it.' From all which Graham perceived that a man cannot learn how to ride any particular horse by two or three words of precept.

'If you talk any more about the horse, or the hunt, or the accident, neither of you shall stay in the room,' said Lady Staveley, who came in at that moment. But they both did stay in the room, and said a great deal more about the hunt, and the horse, and the accident before they left it; and even became so far reconciled to the circumstance that they had a hot glass of brandy and water each, sitting by Graham's fire.

'But, Augustus, do tell me how he is,' Madeline said to her brother, as she caught him going to his room. She had become ashamed of asking any more questions of her mother.

'He's all right; only he'll be as fretful as a porcupine, shut up there. At least I should be. Are there lots of novels in the house? Mind you send for a batch to-morrow. Novels are the only chance a man has when he's laid up like that.' Before breakfast on the following morning Madeline had sent off to the Alston circulating library a list of all the best new novels of which she could remember the names.

No definite day had hitherto been fixed for Peregrine's return to The Cleeve, and under the present circumstances he still remained at Noningsby assisting to amuse Felix Graham. For two days after the accident such seemed to be his sole occupation; but in truth he was looking for an opportunity to say a word or two to Miss Staveley, and paving his way as best he might for that great speech which he was fully resolved that he would make before he left the house. Once or twice he bethought himself whether he would not endeavour to secure for himself some confidant in the family, and obtain the sanction and special friendship either of Madeline's mother, or her sister, or her brother. But what if after that she should reject him? Would it not be worse for him then that any one should have known of his defeat? He could, as he thought, endure to suffer alone; but on such a matter as that pity would be unendurable. So as he sat there by Graham's fireside, pretending to

read one of poor Madeline's novels for the sake of companionship, he determined that he would tell no one of his intention;—no one till he could make the opportunity for telling her.

And when he did meet her, and find, now and again, some moment for saying a word alone to her, she was very gracious to him. He had been so kind and gentle with Felix, there was so much in him that was sweet and good and honest, so much that such an event as this brought forth and made manifest, that Madeline, and indeed the whole family, could not but be gracious to him. Augustus would declare that he was the greatest brick he had ever known, repeating all Graham's words as to the patience with which the embryo baronet had knelt behind him on the cold muddy ground, supporting him for an hour, till the carriage had come up. Under such circumstances how could Madeline refrain from being gracious to him?

'But it is all from favour to Graham!' Peregrine would say to himself with bitterness; and yet though he said so he did not quite believe it. Poor fellow! It was all from favour to Graham. And could he have thoroughly believed the truth of those words which he repeated to himself so often, he might have spared himself much pain. He might have spared himself much pain, and possibly some injury; for if aught could now tend to mature in Madeline's heart an affection which was but as yet nascent, it would be the offer of some other lover. But such reasoning on the matter was much too deep for Peregrine Orme. 'It may be,' he said to himself, 'that she only pities him because he is hurt. If so, is not this time better for me than any other? If it be that she loves him, let me know it, and be out of my pain.' It did not then occur to him that circumstances such as those in question could not readily be made explicit;—that Madeline might refuse his love, and yet leave him no wiser than he now was as to her reasons for so refusing;—perhaps, indeed, leave him less wise, with increased cause for doubt and hopeless hope, and the green melancholy of a rejected lover.

Madeline during these two days said no more about the London doctor; but it was plain to all who watched her that her anxiety as to the patient was much more keen than that of the other ladies of the house. 'She always thinks everybody is going to die,' Lady Staveley said to Miss Furnival, intending, not with any consummate prudence, to account to that acute young lady for her daughter's solicitude. 'We had a cook here, three months since, who was very ill, and Madeline would never be easy till the doctor assured her that the poor woman's danger was altogether past.'

'She is so very warm-hearted,' said Miss Furnival in reply. 'It is quite delightful to see her. And she will have such pleasure when she sees him come down from his room.'

Lady Staveley on this immediate occasion said nothing to her



daughter, but Mrs. Arbuthnot considered that a sisterly word might perhaps be spoken in due season.

'The doctor says he is doing quite well now,' Mrs. Arbuthnot said to her, as they were sitting alone.

'But does he indeed? Did you hear him?' said Madeline, who was suspicious.

'He did so, indeed. I heard him myself. But he says also that he ought to remain here, at any rate for the next fortnight,—if mamma can permit it without inconvenience.'

'Of course she can permit it. No one would turn any person out of their house in such a condition as that!'

'Papa and mamma both will be very happy that he should stay here;—of course they would not do what you call turning him out. But, Mad, my darling,'—and then she came up close and put her arm round her sister's waist. 'I think mamma would be more comfortable in his remaining here if your charity towards him were—what shall I say?—less demonstrative.'

'What do you mean, Isabella?'

'Dearest, dearest; you must not be angry with me. Nobody has hinted to me a word on the subject, nor do I mean to hint anything that can possibly be hurtful to you.'

'But what do you mean?'

'Don't you know, darling? He is a young man—and—and—people see with such unkind eyes, and hear with such scandal-loving ears. There is that Miss Furnival—'

'If Miss Furnival can think such things, I for one do not care what she thinks.'

'No, nor do I;—not as regards any important result. But may it not be well to be careful? You know what I mean, dearest?'

'Yes—I know. At least I suppose so. And it makes me know also how very cold and shallow and heartless people are! I won't ask any more questions, Isabella; but I can't know that a fellow-creature is suffering in the house,—and a person like him too, so clever, whom we all regard as a friend,—the most intimate friend in the world that Augustus has,—and the best too, as I heard papa himself say—without caring whether he is going to live or die.'

'There is no danger now, you know.'

'Very well; I am glad to hear it. Though I know very well that there must be danger after such a terrible accident as that.'

'The doctor says there is none.'

'At any rate I will not—' And then instead of finishing her sentence she turned away her head and put up her handkerchief to wipe away a tear.

'You are not angry with me, dear?' said Mrs. Arbuthnot.

'Oh, no,' said Madeline; and then they parted.

For some days after that Madeline asked no question whatever

about Felix Graham, but it may be doubted whether this did not make the matter worse. Even Sophia Furnival would ask how he was at any rate twice a day, and Lady Staveley continued to pay him regular visits at stated intervals. As he got better she would sit with him, and brought back reports as to his sayings. But Madeline never discussed any of these; and refrained alike from the conversation, whether his broken bones or his unbroken wit were to be the subject of it. And then Mrs. Arbuthnot, knowing that she would still be anxious, gave her private bulletins as to the state of the sick man's progress;—all which gave on air of secrecy to the matter, and caused even Madeline to ask herself why this should be so.

On the whole I think that Mrs. Arbuthnot was wrong. Mrs. Arbuthnot and the whole Staveley family would have regarded a mutual attachment between Mr. Graham and Madeline as a great family misfortune. The judge was a considerate father to his children, holding that a father's control should never be brought to bear unnecessarily. In looking forward to the future prospects of his son and daughters it was his theory that they should be free to choose their life's companions for themselves. But nevertheless it could not be agreeable to him that his daughter should fall in love with a man who had nothing, and whose future success at his own profession seemed to be so very doubtful. On the whole I think that Mrs. Arbuthnot was wrong, and that the feeling that did exist in Madeline's bosom might more possibly have died away, had no word been said about it—even by a sister.

And then another event happened which forced her to look into her own heart. Peregrine Orme did make his proposal. He waited patiently during those two or three days in which the doctor's visits were frequent, feeling that he could not talk about himself while any sense of danger pervaded the house. But then at last a morning came on which the surgeon declared that he need not call again till the morrow; and Felix himself, when the medical back was turned, suggested that it might as well be to-morrow week. He began also to scold his friends, and look bright about the eyes, and drink his glass of sherry in a pleasant dinner-table fashion, not as if he were swallowing his physic. And Peregrine, when he saw all this, resolved that the moment had come for the doing of his deed of danger. The time would soon come at which he must leave Noningsby, and he would not leave Noningsby till he had learned his fate.

Lady Staveley, who with a mother's eye, had seen her daughter's solicitude for Felix Graham's recovery,—had seen it, and animadverted on it to herself—had seen also, or at any rate had suspected, that Peregrine Orme looked on her daughter with favouring eyes. Now Peregrine Orme would have satisfied Lady Staveley as a son-

in-law. She liked his ways and manners of thought—in spite of those rumours as to the rat-catching which had reached her ears. She regarded him as quite clever enough to be a good husband, and no doubt appreciated the fact that he was to inherit his title and The Cleeve from an old grandfather instead of a middle-aged father. She therefore had no objection to leave Peregrine alone with her one ewe-lamb, and therefore the opportunity which he sought was at last found.

‘I shall be leaving Noningsby to-morrow, Miss Staveley,’ he said one day, having secured an interview in the back drawing-room—in that happy half-hour which occurs in winter before the world betakes itself to dress. Now I here profess my belief, that out of every ten set offers made by ten young lovers, nine of such offers are commenced with an intimation that the lover is going away. There is a dash of melancholy in such tidings well suited to the occasion. If there be any spark of love on the other side it will be elicited by the idea of a separation. And then, also, it is so frequently the actual fact. This making of an offer is in itself a hard piece of business,—a job to be postponed from day to day. It is so postponed, and thus that dash of melancholy, and that idea of separation are brought in at the important moment with so much appropriate truth.

‘I shall be leaving Noningsby to-morrow, Miss Staveley,’ Peregrine said.

‘Oh dear! we shall be so sorry. But why are you going? What will Mr. Graham and Augustus do without you? You ought to stay at least till Mr. Graham can leave his room.’

‘Poor Graham!—not that I think he is much to be pitied either; but he won’t be about for some weeks to come yet.’

‘You do not think he is worse; do you?’

‘Oh, dear, no; not at all.’ And Peregrine was unconsciously irritated against his friend by the regard which her tone evinced. ‘He is quite well; only they will not let him be moved. But, Miss Staveley, it was not of Mr. Graham that I was going to speak.’

‘No—only I thought he would miss you so much.’ And then she blushed, though the blush in the dark of the evening was lost upon him. She remembered that she was not to speak about Felix Graham’s health, and it almost seemed as though Mr. Orme had rebuked her for doing so in saying that he had not come there to speak of him.

‘Lady Staveley’s house has been turned up side down since this affair, and it is time now that some part of the trouble should cease.’

‘Oh! mamma does not mind it at all.’

‘I know how good she is; but nevertheless, Miss Staveley, I must go to-morrow.’ And then he paused a moment before he

spoke again. 'It will depend entirely upon you,' he said, 'whether I may have the happiness of returning soon to Noningsby.'

'On me, Mr. Orme!'

'Yes, on you. I do not know how to speak properly that which I have to say; but I believe I may as well say it out at once. I have come here now to tell you that I love you and to ask you to be my wife.' And then he stopped as though there were nothing more for him to say upon the matter.

It would be hardly extravagant to declare that Madeline's breath was taken away by the very sudden manner in which young Orme had made his proposition. It had never entered her head that she had an admirer in him. Previously to Graham's accident she had thought nothing about him. Since that event she had thought about him a good deal; but altogether as of a friend of Graham's. He had been good and kind to Graham, and therefore she had liked him and had talked to him. He had never said a word to her that had taught her to regard him as a possible lover; and now that he was an actual lover, a declared lover standing before her, waiting for an answer, she was so astonished that she did not know how to speak. All her ideas too, as to love,—such ideas as she had ever formed, were confounded by this abruptness. She would have thought, had she brought herself absolutely to think upon it, that all speech of love should be very delicate; that love should grow slowly, and then be whispered softly, doubtfully, and with infinite care. Even had she loved him, or had she been in the way towards loving him, such violence as this would have frightened her and scared her love away. Poor Peregrine! His intentions had been so good and honest! He was so true and hearty, and free from all conceit in the matter! It was a pity that he should have marred his cause by such ill judgment.

But there he stood waiting an answer,—and expecting it to be as open, definite, and plain as though he had asked her to take a walk with him. 'Madeline,' he said, stretching out his hand when he perceived that she did not speak to him at once. 'There is my hand. If it be possible give me yours.'

'Oh, Mr. Orme!'

'I know that I have not said what I had to say very,—very gracefully. But you will not regard that I think. You are too good, and too true.'

She had now seated herself, and he was standing before her. She had retreated to a sofa in order to avoid the hand which he had offered her; but he followed her, and even yet did not know that he had no chance of success. 'Mr. Orme,' she said at last, speaking hardly above her breath, 'what has made you do this?'

'What has made me do it? What has made me tell you that I love you?'

'You cannot be in earnest!'

'Not in earnest! By heavens, Miss Staveley, no man who has said the same words was ever more in earnest. Do you doubt me when I tell you that I love you?'

'Oh, I am so sorry!' And then she hid her face upon the arm of the sofa and burst into tears.

Peregrine stood there, like a prisoner on his trial, waiting for a verdict. He did not know how to plead his cause with any further language; and indeed no further language could have been of any avail. The judge and jury were clear against him, and he should have known the sentence without waiting to have it pronounced in set terms. But in plain words he had made his offer, and in plain words he required that an answer should be given to him. 'Well,' he said, 'will you not speak to me? Will you not tell me whether it shall be so?'

'No,—no,—no,' she said.

'You mean that you cannot love me.' And as he said this the agony of his tone struck her ear and made her feel that he was suffering. Hitherto she had thought only of herself, and had hardly recognized it as a fact that he could be thoroughly in earnest.

'Mr. Orme, I am very sorry. Do not speak as though you were angry with me. But——'

'But you cannot love me?' And then he stood again silent, for there was no reply. 'Is it that, Miss Staveley, that you mean to answer? If you say that with positive assurance, I will trouble you no longer.' Poor Peregrine! He was but an unskilled lover!

'No!' she sobbed forth through her tears; but he had so framed his question that he hardly knew what No meant.

'Do you mean that you cannot love me, or may I hope that a day will come——. May I speak to you again——?'

'Oh, no, no! I can answer you now. It grieves me to the heart. I know you are so good. But, Mr. Orme——'

'Well——'

'It can never, never be.'

'And I must take that as answer?'

'I can make no other.' He still stood before her,—with gloomy and almost angry brow, could she have seen him; and then he thought he would ask her whether there was any other love which had brought about her scorn for him. It did not occur to him, at the first moment, that in doing so he would insult and injure her.

'At any rate I am not flattered by a reply which is at once so decided,' he began by saying.

'Oh! Mr. Orme, do not make me more unhappy——'

'But perhaps I am too late. Perhaps——' Then he remembered himself and paused. 'Never mind,' he said, speaking to

himself rather than to her. 'Good-bye, Miss Staveley. You will at any rate say good-bye to me. I shall go at once now.'

'Go at once! Go away, Mr. Orme?'

'Yes; why should I stay here? Do you think that I could sit down to table with you all after that? I will ask your brother to explain my going; I shall find him in his room. Good-bye.'

She took his hand mechanically, and then he left her. When she came down to dinner she looked furtively round to this place and saw that it was vacant.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### FOOTSTEPS IN THE CORRIDOR.

'UPON my word I am very sorrow,' said the judge. 'But what made him go off so suddenly? I hope there's nobody ill at The Cleeve!' And then the judge took his first spoonful of soup.

'No, no; there is nothing of that sort,' said Augustus. 'His grandfather wants him, and Orme thought he might as well start at once. He was always a sudden harum-scarum fellow like that.'

'He's a very pleasant, nice young man,' said Lady Staveley; 'and never gives himself any airs. I like him exceedingly.'

Poor Madeline did not dare to look either at her mother or her brother, but she would have given much to know whether either of them were aware of the cause which had sent Peregrine Orme so suddenly away from the house. At first she thought that Augustus surely did know, and she was wretched as she thought that he might probably speak to her on the subject. But he went on talking about Orme and his abrupt departure till she became convinced that he knew nothing and suspected nothing of what had occurred.

But her mother said never a word after that eulogium which she had uttered, and Madeline read that eulogium altogether aright. It said to her ears that if ever young Orme should again come forward with his suit, her mother would be prepared to receive him as a suitor; and it said, moreover, that if that suitor had been already sent away by any harsh answer, she would not sympathize with that harshness.

The dinner went on much as usual, but Madeline could not bring herself to say a word. She sat between her brother-in-law, Mr. Arbuthnot, on one side, and an old friend of her father's, of thirty years' standing, on the other. The old friend talked exclusively to Lady Staveley, and Mr. Arbuthnot, though he now and then uttered a word or two, was chiefly occupied with his dinner. During the last three or four days she had sat at dinner next to Peregrine

Orme, and it seemed to her now that she always had been able to talk to him. She had liked him so much too! Was it not a pity that he should have been so mistaken! And then as she sat after dinner, eating five or six grapes, she felt that she was unable to recall her spirits and look and speak as she was wont to do: a thing had happened which had knocked the ground from under her—had thrown her from her equipoise, and now she lacked the strength to recover herself and hide her dismay.

After dinner, while the gentlemen were still in the dining-room, she got a book, and nobody disturbed her as she sat alone pretending to read it. There never had been any intimate friendship between her and Miss Furnival, and that young lady was now employed in taking the chief part in a general conversation about wools. Lady Staveley got through a good deal of wool in the course of the year, as also did the wife of the old thirty-years' friend; but Miss Furnival, short as her experience had been, was able to give a few hints to them both, and did not throw away the occasion. There was another lady there, rather deaf, to whom Mrs. Arbuthnot devoted herself, and therefore Madeline was allowed to be alone.

Then the men came in, and she was obliged to come forward and officiate at the tea-table. The judge insisted on having the teapot and urn brought into the drawing-room, and liked to have his cup brought to him by one of his own daughters. So she went to work and made the tea, but still she felt that she scarcely knew how to go through her task. What had happened to her that she should be thus beside herself, and hardly capable of refraining from open tears? She knew that her mother was looking at her, and that now and again little things were done to give her ease if any case were possible.

'Is anything the matter with my Madeline?' said her father, looking up into her face, and holding the hand from which he had taken his cup.

'No, papa; only I have got a headache.'

'A headache, dear; that's not usual with you.'

'I have seen that she has not been well all the evening,' said Lady Staveley; 'but I thought that perhaps she might shake it off. You had better go, my dear, if you are suffering. Isabella, I'm sure, will pour out the tea for us.'

And so she got away, and skulked slowly up stairs to her own room. She felt that it was skulking. Why should she have been so weak as to have fled in that way? She had no headache—nor was it heartache that had now upset her. But a man had spoken to her openly of love, and no man had ever so spoken to her before.

She did not go direct to her own chamber, but passed along the corridor towards her mother's dressing-room. It was always her

custom to remain there some half-hour before she went to bed, doing little things for her mother, and chatting with any other girl who might be intimate enough to be admitted there. Now she might remain there for an hour alone without danger of being disturbed; and she thought to herself that she would remain there till her mother came, and then unburthen herself of the whole story.

As she went along the corridor she would have to pass the room which had been given up to Felix Graham. She saw that the door was ajar, and as she came close up to it, she found the nurse in the act of coming out from the room. Mrs. Baker had been a very old servant in the judge's family, and had known Madeline from the day of her birth. Her chief occupation for some years had been nursing when there was anybody to nurse, and taking a general care and surveillance of the family's health when there was no special invalid to whom she could devote herself. Since Graham's accident she had been fully employed, and had greatly enjoyed the opportunities it had given her.

Mrs. Baker was in the doorway as Madeline attempted to pass by on tiptoe. 'Oh, he's a deal better now, Miss Madeline, so that you needn't be afeard of disturbing;—ain't you, Mr. Graham?' So she was thus brought into absolute contact with her friend, for the first time since he had hurt himself.

'Indeed I am,' said Felix; 'I only wish they'd let me get up and go down stairs. Is that Miss Staveley, Mrs. Baker?'

'Yes, sure. Come, my dear, he's got his dressing-gown on, and you may just come to the door and ask him how he does.'

'I am very glad to hear that you are so much better, Mr. Graham,' said Madeline, standing in the doorway with averted eyes, and speaking with a voice so low that it only just reached his ears.

'Thank you, Miss Staveley; I shall never know how to express what I feel for you all.'

'And there's none of 'em have been more anxious about you than she, I can tell you; and none of 'em aint kinderhearteder,' said Mrs. Baker.

'I hope you will be up soon and be able to come down to the drawing-room,' said Madeline. And then she did glance round, and for a moment saw the light of his eye as he sat upright in the bed. He was still pale and thin, or at least she fancied so, and her heart trembled within her as she thought of the danger he had passed.

'I do so long to be able to talk to you again; all the others come and visit me, but I have only heard the sounds of your footsteps as you pass by.'

'And yet she always walks like a mouse,' said Mrs. Baker.

'But I have always heard them,' he said. 'I hope Marian



thanked you for the books. She told me how you had gotten them for me.'

'She should not have said anything about them; it was Augustus who thought of them,' said Madeline.

'Marian comes to me four or five times a day,' he continued; 'I do not know what I should do without her.'

'I hope she is not noisy,' said Madeline.

'Laws, miss, he don't care for noise now, only he aint good at moving yet, and won't be for some while.'

'Pray take care of yourself, Mr. Graham,' she said; 'I need not tell you how anxious we all are for your recovery. Good night, Mr. Graham.' And then she passed on to her mother's dressing-room, and sitting herself down in an arm-chair opposite to the fire began to think—to think, or else to try to think.

And what was to be the subject of her thoughts? Regarding Peregrine Orme there was very little room for thinking. He had made her an offer, and she had rejected it as a matter of course, seeing that she did not love him. She had no doubt on that head, and was well aware that she could never accept such an offer. On what subject then was it necessary that she should think?

How odd it was that Mr. Graham's room door should have been open on this especial evening, and that nurse should have been standing there, ready to give occasion for that conversation! That was the idea that first took possession of her brain. And then she recounted all those few words which had been spoken as though they had had some special value—as though each word had been laden with interest. She felt half ashamed of what she had done in standing there and speaking at his bedroom door, and yet she would not have lost the chance for worlds. There had been nothing in what had passed between her and the invalid. The very words, spoken elsewhere, or in the presence of her mother and sister, would have been insipid and valueless; and yet she sat there feeding on them as though they were of flavour so rich that she could not let the sweetness of them pass from her. She had been stunned at the idea of poor Peregrine's love, and yet she never asked herself what was this new feeling. She did not inquire—not yet at least—whether there might be danger in such feelings.

She remained there, with eyes fixed on the burning coals, till her mother came up. 'What, Madeline,' said Lady Staveley, 'are you here still? I was in hopes you would have been in bed before this.'

'My headache is gone now, mamma; and I waited because—'

'Well, dear; because what?' and her mother came and stood over her and smoothed her hair. 'I know very well that something has been the matter. There has been something; eh, Madeline?'

'Yes, mamma.'

‘ And you have remained up that we may talk about it. Is that it, dearest?’

‘ I did not quite mean that, but perhaps it will be best. I can’t be doing wrong, mamma, in telling you.’

‘ Well; you shall judge of that yourself;’ and Lady Staveley sat down on the sofa so that she was close to the chair which Madeline still occupied. ‘ As a general rule I suppose you could not be doing wrong; but you must decide. If you have any doubt, wait till to-morrow.’

‘ No, mamma; I will tell you now. Mr. Orme—’

‘ Well, dearest. Did Mr. Orme say anything specially to you before he went away?’

‘ He—he—’

‘ Come to me, Madeline, and sit here. We shall talk better then.’ And the mother made room beside her on the sofa for her daughter, and Madeline, running over, leaned with her head upon her mother’s shoulder. ‘ Well, darling; what did he say? Did he tell you that he loved you?’

‘ Yes, mamma.’

‘ And you answered him—’

‘ I could only tell him—’

‘ Yes, I know. Poor fellow! But, Madeline, is he not an excellent young man;—one, at any rate, that is lovable? Of course in such a matter the heart must answer for itself. But I, looking at the offer as a mother—I could have been well pleased—’

‘ But, mamma, I could not—’

‘ Well, love: there shall be an end of it; at least for the present. When I heard that he had gone suddenly away I thought that something had happened.’

‘ I am so sorry that he should be unhappy, for I know that he is good.’

‘ Yes, he is good; and your father likes him, and Augustus. In such a matter as this, Madeline, I would never say a word to persuade you. I should think it wrong to do so. But it may be, dearest, that he has flurried you by the suddenness of his offer; and that you have not yet thought much about it.’

‘ But, mamma, I know that I do not love him.’

‘ Of course. That is natural. It would have been a great misfortune if you had loved him before you had reason to know that he loved you;—a great misfortune. But now,—now that you cannot but think of him, now that you know what his wishes are, perhaps you may learn—’

‘ But I have refused him, and he has gone away.’

‘ Young gentlemen under such circumstances sometimes come back again.’

‘ He won’t come back, mamma, because—because I told him

so plainly—I am sure he understands that it is all to be at an end.'

'But if he should, and if you should then think differently towards him—'

'Oh, no!'

'But if you should, it may be well that you should know how all your friends esteem him. In a worldly view the marriage would be in all respects prudent: and as to disposition and temper, which I admit are much more important, I confess I think that he has all the qualities best adapted to make a wife happy. But, as I said before, the heart must speak for itself.'

'Yes; of course. And I know that I shall never love him;—not in that way.'

'You may be sure, dearest, that there will be no constraint put upon you. It might be possible that I or your papa should forbid a daughter's marriage, if she had proposed to herself an imprudent match; but neither he nor I would ever use our influence with a child to bring about a marriage because we think it prudent in a worldly point of view.' And then Lady Staveley kissed her daughter.

'Dear mamma, I know how good you are to me.' And she answered her mother's embrace by the pressure of her arm. But nevertheless she did not feel herself to be quite comfortable. There was something in the words which her mother had spoken which grated against her most cherished feelings;—something, though she by no means knew what. Why had her mother cautioned her in that way, that there might be a case in which she would refuse her sanction to a proposed marriage? Isabella's marriage had been concluded with the full agreement of the whole family; and she, Madeline, had certainly never as yet given cause either to father or mother to suppose that she would be headstrong and imprudent. Might not the caution have been omitted?—or was it intended to apply in any way to circumstances as they now existed?

'You had better go now, dearest,' said Lady Staveley, 'and for the present we will not think any more about this gallant young knight.' And then Madeline, having said good night, went off rather crestfallen to her own room. In doing so she again had to pass Graham's door, and as she went by it, walking not quite on tiptoe, she could not help asking herself whether or no he would really recognize the sound of her footsteps.

It is hardly necessary to say that Lady Staveley had conceived to herself a recognized purpose in uttering that little caution to her daughter; and she would have been quite as well pleased had circumstances taken Felix Graham out of her house instead of Peregrine Orme. But Felix Graham must necessarily remain for the next fortnight, and there could be no possible benefit in Orme's return, at any rate till Graham should have gone.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT BRIDGET BOLSTER HAD TO SAY.

It has been said in the earlier pages of this story that there was no prettier scenery to be found within thirty miles of London than that by which the little town of Hamworth was surrounded. This was so truly the case that Hamworth was full of lodgings which in the autumn season were always full of lodgers. The middle of winter was certainly not the time for seeing the Hamworth hills to advantage; nevertheless it was soon after Christmas that two rooms were taken there by a single gentleman who had come down for a week, apparently with no other view than that of enjoying himself. He did say something about London confinement and change of air; but he was manifestly in good health, had an excellent appetite, said a great deal about fresh eggs,—which at that time of the year was hardly reasonable, and brought with him his own pale brandy. This gentleman was Mr. Crabwitz.

The house at which he was to lodge had been selected with considerable judgment. It was kept by a tidy old widow known as Mrs. Trump; but those who knew anything of Hamworth affairs were well aware that Mrs. Trump had been left without a shilling, and could not have taken that snug little house in Paradise Row and furnished it complete'y, out of her own means. No. Mrs. Trump's lodging-house was one of the irons which Samuel Dockwrath ever kept heating in the fire, for the behoof of those fourteen children. He had taken a lease of the house in Paradise Row, having made a bargain and advanced a few pounds while it was yet being built; and he then had furnished it and put in Mrs. Trump. Mrs. Trump received from him wages and a percentage; but to him were paid over the quota of shillings per week in consideration for which the lodgers were accommodated. All of which Mr. Crabwitz had ascertained before he located himself in Paradise Row.

And when he had so located himself he soon began to talk to Mrs. Trump about Mr. Dockwrath. He himself, as he told her in confidence, was in the profession of the law; he had heard of Mr. Dockwrath, and should be very glad if that gentleman would come over and take a glass of brandy and water with him some evening.

‘And a very clever sharp gentleman he is,’ said Mrs. Trump.

‘With a tolerably good business, I suppose?’ asked Crabwitz.

‘Pretty fair for that, sir. But he do be turning his hand to everything. He’s a mortal long family of his own, and he has need of it all, if it’s ever so much. But he’ll never be poor for the want of looking after it.’

But Mr. Dockwrath did not come near his lodger on the first evening, and Mr. Crabwitz made acquaintance with Mrs. Dockwrath before he saw her husband. The care of the fourteen children was not supposed to be so onerous but that she could find a moment now and then to see whether Mrs. Trump kept the furniture properly dusted, and did not infringe any of the Dockwrathian rules. These were very strict; and whenever they were broken it was on the head of Mrs. Dockwrath that the anger of the ruler mainly fell.

‘I hope you find everything comfortable, sir,’ said poor Miriam, having knocked at the sitting-room door when Crabwitz had just finished his dinner.

‘Yes, thank you; very nice. Is that Mrs. Dockwrath?’

‘Yes, sir. I’m Mrs. Dockwrath. As it’s we who own the room I looked in to see if anything’s wanting.’

‘You are very kind. No; nothing is wanting. But I should be delighted to make your acquaintance if you would stay for a moment. Might I ask you to take a chair?’ and Mr. Crabwitz handed her one.

‘Thank you; no, sir. I won’t intrude.’

‘Not at all, Mrs. Dockwrath. But the fact is, I’m a lawyer myself, and I should be so glad to become known to your husband. I have heard a great deal of his name lately as to a rather famous case in which he is employed.’

‘Not the Orley Farm case?’ said Mrs. Dockwrath immediately.

‘Yes, yes; exactly.’

‘And is he going on with that, sir?’ asked Mrs. Dockwrath with great interest.

‘Is he not? I know nothing about it myself, but I always supposed that such was the case. If I had such a wife as you, Mrs. Dockwrath, I should not leave her in doubt as to what I was doing in my own profession.’

‘I know nothing about it, Mr. Cooke;’—for it was as Mr. Cooke that he now sojourned at Hamworth. Not that it should be supposed he had received instructions from Mr. Furnival to come down to that place under a false name. From Mr. Furnival he had received no further instructions on that matter than those conveyed at the end of a previous chapter. ‘I know nothing about it, Mr. Cooke; and don’t want to know generally. But I am anxious about this Orley Farm case. I do hope that he’s going to drop it.’

And then Mr. Crabwitz elicited her view of the case with great ease.

On that evening, about nine, Mr. Dockwrath did go over to Paradise Row, and did allow himself to be persuaded to mix a glass of brandy and water and light a cigar. 'My missus tells me, sir, that you belong to the profession as well as myself.'

'Oh yes; I'm a lawyer, Mr. Dockwrath.'

'Practising in town as an attorney, sir?'

Not as an attorney on my own hook exactly. I chiefly employ my time in getting up cases for barristers. There's a good deal done in that way.'

'Oh, indeed,' said Mr. Dockwrath, beginning to feel himself the bigger man of the two; and from that moment he patronized his companion instead of allowing himself to be patronized.

This went against the grain with Mr. Crabwitz, but, having an object to gain, he bore it. 'We hear a great deal up in London just at present about this Orley Farm case, and I always hear your name as connected with it. I had no idea when I was taking these lodgings that I was coming into a house belonging to that Mr. Dockwrath.'

'The same party, sir,' said Mr. Dockwrath, blowing the smoke out of his mouth as he looked up to the ceiling.

And then by degrees Mr. Crabwitz drew him into conversation. Dockwrath was by nature quite as clever a man as Crabwitz, and in such a matter as this was not one to be outwitted easily; but in truth he had no objection to talk about the Orley Farm case. 'I have taken it up on public motives, Mr. Cooke,' he said, 'and I mean to go through with it.'

'Oh, of course; in such a case as that you will no doubt go through with it?'

'That's my intention, I assure you. And I tell you what; young Mason,—that's the son of the widow of the old man who made the will——'

'Or rather who did not make it, as you say.'

'Yes, yes; he made the will; but he did not make the codicil—and that young Mason has no more right to the property than you have.'

'Hasn't he now?'

'No; and I can prove it too.'

'Well; the general opinion in the profession is that Lady Mason will stand her ground and hold her own. I don't know what the points are myself, but I have heard it discussed, and that is certainly what people think.'

'Then people will find that they are very much mistaken.'

'I was talking to one of Round's young men about it, and I fancy they are not very sanguine.'

'I do not care a fig for Round or his young men. It would be

quite as well for Joseph Mason if Round and Crook gave up the matter altogether. It lies in a nutshell, and the truth must come out whatever Round and Crook may choose to say. And I'll tell you more—old Furnival, big a man as he thinks himself, cannot save her.'

'Has he anything to do with it?' asked Mr. Cooke.

'Yes; the sly old fox. My belief is that only for him she'd give up the battle, and be down on her marrow-bones asking for mercy.'

'She'd have little chance of mercy, from what I hear of Joseph Mason.'

'She'd have to give up the property of course. And even then I don't know whether he'd let her off. By heavens! he couldn't let her off unless I chose.' And then by degrees he told Mr. Cooke some of the circumstances of the case.

But it was not till the fourth evening that Mr. Dockwrath spent with his lodger that the intimacy had so far progressed as to enable Mr. Crabwitz to proceed with his little scheme. On that day Mr. Dockwrath had received a notice that at noon on the following morning Mr. Joseph Mason and Bridget Bolster would both be at the house of Messrs. Round and Crook in Bedford Row, and that he could attend at that hour if it so pleased him. It certainly would so please him, he said to himself when he got that letter; and in the evening he mentioned to his new friend the business which was taking him to London.

'If I might advise you in the matter, Mr. Dockwrath,' said Crabwitz, 'I should stay away altogether.'

'And why so?'

'Because that's not your market. This poor devil of a woman—for she is a poor devil of a woman—'

'She'll be poor enough before long.'

'It can't be any gratification to you running her down.'

'Ah, but the justice of the thing.'

'Bother. You're talking now to a man of the world. Who can say what is the justice or the injustice of anything after twenty years of possession? I have no doubt the codicil did express the old man's wish,—even from your own story. But of course you are looking for your market. Now it seems to me that there's a thousand pounds in your way as clear as daylight.'

'I don't see it myself, Mr. Cooke.'

'No; but I do. The sort of thing is done every day. You have your father-in-law's office journal?'

'Safe enough.'

'Burn it;—or leave it about in these rooms like;—so that somebody else may burn it.'

'I'd like to see the thousand pounds first.'

'Of course you'd do nothing till you knew about that;—nothing

except keeping away from Round and Crook to-morrow. The money would be forthcoming if the trial were notoriously dropped by next assizes.'

Dockwrath sat thinking for a minute or two, and every moment of thought made him feel more strongly that he could not now succeed in the manner pointed out by Mr. Cooke. 'But where would be the market you are talking of?' said he.

'I could manage that,' said Crabwitz.

'And go shares in the business?'

'No, no; nothing of the sort.' And then he added, remembering that he must show that he had some personal object, 'If I got a trifle in the matter it would not come out of your allowance.'

The attorney again sat silent for a while, and now he remained so for full five minutes, during which Mr. Crabwitz puffed the smoke from between his lips with a look of supreme satisfaction. 'May I ask,' at last Mr. Dockwrath said, 'whether you have any personal interest in this matter?'

'None in the least;—that is to say, none as yet.'

'You did not come down here with any view—'

'Oh dear no; nothing of the sort. But I see at a glance that it is one of those cases in which a compromise would be the most judicious solution of difficulties. I am well used to this kind of thing, Mr. Dockwrath.'

'It would not do, sir,' said Mr. Dockwrath, after some further slight period of consideration. 'It wouldn't do. Round and Crook have all the dates, and so has Mason too. And the original of that partnership deed is forthcoming; and they know what witnesses to depend on. No, sir; I've begun this on public grounds, and I mean to carry it on. I am in a manner bound to do so as the representative of the attorney of the late Sir Joseph Mason;—and by heavens, Mr. Cooke, I'll do my duty.'

'I dare say you're right,' said Mr. Crabwitz, mixing a quarter of a glass more brandy and water.

'I know I'm right, sir,' said Dockwrath. 'And when a man knows he's right, he has a deal of inward satisfaction in the feeling.' After that Mr. Crabwitz was aware that he could be of no use at Hamworth, but he stayed out his week in order to avoid suspicion.

On the following day Mr. Dockwrath did proceed to Bedford Row, determined to carry out his original plan, and armed with that inward satisfaction to which he had alluded. He dressed himself in his best, and endeavoured as far as was in his power to look as though he were equal to the Messrs. Round. Old Crook he had seen once, and him he already despised. He had endeavoured to obtain a private interview with Mrs. Bolster before she could be seen by Matthew Round; but in this he had not succeeded. Mrs. Bolster was a prudent woman, and, acting doubtless under advice,



had written to him, saying that she had been summoned to the office of Messrs. Round and Crook, and would there declare all that she knew about the matter. At the same time she returned to him a money order which he had sent to her.

Punctually at twelve he was in Bedford Row, and there he saw a respectable-looking female sitting at the fire in the inner part of the outer office. This was Bridget Bolster, but he would by no means have recognized her. Bridget had risen in the world and was now head chambermaid at a large hotel in the west of England. In that capacity she had laid aside whatever diffidence may have afflicted her earlier years, and was now able to speak out her mind before any judge or jury in the land. Indeed she had never been much afflicted by such diffidence, and had spoken out her evidence on that former occasion, now twenty years since, very plainly. But as she now explained to the head clerk, she had at that time been only a poor ignorant slip of a girl, with no more than eight pounds a year wages.

Dockwrath bowed to the head clerk, and passed on to Mat Round's private room. 'Mr. Matthew is inside, I suppose,' said he, and hardly waiting for permission he knocked at the door, and then entered. There he saw Mr. Matthew Round, sitting in his comfortable arm-chair, and opposite to him sat Mr. Mason of Groby Park.

Mr. Mason got up and shook hands with the Hamworth attorney, but Round junior made his greeting without rising, and merely motioned his visitor to a chair.

'Mr. Mason and the young ladies are quite well, I hope?' said Mr. Dockwrath, with a smile.

'Quite well, I thank you,' said the county magistrate.

'This matter has progressed since I last had the pleasure of seeing them. You begin to think I was right; eh, Mr. Mason?'

'Don't let us triumph till we are out of the wood?' said Mr. Round. 'It is a deal easier to spend money in such an affair as this than it is to make money by it. However we shall hear to-day more about it.'

'I do not know about making money,' said Mr. Mason, very solemnly. 'But that I have been robbed by that woman out of my just rights in that estate for the last twenty years,—that I may say I do know.'

'Quite true, Mr. Mason; quite true,' said Mr. Dockwrath with considerable energy.

'And whether I make money or whether I lose money I intend to proceed in this matter. It is dreadful to think that in this free and enlightened country so abject an offender should have been able to hold her head up so long without punishment and without disgrace.'

'That is exactly what I feel,' said Dockwrath. 'The very stones and trees of Hamworth cry out against her.'

'Gentlemen,' said Mr. Round, 'we have first to see whether there has been any injustice or not. If you will allow me I will explain to you what I now propose to do.'

'Proceed, sir,' said Mr. Mason, who was by no means satisfied with his young attorney.

'Bridget Bolster is now in the next room, and as far as I can understand the case at present, she would be the witness on whom your case, Mr. Mason, would most depend. The man Kenneby I have not yet seen; but from what I understand he is less likely to prove a willing witness than Mrs. Bolster.'

'I cannot go along with you there, Mr. Round,' said Dockwrath.

'Excuse me, sir, but I am only stating my opinion. If I should find that this woman is unable to say that she did not sign two separate documents on that day—that is, to say so with a positive and point blank assurance, I shall recommend you, as my client, to drop the prosecution.'

'I will never drop it,' said Mr. Mason.

'You will do as you please,' continued Round; 'I can only say what under such circumstances will be the advice given to you by this firm. I have talked the matter over very carefully with my father and with our other partner, and we shall not think well of going on with it unless I shall now find that your view is strongly substantiated by this woman.'

Then outspoke Mr. Dockwrath, 'Under these circumstances, Mr. Mason, if I were you, I should withdraw from the house at once. I certainly would not have my case blown upon.'

'Mr. Mason, sir, will do as he pleases about that. As long as the business with which he honours us is straightforward, we will do it for him, as for an old client, although it is not exactly in our own line. But we can only do it in accordance with our own judgment. I will proceed to explain what I now propose to do. The woman Bolster is in the next room, and I, with the assistance of my head clerk, will take down the headings of what evidence she can give.'

'In our presence, sir,' said Mr. Dockwrath; 'or if Mr. Mason should decline, at any rate in mine.'

'By no means, Mr. Dockwrath,' said Round.

'I think Mr. Dockwrath should hear her story,' said Mr. Mason.

'He certainly will not do so in this house or in conjunction with me. In what capacity should he be present, Mr. Mason?'

'As one of Mr. Mason's legal advisers,' said Dockwrath.

'If you are to be one of them, Messrs. Round and Crook cannot be the others. I think I explained that to you before. It now remains for Mr. Mason to say whether he wishes to employ our firm in this matter or not. And I can tell him fairly,' Mr. Round added this after a slight pause, 'that we shall be rather pleased than otherwise if he will put the case into other hands.'

'Of course I wish you to conduct it,' said Mr. Mason, who, with all his bitterness against the present holders of Orley Farm, was afraid of throwing himself into the hands of Dockwrath. He was not an ignorant man, and he knew that the firm of Round and Crook bore a high reputation before the world.

'Then,' said Round, 'I must do my business in accordance with my own views of what is right. I have reason to believe that no one has yet tampered with this woman,' and as he spoke he looked hard at Dockwrath, 'though probably attempts may have been made.'

'I don't know who should tamper with her,' said Dockwrath, 'unless it be Lady Mason—whom I must say you seem very anxious to protect.'

'Another word like that, sir, and I shall be compelled to ask you to leave the house. I believe that this woman has been tampered with by no one. I will now learn from her what is her remembrance of the circumstances as they occurred twenty years since, and I will then read to you her deposition. I shall be sorry, gentlemen, to keep you here, perhaps for an hour or so, but you will find the morning papers on the table.' And then Mr. Round, gathering up certain documents, passed into the outer office, and Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath were left alone.

'He is determined to get that woman off,' said Mr. Dockwrath, in a whisper.

'I believe him to be an honest man,' said Mr. Mason, with some sternness.

'Honesty, sir! It is hard to say what is honesty and what is dishonesty. Would you believe it, Mr. Mason, only last night I had a thousand pounds offered me to hold my tongue about this affair?'

Mr. Mason at the moment did not believe this, but he merely looked hard into his companion's face, and said nothing.

'By the heavens above us what I tell you is true! a thousand pounds, Mr. Mason! Only think how they are going it to get this thing stifled. And where should the offer come from but from those who know I have the power?'

'Do you mean to say that the offer came from this firm?'

'Hush—sh, Mr. Mason. The very walls hear and talk in such a place as this. I'm not to know who made the offer, and I don't know. But a man can give a very good guess sometimes. The party who was speaking to me is up to the whole transaction, and knows exactly what is going on here—here, in this house. He let it all out, using pretty nigh the same words as Round used just now. He was full about the doubt that Round and Crook felt—that they'd never pull it through. I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Mason, they don't mean to pull it through.'

'What answer did you make to the man?'

'What answer! why I just put my thumb this way over my

shoulder. No, Mr. Mason, if I can't carry on without bribery and corruption, I won't carry on at all. He'd called at the wrong house with that dodge, and so he soon found.'

'And you think he was an emissary from Messrs. Round and Crook?'

'Hush—sh—sh. For heaven's sake, Mr. Mason, do be a little lower. You can put two and two together as well as I can, Mr. Mason. I find they make four. I don't know whether your calculation will be the same. My belief is, that these people are determined to save that woman. Don't you see it in that young fellow's eye—that his heart is all on the other side. Now he's got hold of that woman Bolster, and he'll teach her to give such evidence as will upset us. But I'll be even with him yet, Mr. Mason. If you'll only trust me, we'll both be even with him yet.'

Mr. Mason at the present moment said nothing further, and when Dockwrath pressed him to continue the conversation in whispers, he distinctly said that he would rather say no more upon the subject just then. He would wait for Mr. Round's return. 'Am I at liberty,' he asked, 'to mention that offer of the thousand pounds?'

'What—to Mat Round?' said Dockwrath. 'Certainly not, Mr. Mason. It wouldn't be our game at all.'

'Very well, sir.' And then Mr. Mason took up a newspaper, and no further words were spoken till the door opened and Mr. Round re-entered the room.

This he did with slow, deliberate step, and stopping on the hearth-rug, he stood leaning with his back against the mantelpiece. It was clear from his face to see that he had much to tell, and clear also that he was not pleased at the turn which affairs were taking.

'Well, gentlemen, I have examined the woman,' he said, 'and here is her deposition.'

'And what does she say?' asked Mr. Mason.

'Come, out with it, sir,' said Dockwrath. 'Did she, or did she not sign two documents on that day?'

'Mr. Mason,' said Round, turning to that gentleman, and altogether ignoring Dockwrath and his question; 'I have to tell you that her statement, as far as it goes, fully corroborates your view of the case. As far as it goes, mind you.'

'Oh, it does; does it?' said Dockwrath.

'And she is the only important witness?' said Mr. Mason with great exultation.

'I have never said that; what I did say was this—that your case must break down unless her evidence supported it. It does support it—strongly; but you will want more than that.'

'And now if you please, Mr. Round, what is it that she has deposed?' asked Dockwrath.

'She remembers it all then?' said Mason.

'She is a remarkably clear-headed woman, and apparently does remember a great deal. But her remembrance chiefly and most strongly goes to this—that she witnessed only one deed.'

'She can prove that, can she?' said Mason, and the tone of his voice was loudly triumphant.

'She declares that she never signed but one deed in the whole of her life—either on that day or on any other; and over and beyond this she says now—now that I have explained to her what that other deed might have been—that old Mr. Usbeck told her that it was about a partnership.'

'He did, did he?' said Dockwrath, rising from his chair and clapping his hands. 'Very well. I don't think we shall want more than that, Mr. Mason.'

There was a tone of triumph in the man's voice, and a look of gratified malice in his countenance which disgusted Mr. Round and irritated him almost beyond his power of endurance. It was quite true that he would much have preferred to find that the woman's evidence was in favour of Lady Mason. He would have been glad to learn that she actually had witnessed the two deeds on the same day. His tone would have been triumphant, and his face gratified, had he returned to the room with such tidings. His feelings were all on that side, though his duty lay on the other. He had almost expected that it would be so. As it was, he was prepared to go on with his duty, but he was not prepared to endure the insolence of Mr. Dockwrath. There was a look of joy also about Mr. Mason which added to his annoyance. It might be just and necessary to prosecute that unfortunate woman at Orley Farm, but he could not gloat over such work.

'Mr. Dockwrath,' he said, 'I will not put up with such conduct here. If you wish to rejoice about this, you must go elsewhere.'

'And what are we to do now?' said Mr. Mason. 'I presume there need be no further delay.'

'I must consult with my partner. If you can make it convenient to call this day week—'

'But she will escape.'

'No, she will not escape. I shall not be ready to say anything before that. If you are not in town, then I can write to you.' And so the meeting was broken up, and Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath left the lawyer's office together.

Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath left the office in Bedford Row together, and thus it was almost a necessity that they should walk together for some distance through the streets. Mr. Mason was going to his hotel in Soho Square, and Mr. Dockwrath turned with him through the passage leading into Red Lion Square, linking his own arm in that of his companion. The Yorkshire county magistrate did not quite like this, but what was he to do?

‘Did you ever see anything like that, sir?’ said Mr. Dockwrath; ‘for by heavens I never did.’

‘Like what?’ said Mr. Mason.

‘Like that fellow there;—that Round. It is my opinion that he deserves to have his name struck from the rolls. Is it not clear that he is doing all in his power to bring that wretched woman off? And I’ll tell you what, Mr. Mason, if you let him play his own game in that way, he will bring her off.’

‘But he expressly admitted that this woman Bolster’s evidence is conclusive.’

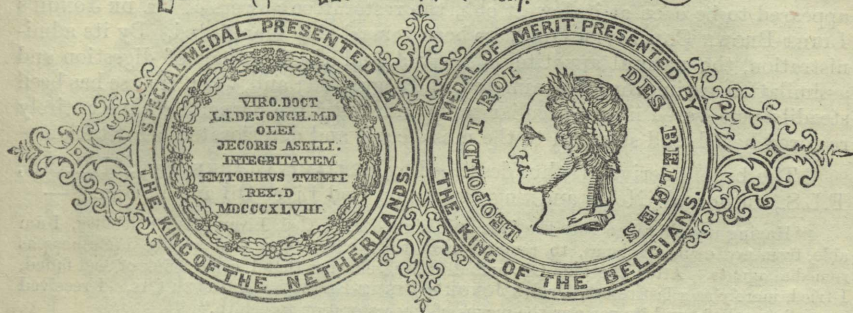
‘Yes; he was so driven into a corner that he could not help admitting that. The woman had been too many for him, and he found that he couldn’t cushion her. But do you mind my words, Mr. Mason. He intends that you shall be beaten. It’s as plain as the nose on your face. You can read it in the very look of him, and in every tone of his voice. At any rate I can. I’ll tell you what it is’—and then he squeezed very close to Mr. Mason—‘he and old Furnival understand each other in this matter like two brothers. Of course Round will have his bill against you. Win or lose, he’ll get his costs out of your pocket. But he can make a deuced pretty thing out of the other side as well. Let me tell you, Mr. Mason, that when notes for a thousand pounds are flying here and there, it isn’t every lawyer that will see them pass by him without opening his hand.’

‘I do not think that Mr. Round would take a bribe,’ said Mr. Mason very stiffly.

‘Wouldn’t he? Just as a hound would a pat of butter. It’s your own look-out, you know, Mr. Mason. I haven’t got an estate of twelve hundred a year depending on it. But remember this;—if she escapes now, Orley Farm is gone for ever.’

All this was extremely disagreeable to Mr. Mason. In the first place he did not at all like the tone of equality which the Hamworth attorney had adopted; he did not like to acknowledge that his affairs were in any degree dependent on a man of whom he thought so badly as he did of Mr. Dockwrath; he did not like to be told that Round and Crook were rogues,—Round and Crook whom he had known all his life; but least of all did he like the feeling of suspicion with which, in spite of himself, this man had imbued him, or the fear that his victim might at last escape him. Excellent, therefore, as had been the evidence with which Bridget Bolster had declared herself ready to give in his favour, Mr. Mason was not a contented man when he sat down to his solitary beefsteak in Soho Square.

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Do. Forks	27 0	38 0	40 0	50 0	44 0	54 0
Tea Spoons	16 0	20 0	24 0	32 0	27 0	36 0
Soup Ladles	12 0	16 0	16 0	18 0	17 0	20 0
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