Ed. Stolmeg.

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THE

POTTLETON LEGACY:

A Story

OF

TOWN AND COUNTRY LIFE.

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HABLOT K. BROWNE.

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TO

CAPTAIN H. PERCIVAL DE BATHE,

OF THE SCOTS FUSILIER GUARDS,

This Story is Dedicated,

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MUCH KINDNESS,

BY ONE WHO HAS THE PLEASURE OF RANKING AMONGST

HIS MOST SINCERE FRIENDS.

London,—May, 1849.

LIST OF PLATES.

All's well that ends well . . . . . *To face Title.*
The First Glimpse of the Legacy. p.19
Mr. Wyndham Flitter makes himself at Home . . . 44
The Dinner at Long's 72
Miss Martha Twinch's Adventure in the Wild-beast-Show 60
Philip's Return 97
Mrs. Wracketts receives her Friends 110
M. Polpette at Home 146
After the Duel 171
The Reverend Mr. Page receives a Visit 211
The Beauchamp Tower 236
Tip's Degradation 267
Lotty and Totty Behave Dreadfully 285
The Boarding House 299
Lady Flokes, Mr. Page, and Patience 319
The Return from the Races 358
Old Lady Flokes in Great Distress 373
Mr. Spooner meets his Father 390
The Ganger's Fate 420
The Legacy unfolded 444

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

Of the Village 1

CHAPTER II.

Of the great Excitement that was caused in the Village by the visit of a Strange Monster . . 4

CHAPTER III.

In which the First Personage of the Tale appears 10

CHAPTER IV.

The First Glimpse of the Legacy 14

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Twinch's Household and Opinions 20

CHAPTER VI.

The Game Commences 27

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Flitter arrives in London 34

CHAPTER VIII.

The Miss Twinches come out in a gratifying manner 49

CHAPTER IX.

PAGE

Mr. Flitter's Dinner at Long's 63

CHAPTER X.

A Long Way from Pottleton 77

CHAPTER XI.

Home again 93

CHAPTER XII.

Philip's Return 97

CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter introduces Philip into good Society 105

CHAPTER XIV.

Philip sees more life 114

CHAPTER XV.

Margaret Sherrard 119

CHAPTER XVI.

Miss Twinch's Bereavement 130

CHAPTER XVII.

M. Polpette at Home 145

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Funny Writer 152

CHAPTER XIX.

Mr. Spooner's Affair of Honour 161

CHAPTER XX.

PAGE

The Pottleton Ball 172

CHAPTER XXI.

Two Nice Children 193

CHAPTER XXII.

Fresh Excitements 204

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Letter, a Dinner, and an Adventure 227

CHAPTER XXIV.

An Unexpected Introduction 241

CHAPTER XXV.

A Change of Scene 256

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Cooze Jewels might still behave better . . . 268

CHAPTER XXVII.

A Boulogne Boarding-House 289

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Twinch Family in Debate 302

CHAPTER XXIX.

Lady Flokes at Home 313

CHAPTER XXX.

Mr. Flitter and the Manager 323

CHAPTER XXXI.

PAGE

Philip goes to Epsom, to his Cost 337

CHAPTER XXXII.

Annie goes to Lady Flokes's 359

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Mr. Spooner's Unexpected Visitor 385

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Robbery at Monkscrofts 398

CHAPTER XXXV.

Some Family Matters 411

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Mr. Flitter's Dilemma 420

CHAPTER XXXVII.

An Unforeseen Night's Journey 433

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Legacy 442

CHAPTER XXXIX.

All's Well that Ends Well. 454

CHAPTER XL.

Which Disposes of Everybody 465

THE POTTLETON LEGACY.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

OF THE VILLAGE.

About fifty miles from town, taking a somewhat westerly direction, there is a little village, which has generally been considered so very unimportant a place, that it has not found its way into any gazetteer; nor, indeed, can the most microscopic eye discover its name in the county map. It has even been accounted too out-of-the-way a spot to be published as the abode of any patient marvellously cured by a patent medicine. In fact, until very lately, nobody was known who had ever been there, except the candidates for the shire, on their canvassing expeditions preceding a contested election; the carrier, who met the mail on the high road, at the finger-post, some three miles away, and was also the postman; or the literary missionary, who left works in numbers at the farm-houses, whereof the gentle excitement was well sustained, by sewing up the most startling illustrations with the heavier reading, opposite remote parts of the story; which was an admirable notion, and very promotive of continued curiosity.

This little village, then, which was called Pottleton—or Pot'ton, by popular rustic elision—was situated in a valley, along the centre of which ran a small stream, whose only mission was to turn a couple of mills, and then babble pleasantly through some rich meadows, spangled with water-lilies, and edged with round-headed pollards, until it tumbled over the lock of a canal near the high road. The valley ran from east to west, and so the village had the sun all day. In the morn-

ing, its white cottages quite sparkled in the light; and towards afternoon, when you had climbed one of the hills—through the fern, and golden furze, and quivering harebells that clothed them—and turned round to breathe, and look back, upon gaining a platform of something that was neither turf, nor moss, nor velvet, but a union of all—how pleasant was the prospect of the village! At such time it seemed to be dozing in the warm glow, embosomed in trees. The gilt weathercock on the square grey church-tower twinkled in the sunlight, and one or two casements flashed back the rays, revealing small dwellings which, but for this, you would not have noticed, so embowered were they in thick-leaved clumps. You heard no more noise than was sufficient to set off the silence. The lulling murmur of the mill-water, a distant sheep-bell or two, perhaps the occasional low of a cow, as she turned round and looked behind her with an inquiring gaze, whilst strolling up the village; or the hum of an aspiring bee, who preferred having it all his own way upon the hills, to joining the swarms about the sunny and secluded cottage gardens—that was all. Everything, at such times, spoke of rest and comfort, and tranquil existence. If you had found yourself there, fresh from the fevered struggling life of a large city, the intense feeling of repose would have affected you almost to pain.

The houses of Pottleton were very humble. The inn was the largest; and the inhabitants looked upon its sign—which represented a red lion, as he might appear when anxiously learning a hornpipe—as a fine piece of art. There were no rows nor streets. The dwellings stood by themselves, presenting warped gables and massive chimneys in all directions; and monthly roses and honeysuckles seemed ready to pull them down by their very weight of petals. Huge trees grew before them at the roadside, casting deep shadows a noon over the highway; and in one, at the inn, had been made a perfect house upon the first branches, where, in summer-tide, quite shut in by leaves, the thirsty passengers rested and smoked their pipes, and tasted their clear beady ale, as they listened to the birds, all about them, making such fine minstrelsy, that hearts were scarcely large enough to drink in so great an enjoyment.

At the end of the village, a short way down a bye lane,

along which was such small traffic that the road was covered with grass, stood The Grange. A long time ago, out of the memory of everybody, and now only known by a damp, half-legible tablet in the church, a good old Cavalier family had lived there, whose fortunes it betokened as it became dilapidated or restored; but hardly compensated, by the revelry that reigned about it at the Restoration, for the sad, harrowing days and nights of suspense and terror that had followed on the fights of Naseby and Worcester. But the land around it had been bought, and juggled away, and encroached on, from some uncertainty in the title—bit by bit—until scarcely any was left. Then the house stood for years untenanted, and was, of course, haunted. Boys knocked at the door and rang the rusty court-yard bell for amusement, paying imaginary visits to the phantom owners whenever they passed—only in the broad daylight, though—until the knocker and bell were both carried away. Next, the same boys broke the windows, which was a fine excitement at a small risk; and then the birds and bats got in and lived all about. But at length the parish put the old building somewhat in order, and parcelled it into a number of small tenements—half of which were made into almshouses, and the others let to the poorer villagers; the man at "the shop" renting the hall as a warehouse. What had been the terrace was divided into slips of garden; the chimneys that had tumbled down through the roof into the lofts were all set up again; the owls were driven out, and the tiles replaced; and soon creepers hung to the walls, up to the very eaves. And far worse objects might have been looked at than the scarlet runners which swung their bright blossoms from the blackened timbers and rusty bits of iron, wherever they could contrive to twist themselves round.

The church was an old grey Norman building near the Grange, with no two windows alike, albeit there were many; and these appeared to have been studiously put in the most useless places—behind beams, and under pews, and right up to the ceiling; and glazed with panes as green and thick as though they were made of flattened wine bottles. All about the graves were daisies; and primroses and cowslips even. None of them were shuffled down, nor were the withies displaced that bound them into form, although a foot

thoroughfare ran between them, cutting off an angle of the road; for the churchyard was the resting-place of one large family, and the same names could be read on many of the wooden monuments. Death lost much of its terror, and the separation was less severe, when the survivors reflected that, in a few years, they would again meet in that common home. Little children played under the lych-gate, and made flower-chains upon the tombstones. These grew up, and married and died; and at their funerals, other little children still clustered about the grave-yard and under the lych-gate, as they watched the body carried to its rest, with curious awe.

And so, all tranquilly, the life of the village went on.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE GREAT EXCITEMENT THAT WAS CAUSED IN THE VILLAGE BY THE VISIT OF A STRANGE MONSTER.

One fine July morning there was a great stir in Pottleton. Had any one taken a stick and poked up an ant's nest, the inhabitants would not have been in fuller activity.

For months before there had been indications of important changes in the neighbourhood. Trees and hedges had been cut down and levelled, and huge banks cast up in the middle of the fields. Stalwart men worked with spade and pickaxe from morn till eve; and when sunset came ate so much beef and drank so much ale that the butcher opened another shed, and two inoffensive cottages made an almost fairy change into beer-shops, with real signs of the "Fox under the Hill," and the "Bold Navigator." The latter at first somewhat confused the villagers by being represented upon land, with a spade in one hand, and a pewter-pot in the other—thus far differing from Captain Cook, the only navigator received at Pottleton as an authority, by means of his "Voyages," left in numbers as above described, although after a time they got used to him.

The natives were told that a railway was coming that way; but they looked at the hill towards which it took its direction,

and incredulously shook their heads. When, however, the labourers arrived at its base, and, instead of going up its slope, proceeded gravely to tunnel it,—when, also, they saw that these strangers had a wonderful horse, which they made to pull a dozen trucks of dirt after him as easily as though he had only been drawing a tilted cart, they began to look upon them with awe. And henceforth none of the village swains had a chance, either in love or war, with the navigators.

At last, they were told that all was ready, and the line was to be opened on a certain day; and when that came, Pottleton was like a fair. Hitherto, "Club-day" had been the great festival. On that anniversary the men wore blue bows on their hats, and marched all about the village, with a band, and a banner inscribed, "Let brotherly love prevail," which it always did until after dinner, when the fighting commenced for the evening, and the brothers laboured under notions that they were all right, and not going to be put upon by nobody. Their wives then haunted the "Red Lion" in great distress; and the doctor was constantly called up, all night long, to broken heads. But the outburst over, Pottleton was always tranquil again for a twelvemonth.

Except on the fine July morning above spoken of, when, at an early hour, the bells were ringing; for there was a regular peal in the old Norman tower, belonging to some abbey long since levelled, with mottoes cast around them in quaint letters of monkish Saxon, which Mousel, the sexton, said was "forrin." Then came all sorts of strangers into the village, as the morning advanced. The "Red Lion" was full—so were the beer-shops—so even were the temporary hostels formed of fan-like ferns and hurdles, which covered tubs of beer under the hedges at the cross-roads, that they might look cool to the dusty visitors when the day got on: and it promised to be a broiler.

Old Master Harris, the pieman, who also took messages and small parcels to Dibblethorpe,—distant some two miles,—was early about, with an artful engine that spun round, and always frustrated the hopes that rode upon the point of its dial, to his immediate advantage. His pies were wondrous things, made entirely of air and pepper; and were distinguished by various names, as the taste of the consumer sug-

gested. In all of them, to be sure, were certain atomic substances, over which the dome of crust was raised; but they bore no greater proportion to it than did the body of Cheops to his pyramid. Nevertheless, they were very popular in Pottleton.

Soon came in folks from the adjacent hamlets, mostly rosy girls in the gayest patterns from "the shop" where they sold everything; and, in the hurry of Saturday nights, often wrapped up the half pounds of butter in the printed cotton handkerchiefs, mistook eggs for balls of cotton, and got confused between button-moulds and peppermint drops. Anon, carriage people drove into the village, all of whom were hurrah'd by the boys as forming a part of the festival: the boys being then, as now, and there as everywhere else, the grand enthusiasts in all popular gratuitous festivity. Lastly, the excitement was wrought up to its highest pitch by the arrival of the band, with the sexton of the church vestry, staff in hand, acting as a sort of ecclesiastic drum-major. The band was powerful in wind, and exceedingly great in brass; with a very able-bodied drum. It would have come out greatly in those singular concerts popular with the Dutch, wherein various airs are said to be sung by as many voices at the same time. But what it wanted in harmony it made up for in earnestness; and but for lack of length in arms and instruments, there is no conceiving to what extent the trombones would have been pushed out by the exertions of the performers.

But the grand centre of all the attractions was the triumphal arch over the line at the corner of the "Four-acres." At first, when its naked poles were raised, the villagers thought it was a scaffolding for a church-tower or brewery-chimney. Then wicked wags circulated the report that it was a great gibbet to hang twelve of the navigators upon, for robbing Farmer Grant's hen-house; which, by the way, after all, had been traced to the gipsies. But at last, when cartloads of evergreens went through the village, and were tied about it, and flag pocket-handkerchiefs were hoisted at its corners, and a large nest was left amongst the laurel, in which the Sunday-school children were to sit and sing a moral chorus, then its destiny became clear. And here the greatest mob collected, bawling, jostling, and launching local

allusions at the constables, who had been selected for the day from the better class of labourers. The very young children, with sun-blanched hair and unlatcheted shoes, buried one another in the dust until they resembled heaps of road-scrapings themselves. The gathering of the people made their festival; and if there had been nothing else to see but the crowds, they would have been equally happy.

There were many old-fashioned inhabitants of the village who did not enter into the excitement with all the gay feelings of their neighbours. Not from any proper-to-be-observed love of the "good old coaching times," nor from misgivings as to the result of the railway station upon the general prosperity or economy of Pottleton. But they were old world folks, kind and honest withal—for the old-fashioned hearts, like the furniture, were well and truly put together, and stood a deal of wear—and to them the village had been a universe; and so everything about it was almost a part of their being. They had known the very individual trees which now lay lopped and barked at the side of the line, from childhood; they had ridden in the wagons that once plodded along the level road on which they now had to climb a hill to cross the rails, or had gone, when very little, into the field on sunny summer evenings, to blow the "what's-o'-clocks" into many feathery films, or collect great handfuls of fragrant clover and buttercups, where a deep cutting now divided the pasture. And therefore they felt that they were losing their oldest friends, and breaking away from those disinterested attachments which childhood only forms, without hope of profit or dread of insincerity. The change was to them a sad one. It was like a public sale of old sympathies—the humblest things through which nature once communed with them about their homes, put up to auction, and knocked down to the highest, and strangest, bidder.

But the boys were less sensitive. They found fun in everything—even in the sexton when he was not looking. But at other times they respected him greatly, more especially on hot restless afternoons in church. For then he had a cane, the echoes from which now and then interrupted the service, as it fell on the shoulders of ill-disciplined urchins in the free seats who dared to go to sleep there—a breach of manners which betokened marvellous somnolency, when the

upright and knotty construction of the free seats was taken into consideration.

"Ooray, for Pickled Sam!" shouted a boy who was sitting on the foot of a young oak.

The sexton had acquired the title from the habit of crying "pickled salmon" through the village, which cry he had corrupted into the nickname applied to him. He looked sharply round, turning his attention from the band, and directly another voice saluted him from the other side.

"Mind your toes with that big stick: look out, Sam!"

And a weed with a fibrous root, and a quantity of dry earth about it, flew through the air and hit his hat.

"Please, Mr. Mousel, sir, that was Whacky Clark throwed that, sir," cried a weak-minded boy of parasitical disposition, who looked damp and acid, and hunted the tufts—so to speak—of the sexton's Welch wig, which he wore at rainy funerals.

"Give it him!" cried a dozen voices. The partizanship of a mob, either of boys or men, is but a rotten affair to trust to.

Whacky Clark, as he appears to have been called, although there is no record of the name in the Pottleton registry, and who was the ne'er-do-well of the village, gave his accuser the lie in good Saxon English, and then dived amongst the crowd to put him, according to old law, to the ordeal by battle, which turned very rapidly in Whacky's favour; and the diversion caused by this scuffle was only put a stop to by the clock striking noon, at which time the train was to be expected.

"Here she comes!" cried the urchin in the tree.

There was renewed jostling, and jumping up and down, and then a laugh from the same quarter showed the mob had been made fools of.

But that the time was at hand was shown by the arrival of the privileged company, who stood beside the arch. There were the two Miss Twinch's, sisters of the lawyer, who, conceiving that they had been neglected through life, revenged themselves upon a small portion of mankind, by visiting the poor, but never giving them anything except advice: and would stop small children in the road when taking their father's dinner to the field, and ask them, with great severity, the hardest parts of the Catechism, such as "I desire," and their

duty towards their neighbour, of which personage each one had a different notion according to their residence. The eldest Miss Twinch had lately taken some strange religious fancies into her head—at least, so the villagers thought, who had great belief in the creed their fathers had professed before them. They attended their morning and evening service on the Sundays with constant zeal, when the pleasant bells called them to worship; but this was not enough for Miss Twinch. She would watch the old woman who went in to beat the hassocks and clean the church, and steal in too, for what she called her private devotions. Indeed, once she was nearly cured by being locked in by mistake, and passed a winter's night in the old carved oak family pew, formerly belonging to the Grange, where she was found the next morning, on the occasion of a wedding, more dead than alive. She had also worked something with a hard Latin name, to put upon the altar, for lack of employment in the slipper and brace embroidery line—the young men of the locality having ceased to throw out even any straws of hints that they wanted such things, for Miss Twinch's sinking hopes to clutch at. She had besides been more than suspected of having once walked to the site of the abbey with uncomfortable pebbles in her shoes, after she thought that she had done wrong in going to a party at Farmer Grant's; at which, by the way, no one asked her to dance, even in Sir Roger de Coverley, which we take to be always a great asylum for the neglected. But finding that the pebbles all cut holes in her stockings she had given up the pilgrimage for the future.

Mr. Wolly also was there, the retired grocer, who had built a house like a large tea-caddy, with a conservatory that reminded one of an inverted sugar-basin, and garden-walks that looked as if they were gravelled with powdered candy; and who had lost the civility of the tradesman without acquiring the manners of the gentleman; and his daughter, who dressed according to the fashion books, and was looked forward to at church, on the first Sunday in the month, as though she had been a periodical, by all the farmers' daughters. Several, to be sure, were rather jealous of her, and these, with great bitterness, would speak of her father's money as "fig-dust."

Mr. Page, the clergyman, was received with general

welcome; indeed, so eager were the children to make obeisance, as they rubbed their small buttons of noses upwards with the palms of their hands, that they quite impeded his progress by getting before him. The little girls perpetually curtseyed, as though they had been pulled down by a string; and the boys were, for once, silent, because, seeing that the sexton himself was awed, their notion of the clergyman's position was tremendous. These, and other folks, took up their places, and at last, by general clamour, the approach of the long-expected train was announced.

From the entrance to the tunnel they first saw the coming monster, as the steam shot up the hill-side, and its brass glittered in the sunlight, making it look like some huge beetle. It came on—its distant-measured puffing changing to a racketing rattle, and that to a humming roar as it approached—crossing the bourne, and going under the Dibblethorpe-road as though neither existed—until, with a scream and a clatter, amidst the buzz of the company, the terror of the old ladies near the line, and the delighted shouts of the boys, the first train into Pottleton came up under the triumphal arch.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE FIRST PERSONAGE OF THE TALE APPEARS.

How the uproar attendant upon the arrival of the long line of carriages created an excitement so great, that, to those who arrived late over the hill, nothing was visible but a sunny haze of dust and steam in the valley—how the coaches that dashed up to take off the passengers to their different destinations, the names of which were temporarily pasted on the panels and boots, carried each a dozen boys in addition, who swarmed like bees upon the back seat—how the moral chorus of the Sunday-school children was drowned in the universal noise, which was possibly an advantage, from a difference of opinion respecting the key in which it ought to have been sung, and an unintentional accompaniment of the band in another tune altogether—may be thus briefly

noticed. Let us conceive that all this has been going on until the sight is over, and the Red Lion is filled with thirsty spectators.

Thirsty indeed they were; and terrible was the struggle to get anything, admitting that any one had passed the door even, leaving the bar altogether out of the question; for intruders were as much kept back by the brittle nature of the pipes that almost formed a palisade along the passage, as they would have been by stout stockades. And the volumes of smoke that rolled from the open windows caused the Red Lion to look like one vast pastile-burning cottage; filling the rooms, also, and making the long-snuffed, pale-flamed candles that burnt all day, almost invisible in the cloud.

But the great struggle was at the bar; and very difficult it was for Mrs. Baker, the landlady, with her single sister, and Whacky Clark—who, when not idling, earned what he could anyhow about the establishment—to act right by the many hands that were thrust through the window. Customers that day never got what they ordered and so they caught things flying as they passed; but more frequently knocked them over.

Thronged as every division of the hostelry was, one especial part of it became above all others the centre of attraction. At the head of an insecure table erected in the tree before spoken of—looking like a shutter upon four broomsticks—sat a gentleman, who, amidst the pipes and screws of the villagers, smoked his own cigars. He might have been thirty years old; or, with equal probability, half-a-dozen over or under that age: for he had one of those faces which give us no more idea of how time is going on behind them than do those of clockwork pictures, whose only visible mission is to send a train over a bridge, or a boat under it, or toss some ships, or turn a windmill and a waterwheel, or, indeed, do anything that may keep the amused spectator from searching too narrowly after the time of day. He had on that peculiar kind of flashy dress which police reporters denominate "a fashionable exterior," consisting usually, as in the present case, of a smart scarf, a very new hat, a slang coat, and a massive watch-chain.

He also carried much hair on his face; but in that fashion which gives the wearer anything but the military appearance

at which he aims: not being confined to the carefully trained and trimmed moustaches of a cavalry regiment, but forming two wild and fuzzy penthouses above the lips, joining the whiskers, which, in their turn, meet underneath the lower jaw. And beyond this, a little tuft adorned the chin of the stranger—for such he was to the natives of Pottleton.

Nevertheless he was looked upon by them with great respect. For, when the train had first arrived, he had made a speech, standing upon the village pump to be heard the better, pointing out the proud position which Pottleton, and everybody in it, held that day, and rather contradicting himself by the hurry in which he jumped off, when somebody of evil intent worked the pump-handle behind him. But his appearance and language proved him to be a clever person: and when he eventually walked up to the Red Lion, several of the aspiring minds of "Young Pottleton" followed him. And they said to one another, as they gathered round the shutter-table, "he is evidently a knowing fellow."

Mr. Wyndham Flitter, for so was he called, or rather so did he call himself, had been known for some short time in great London, as a man about town: not *upon* town, let it be understood, but *about* it—one of those sharpshooters who hang around the outskirts of society to bring down all pigeons that escape the privileged marksmen. His circle of acquaintance in taverns, theatres, and "men's rooms," was immense —in drawing-rooms and clubs exceedingly circumscribed. No one knew exactly where he lived when at home, for his address was always either at an hotel, with the waiters; at the stage door of a theatre; or at a post-office. And yet no scheme was afloat with which he had not something to do; no science existed whose rudiments he was unacquainted with; no topic occupied public attention that he did not understand, or at all events could not talk a great deal about. And, above all, he was an inimitable liar.

Therefore, when the Pottleton Railway had first been projected, nobody was surprised upon hearing that he had been chased out of private parks by family dogs—very rapidly finding his own level instead of the one he was sent to take. Nor did it appear singular that he spoke at different meetings, being engaged specially as a "bewilderer"—that is to say, to talk the shareholders into such a labyrinth of

statistics and figures, that it was perfectly impossible for them to ask any questions. And when finally he spoke of "my line," no one doubted his claim, nor the way in which he had got others into it.

"May I beg the favour of a pinch, sir?" said Master Grant, the farmer, as the stranger put down his box, after a flourishing speech. "I should say that was uncommon valuable."

"Oh—a trifle, as it is," replied Mr. Wyndham Flitter: "but valuable indeed from association. The great Russian minister, Count Onoroff, gave it to me for placing two of his sons in the Austrian embassy. You have not been to Vienna?"

"Can't say as I have, sir—no," answered Farmer Grant, shaking his head after a minute's reflection. "My missus has a brother, though, in forrin parts. Let me see—where is it he's a sailing; it's something to do with needles."

"Isle of Wight," said Mr. Flitter, decisively, silencing a rash miller who had suggested "Birmingham."

"No—stop a bit—the Darning Needles—that's it."

"Ho!" continued Mr. Flitter: "Dardanelles you mean."

Farmer Grant nodded, much relieved in his mind.

"That's not near Vienna," said Mr. Flitter; "but I know it well. This ring was given to me there. It's odd you should have mentioned it; and the anecdote of my getting it is somewhat curious."

The company all turned towards him.

"It was during a bombardment by the French," he went on; "I was in a Greek regiment, merely as an amateur, and quartered with a native noble. One morning, whilst we were shaving, a shell came through the looking-glass. The fuze was alight—not a second was to be lost—I cut it off with my razor, and threw it into the hot-water jug. We were saved; and he gave me this ring for doing it."

The stone was like half a blue bird's egg, set and polished.

"It has a singular property," he continued, taking it off. "Observe—I spin it on its stone. After a few revolutions, the stone turns uppermost."

In effect the ring behaved as he stated, and the admiration of the company was great.

"Centrifugal force," continued Mr. Wyndham Flitter: "nothing else—the force that makes your taxed cart cut the outside edge, and throw you out, when you go sharp round a corner. Precisely the same thing."

The villagers looked, and thought, and contracted their foreheads, but did not clearly understand the theory. Mr. Flitter drew out his watch meanwhiles; indeed, throughout the conversation he had been very intent upon the time.

"This watch," he said, fearing the villagers might ask him more questions about centrifugal force than he cared to answer, "once belonged to Napoleon. He was a distant relation of my family—my mother, in fact, was a Corsican. But difference of nation should never sever honest men. Gentlemen, I beg you will join me, in drinking success to the railway in a bowl of bishop."

They did not exactly understand what the beverage meant, neither the guests nor Mrs. Baker herself; but Mr. Flitter offered immediately to show them how to make it. And this condescension and fresh proof of knowledge raised their admiration higher than ever; so that altogether it was agreed that it was a proud day for Pottleton.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE LEGACY.

The excitement that marked the approach of the first train was renewed as one or two more arrived in the afternoon; and at last night came. One after another the twinkling stars peeped out in the ruddy twilight, as the cool evening, blushing and dewy, cleared the dusty atmosphere that hung about the village, until it almost resumed its old tranquillity, except that the Red Lion was yet besieged by customers, and the navigators held high festival at the beer-shops. Then the moon came up behind the hill, sailing just as calmly through the deep still heaven as though railways had never been thought about. By her cold silvery light, the people from the neighbouring hamlets could be seen

going homewards along the fields; and by her light also, Mr. Flitter might have been observed stealing from the Red Lion and bending his steps towards the lane down which the Grange was situated.

Ten o'clock sounded from the old grey church tower, and ere the last stroke had ceased to throb in the air, he had arrived at the building. He walked up and down in front of it several times, keeping under the shadow of the trees opposite, and watching the lights in the different windows. At last, the door opened, and a figure quietly stepped out. Flitter replied to a low cough in the same manner; and then the two persons came into the moonlight, and met in the centre of the road.

The new comer was a man of enormous stature, having the appearance, at first sight, of a common railway labourer. His features were stern and marked; and his eyes retired far under a singularly projecting brow, which depth of orbit appeared to have saved one of them from a gash that had left a scar on the side of his face. His black hair was twisted in seaman-like curls over his forehead—not in the short crisp style of the working sailors, but rather following the fashion of the distressed navigators, who make voyages through the muddy streets in bad weather; or scud with bare poles—as regards their false legs—after carriages on the roads to the races. Nothing could be more opposite than the look of the two individuals who now met; and yet their greeting showed that there was evidently some strong tie between them.

"Is it all over, Sherrard?" asked Flitter, as the other came up.

"It ought to be," replied his companion, who was known in the village as "The Ganger"—a name he had acquired from his situation on the railway, where he was a sort of sub-contractor for the works requiring labourers, collecting his own men, and paying them; "when the doctor left to-night, he said she was going out just like the snuff of a candle, and he could do nothing more. That's the room," he added, pointing to an old mullioned casement in the centre of one of the gables, at which a light was dimly burning.

"And there's the girl," said Flitter, as a shadow passed across the thin curtain. "Has she been there all the time?"

"She has never once left the house—but come in; perhaps the time is nigh at hand."

"I don't exactly see the necessity," said Flitter; "besides—if it should be so—I——"

"Well?"

"Well, then; I hate a dead body. I have never seen one that I have not dreamt of for a week afterwards; although I have always made a point of touching it."

"Stuff!" exclaimed the other; "follow me—and as quietly as you can."

The man took Flitter by the hand, and led him through an old porch and doorway into a large room, with a floor of irregular flags and tiles, which had apparently once been the kitchen of The Grange. Despite the time of year, the place was chill and damp. Huge cobwebs, looking as if they had been spun in the middle ages, to collect all the flies and motes that had since floated upon them, stretched across the angles of the walls, or adhered to large rusty hooks which depended from the ceiling. There was very little furniture. A truckle-bed was in a corner of the room; and one or two boxes about the floor served as chairs. The plaster had fallen from the walls and ceiling, showing the laths and joists underneath; old wooden racks were tumbling from their corroded nails, and the stove of a copper, in the corner, had been converted into a sort of cupboard for rubbish. The rust and dirt showed that it was long since a fire had been lighted there. An old long single-barrelled gun, a spade or two, and a pickaxe, completed the catalogue of all that was moveable.

"Mind how you come," said the Ganger. "Stop! keep where you are an instant, until I can get a light."

He felt on the shelf over the fireplace for some matches; and, after a flash and a lurid glare that threw a ghastly expression over his features, lighted a candle end stuck into a lump of clay on the mantelpiece.

"I am glad of that," said the other, in a low tone. "If there is a thing I hate, it is the moon shining into a dark room. It keeps me awake like a dog."

"That's lucky, then, just at present," replied his companion, with a single dreary chuckle; "for I want you to be awake, and very wide, too. There," he added, shutting the door; "now we are all right."

"Can nobody hear us?"

"Not a soul. The house is walled into three divisions, and this is one of them. The old woman's room overhead is the only other. Now, look here."

He went to one of the boxes, and unlocking it with a key which he kept tied up in a corner of his neck-handkerchief, took out a paper and brought it to the fireplace, round the few expiring embers of which they gathered—more from habit, though, than cold."

"You will see I have not thrown away my time," he went on; "the six months I have been here is worth a future life."

"I hope it may be," said Flitter. "Proceed."

And poking a cigar into the live ashes, he began to smoke, whilst the other continued, speaking almost in a whisper—

"When I first found out that the old woman was really a miser, and lived in this miserable way, still to keep saving, I watched my time, as you know, and got this room to keep my eye upon her."

"And you have succeeded?"

"You shall hear. It was not difficult to make friends. One of my gang wired a hare now and then, or knocked down a bird in the gorse along the big cutting, and I used to send it up to her. This saved her money; and that was quite enough."

"And her nephew—young what was his name!"

"Hammond—Philip Hammond. Oh! I contrived that very cleverly. He could turn his hand to anything, so I got the contractor to give him something to map, or plan, or draw, or whatever it was, on one of the French lines. He scarcely knows that his aunt is ill. I have played our game, though, capitally in his absence, as we intended to do."

"But have you quite succeeded?" asked Flitter, eagerly.

"Hush!" replied the other, speaking in a still lower tone. "I got her to believe that he was making his fortune, and gave her a few trumpery things that I brought over when I was on the 'Havre and Rouen,' as though they came from him. I need not tell you all I did. However, it ended in her making a will, and leaving everything, I am assured, to the girl, as likely to want it most, and with a recommendation to her to marry Philip on his return."

"A 'recommendation'!" exclaimed Flitter, with a short cynical laugh; "very well—we shall see."

"I may depend upon you;—is it a bargain?"

"Safe," replied the other. "Hark! what's that?"

As he spoke, some light, hurried footsteps traversed the floor of the room above them; they then heard them descending the creaking staircase quickly, and the next instant the door opened, and a young girl entered.

She was, at a glance, very handsome; of a rare perfection of features and general contour, that even her pale jaded face and very ordinary apparel could not deteriorate. Her hair, dishevelled, as though from watching or allowing her head to lie about in uneasy slumber, was of that lovely colour which, chesnut in subdued light, becomes as bright as gold when the sun shines through out, and is always the accompaniment of a beautiful skin. As she stood in the doorway, in her thin white dress, with the light she had left in the passage thrown behind her, she appeared almost like a spirit.

"Come up stairs, Mr. Sherrard; pray come directly. My aunt is dying!"

She spoke this with a quick and terrified emphasis, scarcely noticing Flitter, who had risen as she entered. The Ganger took the light from the chimney-shelf, and, with his companion, followed her.

They went up stairs into an apartment immediately under the heavy roofing of the gable, more forlorn than the one they had just quitted, one side being almost taken up by an ancient bureau, of which we shall have to speak anon more particularly. Beyond this was another and still smaller room—a mere closet—the entrance to which was veiled by an old curtain. Directly under the sloping roof was a bed, and on it lay an old female, evidently in the last agony, the only signs of life visible being an occasional convulsion of the muscles of the lower jaw, and a clutching of the patchwork coverlid in her skinny bird-like hand.

The girl went at once to the bed, and then looked at Sherrard with an anxious and inquiring gaze.

"She's going," he said, aside to Flitter. "Send for one of the women next door, and get somebody else to run after the doctor. It's of no use, but he had better be here."

The first glimpse of the Legacy

The other departed, as the girl raised the head of the patient against her bosom with one arm, and with the other seized the hand lying on the bedclothes.

"Aunt!" she cried—"Aunt Milly! do speak to me. It is only Annie."

Whether it was that the well-known voice recalled for an instant the sense of departing life, or that, just at the moment the expiring light gave its last flicker, cannot be told. But the dying female opened her eyes and turned them towards the girl, and then slightly moved her other hand, which had been hidden beneath the turn-down of the thin worn sheet. Annie, as we may now call her, threw back the cover, and saw that she clutched a folded paper tightly. As this was done, the girl felt the weight heavier on her arm—more dead, as it is expressively termed. The eyes were still wide open and turned towards her, but an instant had served to cast a dull glaze over them; then the mouth slightly opened, and the hands moved no more.

"She is gone!" said Sherrard, through his teeth, as he watched this short closing scene.

With a look of mingled agony and terror, the girl allowed the head to fall back upon the pillow, carefully though, as if she still feared to disturb it. And then she again called out the name, but this time in sharper and more intense accents. The eyes were still wide open, but there was no reply.

"She is dead—she is dead!" cried Annie, bursting into tears, as she fell on her knees at the side of the bed; and seizing the hands, bent her fair head upon them. "Philip is not here; and now I am quite alone!"

"Not alone," said Sherrard, as he advanced towards the corpse and drew the paper from its relaxed hold—"not alone, Annie; I will look after you."

The document that he now held in his hand was The Legacy.

CHAPTER V.

MR. TWINCH'S HOUSEHOLD AND OPINIONS.

Mr. Twinch, the lawyer, was a hard-faced man, who never allowed any of his features to play, except his eyebrows; and that was only because he could not help it. He wore a light brown curly wig, that looked as if it had been made out of a door-mat, and large spectacles, such as the alien world believed were used only by astrologers, wicked old fairies, superannuated collecting clerks, and Mother Hubbard.

The furniture of Mr. Twinch's house was equally hard. The chairs were harsh, durable things, that kept bolt upright, and were incapable of impression; the stark sofa had the deceptive stuffing of the wooden pin-cushion in a cheap work-box, and could not be perforated beyond its hard serge cover, except by a harder nail, rows of which, with round polished heads, gave a coffin-like gaiety to the article. Some hard, light-reddish mezzotints of female figures, with very short waists, in allegorical positions, with hard Cupids, were hung up in tough, tarnished frames; the locks turned hard and scrooped, in the cellarets; the biscuits in the sideboard were all rock-cakes; and everything about the house had been rubbed so hard, that it looked as resolutely gaunt with the chafings it had experienced, as though it had been human.

On the day on which the railway opened, Mr. Twinch had been keeping what he called open house—that is to say, he had prepared his two rooms for all such valuable clients as the event might have brought into Pottleton. The right hand apartment, or drawing-room, in which was a hard, gaunt piano, whose hammers justified their name, was set aside for his more distinguished connexions; and there, port and sherry kept guard by the cold fowls. The left hand room, or parlour, received the yeomen guests, and cape and currant wines stood in black bottles beside the spare-rib and boiled beef. The eldest Miss Twinch presided over the quality, and the younger one paid attention to the farmers; whilst Mr. Twinch himself oscillated between the two rooms, and shook every-

body hardly—not warmly—by the hand, imploring that they would call for what they wanted, which is always a likely thing for people to do at a strange house, when they do not see it on the table; and especially one like Mr. Twinch's.

"Well, thank goodness, that's over!" said Mr. Twinch, as the last guest went away in a chaise-cart. "Now, I'll try and get something for myself; I have not had a crumb to-day."

Miss Letitia, or, more properly, Miss Twinch, obeyed the call. She was thin and straight in figure, devoid of prominences, and guiltless of crinoline; and her complexion reminded one of Castile soap.

"Come, Tishy—sit down," said Mr. Twinch; "and where's Martha?"

"She will be here directly, Septimus," replied his sister; "she is only seeing that the plate is all right. I said the good people in the parlour would never know what to do with the silver forks."

"They hadn't a bad idea, though, to judge from the round of beef," answered Mr. Twinch.

"I do not allude to their appetites, but to their habits, Septimus," continued Miss Twinch. "We have found the forks in such odd places—so absurd to be sure—tumbled into the brandy cherry-bottles and the pickled onions, and stuck in the mustard-glass, and even lying in the butter-boat of cold mint sauce."

"They took them for spoons," observed Mr. Twinch; "slit spoons, I shouldn't wonder."

"But that made them very difficult to find," said Miss Twinch. "And they bent some of them so, trying to carve Farmer Grant's chickens——"

"Chickens!" cried Mr. Twinch: "cast-iron cocks and hens, you mean. They were perfectly petrified."

"I know they were, Septimus; and that is how the prongs of the forks all got bent, like I don't know what."

"Don't you?" said Mr. Twinch. "Never mind, Tishy, as long as they are all safe. There; do sit down and take something. Here's a sidesbone."

"No, not to-day, Septimus; thank you, but not to-day," replied his sister, looking somewhat grave.

"Oh! I forgot," said the other. "To be sure! it's one

of your fish days, as I call them: scaly feeding, ho! ho!" and Mr. Twinch rubbed his hands as he chuckled at the joke. "Well, I don't know what we shall do, then; there's nothing in the shape of it in the house, except the bottle of anchovy sauce; and you can't dine from that alone, you know."

"Don't, Septimus," replied Miss Twinch, in a tone of mild reproof,—"don't."

Mr. Twinch didn't accordingly; but began to make a keen inspection among the remnants of the cocks and hens, to see if there was anything left besides backs and drumsticks. And whilst he was thus occupied, Miss Martha Twinch, having filled the plate-basket to her satisfaction, entered the room, and put down a little square mahogany box upon the table, with a bang that almost alarmed the others.

"There!" she said, somewhat angrily; "that does not speak much for the *charity* of your friends, Septimus. Not a shilling—not a penny even, from the whole lot."

On close inspection, there might have been seen, inscribed upon the side of the box, "Penny Contributions for the Pongo Enlightenment Mission."

"And when I presented it to young Grant," said Miss Martha, "he said, 'Thank you, but I don't smoke.' The filthy wretch thought I offered him cigars."

"I can't blame him for that," observed Mr. Twinch, "considering it's an old box for holding them. Besides, the whole affair's against my system."

"Septimus," said Miss Martha, reproachfully, "there are two million savages in the Pongo islands, who have eaten every missionary upon his arrival, and can't write their names."

"Ah!" said Mr. Twinch; "well, they can't be very particular if they ate the last you sent. He didn't look very digestible. Here, give me the box."

He took the box, and, driving one end in with the handle of his knife, tumbled the halfpence it contained into his hand, and put them into his pocket, as he added:

"Charity begins at home, and ought to end there, too. Now, not a word; I won't have it, girls."

"The Girls," as Mr. Twinch had termed them for thirty years, looked at one another, each desiring that the other

should speak. But finding no apparent intention, they were both about to begin, when their brother stopped them.

"Pooh! stuff! nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Why, it's making yourselves accessory to murder; you might as well call it a mission for the propagation of cannibalism. Pshaw!"

Here Mr. Twinch darted his fork into some collared head, and proceeded to carve it as savagely as though he had been scalping a native. And The Girls, knowing he was not to be spoken to after he had once expressed a determination, with anything like effect, silently retired—Miss Martha to take account of the fragments, and put the things away in the china-closet, where they would have a long repose, and Miss Twinch to make a light meal from a poached egg in the kitchen. She chose this retreat, because she feared her brother's improper raillery, who would insist that eggs were poultry, and that she might just as well eat a boiled fowl whilst she was about it. In the matter of fish also he had been equally severe, having learned from the answers to correspondents of a Sunday paper, that "a whale was an animal," so that he would say, "it's just as likely salt-fish may be boiled beef in another shape." And this point he would never give up, reading it aloud every other week, with the age of a popular actress, the question about the county of Southampton, how many fifteens B held in his hand at cribbage, and all the other weekly points of dispute that certain obtuse individuals will persist in not feeling comfortable about.

Having finished his repast, Mr. Twinch retired to his office, which, from being fitted up with a cooking-range and copper, was suspected of having once been a wash-house. But there was the regular regulation-table, covered, as were the shelves, with bundles of those grubby smoked papers you always see lying about in an office, and looking as if they had never been moved from one year's end to the other. Amongst these Mr. Twinch sat, and performed feats of sleight of head and conveyancing, as well as making Pottleton and its neighbourhood into one great chess-board, on which living men changed about. And some of the moves by which he won his game, or checked his adversary, were very remarkable. Yet he was an honest man with all his hardness; but as rigid as if he had been a mere legal machine of perfect construction, with all its decisions the results of rack and pinion work.

He had lighted a huge flaring candle under a shade, and was reading over a document, written in a strange tough, bolt upright hand, which might have been Chinese upside down, for what any ordinary person could have told to the contrary. The crackling sheet of parchment was inlaid with blue bits of paper, of the same kind as that twisted at the tops of fireworks, and, at times, of the same inflammable nature, and these were, in their turn, variegated by snips of the metal used in packing tea. Whilst thus occupied, he heard a mild double knock at the office door. It was not a usual hour for a client to come, so Mr. Twinch was somewhat startled; but he took his candle, and letting in the visitor, found it to be the clergyman of the parish—a young curate, in high shirt collar and cloth boots.

"Ah! Mr. Page! come in, sir,—pray come in," said Mr. Twinch, as he led the other into his office. "Let me offer you something—perhaps you have not dined?"

He kept his fingers on the bell-rope: but he didn't pull it.

"Thank you—not for me," returned the other. "I must apologize for intruding upon you at this time, but my business is somewhat important."

"Well—pray sit down," said Mr. Twinch, pushing an uncomfortably high stool, with its seat on a slope, towards him; "we don't charge any more for that, you know. That's it—stop, let me move those papers. Ah! that's the Dumpy Hollow turnip-field that Grant means to oppose, in the extension bill. I wish we could move it as easily. Now, then—what is it Mr. Page? The railway again, I suppose."

"No, indeed," replied the other. "I have been this evening with old Mrs. Maitland at the Grange. She is dying—at least so Mr. Lane says, who has been attending her—and she has sent this up to my house, with a request that I would see you."

He took a small parcel from his pocket, and, unfolding it, produced a steel key of curious and elaborate form, with some initials worked in a monograph in the handle. It was spotted here and there with rust, but had evidently been carefully preserved.

"Ah! that's it then: quite right—quite right," cried Mr. Twinch, taking up the parchment that he had been

reading; "singularly enough, I was occupied with the subject when you came in."

"The will," Mr. Page went on; "I have heard all about it from the old lady herself. Do you know, Mr. Twinch, I am not quite satisfied about this matter: there appears to have been some juggling, or under-current of influence, going on. You see, that everything has been left to her niece, and young Hammond is almost disinherited."

"Just so," answered the other, running over the gaunt writing of the parchment with the feather tip of his pen.

"Now, the girl is as good and virtuous a girl as any in the world, and has some additional claim upon Mrs. Maitland for having lived with her and waited upon her——"

"Slaved for her, you may say."

"Well—slaved for her, then, so long. But it appears to me to be very strange that she should have so overlooked the young man; for she is known to be possessed of certain property. Let us see—what relationship do they all stand in?"

"The two young people are cousins," said Mr. Twinch. "Old Mrs. Maitland (or Miss Maitland, as the village people still properly call her, for she is a spinster) had a brother and a sister. When I first came to Pottleton, between twenty and thirty years ago—ah! it's a long time to be looked so shortly back upon—they were alive."

"You knew them, then?"

"Perfectly well. The brother was a good-looking fellow, and one of the daughters of the Marsden family, who then lived at the Court here, fell in love with him, and they were married on the sly. He was only a young farmer, and her father was a baronet, so you may judge how the affair ended. Struggles, poverty, and their utter ruin, followed. The poor young wife died before her baby was six months old, and Maitland, leaving the child with his sister, went abroad, and perished somewhere in Southern Africa. That is the rough history of one of the parties."

"And the other?"

"The other married old Hammond, who lived where Grant does now. There again was misery. Emma Maitland wanted a home, not a husband. The parties were ill-matched, and one day she left him and her little boy for some old sweetheart. That was another step you may see

the end of. She fell lower and lower, until at last misery and disease did their worst, and she died in a London hospital. This upset the poor man's reason. His affairs fell into difficulties, and when he died he was not worth a farthing—on the contrary, he was involved."

"It is a sad history of a family," said Mr. Page. "Then, our Mrs. Maitland, I suppose, took charge of the children?"

"Just so. She was always thought to be decently off, being a saving, economical woman; and she volunteered to bring them up. This she certainly did, most creditably, although her economy changed to absolute avarice in the time. I certainly thought, though, when she died she would, at all events, leave everything between them, if the boy did not have the preference."

"You never heard anything against young Hammond?" asked Mr. Page.

"Never," answered Mr. Twinch. "No, never," he repeated, after looking hard through his spectacles at the candle, as though he expected to see some crimes chronicled in the flame. "But don't you think she may have been influenced?"

"That's what I'm coming to," returned the curate. "You know that strange fellow who has been lodging at the Grange since the works began here. I don't see why or wherefore, but I cannot help thinking that he has had some hand in it."

"To marry the girl, perhaps."

"No, that cannot be. He has a wife living—at least, I have heard so—somewhere in town. Now, I wish you to make all inquiries, and watch the business narrowly. I am to keep this key a twelvemonth, and at the end of that period it is to be given up; so that will give us time."

"Be comfortable, my good sir—be quite at ease. I will look after them—and sharply too, very sharply."

If the inspection was to be made with the same eyes which now peered so hardly through the spectacles that it was a wonder the glasses did not shiver, there was little doubt of its success.

The conversation then turned on general matters, and Mr. Page stopped until it was late enough to have what poultry scraps still remained served up at supper for a grill. The girls did the honours with all the devotion that rising

two-score-olds feel for single parsons; and when they parted, Mr. Page shook hands so warmly, that each thought to herself, "I will teach at the infant-school with redoubled energy; and who knows what it may end in?"

But they did not tell this to one another.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GAME COMMENCES.

For a few minutes after the last breath of life had ebbed away from the withered lips of the old woman, there was a dead silence in the chamber. The girl still knelt at the bedside, showing only by the convulsive throbbing of her frame, that she possessed more life than the corpse over whose thin hands the tears were now trickling. The Ganger stood looking at them, without uttering a syllable; but just betraying a scarcely perceptible motion of his head—nodding, as it were, in acquiescence to something that was passing in his mind—as he kept his eyes fixed on the document he held.

Soon, however, they heard the neighbours coming round, and up stairs; and then two or three old women entered the room—too anxious to arrive, upon the summons, at that most favourite of all excuses for crones to collect together — a death-bed. One of these was the layer-out of the village, to whom the management of the last dreary toilet for the grave was, by long usage, always conceded. She was the wife of the old sexton Mousel, and added a small store to the family income by her dismal office. It was not, however, openly proclaimed; but pertained to her position of "searcher" in matters of suspicious deaths. Her husband had a board over his doorway, on which one might read, "Lodging for travellers, pickled salmon, and stout elm coffins at a pound each;" but Mrs. Mousel retired from publicity, only appearing, like a church-yard bat, in connexion with graves and nightfall.

It was impossible to conceive anything more like the received notion of a witch than was this old woman. She was shrivelled and dirty — every line of her worn and

wrinkled skin being filled up with black. Something dusky between a bonnet and a cap was tied round her head, and this she was never seen without; and a few grey hairs straggled from beneath it into her bleared and filmy eyes.

"Poor deary! poor deary!" she exclaimed, as she went up to the body, pushing her way past the others, and taking no notice of Sherrard. "I was only talking to her yesterday, and she was saying, 'Mrs. Mousel, I haven't heard from my nephew that's abroad for one month come Monday;' and now she won't, a poor thing!"

The women about expressed great concern, and remarked how curious it was, calling each other "Mum;" and then they all whimpered.

"Now, I didn't send for a crowd—one will be enough," said Sherrard, sharply. "You may all go back again as soon as you like."

The visitors were quite astonished: to be driven away from a corpse within The Grange was incomprehensible! Mrs. Mousel alone was unmoved. She took no notice of the Ganger's words, but, putting her thumb and finger on the eyelids of the deceased, closed them; thus constituting, as she imagined, her right to remain.

The sound of her voice caused Annie to raise her head, and look round the room.

"Pray go away," she said, "Mrs. Mousel will be sufficient to remain with me to-night. We can do everything ourselves."

"Of course we can," added the old woman; "and a pleasant corpse the poor dear shall be, and as comfortable as the Queen herself, with silver shillings on the eyes, that have closed the best of carriage families."

"Don't you want a bit more candle, Mrs. Mousel?" said one of the neighbours, going to a closet. "Perhaps there is some here."

There was immediately a movement of the women in that direction, anxious to pry into the shelves, and see "how the old 'oman lived!" Annie hurriedly rose, and ran to t he door, placing her hand against it.

"Not there—not there!" she cried. "Poor Aunt Milly never liked any one but me to look after her things; and no

one else shall do it, now she is gone." Then with an imploring look at the Ganger, she added, "Do tell them to go away, Mr. Sherrard. They do not mind me."

"Now, troop!" the other exclaimed, as soon as she had spoken. "Be off, the whole pack of you, you carrion-hunters."

There was a rush towards the door as they fell back, muttering, before the man's determined aspect, further alarmed at the violence with which he banged a chair against the ground. At the same minute their departure received a check, as Mr. Twinch came upstairs into the room.

"I have only just heard from a neighbour, who was going home, and rang my bell," he said, "of the poor old lady's death. Hi!—listen," he added, to the women, "I have a little to talk about here; you will oblige me by retiring."

Sherrard directly shut them out with the door, whilst Mrs. Mousel occupied herself doubly about the body.

"Presently, thank you—presently," said Mr. Twinch, addressing her. "You can go with the rest, now."

"I can't leave her, sir; I can't leave her," said the crone, in a low tone of important confidence. "If the poor dear once gets cold, the beauty will be ruined, and I never had a corpse that wasn't handsome, except Whacky Clark's own father, who walked into the lock one dark night at flood-time, and stuck head foremost in the sluice. Ah! if some people had told other people what other people had said they did——"

"Yes, we all know; but presently, Mrs. Mousel," said Mr. Twinch, quietly putting her without. "Miss Maitland, my dear, this is a sad bereavement—good evening, Mr. Sherrard—but one that we must all, sooner or later—I did not know that you were here—experience. There—there—don't fret, let me see; a little more light; a—little—more—light; and then—ah—yes."

He spoke in this disjointed manner as he took a deed from his pocket, and tried to untie the knot of the tape that was around it.

"I don't think we have any more candle, sir," said Annie. "I ought to have seen about it; but I had everything to do —and——"

Her voice failed her, and she broke down in tears.

"I've got some," said the Ganger; "I'll bring it to you in an instant."

He left the room, and directly afterwards an oath and an altercation showed that he had nearly tumbled over Mrs. Mousel, who, having driven the others away, had crouched down outside the door to hear what she could.

"How long has that person lived here?" asked Mr. Twinch, as the sound of his footsteps receded.

"Six months; perhaps a little more, sir," replied the weeping girl.

"Did your aunt know him before?"

"Oh no, sir; but he has been very kind to her. When I went to the shop, he would come and sit with her, and he got Philip his situation abroad."

"Um—ah," answered Mr. Twinch; "very good. And what about the key you sent to Mr. Page?"

"It opens that large bureau, sir; but I do not know what is in it. She never let the key go from her, until she thought she was going to die; and then I took it myself to Mr. Page.

"The box has not been opened then for a long time."

"Oh, yes, sir; poor Aunt Milly, I know, often went to it. Only two or three days ago I found she had left her bed to get at it, whilst I was out, and had not strength to creep back again. If it had been winter she would have died with cold."

"And she never said anything about it."

"Never more than it was all for Philip and me."

"For *both* of you?" asked Mr. Twinch, emphatically.

"Yes, sir," hesitated the girl; "that is—if he married me. But that is only what poor aunt said."

The Ganger's heavy tread was heard returning; and the conversation dropped.

"Here are heaps of candle-ends," he said, lighting one, "I was just in time, too. I only waited a minute to see a friend, who was starting for London to-night."

"Mr. Sherrard," said Mr. Twinch.

"That's my name, sir," answered the other, in a sturdy voice; "and I've never been ashamed of it."

"No—to be sure—no," observed the lawyer, still looking

over his papers, which he kept putting into a certain order, as he would have done the cards of a hand at whist. Annie had thrown a handkerchief over the features of the corpse, and now came and sat down by the others on a little seat that Philip Hammond had made for her when quite a child.

"You may think this a very premature visit," Mr. Twinch went on, speaking to Annie and Sherrard; "but I expect it may concern you both too much to be put off."

The girl stared at her rough companion, and then at Mr. Twinch—her eyes expanding in the gloomy light until they appeared to be all pupil—in perfect unconsciousness of his meaning. The Ganger never moved a fibre of his countenance, but preserved the same attitude, listlessly gazing at the lawyer. Mr. Twinch went on—

"I made out this will for the good woman there;"—in the presence of the dead, he spoke in a lower tone, as though he thought the senseless body would hear it, and rebuke him for a breach of confidence,—"from a paper she brought to me. Do you know what its contents were, my dear?"

Annie shook her head mournfully.

"Nor you, Mr. Sherrard?"

"How on earth can I answer, unless I know what it is you are talking of," replied the Ganger.

"Very good," said Mr. Twinch, giving him one of his peculiar looks through his monster spectacles. "I will tell you."

He unfolded a single sheet of parchment, and holding it up near his eyes with one hand, and the candle with the other, was about to read, when Sherrard interrupted him—

"I beg your pardon, but I see it is a legal document. If you will tell us the real meaning of it, instead of going through the detail, I think it will be better.

There was a quiet assurance and singularity of expression in the man's words that quite astonished Mr. Twinch, and for a few seconds almost took his speech away. But when he recovered, he replied—

"Well; as you like. I thought there were one or two points in Mrs. Maitland's determination, with respect to what little property she may have to leave, that were not altogether judicious——"

The Ganger scowled at him.

"But which I have, I think, arranged properly. First and foremost, however, my dear, everything is left to you."

"To me!" cried Annie, as her face assumed, if possible, a paler and more painful expression than it had hitherto borne, "to me! And Philip, sir, what has she left him?"

Mr. Twinch looked hard over his horn rims at the Ganger, as he replied in a voice that seemed, from its very hardness, to grate against his teeth as it came out—

"She has left him nothing at all."

"It cannot be possible!" exclaimed the girl; "he was so good, so kind to everybody, and everybody loved him so!"

"Except," Mr. Twinch continued, "a recommendation to him to marry you. Perhaps this has been well done, after all."

"No, it has not been well done," returned Annie. "Mr. Sherrard, why did you get him to go away—to be so far off, too, when our aunt died?"

Mr. Twinch looked again over his horn rims, and harder than ever at the Ganger; but he merely replied—"Whatever I did was for the best. I am sorry it has not turned out so."

"And oh! Aunt Milly," continued Annie, as she approached the bed; "why did you make me so very, very wretched?" But the next instant, as though she thought she had wronged the senseless corpse, she drew back the handkerchief from its face, and kissed the forehead passionately, exclaiming, "I did not mean to scold you—no, no—I know it was all your kindness to me."

"Is that all?" asked the Ganger, still unmoved.

"Not quite," answered Mr. Twinch; "but the rest is comparatively immaterial. I am the executor."

"You?" said the other, with some emphasis.

"Is there anything remarkable in it?" asked the lawyer. "And the worldly wealth—my good girl, listen to me—of Mrs. Maitland, is treasured in that chest, of which our clergyman, Mr. Page, has the key."

"By what right?" asked Sherrard.

"By the old lady's request, sent to our clergyman, with the key, this morning."

"Then I suppose he will now send it back again."

"He will do so at the end of a twelvemonth; at which time, and not before—it is to be opened."

"Oh, there is some juggling—some plot or mischief going on in this affair," said the Ganger.

"I believe there is," replied Mr. Twinch, with the hardest imperturbability; "and that is why I have taken these precautions." He evidently thought that the Ganger spoke the truth. "And now," he went on, "having gone thus far, we will leave the room for the women. Who are you going to have with you to-night, my dear?"

"No one," Annie answered, sadly.

"But there must be somebody. You cannot be left alone with a corpse. Will you come up to my house?"

"I will remain here, sir," replied the girl, "for I could not bear to leave her alone. And besides, the people would come and pry about our rooms, and might take some of the things away. I am very much obliged to you, but I would rather stay. I was never long away from poor Aunt Milly when she was alive, and I will be with her now until she is in the churchyard."

"Not alone, surely!" said Sherrard.

"Why not?" asked Annie, quickly. "What should I be afraid of?"

"Well, well, my dear, as you like—as you like," said Mr. Twinch. "One of The Girls, or both, shall come in the morning, and see if they can do anything. Now, Mr. Sherrard, we will send one of the people up, and leave her."

The old woman, who had been dismissed when Mr. Twinch arrived, was again sent for. She had been muttering and crooning about the lower room, and soon obeyed the summons, as the lawyer and his companion left. The Ganger sullenly lighted him to the door, and then returned to his own room, lighted a pipe, and drawing near the chimney by habit, surrounded himself with a cloud of smoke as he gave way to his reflections.

"So," he thought, "the prize will not be quite so soon captured—the game will not be so easily won as we expected. She has got people to look after her more carefully than we reckoned on; and she is engaged to young Hammond—loves

him, too. Very well, we shall have to beat them all. Long odds, to be sure; but I've fought against more, and conquered them before this."

He pondered on until the last half inch of the candle, which he had stuck in a bottle in place of the clay stand left up stairs, tumbled through inside, lighting up the green glass with a ghostly flash for an instant, and then disappearing altogether. Without undressing, he threw himself upon his bed, and despite his thoughts, was soon in a heavy sleep.

But a dull light burnt all night long in the window above, the only one that could be seen in the village; and once or twice when he awoke, he could hear by the creaking rafters that they were moving in the death-room. At last this ceased. Annie crept, worn out with watching, and broken-spirited, to the small inner chamber; the old woman having finished her dismal task, and examined the contents of every bottle she found about, even to the phials, which she pocketed to sell, seated herself in a corner, and gathering herself up in a heap, with her chin on her knees, rocked herself backwards and forwards until she went to sleep. And then the apartment where the body lay was as still as the grave to which it would shortly be consigned.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FLITTER ARRIVES IN LONDON.

That same night, Mr. Wyndham Flitter left Pottleton, and started for London by the first up-mail train that had gone from the village.

He waited a long time at the station; and stations are not the liveliest places in the world to pass an hour or so in—most especially late at night. For that of Pottleton being as far removed from the haunts of life as they generally are—on a bleak common, or down a steep cutting, or at the junction of a newly-made, quaggy, painful cross-road—no sound broke the stillness but the ticking of the clock, or the

chirping of the clerk's tired pen, as he filled up unending papers, ruled like problems on a ciphering-book.

A tired policeman opened the door every now and then, and looked up and down the line, apparently from wanton curiosity, and to let in the cold; for he knew it was not the time for anything to come. A rough, friezy man brought in some uncouth leathern bags, and plumped them down in a corner, as though they had been empty coal-sacks, and yet they contained the essence of the loves, and hopes, and hates of hundreds in the shapes of as many letters; and then branch coaches dragged over the new gravel with more sleepy people. At last, a discordant bell sounded, and the train came up. Mr. Wyndham Flitter was rudely inserted into a carriage, amidst five drowsy passengers, dimly seen in the glimmer of the light; the train went on again; and he was on his way to town—stopping once at a refreshment station, where some pretty girls, wrapped up in shawls, and pale and shivering with keeping awake, poured out coffee with their eyes shut, and handed about quarters of pork-pies at random, which, partaken together, kept the travellers in a lively state of combined watchfulness and indigestion all the rest of the journey.

It was barely light when they arrived in London. Mr. Wyndham Flitter, whose luggage was comprised in his coat-pocket, got at once into some of those remarkably loose boxes which ply upon wheels as night-cabs, and drove to his lodgings. Not having the latch-key, he rapped lustily at the door, and then, finding no notice taken of the summons, again and again—the number of knocks increasing as progressively as did the sums of money due to the sharp-witted dealer, who disposed of his horse by the number of nails in its shoes, to the confiding, but less calculating, individual who desired it.

Mr. Flitter's rooms were small and unassuming—very much at variance with the mustachios that had grown and flourished in them. In the world, he called them his "*pied-à-terre*,"—in reality, they consisted of a small suite of a top back bedroom and a closet, in one of those streets running out of the Strand, which look as like one another as the houses Morgiana chalked, and require great knowledge of their corner shops to make sure of the right one.

Mr. Flitter knocked until heads or lights appeared at all the adjacent windows; and lastly, after a fierce single combat

with the area bell, a ray shot through the chinks of the kitchen shutters, and a voice called out—

"Who's there!"

"Me," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter; "only me, Mr. Stanley."

"Well, this is a pretty time of night to be making such a noise," returned the voice, which was either that of a masculine woman or an effeminate man; and then, after some delay, there was a flicker through the fanlight of the street door, and it was cautiously opened as far as the chain would allow.

"Unless the last month is settled, you can't come in," said the voice, now seen to be feminine. "I can't afford to trust you any longer."

"It's all right, Mrs. Docker," said Mr. Flitter; "I have gained the lawsuit. You must congratulate me; in the meantime, oblige me with half-a-crown? I have no change."

"No more have I," answered the landlady, making no advances towards removing the chain. The nearest public-house is open all night—you can get change there."

"Um—yes, to be sure," said Mr. Flitter; "but it's rather awkward, you see; it's a check for a large sum."

"It won't do, Mr. Stanley; you've tried it too often," said the voice. "And mind, if you continue making that noise, I shall give you in charge."

"But stop! one instant, Mrs. Dock——"

The closing of the door with a bang cut short the speech. The gleam left the fanlight, then reappeared in the chinks of the kitchen shutters, and finally went out.

What was to be done? The morning was breaking with a cold drizzle, and the cabman looked anxious.

"Look here, my good fellow," said Mr. Flitter, "you know the house. If you will call in the morning for your fare, you shall have a shilling extra. The woman is cracked."

The cabman did not see it exactly in the same light. He merely grumbled forth that he could not lose sight of Mr. Flitter till he had got his money.

"So absurd!" observed Mr. Flitter, "and with hundreds of pounds in my pocket, too! Well; I'll hire your cab on, then; by the hour, mind."

"Where do you want to go to, sir?" asked the cabman, still somewhat gruff.

"Go to? Oh—ah—to sleep, to sleep," replied Mr. Flitter. "Go on to Panton-square, by the Haymarket, and pull up in one of the near corners. And mind you call me at nine."

Satisfied that his money was pretty safe, as long as he had his fare in his possession, and quite as ready to eke it out by remaining in the same place instead of driving about upon chance, the cabman followed Mr. Flitter's directions. And by the time he arrived, that gentleman had wrapped himself up in his cloak, pulled down the blinds, tied his pocket handkerchief over his head, and was fast asleep.

Innovation, which now-a-days has no time to turn either to the right or to the left, but must drive straight on through everything, has passed by Panton Square and forgotten its existence. The thousands who scuffle their way to and fro on the pavement of Coventry-street during the day never give it a thought—perhaps know not that there is such a place. There is, therefore, reason to suppose that a century hence Panton-square will be exactly as it is at present.

For years it has not changed. The same wonderful numbers of foreigners are, season after season, incomprehensibly stowed away—how, the landlady only knows—in the same lodging-houses. At early morning the same packs of little dogs are let out to air themselves, and then dragged back again. The same watchman haunts the pavement, and carries on the same communications with the apple-woman at the corner—both being looked upon, by the aforesaid foreign colonists, as spies paid by the French and Italian governments to watch them. Behind the houses also are the same gardens—gardens at the top of the Haymarket! They are not productive: they grow nothing, to all appearance, but small birch rods ready for use; but yet the inhabitants appear slow to be convinced on this point. For they have everything necessary for gardening, even on a daring scale. There are nests of flower-pots, rakes, water-pots, and rollers even—everything but leaves. And some have, in their fondness, built arbours—melancholy little structures of old tub-hoops and drying-posts, about which the skeleton of some former creeper is held up by shreds and rusty nails. But nothing now grows near them—not even a weed; for the cats and smoke have done their worst, and neither the fortunes nor dispositions of the inhabitants are promotive of

further enterprise. The lamp in the centre of Panton-square is possibly the dimmest in London. The ordinary experiments of science appear to have been reversed in constructing it, and the property of producing the smallest possible amount of light from the largest practicable burner most satisfactorily discovered.

Despite his strange bed-room, Mr. Wyndham Flitter slept until nine o'clock, and without interruption. On waking, his first thoughts reverted to his lodgings, and the somewhat inhospitable reception he had experienced. But it would not do to quarrel with Mrs. Docker, and the cabman had to be paid; so, after Mr. Flitter had made his toilet, accomplished by a metal pocket comb, which played tunes in the hair as it was used, he rapidly decided upon a reply to the driver's question of where he was to go next.

"The Albany," said Mr. Flitter, with imposing coolness, as though he had been invited to take the chair at a public breakfast of all the inmates.

The locality sounded well, and the cabman, by a series of hazardous experiments in placing huge wooden shoes upon most uncertain projections, climbed up to his box and drove round to the Piccadilly entrance.

"You'll wait here an instant," said Mr. Flitter, as he opened the door himself.

A thought of the egress at the north end flashed through the driver's mind.

"I must have my fare first, sir," said the man, tumbling off his perch with frightful recklessness.

"Stop, I forgot," said Mr. Flitter, pulling out his watch. "Oh yes. I am too early now—ah well—never mind!" and finding that whatever intentions he had were foiled, he returned to his cab, which he now regarded as a locomotive prison for debt, that he could not leave even upon parole.

Seeing Mr. Flitter's watch—the relic of Napoleon before spoken of—the man felt easier in his mind as to his fare, and started again at a livelier pace.

They called at two or three houses in the back streets about St. James's; but the men asked after were never at home; or rather—as the servants usually said, they did not know, but would go and see, and returned with a negative—it is possible they did not wish to be so to Mr. Flitter.

The morning was getting on, and with it came the wish for breakfast. Mr. Flitter looked at pawnbrokers' shops with hungry gaze, as he passed; and then thought about his personal property. But this brought little hope. The snuff-box of the minister, Count Onoroff, owed its platinum inlaying to the British metal, of which it was composed, having become deadened. The monster turquoise in the ring was as valuable as the same amount of blue sealing-wax would have been; and the watch, which was really good, was pecuniarily unavailable, for Mr. Flitter had bought it, in an hour of wealth, and without questions, of a cabman, who had forgotten to take it to Somerset-house; and he had misgivings whether certain advices, addressed to pawnbrokers and others, might not be still extant, which would render its temporary change of place not unattended with inconvenience.

At length a thought struck him. "Go on to Long's," he said to the driver. "Long's, Bond-street."

In two minutes they were at the hotel, and Mr. Flitter again opened the cab door.

"Wait," he exclaimed; adding, as there appeared a second doubtful movement on the part of the driver, "Pshaw! there's my coat left on the seat, is there not? How d'ye do, Markwell?"

There was no distinct recollection in the proprietor's mind of the face of the visitor; but the greeting was so familiar, that he imagined it must come from an old customer. So he replied that he was quite well, and hoped the other had been so.

"Markwell," he said, "I want dinner here to-day—a first rate dinner for four, in a private room: half-past seven—sharp,—and take care of whatever letters or luggage may arrive for me."

Then, not caring that Mr. Markwell should ask any questions, Mr. Flitter rushed back to the cab—tolerably confident that nothing of great importance would arrive in his absence if his name was not precisely understood—and gave the driver a fresh address, "and then," said Mr. Flitter, "I will pay you, and you can go."

They stopped at a house in Mount-street, Grosvenor

square—a shop with a private door; and Mr. Flitter was admitted by a man-servant, who led the way upstairs.

"Is your master up, West?" he inquired.

"As much as he is, sir," replied the man; "but you can go into his room."

And Mr. Flitter was accordingly shown into the chamber of the friend he had come to see.

It was a small room, but fitted up in a very expensive and elegant manner; far beyond what might have been expected from the dingy exterior of the house. The curtains to the French bed were of rich damask, and the wash-hand stand of polished marble. The toilet-table glittered with the contents of a costly dressing-case, of cut-glass and silver richly gilt, chased, and emblazoned; and amongst these, money, keys, studs, notes, rings, and a watch about the size and thickness of a shilling, with a Trichinopoly chain and a bundle of Neapolitan coral charms attached, were carelessly scattered, with two large ivory-backed brushes, almost as big as battledores. The looking-glass over the fire-place was nearly obscured by cards and notes stuck in the frame. Tickets for benefits, private boxes, and programmes of dances at semi-questionable public balls—chances in racing sweeps, invitations to parties, and visiting cards, with all sorts of random messages and appointments scribbled on them, were all huddled together; whilst a quantity of bills, principally for gloves, Joinvilles, and white-bait dinners, paid and unpaid, were crammed into a glass cornucopia on the mantel-piece.

A young man, scarcely of age, was wandering about the room in a pair of Turkish slippers worked with gold, and a rich black velvet dressing-robe, lined with wadded crimson silk, and tied round his waist with a twisted golden cord, apparently trying to make the operation of dressing last as long as he could, that part of the day might be got over. His smooth cheeks and chin were utterly devoid of hair, or even down, but he had evidently been shaving elaborately, and cut himself. One or two prints of popular actresses and dancers were hung about the room; and, at the end, an entire battalion of boots was drawn up in review, suggesting that absurd feeling of the presence of invisible phantom wearers, which boots always cause.

"Ah, Wyndham, how d'ye do, old fellow?" observed the

young gentleman. "Sit down; will you have some milk and soda-water, or some *eau sucrée* and claret? It's all here."

He pointed to a table at the bedside, on which stood various bottles and tumblers, with a large silver cup.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Flitter; "when do you have breakfast?"

"As soon as you like. I'm not very hungry myself; but I'm devilish glad to see you. West, get breakfast ready: cutlets and grill; and some—some—what else shall we have, Wyndham? You know all about these things. West can take a cab down to Morel's in a minute."

"Any pâté they can recommend," replied Mr. Flitter. "By the way, talking of eatables, I came to ask you to dine at Long's to-day. A picked party—half-past seven—you'll come?"

"Why, I was going——"

"Oh! never mind; throw him over. We can't do without *you*, you know; the party would be knocked on the head at once."

The young man promised to be there, just as the servant came into the room to say that the cabman had sent in for his fare, and that he wanted twelve shillings.

"God bless me! yes—to be sure. I quite forgot. My dear Tidd, I have no change; lend me half-a-sovereign."

The money was immediately produced from a small glittering purse.

"What does the man want, West?" asked Mr. Flitter.

"Twelve shillings, sir."

"Ah—there's half-a-sovereign: give him that; and tell him if he's not content, I'll fight him for the other two shillings. It's quite enough."

West took the money and retired.

"An awkward business," continued Mr. Flitter; "you may judge what time I was up this morning. Young Feversham, in the Blues, had a row last night with Lord Edward Hampton, about a certain little party that—never mind—they fought this morning at Finchley. I went out with Hampton: but it's all over, and we got an apology."

"I never went out," said the other; "and I don't seem to care much about doing so."

"Wouldn't you go out, then, if you were challenged?" asked Mr. Flitter, keenly.

"I don't know, I'm sure. If I did, I should either not aim at my man, or fire in the air."

"Don't say fire in the air," said Mr. Flitter. "'Delope' is the proper word. And you would do that?"

"I think so," said his friend.

"Oh!" replied the other.

"What do you say 'Oh!' so curiously for? Don't you believe me?"

"My dear fellow, I applaud your feeling. But a man must go out when called. Pshaw! what is it: only one in fourteen falls. However, let me know when you're in trouble. I'd face an infernal machine as far as my own feelings go, and will fight for you if ever I get the chance."

The conversation was again interrupted by West, who entered and said:—"If you please, sir, the man won't have less than twelve shillings; because he says it was half-a-crown from the railway to the Strand, and then five hours in Panton-square, at two shillings an hour."

Anybody but Mr. Flitter would have been thrown off his guard at this contradiction to his story. But his expedients were always ready.

"Come, that's not so bad," he said. "The cabby's a close fellow after all. I told him not to say a word about it. Ha! ha! very good. He deserves the two shillings. I must trouble you again, Tiddy."

This time he helped himself from the purse, and sent the money down. Then vapouring about the room; humming snatches of operas; reading various notes in female hands, as the other requested him, and having discussions thereon; admiring the dressing-case, and getting a ring on his finger which he could not get off again all he could do, he carried on the time of his friend's dressing until they went in to breakfast.

Mr. Tidd Spooner—he had Mr. H. Tidd Spooner on his cards, but nobody ever knew what his first name was—was a young "Oxford Man," whose uncle had lately been so good as to die and leave him an enormous deal of money. In consequence of this he started rooms in London; and on his visit knocked all the gaieties and dissipations of the season

into a few weeks, and had extraordinory notions of what he considered to be "life." Thus, he would account it a triumph of fast connexion-making to know a funny actor; and if he prevailed upon a *coryphée* to accompany him to a private box, he thought he had arrived at a pitch of daring gallantry that Rochester or Lauzun would have shrunk from. He deemed nothing good, or even worth any attention, that did not cost a great deal of money; and was convinced that none but certain tailors could supply particular articles of dress, by the taste of whom, rather than by his own, he was governed in his wardrobe. It was the same with boots, and cravats, and even things to eat. He affected particular billiard-rooms, where he drank beer from the pewter, more especially when he did not want any, and smoked a pipe: not because he really liked either, but because he thought it was the proper thing to be done, and gave him an antithetical superiority of position. He had, as we have said, plenty of money and great lack of experience; therefore he paid to be put up to everything; consequently he was just the man to suit Mr. Wyndham Flitter.

"What do you think of my being married?" said the latter, in one of the intervals of breakfast.

"You must not marry, Wyndham," said Mr. Spooner. "We can't spare you."

"Oh! it's not to come off yet," answered Mr. Flitter; "but I think it's the proper thing to do?"

"And who is the lady?"

"Something very nice that I met down at an old country house where I have been staying."

"Pretty?"

"You should see her."

"Money?"

"It is said a good sum."

"Very well; ask me to your house when it's all over."

"I'm not quite sure about that, Master Tiddy," said Mr. Flitter. "You are not the sort of fellow a man would like about his young wife; you gay, dangerous dog, you!"

Mr. Spooner was so pleased!

"I don't think we should turn you from the door, though, if you came. However, nothing is settled just yet; but you shall be the first to know when there is."

The meal went on. Mr. Flitter, certainly, did full justice to it; what with coffee, cutlets, marmalade, eggs, toast, grill, and pale ale, he contrived to make ample amends to his stomach for the deprivations it had endured. Then Mr. Spooner introduced some cigars, whereof Mr. Wyndham took one to smoke, and half a dozen to fill his case with; and, after that, they got into a long conversation, in which Mr. Flitter promised his friend all sorts of introductions, and Mr. Spooner thought what a brilliant career was before him, which increased in splendour as the pale ale diminished.

"Mighty wine," however, by which term the poets signify fermented drinks generally, is a great failure, after all, viewed as a source of happiness—a miserable will-o'-the-wisp, that leads you into all sorts of quagmires; and trusting to it for good spirits or bright thoughts is only living upon your capital, with the certainty that one day you will be bankrupt. Everybody, under its power, can imagine himself to be a tremendous fellow; but if he has not fixed his position in his own sober reflections, he will but elevate himself for a harder tumble, in trusting to whatever notions of self-superiority the poor glamour of hard drinking gives him. It will brighten the brain for the instant, as the blot of tallow does the wick of the candle, or the nozzle of the bellows the billet of firewood, but only to burn it away, and leave everything more gloomy and dead afterwards.

They sat for some time talking, until Mr. Flitter, having begged his friend to make up the borrowed twelve shillings to five pounds, that he might recollect it the better, took his departure, telling the other that he calculated on him at Longs, and to be sure and come. And then he went boldly back to his landlady with four pounds eight shillings in his pocket.

He knocked at the door with great confidence, and this time it was opened to its full extent, and he entered. A new servant received him, who was apparently fresh from working in that mine of pure black lead, which the downstairs department of all lodging-houses appears to form.

"Oh," said Mr. Flitter, "who are you—the maid?"

"Third floor back, sir," was the answer. It was not altogether satisfactory, so he tried again.

"Where's your mistress?"

Mr. Wyndham Flitter makes himself at home

"Ten shillings a week, sir, furnished," replied the maid; and then, seeing some expression of bewilderment upon Mr. Flitter's face, she added, "I beg your pardon, sir, but I am rather hard of hearing."

"I—want—to—see—Mrs.—Docker!" bawled Mr. Flitter, so loudly that a boy heard him in the street, and exclaimed forthwith, "Why don't you speak up?"

"Yes, sir," answered the girl, nodding her head, but still keeping hold of the door-latch, not pretending to move.

This was quite beyond Mr. Flitter's perception. There is no telling what he would have done if the landlady herself had not appeared, rather in a flurry from tumbling over the dust shovel, which, after the ancient usage of her race, the servant had left upon the stairs.

"Now, I won't listen, Mr. Stanley, to any more promises—" she was beginning, when the other interrupted her.

"Mrs. Docker, I have come to pay you; I only regret this little account has been so long unsettled."

"Never mind, so long as it's going to be," said the landlady. "Come in here, Mr. Stanley; the parlour's just summoned to an inquest that was found in the mud by the pier yesterday morning whilst he was waiting for the Moonlight."

This, to many ears, might have been a somewhat confused statement of occurrences, but Mr. Flitter appeared to understand it, and entered the room.

"I think I owe you for four weeks, Mrs. Docker," he said. "You need not have been so sharp. There's your money—one—two," and he banged the sovereigns upon the table until they jumped inches high, to give an idea of profusion and carelessness. "Oh, they are quite good, Mrs. Docker. I suppose you'll think me smasher next, as well as a swindler. I shall be able to tell you a different story, though, in a short time. Now we are quits, I believe."

"There is a small account, Mr. Stanley," continued the hostess, taking a strip of paper from her pocket, at which Mr. Flitter winced, it looked so like a writ at first glance: "it's for washing, and expenses, and things."

"What's all that about?"

"Yes, sir. May twelve. Seven shirts, two and four—"

"Seven shirts!" exclaimed Mr. Flitter: "I never sent seven shirts at once to the wash; it's impossible. In the

first place, I must have worn one a day; in the second, I haven't got them."

It was necessary to correct Mr. Flitter's notions on this point, so Mrs. Docker's tongue went off immediately like a clockwork toy. She pointed out to him that there was the scarlet shirt with the white collar, and the wafer pattern, and the one with the nankeen-coloured stripes between the rows of bulldogs. That made three: and then the cricket bat pattern shirt; and the one with the new back; and the one from which the collars had been cut away (because he was afraid their serrated edges would some day saw his ears off when over starched), and two that he was obliged to wear long stocks with—when these others were reckoned up Mr. Flitter was convinced.

"Well—I have not got seven now," he said; "but I shall have—soon—seven dozen, if I choose. What else is there?"

"Letters—fifteen pence," read Mrs. Docker.

"Oh, send them back to the post-office."

"But you opened them, Mr. Stanley."

"Never mind—they were insulting and vexatious communications."

"And fourteen skuttles of coals."

"Fourteen!—how much, Mrs. Docker! Why, I must have kept a blast furnace in that fire pail. It couldn't do it."

"Well, sir, there it is," said the landlady; "I always endeavour to act right by gentlemen's coals, and wouldn't rob them of a knobble."

"What's the sum altogether?" asked Mr. Flitter, taking the bill. "Um—eighteen shillings. Very well; I'll see to it. And now, I suppose, I may go to my room."

"In course you can, sir," replied Mrs. Docker.

Mr. Flitter went up stairs by threes and threes to the room, and having deposited his coat, containing his luggage, on the bed, rang the bell for some water. But as the bell was hung in the kitchen, and the deaf servant was at that moment cleaning boots in the dust-hole, it was not answered. Mr. Flitter was therefore driven to call upon Mrs. Docker, in a loud voice, from the landing, and presently the lady came up stairs.

"I want a needle and thread, Mrs. Docker, if you can

oblige me with one—black thread, and rather strong, if you please," said Mr. Flitter.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" asked his landlady.

"No, Mrs. Docker; I am a traveller, and am used, as you know, to shift for myself. I am a cosmopolite, Mrs. Docker."

"Are you now, sir?" said Mrs. Docker. "I dare say you know Mr. Terkin, then, in the parlour. He's a Bold Outlaw."

"I think I know the name," said Mr. Flitter, not caring to correct Mrs. Docker, whose ideas evidently connected a cosmopolite with some order of convivial brotherhood. "Oh! so he's a Bold Outlaw, is he?"

"Yes, sir; holds lodgings, as he calls them, in the parlour, once a month."

"And what does he do there?"

"Oh, bless you, sir, it's a secret! Several gents come, and while they're at their conjurations, one stands in the passage, and always borrows Mr. Docker's old sword that he had in the Lumber-troop, and wont let a soul approach—no, not if you was to beg it on your bare bones, until the singing begins."

"Oh! they sing, do they?"

"Sing, sir! you should hear them; and smoke until its enough to lift their hats off the pegs. I should have lost the drawing-rooms, only they made the husband an Outlaw too, in this very house."

"What did they do to him?"

"Never knew, sir," said Mrs. Docker, gravely. "But it was no cruelty, for it was summer time, and all the fire-irons as bright as could be. All we could find out was that he sent for his boothooks. I took them myself, because Sarah couldn't make out what they meant."

"It's a pity she's so deaf," said Mr. Flitter, untying his scarf, and refolding it the reverse way, to bring out the clean part.

"Oh, it's a great comfort, sir," answered Mrs. Docker, as she hung a towel on the back of the chair, and took away the water-jug, in which a black-beetle had committed suicide from the mantel-piece at a remote period. "It stops all

magging. The baker and policeman used to worry my life out. Now the maid can't hear their stuff and nonsense, and so they needn't throw their words away."

"But what do the lodgers say to it, Mrs. Docker?"

"Well, sir, then I don't mind telling you," replied the landlady, in a low, confidential voice, fearing a crowd of imaginary listeners all bent upon immediately reporting her words to the world generally, "because you never give trouble; but it does them good. When a servant can hear well, the bells are always a going; but when she's deaf, they know it's no use ringing, and so they do the things themselves or go without."

"Oh, I see!" said Mr. Flitter.

"Yes, sir," continued Mrs. Docker, "and that's the only bad thing about Mr. Terkin. If he had a hundred black slaves, and all in this house, they wouldn't have a moment's peace amongst them. For he either wants two letters posted, or a bottle of soda water, or his things home on Wednesday, or to know what the man's crying at the top of the street, or the time-bill of the Birmingen railway, or yesterday's newspaper—there, that's him again, sir. Now, I'd bet any money he's come in and can't find his shiny boots."

It is probable that Mrs. Docker was right; for Mr. Terkin, being convivial, would at times, upon taking them off at night, fling his dress boots recklessly about—on to shelves, and behind drawers, and under tables. As the servants had orders never to touch them, since a few ignorant handmaidens had, in his time, tried to black them in the ordinary fashion, and so ruined them altogether, Mr. Terkin now and then found their recovery a matter of time and research; and when, as on the present occasion, he had thrown them out of window after the cats, and they had, missing their aim, gone into the water-butt, their repossession became additionally uncertain.

So Mrs. Docker hurried down to the rescue; and Mr. Flitter, finishing his toilet, despatched an invitation to the particular friends whom he intended should make up his dinner-party.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISS TWINCH'S COME OUT IN A GRATIFYING MANNER.

A FEW days passed—sad and heavy ones for Annie Maitland, who never once left the gaunt old Grange—and then her aunt was buried.

Next to a wedding, a funeral caused the greatest excitement in Pottleton; and all the village would turn out to see the ceremony, as they did in great London for Lord-mayor's show. The idlers might be observed assembling about the lych-gate of the churchyard even in the morning; ragged boys, slatternly women carrying uncared-for infants, or dragging dirty children after them; and ancient men—parish pensioners, who sat on the tombstones, in the sun, that its warmth might drive on their wearied and lagging blood. These would go over the history of the deceased, and talk to Mousel as he finished the grave, whilst the boys were delighted at being permitted to drag the boards, which were to form its platform, from the dark place beneath the belfry, into which, however, they only ventured in parties of two or three. This done, the crowd would peep into the pithole, as they termed it, with fear and awe, and point to the blackened wood and corroded handles of former coffins that appeared in its sides, or speculate on the morsels of decayed bones that had been thrown up with the rank earth; and then, at whatever time the funeral was to take place, there the crowd remained for the day.

The old woman had left but little in the way of money available for the expenses of her burial; but Mr. Page represented the case to several of his congregation, and they subscribed amongst themselves for a plain and decent funeral. Sherrard made Annie accept some mourning, on the promise of receiving what it had cost from Philip when he returned. She followed behind the coffin; and all the poor people who inhabited the Grange swelled the procession, and displayed such small articles of faded black as their scanty wardrobes furnished. And when it was over, she returned, sad and tearful, to her lonely home, whilst the crowd dispersed about

the village, and the boys scrambled over one another to fight for the shovels, and fill in the grave.

The afternoon sunlight came warm and bright through the old window, and fell in a long ray of yellow light over the bed on which the body had lain, as though the spirit still lingered about the site of its former tenement. It gleamed through Annie's hair, and steeped it in gold, as she sat weeping, with her fair head bent down upon the window-sill; for although she had begged to be left to herself, yet, now she was alone, the solitude was so terrible that she had moved towards the casement, whence she could see that living things still had existence about her. And here she remained nearly all day, until Mrs. Mousel came towards evening, bringing a basket of provisions with her, sent down by Mr. Twinch, and a private bottle of her own, which had once held fish-sauce, but was now filled with a clear pellucid liquor, and would be, in its turn, sold to the doctor to be cleaned out for the next cough-mixture he prepared. She had been Annie's only companion during the week, and she now came to stay that night for the last time; and after entertaining her with all the dismal stories relating to deaths and burials that she could call up, she took possession of the poor old lady's late bed without any qualms, and Annie retired to sob herself to sleep in her own little room.

Mr. Twinch was the first visitor next morning; and he came, accompanied by Mr. Page, to see about the removal of the cabinet. It was a huge bureau of carved oak, with a door secured by three cumbersome hasps, shot by one lock, and was obliged to be got out of the window upon scaffold-poles, for Mrs. Maitland had lived in that wing of the Grange before its last subdivision; and so the old staircase—which a coach might have been driven down, provided any one could have found a driver daring, or a skid strong, enough—was shut in. As the rustics assisted to lower it down, when within a few inches of the ground, the inclined plane gave way, and then everybody heard a clinking sound, similar to what plate might have made, shaken together. A strong truck was borrowed from the stone-mason, and on this it was pulled up to Mr. Page's house, followed by the boys, who jostled to get near it, expecting to see it drop money as it went along. For, as is the case in country villages, everybody knew all

about it and its destination as soon as the parties most interested. And many averred that they knew it before, but were bound to secresy.

It had scarcely reached the house ere the two Miss Twinch's might have been seen walking down the village towards the Grange, and accompanied by their small dog Tip. Tip was one of those little wiggling dogs, who are such a constant source of distress to their owners, that one is almost tempted to believe in the existence of mischievous imps, assuming other shapes to perplex mankind. When taken out to add to the pleasure of a walk, if allowed to go loose, he loitered behind, and showed fight to gigantic and unmuzzled mastiffs, who could have bolted him at a snap, at which halfpenny boys were compelled to be sent after him, whilst the Miss Twinch's remained in great agony, uttering piercing cries, in the middle of the road. Or he hid in nutritious shops and familiar cottages, and then was supposed to be lost. upon which the Miss Twinch's would return home—calling him by name all the way, and informing him that he was naughty—only to see him a great way off, when they arrived, taking calm observations. If they secured him with a string, he was much more troublesome—pulling Miss Twinch on, when he saw Toby, who lived at the Red Lion; or hanging back to inspect any old rubbish, until he was all but choked. And if he once caught sight of a cat sunning herself on a door-step, he would put up the game, and go away altogether over distant hunting grounds. Then the Miss Twinch's would sit up and lament all night, sending messengers about in all directions, until Whacky Clark, whom the more thinking suspected of frequently detaining him, would bring him back in the morning, and receive sixpence. In fact, to Whacky and certain trustworthy accomplices, Tip was as good as an annuity.

Preceded by this evil genius—who scrambled hurriedly up stairs before them, only to be pulled back and hung, for a short period, at every step—the Miss Twinch's entered the room in which Mrs. Maitland had lived. Annie was there, and alone, looking over her aunt's things, and putting by some to give to the poor neighbours who had been as civil to her as their means permitted.

The Miss Twinch's advanced towards her with solemn

looks, seized her hands, pressing them earnestly, and then moved their lips in silent greeting, as though their feelings overcame them.

"It is what we must all expect," said Miss Letitia, speaking first.

"And time alone will relieve the blow," added Miss Martha.

"I am very sorry to receive you in this rude fashion," said Annie, as, her hands being liberated, she put forward the only chair the apartment possessed. "But I have another in my room——"

"Now pray don't put yourself out, my dear Miss Maitland," said Miss Twinch, "on our account. We have come to make a proposition——"

"At our brother's request——" added Miss Martha.

"Which you must agree to——"

"In fact, we can take no refusal."

And here the seesaw address was interrupted by Tip, who had dragged an old slipper from its hiding-place, and was now fighting and struggling with it in the middle of the room; getting more angry as he failed to frighten it away, or rouse it to a combat, by barking.

"How dare you, sir?" cried Miss Twinch, as she made believe to hit him with her parasol six feet off.

"Naughty!" exclaimed Miss Martha; "where's the rod? Ah, here it is!"

But Tip was no longer affected by threats, nor did he believe that the crumpled tract which Miss Martha shook at him was an instrument of severe punishment. So Miss Twinch was obliged to take the slipper away by manual force, lifting Tip up by his teeth twice his length in doing it.

"He behaves so very badly!" said the elder of the girls.

"That we really get quite ashamed of taking him out—" added Miss Martha.

"Only he is always so admired," resumed Miss Twinch.

"And it's a naughty little man—it is!" went on the other, speaking very decidedly to Tip, who now turned his attention to her dress. "Oh! don't toax me, zu fooliss boy. What is it, then? Puss! Is it puss? Hi away, then—hi away, Tip!"

If Miss Martha had ever been fortunate enough to have

had an offer, and clenched it, she might, in course of time, have addressed these remarks to something more worthy in the scale of creation than Tip. But as such had never been the case, and as the confiding heart of woman must have something to cling to, she had twined its tendrils round her dog.

"We are sure, just at present, you must be very lonely here, Miss Maitland," said Miss Twinch, when Tip had been taken into lap-custody by her sister; "and we have come to hope you will stay a few days with us, until you get over this bereavement."

"You are very kind," Annie replied; "I have been most wretched here since—since poor Aunt Milly died. But I do not want to go away. Besides, Philip will be back soon; I am expecting him every day."

"You have sent to him, then?" asked Miss Martha.

"Mr. Sherrard knew somebody going to France," replied Annie, "and was good enough to write to him. He may be back to-day."

"But if only for to-day, you must come up with us," said Miss Twinch. "It will injure your health to stay here. I should forget I was a girl if I were shut up in this old place for any time."

Miss Twinch did not specify for how long; but she must have meant a protracted imprisonment to induce such a remarkable lapse of recollection.

"Our little circle will do you good, Miss Maitland," added the sister. "We are cheerful without boisterous gaiety, and calm without despondency; whilst some pleasing feminine employment or instructive work beguiles the hours which hang so heavily on those—Does it want to tiss its ittle mistress? then it sall!—moving in what folly calls the world."

It must have been from one of the instructive works in question, with the exception of the little episode in which Tip was concerned, that Miss Martha had quoted the above speech. She had many of them, bought in great numbers at a corresponding reduction. They were cheaper than loaves to give away; and, in the long run, got up a better reputation than administering to the mere gratification of hunger.

Annie did not want to go. Poor and, to others, comfort-

less as the room in the Grange was, yet it had been her home, and the different things about it were all old friends. But she thought it might be of advantage to her to keep in with Mr. Twinch; and the girls appeared so anxious to receive her, that at last she consented to come.

"Oh, that is so kind of you," said both the young ladies at once.

"And now," continued Miss Twinch, speaking alone, "we will tell you of our little conspiracy. A collection of wild beasts has come into Pottleton this morning, and we are going to take the infant-school to see them, after we have regaled the children at our house. You will be delighted."

Looking at the word "regale" defined in our dictionaries to signify to "feast," it is odd that at the present day it is never used, except to designate that sort of mild banquet, where tea and buns are distributed, and notions of gratitude impressed, by heads of charities and virtuous publishers, upon their dependents.

But this by the way. Finding Annie would come, the ladies took their leave; and after having been separately nearly thrown down stairs by Tip, who wound his string round their ankles, and got in their way on every step, "looking up," as Miss Twinch observed, "like a fellow-creature"—after these perils, they arrived at home.

When they were gone, Annie began to collect her things for the visit. Neat and exquisitely clean they all were; but her wardrobe was a poor one, and she thought that the servants might sneer at the small display her apparel made when it came to be placed in the drawers, although it had done so well for her at home. And this nearly shook her resolution, and more than once made her think of sending an excuse, and stopping in her own little room. But then she had promised; so she contrived to secure the services of Whacky Clark to carry her box, and, locking the door after her, went up to Mr. Twinch's.

There was great excitement before the house when she arrived. Crowds of small children clustered about it, and twisted their legs in the scraper, or got their shoes between the palings, and couldn't get them back again; others swung on the chains, perpetually tumbling over, hurting themselves, and crying; whilst others kept jumping up to look in at the

window of the second parlour, in which the chief interest appeared to be centred. And they all so swarmed about the house, that Whacky was obliged to put them away with his feet before he got to the door.

When Annie was admitted, she found the Miss Twinch's sitting at a table, on which was so large a tea-pot, that it looked like a soup-tureen with a spout and handle, and bore a huge disproportion to the tea-caddy at its side. There was also a great pile of what appeared to be bread, with currants in it at most uncertain distances, but which Miss Twinch denominated plum-cake. Round the room sat twenty small children—attired in those unrecognised varieties of fashions which the full-dress of an uncostumed charity-school presents —upon some forms, much too high for them, singing a moral song to Miss Martha's piano accompaniment. As they were going to the wild-beast show, Miss Martha had selected, "Let bears and lions growl and fight," to bring their minds into a fit state to view the savage wonders of creation, as well as to warn them not to let their "angry passions rise" when they struggled for a good place in front of the dens. The pile of plum-cake, however, sadly interfered with their throwing all their heart into the song; for none of them removed their eyes once from it.

"Dear Miss Maitland—you have come in time for a charming sight," said Miss Twinch; "and you can assist at our little festival. Jane Collier—you are singing "Your little hands' to the music of 'But children you.' You shall be left behind, miss, if you don't attend."

Whereupon Jane Collier, over whose head five summers and a hard brush had just passed, lost her reckoning altogether, and got to "Each other's eyes" in a vague and reckless manner, the effect of mingled fright and despair.

At last the song ceased, not so much from coming to a natural end, as to meet an implied wish of Mr. Twinch, who, being in his office, knocked with a Burn's Justice against the wainscot, to quiet the war of notes going on in the parlour. Upon this Miss Twinch rang a bell, which was the school signal for silence, aud then the tea-making began, with the assistance of the teachers.

There were no saucers, and it was given to the children very hot, so that it might last a long time, and keep them

from coming too soon for more. They did not enjoy it much, but took it in great fear and trembling, not beginning until their teachers did, nor daring to blow it.

"Why don't you eat your cake, Harriet Stiles?" asked Miss Twinch, severely, "you naughty girl, to keep crumbling it in that way!"

Harriet Stiles was a child of nervous habits, and too frightened to eat anything; so she had gradually moulded the cake into indistinct forms, in her little puddy hands, until you might have made bread seals with it, and Tip was nearly choked with the fragments.

"We must have the other cake in," said Miss Martha. "The Humphreys' children eat as much as able-bodied labourers."

"What can you expect of children fed entirely upon fish," replied Miss Twinch. "Poor things! they all look like tadpoles as it is, with their large heads and eyes."

"Fish all turns to water, miss," said a teacher as she tried to excite the exhausted tea-leaves with some boiling water.

"Water, indeed," replied Miss Twinch: "and it all settles on their brain."

In effect, the paternal Humphreys was skilled in ledgers, night-lines, and Paternosters, and kept his family upon a species of domestic water-souchée; which, although an agreeable dish, accompanied by punch, and backed up by salmon-cutlets, whitebait, and ducks, is not, in itself, calculated to fatten.

"Is it not a charming sight, Miss Maitland?" said Miss Twinch to Annie, who had been taking a tiny scholar under her own protection. "See, with how little we may make many happy."

Hereat, Jane Collier, having choked herself, coughed in her mug, and for such a breach of manners was immediately slapped, and sent into the kitchen.

"That is the worst child we have," continued Miss Twinch to Annie; "and she always has a cold in her head. We have told her parents of it several times, but it does no good. They allow her to go on just the same."

"If you please, miss, Whacky wants to know if he may have some beer for bringing your box," said the servant, coming in and speaking to Annie.

"Oh, yes, certainly. I quite forgot him," she replied, as she took a little purse from her pocket.

"A nice warm cup of tea will do him more good," observed Miss Twinch, as she went into the passage, where Annie's attendant had been waiting, quite overlooked. "There, Clark—that is better than anything intoxicating. Drink it, and be thankful!"

Whacky took the cup and winked at the maid, which telegraphic signal was unfortunately seen by Miss Twinch. Exceedingly enraged, but not choosing to demean herself before the common people, she flounced back into the room, saying that the children had had quite enough; that they would eat all night if they were allowed; and that it was time to go to the show.

And to further their progress, Whacky opened the door, and threw the contents of the cup over the children, clearing them away, only that they might insult the party as they went to the menagerie, in the belief that Miss Twinch had commanded the aggression.

The wild beast show was arranged upon a plot of turf behind the Grange, used on summer afternoons as the cricketing ground; and from the first arrival of the caravans, all the children not interested in the Twinch festival had collected about it.

It was not without awe that they occasionally heard deep roars and yawns proceed from the interior; insomuch that they dared not creep under the carriages, or disturb the tarpaulins, to obtain surreptitious views. But beyond this there was too much to gaze at without, as, one by one, the large pictures were unfurled, and hoisted to the top of the poles. They were so terrific, that they absolutely made them shudder.

There was the Aurochus or Gnu, looking like the Unicorn, whom they had never seen, but who was reported, in a metrical legend extant, to have been beaten through all sorts of thoroughfares, by the identical Red Lion of the public-house, after a contest for the government. Then there was a happy family of Lions, forming a bed for a Roman warrior, who reposed upon them with his head upon his hand, as ladies and gentlemen are depicted asleep in dream-books and Valentines; and the same intrepid spirit

was afterwards represented engaged in single combat with a Bengal Tiger, with two leopards for bottle-holders; and these were eclipsed by the dreadful representation of a Polar Bear climbing up an iceberg after a British seaman, who, considering what a treacherous hold a steep hill of ice must offer the feet, was making very good way. His friends were attacking another bear upon the frozen sea in front; but this did not so much astonish the Pottletonians, who had been made familiar with such perils by a picture in the barber's shop, and attached less importance to the struggle when they found that its results were retailed, at sixpence a pot, to strengthen, beautify, and preserve their hair.

But to the enormous canvas of the Elephant most of the attention was directed. Not only was a large army ascending to his shoulders by scaling ladders, as he knelt down, but, by the wondrous power of the limner, Windsor Castle had been transported on to his back; and the windows were crowded with royal and distinguished personages, whilst high up on the round tower a vast throng of visitors were inspecting the country. This festival appeared to have drawn together a remarkable company, comprising Blue Beard, Queen Victoria, Julius Cæsar, some country gentlemen in top-boots, many court ladies in short waists with coloured feathers, Othello, a Highlander, and Ibraham Pachą, all enjoying themselves, and expressing wonder—as well they might—at their position.

Not much less exciting was the Boa Constrictor of many miles in length, whose tail, after coiling round a tree, stretched over an expanse of eastern country, and finally disappeared beyond the blue hills of the horizon. He had come rather suddenly upon a small pic-nic party of coloured gentlemen, the indistinct outline of one of them being seen struggling in his throat. Another, lower down, had cut his way out with a hatchet; and the rest were, in fascinated terror, running direct into the mouth, which was as large in proportion as the awful fire-vomiting jaws, in which the career of the dishonest baker terminates, in the magic-lantern. We say little of the colony of Monkeys, all engaged in the industrial arts; the forest of painted Macaws; and the lioness attacking the off-leader of the Exeter mail—a daring beast whose age must now amount to the fabulous—for the other

pictures were too exciting; especially when we wind up with the terrific flight of the Condor-minor of Peru, carrying off a buffalo in its claws, which at once confirmed the belief of the children in Sindbad's Roc, and made them nervous whenever they saw a bird over their heads, at a great height, for a month afterwards.

The infant-school came up to the show in orderly procession, with the teachers at certain intervals, and followed by the Misses Twinch and Annie; upon seeing which promise of additional custom, the foreign musicians, in tiger-skin caps and tunics of bed-furniture, blew and banged their instruments louder than ever. So that a glow of enthusiasm made their hearts throb quicker as they went up the steps, and the gentleman in the feathers and Roman armour told the boys below "to stand away there," and himself descended from the platform to assist them. And when Miss Twinch stood on that elevation, and saw the crowd below, the band above, and the children stumbling up the steps, she thought of the old days of chivalry, and a great deal more that had nothing at all to do with the subject, until her woman's heart swelled, and the tears almost came into her eyes with the excitement of the moment, as she murmured—"Oh, if the reverend Mr. Page could see me now!"

The teachers and children were compounded for at threepence each; and the money being paid to an elegant lady in a blue bonnet lined with red, with green and yellow plumes, who sat in a canvas alcove, made to represent an ancient hall, guarded by two dissipated gentlemen in armour, they entered the show. And here Harriet Stiles entirely lost her courage at the first sight of the lion, who was standing on his hind legs as he yawned through the bars, and commenced screaming so dreadfully, that it was not until the Roman warrior had been called in to counter-frighten her, she could be induced to move an inch. And after that, tightly clutching the teacher's dress, she disappeared in its folds, and was seen no more.

The keeper called the company to the end of the show, and went round in front of the cages describing the animals. He had got half through them, and was speaking of "the striped untameable hyæna of the desert, or tiger-wolf," whom he had irritated to a proper degree of ferocity by rattling his

stick against the bars, when a piercing shriek from Miss Twinch threw all the children into convulsions, they imagining at first that nothing less had occurred than the simultaneous opening of all the doors of the dens. But Miss Twinch pointed with her finger, and cried—"There! there! save him!—oh, save him!" and following its direction, they perceived the half-strangled Tip writhing in the clutch of a great ape, who was trying to pull him through the gridiron-like front to his cage. With another cry of despair, Miss Martha ran towards the door to liberate him, and the same moment came within reach of the elephant, who, being always on the look out for everything, and attracted by the trimming of hops, immediately seized her bonnet, with the intention of either eating it or cramming it into a little box at the top of his cage, into which he ordinarily put sixpences. The bonnet, being of a light summer style, readily parted with its strings, after a moment of horrible suspense as to whether Miss Martha would not be taken up as well, and carried with it two small bunches of ringlets attached to its inner side, leaving the hapless lady in a scanty *coiffure* somewhat after the antique style.

The confusion was dreadful. The keeper flew to the rescue, and, with some difficulty, dragged the wretched Tip from the grasp of the monkey; and then, putting him in Miss Twinch's arms, tried to save the bonnet. But here he was less fortunate. The elephant, having been taught to open bags of things given to him, proceeded to inspect his new acquisition. Putting his foot on it, he pulled the ringlets off with his trunk as delicately as though fingers grew from the end of it; and then, as the grapes, attached as well, came off with them, he directly ate the whole spoil; whilst, failing to discover any gingerbread or apples in the crown, he trampled it flat, and brushed it into a corner. And, to add to the consternation of Miss Martha, the Rev. Mr. Page arrived at this moment in the show. Could it be possible that the heart of her sister was so strange a thing, that, if anything, she was pleased at the dilemma, — that a glow of joy suffused her face, when she recollected that her own head-gear was as perfect as when it had left the glass? Alas! there is no telling what subversion of the domestic

Miss Martha Twinch's adventure in the Wild-beast show.

affections love will not work in the female heart—especially as the chances of an offer diminish.

With Tip in her arms, Miss Twinch advanced to meet Mr. Page, feeling sure, for once, of having all the talk to herself. Her sister was overwhelmed with confusion, when Annie, hastily unfastening her own bonnet, took it off, and placed it on the poor sufferer's head, considering her own lovely hair quite sufficient for herself, or, more probably, not giving a thought about the matter. Yet when she shook her rippled tresses about her head, it could be soon seen which was the most becoming gear.

Mr. Page even was attracted, and looked at her with some admiration. Not so Miss Twinch, who thought that her sister might just as well have remained as she was, and that it was a piece of forward interference on the part of Miss Maitland to act as she had done. How, for the minute, she hated her!—how, in the most fugitive passing thought, she would have liked to have seen her in the lion's den! But it was the moment to follow up the advantage; so Miss Twinch said—

"You are just in time. I was about——"

"The performing and sagacious elephant will now be exhibited," interrupted the showman; "before which, ladies and gentlemen, I am allowed to pass my hat round, being all I have to depend upon for hourly exposing my life and family to the ferocious beasts of the desert."

There was a little delay, whilst a halfpenny was given, with very benevolent parade, to each child, except the perpetually influenza'd Jane Collier, who had forgotten her pocket handkerchief, having but one, which was at the wash, and in its normal state consisted of a foot square of something between calico and sand paper, imprinted with an illustrated moral history, in neutral tint ink.

"I like them to be taught a proper spirit early," said Miss Twinch to Mr. Page, "poor things! The halfpenny they give to the good man who runs such risks to instruct them, elevates their character."

And then she slapped Harriet Stiles for looking after the monkeys while she was talking; and took away her halfpenny to give to the elephant, who directly offered it in exchange

for a cake to the travelling confectioner who sat by the side of his den.

Stop, my good man," said Miss Twinch, as the keeper had finished his eleemosynary round. "It is now the time——;" and here she followed up her address to Mr. Page, which the man had interrupted, "—— it is now the time to add a little moral instruction to the entertaining knowledge which you, dear children, have been imbibing. Stand round me."

The children formed a semicircle about her, and the other visitors stood behind them; whilst the fustianed keeper winked at the gorgeous Roman warrior in a manner strangely at variance with their respective costumes, and then began to play with the paws of the lion.

"Jane Collier," went on Miss Twinch, "where is the pelican of the wilderness?"

Jane Collier returned no answer, but commenced weeping.

"She is affected by the recollection of its maternal suffering to provide food for its offspring," said Miss Twinch, with admirable tact. "I will not try her feelings further."

And not wishing to risk the instruction the class had acquired any more, before Mr. Page, she went on another tack.

"You observed when you came in, dear children, how the animals growled and roared. Harriet Stiles—come forth, miss, and listen. Now tell me; would it not have been dreadful if these savage beasts had in reality escaped?"

The bare contemplation of such an accident was too overwhelming for a mind of Harriet Stiles's fibre. She began to cry again, and sought refuge under the teacher's shawl.

"The ferocity of the lion and tiger, the untameable fierceness of the hyæna, the guile of the serpent, and the cunning of the fox, are not so destructive as the—the——"

And here Miss Twinch, who had evidently learned a bit off by heart, from somewhere, and broken down, would have come to a stand-still, had not her more amiable sister whispered in her ear, from a small work (at fourpence a dozen for distribution),

"——As the envy, hatred——"

"Envy and hatred," the other went on, having got the cue, "of the human heart, which will break out as furiously as

that savage hyæna would do, were his cage open. Now, good man, go on."

The keeper then entered the den, and commenced his performances. But Miss Twinch's address had so alarmed the children, that they trembled all through the exhibition, and scuffled out of the show, when it was over, as though the last were to be the victim—like the ducks of a Chinese boat-house, where the ultimate one is always beaten, to teach them expedition.

Miss Twinch, however, was happy, for she believed that she had made her effect before Mr. Page, until, in the most incomprehensibly rude manner, that gentleman, amidst the blushes which appear inseparable from a whiskerless young curate in high shirt collar, offered his arm to Annie Maitland—who was without her bonnet, too!

Poor Miss Martha had not expected such attention, for since her unpleasant accident, she had retired into remote corners of the show, and looked, with glistening eyes, at animals that did not interest her, to conceal her mortification. But she loved Annie for her kindness, and was pleased to see the attention that Mr. Page paid her, which Miss Twinch, singularly enough, did not appear to observe, but lavished all her attention upon the restored Tip, who had come from the almost fatal grasp, safe and sound, with the exception of a bell on his collar.

And this the ape had seized; and, by a retributive justice, nearly choked himself with it, after having kept it in his cheek for several minutes, and vainly attempted to crack it, thinking it was a nut.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. FLITTER'S DINNER AT LONG'S.

We will now return to Sherrard, whom we left asleep on the night of Mrs. Maitland's death. The day was just breaking when he was up again, and as soon as there was sufficient light, he had opened one of his boxes, and taken

from it a suit of clothes different from those he had worn on the preceding evening. They were pressed closely together by many things—musty books, corroded tools and instruments, and old pistols—and appeared to have been undisturbed for some time. When he put them on, they looked more nautical than anything else; but they were either of a fashion long gone by, or made at some foreign place. Still they gave him the appearance of a seafaring man—one of that rough tribe you see lounging about the purlieus of the Docks and Tower-hill; and from his tall figure and determined air, he looked as awkward a customer to meet, either on land or water, as the most adventurous maritime hero would desire. When he was dressed, he started off, shutting the door quietly after him, and went straight along the village.

Pottleton still slept, later, possibly, after the excitement of the previous day. There was a golden blush in the sky over the end of the valley; but the weathercock had not yet caught the rays of the sun, and the diamonds that would sparkle on every blade and leaflet when it came out, were still drops of dew.

Nobody was moving; a few early birds and squirrels rushed about among the trees; and now and then a lark set off upon a high mission to see whether the sun was coming or not; making his glorious song of joy and excitement ring through the clear morning air for a mile about. The field mice, as well, scuffled amongst the corn; and little shrews peered, with perking snuffling noses, from the doorways of their nests in dry warm banks, to look after their breakfast, tolerably sure that the owl had gone to bed at last without searching for his own.

There was not even a straight column of smoke to mark the presence of life as it rose above the summer foliage, nor any country sound to be heard; for the very watch-dogs were asleep, like tired policemen. Yet such goodly odours came forth from the fresh earth and opening petals into the pure air, that they who missed them knew not how great was the delight they lost.

This did not much affect Sherrard, though. He went on, along the side of the lane, until he came to a bit of common, on which several of the railway labourers had built their

huts of mud and turf. Approaching one, only closed by a hurdle that turned on a withy hinge, he called out the inmate, and told him that he was going to town for a day, or possibly two—that he was to say nothing about it, but take the lead upon the gang during his absence—and that he should return in time to be present at the pay-table. The man promised compliance, and then crept back to his hut, whilst Sherrard continued on his way along the line.

His object was not to start from the Pottleton station, as he did not wish to attract attention; and to reach the next nearer to town he had a three miles' walk, through the tunnel also, which was not the most cheerful place to select for a promenade; but this did not matter much in the present case. He arrived there with some little time to spare, and was at last on his way, in a parliamentary carriage, very like a rabbit-hutch in a pantomime that ought to have changed into an omnibus, but had stuck half-way.

Gathering himself into a corner, he tried to stop all his meditations that sleep might overtake them again. But he found that they would not be so easily arrested. A sort of ground-swell after the excitement of the night still agitated his mind, and in his impatience the cheap train journey appeared as though it would never come to an end. At last, however, he arrived in town, and went direct to Mr. Wyndham Flitter's lodgings, missing that gentleman by a few minutes only, to his annoyance. But he learnt something from Mrs. Docker about a dinner at a West End hotel—she could not say which, only it was a great one; and upon this slender information he started forth upon a voyage of discovery.

From former unpleasant circumstances, with respect to a satisfactory settling for value received, Sherrard knew pretty well which establishments were *not* likely to be honoured by his associates' patronage. And, therefore, Covent Garden Piazza, Charing Cross, and the Haymarket were at once discarded, as dangerous localities; Leicester Square he also felt to be treacherous ground: and there were certain quarters in which Mr. Flitter would be more agreeably welcomed than in Oxford Street and certain of its appendages. So determining upon making the round of those he considered the most probable, he chose Bond Street first.

He was slightly puzzled at the commencement to know by which of his names he should inquire after his friend. For Mr. Flitter had several, which he changed according to outward influences, like his boots—sturdy common ones for general serviceable wear and tear—light travelling ones for especial excursions—glossy and fashionable ones for polished or flashy society, and these, if he found himself suddenly overtaken by storms, sometimes required an overall, or alias, of less stylish exterior. Knowing, however, that Stanley was his latest cognomination, he used that at the first hotel he inquired at. His journey was not altogether without trouble. He was first shown into a wrong room at the Blenheim, where a harmless gentleman, named Stanley, chanced to be dining. Next he was refused entrance at once, at the Clarendon, by the porter, who thought he looked as if he came to dispose of some fine contraband Havannahs, or silk pocket handkerchiefs, to the guests. After that he was stared at by several more young Oxford men, friends of Mr. Spooner, who were in the coffee-room at Stevens's, and, trying to chaff him, had failed therein. And lastly, he had, by a lucky chance, hit upon the right spot at Long's to which hotel we will now return.

In the meantime, Mr. Wyndham Flitter had found the two friends to form his *partie carrée* at Long's: and at the time appointed he went to the hotel, meeting Mr. Spooner at the door, as he arrived.

"What a famous fellow you are, Tidd, to be so punctual," said Mr. Flitter, squeezing his friend's shoulder affectionately; "and to come here at all, even, considering what request you are in. Waiter, which is the room?"

They were shown into an apartment on the first floor, which looked very comfortable, for the daylight had been shut out, which it ought always to be, except at Greenwich or Richmond. The bright lights and glittering plate—the wine-cooler and ice-pails—the fancifully distorted napkins, which seemed made up to turn, after the fashion of the folded sheet of paper, into church-doors, sentry-boxes, salt cellars, or currycombs, whenever wanted, and the pretty bouquets in the vases, appeared to give promise that everything would be in keeping with the first impression.

"You will meet two very nice persons," said Mr. Flitter; "my friend Wracketts and his charming wife—the most de-

lightful little woman—a Swiss by birth. She ran away with him from that place with the margin—pshaw!—where the fairest of fair What's-its-name's daughters dwelt, you know?"

"Zurich," suggested Mr. Spooner.

"Zurich! that's it—from Zurich," continued Mr. Flitter.

"She speaks English?" asked Mrs. Spooner, with slight misgivings, feeling better up in his university languages than in those useful in society.

"Oh! perfectly; but with a slight accent." Mr. Spooner turned to the glass to see if he looked effective, and then inquired—

"And what's Wracketts?"

"Oh! nothing—a gentleman. He was in the Baden Rifles; but the parading business bored him, so he sold out. A man of great information. You'll be enchanted with him. Hark! here they are."

"Mr. and Mrs. Wracketts!" said the waiter at this instant, and in they came.

Mr. Wracketts was a gentleman very like a dissipated eagle, with a hook nose, and wild hair, which constantly stood upright, as though he was sitting on the prime conductor of an electrifying machine. He had a very pale face, and he constantly appeared to be trying to catch his ear with his teeth, by an odd convulsive twitch of his head, after saying anything; and at the same time he would wink, as if he was deceiving even himself. He had not pretty hands. His fingers looked all thumbs, and his nails were very short; but, nevertheless, he wore an uncommon quantity of rings, of such a size that to have drawn a shawl through any of them would not have been so difficult a task as the old fairy chroniclers made it to younger princes.

His wife was a very pretty woman, evidently his junior by ten or twelve years, with dark floating eyes, always half shut, and black hair in smooth bands, so glossy that a line of radiance crossed whatever part was presented to the light. She had on a high loose dress, which made her seem as if she had been put into a muslin bag, tied round her neck and waist, and had then cut her hands and feet out of it, like a female Monte-Christo. It was the more attractive for being high, as it was very transparent. Her complexion was of the most perfect pink and white; but when admirers looked

athwart her skin instead of at it, a very slight efflorescence was just perceptible; and the colour on her cheek was more circumscribed than flushing. A narrow gazer might also have detected a fine black line pencilled along the edges of her eyelids. But her eyes, her hair, and her long lashes were undoubted facts; and certainly very beautiful they were.

"Ce cher Wracketts!" said Mr. Flitter, with much warmth; "and Mrs. Wracketts, too. Let me present my friend Mr. Tidd Spooner; he is anxious to know you."

Mr. Spooner coloured and bowed, and said something about being most happy.

"We were at school together, at Eton," continued Mr. Flitter.

"I was at Eton, too," said Mr. Spooner.

"I don't mean *the* school," Mr. Flitter observed; "we were at a little academy."

"Well caught," muttered Mr. Wracketts, in an almost inaudible voice, as Mr. Flitter felt sorry he did not say, "Winchester." And the dinner being now all ready, they sat down, Mr. Flitter and Mr. Wracketts at the top and bottom, and the lady and Mr. Spooner at the side.

Mr. Flitter understood dining, and looked over the *menu* with exceeding pleasure. We reproduce it to show how refined a banquet he had invited his friends to.

Potage à la Comte de Paris.

Poissons.

Rouger à la Vénitienne.

Deux Entrées.

Rissolettes à la Pompadour.

Epigramme d'Agneau aux Comcombres.
Filets de Poussins à la Maréchale.

Rissolettes à la Pompadour.

Entremets.

Bombe Glacée au Café.

Petits pois à l'Anglaise.

Mironton de Homard.
Jambon Glacé à l'ananas.

Dessert.

Raisins Muscat.
Pèches,
Abricots,
Quatre Mendiants,

Wines.

Champagne.
Claret.

Port.
Sherry.

"This fish reminds me of those we used to catch in the lake, out of our *châlet* window; don't it, Léonie?" asked Mr. Wracketts.

"Oh, yes!" replied the lady, with the prettiest accent and the least tinge of melancholy retrospect, floating her eyes languidly towards Mr. Spooner. "N'est-ce pas c'est un beau pays," she added, addressing him.

"I don't speak French," observed Mr. Spooner, blandly, but blushing. "I have never been beyond Boulogne. I went there to read."

"Oh, nonsense; you do, Tidd," said Mr. Flitter; "it's only your modesty."

"No; I don't, indeed. I can read it well enough, but can't speak a single word."

"Tant mieux," murmured Mr. Flitter, eying Wracketts.

"I could meet you, if you were a Greek," Mr. Spooner went on.

"Ah; we're not that," said Wracketts, returning Mr. Flitter's glance.

Champagne went round, and the conversation soon became animated. Mr. Wracketts was a most entertaining person; knew everybody and everything. He had been a great traveller, too, especially in the East, and talked at intervals as follows:—

"The desert, sir; have crossed it seventy-five times, and always on the same camel. I mean to have her over to go to the Derby on next year; she keeps up so well without water, and that will be invaluable on the Downs. Yes; I was going to mention about the Pyramids. We crawled further into the interior of the pyramid of Cheops than anybody had ever been, and killed a Bedouin there, who was rude to Mrs. Wracketts, in the dark. I knocked him down a deep dry well, and left him. That was *his* bakshish—the miscreant!"

Mr. Spooner was going to look hard at the lady, and express how he would have defended her had she been insulted; but Mr. Wracketts' anger was so terrific, that he rapidly turned his eyes away, and took salt when he didn't want it, by mistake.

"Didn't you have a curious adventure in Switzerland?" asked Mr. Flitter. "My friend Spooner would like to hear it."

Mr. Wracketts was not a Munchausen in his stories; everything he told was just probable. But he evidently belonged to that class of tourists who never go anywhere without something wonderful happening to them. He could not have crossed from Folkestone without the most dreadful storm ever known in the Channel, and landing at Portel in a life-boat; nor climbed the Rigi except an avalanche had crossed his mule-path.

"Switzerland! ah-h-h! that was an escape," said Mr. Wracketts. "I had nearly got to the top of the Jung-frau, when a ledge of snow on which I was standing broke away, and glided down right into the valley. I had been seven hours getting up, and came down in half a minute unhurt. Mrs. Wracketts was at the window of the hotel, and saw it all. Didn't you, Léonie?"

Mrs. Wracketts, who dined in her gloves, raised her hands in an agony of retrospection, and her shoulders also, in such a pretty terror, that the shudder, under a transparent muslin, was quite delicious. Mr. Spooner thought that he would have gone down Niagara in a wager-boat had she been looking on.

"Nothing to whaling though, in the South Pacific," continued Mr. Wracketts, *à propos* of something of remote allusion. "I was once out in a boat, backing up the after oarsman with my left hand, and steering with my right, when we came up to a whale, that I harpooned. But the line by some chance tangled, and I hadn't got my hatchet, so that I can assure you, sir, upon my sacred honour, we were pulled down and through the water, I can't tell how many fathoms deep, for three or four minutes. Every man kept his seat, and when we came up, another harpoon had struck the fish, who was in her 'flurry.' She hit our boat with her tail, and sent me into the rigging of the schooner. The ropes broke my fall, and I was the only one saved."

Mr. Spooner was deeply interested; nor was Mr. Flitter inattentive; for he adopted all Mr. Wrackett's stories second-hand; but he was not bold enough to start them. He shone more in small social lies.

Meanwhile the Champagne kept going round; and the broad shallow glasses were so deceptive, that Mr. Spooner did not know how much he was drinking. But every moment

Léonie got more lovely; her hair more glossy; and her shining eyes floated in an additional quantity of liquid light. And every moment he thought, "I should not be asked to a party like this, if there was not something in me."

Both the men were watching him and one another. Léonie was also on the alert.

"Parlez des cartes," she said to Mr. Wracketts.

"Pas encore: il n'est pas assez amoureux de vos beaux yeux, Léonie," observed Mr. Flitter. "Chantez un peu."

"Bien," replied the lady.

"It is very rude to speak French, Tiddy," said Mr. Flitter; "but it is so natural to Mrs. Wracketts, you will excuse it."

"It's delightful to hear it," replied Mr. Spooner, in ecstasy.

"We were only trying to persuade her to sing," said the other.

"Oh! if you would!" exclaimed the young gentleman, looking adoration at her.

"Corns!" cried Mr. Wracketts, drawing up his leg suddenly, and knocking the table with his knee, with a shock that made the cruets and glasses jump again, "I wish you would keep your boots to yourself, Wyndham."

"I never touched you," said Mr. Flitter. Mr. Spooner quivered with terror. He had pressed a foot he did not intend.

"Nonsense!" replied Mr. Wracketts; "do you think I have no nerves? Never mind—we were going to have a song."

And Mr. Wracketts twitched and winked, and then hurriedly begged Mr. Spooner to have some Champagne with him, to his great relief.

The waiter was told to bring in the case that was outside the door, and then retire. From it Mrs. Wracketts took a guitar, and then commenced that struggle with the screw-pegs and strings, which always precedes the humblest performance on that instrument, during which the spectators sat in great horror of seeing the catgut fly and cut off the tips of her fingers. At last, it was supposed to be perfected, and Mrs. Wracketts looked affectionately at her husband, and said:

"What shall I sing, dear?"

"Sing, love—oh! that little thing—what was it?—about 'Do, do,'—do something or another, but I can't recollect what, just at present."

"Oh, the German air, '*Du, du, reichst in mein herzen.*' No, not that, I think. Mr. Spooner would not follow it well;" and her eyes looked at him large and black like those of a dormouse. "Shall I try, 'Singing from Palestine?'"

Mr. Wrackett, assented, and the lady began a touching ballad, showing how a gentleman had fought in the Holy Land with a guitar on his back—for to judge from the rapscallions who followed the Crusades, he must have kept it there all the time to have brought it safely home again—and how he announced his return by singing under her balcony, which in more modern times would have induced either halfpence or the policeman; and which, as it was, to those who studied the history of the middle ages from pantomimes, would have provoked a savage attack from a large-headed warder with a dreadful spiked ball, similar to that held by Gog or Magog—one or the other, for we never were certain as to their respective individuality.

Léonie, before singing, had complained of the chair being too high for her, and had therefore quitted it for a low footstool, which she took her place upon, first making a "cheese," which whirled the loose muslin dress about her, until she sank in the middle of it, like a China French Marquise penwiper, pressed down. And this she did with such a childish relish, that Mr. Spooner was entranced; and he followed the song until the candles, dessert-glasses, and company even vanished away, and he saw nothing but Léonie's eyes shining through a glittering array of pennons, men-at-arms, plumes, clarions, and champing steeds."

"Oh, beautiful!" he said, as she finished. "Sing another."

"You don't like the claret," observed Mr. Flitter.

"Oh! never mind claret," returned his guest. "Pray sing again, if it is not asking too much."

"But Mr. Wracketts wants some, if you don't," continued Mr. Flitter; upon which Mr. Spooner recklessly filled his glass, and then turned again to the lady, inquiring—

The Dinner at Long's.

"Do you know—

'And the beating of our own hearts
Was the only sound we heard?'"

No; Léonie did not, but she thought the notion very pretty, and asked where it was to be got, because she would order it. She knew another, though, if it was not too old,—"'Twere vain to tell thee all I feel," which, sung by a soft, tremulous contralto voice, with the accompaniment of a guitar and dark eyes, is as wickedly disposed a song as we know of.

The last chords were dying away, when a waiter entered the room—having properly stopped without for the applause, according to custom—and looking first at one of the male guests and then at the other, with great uncertainty said—

"Mr. Wyndham Flitter?"

"Not here," observed that gentleman; but immediately he added, "Stop! who wants him?"

"I think I had better go and see," observed Mr. Wracketts, rising.

Mr. Flitter thought it would be as well; he had a great and natural horror of being inquired after; so his friend left the room. Fortunately, Mr. Spooner was so taken up with the fair songstress, not having yet recovered, that he did not observe what was going on.

"There is some one asking for you down stairs," he said. "A tall, seafaring sort of man."

"Tall—seafaring," repeated Mr. Flitter; "does he look safe? Or—eh?"

He accompanied this question by patting his own shoulder with his hand, as though he was arresting himself.

"No—I should say a sailor," answered the other. "He has got a scar upon his face."

In an instant, it struck Mr. Flitter that it must be the Ganger: but this did not in any way diminish his apprehension; for he perceived at once that something very important must have occurred to bring the other so soon upon his heels. However, he was tolerably comfortable about his own personal safety as regarded going down stairs, and so went down at once to the coffee-room; and, to be sure, there, at the end

of the room, was Sherrard, seated on a table, to the great surprise of the various groups of guests, his appearance not being altogether in keeping with the West-end hotel, and also to the apprehension of the waiters, who did not leave the room, but quietly gathered away the desert-knives and spoons from a table just vacated, without once taking their eyes from the new comer.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter saw who it was in an instant; and, with his quick glance, he also saw one or two men about the coffee-room whom he was in the habit of meeting here and there; so he assumed a superior tone as he said to Sherrard:

"Oh! is it you, my man? Come here, and I will speak to you."

The other was not offended. He knew Flitter's reason for speaking in this manner, and followed him up stairs to the landing outside the dining-room.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Flitter, as they stopped. "Nothing wrong, I hope? How the devil did you find I was here?"

Sherrard briefly explained the difficulties he had overcome.

"But what's the matter—is it good or bad?" asked Mr. Flitter.

"Just as it may turn out," replied the Ganger; and he related to his companion what had passed between him and the lawyer at Pottleton, especially with reference to the twelvemonth's delay. "You see it is not so smooth as we fancied," he went on; "she will have whatever is left at the end of a year; and, take my word, she will have young Hammond, too,—that is, if we allow it."

"Very good," said Mr. Flitter; "but I don't see how we can help ourselves."

"You must be off at once to the continent, and find him out; tell him of his mother's death, as a special friend, and gain his confidence. You can do it, if you please. He is on the Rouen line—that I know. There is a boat starts from St. Katharine's Wharf, in two hours, for Havre; you must go by it."

The cool, determined rapidity with which the Ganger gave these orders, quite took away Mr. Flitter's breath.

"I don't exactly see it in that light," he uttered.

"Pshaw! look here," replied Sherrard. "Make a friend of him at once; and whatever he may hear, let it be first from you. Get him to keep where he is: we don't want him here—understand that."

"But I can't go off in this hurry," said that gentleman; "besides, I only paid my lodging-bill to-day; so it would be all money thrown away. And another thing—I haven't got any more."

"I'll see about that," said Sherrard. "I can't leave the line—it's impossible—and I don't want to leave Pottleton, just now. You *must* go: here, look at this."

From the corner of his handkerchief he unrolled, after some trouble with the knot, three or four bank-notes, tightly crumpled up together. The sight reassured Mr. Flitter; and the same instant he thought of another financial scheme.

"I'll go," he said; "but come in here for a minute. We've caught a likely friend."

He opened the door, and introduced Sherrard to the others. Mr. Spooner had quitted the table, and seated himself on the sofa near the lady, tolerably far gone in claret and admiration; whilst Wracketts had apparently found something far more interesting to look at in the smoke of a cigar, which he was watching, as, with his legs up on a chair, he assured the visitor that "Mrs. Wracketts rather liked the smell of it than otherwise—in fact, she smoked cigarettes herself." And this little acquirement, in Mr. Spooner's opinion, threw a greater halo of romance round her than ever.

"This good man has just come from Havre," said Mr. Flitter, as they entered. "He has made the most marvellous voyage, and come over in an open boat. I am required there by the consul immediately, and must leave to-night."

He poured out a tumbler of claret, and gave it to Sherrard: if he had not done so, the other would have helped himself.

Mr. Wracketts was not put out. He saw something was "up," and that was sufficient for him, not to say gratifying; for both Flitter and himself formed branches of that large family of scamps who live such an incredible time upon paper, building up scaffolds of accommodation bills, above low-water mark, and climbing to perch thereon, until the frail elevation gives way—which it always does sooner or later—and swamps them irremediably, and for ever. And

therefore, seeing his friend did not look embarrassed, he calculated that it might be something to their mutual advantage.

"Wracketts," said Mr. Flitter, as he darted his eyes backwards and forwards from the lady and young gentleman to his associate, "I am miserable to leave you in this hurry, but I hope I may ask you a small favour. Will you be so kind as to settle the bill?"

"My dear fellow, certainly, certainly," replied Wracketts, with a hearty shake of the hand, and in tones of most enthusiastic warmth. "But must you really go?"

"I must—I *must:* but I shall come back, if possible, by the next boat. Tidd, use this room as if you had given the dinner instead of me. It is very early, and I have no doubt Mrs. Wracketts will treat you with another song, if you speak prettily. You rascal, you!"

He put his hand so kindly on Mr. Spooner's head, though he did call him names!

"Adieu, Madame," he added, to the lady; "et n'oubliez pas de bien faire votre jeu."

And then saying "God bless you all," to the party generally, he left the room followed by Sherrard.

In three hours from that time the persons of this scene were somewhat divided.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter was trying to go to sleep, seated on a stool, which he knew would be of perilous steadiness when the vessel got to sea, in the fore-cabin of the Havre boat *James Watt*, as she throbbed her way down the dark river.

The Ganger had gone to some humble coffee-house, there to doze, or otherwise make out the time, until the first train went back again to Pottleton.

And Mr. Spooner, having been challenged by Mrs. Wracketts, who declared she had exhausted her *répertoire* of songs, was looking a great deal more into her eyes than over the hand he held at *écarté;* whilst her husband, playing a different game, gazed intently at the hand aforesaid, and scarcely took notice of his wife at all, except by a rapid glance now and then, given and acknowledged with electric celerity. This went on until the first grey gleam of morning showed through the window curtains, and found Mr. Spooner tremulously writing a cheque on the sideboard. Léonie was

his only companion, as Mr. Wracketts had insisted upon going out to fetch a cab, saying the fresh air would relieve his head; and, by the time he was absent, there appeared to be a great dearth of cabs, even in the neighbourhood of Long's Hotel.

CHAPTER X.

A LONG WAY FROM POTTLETON.

THE glowing afternoon sun threw a cheering glorious flood of light upon a rich and lovely country. Wooded hills and deep green pastures—a sparkling river with small islet patches breaking the course of its stream, and villages and cottages dotting its banks; here and there, avenues of lofty poplars, half obscuring the noble châteaux beyond them; an ancient city, with its mediæval spires and gables, and busy quays of modern traffic; a clear blue sky, and an air so pure and exhilarating, that all who breathed it felt its influence—might be enjoyed by any one who sat outside a small wayside inn, to which we shall now transport the reader.

The river is the Seine; the old city is Rouen; and the entire tract of goodly land and water is Normandy. We give it in its own old name, and do not recognise that of the latter "department" which comprises it. The "Seine Inférieure" has no claim upon our emotions. We repudiate it, in common with the other matter-of-fact appellations by which the goodly regions of Burgundy, Touraine, Languedoc, Provence, or Artois are now known, and ever shall, to the neglect of all other titles that new dynasties may think fit to ordain.

At this small inn, a large party of labourers were drinking and smoking. The difference of their appearance—the stalwart, almost gigantic forms of some, in their round felt hats, short white smock-frocks, and corduroy trowsers, tucked up round their ankles, with their stout heavy spades, on the one hand; and the slim, although still muscular build of their companions, in their cloth caps, blue blouses, and long light

shovels, on the other; the difficulty they had, on either side, of making a few simple words of their own tongue comprehensible to their fellows, showed that they were divided into nearly equal parties of French and English. The unfinished embankment of a railway close to the public-house told their occupation.

The inn was a long one-storied building, of yellowish clay and plaster, daubed white, and roofed with coarse, irregular tiles. It had evidently been only an estaminet; and the original inscription, "*A la Jeanne d'Arc*," was faintly visible. But the vast importation of "navigators" had here, even as at the remote Pottleton, rendered some little change necessary; and so an attempt at a sign-board had been mounted, on which was painted "To the Rendezvous of Joyous Mariners," whilst above the letters, a bunch of turnips was depicted, from some obscure connexion in the foreign artist's mind between our term "navvy" and the *navet* of his own country. On the shutters was labelled the ordinary "*Vin, bière, et eau-de-vie*," "*Bon cidre de Normandie*," and "*On donne à boire et à manger*," of the small inns; and a further inducement to foreigners was held out by the information of "*Grog confectioned in every especies*," and of "*Soda-beer and portere*." And there is no doubt but that when all these inscriptions had been completed, the owner retired happily to bed, in the idea that he had established a thorough English public-house.

The new structures about the spot showed that colonization on a large scale was going on. Close to the inn some workmen were building a house—an eccentric process in France, of which no one was ever old enough to see the beginning and end. Casual and attentive observers have, however, left accounts from which we glean the following facts. The scaffolding being made of long slim clothes-props, fastened together with string, wythes, and dabs of mortar the chimneys are first built on its top. The workmen then descend, and sitting on the blocks of stone about, smoke a pipe and admire their work. Years roll by in this easy listless manner, during which the walls gradually descend, as the cement and rubbish that compose them is pulled up in a small pail to the platform hung from hooks in the roof, on which the builder works; and other hooks are built into the

garret-window frames, which are never glazed, for shutters which are never placed there. Between every morsel of material added to the edifice, the workman has another pipe and another lounge with his comrades; and then half a dozen of them assemble to lay a brick, and talk or quarrel over it for an hour. And thus engaged, several of them were sauntering about the round tables placed before the inns, or pretending to make the mortar, which appeared to be a simple composition of wet sand and chalk.

The whole scene looked like the opening of an opera. The French labourers had collected on one side, drinking cider and washy beer, and playing some game of chance with revolving numbers, as they chatted with the girls and women who were waiting about, many of them wearing the tall lace cap of the *cauchoise.* And all were more or less bawling out the following song to an old air, "*Vite en avant deux.*"

"Allons violons et clarinettes,
Donnez le signal du bacchanal,
Fripons, cotillons, jeunes fillettes,
Accourez au bal, au bal;
Venez,
Joyeux ouvriers,
Déguster bouteilles et litres,
Chanter à rompre les vitres,
Rire à ventres déboutonnés."

The navvies were not behind them in noise. Brandy and water was their favourite drink, and a cloud of tobacco smoke enveloped them, as they listened to a song, of which the following is a verse, put to that peculiar tune with the prolonged final note, which may be heard in the tap-room of any country public house on a Saturday evening—

"O-h-h-h! his coat it is so red, and his trowsers is so blue!
O-h-h-h! his coat it is so red, and his trowsers is so blue!
His trowsers is so blue,
And his weskit is so new,
He's a chick-a-leary cove, and I loves him tew-w-w!"

And when the supposed country damsel had described, in like fashion, the various superior attributes of her lover, with a chorus of friends, the song began all over again.

A little way from the door, at another table, a young man was sitting, paying the different people, assisted by a couple

of gens-d'armes, who kept order. For as none of the French workmen could receive a franc, any more than they could lay a brick or move a shovelful of earth, without half-a-dozen offering their opinions upon the proceeding, which ultimately ended in a combat of words, and stilted oaths, the presence of these authorities was not out of place.

The young man managed them very well though. His light curling hair, fresh good-humoured face, and steady resolute way of proceeding, apart from his language, showed that he was an Englishman; but he spoke French excellently, whenever a native presented himself.

"What, another accident?" he said, as a navvy advanced with his arm in a sling. "Really, my men, you should be more careful. If you have no regard for yourselves, think of the company. How is this, Taylor?"

"I was having a bit of talk with Howard, sir; and I just laid my elbow on a pile, and the monkey came down, and smashed it."

The "monkey" was the large driving-block that falls upon a pile-head.

"Well, you must appeal to the Police Correctionelle, I suppose; and we must pay. I do really think if one of you, who knew he couldn't swim, went bathing and was drowned, the tribunal would come upon the company."

"If you plase, Mr. Hammond, sirr, Paddy Blake's come to a bad hurt," said another labourer, whose accent betrayed his Hibernian origin.

"Another?" said the young man. "Well, what now?"

"It's the powther, sirr," was the answer. "He blasted his eyes."

"Now, you can speak without using that language, Ryan," said the other.

"No, I don't mane that, sirr," answered the man. "The bore in the rock was full of powther, and wouldn't go off; and Paddy jest went to give the priming a bit of a blow, sirr, with his mouth; and then it did."

"And what has he done?"

"His eyes and his arms is gone, sirr."

"And where's he gone himself?"

"To Ruen, sirr."

"Ruin, indeed," observed the other, half smiling, as he re-

peated the man's pronunciation. "Well, take this money to him; and there are five-and-twenty francs for his present wants. I will come down and see him to-night."

The man touched his hat, and was departing to make room for the others, when a stranger pushed in before them, and came up to the pay-table.

"Mr. Hammond, I believe," said the new-comer, with an easy familiarity, poising himself about as if the soles of his boots had been made of springs.

The young man rose, and acknowledged his name; for, as the reader may have guessed, he was the nephew of old Mrs. Maitland.

"I must introduce myself, Mr. Hammond," continued the other, as he took a glazed card from his pocket-book, on which, below the crest of a phœnix, was inscribed, in microscopic capitals, "WYNDHAM FLITTER." The "Mr." was considered an unnecessary addition. "I have come from England," he went on, "and, I regret to say, on a painful errand. Can I have a word with you—in the inn, perhaps?"

Young Hammond's countenance assumed an expression of alarm. He told one of the gens-d'armes to take his place at the pay-table, and accompanied Flitter into the cabaret.

"I am sorry to be the bearer of bad tidings, Mr. Hammond," observed the other; "but you may possibly have been prepared for them. In a word—your good aunt——"

"Well—what of her?"

"She is dead."

The young man caught in his breath hastily; and then, as he muttered the word "Dead!" appeared as though he wished to comprehend some vague announcement by repeating it.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter, not knowing precisely what to say beyond a few conventional platitudes relating to deaths in general, ordered some Cognac, to occupy time until Philip's first burst of surprise and grief had calmed down. And then, whilst sipping his tiny glass of brandy, he entered with consummate tact into certain particulars connected with the will and the disposition of the property—hinted at underhand work, evidently carried on by somebody living with her—he did not mean to say by whom; on the contrary, Heaven forbid, on so melancholy an occasion, that he should throw

suspicion upon anybody; but so it was. And when he considered that he had made mischief enough, he recommended Philip to think no more about it, but leave Mr. Sherrard, whom he knew well, and who had been so kind to the old lady, to look after everything, whilst he (Hammond) pursued the career still abroad, in which he was becoming so honourably known.

"On the contrary," said Philip, as he found an opportunity of replying, "I shall return immediately."

"Indeed," exclaimed Mr. Flitter, somewhat alarmed. Then, after a few seconds of reflection, he added: "Pray do not think me impertinent in alluding to the attachment between your cousin and yourself, which I have heard existed."

"Existed?"

"I speak in all humility—possibly still exists between you."

"But what reason have you for supposing that it does not?" asked Philip, earnestly. "Has anything happened? Have you heard anything?"

"Nothing, nothing, I assure you; only—" and here Mr. Flitter hesitated, as though he wished not to allude to the subject—"only—I really ought not to meddle at all in the matter. Does not the will strike you as singular? And do you think you would be received in such a way as to make the visit to England agreeable? But, pshaw! as I said before, what have I to do with this? I am taking a great liberty—I feel I am—in venturing to give an opinion on it."

"I am sure I am gratified by the interest you take in it," said Philip, seizing the other by the hand with the warmth which a person in trouble always feels towards any kindly associate. "It is most kind of you. But I would rather be at home, or, at least, be near where my home was."

"We will return together, then," said Mr. Flitter, "you may perhaps like to stay in London with me for a little while. And Sherrard, too, will be glad to see you."

"Do you know him well?" asked Philip.

"A good creature," replied Mr. Flitter; "rough, but honest. His nature is not plated, like nut-crackers, wherein a dig, in producing their roughness, discovers the coarse

metal below; no, it is all good. I first met him when the railway was projected through some property of mine."

"I believe he has been very kind to my poor aunt."

"Always, always," said Mr. Flitter, "and will be so to you, as you have seen already."

Mr. Flitter made a few more attempts to prove to Philip Hammond the advantage to be gained by staying abroad, but the other was inflexible. This point settled, it did not take him long to make his arrangements for departure. Mr. Flitter, at the same time, never lost sight of him, and the day after this interview they were standing together in the court-yard of the Hôtel de la Messagerie, at Rouen, watching the arrival of the diligence from the Paris railway, and awaiting the dinner prepared for the passengers.

The table-d'hôte was laid out with a great eye to effect—that is to say, effect through the windows, upon the passers by in the street. For from the imposing appearance of the thirty napkins sticking out of the tumblers like peacocks' tails, and the wonderful epergnes loaded with the choicest exotics and the rarest fruits, idle gazers believed that crowds of noble and distinguished persons were expected to dinner, and thought much of the hotel accordingly. But when the time of dining came, and the shutters were closed, and the confiding stranger, who had been caught by the glare, found that the flowers were artificial and the fruit wax, and that the real five or six guests huddled all up to one end of the table, as though spirits were sitting behind all the other knives and forks, to restrain them and keep them in awe—then the visitor mistrusted first impressions and outside appearances, and remorse and self-reproach spoiled his meal.

At last, the diligence from the Paris railway, having been hoisted up from its truck and let down upon fresh wheels, came clattering through the narrow streets, making every window jingle as it passed. Next to seeing talented persons dance hornpipes amongst eggs without breaking the shells, it is wonderful to reflect how diligences wind about the narrow, contracted streets, without cracking all the shop fronts. We cannot fancy anybody driving an omnibus through the Lowther-arcade, or Hampton-court maze, or the pens at Smithfield, or any other intricate passage; but a

diligence would thread the thoroughfares without scattering anything. Not less wonderful is their power of going through small arches and apertures. The man who once wagered that he would get into a pint bottle, did not do anything so wonderful as Laffitte's elephantine vehicles, when they were wont to creep through the low narrow gateways of fortified towns. As well, to all probability, might the late Mr. Daniel Lambert, of mountainous memory, have determined upon occupying the last seat of a railway omnibus, on the arrival of a Sunday evening train.

The people crowded into the eating-room, and took their places at the table; Mr. Wyndham Flitter put himself at the top, as he was stopping at the house for the night, which, he assumed, gave him a position of honour; and began immediately to talk to all the party, as though they were old friends, ultimately offering to pay the bill in its total, and then divide it afterwards, as they were pressed for time. By this latter arrangement he not only contrived to come off free himself, but to make eight or ten francs into the bargain. During the meal, however, having rubbed his snuff-box against his trowsers until it became very bright for the time, he flashed it before the eyes of the company.

But they did not notice it. In the hurry of dinner, and occupation of changing vehicles and luggage, he could not attract their attention, so he commanded it.

"That's an interesting memorial, sir, that box," he said to gentleman on his left, who took a pinch from it—a youthful tourist, who had let a light pluffy moustache grow, upon the strength of having been in France a fortnight.

"Indeed, sir! I was admiring it," replied the other, called upon to say something.

"Yes; it was found by a diver opposite Quillebœuf, under the wreck of the Télémaque. Not a doubt of its authenticity; it was part of the treasure, and belonged to the unfortunate Louis."

"I thought it was proved that there was no treasure," observed a gentleman hard of conviction.

"There are more things in heaven and earth than ever came out of it," replied Mr. Flitter, somewhat losing himself in his quotation. "It was well known where the treasure

went. But of that—mum! Ah! here are some Normandy soles; 'Je vais revoir ma Normandie.'"

Glad of the diversion, Mr. Flitter hummed the air, and directly began to help the fish; then, not choosing to retire from the battle-field altogether beaten, he took out his watch. Having looked at the time, with a large clock staring him right in the face from the messagerie yard, and one going on each of the two mantel-pieces, as nearly together as French clocks can be expected to go under common circumstances, he went on:—

"In fact, here is a thing there could have been no mistake about. This watch had on the back of it when I first came by it, M. R. à M. A.,—'Maison-Rouge to Marie-Antoinette,'—a gift from the unfortunate chevalier. I sent it once to be repaired, and have my crest put on it," he added, as he passed it round for inspection, "and the idiots punched out the cypher by mistake."

"You had it new fitted too, I see," said the gentleman who was difficult to be convinced. "The works bear date 1806."

"Oh, of course, of course; it had been so long under water, you see," said Mr. Flitter.

He was always ready; and unless one of his race can be so, he is the most contemptible of impostors.

In spite of his anxious troubles, Philip Hammond was rather amused at his new acquaintance. There was such an air of *bonhommie*, notwithstanding all his vapouring, and at times, childish frankness about Mr. Wyndham Flitter, that the others formed a great notion of him—so much so indeed, that a day had not passed before Philip thought how fortunate he was to have made friends with a man of evidently first-rate connexions, and possessing singularly varied information.

Very early the next morning, before the first rays of sun had got through the fog to fall on the tops of the hills along the Seine, our travellers were ready to depart for Havre. Few people were about, and the quays were quite deserted, except at the spot alongside of which the *Normandie* was getting up her steam for the journey; and here a little knot of persons had collected at the gangway—waiters and porters

from the hotels, officials, and sellers of fruit and cakes for those who had come off too early to get any breakfast. For from something to do with the tide of the Seine, which at certain periods is given to behave in a comically uproarious manner, the boats from Rouen usually go off at hours uncomfortably betimes; or rather, they give out that such is their intention, and then they do as they please, beguiling the delay after the appointed hour by whisking the water backwards and forwards with their paddles, and by ringing most diabolical bells from time to time, in mere wantonness, for the bewilderment of the still blinking passengers, who, called in the middle of the night from their beds, nod and doze in the river mist, upon the damp deck, which is always sluiced with water immediately before they arrive, from some unaccountable notions of clammy cleanliness cultivated by steam-boat sailors generally.

By degrees the travellers collected, and amongst them Mr. Wyndham Flitter recognised several of his acquaintances of the day before, including the young tourist, and the stern gentleman who was so difficult of conviction. His first object was to learn all their names from the cards on their luggage, and his next, to be very useful to those whose French was feeble and badly constructed. For these he squabbled with the *commissionaires*, and settled disputed bills and gratuities, assuring them all, that he had saved them from the atrocious imposition practised upon liberal travellers. And by the time the boat really did start, going at first very slowly through the fog, next to the captain, there was nobody on board so entirely in command of everybody's attention as Mr. Wyndham Flitter.

The young gentleman with the pluffy moustache, though, was his greatest listener. He found out that he knew something about Oxford, and also knew Mr. Tidd Spooner; which was quite enough to make him friends at once with Mr. Flitter. And as he had, moreover, bought a guide-book, and now and then stuck fast at a word or two, Mr. Flitter thought it most charitable to take it out of his hands altogether, and tell him what he was looking at.

"This is a fine boat," observed Mr. Flitter, in a loud tone, as the *Normandie* got clear of the fog, and began to go a-head.

"It conveyed Napoleon's cinders——" the young gentleman began.

"Excuse me —'ashes,'" interrupted Mr. Flitter, confidentially. "Yes, you are right," he continued, aloud, "the *Normandie* conveyed the ashes of Napoleon from Cherbourg to Courbevoie. I have a curious relic. This watch——" And Mr. Flitter pulled up short, having almost forgotten that the evening before he had told a different tale about it. But he went off at a tangent immediately, looking towards the engines, as he glanced at the guide-book by the way, and caught a notion flying, "There is some doubt, after all, whether we invented steam. Its origin appears to be French.'

"Indeed!" said the gentleman, who would not be convinced.

"A man I know, high in a government office, has a letter from Marion de l'Orme, who says that she went over a madhouse with the Marquis of Worcester, where they saw a poor devil confined for some lunatic plan for moving machines by vapour. The Marquis stole the secret—there you have it."

Mr. Wyndham Flitter peeped into the guide-book once or twice during this story, as a boy does in class, when he wants a word.

"I don't doubt it," said the gentleman. "Of course the French are right. They invented steam at the same time they discovered America, vaccination, electricity, chess, and the mariner's compass."

"Ha! ha! very good! very smart!" said Mr. Flitter; "neatly put, indeed. Something like the Irish," he went on, turning the subject. "You never praised anything before an Irishman, but he said, 'My boy, you should see the ones we've got in Dublin!' I do believe he'd make pine apples grow in Phœnix Park. Ha! ha! Monument Yard—twenty thousand just landed."

Mr. Flitter's conversation was always carried on in angles, never following one straight line. Its course might be well described by the way in which artists depict a flash of lightning; or better, by the figure formed in a game of dominoes, inasmuch as at times, coming to a fix, he drew upon a reserve for something to go on with. But to those deep thinkers who can picture the diagram of the journey performed by a

knight in covering all the squares of a chess-board consecutively, no further illustration of the dodging, jumping style of Mr. Flitter's usual talk is necessary.

The business of breakfast for a time distracted the attention of the travellers. The Seine boats have capital and cheap restaurants attached to them—we mean those between Havre and Rouen. They had once equal need of them, on the journey from the latter city to Paris, which might have been taken as an extended edition of our own river trip to Hampton Court, occupying thirteen hours of progress, three of retrogression, and nine of sticking upon sand-banks—in all, twenty-five, popularly called twelve. But now the railway has altered all that.

Whilst they were thus occupied, the *Normandie* glided past the mountain, on the summit of which once rose the castle of Robert le Diable. Here was a fine chance for Mr. Flitter to go in and win the fresh attention of his companions. He hummed the drinking and the gambling chorus from the opera—alluded to the nuns coming out of their graves and dancing in pink tights—told any legend that came uppermost about the hero—and finally stated that those who had not seen Staudigl as *Bertram*, had missed a wonder of the world.

At the name of the great singer, a German passenger, who had been hitherto sitting behind an enormous pipe, laid it down, as he cried—

"Shtaudigl—ah-h-h! vos goots as Pertram—ya—zo!"

"What? Stoff?" cried Mr. Flitter, as he recognised the speaker. "Who would have thought of meeting you here? A most remarkable man that," he continued, speaking in a low tone to his immediate neighbours, thinking that the appearance of his friend was not altogether of that dashing description it was eligible for his acquaintances to assume. "A most remarkable man—great mind—deep thinker; but has an almost childish veneration for Staudigl."

"Ha! ya! zo!" replied the other. "Vell, vot it is; zo!"

Having thus expressed himself, he put his pipe alight into his pocket, and shook hands with Mr. Flitter, who asked—

"And where have you turned up from?"

"Turn up—ya! ha, ha! zo; very goot vits. 'Tis a chokes."

"No—no joke," replied Flitter. "I'm glad to see you. Where have you been? Nova Scotia?"

"No—fiddleshtickle—Noveskotes!" continued his friend. "Wien."

"Oh, Vienna!" translated Mr. Flitter. "Ah! what have you been doing there?"

"Mr. Shtaudigl zings Der Freyschutz: 'tis goot—ya—zo!"

Mr. Flitter winked collectively to his fellow-travellers; and as the German rose to knock the still incandescent ashes from his pipe into the river, observed—

"A wonderful man; no one ever knew where he lived. You will see. And now," he went on, as the other returned, "where are you staying, Stoff?"

"Oh—der ish loadgings; ver goot loadgings in Lonedon, zo; not exbensives. When Mr. Shtaudigl vos in Lonedon he vos; vot he vos, ya, zo.

"Yes—I know," said Mr. Flitter, evidently appearing to comprehend all about it; "and after that?"

"Der ish de loadgings for de difrent beebles."

"The how much?" asked Mr. Flitter.

"De beebles—das volk: zo."

"Oh, the people! ah, I see; go on."

"And oather loadgings, zo, der ish Deutschers, der ish, and Mr. Shtaudigl, vot he vos in petter loadgings; ya, no, tish not tear—ver nyshe: zo."

The last few words were pronounced as a confidential commentary on his own speech, made to himself.

"Near Drury-lane, I think, it used to be?" said Mr. Flitter.

"Ah — va! Trury Lanes!" cried the other; "ver Mr. Shtaudigl vos played Pertram, and Mr. Punn. Ya, Mr. Punn vos, vot he vos, pewtiful, and zo."

On which the foreigner nodded several assents to thoughts passing in his mind; and then reproduced his pipe, from which, having refilled and lighted it, he had taken one or two mighty puffs, when the steward came and told him it was not allowed in that part of the boat.

"Fiddleshtickle!" replied the Herr.

Nor was it until Mr. Wyndham Flitter had assured him such was the rule, that he went grumbling away to the forepart of the steamer, justifying his right by a disjointed statement, in which the name of "Mr. Shtaudigl" was, end upper-

most, tossed amid a flood of broken words, like a cork in a sluice.

The *Normandie* went on, and so did Mr. Flitter—now pointing out the ruins of the Abbey of Jumiéges, and talking about Agnes Sorel, whose history he made up from reminiscences of La Vallière, Anne Boleyn, and favourites or unlucky queens in general; and, anon, talking of the fortune he lost by starting a large manufactory at Candebec, through the dishonesty of the partners, who bolted with the money. All this impressed Philip Hammond with higher notions than ever of his friend's position. And when he got off Quillebœuf, where the Télémaque went down, he was as good as a book.

"By the way," he said, apropos of the Télémaque, "here is the box belonging to Marie Antoinette, which I spoke of."

And he handed it round for the company to take a pinch.

"I thought it was a watch," said the gentleman who was still difficult to be convinced.

"Very true—we are both right," said Mr. Flitter. "There was a sad jumble of the things when the vessel went over on her side—she lay on her side, you know—so that watches, and boxes, and everything else, were all confused. A friend of mine said a capital thing about it—a devilish clever fellow, wrote those letters—what were they?—about something that made such a noise. Dear me! I quite forget. No matter. He said more money had been sunk preparatory to raising the Télémaque than ever had been raised preparatory to sinking her. "'Raised,' you see, and 'sunk:' the play upon the words is not bad. Ha! ha!"

And having thus got away from the dilemma altogether, Mr. Flitter pointed out the spot where the ship had foundered, and spoke of having been a heavy loser by the affair.

At last, after much more talk, during which the *Normandie* passed a town, when Mr. Flitter facetiously observed, that they were in the same situation as Scene i. Act 3 of Shakspeare's "Henry the Fifth," "Before Harfleur," they at last came alongside the quay of one of the Havre basins.

Havre may be called a French edition of Bristol—at least, in appearance. In commerce there is a slight difference. For its principal trade, upon a first glimpse, appears to be entirely confined to cockatoos, monkeys, and Java sparrows; and the traveller wonders by what extraordinary influx of visitors

there can ever be a chance of its screaming, chirping chattering commodities being carried off. It is the dominion of strange birds they bring in cages from the windows ; they sit gravely side by side, in rows of twenty and thirty, or perches in long grated boxes, like larks spitted, ready for roasting. You look into back parlours, passages, and cellars even, and still see nothing but birds. Parrots gnaw your buttons as you look after the smaller game ; cockatoos claw hold of you as you pass in front of the shops ; and hosts of foreign tom-tits, driven into great fears by your proximity, flutter and scuffle as you approach, covering you with wet seeds and water, and making the air about them thick with clouds of flue, which ultimately settle on your clothes, and defy brushes.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter and Philip made up the time between their dinner and departure by strolling about the town, and making a few purchases—Mr. Flitter's being principally confined to tobacco, with which he stuffed every available portion of his attire so tightly, that he might have passed for a walking pincushion.

"Smuggling is a great delusion," he said. "People only do it when they first come to France. I get everything cheaper in London."

There were reasons for this, besides the mere commercial value of the articles; the shopkeepers abroad gave no credit.

At last midnight arrived, at which hour the boat was to start. Mr. Flitter had despatched their luggage on board at an earlier hour, "that they might have no bother," as he said; and at five minutes to the time walked from the hotel to the quay.

"Is everything settled?" asked Philip.

"Don't trouble yourself about it, my dear fellow," replied Mr. Flitter, with the expression of a man wishing to pay for another in a delicate manner.

"But really——," observed Philip.

"Now I must insist——" interrupted Mr. Flitter, placing his hand upon the other's arm; and their arrival at the gangway precluded further altercation.

They went at once down to the cabin, and were selecting their berths by the peculiarly feeble lamp that chiefly flourishes in steamboats, when the waiter from the hotel

came down the stairs, and proceeding at once to Mr. Flitter, with eyes that rivalled those of a cat in the gloom, exclaimed:

"Please, sir; you've forgotten the bill."

"Eh! what?" inquired Mr. Flitter, in vague surprise: "What bill? You paid, I believe, Mr. Hammond: did you not?"

"I?" asked Philip: "Certainly not. I imagined—really excuse me—that you had settled it."

"Well, this is capital!" added his friend. "Ha! ha! come—we are not so bad as that either. A mistake, you see," he continued to the waiter. "I am exceedingly glad you came. What is it? Twelve francs—um. Mr. Hammond, if you give me five shillings that will make it right. Short reckonings make long friends. I always act on that principle."

As he paid the money the waiter intimated that he expected a slight gratuity.

"You must give me change for a sovereign," said Mr. Flitter, kicking Philip, who proffered some, with his foot.

The man had not got any.

"Well—I am very sorry," returned our friend: "but what am I to do? Look out—unless you wish to find yourself at Southampton in the morning, I should recommend you to go on shore."

There was a noise on deck, as the gangway was pulled up to the quay. The waiter did not stay another moment, but darted up stairs, and stepped ashore from the paddle-box.

Philip did not exactly understand the scene, but was stopped in an inquiry by a dissertation from Mr. Flitter upon the impositions of hotels generally.

And then, after a few vibratory motions, the lamps and glasses in the packet began to jingle; and an uneasy motion of the cabin floor pitched the gentleman with the pluffy moustache, who was standing upon one leg to undo his straps, into his berth sooner than he intended, showed that the steamer had left the mouth of the harbour, and was fairly upon the dark tumbling sea.

CHAPTER XI.

HOME AGAIN.

Leaving Mr. Wyndham Flitter and Philip on their journey, homeward bound, we will return to Pottleton, where renewed excitement was commencing by the changes effected by the railway. Of all the benefits arising therefrom, Mr. Twinch was the receiver-general. If any property changed hands amicably, he drew out the deeds; if the people squabbled, he drew out the deeds just the same, only more of them. But, as we have said, though a hard man, he was very honourable. He got all out of his clients that he could, but no more; that is to say, they, being the geese who laid the golden eggs, were directly despoiled of all that he considered as due to him; but he never destroyed them to get them all at once.

He was at work one evening in his office, whilst the Girls and Annie had gone to drink tea at Farmer Grant's, when Mr. Wyndham Flitter was announced, and came into his office attired as if just from a journey. Almost before Mr. Twinch could ask a question, that gentleman informed him with some degree of volubility that he had arrived from the Continent, bringing young Hammond with him, whom he had left in London; and that not finding Sherrard at the Grange, he had come to inquire whether Mr. Twinch had learned any more with respect to the old lady's property than he had known before.

"I am an old friend of the family," said Mr. Flitter; "but knowing how the legacy was framed, I thought I would wait and see whether it would be advisable or not to bring young Hammond down here."

"I do not quite understand you, sir," said Mr. Twinch; "pray take a seat. Bring young Hammond down! Cannot he come by himself?"

Mr. Flitter felt for a minute confused; so he caught at the fact of a decanter standing on the table to ask for a glass of water—the refreshment that Mr. Twinch usually kept for hysterical clients when their feelings became excited.

"I do not think you will like that," said Mr. Twinch; "our pump is a chalybeate."

"Oh, anything will do," replied Mr. Flitter. "I am thirsty with my hurried journey."

He poured out some of the water and put it to his lips; but he very soon took it away again; for it tasted as much like ink as anything not absolutely black could be expected to do.

"My dear sir," he said, "is the spring of this water on your property?"

"The pump is in the kitchen," answered the lawyer.

"Then our fortune is made," cried Mr. Flitter, jumping up, suddenly.

"You don't say so!" observed Mr. Twinch, completely bewildered.

"Don't you see?" asked Mr. Flitter. "I have it all. A chalybeate—pump-room—sick people—water cure—Pottleton a second Cheltenham. Let me rent the pump."

Mr. Flitter accompanied every one of these sentences by giving Mr. Twinch a dig in the ribs with his finger, which process, together with his astonishment, completely took his breath away.

"Let me rent the pump," repeated Mr. Flitter.

"My good sir," said Mr. Twinch, "I can't let the pump; it is in the middle of the kitchen."

"Well, let me the kitchen—the whole house," continued Mr. Flitter, evidently excited, "and I'll build you a palace. Or join me in the scheme. Turn your kitchen into a marble temple, the pump into an antique fountain, and lay out your grounds as an earthly paradise."

Mr. Twinch's grounds formed a wilderness of gooseberry bushes and apple trees, which he never looked after. For, as he was wont to say, when he had a gardener his potatoes cost a shilling apiece, and he found he could always buy more of every fruit for sixpence than his entire half acre produced. But Mr. Flitter appeared really so enthusiastic about the affair, that he resolved himself to turn the matter over in his mind; at present he brought his strange visitor back to his original subject, by saying—

"But excuse me, sir; what about young Hammond?"

The conversation thus entered upon, Mr. Wyndham Flitter found that he did not make any great way with Mr. Twinch about young Hammond. For the tough old lawyer was accustomed to deal with social jugglers of all kinds: and thinking,

from the strange interest his visitor was taking in the affair, that some plot was in contemplation, he gave such hard, straightforward replies, that the other was completely foiled.

There is nothing beats the tacking of a "do" so completely as a plain-sailing way of proceeding, because he cannot understand it at all. He feels as awkward as an Astley's fox-hunter accustomed to go round the circus upon two bare-backed steeds and over elastic five-barred gates, would do if put upon a common active pony, and sent right ahead across the country. If you try to meet a "do" on his own ground, and out-do him, you are certain to be "done." Reversing the above illustration, being a good field horseman, you might as well attempt to cope with any of the active gentlemen in Olympic costumes, who jump through hoops and over streamers in the arena. In like manner, people who know nothing in the world about certain games, will often win at cards, dominos, and the like. Their adversaries think they are laying deep schemes, and go out of their way to counteract them, when all the time there is not the slightest occasion for any stratagems of the kind; the others simply playing the most palpable game that appears open to them.

So all Mr. Wyndham Flitter's plans were for the present frustrated with respect to several artful schemes he had in view about Philip Hammond, and he went back to London, mentally calling Mr. Twinch a pig-headed old fool all the way, because he had not afforded his visitor any opportunity of displaying ingenuity and acumen.

A day passed, and then another visitor came to Mr. Twinch's.

Railways are great subverters of romance, as connected with a stranger's return to his native village. All the descriptive bits connected with the arrival, that once told so well, can no longer be made available. We no more picture the solitary horseman riding slowly up the village, and throwing his lengthened shadow before him in the afternoon sun; nor the weary pedestrian pausing on the hill that overlooks his home, and putting down the bundle—which all pedestrians were once bound to carry in a story or painting, and in which the whole of their worldly goods and chattels were comprised, whatever their rank—the better to give vent to emotions. Nor can we so well call up the way-side inn on the bye-road, with the light gleaming on the snow through

its red-curtained windows, in the common-room of which, according to story commencements from time immemorial, some splashed and booted traveller arrived, and always at night. And so we are driven to the necessity, being faithful in our chronicle, of throwing aside such picturesque embellishments, and bringing back our wanderers, now-a-days, in the less romantic, but more convenient, railway carriage—the loitering horseman, to whom time, and therefore money, might not have been such an object, in the first class; the booted rider of the way-side inn, in the second; and the bundle-bearing pedestrian—to judge of his means by his wardrobe—in the parliamentary.

In this fashion, too, we must bring Philip Hammond back to Pottleton.

Anxiously as he looked forward to his arrival, yet this being his first journey hither by the rail, he could not help feeling some other little excitement along the newly-extended branch, it was so curious to make only a journey of eight or ten minutes between Dibblethorpe and Pottleton. He recollected the long walk it used to be through the muddy lanes behind Farmer Grant's homestall, that the land-springs and the hoofs of the cattle always kept in a quag; over the meadow if the floods were not out, and if they were, round by the towing-path; then toiling up the hill, and jolting down it on the other side—it made a morning's journey altogether. But now they left Dibblethorpe almost as the domestic clocks of Pottleton, set by the dial in the old grey Norman steeple, were giving warning that they were about to strike twelve—went under the hill right away from day-light—screamed over meadows hitherto only known as patches in the panorama except by their owners; and high and dry on the embankment along Farmer Grant's muddy lanes—looked into the very back bed-room windows, which made pretty Miss Grant very particular about the blinds; and came finally, panting and humming right up into Pottleton, before the old bell, with the monkish characters round it, has got through the hour of noon. It was almost like enchantment, so that, all circumstances considered, he was somewhat confused and excited when he got out of the carriage, and at last found some old landmarks still left to show him at what point of the village he had been deposited.

Philip's return.

CHAPTER XII.

PHILIP'S RETURN.

PHILIP HAMMOND knew that his cousin was at Mr. Twinch's, and directly went towards the lawyer's. He saw her, before he got to the house, tying up a refractory cluster of hops to an ingenious structure of fir-poles, which Whackey Clark, under the ladies' direction, after the pictures of the triumphal arches in the illustrated papers, had built for an arbour. The proper way would have been, he knew, for him to have gone to the door and knocked; but he was too impatient for such an ordinary proceeding, so he vaulted lightly over the low wall that parted the garden from the fair-field, and stood before his cousin. Annie was startled at the sudden appearance. She gave a slight shriek, as she nearly let the whole of the clustering bine fall over her; but directly afterwards was in his arms; and then, as suddenly reflecting, she exclaimed, starting back again—

"Oh! my goodness, Philip; I forgot they can see every thing from the road!"

The first greeting over, and words of the hastiest kind relative to his arrival exchanged, young Hammond spoke with some emotion of his aunt's death, as he led Annie into the side bower that had been erected, and took his place at her side. The young girl, with glistening eyes, gave him an account of what had transpired since he last heard from her; and then came to speak of the circumstances under which the property, whatever it might be, had been left.

"I cannot tell why this was," she said, speaking in a tone as though she imagined she had been to blame for it. "I think that Mr. Sherrard had great power over her, and so influenced her. He was very kind to us, though, and I am sure I should have done anything that he thought would be for the best. But it will make no difference, Philip," she added, with a faint smile, as she turned her eyes, full of trust and love towards him.

"You might find some better match, Annie," he said, half wilfully, "now you are an heiress, than poor me."

"You do not think so, I know," she replied. "But Mr. Sherrard says, Philip, that you have made ever so much money abroad—more than you know what to do with."

"My own Annie, what can have induced him to say so? On the contrary; it has only been by the greatest prudence that I have been able to get on respectably."

The girl looked at him most incredulously, but she knew that he had never deceived her, and she directly uttered, with some warmth, as she seized his hand, "Well, never mind then, Philip; so much the better for both of us. You shall have every farthing I have got. It is all yours, properly and by right; for you know, you were always to have everything, and I am sure you deserved it; I shall never call it mine. And then," she added, once more smiling, "I shall be sure of you, sir, for you will not be able to live without me."

"But shall you keep in the same mind, Annie? You see, you are only 'recommended' to marry me."

"Recommended—Philip! Do you think I required it? or that I am quite without a heart, to forget everything that has passed? I am sure I cannot think what poor aunt Milly meant by putting down anything so strange."

"I wonder what can have been left for you," said Philip. "I never even saw what was in that old box myself, except when I was quite a child, and once, just so long ago as I can remember, I recollect playing with some bright beads, and poor aunt put a piece of white net-work over my head, like a collar."

"It is very heavy, Philip; you cannot think what a job the men had to move it."

"I wish the year was past," the other continued. "But do not think, little woman, that I want to know what the legacy is from any selfish motives. Only it might be nothing after all; and then, I should not be, perhaps, so soon prepared to marry you. I almost wish it might prove to be nothing," he added; "for then you would know I married you for yourself, and not for what you had."

"Oh, don't, Philip—don't," cried Annie, as she gave him another kiss—a longer and sweeter one even than the other, for they were quite hidden by the hops. And as soon as she had the use of her lips again to speak, she said,

"What do you think of doing, first? Now, I mean—directly. Do not go back to France. You are so clever. I am sure you could earn—oh, a great deal of money here. Besides, I should see you often; perhaps always. And you will be better here, perhaps, altogether."

"What do you mean, Annie?"

"Oh, a great deal. I have seen pictures of the Normandy girls, in all their tall caps, and short—dreadfully short—red petticoats—the impudent things! I have no doubt you are able to tell a great deal about them if you chose."

"What nonsense, Annie," answered Philip, with a laugh. "If you had been abroad, you would have known how different the pictures of the places and peasants are to the realities. I am sure there is nothing half so nice as your own dear face, all over the world."

Annie did not know well what to say to this, beyond "Oh, stuff!" which was not a very satisfactory reply. So she turned the conversation by asking, "But what are you going to do, Philip? Can't you come down here?"

"No, my dear Annie; not yet, at least. Mr. Wyndham Flitter, whom I think you know, has promised to put several good things in my way, and he has great interest. He is going to introduce me to some very leading people next week."

"Well, Philip; whatever you think is for the best, will, I am sure, be right."

Having said this, Annie suggested that it would, perhaps, be just as well for them to go into the house, and see the Twinches, who had been exceedingly kind to her, but who appeared to be forgotten altogether. And, acting on her suggestion, they went up to the Twinch residence.

The elder of the sisters was very busily occupied just then. The infant school-room was being whitewashed—a process it always underwent whenever the appearance of a popular autumnal epidemic raised a cry of approaching cholera; which was, however, usually to be attributed more to plums than plague. During this sanitary measure, Miss Twinch gave up the parlour for a school-room. All the furniture was removed, and the walls were now decorated with large pictorial placards and alphabets, before which the children sat, upon benches too high for their legs, staring at

them in great awe, as if every one had been a basilisk, especially the nervous Harriet Stiles, who trembled and wept whenever she looked at the representation of Daniel in the lions' den, as it recalled the double terror that was struck to her soul by the lion on his hind-legs, and the Roman warrior with the red feathers, in the wild-beast show.

Miss Twinch had a yard-measure in her hand, with which she pointed to the placards, and her face betokened resolution and stern perseverance.

"Jane Collier," said Miss Twinch, "what letter is that? Heyday! miss. What—no pocket-handkerchief again! where does your mother expect to go?"

Jane Collier wriggled uneasily on the bench, and looked vacant.

"Where does she expect to go?" repeated Miss Twinch, with great asperity.

The child, in an almost inaudible voice, whimpered, "The new work'us, please, if father don't come back."

"Come back!" observed Miss Twinch—"where is he gone?"

"Run away on Friday, please."

There had been reports in the village of the absconding of the paternal Collier, in whose breast the attractions of the "Fox under the Hill" had long superseded the domestic affections.

"I wish your cold would run away, too," replied Miss Twinch. "There—never mind—go and tell Mrs. Hunt to look after you."

Mrs. Hunt was the cook, and a good-hearted woman, who often put by attractive scraps for the children, which were not likely to be asked for again in the parlour. So Jane Collier required no further directions—she was too glad to avoid the probability of Miss Twinch looking after her herself. For the agony endured, according to popular illustrations, by the devil, when St. Dunstan had him by the nose, was but light compared to the tortures undergone by the children as they writhed under Miss Twinch's handkerchief. The only parallel the village offered to their sufferings was found at the farrier's, where the noses of restive horses were put in a twitch, to be numbed for half-an-hour afterwards.

"Harriet Stiles," said Miss Twinch, when Jane Collier

had been banished—"Harriet Stiles, what does A stand for? How dare you look at the picture?"

Harriet Stiles' eyes darted away directly.

"Now, quick; what does A stand for?"

"Monkey," faltered the child, retaining the image of the popular animal that accompanied the letter.

"*Ape!*" exclaimed Miss Twinch, in loud and angry tones, "Now, again; what does F stand for? Come—quick!"

"Mr. Merriman," at last replied Harriet Stiles, in the same imaginative manner.

"*Fool!*" cried Miss Twinch, correcting her again in the loudest tones.

On this, Harriet Stiles, believing that the epithets were applied to herself, went off into a screaming fit, for which she was slapped on the back, until it stopped through her being choked. In the middle of all this, Annie and Philip entered the room.

"Silence!" cried Miss Twinch, ringing a small bell, which produced a temporary lull. "Ah! Mr. Hammond—I hope you are quite well. So you have come to see us again, for a little change?"

Before Miss Twinch concluded, she recollected the circumstances under which Philip had come over, and very properly assumed a melancholy expression. The young man returned the greeting. Annie slightly blushed; and the children, awed by strange visitors, sat round the room and stared, in deep silence, holding tight on by the edge of the form.

"Children," said Miss Twinch, "I have no doubt but that this gentleman will be so kind as to beg a half holiday for you, to celebrate his return to his native land from France. Elder Humphreys, where is France?"

"France—a country of Europe; capital——" Here the child stopped short, and shuffled on the form.

"Well," said Miss Twinch, "come—you know. Think; where does the plaster come from?"

"Please, from Dr. White's, with an order," was the tremulous reply.

"Nonsense!" cried Miss Twinch, very angry. "What did I tell you. P, eh? P—Par—come, what is it?"

"Paregoric!" answered the girl, still clinging to the doctor's shop, in desperation.

"Go away!" exclaimed the lady, with wrath. "I should be ashamed of such ignorance, if I was a pupil."

"Paris is the capital of France, please 'm," said a thin, eager child, with large eyes, and a mind as sharp as her elbows.

"Good girl, Patience Pitt," said Miss Twinch, assuaged greatly. "This gentleman," she continued, "has asked for your holiday. He has just returned from the sea, of which you have read. Here is a beautiful little story for all of you about the sea; showing how that bold, impudent, and wicked girl, Lucy Baldwin, ran away from her friends and home with a bad soldier, and was drowned at last in a storm."

Miss Twinch here gave one of the small works (at fourpence a dozen for distribution) to each child; and informing them that they would be examined upon the texts it contained the next day, dismissed them in a body, and opened the windows.

"And so you have come back, Mr. Hammond," said Miss Twinch, when the school had departed. "Ah! there have been great changes—great changes every way, since you left."

"There have, indeed," replied Philip; "and nowhere greater than in our own little circle."

"You must thank Miss Twinch for her exceeding kindness to me, Philip," said Annie, "and at a time when I had no friend, as I thought, near me."

"Not a word, Miss Maitland," replied the lady. "Now I will not have one single word. We did all we could, although it was but little; and we are delighted to see Mr. Hammond back again."

This was true; for Miss Twinch thought at the same time of Mr. Page, and how he could not well pay any more attention to Annie, for Philip had returned.

"But come," she continued, "you must need some refreshment. My father and sister have gone over to Dibblethorp, but will soon return, and you must see them. You must take us quite in the rough. I really do not know if we have a crumb in the house; but I dare say Mrs. Hunt can find something."

Miss Twinch was pretty sharp, though, in the matter of what went out—she had artful imperceptible methods of marking the joints, and would put minute dots of tallow out-

side the bottles, to see if their contents diminished. And nothing was ever wanted anywhere, even for cruets, without much trouble in finding misplaced keys. Possibly, in this latter case, the care was superfluous, since, although very well in their way, mustard and vinegar are not tempting refreshments by themselves, nor at all calculated to induce surreptitious consumption. But her greatest care and caution was expended on the four-and-a-half gallon tub of beer, which came in, at certain periods, from the brewer. Whether it went or not, she always had an idea that evaporation on a large scale was constantly going on; and no complicated taps or keys ever invented reassured her. For once, when she had procured a tap—so very cleverly contrived that it was always out of order, and being turned could not be got back again, or, when the key was lost, was never more of use—and had gone calmly to sleep in the possession of such a treasure, she was still doomed to be deceived. For the beer had sunk faster than ever, making all allowances for waste; and it was not until long after that it became apparent how wicked Whackey Clark, being engaged to pile some coals, had knocked out the vent-peg and introduced a tobacco-pipe, whereby he had abstracted successive pints; and this breach of trust confirmed Miss Twinch in the opinion that everybody about her stole everything, in which belief she continued until her dying day.

The refreshments were laid in the outer parlour, as soon as the children had cleared off. There was a cheese so hollowed out that it might have made a Jack-o'-lantern, upon emergency; and all that remained of a duck after its legs, wings, and breast had been eaten; but what it wanted in flesh was made up for with lots of parsley. There was also a jug of beer, and a black bottle recorked.

"I am afraid you won't like our beer, Mr. Hammond," said Miss Twinch. "It is home-brewed, but what they call hard; for my part I prefer it hard, but tastes differ. Let me prepare a little for you."

The preparation of hard table-beer did not sound promising. Philip was so much occupied, though, with Annie, that he would have relished anything.

Miss Twinch proceeded to take a small portion of white powder from a folded paper stuck into a card-rack on the

mantel-piece, and stir it into a tumbler of the domestic beverage in question. It foamed immediately, and looked very potent and promising; but upon being tasted, reminded one of equal parts of weak pale ale and soap-suds mixed together. Philip was, however, very polite. He tasted a little, made a slight grimace, and called it "pleasant." And then Miss Twinch, trying to get a flake of cheese from the inside of the lantern, pushed the knife through the rind, and so was driven recklessly to destroy it.

"My brother is a connoisseur in cheese," she said, "and you will find this excellent grated. It improves the flavour amazingly to grate it. We are great graters of cheese, Miss Maitland,—are we not?"

Miss Twinch looked quite festive at Annie, as she recalled these epicurean propensities; and then produced a trifle from Tunbridge, made like the Pavilion, at Brighton, in which a grater was cunningly hidden. On this, she began to shred the cheese.

Philip ate and drank everything very tractably, even to the contents of the bottle, which had a round "O" inked on the cork, and which, therefore, being first called "Cape Madeira," turned out eventually to be Ginger, and this was quite enough to please Miss Twinch; who, however, in all attention to her guests, would not leave them to themselves, but even, when they proposed a walk in the garden, would come with them to show them her vegetable marrow, and also her slipped geraniums, each of which had its appropriate legend.

But the hour came for Philip to depart by the train; and the walk to the station was all that he could get with Annie unaccompanied. What was then said was so much more interesting to themselves than to anybody else, that it need not be repeated. All that concerns us to know is, that he spoke much of what Mr. Wyndham Flitter was about to do for him—of the interest that gentleman took in his affairs, and of the bright, although certainly indefinite prospects, that were opening before him in London, by means of his friend's promised influence and introductions.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. WYNDHAM FLITTER INTRODUCES PHILIP INTO GOOD SOCIETY.

A DAY or two after the events of the last chapter, Mr. Wyndham Flitter was at dinner in an eating-house, situated in one of the mouldy streets that encircle Leicester Square. A plate turned down on the table, at his side, and his constant glance at the clock, showed that he expected another person.

It was not a very elaborate meal upon this occasion, but consisted of a few slices of animal fibre, which had the singular property of passing for any especial meat demanded, by a small change in the sauce or gravy. Thus, with onion stuffing, it was called pork; with a brown gravy and scraps of horseradish, it turned to beef; obscured by capers and melted butter, it passed for boiled mutton; and, by further varying its "trimmings" to greens, carrots, peas-pudding, bacon, or currant jelly, its combinations were marvellously increased.

But whatever it was, Mr. Wyndham Flitter had a high opinion of its nutritive qualities, and ate it with great relish, as he studied the newspaper, doubled up so as to stand upon its two ends before him. His reading was at length interrupted by the arrival of Philip Hammond, who came and sat down in the box with him. The young man was in evening dress, and Mr. Flitter also betrayed signs of having paid greater attention to his toilet even than was his wont.

"Ah! Hammond!" he said, familiarly, as he recognised his friend, "you are tolerably punctual. That's the way to succeed; and most extensively got up. By Jove, sir, it's tremendous! What will you take?"

"Oh, anything!" replied Philip, carelessly—"anything that's not expensive."

"You can't ruin yourself here," replied Mr. Wyndham Flitter. "You could have whitebait and venison for a shilling. I like the place, though, independent of all economy—one studies character so well. The preponderance of garlic

in the pastry is the only thing objectionable. Harriett, what is in best cut?"

This question was addressed to a clever woman, who was carrying a number of plates at once, balancing them as cunning jugglers do the hand-basins, and always recollecting by whom every individual one had been ordered.

Harriett suggested roast beef, which being agreed upon, a portion of the same joint that Mr. Flitter was discussing as haunch of mutton, soon made its appearance. And flanked by a pint of stout, pulled sharp to make its head like a cauliflower, and two potatoes in their skins, Philip "saw his dinner," as people are wont to observe.

And a very foolish observation it is—a mere bait thrown out to catch a polite answer, such as, "And very nice, too," or, "I'm sure it can't be better," or some other fiddle-faddle reply. And, besides, in such cases, you never do see your dinner; for there is always something to come afterwards, which you are to suppose to be beneath notice, as a matter of usual occurrence.

"I have studied eating-houses for many years," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter, as he finished his meat, and made an inspection of how he stood as regarded crust, in anticipation of cheese, "but I cannot understand them yet."

"No?" asked Philip.

"No," responded Mr. Flitter. "First, I cannot make out where all the kidneys come from. They are not like joints of ox-tail, you know. Neither can you make them out of anything, like sausages; and they won't keep for ever, like coffee-house eggs, or pickled walnuts; nor use over again, like fowl's bones in a fricassee. It's very odd. All the sheep in London couldn't supply the Cyder Cellars, alone, to say nothing of everywhere else. It's as wonderful as where Champagne comes from."

Philip could not offer any solution to the puzzle. His London life was not sufficiently matured. So he merely bowed as Mr. Flitter went on:—

"And then, why do they bring potatoes in their jackets: only to make you miserable, and break them all to pieces in trying to peel them? And why, when meat is so underdone as to be almost raw, do they tell you that it is only 'the gravy' in it? How do they cook their joints so as to have brown for every body? Where does all the fat come from?

How do they halve fowls into three? All great questions, sir—problems never to be solved."

Their meal being ended, Mr. Wyndham Flitter proposed that they should go in a cab to their destination; and bringing down one flying, as he termed it, they entered.

"They must make a great deal of money at these houses," observed Philip.

"They do," replied Mr. Wyndham Flitter. "But I know a place where there is a tavern, only kept open for the amusement of the landlord."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; quite a romance. I will tell it to you. I was one day coming westward from the Bank, where I had been to receive my dividends, when I saw a tavern, with the name of which I was not familiar, so I determined to dine there."

"Only because you did not know it?" asked Philip.

"Just so," returned Mr. Flitter. "I often take that whim in my head, to go where I do not know the place, or rather where I am not known."

He spoke truth: he very often did.

"Well, I entered the passage, which led to it, as often happens, through some house. I went on, and on, and on, until I began to think of emerging in Thames-street, or coming out, as the passage descended all the way, from some secret Tunnel under the Thames, at Bankside. I left the busy hum of men, and the ceaseless rumble of vehicles in the Poultry far behind me, and at last reached a vast coffee-room —a black and ghastly place, lighted by a few meagre gas-lamps, and adorned with immense sombre pictures, nearly as big as the cartoons at Hampton Court."

"How strange!" observed Philip.

"Was it not? The echoing of my footsteps called forth a spectral, grimy waiter, who was cleaning unused spoons in a dark recess. He glared at me with surprise, and mechanically pointed to a box, in which a table was set out; and placed a bill of fare before me."

"Oh, they had got something to eat, then?"

"Listen. The bill of fare had been written long, long ago; the hand that penned it had probably passed away from the earth many years. I asked for fish; there was none ready, but the phantom waiter would get some. I demanded

harricoed mutton; the spectre could not recommend it. I avowed my liking for hashed calf's head; the last of it had been eaten. The last! it must have been in the middle ages, when the 'prentices satisfied their hunger after "evil May day." At last, I ventured to inquire respecting the potatoes; I was told I could have them if I pleased to wait whilst they were boiled! I looked at the cruets; the mustard had long formed itself into a tawney crust round the glass; the vinegar had evaporated altogether; there were only a few huge grains of pepper at the bottom of the castor; and the salt had hardened into a block, like alabaster. That was enough."

"And what did you do?"

"I rose and fled precipitately. I heard a yell of despair burst from the waiter's lips as I left, which rang in my ears until I once more emerged into the Poultry, knocking several people under an omnibus that was passing, in my rush. I never went near that fearful place again."

By the time the narration was finished, they had arrived at their destination.

"And now," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter, "I shall have the pleasure of introducing you to my friends the Wracketts. You will meet a tip-top circle, I can assure you. Have you got a shilling for the cab? I have no change."

Philip gave the coin, which appeared to dissatisfy the cabman.

"Nonsense! what are you talking about," said Mr. Flitter as he entered the house. "I question whether it is not eightpence. Very well, summons me. There—shut the door!"

They entered the house, or rather the lodgings of that eligible pair, situated in one of those would-be genteel—a good word for the purpose, though an odious one in general—genteel streets that hang "Manchester Square" to their names for pearances.

It was the particular evening on which Mrs. Wracketts (for at such times her husband did not appear so prominently) "received" her friends; and if the adjective verb "to receive" be considered in its dictionary sense, "to take in," Mrs. Wracketts certainly did so to the fullest extent.

A queer party composed these receptions. There were young men, old from depth; and old men, young from

frivolity. There were also many foreigners—dark, hawk looking fellows, such as one sees hanging about the West-end billiard-rooms and the stage-door of the opera—that class we meet so very often about the Haymarket, and so very seldom in private circles.

They had unshorn beards and prison heads of hair—occasionally mustachioes—and rarely shirt collars. Their stocks of satin were long, and their stocks of shirts proportionately short. Their coat collars were as narrow as they themselves were deep. The great aim of their toilet appeared to be to hide every morsel of linen; their boots were delicate, but capable of great repair, and occasionally turned up at the toes, effecting a neat compromise between the pointed shoe of the middle ages and the modern Wellington, which terrible name the foreign gentlemen did not object to use, because, as they said, it had reference to what was trodden under foot.

There was not a darker enigma unsolved in London than the question how these people lived, in common with their compatriot professionals. They came over in shoals with the spring, and never left until the autumn. They evidently brought no money with them, usually leaving their country from destitution, and they certainly took none away. But still they existed, and still ordinary thinkers were puzzled to tell from what possible source their means of subsistence were derived.

Mrs. Wracketts at these *réunions* always scraped together, in addition, all the wonderful people who would come, without the slightest regard to character or position, so long as their names were at all common property. There were authoresses, who wrote poetry for nothing in fashion-books; and vocal *artistes*, whose names sometimes crept by chance into the programmes of the Hanover-square rooms, and who sang whenever they were asked, and very often when they were not, in the frantic hope of getting pupils, or disposing of tickets when their concert came round in the spring. The authors who took the lead in fashion-books and magazines that did not pay for contributions talked wonderfully; at least, so the old ladies used to think, who listened to them through their ear-cornets. With them, all the popular writers had written themselves out; and all the great men of the literary world were those

with whom the world in general was least acquainted. Copies of their works used to lie about on the tables; and the mistress of the house was dimly fictioned as being the only person who had ever read them. And this she did, because, according to custom, the authors would be sure to ask her how she liked such and such a part.

But, many as there were at Mrs. Wracketts', you might divide them into two parties—the pigeoners and the pigeoned, with a medium set of auxiliaries to either class of guests.

Philip was presented by Mr. Wyndham Flitter to Mrs. Wracketts, and the lady forthwith turned her whole attention to him.

"It is very kind of you to come," she said, in her most captivating accent. "I have heard so much of you from Mr. Flitter. And you speak French so beautifully, too, he says. We shall be very good friends—eh?"

She took Philip by the hand, with the slightest pressure in the world, and smiled at him most bewitchingly. A thrill pervaded him from the extremities of his fingers, and then back again.

"Do you play cards?" she asked.

"No; I know nothing about them," said Philip, with a good-tempered laugh. "I am very stupid. I don't think I could tell a club from a spade for certain."

"Do just as you please," replied Léonie—"only make yourself quite at home. That is the only condition on which I shall receive you as a friend. I have acquaintances and *intimes*, and friends. You must be a friend."

Speaking in a low soft voice, and with another gentle pressure of his hand, she turned away; and Philip, for the first time, looked around him.

All were employed—playing, flirting, and conversing. Mr. Wyndham Flitter, who looked as though he had walked right out of a tailor's show-picture, lounged about the rooms, and talked to everybody whether he knew them or not; and brought in weak refreshment from the smallest apartment at the end of the *suite* it was possible to conceive, which men would have made into a boot-room, but which Mrs. Wracketts called her boudoir. This was cheaply arranged with an eye to artistic effect. Some sixpenny images were stuck about, setting off some Lowther Arcade china; and the little side

Mrs Wrackets receives her friends

table was covered with "fashionable litter"—taper candlesticks never lighted; useless penholders of cheap enamel; square blocks of polished stone, said to be bits of the rock of Gibraltar; a box to hold nothing made of seals and sealing-wax; and a small long basket, in which were knitting needles, shreds of coloured worsted, and a half-finished scrap of canvas, intended eventually for a mat, but which had remained as it then was to the extent of the memory of the oldest resident housemaid. There was also a rickety old carved chair put in a corner for an unstrung guitar to lie upon, which it did always, for the look of the thing.

In a room, between the principal apartment and this boudoir, lighted by a new camphine lamp, which was gradually covering everybody with small black tadpole-looking atoms that rained down from the ceiling, Mr. Spooner and Mr. Wracketts were at cards. The latter gentleman was giving the other his "revenge," which on this occasion was for paying for the dinner at Long's, besides losing a large sum to the lady. The vengeance, in the present instance, did not appear likely to turn out very satisfactory to Mr. Spooner; but he felt so delighted at the continual attentions of the hostess, and the eminent persons he was every minute introduced to, that the money was a mere nothing. He looked upon what he lost as sums excellently laid out, in being taught first-rate knowledge of the world, and fast London life.

Wracketts foresaw that, properly managed, Mr. Spooner would be a pump to supply his coffers with a constant stream of small sums for some time to come. So at last he said—

"By Jove, the king in my hand again! What ill luck you have. I will not play any more. It is downright robbery!"

"Oh, no, returned Mr. Spooner, "only a little freak of fortune. I'll turn my chair—there."

"Well, there is one comfort," Wracketts went on, "bad luck at cards, you know, good luck in marriage; and *vice versâ*. I never knew the old saw wrong."

"It don't apply in your own case," said Mr. Spooner. "You always win, and your wife is—but I wont pay compliments."

"The king again, as I'm a living man!" exclaimed Wracketts. "No, no; this shall not go on; besides," he

added, throwing up his cards, "my hands are quite dirty. I never will have another lamp from that shop again."

As the present one had not yet been paid for, nor was it likely to be, there was some probability in what Mr. Wracketts said.

"We will have our game out another time," he continued, "when the fates are not so much against you. Ah! Mrs. Wracketts is going to sing. Now—really—don't let me detain you. You are, I know, so fond of music."

Mr. Spooner rose and went into the larger room, where the guitar was being tuned, and the lady was just going to sing a duet with a foreign gentleman who had another guitar. The foreign gentleman was called Monsieur Polpette. He had mustachioes and whiskers; the former went on by means of two little springs invisibly attached to his nose; the latter were fixed by artist's glue, and were continued to his wig, which was dark and curly, and of that peculiarly-to-be-detected style worn by all gentlemen struggling to appear juvenile—parted high up and covering the ears. He rouged also, and carried things inside his cheeks to plump them. But he had beautiful teeth—terro-metallic; and the legs of his trousers and back of his coat were padded to perfection.

The duet that these two sang was something about the sun of their Brittany, Mrs. Wracketts' eyes floating more liquidly and languidly than ever, as she looked at Mr. Spooner and the foreign gentleman's being turned up in the manner popularly assigned to ducks on the point of dissolution when the atmosphere is surcharged with electric fluid. But at one point, catching sight of Mr. Spooner, he looked at him like a demon.

"I say, Flitter," said Mr. Spooner, in a low tone, to his friend. "What do you think? That's the foreigner we are going to unearth to-night at my rooms, when we leave here. You will come with us."

"I shall be delighted," said the other; "only don't let Polpette recognise me till it's over—that's all. It would not be pleasant, you know. And I'll tell you what! I can bring a capital fellow with me—that young Hammond."

"Oh! is he anything? He don't look it," replied Mr Spooner.

Mr. Spooner had noticed Léonie's warmth to the new

guest, and accordingly did not think much of him. When one has a rival, it is extraordinary what a poor opinion is entertained of his capacities.

"You'll be delighted with him," said Mr. Flitter.

The song continued, and whilst it was going on, Mr. Flitter turned away with Mr. Wracketts into the boudoir.

"I calculate upon you to help me," said the former worthy. "I have introduced him to you as soon as I could, and you must sew him up as quickly as you can. I am sure of the property; and the instant I am married the money shall be yours."

"But suppose you are *not* married," said Wracketts.

"Oh! there is not a doubt about it. I believe, at present, that the girl may care for him; but we can soon upset that; Léonie must take him in hand. If she manages him as well as she does the muff in the next room, our fortune is made."

"And when will the fun begin?"

"As soon as Sherrard and I have arranged what he is to do. Hush! the song is over. Mum!"

Mr. Wyndham Flitter put his finger to his lips, and Mr. Wracketts nodded with a knowing expression in return. They evidently understood one another very well. They had just finished speaking when Mr. Spooner came in towards them.

"Well, I must wish you good night," he said; "I am very sorry to go, but I have got another appointment."

"Nonsense! pooh!" replied Wracketts; "we can't let you off yet."

"Yes, I really must," returned Mr. Spooner. "A most curious thing has happened. Hush! you mustn't tell anybody. But that foreign gentleman——"

"Well; what of him?"

"Why, he lives under me, and don't pay his rent."

"Oh! impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Wracketts and Mr. Wyndham Flitter, both at once, looking at each other.

"It is true," said Mr. Spooner, "and my landlord can't get rid of him, so he has given me permission to try; and I have asked one or two men who were with me at Oxford to come and help me."

"To-night?"

"Yes. I ought not to have been here, only Mrs. Wracketts was so pressing. I really must go. I have had a delightful evening, I'm sure, and am much obliged to you for it. I will send you that little matter to-morrow."

This last being an allusion to a cheque, Mr. Wracketts said:—

"My dear fellow; don't think about that. I am really ashamed to take it. Good night—good night."

He shook his hand so warmly—so very like a true friend's grasp!

"Hammond," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter to Philip, "I must tear you away."

"So soon!" exclaimed Philip, already hit somewhat hard by Léonie's attractions.

"There is some more fun up," said the other. "Stop—Tiddy, this is my friend Hammond. Mr. Hammond, Mr. Spooner. You will get tremendously intimate, I know."

Mr. Tidd Spooner bowed gravely to Philip; and then Mr. Wyndham Flitter pushed them both out of the room, and the next minute had one on each arm, progressing towards Mr. Spooner's lodgings.

CHAPTER XIV.

PHILIP SEES MORE LIFE.

When they got to Mr. Spooner's rooms, they found four or five young men assembled.

The absence of the host did not appear to have put them out much. Under the care of West, they had made themselves tolerably comfortable, with a potted game-pie, a large dish of oysters, pale ale, and grog, preferring the bed-room to the sitting room, because they could lie on their backs on the bed, with their feet cocked up at a most uncomfortable angle above their heads, against the four-posts, and smoke cigars. Three were thus disposed; and the other two were amusing themselves by blowing out the candles with a double-barrelled gun and percussion caps.

"Here he is at last," said one of the men on the bed. "Why, Tiddy, old fellow, we thought you had sold us."

"Not likely," replied Mr. Spooner, as he threw down his coat.

"Won't you introduce me?" asked Philip of his friend, in an undertone.

'No—it's not the thing—never done at the universities. Talk to all the men just as if you knew them—that's all. Make yourself at home."

The gentleman on the bed who had before spoken was called Willy Sprott. He was a famous fellow, but had been a little too lively for his college; and having painted one of the nude statues about it like a jockey, in a striped jacket and top-boots—on the eve of some grand solemnization, and before there was time to remedy the evil—had been requested tc leave the college of his own accord, that he might not experience a harsher mode of being got rid of.

"Are you sure of your game to-night?" asked Willy.

"Cock," replied Mr. Spooner; "such a curious thing. I and my friend met him at a party, this very night."

"Poor devil!" said Sprott, "what a deal of fun we have had out of him. Do you remember when he began to play the guitar, what a twanging row he used to be always making under us?"

"To be sure," said Spooner, "and you brought your post-horn to accompany him——"

"With an obligato of two notes," added Sprott; "not very musical, but I rather flatter myself uncommonly well sustained."

"And when he sent up to say you rather put him out, don't you remember you returned your respects, and said it was a most singular coincidence, but that was exactly the message you were going to send to him by West."

"And when we filled his slippers with the heads of the prawns——"

"And screwed his boots to the floor, through the heels, with coffin screws that wouldn't turn the other way——"

"And filled his umbrella with black beetles——"

"And locked up the cat and puppy in his wardrobe, and ost the key."

"Oh! I recollect," said Willy

From this it appeared that the foreign gentleman had long been the object of Mr. Spooner's fun, or rather Mr. Sprott's, for the former gentleman had not much of that commodity, but was very good at following. It was supposed to have been Willy who sent the hapless alien the small frog in the letter, not prepaid; the more so as there was proof positive that he had given sixpence to a boy of imperfect wardrobe, to collect a few of those amphibia in a blacking bottle from a pond at Bayswater, this being a joke perfectly allowable to be played with foreign gentlemen generally. For the million, and Sprott was one of them, look upon all Frenchmen as eaters of frogs, upon which they subsist for cheapness, never having any money—an idea which any one who may be rash enough to order a dish for himself at Vefour's, or the Rocher de Cancale, will easily prove to be a fiction.

Once, also, when the foreign gentleman stayed out late, they hid his lucifers: and they invented still more cruel inflictions upon him; for at another time, when he was expected home, they put a lot of gunpowder on the step, carrying it under the door in a train, and then, having bolted the latch so that it would not move, they actually blew up poor M. Polpette, whilst he was fumbling at the keyhole, having kept watch for him, with a bit of incandescent German tinder. But this was not all: a policeman, seeing the flash, of course imagined that it was the foreign gentleman's own work, he having a design upon the house, after some French infernal-machine fashion, and immediately took him off violently to the station-house, from which Mr. Spooner nobly got the landlord to bail him out; so that it was wonderful how the foreign gentleman stayed in the house under such a system of persecution. Mr. Spooner had, however, half accounted for it: he owed too much to leave.

Conversation went on for a little time, until the return of the victim was signalled by West, who had been on the look-out. They gave him time to undress, as they supposed, and then called upon Willy for a song, upon which he got off the bed, and went through the facetious experiment of pitching the key with a silver fork, common to jocular melodists; after which he sang a convivial song, with a chorus about—

"Vive l'amour, cigars and Cognac!"

with several huzzas after it, which afforded great scope for vocalization; and, in addition, an effective accompaniment was formed by knocking the glasses on the table and the feet on the floor, until there was a responsive knocking on the ceiling underneath, which showed that the great end—that of disturbing the foreign gentleman—had been achieved.

The chorus concluded amidst general applause, after which Willy apologised for being hoarse, after the manner of singers in general, he never having been in better voice. Whereat Mr. Wyndham Flitter offered him a jujube, from a concrete mass of transparent parallelopipeds, which he produced from his coat pocket. This Willy declined, saying that all jujubes were made of hair-oil and india-rubber, a statement which excited much diversion.

Philip did not, at first, enter into their conversation; he was a stranger, and was, besides, somewhat bewildered with the scene altogether. But the coldness wore off under the influence of the supper, and he got more and more intimate, taking a lively part in the chat upon the topics started, and when not talking making a capital audience; so that the men soon agreed that he was a very nice fellow—amiable and intelligent, too, considering he had never been at a university.

The gentlemen continued to drink, until Sprott thought it was time to proceed to the second stage of cruelty towards the doomed inmate. From a division of Mr. Spooner's gun-case he produced an enormous cracker, with a number of bangs scarcely to be credited if enumerated, and to procure which he had made an express pilgrimage to the wild regions of Lambeth, where the entire houses of the pyrotechnists sometimes go off of themselves, like rockets. This being fastened to a piece of string, was delivered up to West, who crept silently down and tied it to the foreign gentleman's door. After this, he took the fire-irons in a similar stealthy manner, piling them all up, so that the fall of one might bring down all the rest—which is an attribute peculiar to fire-irons, however they may be placed—and then, carefully strewing the passage with the deep oyster-shells, sharp edges uppermost, he lighted the cracker, and returned upstairs, where the gentlemen had assembled to await the result, clustering like bees upon the balusters.

They watched with nervous anxiety the tiny red spark, as

it crept round the twisted end of the cracker, whispering, "Now it's out," "No," "Yes," "All right," until suddenly the powder caught, and a sharp bounce that threatened to blow the door in, made the very house tremble. Then came another, almost before the echo of the first had arisen, and another, and another, until the door suddenly opened. Down went all the fire-irons immediately into the room, and on the bare feet of the foreign gentleman, who rushed out, looking as Don Quixote might have done, in a *robe-de-chambre* made of old bed-curtains. But his first steps upon the oyster-shells elicited an expression of amazing bodily torture, which gave Mr. Spooner and his friends time enough to get back to their room and assume an appearance of solemn conversation, before the other rushed up stairs, and entered it.

"Monsieur Spoonare!" he cried; "bah! vous êtes un polisson! vous et vos amis; canaille—br-r-rigands—voleurs!"

Mr. Wyndham Flitter turned his face to the wall, and was not recognised. Mr. Sprott rose, and said, mildly, as he passed a bottle towards him—

"Certainly, monsieur, I don't speak French, but anything we have here is at your service. I can recommend the Hollands."

"Mais, c'est infâme!" continued the foreign gentleman. "C'est le dernier soir que je reste dans cette maison. J'appelerai le *polissman.*"

"Oui, monsieur," replied Mr. Sprott, gently pushing the sugar-basin towards the intruder; "as much as you like. We have plenty more—indeed we have."

The foreign gentleman screamed with rage, and vanished back to his apartment, swearing, "*Crée mille tonnerres du diable!*" all the way. And then Mr. Wyndham Flitter thought that at a future occasion he might turn the affair to his own advantage, and silently decided upon his own plans accordingly.

CHAPTER XV.

MARGARET SHERRARD

A GLOOMY and threatening twilight had followed a sultry day; and at length a storm burst with violence over London when night drew nigh.

People knew it was coming; for the lightning had played about the horizon ever since dusk, and the sullen murmur of the heavens had become louder and more continuous, until the large spots of rain fell audibly on the pavement, and drove them home. And then the storm came on in all its might. The earth appeared to tremble at the thunder, as it clattered with deafening reverberations through the wild heavens. Each instant, the spires and chimneys were thrown out, more clearly than the brightest sunlight could have shown their outline, against the dazzling sky; and the bursting clouds poured down almost in cataracts, whilst the watercourses leaped and raged like torrents, as they rushed down the declivities of the streets to whirl through the choking gratings. For the tide of the Thames was, at the same time, still rising, and the angry currents met and battled underground, until the churned and noisome flood was regorged, and spread out into large pools, which poured through every channel that lay open to them, in the lower grounds bordering the river.

In one of the most squalid and narrow of the streets at the waterside, below-bridge, in which the blackened wooden houses appeared to have been built and fitted up entirely from old boats, a candle was burning at a window. Feeble as it was, its rays shone some little distance through the rain; for the only public light was a dull lamp at the end of the lane, which looked as though it had lost all its power, from its protracted fight with the wind-gusts that stormed its broken glass. Hence the little beacon was of some use; for the water had collected until it had covered the footway, and would have been much deeper, but for the cellars into which it was now tumbling.

Within this room, as poorly furnished as might have been guessed from the exterior, there was a woman occupied in taking down some linen from lines that stretched across the apartment. She was nearly forty years of age, and indeed looked some years older, but her face was marked rather with the lines of trouble than of time: and her hair, although partially grey, was still abundant. Handsome she must have been, for her eye was yet bright, and traces of beauty could yet be discovered in her oval countenance. But she had passed all care of personal appearance. Her scanty clothing was huddled on, and pinned about her in any fashion; and as her hair now and then came down, she pushed it back under her cap and pursued her work. And at this she kept steadily on, until the street-door was pushed open—it had no fastening, for the general accommodation of the inmates of the house—and Sherrard came into the room.

The woman looked up towards him. But if she expected a greeting, none came. The Ganger was wet through; and a long splash appeared on the floor as he took off his hat, and flung the water from it.

"What, no fire!" he exclaimed, as he looked towards the grate. "I suppose you thought I was to be brought here in a bandbox, and kept dry. Why don't you light it?"

He spoke the last words so sharply, that the woman started.

"I was going to," she said, "as soon as I had taken your things down. You see the irons are standing there, ready."

The reply to this was a single grunt, as the man twisted a piece of paper, lighted it by the candle, and thrust it into the fire-place.

"It was so hot to day," said the woman.

"I know that," returned Sherrard; "but that is no reason that it should be hot always. Things change."

"They do, indeed," murmured the woman, apparently addressing herself.

"What?" sharply asked the Ganger.

"Nothing," returned the woman, sadly.

"Oh! I thought you said something," he rejoined.

And then, taking off his wet, heavy coat, and throwing it

carelessly into the corner, he lighted his pipe at the fire and began to smoke.

The woman looked at him for a short time, and at last said, "Luke!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Are you going to stay here for a little time?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I may want to be off to-morrow. so my things had better be ready."

"They will be quite ready," answered the woman, calmly. "But when will you take me with you? I have been so ill here. I am sure the country would do me good."

"Now, don't begin that old story again," resumed Sherrard, "or I shall be off at once. Yes, even through all that," he added, as a fresh flash glared through the window, and the peal of thunder that followed it threatened to shake the house about their ears.

"I will close the shutter," said the woman, as she went towards it.

"No, don't do that; I expect somebody presently, and I'm sure he won't find his way if we don't put out some sign."

"Is it a stranger?"

"No; Flitter. He will sleep here, somehow or another. Where's the hammock?"

The woman pointed to a corner, where the article in question lay bundled up.

"Ah, that will do. He don't want to go near his house for a night or two, and we've got something to settle—something that will benefit all of us. I may die a rich man yet."

"And, then, Luke," said the woman, mistrusting as she spoke, "shall we live together again? I do not wish to be any tie upon you—God knows I never have been; but it is so wretched to be always left alone. Sometimes I do not speak to a soul for days."

"I don't know what you would have," answered Sherrard, as he put away the hand which the woman ventured to place upon his shoulder. "You never told me that you wanted anything, but I allowed it. If you wish for any money now, I can let you have some. Many would give their heads to be in a like position, Margaret."

"Many would have left you—long, long ago," said the woman, gravely.

"Left me! oh! that's it, is it?" exclaimed the Ganger, with a dreary, single laugh. "Well, and suppose you did leave me, what are you to do? Starve—die in a ditch, or be found somewhere at low water. Take my advice, and when you are well off—keep so."

At the last words he drew a flat bottle from his pocket, and took a long draught from it.

"I do not want money," continued Margaret, as we may now call her. "I have never asked you for any, except when I have been perfectly destitute. And yet I think I could have kept myself, had I been free to do as I pleased. As it is, I have lived upon so very little at times, that you would scarcely believe me if I told you, rather than ask you for anything."

"It was your own fault, then," replied Sherrard; "for you might always have had it. What is the use of this constant nagging? You took me with your eyes open. You knew that Emma Maitland had thrown me over, because I was poor, and married old Hammond. Well, I had my triumph there. She left *her* husband; and what came of it? When she died, she wasn't worth a mourner or a tombstone. Do you want to follow her?"

This time the woman made no answer. Her tears were falling fast upon the things she was folding up at the table. Sherrard continued—

"I married you out of pique. I was not to blame. How did I know you were not in the same position? But then, I felt bound to keep you. What else took me away for so long to every part of the globe, until those who had known me from a boy forgot me? What am I doing now? Why have I watched the old woman, who died the other day, but to be well off, at some time or other? And if you had always been, like a dog, at my heels, nothing would have been done at all."

"I am not upbraiding you, Luke," said his companion.

"No," returned Sherrard, taking another draught from his bottle; "you are doing worse—goading, and worrying, and driving me into such corners, that I hardly know where I am. What do you want me to do? Take you back to

Pottleton, I suppose : be recognised, both of us : have the grabs point at us as swindlers : and, perhaps, at last be driven from the village, and the game lost for ever. Bah! Hark! there's some one blundering in the dark. Go, and see who it is."

The woman left the room, but immediately returned, ushering in a mass of wet over-alls, which, being unfastened, proved to be Mr. Wyndham Flitter.

"Wr-r-r-r-r!" he exclaimed, as he threw off his attire; "perhaps you'll send a boat for your friends the next time they come to see you in wet weather. They say the world has been topsy-turvy for a long time: I expect it has just been turned back again, and all the water's tumbling to where it came from."

"You've got an umbrella, too," said Sherrard.

"Yes—took it by mistake from Spooner's rooms. It's a very good one, though—isn't it?"

"Of course, you will return it. Meantime, lend it to the missus here, to go and get our supper. Look here, Margery: two pounds of steaks, some baked potatoes, and tell them to send a couple of pots of porter;—and, stop, you may as well get this pocket pistol filled with brandy; also get some tobacco. Now, sharp's the word, for we're all hungry."

He gave her some money, and then, without a word of reply, the woman threw a shawl over her head and shoulders, took the umbrella, and departed.

"What damned things writs are!" observed Mr. Wyndham Flitter, as he drew up to the fire, and allowed the soles of his boots to steam in the heat.

"Just found that out?" asked the Ganger.

"No, it's an old and rooted prejudice. I've sold them, though! I heard they were looking out for me, night and morning,—so what do you think I've done? I've underlet my rooms to young Hammond,—don't you see? Clear profit, you know. He pays me, and I don't pay Mrs. Docker, because I never mean to go near her again! It's all fair. She has made quite enough of me in her time."

"Well, nobody will find you out here," said Sherrard.

"It's only for a night or so. Where can you put me?"

"We can sling a hammock for you in that corner."

"Ah!—yes!" said Mr. Wyndham Flitter; "a hammock—true. But I don't know whether I exactly understand a

hammock. Aren't you obliged to learn to dance on the tight rope and slack wire before you can sleep in one?"

"You'll sleep," returned the Ganger; "if you can't, you must try Pottleton."

"Oh, I'm not so hard pushed as that," said the other; "only it's best to be on the safe side. But I really want to go to Pottleton. I'm boiling over with notions. I've a scheme to get Spooner into a scrape, and then get him out of it—for a small consideration, of course. I've a scheme to make Pottleton a watering-place——"

"Why, it's miles inland!" said Sherrard.

"All right; but I know of such a pump! with, beyond all conception, the nastiest water any one ever tasted. Then, I've a capital idea for a new periodical;—ah! and that brings me to our own affairs. I've a great notion for young Hammond: I shall give him a berth upon it."

"Can he write?"

"He will, with very little practice. I read two or three things he did for amusement, whilst he was in France, and they really were not so bad. Then, don't you see, we shall be able to keep him in town; whilst, with the anomalous position of a literary man, and the society he is likely to be thrown amongst, he can soon be 'all right.'"

Mr. Wyndham Flitter winked, in a knowing manner, to Sherrard, as he uttered the last words; and the return of the woman with the articles sent for turned the conversation.

The absence of pride was a happy feature in Mr. Flitter's disposition—no less so, though, than his universality of acquirement. In a few minutes, he was kneeling at the fire, superintending the cooking of the steak, whilst the Ganger looked idly on, through the smoke of his pipe, and Margaret was collecting a few dispersed articles of crockery on the table.

"Where did you learn to cook?" asked Sherrard, as he watched his companion turning the meat about upon the bars of the gridiron.

"Off the Nore," said Mr. Flitter, "on board the Lights, after I was so confoundedly let in by the Patent Artificial Flour Company affair, and obliged to creep 'up a tree' for a while."

In common with the class of which he was a type, Mr.

Flitter invariably attributed his difficulties, not to his own somewhat lax notions of credit and monetary transactions, but to certain unjust, not to say wicked, deceptions practised on him by his false friends. In the largeness of his heart, he accepted bills for dishonest acquaintances, who betrayed him; and in the same spirit of philanthropy, he became security for men that he loved as if they were his brothers, who proved utterly unworthy of his fraternal confidence. He had been, more than once, cast into prison, from which he could have walked out any day that he pleased to make certain concessions; but he had always acted on principle, and would do so to his dying day. And he could safely swear that no other man living had been exposed to such persecutions from designing villains; and yet he defied the world to say that he had ever injured any one, in word or deed, which, after all, was a great solace.

"What do you mean by off the Nore?" asked Sherrard.

"A devilish fine situation!" said Mr. Wyndham Flitter. "Talk about fresh air—by heavens! a man feels, after breathing it, as if he did not owe a farthing! I lived in the boat there for a month, out of everybody's way, and fished for flounders, small haddock, and whiting. That was where I learnt cooking. I'll toss a pancake, fry an omelette, poach an egg, grill a bone, or make a sea-pie with anybody;—damn it all! I'd curry the devil, if I got him!"

The steaks were soon done, and put almost red-hot upon a dish; the potatoes were caught up from under the grate, and thrown upon the table; and then Sherrard and Flitter drew their chairs towards it.

"Mrs. S.," said Mr. Flitter, as he saw the woman standing aloof, "you will join us?"

"Thank you, no; I had supper before you came in," she replied.

"Then you had better go to bed," said Sherrard, shortly. "We have business to talk over."

"I shall not interfere with you," she rejoined.

"Go to bed!" cried the Ganger, savagely, as he rose from his seat, and clutched one of the pewter pots. "Go to bed, unless you want this sent after you!"

The woman quailed before him, and shrank towards the door. And a peal of thunder from the dying storm startled

her afresh, as she quitted the apartment, pale and trembling, leaving Mr. Wyndham Flitter and the Ganger alone. But had any one followed her, he would have seen her, watchful and intent, as, with her ear against the wainscot, she caught every word of the others' conversation.

They talked long and vehemently. Sherrard was excited by drink, and spoke carelessly about the affairs at Pottleton; whilst his companion schemed, contrived, and argued all sorts of steps, proper to be taken, to get whatever they could into their own hands. And in this way the greater part of the night passed, until the storm gradually sank into distant growls, as daylight came on, and Mr. Wyndham Flitter, after a series of gymnastic attempts that would have covered him with laurels in the ring at Astley's, contrived to get into his hammock, and keep there, without being shot out on the other side. This accomplished, with his happy power of accommodating himself and his organization to any circumstances in which he might be placed, he was soon asleep.

He awoke late in the morning, and after contriving his toilet, with the assistance of a neighbouring barber, he went to one of the river steamboat piers, where he had appointed to meet Philip Hammond, not caring to venture, just at present, too near his old domicile. The young man was tolerably punctual to the hour named. He gave Mr. Flitter a few letters that had arrived for him, which that gentleman having glanced at, threw into the river, whereby it may be inferred that they were more of those insulting and vexatious communications he had hitherto spoken of. And then, taking Philip's arm, they started off in the direction of one of the small thoroughfares about Lincoln's-inn Fields.

It was a bright morning; and every body seemed in bustling good spirits. The storm of the preceding even had washed the streets quite clean; the air was light and freshened, and the sky was as blue as it could well expect to be, in the face of the million chimneys that pointed towards it. Even in the small back courts and passages through which Mr. Wyndham Flitter preferred to go, the sun contrived to throw down a few beams upon the children and oysters that abounded therein. Philip felt the influence of the fine weather; and he went cheerfully on with his friend.

"We are going," said Mr. Flitter, "to the editor of our new periodical, where you can make your bargain. Don't let

him see you are a novice. Put a good face on the matter, and stick out for a good price—there is plenty of plunder to back it up; and it may turn out a comfortable berth for you."

"But what shall I be expected to do?" asked Philip.

"Light articles," replied Mr. Flitter—"the lighter the better. And don't mind who you go at. The editor will get kicked for it, if anybody. He's paid on purpose—it's his place."

"But what do you mean by 'going at every body?'" asked Philip.

"Oh, hitting them hard—any body that's known—that is to say; but especially those you think are getting on. Because they are sure to have most enemies—don't you see—eh?"

"Oh, I see," said Philip, "you mean the enemies will read it."

"Buy the paper, sir," continued Mr. Flitter—"buy it, not only for themselves, but to send to the object. Nobody is ever attacked in print, but he receives a copy of the paper from every body who does not agree with him. So you see how it increases the circulation. Look here. A is a tolerably popular man; and as popularity is only attained by walking over somebody else's shoulders, B, C, and D, who have formed the steps upon the occasion, are in a rage."

"That I can perfectly understand," said Philip.

"Very well. Consequently, when anything against A appears, B, C, and D, trumpet it all about the world, to support their own abuse. For the case of the man who attacks another publicly, is usually the weak one; and so he thinks the more highly of his allies."

They beguiled the journey with conversation of this kind, until they came to the house of the editor.

It was not exactly the place in which any one not conversant with the literary world would have imagined the person could reside, whose mission was to move the masses, and sway the universe generally. It was a murky house in a dingy street; and a dingy street near Drury-lane. There were one or two bell-pulls on either side of the door, one of which only was dignified with a name-plate, so that the wrong one was sure to be pulled when a call was made upon anybody else. And for this reason, when persons went to

call upon Mr. Scute—that was the editor—they never could find out, under a long time, whether he was at home or not; the inhabitants of the various floors possessing as vague a knowledge of the movements of their neighbours as though they lived in different streets.

The usual fate awaited Mr. Wyndham Flitter and his companion. They rang the wrong bell, of course, and received an impudent answer from the woman who responded to its summons, and whom they had rung down from the third floor, with a sufficient lapse of time, before she got back again, to allow all her family to fall into the fire, or drink from the boiling tea-kettle, or leave red-hot irons upon the linen, or tumble out of window, or promote any more of those accidents which childhood, left to its own devices, so spontaneously indulges in.

The next ring brought a slip-shod girl up the kitchen stairs, who did not know whether Mr. Scute was at home or not, but somewhat furthered their object, by pointing out the real bell. And this being pulled, two small uncombed children peeped over the banisters; and, eventually, a gentleman in a duffle dressing-gown descended.

"Ha! Mr. Wyndham Flitter—good day, sir—good day," he said. "Is this the gentleman you spoke of!"

Mr. Flitter presented Philp to their new acquaintance.

"Come up, sirs—pray, come up," said Mr. Scute. "I am sorry to receive you in this way; but some miscreants of a licensed villain have plundered my home and hearth."

Philip scarcely comprehended the sonorous language of the other; but Mr. Wyndham Flitter whispered to him, as they followed Mr. Scute up stairs:

"Rather an unpleasant occurrence—a seizure for rent. But he has a mind—that man—to fall down before and worship."

"But I have a rod in pickle for the scoundrels," continued Mr. Scute. I think—I *rather* think—"The Cracker" will a few of them inside out."

By this time they had reached Mr. Scute's apartment on the second floor.

"Enter, gentlemen," he said, somewhat theatrically; "enter, and see the desecration that has taken place around my hearth."

The desecration had been simply caused by carrying away everything capable of transportation, in consequence of

which the furniture was now reduced to a borrowed table, and a chair of old cane-work, which, having been ruthlessly broken through, reduced the occupier to the task of sitting, perch-like, upon the front bar of the seat.

The table was covered with letters, papers, play-bills, scattered wafers, and proofs of placards, one or two of which were stuck up against the walls—especially a wood-cut of an enormous cracker, with the effigies of distinguished political and literary individuals struggling in its bends, implying that they would be put to great personal inconvenience when its bangs went off—for Mr. Scute, when he got a little beery, to lean back and admire, through the smoke of his pipe, and think, "And I am the creator of all this!" An empty pewter pot on the table, and a sticky tumbler with a spoon in it, showed that this might possibly have been his late occupation. In fine, the whole apartment had the look of those we find described in bygone novels as the usual residences of poor authors, which by the uninitiated are regarded as comical fictions, but which abound, at this very day, in the literary world of London.

"We shall make a great sensation," said Mr. Scute; "the orders are coming in well from the country, and I have made sure of a famous corps. Banger will write the virtuous-indignation leaders, and Slime will handle the social abuses. And we have a capital fellow for the short bits and paragraphs. You know Wince?"

"Let me see; didn't he get into some awkward mess about an insurance company?"

"Yes, that's him; but it was not his fault: he was very badly treated—a victim, sir—a victim to the scoundrelly laws of this power-ridden country. He's very smart, though."

Folks of his species generally are—they are blades to which the rough grindstone of the world gives, at last, a remarkably keen edge.

'And you, sir," continued Mr. Scute, addressing himself to Philip—"you, I understand, will favour us with light sketches. You have written in that style before, I believe?"

"I have thrown off a few short papers, from time to time," said Philip.

"And very clever ones," added Mr. Wyndham Flitter. "All our friend wants is constant employment—unceasing

work; and the louder the printing press is clattering about his ears, and the devils clamouring at his door for copy, the better. Eh, Hammond?"

Philip acquiesced enthusiastically, so warmly did Mr. Wyndham Flitter deliver these words.

"Three guineas a column—those are our terms," said Mr. Scute; "but we shall improve them with our circulation. You can begin at once."

Three guineas appeared to Philip such a large sum, for simply putting down his ideas upon paper, that he almost felt inclined to say it was too much. But recollecting what Mr. Flitter had said to him, he bowed an acquiescence.

"One thing," said Mr. Flitter: "I think you said it would be essential for Mr. Hammond to remain in town as much as possible."

"Why, yes," replied Mr. Scute. "Just at present, his aid may be suddenly required. It will not put you to any inconvenience."

"By no means," returned Philip; "on the contrary; I wish to be settled."

Preliminaries being thus speedily arranged, Philip and his friend, after some general conversation, withdrew — Mr. Wyndham Flitter to "see some capitalists upon another important affair, at the West End," and Philip to write to Annie, and inform her of his first start in metropolitan life; telling her, at the same time, not to expect him, just yet, at Mr. Twinch's.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS TWINCH'S BEREAVEMENT.

It was now the end of autumn. The fog was heavy in the mornings, as it hung sluggishly about the hills over Pottleton; chilling the sunbeams as they struggled through it, so that the large drops of dew clung all day to the blades of grass. The shrivelled brown leaves, as they fell from the trees, allowed glimpses of distant country to be seen through the skeleton branches; and then, pattering down, lay thick upon

the ground, covering the wet cloggy footpaths through the shaws and copses.

The tops of the noble chesnuts, that had been so glorious in the spring, were now quite bare; except that, here and there, a tawny, ragged leaf fluttered and whirled about in dreary loneliness; and the creepers that reached even to the chimney-tops of the old houses had turned fiery red, striving to make as warm an appearance as they could in the sharp mornings. Smoke curled up from the cottages, and people began to collect wood for the long evenings, and stack it in "cords" in the yard, as the cold nights announced the approach of winter. Otherwise, the season was still and fine—the calm old age of the year, now that the turbulent passions of its spring, and hey-day of its summer-tide had settled down to rest, as it tranquilly awaited its final passing away.

In this lapse of time, however much the steady-going old inhabitants objected to have things altered, it could not happen that the railway would come into Pottleton without some changes, before long, taking place: and so it fell out. The Red Lion, which had hitherto enjoyed all the patronage, began to tremble at the foundation of a new building adjoining the station, meant for an "hotel"—a word hitherto imperfectly understood in Pottleton. Next, the village dealers found out the difference. They had met together, and dined, and made speeches, and drank prosperity to the trade of Pottleton, and gone away beery and self-elevated, thinking "What fellows we are to do things in this style!" But it was their last banquet. Like the Girondins, they only celebrated their fall by their feasting; for when the luggage-shed was put up, and goods were brought from London for next to nothing, the Pottletonians looked more after their own interests than those of the native dealers, and sent large orders up to town accordingly.

The man at "the shop" felt the improvements most. Hitherto he had supplied all the branch retails about the neighbourhood, not merely with the ordinary articles they were licensed to deal in, but even the small dried-up cakes, crockery, brooms, coals, and lollipops, of their general trade. He also dealt in marvellous wines, the likes whereof had never been tasted anywhere, but which did very well for the Pottletonians, who had hitherto believed in his cheap Cape,

and occasionally imbibed his celebrated thirty-shilling old crusted Port, without thinking of any antidote, in the notion that the glowing vineyards of Madeira had supplied the first, and the sunny regions of the Upper Douro the second. And so he reigned at Pottleton, and gave what faded teas, and coffees long since roasted, and Cape—not of Good Hope that any better would follow—he chose. But reverses came. First of all, his favourite young man left his service, taking all the little shops and Saturday old women with him, and opening an establishment directly opposite; where he roasted coffee every day, to the wonder of the Pottletonians, and attracted more boys by his empty sugar-hogsheads than ever the other had been able to accomplish. Then the railway came. Chests of tea—good family Congou, strongly recommended, too—could be had down from London, with the carriage saved over and again, in every pound, from establishments where there were pyramids of every sort in the window, at prices that gave the most lamentable notions of the remuneration of labour and value of land in China. Small casks of sherry, direct from the docks, were also brought by rail, and then bottled at less than the facetious Cape and Port above mentioned. So that lastly, the dealer, finding he was not going to make the fortune of his predecessor, Mr. Wolly, became a confirmed radical—not from any honest political enthusiasm, but because, finding his hopes blighted of attain ing that position he had frequently aspired to, and not seeing the slightest chance of ever doing so, he took to abusing it.

The change, in a measure, operated on all the Pottletonians; but on the whole it did good. For the inhabitants of country places, cooped up in a little world of their own, which they seldom go beyond; intermarrying, and living on traditional or conventional plans of social and domestic economy, become, in time, as it were, mildewed and weak-minded; and if new blood and fresh notions are not infused amongst them, they go out from inanition, like an ill-supplied coke fire.

Property, at the same time, improved in value; and, as wealthy immigrants arrived, fresh features were soon visible in the beautiful valley. Swiss cottages rose on the hill-side, and Doric villas bordered the river. Mr. Wolly found his own tea-caddy residence quite overpowered by the adjacent

buildings that ran up in a night like Aladdin's palace, to the consternation of the native builders, who took a year to construct a pig-sty, having previously occupied several months in thinking about it.

Pottleton Court, which had been long in chancery and unoccupied, was once more inhabited; and, being a very large house, this was a great improvement to the village; so that altogether things looked promising.

About this time, Miss Twinch received a letter one morning from her friend Mrs. Cooze, of London, hoping that now the railway had brought her within such a short distance, so to speak, of town, she would pay a long-promised visit—indeed, she could take no refusal. Mrs. Cooze had been a schoolfellow of Miss Twinch's—a fact which the latter lady constantly circulated, inasmuch as she was a grown-up pupil when Mrs. Cooze came a little girl to the school—and had married Mr. Cooze, of the Customs, after a sojourn, for two different seasons, at a Ramsgate boarding-house, upon the strength of which, Miss Twinch went there for two years after.

There was much to be said for and against the journey. London life, change, and the chance of an advantageous introduction, were great attractions. On the other hand, Miss Martha would have Mr. Page all to herself, with the infant scholars as her powerful allies; and her dear Tip would run the chance of being neglected during her sister's extra occupation, in spite even of Annie's offer to take charge of him. Nobody also could be trusted with the manufacture of the grape wine; and Whacky Clark would steal more than he gathered, if Miss Twinch was not there to stand at the foot of the ladder all the time, and look after him. On such occasions, Whacky usually got rid of his inspectress, by climbing on to frightfully insecure parts of the verandah, until Miss Twinch declared that she could not bear to look at him—it made her blood run cold! It was certainly her duty to stay at Pottleton; but the woman who deliberates is lost—so Miss Twinch, having once made a question of the matter, ended by deciding on going. And she did more: to the anxiety of her sister, and the delight of Mr. Twinch, she determined that Tip should go with her, because she was sure he would be so pleased with London.

Annie promised to take all her duties while she was away; and at last the morning of departure came. It was a touching ceremony. The infant school was visited, and the pupils were affectionately exhorted to diligence in her absence: whilst the two head children were allowed to come to the railway, and see their loved instructress depart, and, by this means shame Harriet Stiles, who, on the day of the opening of the line, when she first saw the locomotive approach, had set up such a scream, that the whole solemnity of the moral chorus was destroyed, and Miss Twinch was advised—loudly and personally, and before all the great folks of the village—by the low vulgar boys, "not to keep pinching of the girl like that, or she'd have the beadle after her!"

Whacky Clark was retained to carry the luggage to the station; and it took him and the maid so long to bring it down from Miss Twinch's room, and stack it on the barrow, that, at a less exciting time, domestic indignation would have been aroused. Then the procession started: first, Whacky and the boxes, with the infant scholars, one on each side, who would keep a hold on the cord, to show that they had an interest in the cortège; then Miss Twinch, looking benignant adieus at the neighbours, and carrying a large muff, for a reason. Next to her walked Annie and Martha—the latter lady bearing the precious Tip, who was directed just like a parcel, for fear of accidents. And lastly came the usual escort of children, who are always ready to accompany any excitement in the country, however small. The servants watched them from the door-step, and Mr. Twinch nodded over the blinds of his office, and then went on with his business.

As they approached the station, Miss Twinch took Tip, and with many kisses tried to force him into the muff she carried. But Tip evidently did not see the process in the same light, for he struggled violently, and scrambled over the outside, and got over Miss Twinch's shoulders, and even behind her bonnet on her neck, crying in a manner that wrung her heart. But as affection, ill requited, sometimes turns suddenly to spite, Miss Twinch seized Tip by his fore-paws, and dragged him into the depths of the muff with a determination that astonished her pet as much as it terrified him.

The reasons for this proceeding were two, arising from the economical mercy that governed most of Miss Twinch's actions. In the first place, dogs had to be paid for, which was an expense that a little pardonable deception might evade; and in the second, when booked, they were consigned to dismal places in the train for the entire journey. So that, by smuggling Tip into the muff, both these evils might be avoided.

"First-class to Dibblethorpe, if you please!" said Miss Twinch, as the man thrust the ticket into the compound coffee-pot and nut-crackers before him, and handed it over.

Miss Twinch took a first-class seat to Dibblethorpe, for appearances; and then got into a second class carriage for London. In the same manner, newly married people start in a carriage-and-four from the breakfast, with two servants, to give folks a notion such will be their constant method of travelling, and then take a post-chaise at the first town, and send their domestics back again by the coach, if there is one. This is not the only false impression of future life made on a wedding day.

Miss Twinch had allowed Tip's nose to peep from the muff, for fear that he would be choked; and all had passed off quietly, when some evil genius directed his attention to the clerk's cat, Smut, who was purring in the window. Between Tip and Smut had long existed an implacable enmity. When he caught her in the cinder-hole of the lamp-house, which was her favourite boudoir, he would keep her there at his pleasure; and she was subject to similar detention if Tip surprised her on the top of a stool; and the more she swore, and arched her back, and dilated generally, the more Tip's excitement burst forth. Sometimes she made a sudden feint, and darted off, with her tail in the air just like a sword, upon which Tip would be after her like a cricket ball, until the two were lost by getting through some small hole in the palings about half the diameter of each of them, and then the result of the chase was never known.

Catching sight of his old enemy, Tip barked immediately.

"You have a dog there, ma'am," said the Clerk.

"Bless me, so I have!" said Miss Twinch, not knowing what to do in the agony of the moment. "But he is a

very little one," she added, as if in exculpation, immediately afterwards.

"Two-and-twopence, if he is going with you, ma'am," said the Clerk. "Branker! here's one dog."

"I can take him with me," half-inquired, half-affirmed Miss Twinch.

"No dogs are allowed in the Company's carriages, ma'am," said the Clerk, adding Tip to the way-bill as the bell rang.

"Where is he going to be put?" asked Miss Twinch, wildly. "Oh, dear! see how piteously he looks at me!" She then continued to the dog, "It's a poor ittle darling man, he says; and ties enough to bake its ittle heart, he says; and toudn't a-bear to leave his ittle mistress, he says."

The expressions attributed to Tip had no effect upon the stern guard, Branker. All that could be done was to put Tip in a locker, under Miss Twinch's seat, whilst Whacky Clark was treated to a twopenny ride in the third class carriage, to go as far as Dibblethorpe and bring back word how he had behaved. Then the guard blew his whistle, and Annie and Miss Martha walked by the side of the train as far as the platform went, nodding all the way; and the last words from all parties, as they finally separated, were, "Write soon!"

The train made such a noise, that no sounds of Tip were heard during the journey to Dibblethorpe, where the Pottleton branch joined the main line; but when they arrived there, the carriages had to be changed. The instant the door of the locker was opened, Tip shot out like a Jack-in-the-box, scared to death, and directly bolted up the embankment, whence he was only recovered by Whacky just as the train to London came up. And this time Miss Twinch's heart was crushed, indeed; for, having seen her pet in a locker already nearly filled with hampers, the doors of which were slammed to with ferocious disregard of her feelings, she could not find a vacant place in the carriage; and was compelled, on the "Now, ma'am, if you please," of the guard, to be thrust hastily into a remote seat, with no more sympathy exhibited towards her, as she afterwards said, than if she had been "so much nothing." She had not nice companions, nor any likely to console her. There was a woman with two

children, one of which she was obliged to nurse, whilst the other amused itself by walking up and down the length of the carriage between the legs of the passengers; two farmers, who compared the state of every field they passed with their own; a livery servant and a lady's maid; a gentleman who smelt of smoke; and a soldier; so that Miss Twinch's heart sank within her; and every time the train stopped, when she distinctly heard the dismal yelp of Tip, followed by angry stamps, and ferocious orders to him to "lay down," from the more irritable passengers, her misery increased.

At last, she could bear the trial no longer, and when the train stopped at the station, where refreshments were to be had, Miss Twinch bounded from her seat like a spinster gazelle, and ran up towards the locker. It had a grating to it, like the Venetian blind of a baby house, through which Tip could be spied, yelping the more wildly, and trying to tear down the bars, as he saw his mistress.

"Did ze naughty dards lock him up, he says!" exclaimed Miss Twinch. "A pitty boy he was! and he shall have something nice, he says!"

To carry out which, Miss Twinch went back to the refreshment room.

She had a little difficulty in getting to the marble counter, for everybody was close up to it, literally engaged in that "struggle for the crust," which we sometimes read about in touching books. It required a strong mind to manage a luncheon at this room, for it was necessary to drink your bottled beer, enumerate what you had eaten, and count your change, all at once. And when, with some gay spirits, the desire, at the same time, to look dreadful things into the eyes of the very pretty girls who served, was predominant, how anything was got, eaten, drunk, or even paid for at all, was marvellous.

Miss Twinch tried in vain ton find an opening; at last, amidst many cross orders, she was enabled to exclaim—

"Milk—a little milk, if you please!"

There was a moment of confusion, and then a pint bottle of stout was put before her.

"That's for me," said a burly man at her side. "Where's a corkscrew?"

The young lady went to get one, as Miss Twinch repeated

her prayer for milk. In the idea that it was for coffee, the cream-jug was handed to her by some civil bystander. At the same instant the bell rang, and the passengers flocked back to the carriages.

"A saucer!" cried Miss Twinch; "a saucer, if you please —quick! and more milk than this. It is for a little dog."

Beginning to understand what was required, one of the pretty young ladies hastily brought a saucer and a little tin can, which she put down before Miss Twinch. That lady tremulously poured some out, losing an equal quantity in her nervous hurry, and was going to the platform, when the engine gave a shrill scream, and the carriages glided one after another past the doorway.

"Stop! stop!" screamed Miss Twinch, as the last guard slung himself up from the platform to his watch-box, and the train went off.

But an unfeeling puff from the engine was the only reply. The last carriage moved away, and from its grated locker a flying glimpse was obtained of Tip struggling to get through bars placed half-an-inch apart, as he, in turn, saw his mistress. The signal-post dropped its arms from a T to a gibbet; and Miss Twinch remained alone!

In the first great shock she did not see the whole of her misery; but as consciousness returned to her paralyzed faculties, the entire truth burst upon her in all its frightful complexity. The direction tied to Tip's collar only conveyed the fact that he was the property of one Miss Twinch, a passenger; but she remembered that it had been written on the back of an address card of some bird and monkey shop in Havre, left behind by Philip with some trifles he had brought over for Annie. It was possible, she thought, that he might be sent on there! Then her luggage was anything but safe. Travelling but seldom, the old directions remained on her boxes, which she thought would be under her eye the whole way; and these all bore her Ramsgate destination of preceding years, to which she expected they would be immediately forwarded. Her cloak, muff, parasol, and umbrella were in the carriage she had left, at the mercy of anybody; there would be nobody to meet her when she got in—if ever she did, for despair had almost crushed her; and the non-

arrival of the letter she had promised to write by that night's post, to show that she had reached town in safety, would the next morning throw her tranquil but distant home into the greatest anxiety. Overwhelmed by her misery, she hurried back to the refreshment room, sank upon the only chair it contained—for the passengers never had time to sit down as they fed—and gave way to her feelings.

The pretty young ladies paid her every attention—enough, had its object been a gentleman, to have driven him wild. They suggested a little water; then a little brandy and water; and, lastly, the least quantity of brandy alone. They said that nothing was ever lost on the line; that Tip and her boxes would both be kept till she arrived; and that there was another train in half-an-hour. And their gentle voices and nice faces had some effect, even upon Miss Twinch, who was so far recovered at the end of a few minutes, as to walk out on the platform and look up and down the line, in some shadowy expectation of seeing Tip left behind; after which she stated her case to the porters, who condoled with her earnestly, and would have liked to have drunk her health, but for a notice against the wall that forbade gratuities.

The next train at length came up, and Miss Twinch was on her way to London. On arriving, she hurried from the carriage,—having told her sad story to the passengers all the way up, and received their advice—asking the first person she encountered if he had seen anything of a dog. The man thought she had better ask the guard, who referred her to the superintendent. He passed her on to the luggage office, the chief of which directed her to the parcels department, but all without success; until an intelligent stoker by chance said there was an unclaimed dog in the engine-shed.

"Are you sure?" asked Miss Twinch, trembling with anxiety.

"Certinly, mum," replied the man. "There was two in the train, and a feller wanted to take 'em both away; but he'd only a ticket for one; so we kept the most wallable till inquiries was made."

"Some villain!" ejaculated Miss Twinch.

"Yes, mum," said the man; "that he was."

It was cheering to find sympathy in the cinder-crusted man,

who looked almost like a human clinker before her. Miss Twinch at once begged him to conduct her to the shed.

A journey over any part of a railway terminus, not expressly devoted to passengers, is one of much toil: and so Miss Twinch found it. She had to make long legs in stepping up and down platforms, and got her feet wedged into the locks of the turntables. She stumbled over the rails, and had to cross frightful chasms, full of cinders and dirty water. She was also obliged to creep between threatening buffers of carriages, and tremble before vague engines, who were running about all sorts of rails, and starting off alone upon unknown errands. But, at last, she arrived at the shed, and followed the man to its extremity, with a beating heart. He led her to a species of cinder-bin; and there she found, not as she had expected, her darling Tip whining and yelping his joy at her approach, but, beyond all exception, the ugliest bull-dog that ever a fighting innkeeper was proud of.

"He's worth a trifle, mum," said the man.

"That my dog!" screamed Miss Twinch, as the plebeian brute showed his teeth, "Oh! there is another—I'm sure there must be; don't tell me there is no other."

"Well, we won't, mum," said the man, touching his hat, "not unless you wishes it. But I'd recommend you to take this one—the other was a reg'lar little whelp."

"No; no whelp," replied Miss Twinch—"the dearest little dog that ever—that ever—" and, not finding any thing apt, she went on: "Are you sure there is no other?"

"No, mum, only old Buster. Ullow, Buster, where are you?"

As the stoker whistled, a blind dog crept out of the fire-hole of a used-up engine, arrayed in a paletôt made of grimy canvass.

"A steam-pipe was turned off upon him by mistake, mum, and he lost his coat—so we made him another, and shunted him into here. Eat any thing, mum, he will—he's uncommon fond of a bit of coke."

Miss Twinch was insensible to the information. Her heart was with Tip, and his acquirements: it was not large enough to hold two dogs at once. She returned sad and lonely to the station, where the discovery of her luggage did

not even tend to raise her spirits—she would sooner have seen Tip. And so, in deep distress, she was packed up in a cab, with her recovered effects, and rattled off to the abode of her friend.

Mrs. Cooze resided in one of those gaunt, dusty houses, with large passages and heavy window-sashes, forming the streets that lead from Soho-square to some complexity of butchers' shops, market-stalls, and short courts, never thoroughly comprehended. It is a dangerous thing to wander in this neighbourhood unadvisedly. Bent upon such a destination you may get into Leicester-square—but you may also, with equal chances, find yourself in strange localities, abounding in old furniture, second-hand books, piping bullfinches, and manufacturers of hitherto unknown, and now but indistinctly-understood, articles of commerce.

These Soho streets have a distinctive feature, apart from other bygone quarters. They are almost entirely inhabited by persons who have allowed time to go on without the least effort to keep up with it. They form a little world by themselves, and live in the past. Everything about them is of the gone-by, and they do not desire a change; hence, their bonnet-shops display the fly-spotted paper patterns of former seasons; their libraries offer old novels and magazines; their upholstery is cumbersome and dark with age. But it is old—not antique: for one style must not be confounded with the other. The natives of Soho have not yet been able to draw the line between the mediæval and the rickety, but incline to the latter. In their furniture, they patronise secretaries, square pianos, knife-cases on sideboards, and round flap-tables; and their notions of daily papers are confused, and far from general.

Mrs. Cooze was, however, in advance of her neighbours, and lived there with her husband because she got a large house at a small rent, not caring for situation. She had great notions of the air, though, and kept plants on the leads at the landing—small, potted bits of stick, dignified by various names, which there was no chance of refuting. She might have called a fuchsia a geranium, or anything else; no one, by its characteristics, could say that it was not. She was a woman of impulse and poetic temperament; said she was thirty; liked society, and admired talent. She also suffered

from depression of spirits, for which she was occasionally compelled to have recourse to stimulants.

Miss Twinch's arrival caused some degree of confusion; for Mrs. Cooze, having given up all idea of seeing her visitor that day, had suddenly changed the dinner of welcome to that of ordinary domestic life, and sat down to it. To speak more clearly, the preserved currant tart had been put by uncut to come up fresh on the morrow; and, for the couple of fowls, had been suddenly substituted some cold boiled beef from the fourpenny luncheon shop, on which Mr. and Mrs. Cooze were regaling when Miss Twinch arrived, with one Palmer's candle in the middle of the table, burning in a large glass shade, to make it look like a lamp. The noise of the cab-wheels gave the alarm, on which the other candle was rapidly lighted, as well as two wax ends, stuck in a pair of black images on the mantel-piece; and a cover hastily put over the cold beef.

"Come in!" cried Mrs. Cooze, joyfully, as she burnt her fingers with the spill, and throwing it unguardedly into the grate, set fire to all the willow shavings, which went off in a puff almost like gun-cotton. "Come in, dear! we were so disappointed when you did not arrive; but never mind—here you are, and there's Mr. Cooze."

Mr. Cooze stood at the table as if he was going to make a speech, smiled graciously, and bowed his head—only his head though—until his chin touched his shirt-pin.

The slight confusion of getting the luggage in, and paying the cabman—when Miss Twinch, being a lady, had not got her money ready, of course, this being one of the circumstances under which her sex make a point of being similarly unprepared, in common with getting out of an omnibus, procuring a second-class ticket in a rush of passengers, and keeping back a string of vehicles at a turnpike whilst they dive into all the corners of their baskets and pockets—this little matter being arranged, Mrs. Cooze said, hurriedly, to the maid, "Tell the cook to put down the fowls again, if the fire is not too low:" and then accompanied Miss Twinch to take off her things; whilst she gave Mr. Cooze a nod, as pregnant with meaning of every description as Lord Burleigh's in "The Critic." That is to say, by the single motion she wished him to understand that, whilst they were gone, he

was to see the table laid again, get out the wine, have the cold beef removed, see that the Palmer's candles would not go out in the middle of dinner—from which disease they frequently suffered—and send out for some more ale.

It was not until all this was over that Mrs. Cooze saw, for the first time, her friend's sorrowing face. We will not so far impeach her gentle woman's nature as to say that, whilst she condoled with Miss Twinch with affectionate sympathy, she inwardly rejoiced at the cause of Tip's non-arrival. But she told his mistress that they would be sure to recover him again, for her butcher had a large connexion amongst people who dealt in dogs, and he should be directly applied to. And after this consolation Miss Twinch and Mrs. Cooze descended to the dining-room.

All that Mrs. Cooze desired had not been accomplished: for Mr. Cooze was still slightly black in the face with tugging at the woody cork of a bottle of Marsala with a pocket corkscrew that hurt his fingers, being also flurried by some ill-management of the Palmer's candle, which had shot off suddenly, and fired its inch that remained against the ceiling, where it stuck. But these were no great matters: and at last they sat down to dinner.

"We have been keeping all our gaiety for you, Letitia," said Mrs. Cooze, "and mean to make you a perfect rake."

"That will 'harrow' her feelings," exclaimed Mr. Cooze, laughing, and rubbing his hands.

The worst thing in Mr. Cooze's character was, that he thought himself a funny man, and would be always making jokes.

Miss Twinch smiled, and said:

"Very good indeed!"

"Now, Septimus!" said Mrs. Cooze, with affectionate upbraiding. "He's just the same, you see," she added, to her friend.

"Just the same," said Miss Twinch.

"What, did you expect to see me anybody else?" asked Mr. Cooze. "Because I'm sorry I'm not, if you did. Let me give you a little more fowl. 'Fair is foul,' you know, and fowl's our fare. Eh? Ha! ha!'"

"We have conspiracies for all sorts of little parties while

you stay with us," said Mrs. Cooze; "and Septimus has been promised a box at the play."

"Better than a box in earnest," said Mr. Cooze. "Come, I think that's not so bad. Oh, we will show you all sorts of things, Miss Letitia, before you perform that singularly evanescent operation popularly known as amputating one's timber."

This was another of Mr. Cooze's attributes. He thought it funny to elaborate common-place sayings into long phrases.

"Now, Septimus," said Mrs. Cooze, again, "you forget that Miss Twinch is not quite used to such conversation. Oh! he's a terrible fellow when I'm not in town!" she continued, to her friend.

Mr. Cooze did not give one the notion of a terrible fellow. But he evidently liked to be thought so.

"Never mind what I am," he said. "Call me what you like, so long as you don't call me too late for dinner—eh? Take a little nutmeg with the custard. Miss Twinch. We are all great, but that's a grater. Eh?"

He handed the nutmeg-grater to her. It was like their own at Pottleton, fashioned after the Pavilion at Brighton, and had been bought at the same time, when the Cooze's were on their wedding tour.

"You know that?" he said. "The Pavilion. What do you think I call it? The wreck of the Royal George. Do you see? Eh? Ha! ha!"

And in conversation of this kind the evening passed; until Miss Twinch, wearied with the events of the day, retired to bed, and dreamt that Tip was restored to her by a deputation of missionaries and infant scholars, who had found him in the Pongo Islands.

CHAPTER XVII.

M. POLPETTE AT HOME.

There is, in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, an infinity of houses, devoted entirely to the habitation of mysterious foreigners, who have, in this quarter of town, established, as it were, a perfect colony; and here enjoy their own customs, cookery, dirt, and domestic economy to the extreme verge allowed by our social habits and observances.

Apart from the regular hotels, which stand boldly forth with their names in blazoned letters, you will find, on close inspection, a number of small establishments shrinking, half-concealed from the casual eye, with the usual reluctance of poverty to attract attention. Thus, the *Hotel de Flandres* may be entirely confined to the second and third floors of an ordinary house, and would be entirely unknown but for its name under one of the bell-pulls: the *Café-Restaurant*—which may almost be regarded as the site of a secret society, known only to a few, without sign or direction—looks upon some back leads, or into a well of brickwork and grimy windows; and the *Pension Bourgeoise* can only be reached by those well acquainted with certain long dark passages and eccentric stairs, bounding a shop in which imprisoned flights of canaries and finches chirp, and twitch, and take galvanic and limited exercise in their model prisons.

At the extreme top of one of these latter establishments—that is to say, over the ordinary garret, and in the pitch of the roof—a room, such as it was, had lately found an occupant in the person of M. Polpette. Its dimensions were necessarily contracted. He was compelled to get upon his bed to open the door, and to lie upon his back to shave so much of his face as he was accustomed to keep in stubble. It was lighted by a few glazed tiles, which in fine weather allowed the sun to shoot down upon his eyes early in the morning, but when covered with snow kept him in total darkness. A door, originally intended as a fire-escape, opened upon the roof, and there the greater part of M. Polpette's system of domestic economy was carried out. An old pigeon-house

formed his kitchen; and an earthenware furnace, something like a flower-pot, with a grating half-way down inside, his cooking range. On the top of a party-wall were a few articles of crockery, and against the door were some candles, hung there to harden, and so burn the longer. There was little fear of these things being stolen. In the first place, they were not worth it; and in the second, the place was very difficult of access. The cats alone invaded it; and as there was never anything for them to eat, and nothing they could carry away, M. Polpette's privacy was undisturbed.

He had a neighbour though. From a similar opening in another roof, a gentleman sometimes showed, when the weather was fine enough to admit of an *al-fresco* pipe. He was also a foreigner, although not a Frenchman; and when they had been lucky enough to get an old copy of the *Constitutionel*, it was to be regretted that no powerful politicians were present to hear the simple means they put forth for the entire regeneration of Europe.

After M. Polpette had left his last lodging so unceremoniously, some little time elapsed before Mr. Wyndham Flitter discovered his habitat, which for certain reasons he was anxious to do. At last, recollecting a shop whereat the Frenchman was in the habit of buying his haricot beans, he applied there, and was by the people directed to the house.

He found M. Polpette preparing his breakfast on the tiles, when, after some trouble, he got there. The foreign gentleman was cooking some eggs over his little charcoal stove, in the saucer of a flower-pot, by a process something between poaching and frying. By his side stood a pint of beer and roll, brought there by some mysterous agency; and hanging from the wall was a slice of butter in a bird-cage. The appearance of M. Polpette at home was not of that fashionable character he assumed in society. His mustachios, whiskers, and wig were in their box: on his head he wore an old velvet cap, and the remains of a once-gay dressing-gown, without any buttons, enveloped him. But this did not surprise Mr. Wyndham Flitter. He appeared to know all about it.

"Bon jour, Polpette!" exclaimed that gentleman, as he put his head through the doorway.

"Ah, c'est vous?" replied the other, after a moment's pause of incertitude; for M. Polpette had been haunted,

"M. Polpette at home."

ever since he left his last abode, by fears of persecuting landlords.

"Don't derange yourself," said Mr. Flitter, turning an oyster barrel, with charcoal in it, topsy-turvy, and sitting down upon it. "Go on; I've breakfasted. Those eggs are scarcely the thing. I don't think you put enough butter in the pan first. They'll stick and burn—'*œufs au gratin*,' instead of '*sur le plat*.'"

"Ah! ce bon Flittare!" said M. Polpette, delighted to find that a great mind could stoop to such trivial considerations; and then he handed his visitor the beer, who just put it to his lips, and returned it: first, because he really did not wish to rob the Frenchman; and, secondly, because he had been making a capital breakfast, beginning with oysters and Chablis, and ending with coffee and Cognac, at Spooner's rooms.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter had an object in thus paying a visit to M. Polpette; indeed, he never did anything without one. But he did not explain it just yet. He laughed and joked with the Frenchman, told him good stories, and talked about his favourite politics, until their conversation became amazingly animated when they were suddenly interrupted.

"Bolbette!" said a voice from a neighbouring skylight; "here ish der newsbabers—der *Zeitung*—zo!"

"Stoff!" cried Mr. Flitter, as some familiar tones fell upon his ear, and he recognised the face of his friend behind the dense fumes of a pipe, that clouded up from the trap. "Well, this is odd! So we've discovered where you hang out, after all!"

"Ya! 'hang out,' zo!" replied his friend; "ver goot vits. 'Hang;' ya, ya—zo."

"Yes—you've deserved it long ago, you old rascal!" said Mr. Flitter, in affectionate abuse. "Well—what's up?"

"Vot's ope! ya: Mr. Shtaudigl—see dare!" the other went on, pointing to a paragraph in the newspaper with his pipe; "Mr. Shtaudigl, vos sing Der Freyschutz with der Kœnig."

"Yes—I know Koenig," replied Mr. Flitter, "plays the cornet-a-piston."

"Bishtons! no!" said Stoff, smoking his pipe furiously to get it alight again. "Vith der King—vot he vos—der real king; ya—zo!"

"Oh, now I have it!" said Mr. Flitter. "Why don't you speak English?"

"Ya! tish difficoold!" returned the Herr. "Ven Mr. Shtaudigl vos play Pertram, he speak pewtiful—zo—ya: goot pye!"

And here Mr. Stoff appeared to be summoned from below, for he rapidly disappeared down the trap, after which voices were long heard in foreign altercation, which is never very subdued.

As soon as he had gone, Mr. Wyndham Flitter unfolded the purport of his visit to M. Polpette. He first painted, in glowing colours, the indignities that the foreign gentleman had met with from the hands of Mr. Spooner; and then alluded to the surprise of certain acquaintances at finding that M. Polpette had allowed the insult to go unnoticed. This, M. Polpette listened to with the expression of several thousand "*tonnerres*" and "*sacr-r-risties*" until Mr. Flitter found he had worked him up to the proper pitch of anger, when he added, speaking always in French, "In a word, Polpette, you must call him out."

"Oui!" replied the other, with an expression that sounded anything but acquiescent.

"There will be no danger," said Flitter; "but your position renders such a step absolutely necessary. He can't shoot: it would bother him to hit a barn door at six paces."

"But I am not a barn door," answered M. Polpette; "besides, he might hit me by chance."

"He won't even aim near you," said Flitter. "Now look here, Polpette: I come to you as an old friend, and a man I regard as my brother, and I am going to tell you what no power on earth could have forced from me; you must keep it a dead secret."

"Always—I swear it," returned the Frenchman.

"Well, then—now, may I trust you?"

"To the end of eternity," said M. Polpette.

"Well, then—Spooner once confessed to me, that if he was in a duel, he would never aim at his man, but always fire in the air. Now, what do you say?"

This statement appeared to render M. Polpette more comfortable in his mind. He immediately said that a Frenchman never put up with an insult; and that his ribbon of the Legion of Honour was still without stain or reproach. Having expressed which feelings he went on with his cookery.

Thus far being settled, Mr. Wyndham Flitter's next visit was to Mr. Spooner, to whom he had agreed to go as M. Polpette's friend, "waving all private feelings," as he observed, "in any matter where the honour of a man he esteemed was concerned."

He found Mr. Spooner and his friends as he had left them, still at breakfast, or rather at cigars, and Willy Sprott entertaining them with various diverting accomplishments. These were unbounded, and had the advantage of never requiring much preparation. At present he was blowing soap bubbles filled with cigar smoke, until they looked like large globes of opal. He had reduced bubble-blowing to a science that the whole Stock-exchange might have envied. With a little paper cone and some suds he could do such marvels, that when, on fine summer evenings he took it into his head to sit at his open window in Lincoln's Inn, and there experimentalize, he would cover the whole area with his fairy balloons to the intense delight of the boys who swarmed below. And once—when having produced one of great size, he artfully changed it for the round globe of a lamp, and tapped it with his pencil-case to show that it was hard—he was almost regarded as a magician, and so cheered by the increasing crowd, that the police were compelled to request Mr. Sprott would not blow any more bubbles in public, since which his feats had been confined to his rooms, or those of his friends.

"An emblem of life," observed Mr. Flitter, as a bubble burst into a light vapour when he entered. "By the way, Tiddy, can I have half a word with you in private?"

"To be sure," replied Mr. Spooner. "Come in here."

The two moved towards the door.

"Oh! that's it, is it?" said Sprots, pretending to know all about it. "Don't believe her any more."

"If you owe anything, old fellow," said another, "my purse is quite at your disposal. There it is—there's nothing in it, but no matter. The will's the same."

Mr. Spooner looked back at his friends—gave a wink which he wished to express that he was not the man to be done, and that he was going to be put into a good thing, and closed the door.

"Now what is it, Wyndham?" he asked, eagerly.

"Spooner!" said Mr. Flitter, with earnestness; "I have known you long, and I hope the deep regard I have ever entertained for you is mutual."

"My dear fellow!" replied Mr. Spooner, wringing his hand.

"If it were not so," said Mr. Flitter, "I should not have come to you upon this serious affair."

"What affair?" asked Mr. Spooner, whose face had been going through the physiognomy of the passions, ending with fear.

"In a word; then Polpette—that wretched Frenchman whose cover you drew below here, has been goaded on by some of his damned bravo friends to call you out."

"Oh stuff!" said Mr. Spooner, pulling vigorously at his cigar. "I shan't go."

"Now, stop a minute, Tiddy," observed Mr. Flitter, "You see, in the position——"

"Oh, I shan't!" repeated Mr. Spooner, with firmness.

"Now, will you listen. I can have but one motive—that of serving you. If you will not, I must wish you good morning. It will make, I trust, no difference in the good feeling that has hitherto existed between us, but as a gentleman, and a man of honour——"

"Stop! stop! Wyndham," exclaimed Mr. Spooner, as his friend had been gradually getting towards the door, with an expression of wounded pride upon his face. Mr. Flitter was softened, and returned.

"You are in for it, Tiddy," he said; "and that is the truth of it. You see you are a known man—one of the celebrities of the day—in London, and must not flinch. A snob could do anything."

"It is true!" replied Mr. Spooner, with sorrowing conceit.

"Now, I'll tell you what I have done. I have undertaken to be Polpette's second."

"My God, Wyndham!" exclaimed his friend. "You don't mean that? I was counting upon you myself."

"Stop a minute," said Mr. Flitter, "and understand me. Is it not better that I should be his second than some of his cut-throat foreign friends, who are all professed duellists? Do you think, if he is put with the sun in his eyes I should object? Eh?"

"My dear Wyndham," said Mr. Spooner, "I am in such a flutter I scarcely know what to say."

"Ah! I can understand it; the first time," answered Mr. Flitter. "But it's nothing when you are used to it. I have been out three or four dozen times. This ring with a blue stone was given me by a man who had wronged me, and whom I afterwards wounded. The watch is rather a more serious souvenir. It belonged to a poor fellow I shot through the lungs."

Mr. Flitter spoke in a deep solemn tone—so much so that the other quite trembled.

"But don't you be nervous, Tiddy," he went on. "See what a position it will give you. And now, about your own second. What do you say to young Hammond?"

"I scarcely know him," said Mr. Spooner. "I should like Sprott, I think."

"Not to be depended on," returned Mr. Flitter, shaking his head.

"But really—I have only met Hammond once."

"So much the better," replied Flitter; "for he will have the greater influence over you. Besides, I know him; and it will be better for us all to keep the affair in a ring fence."

"Oh—as you please," said Mr. Spooner; "if, as you say, it must be, it must. I leave everything in your hands."

"And you shall not repent it," replied Flitter. "But, remember—not a word: you see the delicate position I am in with you all, and I should be ruined if it was blown. I will settle everything. In the meantime, don't let these men know anything about it; and wait till you hear from me this evening."

Mr. Wyndham Flitter grasped his friend's hand and departed; whilst Mr. Spooner returned to his companions. But his manner was so changed; he was so pale and distracted that a sudden chill fell over the party, and they one by one took their leave, with the notion that some heavy money scrape was impending, and that they might be asked to advance a trifle to clear him from it.

"I thought he was going too fast," they observed, one to the other, "and would be obliged to pull up suddenly. , Very well—serve him right, a stupid ass. He ought to have known better."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FUNNY WRITER.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter's scheme had thus far progressed very well; and it now only remained for him to see Philip Hammond. He was getting his acquaintances into the position of billiard balls in the hands of an experienced player—nursing and pocketing them as suited him, but always leaving them in circumstances most advantageous to himself; and the game he played was always one of winning hazards.

He had reasons for supposing that Philip would visit the printers of "The Cracker," who were also the proprietors, and accordingly first turned his steps in that direction.

The printing office of Messrs. Brainer and Clinch composed a tall building, all windows, looking, indeed, like half-a-dozen greenhouses, built one on the top of the other, and constantly reminding the inmates that they should be the last people in the world to throw stones. It was situated in the centre of a labyrinth of courts between Fleet-street and Holborn, which opened upon small streets, only known to travellers by omnibuses trying to discover a north-west passage, when the great arteries were blockaded, by what a medical man would term a varicose state of the sewers, or congestion of the gas-pipes. Otherwise dead quiet reigned in this quarter. Wandering pilgrims, who vended household articles, occasionally announced their arrival by unearthly and unintelligible cries; and potboys and muffin-men woke the echoes of the solitude in their respective callings.

The printing-office alone was noisy. At unwonted hours its windows were gaily lighted up, and such a banging and clattering would begin as made the neighbourhood tremble again; and this in itself was enough to appal budding authors, who crept timorously up creaking stairs and worn ladders, through heavy swinging doors that came to with a weight before they had passed their portals, and drove them half-way up the next flight—the *sanctum* wherein Messrs. Brainer and Clinch wrung jokes from authors, as the barons of old in their fastnesses made all their own when the victims once crossed their threshold; or rather they turned human heads

into alembics, and, with a fire made of cheques, distilled into their receivers the last drop of essence that the mind was capable of yielding.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter knew all the stairs and doors intimately; and he went through rooms, where compositors were quietly packing together the unit letters that were to produce more powerful effects, when combined, than if they had been cast into bullets, instead of small pica; and others, where driving-bands flew round their shafts, and huge machines threw forth their damp knowledge to the world, until he came to the office of the partners.

"Oh, Mr. Flitter!" exclaimed Mr. Brainer, as he entered; "this is too bad!"

"Too bad!" echoed Mr. Clinch.

"What is the matter!" asked Mr. Flitter, with an air of simple astonishment.

"The first number of 'The Cracker' should be out to-morrow, and there are still four columns short!"

"Four—columns—short!" said Mr. Clinch, impressively.

"Four columns short!" ejaculated Mr. Flitter, with astonishment. "Impossible!—how can that be?"

"That is Mr. Scute's business—not ours," said Mr. Brainer.

"Certainly not ours," corroborated Mr. Clinch.

"And we have sent to his house, where the gentleman you introduced to us is at work with him; and all we can learn is, that one of his children has been burnt. Now, really; we are very sorry for his child, but if his entire family were to tumble into the fire, admitting that he himself escaped, he should recollect a great property is at stake—a serious affair."

"A very serious affair!" added Mr. Clinch.

According to a summons, the foreman now appeared, with long slips of literature in his hand, putting one in mind of three feet of new and popular jokes for a penny.

"Well, Mr. Chapel, how does the copy stand?" asked Mr. Flitter.

"There wants four columns, sir," replied the foreman. He said this in a cold, deliberate tone, as though four columns of jokes could be furnished on the instant, like an extra piece of paper-hanging.

"Well—stop a minute," said Mr. Flitter; "don't bother poor Scute; I'll see him myself. In the meantime, give me a pen and paper: I'll knock you off something in a jiffey."

"We would rather have your articles the result of work and thought than knocked off in a jiffey, whatever that may be," said Mr. Brainer. "Rapid writing is slow reading."

"Slow reading, indeed!" observed Mr. Clinch.

"Oh—I don't mean to write anything that I have not arranged beforehand," said Mr. Flitter: "I have often been called in upon similar emergencies. This very ring, with the blue stone, was given me by old Ghoul, the publisher, for finishing a novel that poor Rackstraw was prevented from doing, by dying in the Fleet—breaking up in mind and body altogether. 'I thought there was still meat on him,' said Ghoul. But he was done—the other was a mere dry bone. Pepin's digestor couldn't have got any more from him. Give me some paper, and just leave me to myself for a few minutes."

The partners went on with their work, which consisted in turning over mighty books of abstruse sums; and Mr. Flitter's pen was heard chirping and sputtering at a mighty rate, over acres of scribbling paper, until he once more addressed his two employers.

"Here is a thing," he said, "that I think may do—a sort of Bacchanalian song. It goes so—"

"Fill the bumper fair,
Every drop we sprinkle,
O'er the brow of care,
Smoothes away a wrinkle.
Wit's electric——"

"I think I have heard something before very like that," said Mr. Brainer.

"Very like it, indeed," added Mr. Clinch.

"Possibly," answered Mr. Flitter; "the idea would be likely to strike, generally. However, never mind; we won't have it for an instant. There!" And as he spoke he tore up the manuscript, and threw it into the fire-place, with great unconcern. "I'll run over and see Scute," he went on. "It is possible that he may have got all ready, and then my work would be thrown away. You shall hear from me in twenty minutes."

And, without waiting for the chance of any more remarks, Mr. Wyndham Flitter caught up his hat, and rushed out to the editor's lodgings.

Those who laughed over the number of 'The Cracker' when it came out on the following week, could not have conceived the scene in which it had been concocted. In the cheerless apartment wherein Mr. Scute had been first discovered, that gentleman, unshorn and undressed, was sitting at a rickety table, working, with Philip Hammond. An apology for a cloth had been spread, and on this was a plate or two, with some slices of meat and unskinned potatoes together in a pie-dish, evidently purchased at a cook-shop: a bottle of gin nearly empty, and a pewter pot. In one corner of the room was a trestle bed; in another a large press, which appeared to serve for kitchen, wardrobe, and cellar.

On some chairs at the fireside lay the poor little child that had been burnt—one of those who had peeped over the banisters when Philip first called. The shock that the system had received had been so severe that it had no power left to cry. A low moan was all that escaped from time to time, as it shivered with agony, unable to bear any covering over its scorched and naked limbs. One of the women who lodged in the house was attending it, placing rags dipped in vinegar and water on its chest, where the injury was greatest, and supplying its constant entreaties for something to drink. The other child—a little girl of six or seven—was adapting some tattered finery to an old doll, glancing timidly every now and then at the sufferer, but afraid to approach within some feet of the temporary couch. They had no mother living. Mr. Scute, like many literary men who have not been thrown into general society, had married foolishly and early. Afterwards getting some slight name, he was taken up by circles, higher far than that in which he moved, and invited to their tables, to amuse the guests by his conversation. Flattered by this notice, he lost his self-respect so far—in common again with many literary men, we regret to say—as to be constantly visiting where his wife would never have been received by the females of the family, and believing himself, even under these mean circumstances, on a level with them. Thus neglected, Mrs. Scute first fretted, and then gave way to drowning her sorrows in drink, until after

several wretched years she died, leaving her husband with two children, neither of whom could assist their father in any way with his household. And so affairs became worse and worse; and each day Mr. Scute became dirtier and more grisly and unpresentable. Then, with the carelessness of genius, he became embarrassed; and troubles thickened, until every feeling of self-respect was gone, and he became the hapless literary hack, trusting to chance for employment, and to the bottle for inspiration.

"I think she seems a little easier, Mrs. Tollett," he said, as he went to the fireside and looked at the little patient. "My poor Louey! never mind, dear—it will soon get better. Doctor will come again at tea-time, and do it good. Ah!"

And as he came back to the table he almost gave a wail of brain-weariness and despair.

"Come, Mr. Hammond," he said to Philip; "we don't get on. Take some more gin-and-water."

"Thank you—no," returned the other. "If I can't write without that, I'm sure I can't with. Don't you think that trusting to drink for ideas, is living on your capital?"

"But suppose your interest won't keep you," replied Mr. Scute; "what are you to do then—eh? You won't have any? Very well, then, I must drink by myself. Now, then —the jokes, the jokes!"

He mixed a tumbler—half gin and half water—and took up his pen when he had swallowed some, whilst Philip, at his desire, looked over a newspaper to see what subjects offered.

"Here's Mr. Topper's last work advertised," cried Philip.

"That will do," observed Mr. Scute. "Quote it as a paragraph, and head it 'Gratifying Intelligence.' The 'Last' —don't you see?"

"Oh—I see," said Philip. "But I like his books, really."

"That's nothing to do with it: you wouldn't lose the joke, would you? What's the book called?"

"Madelaine; or, the Three Trials."

"Capital; we must say those were the trials the reader made to get through it, and failed in all. Put it down."

Philip did as he was ordered, not altogether seeing the justice of the attack; and then continued, as he looked over the paper:

"I think here's something we may make some fun of."

"What is it?" asked Scute.

"An advertisement headed 'To Amateur Farmers,'" replied Philip. "That looks promising. I tried my hand with a bit of ground myself once at Pottleton. Let me see about it."

Poor Mr. Scute was not sorry to jump at the subject; for, as a last resource he had just made up his mind to another squib upon the ministers, which was always the refuge of his destitute humour. Gin, trouble, and a constant drain upon his head, for artificial fun, had nearly done their work, and the arrival of the doctor to see the poor child, furnished him with an excuse to leave the writing-table; whilst Philip, after a little arrangement, went on with his paper.

"I think we are better, Mr. Roopy," said Scute, as the medical man approached the couch. "Not so much pain this last half-hour—none at all scarcely just now."

"She is very ill," answered the doctor, with the slightest shake of the head, after looking at his patient for an instant.

"But her screams was dreadful an hour ago," observed the woman.

"And now it is scarcely a whimper, you see," added Scute.

"I will send you something different to that wash," said Mr. Roopy—"something that will not chill her so much. But she is in danger. I almost think it would have been better if she had been taken to an hospital."

He looked round the room as he spoke. Mr. Scute saw what he meant; but he did not now talk about "the miscreants of a licensed villain," or display any "virtuous indignation." He knew that embarrassed literary men and disaffected mechanics were the only classes such a tone agreed with. And when the medical man took his leave, and said that his wife should send a few delicacies round for the little patient, he felt how empty all his jokes against the doctors, from time immemorial, had been; and perhaps he would have felt all the other attacks he made upon classes equally unjust, had they come as literally home to him.

Mr. Scute returned to the work-bench of his brains, on which he strained, and screwed, and twisted them into various articles of sale. As the doctor left the room, he called the woman after him on some pretence, and whispered to her—

"The poor child will not live through the night. Her

feeling so little pain is the worst symptom. I would rather hear her screaming, bad as it would be." And promising to come again, he left the house.

During this time Philip had been at work; and whilst Mr. Scute had collected his ideas, by drinking the remainder of the liquor in his tumbler, and arranging a few scraps of articles, Mr. Wyndham Flitter arrived.

"Are we no better?" he asked, as he entered. "Dear. dear!—well, I am very sorry to hear it. I've come up from B. and C.'s. They're in a devil of a way about the number. What have you got?"

"I have just tried something," said Philip, "if it will do."

"Not a doubt of it," observed Mr. Flitter. "What is it? Go-a-head."

"I call it 'A Letter from a Gentleman Farmer.'"

"Good!" observed his friend; and Philip commenced, as the other gentleman assumed a critical air.

"'My dear Mecænas.'"

"Who's Mecænas?—I beg your pardon," asked Mr. Flitter.

"Oh, he's the friend," replied Philip: "it's a letter, you know."

"Yes; but there are no Mecænases now-a-days; I wish there were."

"So do I," said Mr. Scute. "A man of fortune, whose purse and house were ever open to literary men, would be——"

"In the Bench in six weeks," said Mr. Flitter. "I've known a few small such, in my time,—men who collected what they called 'the wits of the age' round their table, to supply the only article their money failed to procure them: it was great whilst it lasted; but they all came to a wind-up—served them right."

"I think it rather lowers one, to go out under such circumstances," said Philip.

"Not at all," replied Mr. Flitter; "the fairest thing in the world. They've got money, which you haven't; and you've got brains, which they havn't. Perfectly equal."

"But Mr. Hammond is going on with his paper," observed Scute.

"All right," said Mr. Flitter; "but don't have Mecænas; call him Jones. It is the age of the real, and will do much better."

"'My dear Jones, then,'" Philip went on, "'I should have written to you before, to have told you how my farming has answered, but did not feel sufficiently *au fait* in the subject.'"

"Don't put a French word where an English one will do," said Mr. Scute; "not *au fait*—say, 'up.'"

The correction was made.

"'A valuable little work,' continued Philip—'*Every Man his own Farmer*—has taught me everything, although, from hard studying it, my notions are at present slightly confused, and I cannot say that I have been altogether fortunate. My last litter of ducks that I turned out on the hills to breed about and form coveys, like game, instead of dirtying my lake, have all died; and the flock of pigs that I tried to keep upon the spoiled hay during the winter, and lodged comfortably in a dry loft over the harness-room, went off in fits, one after the other. But this will be remedied next year. I escaped the ravages of the fly pretty well, by letting my rabbits have the run of the turnip field before it came, which was rather an artful move. I send you a brace, that you may see what good condition they are in. In consequence of this, however, my sheep had to live during the frosts on the apples stored up for the servants' winter puddings. So I kept the servants on rabbits; by which means the circle of consumption and supply was well maintained.

"'With respect to breeding cattle, I am in hopes of getting a cross between a Southdown and an Alderney, which will, I think, produce a profitable race; as I may possibly then be able to have my wool and butter from the same animal—a delicate kind of mutton remaining. Of a breed between my bantams and partridges, I am less sanguine. The last dozen that I shut up together all killed each other; and some snipes also died, that I tried to fatten in a coop.

"'I send a great deal to market; but the worst of this is, that I can generally buy the things I sell for one-third of what they cost me. This is particularly applicable to my cabbages and eggs. The latter might do; but since I turned all my fowls out on the moors to live naturally, no one knows where they lay, except the boys and weasels.

"'My thoroughbred brood mare answered, but the colt I broke in myself kicked my gig to pieces, so I have put her into the timber-waggon. This will spoil her for the race-

course ; but one cannot have everything. Perhaps, however, when she misses the weight of the wheels, she may run the quicker, as dancers who wear leaden shoes at rehearsal fancy themselves balloons at night.

"'The large dog I was recommended to get as a guard, howls all night long, if tied up ; and, if let loose, worries my neighbours' sheep. He has also bitten the tax-collector, and the whole parish is on tip-toe to see whether the man will go mad before Easter. But these, of course, are chances that every man is liable to who engages in a large concern.

"'I will write again in a week ; meanwhile, believe me, your sincere friend, "'AGRICOLA.'"

"Very fair," said Mr. Flitter, as Philip concluded—"must be brightened up a little; we will put in the plums. Only, why 'Agricola ?' Have a comic name, that alliterates—'Tom Turnip,' or 'Walter Wurzel,' or 'Christopher Crops.' Don't you see the fun ?"

"Not exactly," said Philip ; "but I dare say I shall. Put it down."

"Bravo!" said Mr. Flitter—"that will do; and now, Scute, I must leave it to you to get this ship-shape ; for I have a matter of some importance to arrange with our friend Hammond."

"Are you going?" asked the editor, drearily.

"We must, my boy. I hope all will be better here to-morrow : it will though. Finish the paper, you know, and send it down."

"I have nobody to send," said Scute.

"Oh yes, you have—anybody ! Sorry I can't stay longer. Good-bye."

And so saying, he led Philip away with him, towards Mr. Spooner's.

Mr. Scute laboured at his task, and it was late when he started to the printing-office—for he went himself. Once there, he was not allowed to depart : they would have locked him up sooner than let him have gone. But he was kept there all through the night—altering, and adapting, and correcting, until the few pages that were to throw England into convulsions on the Saturday following were ready to go to press ; and then he crept home—a living automaton that moved, but scarcely thought. When he got to the door, he

found he had forgotten his key, so he rang softly, and the woman in attendance came down and let him in.

"How are we going on, Mrs.——," he said, for he had forgotten her name.

She made no answer, but preceded him up stairs with the candle, to his cheerless room. The temporary bed was still at the fireside as when he had left; but now there was a white cloth thrown over it.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. SPOONER'S AFFAIR OF HONOUR.

"SCUTE's a poor unlucky devil!" said Mr. Flitter to Philip, as they went on their way. "A man who has let time get before him; and that's fatal, now-a-days. Mind you never get distanced in a like manner; or, however you start, you'll never be placed."

Mr. Spooner was at home. He had been engaged to dine with a man at a club, but had thrown him over. He had taken a box for the benefit of his friend, Mr. Shorn, who let him go behind the scenes; but had given the ticket to his landlord. He had promised to take a Pearl of the Ballet to Weippert's, but had written a hurried note to say that his mother had come up unexpectedly from Suffolk. And so, altogether, he was in a bad way. A light dinner—two cutlets and some maccaroni—was untasted on the tray; but the silver mug, and the pint bottle of claret were both empty. He had evidently taken to drinking for the nonce.

The business of the visit was soon talked over; and then Mr. Flitter took his leave. But before he went, he said:

"By the way, Tiddy, a verbal arrangement is not etiquette, I know; but that poor devil Polpette, has hardly a sheet of paper to bless himself with. He gives me entirely *carte blanche* to decide everything. Where will you meet?"

"I thought there was danger in England," replied Mr. Spooner, "from the—hem!—the police fellows. Can't we go to Boulogne?"

He had feeble hopes of a possibility of fraternization on the journey, ending in a dinner at the Hotel du Nord.

"Oh—no—no! not the slightest occasion. Only keep it dark. Where shall it be—Battersea Fields!"

"No—not Battersea Fields," said Mr. Spooner. "It's so cheerless there."

"Well; but duels don't take place in a thoroughfare," replied Flitter. "Never mind—anywhere else. Greenwich Park—Epping Forest—Brompton—or Clapham Common? It's a good place to get away from, in all directions, if anything happens."

Mr. Spooner flinched at the notion.

"Come now," continued Mr. Flitter. "Hampstead Heath, —you can't find fault with that."

"Very well," said Mr. Spooner. "My head is in such a whirl that I don't know what I am about. It has been going round ever since you left."

"But my dear Tiddy," said Mr. Flitter, alarmed at the state of brains such a long gyration must have produced: "you really must keep cool. Now look here. Mr. Hammond knows that I am influenced only by the warmest feelings towards you. For all our sakes, as gentlemen, pray pay a little attention."

"I will pay attention," said Mr. Spooner, in desperation, tying the cord of his dressing-gown so tightly round him that it made him cough. "Go on. I'm calm."

"Well, then, Hampstead Heath, this side of the Spaniards, at half-past seven to-morrow morning. Am I to say that?"

"Oh, yes," answered Mr. Spooner: "wherever you please," and he spoke with great resignation.

"By the bye, Tiddy," said the other, "oblige me with five pounds till to-morrow morning. The banks are shut, and I have nothing but a cursed check."

"Oh—to be sure," replied his friend. "Will five be enough—better have ten."

He fancied his antagonist's aim would be a degree more oblique, for every pound he accommodated his friend with.

"I don't want ten—really, no," answered Mr. Flitter, taking them. "Here's an I.O.U."

"Oh—never mind that, Wyndham."

"Pooh! pooh! as I have often told you—short reckonings make long friends. Besides, suppose anything was to happen

to you—I only said 'suppose'—are there no other that such an acknowledgment is due to? Think of that."

"God bless you, Wyndham!" said Mr. Spooner.

"God bless you, Tiddy!" was the response, as he left the room. "Keep your courage up and your powder dry: it's a good *debut* for your pistols."

He went down stairs, but Philip followed him, and overtook him at the door. A brief conversation passed between them. What took place, it is not here necessary to record; but they appeared to understand one another, at parting, very well; and then Philip returned to Mr. Spooner, whom he found dispatching West off in haste with a note written in the interval.

Philip agreed to remain with his friend all night; they could lie down on the bed by turns, Mr. Spooner observed, for it was not probable that, under such circumstances, either of them could sleep; besides, they had a great deal to arrange. This "great deal" chiefly consisted in various attempts on the part of Mr. Spooner to make a will, or rather, put upon paper the distribution he wished made of his property. But this was not such an easy task, for the minute he had left a thing to one person, he thought of somebody else he liked better; and finally bequeathed it to nobody. Mrs. Wracketts was, however, the chief legatee; and in the depth of his admiration, he would have put her down, not only for his lighter articles and ornaments, but even for his glazed boots and bear-skin wrapper. And as he kept drinking claret, so did his affection increase, until, becoming too large for the especial object, it took in all the world.

"I would not drink too much," said Philip; "you will not be sure of your aim in the morning."

"I can't help it," answered Mr. Spooner. "I'm getting into such a state, that I shall shoot myself, perhaps, instead. Besides, you don't suppose that I should aim deliberately at that poor man, to kill him? Pooh!"

"You should not say so."

"Why not?"

"Because, if it was known about, it would expose you to all sorts of insults."

"Pshaw! I can't help it though, and that's the truth. When I shot at the conjuror who caught the bullets at the

theatre, I never aimed at him—always took my sight a yard over his head. Suppose I had killed him!—a ghost is a nasty thing, any way, to haunt one; but the ghost of a conjuror must be fearful!"

Mr. Spooner paused an instant, shuddering at the bare notion, and then continued—

"Were you ever out before?"

"Once," replied Philip, "at Rouen. It was a quarrel between two young French engineers."

"And how did it end?" asked the other, anxiously.

"One was shot through the heart, poor fellow!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Spooner, as he twisted his handkerchief into a cable. "And where were the police?"

"They never interfere unpleasantly abroad," replied Philip.

"But they do here," said Mr. Spooner; "it's unlawful, you know."

"They can't interfere if it's all kept close," observed Philip—"and only cowards would inform."

"Of course not," answered the other, pouring out some more wine, with a hand that made the neck of the bottle chatter against the glass. When he had drunk it, he said, gravely—

"Hammond, I shall write to my mother."

"I think you ought."

"What would you say, if you were in my place?"

"Well, I can't exactly tell. You are the best judge of that."

"I am, I am; I know I am," said Mr. Spooner, with haggard intensity, "only I am such a precious fool! Take another cigar, and let me alone for a few minutes."

Mr. Spooner wrote, to all appearances, half a dozen letters, but none appeared satisfactory. At length, however, he concluded one after a fashion, and gave it to his companion to read. It was as follows, as well as it could be deciphered:—

"My dearest Mother,—In the agony of mind" ("*and*," *that*," scratched through) "of one on the brink of a precipice" ("*which I*" scratched through) "is too dreadful to contemplate when this reaches you I shall be" ("*no more*" scratched through) "beyond all trouble but the honour of my family

which is the first duty of your" ("*unhappy*" scratched through) "poor boy a foolish quarrel with a French nobleman to avenge which I have been compelled to" ("*be butchered*" scratched through) "assert my position as a gentleman and a man of honour I forgive all my enemies excuse this scrawl but I am distracted and let" ("*Harry*," "*William Fenn*," "*Uncle Click*," all successively scratched through) "the bearer of this Mr. Hammond have the pony I remain yours" ("*once*" put in over the line) "affectionate son

"H. TIDD SPOONER."

"I am to take charge of this, then?" asked Philip.

"If you would be so good," replied Mr. Spooner; "only let me seal it. Stop! that won't do—it's a comic one. Ah, I've used that in happier times, to many jolly letters!"

Philip agreed that a seal with "Go to the devil and shake yourself" for a motto," was not altogether in keeping with the subject; so he found Mr. Spooner's ring somewhere on the floor, and gave it to him.

"I can't do anything more," said the young gentleman; "everything must take its chance. I shall lie down on the rug. Set that thing to go off at six. Heigho!"

"Won't you go to bed?" asked Philip

"No, no bed; this will do. I shall be too glad to lie here to-morrow. Oh, how my brain whizzes when I shut my eyes! All mind."

Mr. Spooner indulged in a few more broken observations, but Philip, whose equanimity did not seem to be so much disturbed, was already asleep. His companion shuffled about long and restlessly; now bringing down the fire-irons in turning, and anon playing sad havoc with his toilet appointments, feeling about after the water-bottle. But at last he also was quiet, only betraying his presence by a heavy, occasionally startled, breathing.

It was dark early morning, when the alarum—which was a dreadful machine in a small round case, and combined the effects of a shrill bell and a watchman's rattle—went off at the hour appointed. Philip jumped from the bed in an instant, as West, who had been apparently on the alert, brought a light and some coffee into the room, and proceeded to awaken Mr. Spooner. This was not accomplished at

once, nor were his first impressions particularly clear. After having inquired who was there, he simply ejaculated, "Bother!" and was giving out his orders not to be called until twelve, as he had a bad headache, when Philip managed to make him understand his position, whilst West lighted the fire. And then the reality struck him all of a heap, as he gathered himself up on the rug. He had never experienced the sensations of a man waking on the morning he is going to be hung, but he must have known tolerably well what they were like.

With a "stunning" headache, as he called it—and for once the word was not so badly applied—feverish, yet chilled; and oppressed by the uncomfortable feeling which always attends getting up by candle-light; his hair in that reversed style commonly supposed to be attendant upon a forced passage, feet first, through a bramble-bush; and his toilet as consistent with external influences as an evening dress always is at daybreak—Mr. Spooner was not altogether the type of a champion about to undergo the ordeal of trial by battle. Peevishly telling West to get out of the room, and bring some hot water; and receiving the information that there were no other fires lighted yet, he at last contrived to get upon his feet. Philip really pitied him; albeit, he did not, by his general demeanour, appear to anticipate serious consequences. But this Mr. Spooner took for cool courage acquired by continental experience, and respected him additionally.

"I shall not undress," said Mr. Spooner; "if nothing happens I shall be too happy to change when I get back." And he gave a ghastly smile of hope, which shadowed into blank despair, as he added, "And if I am shot, what matters? Oh! how my head aches—it feels as if it was going to fall in two. I wish it would."

Philip poured out two cups of coffee, and then, finding Spooner refused to take any, he said:—

'I think you had better take some brandy. Never mind your head; you want supporting. Try it with some soda-water."

This sounded refreshing to Mr. Spooner's parched mouth; and Philip got the draught ready for him.

"You are very good," he said; "and I have so little claim upon you."

He had not liked Philip a short time before; but a man in a fix is usually most affectionate to a sympathizer

"Oh, don't speak about that," replied Philip. "You must do the same for me some day, when *I* am in a mess."

"That I will," exclaimed Mr. Spooner; "and delighted, too. I should think so!"

"Take a bit of biscuit."

"No thank you, I am not hungry—not at all. I couldn't swallow a crumb; it would either make me sick or choke me."

The time drew nigh for them to start, as wheels were occasionally heard in the street, and the dull grey light of morning showed through the blinds. Philip was collecting together the different articles required, and Mr. Spooner was sitting by the fire with a wet towel tied round his head, to cool and steady his ideas, as he said. All the time his friend was occupied, the latter was asking him questions, or speculating upon subjects connected with duelling. The greatest master of statistics could not have supplied him with sufficient information, as to the proportion of combatants who escaped to those who were shot; and the number of times he peeped out of the window to regard the distance that Philip had defined upon the pavement opposite as twelve paces, and calculate imaginary chances, was incredible.

"You had better send for a cab, I think," said Philip. "Everything is ready. I have put the pistol-case in a carpet bag, to avoid suspicion; so nothing will be known—and we will get a quick Hansom."

Mr. Spooner did not receive this intelligence with proper admiration. In his own mind, he would have preferred a slow cab, with a large placard on the back, informing the world in general where they were going, and what they were about to do. In the interval before the time arrived, he walked nervously up and down his room; first taking great pains to put his right foot upon all the rosettes of the carpet, walking with his left upon its seam, as on a tight rope; then deducing predictions, as to his fate, from the number of sprigs on the border; and lastly, performing intricate cross-steps on the pattern generally, which, long practised with the same perseverance, would have qualified him, beyond all rivalry, to have danced blindfolded amongst any number of eggs that

fashion or scepticism might have ordained. At last the cab came.

"What do you want?—have you forgotten anything?" asked Philip, as Mr. Spooner lingered behind.

"No—no," he said, mournfully; "I was only looking at my old room I may—never see it—again."

"Oh, nonsense!" replied Philip; "we shall be comfortably at breakfast here in an hour"—for once, though, he was wrong—"and perhaps M. Polpette with us—who knows?—all good friends."

"I should be delighted to see him!" said Mr. Spooner, as they went down stairs. "I owe him no malice; you hear me say that I do not. I should have no objection to shake hands with him as soon as we meet. And you think we shall be back here again to breakfast?"

"Haven't I said so?"

"If we do, I will give you a first-rate gold repeater, and——"

"Never mind," said Philip, smiling; "we'll talk about that by-and-by."

They got into the cab, and told the man which direction to take. As they started, Mr. Spooner leant forward, and gave a significant nod to West, who touched an imaginary hat in return.

"That fellow will keep all right, I hope?" said Philip.

"He's as close as——" Mr. Spooner was about to say 'the grave,' but he could not get the words out at such a time, so he said—"wax."

The ride was not inspiriting. It was a cold raw morning, and nothing was about the streets beyond the fog, except flocks of sheep going to Smithfield, to furnish kidneys for the Cyder Cellars, as Mr. Spooner observed—kidneys that he was destined, perhaps, never to eat!

The shops were not opened, and everything looked forlorn. The large teapots, that were presumed to pour forth cascades of unequalled four-shilling black, dripped melancholy condensations from their spouts; and the opposition Chinaman, who every week alarmed the public with the information that teas would rise next month to double their present price, and so, curiously enough, was most anxious to get rid of his stock, instead of keeping it back—this distinguished Mandarin stared with vacant eye, little in consonance with the excitement he

was anxious to create, at the Jehosophat meeting-house opposite. In the New Road, the public exhibitions of ladders, zinc-works, and statuary, were equally depressing. Damp Eves at dry fountains loomed through the fog; and melancholy eagles assumed attitudes of defiance at nothing, on the corners of the show-yards; whilst it would have puzzled the highest artist to have decided whether the Dancing Faun was catching up his leg from terpsichorean excitement or intense cold. The only occupied objects appeared to be the assemblage of revolving chimney-cowls, and they kept constantly turning about and looking in all directions, as though they were anxious to see whether there was a chance of rest and finer weather.

It was within a few minutes of the appointed time when they drove through Hampstead: and at length they arrived at the Heath. Seeing a cab at the edge of the road, they turned off to the left, before they came to 'The Spaniards,' and found Mr. Flitter and M. Polpette already there, in a sort of hollow that concealed them from the thoroughfare.

The Frenchman had got himself up very carefully. All his mustachios and whiskers were in full trim, and he had on a military kind of cloak, with a corner of it thrown over his left shoulder, which gave him an imposing air as he marched up and down, smoking a cigar, with an unconcern that went to Mr. Spooner's very soul. But they bowed gravely, and then left the two others to arrange matters.

There was a fifth party present—a gentleman in a rough pilot coat, with a small terrier looking out of his pocket, who was introduced as Mr. Jollands, of the hospitals.

Mr. Spooner flinched, as he heard it.

"I say, Hammond," he whispered to his friend, "stick up for fourteen paces, if you can."

"Flitter talks about ten," replied Philip.

"Oh, nonsense! it would be murder," said Mr. Spooner, as Philip walked away.

The seconds got the pistols, and proceeded to load them, whilst Mr. Spooner tried to have a cigar also. But he could not make it draw: he only chewed it to pieces in his mouth, and then threw it away. Mr. Jollands, of the hospitals, looked at him with great contempt; and then, still keeping a short pipe in his mouth, sang a convivial chorus, until reproved by Mr. Flitter.

The ground was measured, the places decided, and the pistols loaded and placed in the hands of the principals by the seconds, who then fell back.

"Here it comes!" thought Mr. Spooner, with calm desperation, after an anxious glance towards the road.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" exclaimed Mr. Wyndham Flitter, in a deep, loud voice, as if he had been asking them whether they were all charged.

"Ready!" said the Frenchman.

"Mr. Spooner gulped out some indistinct monosyllable, and shut his eyes.

"Very well! One!——"

And here Mr. Spooner's hair trigger went off, from agitation.

"M. Polpette" cried Mr. Flitter, "you have a right to your fire, but as a man of honour you will not, I think, take it."

The Frenchman declined the chance; and Philip re-loaded the pistol, with a word of advice into his principal's ear to be more cautious. This time, M. Polpette alone fired. Mr. Spooner waited an instant, and then, pointing his pistol straight up to the sky, discharged it.

"This settles the business, I hope," said Mr. Flitter. "Polpette—Tiddy—you are both trumps, and worthy to know one another. Shake hands!"

Mr. Spooner bounded forward for the purpose, and M. Polpette was advancing, when Mr. Jollands, of the hospitals, alarmed by a yelp from his pocket companion, looked down the road, and saw something like the outlines of two people in a gig advancing in the fog.

"Crushers!" he exclaimed. "Cut!"

The information, brief as it was, was important. In an instant, Mr. Wyndham Flitter had hustled M. Polpette from the ground, into the cab; and Mr. Jollands having got on the box, to see that the driver did not spare his horse, the vehicle turned a corner of the road, and was lost to sight.

"The police!" cried Philip. "Who could have put them up to it? *Sauve qui peut!*"

He bolted off towards their Hansom, and jumped in, followed by Mr. Spooner, with his pistols and case under his arm.

"Now, look sharp, my man!" he cried. "Can your horse go?"

"Can't he!" replied the driver. "I wish I had as many sov'rins as he can go when he likes. Pst!"

The lash was applied, and they started off, as the gig was near enough to recognise two policemen in it.

"I didn't bargain for this," said Philip. "Fire away, cabby!—across country—anywhere."

The man turned on to a bye-road, whipping his horse furiously, as they bumped over drains and mole-hills with terrible recklessness; but the gig followed them. Philip was really anxious, but Mr. Spooner was in such a whirl of delight, at being still alive, that he had no feelings at all, until excited by his companion, who kept looking round the side of the cab and urging the driver, he thrust one of the pistols up through the little hole at the top, and cried to the cabman, with terrible spirit—

"If we are overtaken, you are a dead man."

"Don't, sir; it may go off;" said the other, with a grin. Mr. Spooner had not observed that the hammer was down on the nipple.

"Pshaw!" that gentleman went on. "I'll give you a sovereign to get us away."

"All right, sir!" said the man; "on ve goes to China!"

He flogged the horse afresh, and as they emerged into one of the regular roads, they almost flew; at a speed that would have rendered their journey to the remote part of the earth mystically alluded to by the cabman, comparatively a brief one. The gig, however, kept bravely up with them; and a large waggon was a-head in the centre of the road.

"Shout out!" cried Philip—"you can't pass."

'Heaps of room, sir," replied the man.

But his calculations were at fault. Trying to pass, with a spurt, on the off side, the broad wheel of the wagon caught that of the cab, and shivered it to spokes. The man was pitched off; the horse began kicking; and—as such an occurrence is not pleasant in a Hansom—Philip and Mr. Spooner scrambled out as well as they could, just in time for the inmates of the gig to come up with them, and take them into custody for a breach of the peace. In twenty minutes, they found themselves locked up in the nearest police station

Mr. Wyndham Flitter and his own party were more fortunate. They got away unperceived; and as that talented gentleman took Mr. Jollands and M. Polpette to Mr. Spooner's rooms, and ordered breakfast on his own responsibility, awaiting the return of the others, he thus reflected:—

"Polpette is my slave for ever, after being his second—whenever I want him. When Spooner hears that I drew his adversary's ball, on his account alone, I have got *him* under my thumb. And as for Philip Hammond, the affair must be talked about, and he must be lionized, and made to feel that he owes his position to me alone, and so he will always believe in me. If he gets in a scrape thereby, so much the better. It will answer equally well. Not a bad morning's work, upon the whole!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE POTTLETON BALL.

It was about this time that a great event took place in Pottleton.

The railway, as we have seen, had already effected great changes. The natives found that if they did not move a little out of their old jog-trot style, they would be run down by the faster immigrants daily arriving amongst them. And therefore, when they perceived various things done at New Dibblethorpe—which was a town close to the railway that had risen up, all suddenly, as though it had been entirely founded by a tribe of harlequins, who lent the original and celebrated bat to one another, as the Pottletonians accommodated their neighbours with the turnip-cutter, haymaking machine, or, on convivial occasions, musical box, which was the wonder of the village, to work marvels with—when they found, we say, what was done at New Dibblethorpe, they always tried to imitate it: even to starting a book-club, and subscribing for a fire-engine.

The book-club caused much dissention. Each of the dozen subscribers was allowed to order a book in turn, and a remarkable spirit pervaded them all of bespeaking, not what

they liked themselves, but what they thought would be disagreeable to somebody else. Thus young Grant, the little-too-fast farmer, ordered translations of all Paul de Köck's novels, one after another, because the Misses Medlar, who stood close to him on the list, and kept the young ladies' seminary, had openly protested against his sitting opposite to them in church, inasmuch as during the Psalms he would stare at the pretty pupils. In revenge for this, Miss Twinch, who was on tea-drinking terms with the Medlars, ordered the "Narrative of the Pongo Enlightenment Mission, with an Account of the Settlement at Bolter Cove," and thus drove young Grant's great friend, Dick Finch, who kept the harriers, to plan a special committee, with diabolical ingenuity, when the majority of the members had gone to the sea-side, and appropriate all the balance of the funds in hand to the purchase of back volumes of "The Sporting Magazine." Mr. Wolly, the retired grocer, albeit he liked to see his name on the same list with Mr. Howell Ewavitt, the London banker, yet ordered works of "large sympathies," as the reviews called them, to show his neighbours that he was quite as good as they were: in consequence of which, the banker's so ncommanded a Florentine edition of Tasso, "to teach Woolly, or whatever his name was, what a snob he was beside his own governess, who *could* understand it!" The only person who really consulted his own taste was good Mr. Page, the blushing curate in the high shirt collars, who invariably chose abstruse mathematical works; but as these disgusted everybody else, he did not get off any better than the rest of them, but was compelled to see, with sorrow, various popular books, which he looked upon as more or less trivial—not to say really questionable—going the round of the club.

The fire-engine might be considered, as a whole, more successful, and, at the same time, valuable; especially if the imitation of New Dibblethorpe extended to burning a carpenter's shed or two, as had lately occurred there. On certain fine afternoons, when it was taken down to the pond, to see that its valves and pipes were in working order, and how far off it could drench the boys, there were perfect festivals held; and the inhabitants yet recount, with animation, the excitement in the village when it went off, with four post-horses, from the Red Lion, to put out the Aurora Borealis, and was

brought back by the train, twenty miles, the next morning But all these events soon came to be swamped by a greater.

There had been a ball given on the occasion of the opening of the town-hall at New Dibblethorpe; and the trains had run up and down specially, at all sorts of times, to carry distant company to and from the festive scene. The reports of this from fortunate visitors, added to the list of those whom the *Dibblethorpe Messenger* observed amongst the company, so fired the Pottletonians that they agreed nothing would do but to have a ball likewise. And, accordingly, a committee was formed to arrange it. The countenance and support of the Brayboeufs—the family at Pottleton Court—were solicited and obtained, and the leading folks of the village were appointed stewards.

The moment the affair was settled, and formally announced in real printed circulars, there was a bustle and stir, such as had not been known in Pottleton since the opening of the railway. It is a dangerous thing to draw lines in the society of a country village, where the interests of all are, in a measure, mutually dependent. But the circulars were placed in the hands of the landlord of the Red Lion, to send out, with his name annexed; and he was, so to speak, the stalking-horse put forward by the committee; and from behind him they despatched their missives.

Of course there was a great uproar. Why the Fielders, who lived in a little poky cottage under the hill, should have received a circular, when the Gussets, who, though they had been in the advertising outfit line in London, could have covered in the whole Fielders' homestead with their rick-cloths, was more than the Gussets could determine; but never mind—all in good time!—they would have the laugh some day on *their* side. There was young Grant, too—a perfectly low young man, whose father scarcely spoke English, (so Miss Amelia Medlar said, who was not asked,)—he had been invited just because he was a pot companion of "that Mr. Finch," and whooped, and yelled, and scrambled after the hounds with him; and had some rubbishing woods, where people went to make a noise with guns, and kill poor birds. Why was not Mr. Augustus Medlar asked? He was but the brewer's clerk, it was true; but he had every prospect of being a brewer, and brewers never knew where their

working ended. But because he preferred his flute and family to that Mr. Finch's rude riot, he was considered a nobody. Ah! it was all very well then; but the day *might* come—and then they should see!

The Twinches were invited in common with all the professional folks of the village, who, as lawyers or doctors, clutched at an anomalous sort of position, entailing great discomfort, as they struggled to become the fringe of the "families," without offending the general population, upon whose support they so much depended; and, to the astonishment of all the village, Annie was included—specially included in the circular. They could not make this out at all. How Annie Maitland—who would hardly have the decency to go, under circumstances, to be sure, even although she had been asked—how Annie Maitland, who had lived literally in an alms-house with an old miserly aunt, could ever be thought of for an instant, although she was a relation of the Marsdens—but in what a way!—who had lived formerly at the Court, was marvellous. They did not know it had been at Mr. Page's suggestion; and that Miss Martha Twinch, mindful of past kindness at the wild-beast show, had also a slight hand in the affair.

But the great row of all was about the Bulliams. Mr. Bulliam was the most dreadful old man going—drank port wine after dinner, till it filled all his veins instead of blood; and then would begin to swear in such a fashion at everything, that it was a wonder the ground didn't open beneath him. Possibly, as it would only have let him down into the wine-cellar, this would have been no punishment. The young Bulliams had all stubbly hair, and wore pumps—could do little but shoot, play billiards, and drink and swear, like their father, in a diluted form; and the Miss Bulliams couldn't do anything. They were, besides, decidedly ugly; and, what was worse, stupid. But the Pottleton railway had brought heaps of money into Mr. Bulliam's coffers; and as he was now the managing man, and would have much to do with its extension, every one who had ground adjacent payed him the greatest deference; and this upset all the petty gentilities of the village to an awful degree. Mrs. Spink, whose husband had been great things in India—who had a son now in the Ceylon Rifles; and whose rooms were so filled with

Patna boxes, Poonah tea-tables, and whole armies of model Sepoys, Kidgebaloos, Bundledums, Hurrycoos, Mutchgullocks, Chockytaws, Papsylals, with all the other inferior domestics of an Indian establishment, that it was difficult to move about, —Mrs. Spink was so disgusted with the airs the Bulliams gave themselves, when Mr. Bulliam's own brother had been her husband's clerk at Madras, that she thought of returning her circular to the committee, unopened. But her two nieces, who had swarthy, Hindoo complexions; broad, flat noses; and were five feet high at twelve years old, persuaded her to go for their sakes; and so, at last, she consented. As for the Shiners, who had taken Clutcher's cottage, on the old Dibblethorpe road, it was not so much a matter of wonder. Mr. Shiner was an enormous fisherman, and Mrs. Shiner was cruelly pretty, and drove the loveliest ponies, and also hunted like an Amazon. But nobody could make them out exactly. All their visitors were young men who blew horns and drove dog-carts; and they never went to church. So that the establishment was unsatisfactory: and although Mr. Shiner intimated his intention of shooting all the committee through their heads, he soon abandoned the idea, upon calm reflection.

The large room at the Red Lion was to be the ball-room. It took a few days to get the odour of the farmers' tobacco out of it: for they dined there on market days, and afterwards smoked the longest pipes made: and it was also a task of some labour to clean away all the sand ground into the floor by their feet. But when everything was got out—and the huge old sideboard took a day to move—it was not so bad. A private arrangement was made for all the sconces from the meeting-house, to be disguised by ever-greens. Mr. Twinch's best branch candlesticks, and plated snuffer-stand with silver edges, were borrowed for the card room: the yeomanry and club flags were tastefully disposed about the staircase: and the great room was outlined with laurel leaves. Amongst these were tastefully disposed paper lilies and dahlias from the young ladies at the Misses Medlars': and the oranges tied to the potted yew trees in the passage were greatly admired. All this caused intense excitement in the village: and the female branches of the tradespeople's families who were admitted beforehand to see it, formed an exhibition of themselves.

At last the day came, and even at noontide the boys idled about the gate of the Red Lion, in the expectancy of seeing

something. The hair-dresser was torn to pieces. He began his labours immediately after dinner, and they lasted until midnight. Had he not procured the assistance of a brother *coiffeur* from Dibblethorpe, he could not have got through them. As it was, the usual business of his shop was left entirely to the boy, whose energies were usually confined to nailing strings of hair on the wooden blocks, in the manufacture of fronts; but who that day committed such unheard-of atrocities with blunt razors and hot irons, in the recklessness of his power, that there are now living those who speak of him with a shudder.

But the great struggle was respecting the fly—for there was only one in Pottleton, which young Grant talked rudely of as a 'tabby-hutch.' This was bespoken over and over again; and it really did appear so probable that the Drainers, of Boggleswade, would never arrive at all, especially as the machine had first to fetch the Coulters, of Mallow—which was a good five miles off—that the old coach which used to run through Dibblethorpe, and had been contemptibly stowed away in a barn, was dragged out and mopped, and the moths beaten out, and confided once more to the guidership of old Will Turret, the former coachman, who—on the authority of Whacky Clark—cried like a Christian when he got on the box again. There was also a sedan-chair resuscitated, in a similar manner; but as this only took one at a time, its use in a family of five or six was comparatively trifling.

At twenty minutes past eight, long before the candles were lighted—but it could not be avoided—the first fly-load was disembarked under the gateway of the Red Lion, consisting of Mrs. Spink and her nieces. They were very brilliantly got up—in fact, with Oriental splendour. Long-treasured necklaces, earrings, and bangles, flashed and rattled as they descended; and heavy silk shawls shrouded their forms. The fly was redolent of sandal-wood from the fans, and chips of beetles' wings were found all about it, the next day. The boys were greatly excited. They cheered each lady as she descended with a flushed cheek, amidst such demonstrations, and then swept gracefully along the passages to the tea-room, where Mrs. Baker was knocking the candles about all sorts of ways in her anxiety to light them.

Next came old Lady Flokes, who was the occupant of a

tumble-down house the other side of the Green, and visited everybody who asked her, never inviting a soul in return, or allowing them to enter when they called upon her. Her costume was rather that of the middle ages than the present time: and all the fingers of her gloves were much too long for her hands. She revelled also in a great quantity of cloudy lace, and scarfs of ancient splendour, rouged highly, wore false ringlets, and carried a large flaçon of salts. The sedan had been bespoken first, expressly for her: indeed, she usually hired it at parties, making her servant act as one of the bearers, to save expense. When she arrived she was deposited at a card-table, and there remained for the entire evening. These were the only circumstances under which she was ever seen, and nothing was known of her domestic economy; but it was usually understood in the village, that on her return from any entertainment she was packed up very carefully, and put by in a dry place, not to be taken out again until the next festival.

The company now began to arrive quickly, sailing up and down the room, and scrutinizing each other, whilst the band grumbled forth notes of preparation. Mr. Twinch, his daughter, and Annie were amongst them. Miss Martha had a wonderfully bright green wreath, procured expressly from London to make a hit, and the false curls defied detection. She walked along the room with a girlish jerk at each step that was perfectly refreshing to see, regretting only that the Reverend Mr. Page was not there to behold her: with her sister, too, away! But on Annie was the observation of everybody settled. Simply dressed in black, without an ornament of any kind, except a camelia in her hair, which was twisted round her ear in a compromise between bands and curls, she was beyond all question the belle of the room. Accordingly, many were the severe things said about her—the wonder, not only at her appearing there under such circumstances, but of her appearing at all: "really, however," as many remarked, "the public balls were getting so miscellaneous, that they would have to be given up." But Mr Page had talked so much about Annie everywhere—of her sweet temper and general goodness—her really charitable care of the cottagers, and the infusion of gentle blood, which, after all, ran in her veins, than those to whom she was no rival

greatly esteemed her. And when Mrs. Braybœuf, of Pottleton Court, made room for her by her side, and introduced her to her daughter, the Bulliams all looked at one another, and said, "Well, to be sure!" so audibly that Annie heard it. But the blood that flushed up to her pale cheek at the remark, made her look more beautiful than ever, and young Rasper of the Guards, who was staying with the large party at The Court, immediately requested to be presented. Annie only danced quadrilles, which was a severe trial for young Rasper's energy, he being accustomed to go round the room like a firework, clearing everybody out of the way, and knocking not a few over, in a waltz or polka; only selecting, in general, those fast young ladies with whom he could attempt dangerous flights, and accomplish rapid stops and reverses, which in feeble-minded partners would have ended in certain downfall. But Annie was so nice, that he thought he could put up with a quadrille for once, merely for the pleasure of talking to her.

Annie's thoughts were, however, occupied—she was thinking all the while of Philip, and wondering if he would come; for she had, unknown to anybody, written him a letter to beg he would be there, because she was sure he must have learned to dance so well in France. This she made the great reason for his attending, merely adding at the end, "and it is so long since I have seen you." So that whatever young Rasper was talking about, she looked anxiously towards the door at everybody that entered; and when the quadrille was over, she would not go with him to have any tea, but resumed her seat; upon which, young Rasper pronounced her, to Jack Poole, formerly in the 7th, "Deuced pretty, but slow and provincial." Influenced by this, Jack Poole took his arm, and they walked up and down the room, and laughed aloud, and covertly looked at their boots, until they saw Henrietta and Rose Fielder arrive; and as they danced beautifully, and could valse any number of miles in an hour, kept perfect step, said wicked things, and were very pretty girls indeed, the young officers thought no more of Annie all the evening.

Mr. Twinch had long been settled at a rubber with old Lady Flokes, Dr. Keene, and Mrs. Bulliam; and Miss Twinch was conversing with mild Mr. Blandy, the surgeon, who superintended the increase of the parochial census, at five

shillings an occasion; and wrote letters every year to the assistant commissioner, showing, by elaborate calculation, how many miles he walked for a pound, when he divided the year's number of journeys by his salary. This, Miss Twinch said, she far preferred to dancing; and they were soon discussing the sanitary condition of every cottage in the parish, to the sound of Weippert's band.

"The Colliers are getting beyond all endurance," said Mr. Blandy. "I cannot give them enough medicine; but what can you expect of people who live nine in a cottage with two rooms and a scullery, and keep rabbits in all of them. There's a hornet's nest in the thatch, too. The children are always getting stung, and coming for sweet oil and hartshorn."

"Shocking!" observed Miss Martha.

"It is, indeed," said Mr. Blandy. "I told them how to drive the insects away, a long time ago; but Dr. Keene—I speak with all deference and kind feeling—but Dr. Keene has promised them a sovereign if they will keep it for him through the winter, and so the grievous evil is tolerated. Far be it from me, my dear Miss Martha, to depreciate Dr. Keene——"

"Oh, I am sure you would not!" interrupted Miss Twinch.

"No," continued Mr. Blandy; "professional differences ought never to influence either public or private matters. Besides," he added, with great humility, "Dr. Keene holds a higher rank in the world than I do—a plain Mr.—a man of little consequence."

"You must not say that, Mr. Blandy," said Miss Twinch, amiably; and, for the moment—but for the moment only—the Reverend Mr. Page was almost forgotten.

"You are very kind," replied Mr. Blandy. "But to return to Dr. Keene. It may be a grand and gratifying thing for him to show the nest eventually to the scientific men of London, for I see his aim; but can that compensate for the nights of agony that family have endured, when the poor children found the hornets in their little portion of coarse food; or beds—such as they are—or trowsers. It is too bad! —now, is it not?"

"The Stiles are equally wretched," said Miss Twinch, trying to edge off from the incipient attack upon Dr. Keene; for the doctor was a kind of link between all the classes of

Pottleton society; and by bringing different sets closer together, like the connecting screw of a train, often prevented much oscillation and getting off respective lines. Besides, Dr. Keene put all his law business into her brother's hands. "The Stiles, are equally wretched."

"Quite as bad," responded Mr. Blandy. "I believe those children are sent into bad localities to catch the fever, and excite sympathy. They are always in the pigsties, or the drained ponds at The Court, or at contagious funerals."

As Mr. Blandy was speaking, a burst of laughter from the tea-room, rather louder than had as yet characterized the proceedings, diverted their attention.

"Dear, me!" exclaimed Miss Martha; what is that singular noise?"

Mr. Blandy offered to escort her to find out, and taking his arm, they walked off together. When they entered the room, the lady found, to her surprise, that an acquaintance had arrived.

At the end of the table, in most elaborate evening costume, with his cuffs turned up over his wristbands and embroidered at the edges—a crimson velvet waistcoat ornamented with bunches of grapes made of pearl beads with gold tendrils, and a heavy gold chain, which went in and out various button holes, and looped into his pocket and twisted round his neck, was Mr. Wyndham Flitter. He was evidently in great force; and had collected a few young men round him, to whom he was pouring forth a succession of anecdotes, as freely as though they had all been his most intimate friends; interspersing them with riddles, jokes, and good things generally, until one or two of the more convivial guests said, "Oh, bother!" when they were reminded of the ball; and appeared inclined to pass the evening there.

"Who the deuce is he?" asked the Guardsman of his friend.

"I never saw him before, but he's a devilish amusing card," was the reply. "He'd make a hit at the mess."

"Here's another, if you have not heard it," said Mr. Flitter, following up some witticism. "Why is a man in the first carriage of an express train like a village on the Niger?"

The company thought for an instant, until Rasper said—

"We give it up: what is it?"

"Ah—now you have me," replied Mr. Flitter. "I wish I

could tell; but, do you know, the answer has never been satisfactorily defined, and I do not see the least chance of its being so, until we learn a little more about Central Africa."

"Sold!" cried one or two of the young men, with a burst of laughter, as Rasper did not exactly know whether to look angry or amused.

"A glass of sherry?" said Mr. Flitter, with refined courtesy, turning away wrath. Rasper directly assented.

"Talking of sherry," Mr. Flitter went on, "I heard a good thing of Sheridan the other day;" and then he proceeded to give one of the conventional anecdotes, which we may spare the reader's feelings by suppressing. But it went very well: and Mr. Flitter, knowing that the next thing to making an impression *in* a party was to get with effect *out* of it, took advantage of the laughter he created, to make his exit, and go into the ball room. Renewed inquiries were made as he entered, respecting him; and when he gave his spring-hat to Mrs. Baker, to take care of, she was so frightened that she called all the servants up to look at it, and finally broke it. Mr. Flitter made his way straight to Mr. Twinch, and having shaken hands with him, begged to know where his amiable ladies were, as he must dance with them—was very much grieved to find only one there—requested Miss Martha's hand for the quadrille; and then considered his position perfectly established, whilst to Miss Martha it was a circumstance of great joy.

Mr. Flitter conversed on general subjects during the dance; but just at its conclusion, so as not to appear too anxious, inquired after Annie, and she was pointed out to him still sitting by Mrs. Braybœuf. So he immediately offered to provide Miss Twinch with a seat, but the lady thought she should like some negus; and, indeed, did not wish to sit down just yet. Indeed, Mr. Flitter had some difficulty to get away at all, even when she had taken the refreshment.

Annie had seen him as soon as he came into the room, watching him anxiously, and half expecting to see Philip with him. But as the latter did not arrive, she was still more desirous to speak to Flitter: and directly accepting his arm, walked to the end of the room, where their conversation could be less restrained than amongst a lot of people.

"And where is Philip?" was Annie's first question. "I hoped he would have come with you. Is he well?"

"Yes; he's quite well—as far as health goes?" was the reply.

"What do you mean, Mr. Flitter?" asked Annie, eagerly.

"Oh—nothing;—nothing of any consequence. Perhaps he's a *little* too careless of himself: too imprudent, if I may use the term. But then, you know, he is comparatively young upon town. The mode of life is new to him."

"I am sure you are keeping something back: do tell me all!" returned Annie. "I can ask you about my cousin: for I know you have been very good to him. What has happened; and why did he not come here?"

"To tell you the truth, I persuaded him to stay in town," answered Mr. Flitter. "You will find I did, if you ask him. He would have written and told you so himself, but he was rather pressed with his work when I left, and I promised to explain everything to you."

"And why did you persuade him to stop?"

"Well—if you will know, this is the affair. He got into a scrape—some silly brawl—on the morning that the new journal was to be published: and—and——"

"And, what?" said Annie, as the other affected to hesitate.

"And, in fact, then, was locked up in a police-office. This in itself would have been nothing—a mere frolic: but it shook the confidence of the proprietors in him, and so it was unfortunate. But how pale you are looking; let me take you to the refreshment-room."

Mr. Flitter again held out his arm, which Annie took, in her confusion, and they left the ball-room, followed by Miss Martha Twinch's eyes, looking all sorts of edged tools after them, and wondering what Mr. Flitter could want to pay Annie such attention for, and whether it was not rather bold of her to hang on to him so.

Upon gaining the refreshment-room, they found few people there, for a dance was going on: so they took possession of a conversation-stool—not a *causeuse,* but one of the old sort—and when Mr. Flitter had insisted upon Annie taking a glass of wine, he went on:—

"I may speak to you without reserve. I am a straightforward, matter-of-fact person, and I hope you will think the better of me for being so. At all events, I shall think the better of myself. Truth may be blamed, but it cannot be shamed. You love your cousin."

In an instant the red blood flushed over Annie's neck and cheeks, and corroborated Flitter's assertion far more certainly than words might have done; for Annie never spoke.

"Do you think he is, in every way, worthy the affection of one so good—so perfect, as yourself?" continued the other.

Again the poor girl made no reply; but she turned her eyes full upon Flitter, almost flashing with anger at having her cousin's claims to her love questioned. And the next instant she rose coldly, as if to leave the room.

"I have offended you?" he half asked. "If I have done so, I am sorry. I need not tell you that such was far from my present intention. Perhaps, when you know me better, you will give me credit for having only one object in view—your happiness. And remember, I am, and always shall be, through all, *his* friend."

The wily man-upon-town had been concerned in too many intrigues, not to have got both voice and expression into the most perfect subjection to the desired end. He spoke this in such a low, earnest, almost tremulous tone, that Annie's coldness, which she had so suddenly assumed, thawed in an instant, before his apparent fervour.

"Do not speak so mysteriously," she said. "Tell me, Mr. Flitter, what you allude to."

"You have not heard, then?"

"How could I hear anything? Who is there that knows Philip in London, to tell me, except yourself. What is the worst?"

"Oh, 'the worst' is too strong a word; for it really is nothing, except taken in connexion with circumstances. He is paying some attention to, certainly, an attractive person in London."

"Who is she?" asked Annie, in a breath.

"A Mrs. Wracketts; the wife of one of my friends. But, pshaw! it is nothing, I tell you. Leonie, whom I have known from a child, is the best little woman going; and if she

thought for a moment that anybody was buzzing about her, from mere idle gallantry, she would soon settle him, I can assure you. But come, let us return to the ball-room, and don't think anything more about it. The subject is really not worth a moment's consideration."

But now the girl would have been the one to stop, and was about to detain him, when Miss Martha Twinch, having come to the conclusion that Mr. Wyndham Flitter and Annie had been quite long enough together, entered. She had looked all round the ball-room, having made several false starts in the hope of finding a cavalier. But Mr. Blandy was talking to Mrs. Spink about the real Asiatic cholera, and Mrs. Spink, like everybody else who had been in India, had an infallible remedy, which Mr. Blandy was copying, with the determination of trying it upon the first tramp who came into the Union, with any ailment that might be twisted into the disease in question, and afford matter for a letter in the *Dibblethorpe Messenger*, and medical periodicals. And the two young officers, who were again lounging up and down the room—not dancing quadrilles—and had pronounced Miss Martha, with respect to figure, to be "a perfect flat," did not make any advances. So she very determinedly walked off by herself; and informed Annie, in a playful, girlish way, that she had really come to see where she had got to, for that she was getting quite alarmed.

"Oh, you need not be frightened!" said Mr. Flitter. "We have been talking about everything and everybody. What funny people there are here!"

Miss Martha's purpose was diverted in an instant, as Mr. Flitter said this to her with a tone of the greatest reliance on her perception.

"Oh, yes," she said; "so very odd, to be sure!"

"I wish you had been with us," Mr. Flitter went on, with the most delightful frankness—"you would have joined so capitally in our fun. Those Bulliams!—oh, haven't we laughed at them, Miss Maitland?"

Poor Annie said she had: or rather she scarcely knew what she said, so much had Mr. Flitter's conversation upset her.

"I think we will return, if you like," said Miss Martha.

"There is going to be a country dance." And she looked very meaningly at the gentleman, and spoke of it as though it were a great thing.

"Oh!" he observed; "a country dance. Ah! yes; what is that? I think I have seen them mentioned in old magazines, with curious names. 'Lady Bab's Folly' I remember was one—danced at Ranelagh. I should like to see it."

Miss Martha at once perceived that everybody did not think a country dance such an occasion for rejoicing. So she said something pleasantly about reviving old country fashions: for which piece of tact she was rewarded by Mr. Flitter again requesting the pleasure of dancing with her. This he did for various reasons, but Miss Martha only thought of one. And therefore, when they had conducted Annie to her seat, they took their places. The dance was accomplished, as most of its class are—with no conversation and a slow alternation of working like a horse or standing dull and unoccupied, but expected to look festive. When it was over, Mr. Flitter found a partner seat next to Annie, and then went into the card-room, from which he did not emerge for some time.

The dancing went on; and the people's hearts began to open as the hours advanced. Young Bulliam asked Mrs. Spink's eldest niece to dance; and the aunt was really surprised (as she told old Lady Flokes next day,) to find he was so agreeable. For after all, as she took care to add, the family really came from nothing; and Mr. Spink, when he was at the head of the great Madras firm of Spink, Jaggerbedam, Mofoozel and Co., had often given him a sack of cowries to get his dinner with. And the Coulters, of Mallow, who had been at daggers with the Fielders ever since the last election, got quite friendly again; even to Bessy Coulter promising to make a chain for Harry Fielder, who in return promised to send her a pair of lovely bantams, if she would so contrive that they could not get into the garden; inasmuch as they were most indefatigable in their researches after seeds.

The young officers, though, somewhat alarmed the steady old provincials—they did dance in such a very extraordinary manner! After the first polka in which they appeared, the resident respectabilities firmly resolved that at all events *their* daughters should not be twirled, and whirled, and really

even hugged, in that disgusting manner. But when they saw Constance Braybœuf, who went to Almacks, start off in the same strange fashion with the young guardsman; and knew that he had been at the Queen's balls, and that most probably he danced there just in the same manner, their severity somewhat relaxed. But they said, after all, it was all very different when they were young. So, as "that Mr. Finch" observed, were gun-locks and shot-flasks—travelling, lamp-lighting, geography, and new-fangled parsons—and indeed everything that beat cock-fighting generally! But the remarks of this ribald young man were met with the scorn they merited.

One person was supremely happy, and that was Miss Martha Twinch; for when the evening was far advanced, who should appear but the Reverend Mr. Page—not come to dance, but because the whole of the resident gentry were there, and he thought it proper and respectful to show himself. If anything could have clouded her happiness, it would have been the attention he paid to Annie; but Mr. Flitter drew him off, just as the first pang shot though Miss Martha's virgin heart; and began to talk to him. No two people could be more dissimilar; nor had good blushing Mr. Page ever had the highest opinion of Mr. Flitter. But the latter gentleman so immediately began to talk to him on subjects most likely to prove interesting,—paying great deference to his opinion, and not entering upon any questions as to whether a parson had a right, or not, to play antics in costume in the pulpit, or defy his flock, as though a church were a town-hall,—that Mr. Page, at last, pronounced him to be a very entertaining gentleman. And when Mr. Flitter informed the worthy young parson that a friend he had, named Spooner, who was under some trifling obligation to him, had asked him to Oxford, whither he intended shortly to repair, this opened a new vein of talk, which did not finish until Mr. Twinch, looking as hard as ever, so that it was impossible to say whether he had won or lost, came from the card-room, and began to think that it was time to go home.

"You will come and see us to-morrow, Mr. Flitter?" said Miss Martha, as though she intended to appropriate him entirely to herself; albeit Mr. Page was in attendance with the shawls for Annie and herself.

"Yes; I hope for that pleasure," was the answer. "Indeed, I have some affairs to arrange with your brother. Miss Maitland—allow me."

And whilst Annie was looking earnestly at him, and wishing him to come—not that she could learn anything more from him, or that, if she could, the information was likely to prove agreeable, but simply because a strong link in their acquaintance had been rivetted that evening—he allowed Mr. Page to put on her shawl, after some unknown fashion stumbled upon by chance in his confusion; and then escorted her across the road, leaving the others to follow. For it was a fine night, and the Red Lion was near enough to Mr. Twinch's for the servant to have been occupied all the evening in thrusting her body as far out of the window as the laws of gravitation allowed, and watching the company going to the ball.

Annie had little sleep that night. The novelty of the affair, to her, would have been in itself a sufficient cause for wakefulness; but the conversation that had passed between Flitter and herself drove away all thoughts of slumber; and she heard all the carriages go away, one after another, until the very last, when day was just about to break.

This was one of the very dog-carts that an observant eye might have seen, before that, at the Shiners'; but at night it was not recognised. It contained young Rasper and Jack Poole, who had been smoking in the bar of the Red Lion, long after the company left, with Mr. Flitter, whom the Guardsman had asked to dine with him at the Tower, in the delight of his heart, and who had accepted the invitation, "as soon," he said, "as he came back from Oxford, where he was about to go."

The young officers were on their way to knock up Shiner, for some of his game pie: for it appeared, after all, that they knew Shiner in London quite well, and Mrs. Shiner, too, for the matter of that; but yet, were not surprised not to meet them at the ball. Certainly, this was strange; but any, or all, of the Pottletonians would have been more astonished to have seen them blow a post-horn under the window till Shiner put his head out, and asked, in a loud voice, who was there.

"The Duke, and Lord Hardinge, for some pale ale," was the reply.

"All right," said Mr. Shiner, not put out by the announcement of such distinguished visitors. And presently a light was seen flitting about the house, until the master, in an entire suit of scarlet flannel, came to let them in. Upon this the mare was pulled into the yard, and left with a cloth over her; and they all went into Mr. Shiner's room, which they said they liked better than the one in St. John's Wood, because it was jollier: the jollity arising from the perfectly free-and-easy style of the apartment—the tankards standing on the piano—the fishing-hats being hung on the lustres, and the canaries, hyacynths, whips, shawls, and wicker dog-houses all being grouped about in splendid disregard of social conventionalities. There was an odour of cigars that clung to the handsome damask furniture of the room, and the card-racks were filled with kid gloves ('six and three quarters') and paper cigarette books. Mr. Shiner routed about in the kitchen, and brought up the refreshments himself, and then they all set to, and waited there until it was time to go back to Pottleton Court, where there was to be a *battue.* All this was certainly curious; but the respective parties appeared to understand it all very well.

In the meanwhile, the ball had quite broken up. The last of the pretty girls had been escorted down the staircase to their respective vehicles; the last soft words had been whispered into delicate ears; and the last gentle pressures given, and sometimes returned, as the small white hands were presented at the carriage windows. Everybody had left, except Mr. Wyndham Flitter; and he was still in the bar.

"And you really have no bed, Mrs. Baker?" he asked.

"Not a corner, sir," she said; "they were all bespoken a week ago; and the card and tea rooms take away two, you see."

"Isn't there a sofa, Mrs. Baker?" asked the gentleman.

"I'm going to occupy that, sir, with my sister."

Miss Tapper, Mrs. Baker's sister, was a nice young lady, who lived in the bar, and passed her life in saying smart things to the young farmers, and studying hydraulics, as applied to raising fluids by machinery.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Flitter. "There really is nowhere, then? I slept in a cab once; but then it was summer, to be sure. Ha! I have it!—the music-gallery of the ball-room!"

"La, sir!" exclaimed the landlady.

"A capital place," said Mr. Flitter. "Don't distress yourself a minute. Give me my carpet bag, and those two railway wrappers; and if you don't call me until I call you, I shall sleep like a top."

Mrs. Baker offered no opposition, for she was anxious to get to bed herself; so Mr. Flitter collected his things, and wound up a staircase like a hollow corkscrew to the gallery. Here he disposed the music desks, and such instruments as the performers had left, until the morning, so as to leave a small space for his bed; and then, with his usual power of accommodating himself to circumstances, was soon asleep. Indeed, his slumbers lasted until after eight o'clock in the morning; and perhaps, even then, he would have slept longer, had not the string of the violoncello flown, and awakened him.

The village was more quiet than usual—that is to say, the usual promenaders had not yet appeared to give it what very little life it ordinarily possessed. Mr. Twinch was the only one about of the company; and late hours did not much affect his iron nature. He was not, however, in a very good temper, for the servants had sat up for the ladies and taken it out proportionately in sleep the next morning; so that when he came down at his usual time, he found the house all shut up. And therefore, in a huff, he went over to the Red Lion, and ensconced himself in the bar, to breakfast with Mrs. Baker, in her sanctum—the only part of the house that the festivity had not deranged.

"Good morning, Mr. Twinch!" was the salutation of Mr. Flitter, as he entered the bar. "Up early, I see: there's nothing like it, sir."

"How d'ye do, sir?" responded Mr. Twinch, somewhat hardly, as he looked up from the egg he had just cut the top from.

"Stop!" cried Mr. Flitter; "don't eat that egg yet. I'll tell you something worth any money—chloride of sodium is not soluble in albumen."

"I beg your pardon?" said the lawyer, inquiringly.

"Salt won't dissolve in eggs—that is what I mean—hence you get a pellet of nothing else, in the middle of the first spoonful. Now, look here: pour three drops—no more—of

your coffee into the egg. *Now*, put in your salt; there—you see, it is equally diffused."

"Umph!" said Mr. Twinch, dryly, without being so much struck with the value of Mr. Flitter's wrinkle.

"He's very tough," thought the other; but he was not to be so easily beaten; so he went on. "Have you thought anything more about the chalybeate on your property, Mr. Twinch?"

"No, sir;" replied the lawyer, curtly.

"But I have," Mr. Flitter went on; "and am more and more convinced of its being the first speculation of the day. I am about to stay for a short time in Pottleton—at least, I shall be here very often, and we must really have some talk about it."

"If you please, sir," said Mr. Twinch, still hardly, but evidently less so, as the prospect of gain opened before him.

"I never had the pleasure of meeting Miss Martha Twinch before last evening," continued Mr. Flitter. "She is a charming person. I am going to do myself the pleasure of calling on her this morning."

"Bless me!" thought Mr. Twinch; "if he would take a fancy to Patty, what a chance it would be for her!"

And he directly added, "Won't you have some breakfast, sir?"

Mr. Wyndham Flitter did not require any pressing to eat, but immediately fell to, at everything before him. Mr. Twinch, on the contrary, suddenly stopped—a counter-reflection had come across his mind, that he could not exactly make Mr. Flitter out; and that he had been civil too hastily. In a moment of ill-temper, at not finding his own household up and about, he had evidently done his sister an injustice. Mr. Flitter divined this in an instant, so he made up his mind to keep his ground.

"You have been many years in practice here, Mr. Twinch?" he observed.

"Thirty-seven, sir," said the lawyer.

"Thirty-seven!" replied Mr. Flitter, with astonishment. "And yet you must have been, too. Your name is familiar to me from a child. You had the affairs of the Court Estate to manage, I think."

What the Court Estate was, or how Mr. Twinch had been

connected with it, Mr. Flitter had not the slightest idea. But he had seen something about it in an ancient bound twelvemonth of the *Dibblethorpe Messenger* that he had found in one of the rooms of the Red Lion, amongst some of his similar lively specimens of country-inn literature, and this had been quite enough for him to go off upon.

"True enough," said Mr. Twinch, looking up again. "But how did you hear of that?"

"Oh—it is a long story, but some relatives of mine were concerned in the conveyance. I will tell you all about it one of these days. I only know, I have often heard your conduct throughout the affair, made the theme of the warmest praise, by my uncle. But no matter."

And Mr. Flitter dropped his voice into a melancholy key, fearing that Mr. Twinch might inquire too closely who his uncle was. Possibly it would not have been a difficult task for him to have named a dozen, idly speaking.

"He has respectable relations, then," thought Mr. Twinch.

"Those days are for ever gone," Mr. Flitter went on. "But let us speak of other things. I see your amiable sister has been very kind to Miss Maitland."

"Martha has shown her some little attention," said Mr. Twinch; "and, indeed, so has Letitia."

"She is a nice girl," continued the other; "but it would be a pity for her to throw all her goodness away upon that young Hammond. Do you know him?"

"Very slightly," answered Mr. Twinch. "At the same time, I don't know anything against him."

"Nor do I—not a breath," replied Mr. Flitter, eagerly. "But I fear he is getting into a bad set in London. He is young, and easily dazzled. Two or three things have occurred lately that might as well have been avoided."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Twinch, as he looked over his spectacles at the other; "and what are they!"

Upon which Mr. Wyndham Flitter, having got the other exactly to the pitch he wanted, proceeded to tell, in detail, all he had recited to Annie, on the preceding evening.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO NICE CHILDREN.

THE first thoughts of Miss Letitia Twinch, as she awoke on the morning after her arrival at Mrs. Cooze's, reverted to Tip. He occupied her mind all the time she was dressing, and took away her appetite at breakfast, in spite of Mr. Cooze's assurance that the locality of every stolen dog in London was as well known as though it was inserted in the Post Office Directory.

It was a great relief to her depression when the butcher called, for Mr. Cooze had spoken of his connexion amongst the dog-stealers; and by her desire he was introduced.

"Snoswell," said Mr. Cooze, who took upon himself to be spokesman, "this lady lost a pet dog yesterday."

"Yes, sir," answered the man, in a tone which implied he looked upon such an event as a matter-of-course, just as if he had been informed that she had eaten her dinner or gone to bed.

"And we want you to put her in the way of getting it again, if you can," observed Mrs. Cooze.

"It was lost from the railway station," said Miss Twinch.

"I'd sooner it have gone in the streets, ever so much," remarked Mr. Snoswell. "You see a railway's such a place for corded boxes."

The company began to wonder what connexion such kind of luggage had with stolen dogs. Mr. Snoswell relieved their embarrassment.

"You see," he continued, "one of the cabmen keeps a box on purpose: it looks as if it was corded, only it's got no bottom, and the cords are fastened to the edges."

"Did you ever hear!" observed Miss Twinch, to the company collectively. "The wretches!"

"Very well, ma'am," Mr. Snoswell went on. "Now suppose my hat to be the box, and this chaney cup the dog: whilst the owner is looking after his luggage, and the dog's just let out of the locker—all stupid and scared, as dogs are, with the noise of the journey—the cabman's friend that rides

with him for society, claps the box over the dog, like this, and sets himself down upon it. Now, of course, nobody suspects the dog to be in a corded box."

"Of course not," observed all the party.

"Presently, the owner misses him, and wants to know who's seen a dog. 'What sort of a dog was he?' asks the thief: 'little black tarrier?' 'That's him,' says the owner. 'Oh, he's just run through the gate,' says the other; and off the owner starts. The minute he's gone, the dog has rather an uncomfortable journey, as his covering is shoved along the platform, and he has to walk with it; but when they get near the cab, it's lifted up a little ways and he's taken out and thrown into the cab; the box is put on the roof, and off they goes."

"And that was perhaps the way my darling Tip was taken," said Miss Twinch. "But you can get him back again?"

"Well, I'll try, ma'am," said the butcher, "unless he's been shaved or sewed up, and then it's not so easy."

"Don't tell me any more," cried Miss Twinch. "Here is a little account of him, I drew up for a bill. And do, my good friend, use your utmost endeavours. You shall be well rewarded."

Mr. Snoswell promised to do so; and, as he departed, he left Miss Twinch in a calmer state of mind, as she saw Hope riding on his shoulders.

Breakfast passed, during which Mr. Cooze did his best to render the meal festive, by making a joke upon everything at table, and went off to the Customs—"and he hoped some day the Customs would improve his manners," he said, as an exit speech: upon which Mrs. Cooze observed, "she hoped they would, for there was quite room for it." But this was only said in affectionate banter; for Mr. Cooze returned, and saluted her, and then told Miss Twinch "to keep off, as he did not approve of such familiarities," which made quite a pleasant little laugh for him to go away with.

The next excitement was the introduction of Mrs. Cooze's two dear children, Lobby and Totty, with whom she knew Miss Twinch would be so pleased. Lobby, so called because it was the infantile for Robert, was eight years old; and Totty, whose name was Jane, was a year younger.

They were both of that delightful class known as "sharp little things"—high-pressure children, offensively educated to distress acquaintances with the display of their talents. There was nothing of the attributes of pleasant childhood about them: they had large eyes and sallow complexions, and they twitched and worked their features about, as if they were always making faces at you—in fact, at times, their expression was perfectly impish. They seldom laughed, and when they did it was anything but the joyous musical peal which makes children's laughter so delicious; being usually a little sardonic snigger. They said rude things—in which the boy excelled—and when not made the features of the company, got additionally unpleasant.

"There are my 'jewels,'" said Mrs. Cooze, in the words of the Roman matron. "There, my dears—that is the young lady that I told you was coming."

"You're not a young lady," said Lobby, immediately upon the introduction.

"Robert, my love!" exclaimed Mrs. Cooze.

"Well—you're not," continued the boy; "my mamma's ever-so-much younger: she told my papa so, yesterday, before you came."

"How dare you tell such stories, sir!" cried Mrs. Cooze, with great anger.

"But you did, mamma, when you said you never bargained for the dog, too."

The interview was getting as painful for Miss Twinch as it was for Mrs. Cooze.

"Give me that," said Totty, pointing to a brooch, with which something Miss Twinch wore about her neck and shoulders in the morning was fastened.

"I'm very sorry I can't give you that," said poor Miss Twinch; "but I will buy you something much prettier, when I go out."

"And when shall you go out?"

"Oh, soon!"

"Yes—but when?"

"For shame, Jane, to worry Miss Twinch so," cried the mother. "You shall not come down stairs all day, if you behave so badly. What do you ask for that brooch for?"

"Because we're turned out of our room to sleep with Elizabeth, whilst she's here," replied Totty.

"And she's got the looking-glass," added the boy, "and my table."

Fearful that fresh domestic revelations might be made, Mrs. Cooze hurried the children from the room, telling them to get ready for a walk; and then returned to smoothe all their remarks over as well as she could, to Miss Twinch.

"They do not mean anything rude," she said; "it is only their acute perception. They are really not like children; when you have heard Totty play, and Lobby sing a duet with her, you will think so."

Miss Twinch had made up her mind already. But she was anxious not to make Mrs. Cooze uncomfortable, so she turned the subject, and thought it would be a fine day,—thereby also intimating that a walk would be agreeable.

The Jewels were to accompany them, and they soon made their re-appearance, quite ready—Lobby carrying a whip with a frightful whistle at the end, with which he announced his approach all the way down stairs; and Totty, in a crimson dress, made so very short—as Mrs. Cooze loved to see—that her little cold legs appeared to hang out of the bottom of it like the pistils from a fuchsia.

The entertainment of the walk began by the children rushing out into the street the instant the door was opened, by which means they ran under the very neck of a cab-horse, and were saluted with such dreadful oaths thereupon, by the driver, that Miss Twinch felt all her blood go the wrong way, as she expressed it; and the more so, when, being next to the door, the same uneducated and altogether badly brought-up man told her if she had children she ought to look after them; at the which she well nigh fainted. Lobby and Totty were then dragged back by the maid; the playful boy taking the opportunity of splashing her stockings from the gutter, by putting his foot violently into it, as they crossed. Then Mrs. Cooze declared they had brought her heart into her mouth; so that amongst the millions of that great city, probably no two persons went forth with their circulation in such a strange state as these luckless ladies.

The Soho Bazaar was the first visit decided on,—a place

which few picture, except a long way off, through Time's inverted telescope; when they can only recollect their heads on a level with the counters. Ladies, perhaps, know it as it is at the present, but men have no notion of it beyond a childhood's aspect. Yet we imagine that it is still in existence on much the same plan as formerly. Various toys have become, it may be, extinct. The "Miller and his Men," is not, perhaps, the popular drama that it was of yore, in the little theatres; nor do the fashionable ladies and gentlemen made of figs and raisins hold similar sway. Possibly a more modern race of children's books has supplanted Mr. Newberry's; and "The Hundred Wonders of the World" have swollen beyond the old red, thick octavos, with the bad wood-cuts that depicted them. Nor should we be surprised to find science gradually altering the tone of the playthings, and sweeping away the Tumble-down-Dicks, the musical flour-carts with the incomprehensible windmill, that turned on two revolving pilasters at the end; and the little man in the fashionable frock-coat, who so industriously lifted up heavy beams to let them fall again by his toothed barrel, for anything in which magnetism, pneumatics, caloric, or hydrogen could convey a surreptitious lesson of wisdom in the guise of a merry-andrew.

Are the large pictures still left against the red walls, portraying the history of Leopold and Charlotte, about which we were told such melancholy stories? And do the charming ladies and gentlemen who formed "the Drummond gallery" still decorate the staircase? Do the same old dowagers still sit on the chairs to watch the company; and do the same young girls still duck under the counters to gain their fastnesses with such celerity, disappearing like rabbits in a warren? Alack! we expect such is no longer the case. The old ladies must have departed long ago, or have been transported for life to their bed-rooms; and the young ones may be the mothers of the industrious girls who now dive under the mahogany flaps, or jump up, like their own Jack-in-the-boxes, to confront a visitor, or run to their neighbour for change, as of old.

The behaviour of the Cooze Jewels, when they went to the Soho Bazaar,—and it was impossible to get them past it; one might as well have attempted to have persuaded a Rams-

gate donkey to pass his stable,—was not a good example to the other olive-branches there assembled. If there was any article of sale more treacherously placed than its fellows on the corner of a counter, they swept it down in passing, and if it was of a nature in any way fragile, they broke it,—upon which it had, then and there, to be paid for. Then Lobby blew all the bundle of trumpets that hung to the toy-counter; nor would he move until each had been tried; and he had, in addition, turned the wheels of the campanalogian coal-cart, which played a melody of three notes, the wrong way, and deranged its internal economy beyond repair. Totty contented herself by displaying her musical accomplishments to the assembled audience in playing "Ah, vous dirais-je," &c., on the harmonicons, or toy-pianos; but this was less reprehensible, for it gave great pride and pleasure to Mrs. Cooze, who would tell her child to come away, in a tone that intimated to her she might stay; and would then look triumphantly round at the girls who had outgrown their leggings, to the ungraceful exposure of their black boots, and the staring children from the rural districts, with an expression that seemed to say, "When will you be able to do that?" After which she would thank the stall-keeper with a gracious smile, which the stall-keeper returned as graciously as the frustrated hope that anticipated a purchase would permit, and moved on.

To Miss Twinch the babies' dresses were the chief attraction; she loved to look at them, as a boy of fourteen loves to have a dressing-case with razors in it. But as these, in the abstract, were not of deep interest to the Jewels, they found excitement in other causes,—trying to lift themselves over the edge of the counter, in which gymnastic feat they usually pulled over several of the tall bill-files with wooden buns on the top, on which their caps were placed, or indulging in pertinent and impertinent remarks.

"I know where babies grow," said Totty, looking up at Miss Twinch: "you don't."

"And I know, too, Miss," observed Lobby, with a face, to his sister.

"No, you don't!"

"Yes, I do, then; at Nurse Bottler's, at Peckham, where the parsley is. That's where you came from."

"No I didn't."

"Yes you did. Mamma—mamma! Wasn't Totty digged up with a gold spade at Nurse Bottler's, at Peckham?"

"Hush, Robert! I'm engaged," said Mrs. Cooze, incontinently asking the price of a body.

"No; but wasn't she?" continued the pertinacious Lobby: and then, finding he did not get an answer, he went on to Miss Twinch.

"Did you come from anywhere?"

"There's a pretty rocking-horse," said the confused lady.

"Yes, I've seen him," continued the Jewel. "But did you come from anywhere?"

"Pottleton—such a pretty place," replied Miss Twinch, in agony, as she saw the dialogue was furnishing great amusement to some by-standers. "You shall see it, some day."

Ah! that's where you live," continued the indefatigable boy.

"But I mean, where——"

"Now we'll go to the other toy-shop," interrupted Mrs. Cooze; and this announcement had the effect of instantaneously diverting the attention of the Jewels, who frisked on immediately in a species of extempore dance, with their arms working like windmills at their sides. The relief that Miss Twinch felt, those who have had a tooth out, or a new boot off, or a bore go away, only can tell.

"You'll buy me something pretty now—won't you?" said Totty, as she came to that persecuted lady's side, and pulled her mantilla all awry. She spoke in a low voice for her mamma not to hear.

Miss Twinch took no notice, but walked on close to Mrs. Cooze, thinking that such a step might stop the request; and she also thought—albeit, Jane Collier had always a cold in her head, and Harriet Stiles was absurdly nervous—how much better every child in her own Infant School would have behaved under such circumstances.

Mrs. Cooze had raised the hopes of her Jewels rashly: she had led them to the toy-counter without intending to buy; and a grand rebellion would have commenced had not Miss Twinch, with a slight exclamation of astonishment, rushed to another counter, where a gentleman in black with a white cravat, the flat bow of which looked like the two oppo-

site sails of a windmill, high shirt collars, and a smooth blushing face, was making a purchase.

"Mr. Page!" exclaimed Miss Twinch, with energy.

The good young curate, for it was that gentleman, was quite startled. He blushed deeper than ever, advanced his hand and then drew it back again, knocked down his stick, put his purse into a work-basket on the stall in his confusion, and finally extended his smoke-coloured thread glove to Miss Twinch, and said how happy he was to see her. And then, as very often happens after a sudden and rapturous recognition, in which every energy is expended, there was a dead pause. In the moment of plenteous delight no provision is made against approaching poverty of subject.

"Jane," said Miss Twinch to her friend; "let me introduce you to Mr. Page, our clergyman at Pottleton, and my excellent friend."

Here came a moment of fresh embarrassment for the good curate; but he got through it pretty well, touching his hat rather than lifting it, and knocking down a crochet-basket, for which he apologised vaguely to Miss Twinch.

"We are——"

"This is——"

Commenced both Miss Twinch and Mr. Page at the same time, both stopping short to listen to the other, and then begging a mutual pardon.

"My papa won't like you," said Lobby, who had picked up Mr. Page's stick, and was trying to climb up it. "He says all the parsons ought to——"

"What are you buying, Mr. Page?" asked Miss Twinch.

"Hem! a little—I was thinking about—it's not quite in my way—a little work-basket."

And he nervously proffered a shallow basket, lined, and with little pockets all round the sides. Miss Twinch looked at it with a spasm. It could not be for himself; she had once, it was true, heard Mr. Page declare that he could sew on a shirt-button in an extremity—which, indeed, was the case, by holding the needle between his finger and thumb like a watch-key, pressing its head upon the table to push it through, in lieu of using a thimble; and then, in tribulation and suffering, never hitting the right hole of the button when he tried to send it back again, but pricking his thumb, at an unexpected

point. But he could not want such a basket as that for his work-things, or else where was the housewife she had once presented to him, with the thread-tubes and the flannel needle-book? It was certainly for a female!

"What taste you have, Mr. Page," said Miss Twinch. "Jane, isn't it pretty?"

"Oh, very!" responded Mrs. Cooze, in an ecstasy of admiration.

"These have been very much admired," said the stall-keeper, putting forward some fresh things which were totally disregarded in the emotions of the party.

"And who is that for, Mr. Page?" asked Miss Twinch, with a smirk.

"Give it to me," said Totty, clinging fondly round the curate's leg, and treading on his cloth-boots: on which Mr. Page looked pleasant at the child and patted her cheek, inducing further familiarity.

"Jane!" cried Mrs. Cooze, with severity. Miss Twinch, although an infant's friend, wished that Totty could be hung, had it only been for a little while, as she repeated her question.

"Why, you ought not, by good rights, to have been in the secret, Miss Letitia," said Mr. Page; "but now I cannot help it."

Miss Twinch fluttered generally; it might be—and yet she scarcely dared to hope that—in fact, she didn't know what to think.

"Do you like it?" asked the curate.

"It is most elegant," replied the lady.

"That's prettier for half-a-crown," observed Lobby, taking a part in the discussion, and pointing to a ticketed basket. "Give me sixpence," he added, addressing Miss Twinch.

Had that lady carried Golconda in her pocket she would have made it over to the Jewel at that moment.

"It will create quite a little effect in Pottleton," said Mr. Page, "on the table of your parlour."

"Oh, you are too kind!" murmured Miss Twinch.

"Say rather I am too happy," was the reply. "Do you suppose I have not watched with interest for some little time the improvement in our infant flock, without appreciating the unwearied assistance afforded?"

Miss Twinch could scarcely speak; she could only take up a knitting-box and look at it, as she sighed forth, "Oh! don't mention that."

"And, therefore," continued Mr. Page, "I thought this little remembrance was no more than due to Miss Maitland for her kindness."

"Oh—Miss Maitland!" said Miss Twinch, with bitter disappointment.

She could not help the tone in which she spoke. Her hopes had been so suddenly and totally destroyed, that despair rushed, in an unchecked tide, through the breach. Mr. Page saw it.

"You thought it was for your sister?" he half affirmed, half asked. "Her claims are equally great; but, you see, in her present position, the compliment has greater weight with Miss Maitland."

"Don't!" said Miss Twinch, sharply to Totty, who once more pulled her mantilla; and then there was another pause, which Mr. Page varied by pulling out his watch. It was a large silver one, with chain and seals which he tucked away, believing that in London everything was taken from everybody, the minute they appeared in the streets.

"I must be off to the station," he said, "or I shall miss the train. Good bye, Miss Letitia; I shall say I've seen you. Good bye."

He bowed to Mrs. Cooze; forgot to take his change until the stall-keeper gave it to him, and then went away, leaving his stick in the possession of Lobby.

Miss Twinch's manner was so changed all at once, that her friend was quite astonished; she was perfectly snappish, and disagreed with Mrs. Cooze upon every subject started—even to admiring the latest morning caps. So that the rest of the walk was not very lively: and if it had not been for occasional expressions of alarm or expostulation, called forth by the conduct of the Jewels, it would have passed almost in silence. Luckily, however, Mrs. Cooze determined to call upon her friend, Mrs. Budd, in Wimpole-street—first-rate people the Budds were, to introduce Miss Twinch to—and they accordingly proceeded thither, arriving at luncheon time, to the great joy of the Jewels.

The Budds, who were wine-merchants, had always been

intimate with the Coozes; but Mr. Budd had made several lucky hits in his life, one after the other, which had enabled him to move from Ormond-street to Bloomsbury—thence to Berner's-street, and finally in his present location—following the sun, as Mr. Budd's own bottles were said to do on the table, and even now looking forward to Hyde Park Gardens. They were the great connexion of the Coozes, and if the latter could not secure them for a party, they did not give one.

Miss Twinch was a little impressed with the style of the house, and was somewhat recovering from her humour. But the children did not improve—on the contrary, their behaviour when they went to lunch was by no means pleasant.

First of all they would be helped from that dish on which there was the least to be eaten, containing some very nice jugged hare. Then Lobby said, "Is this only lunch? It's ever-so-much better than our dinners at home, when nobody's coming;" and Totty asked Mrs. Budd "whether cold meat wasn't ever-so-much nastier than hot?"

"Well—I don't know," replied the lady: "perhaps it is not so nice."

"There mamma," cried both the Jewels, in ecstasies, drumming with the handles of their knives and forks upon the table. "We told you so—we told you so. She says it isn't."

"Once we had cold meat two times running," said Totty.

"Ah," replied Mrs. Cooze, not precisely knowing what to say; "but Mrs. Budd knows how awkward it is when a cook leaves suddenly."

"No, mamma," cried Lobby, "the cook hadn't left, now, because papa had nice things when he came home, and she gave me some in the kitchen."

In conversation similar to this the meal passed away, in spite of all that Mrs. Cooze could do to turn aside the remarks of the Jewels. But before she left, she contrived to find out an evening on which Mrs. Budd could come to her house, as it would be an opportunity during her friend's visit, to show her a few of the clever people of the day; and this was a great point gained. And then they took their departure to leave the children at home, preparatory to going to some exhibition or another, at which their presence might be extra-uncomfortable, not to say hazardous.

This was the more judicious, since at Madame Tussaud's, Totty had picked a bit out of Mr. Cobbett's cheek with her nail; and Lobby, at the Polytechnic, had utterly ruined a working model of a steam-engine, by putting his cane through the paddles when it was whirling round at full speed, and breaking them like barley-sugar.

Poor Miss Twinch, however, was ill at ease. Her spirits, first unsettled by the loss of Tip, and further beaten down by what she could not but consider as heartless conduct on the part of Mr. Page, were by no means in good order. Nor was it until Mr. Cooze returned home with a newspaper order for the play that evening, which another gentleman in the Customs had given to him, and it had been settled—as it only admitted two, and Mrs. Cooze had seen the pieces before—that he would "beau" Miss Twinch (as she termed it) to the theatre, that she at all recovered. But the little pleasantries that passed on the occasion,—how Mrs. Cooze said she was quite jealous of Miss Twinch, and Mr. Cooze begged his wife would not come on the sly, and look after them,—somewhat dispelled the cloud: although she still thought that if they could politely get rid of Annie Maitland from her brother's establishment, it would be as well.

CHAPTER XXII.

FRESH EXCITEMENTS.

It was some time before Pottleton recovered its accustomed tranquillity after the ball. The little affairs and bickerings, and scandals even, that the eventful night gave rise to, furnished conversation for a good month; and if everything had been published that was then privately circulated, there is no knowing how many actions of libel Mr. Twinch might have had to conduct on matters entirely confined to his friends and neighbours.

Young Grant was the most dreadful promulgator of the reports. He declared that he had seen Harry Fielder kiss Bessy Coulter in the card-room, after the whist-tables had been broken up, and when nobody was there. And, moreover,

that when he kindly said, upon his sudden and unfortunate entrance, "Don't mind me, you know," they both bolted off by opposite doors, one of which led Fielder into the ladies' shawl-room, where Clara Bulliam was said to have boxed his ears—and she could do it, too—and threatened to inform the committee. Accordingly Harry Fielder called upon young Grant to know what he had meant by it,—to which young Grant replied, "Just what he had said."

"And quite right of you, too," he continued, "to take advantage of such a good opportunity. I should have done it if I had been lucky enough to have got the chance. I knew you were not the spoon to let it go by. I'm only sorry I came in to spoil the sport."

Young Fielder's wrath melted before the indirect compliment. What mountains of rage an atom of kindness will at once smooth down: the fabled drop of oil on the waves is nothing to it.

"You ought to be proud of having it known,—such a nice girl, too! By the way, we are going to shoot on the Hill Farm to-morrow. Only three guns—if you like to make a fourth I can promise good sport. I know you're a first-rate shot."

Harry Fielder was quite delighted with young Grant, and had no idea he was such a nice fellow. In fact, they parted most intimate friends; and when it was generally understood, a short time after, that Fielder and Bessy Coulter were engaged, nobody dared to say a word more about it.

The Braybœufs at Pottleton Court continued very kind to Annie, and asked her there occasionally: for there was a sort of romance in her history which, added to her sweet and gentle manners, made them take a great interest in her. But they did not ask the Twinches; they were only very polite to them. And this, under ordinary circumstances, might have offended the latter family greatly. But Mr. Twinch managed all the law business of the Court, and Miss Martha was pleased even to be bowed to by the Braybœufs, so that no great mischief arose.

Old Lady Flokes, having been packed up and put by for the winter, was not able to contribute to the tittle-tattle. During her hybernation, nobody saw her but Dr. Keene, and he was a discreet man, inasmuch as he could not have reported anything without offending some of his patients; and

so he very properly kept quiet. Hence, in the matter of old Lady Flokes herself, when Mrs. Spink was dying to know whether that vestige of quality lived all the cold weather tied up in a flannel bag, as she had heard; or, having once had her face enamelled for a party, could not open her mouth very wide, or laugh or frown after it, for fear the false complexion should crack and chip—to these questions Dr. Keene would never reply. He even professed utter ignorance about her false teeth, and yet he could have made a good story of them; for once, when he called suddenly, and took the old lady unawares, she was so hurried in her making-up that she put in her set upside down; in consequence of which, when she essayed to speak, they sprang out of her mouth like a toy-frog, to her great confusion. But Dr. Keene knew that, if his patients heard him tell anecdotes of others, they might suppose him capable of telling the same things about themselves, so he kept quiet—listened to what everybody said about everybody else—never replied, but built his own conclusions thereupon; and so got a goodly practice.

The rich Bulliams were the most spiteful, especially the girls,—finding fault with all the young men, because none had paid them the attention that they ought to have exacted, except a few of the blundering sons of the families, who feared the extension of the railway would cross their fields. And as they were great at domestic quarrels, not having anybody to abuse directly, they began to knag their brother. "He talked a great deal about his crack friends in town," they said; "and brag'd of the nobility and officers who would have him with them always in London; and now that two real officers, and one of them a guardsman, had come down actually to Pottleton,—in their own part of the world, and where he might have shown them that he had respectable connexions and something like an establishment, in preference to his comic actors, and singing and dancing people in London, with whom he appeared to be so much engrossed—when this had happened, the officers had evidently known nothing about him; and had even been driven to dance with that young person who lived with the Twinches—the companion, or whatever she was—whilst they themselves were sitting down." On which young Bulliam would get savage, and, indulging in his most favourite forms of powerful lan-

guage, would kick over his sisters' work-boxes, bang the door after him; and then getting on horseback, would gallop furiously over to New Dibblethorpe, and get rid of his bad temper in the parlour of the Railway Hotel.

But as the cold weather came on it somewhat checked the epidemical irritation; and, fortunately for that purpose, this year it came very early.

We have returned to Pottleton again—and the snow is on the ground; those who only knew our village in its leafy summer dress would be puzzled to find out their favourite nooks and corners amongst the skeleton trees. But it is still charming for all that. The air is so vivid and exhilarating, that your lungs cannot drink in a sufficiency of it at each inspiration; and the bright clear sunlight is thrown back in sparkling diamonds, with dazzling purity, from the snow that crunches beneath each step. It is as tranquil as in summer; indeed, the repose is that of death rather than sleep, broken only by the sharp ringing echoes of an occasional gun, or the whirring chatter of a stone, sent swiftly sliding across the ice by the ruddy urchin, anxious to know if the mill-tail will bear. The river would freeze if it could; but the floods have driven it on too turbulently. Where the pollards, that its stream has undermined until they tumbled into it, have collected the reeds and dead leaves into their harbour, there is a pellicle of ice, rimy and white, within an inch of where the water washes it: and some of the drooping sprays of the bramble-bushes, that bent so gracefully over its quivering lily-spangled surface in summer, are tipped with long crystal-looking pendants that would have been elsewise fog-drops; but it holds out no promise of skating. Yet it is freezing hard, for the place that was broken in the pond, to let the cattle drink, and get the ice for the Court ice-house, is already glazed over. Still it is a degree of cold that no one feels inclined to quarrel with. Indeed, the only points in the landscape that one might wish to find fault with, are where the southern eaves are dripping in the sun, and making a dark unseemly gutter on the white causeway below.

The road is spotted with birds—poor little fellows, hardly-driven to pick up a livelihood, for the hedge-rows are even too frost-bound for them to scrape out for the pungent roots that would nourish them; and the hips and haws have all been

carried away—so have the seeds about the Grange, that were too high for the inmates to collect. When they settle on the great tree before the inn, they bring down such a shower of crisp flakes of snow, that they are frightened into a departure forthwith, and fly back to the pollards, where they know of decayed knot-holes and hollowed limbs. Some very old birds—plump as pincushions—have lived in Baker's barn ever since the frost began; but this is evidently a secret.

There is something very solemn about the old grey Norman church, in its canopy of snow, which also hangs upon the lych-gate, and covers the grave-yard until the tombstones are merged in the same hue. You can now imagine that those who lie beneath it are locked in a dead and awful sleep—far more so than in summer, when the daisies and primroses looked upwards from the graves towards Heaven, or the gentle cowslips bent their fragrant heads towards the earth, as if in mourning, In the corner there is a heap of black mould, thrown up since the snow fell; but it will be filled in again before night, and those who have been long separated —one, perhaps, toiling and struggling on whilst the other slept tranquilly—will meet again.

Picture this scene, as well as you can from our description, and the slight acquaintance with Pottleton that we have wished you to make—and imagine, in addition, that you see Miss Martha Twinch and Annie walking up the village. Whacky Clark, who is sweeping the causeway before the Red Lion, touches his cap as they pass, and hopes they have heard of the little dog in London as Miss Letitia lost ; and young Grant, who is riding in one of his own waggons to Dibblethorpe, to buy a load of cheap carrots for his cows, now that general food runs short, bows gallantly as they overtake him—for the horses' shoes "ball," and the wheels clog with the snow they drag up in black ruts after them, and so progress is but slow—and asks waggishly if they are going his way, because he should be happy to give them a lift. But they smilingly decline, for they have another object in view —a visit to the Rev. Mr. Page.

Mr. Page lived in a neat lodging over the chemical division of "the shop" of Pottleton; which, as an unambitious and blushing curate, suited him exactly. He had, of course, taken his rooms furnished; but he found it necessary to re-

move a few of the decorations which the taste of the landlord had picked out to adorn the walls of his first floor—being slightly of a sporting turn of mind. This chiefly related to the pictures, whereof there were several of great historical interest. On each side of the oblong looking-glass, in three divisions—and only those who caught sight of their face, half-way between two of these, knew the fearful image it represented—were two full-length portraits of gentlemen lightly attired in certain cotton garments, as they appeared performing the celebrated matches against time between special milestones on popular high roads, for sums of money which, looking to their natural powers of absconding, appeared marvellous instances of faith in one another still existing. There was also an exciting picture of that wonderful dog, Billy, accomplishing his great feat of killing one hundred rats in five minutes, in the presence of a crowd of agricultural gentlemen, in top boots and blue coats, that only a fat cattle-show could have brought to London; some of whom were so excited that they were paying notes away to one another, even in the middle of the match, across the angles of the pit, with a recklessness perfectly incomprehensible, as though they had been from the Bank of Elegance instead of England.

The same comical-looking, burly, broad-faced, merry gentlemen—who appeared built to order to attend a Licensed Victualler's Festival, (of which, by the way, there was an animated print)—were present at all the different events thus pictorially chronicled. Whether it was on the grand arena where Spring beat Langan for the championship in the dark ages; or where Tom Thumb was trotting over Sunbury Common, with a pair of high wheels behind him and a perch on the axle, facetiously termed a gig; or where some tremendous match was being run between two crack horses, on a wild and dreary race-course, with nothing on it but one stand like a Punch's show, containing six people,—still they were there.

Mr. Page's first care was to have these illustrations of the sports and pastimes of the people of England carefully removed, and more seemly pictures of his own put in their places. Next, on the chiffonier, he ranged his library, which was not lively but very proper; and, finally, in a sort of dressing-room, attached to his bed-chamber, he had put up his turning-lathe, which was a great source of revolving consolation to

him, and enabled him to furnish the spiritual spinsters of the village with reels and bodkin-cases for their work-boxes, which they prized highly.

Mr. Page had lots of visitors, and nearly all were ladies, who in his case did not think it against etiquette to call on a single gentleman. Some of his friends, however, at times, made him very uncomfortable: and there were old university chums who came to see him, having also called upon the Shiners, and forgot that Mr. Page was obliged to assume different habits to those he had adopted at college. Thus, it may be conceived how he was shocked, one fine afternoon, on returning from a district visit, to see two of his old friends sitting at his open window, with pipes and beer, to witness the performance of some tumblers in the road, they being, as it were, in a private box, beneath which half the village were collected: and the shouts of laughter that greeted the humour displayed by one of his visitors, in throwing a hot halfpenny to the merry-andrew, were quite appalling; indeed, Mr. Page had words with his friends, and was obliged to speak so decisively that he quite trembled at himself for using them.

On the bright snowy morning just alluded to, Mr. Page had commenced a new accomplishment. Ever since the Pottleton Ball, at which he had found such great pleasure in talking to the ladies of his acquaintance, and had been pleasantly rebuked by them for always sitting out of the quadrilles, he had determined to learn to dance. It was the last thing in the world he might have been expected, or indeed ought to have done. But clever simple secluded people occasionally take wild notions into their heads; and this was the good curate's. So he arranged a private meeting with Mr. Stocks, who taught the young ladies at Miss Medlar's all the new and fashionable dances, curtseys, and deportment; and three times a week had an hour's lesson, entering upon the different steps and positions with the same gravity and attention which he would have bestowed upon a mathematical problem.

Mr. Page wished to keep this a secret; but he could not. People in 'the shop' heard unusual hops and jumps overhead; and the servant, sometimes going unawares into the curate's room, when he was alone, would find him standing up with three chairs, one of which he would lead forward. as though

The Reverend Mr. Page receives a visit.

he was about to offer it to a visitor, and then put it back again, subsequently turning it round him. A large unearthly fiddle, also, on which he was accustomed to play the violoncello parts of Haydn's symphonies, was put to a different use, in puzzling out a totally different style of music; and once, when a wandering boy with a piano-organ had gone through the village, Mr. Page detained him for an hour before his house playing popular airs, whilst, to the folks in the shop, the footsteps overhead became continuous.

It was on this same brisk cold morning that Miss Martha Twinch and Annie decided upon paying a visit to Mr. Page, ostensibly on matters connected with the parish, and they chanced to arrive at the exact moment that he was having his lesson. A visit, under any circumstances, would have made Mr. Page blush; but when he found he was actually detected in going round the room, and repeating with Mr. Stocks "one, two, three—and one, two, three—and one, two, three; a step and a jump!" his face assumed the tint of a crimson flock, and his high collars came out in such relief that they almost dazzled one.

"I fear we interrupt you," said Miss Twinch, speaking first, and most charitably, for the good curate was quite dumb.

"Oh—no—no; not at all!" replied Mr. Page, completely out of breath, with confusion and exercise. "De—lighted—to——" and here, by way of distraction, he took a chair, that had lately formed one of his partners, and handed it to his visitors. "To-morrow, Mr. Stocks," he continued, aside, to his professor, anxious to get rid of him—"to-morrow, about twelve."

But Mr. Stocks, to whom politeness was a portion of existence, would not go until he had bowed respectively to Miss Martha and Annie, and inquired after everybody they knew, with the deepest interest; and finally asked if they had seen the new foreign dance, the Shufflische, so popular at the nobility's balls, which he was endeavouring to prevail upon Mr. Page to learn. And not before all that had been gone through could he be got out of the room.

"You will smile, Miss Martha," said Mr. Page, who had collected his breath a little, in the meanwhile, "at my occupation. But exercise has been recommended to me, and

dancing appears to condense muscular action more than anything else. It is purely a medical whim, I can assure you."

Those who knew the long walks that good Mr. Page took, across plashy windy commons, with clogs over his cloth boots, and a large umbrella over his head, in the pursuit of perverted paupers, would have marvelled at his wanting exercise. Miss Twinch was one of these, and she did so; but at the same time inwardly rejoiced that her Curate was learning to dance, as she thought of future balls at Pottleton.

"We have come on a little message—almost professional," said Miss Martha, with a smile; "which may provide a little more exercise for you, Mr. Page, and perhaps equally agreeable."

And here Miss Martha smiled still more slily.

"I shall be too happy—anything," replied good Mr. Page. "Pray what is it?"

"My brother has come from the union, where he has been attending the board," said Miss Martha; "and brought a message, that if you could go there this morning, a woman who had just come in was anxious to see you."

"I shall be happy to walk up there at once," said Mr. Page.

"And if," said Miss Martha, almost blushing—"and if it will not incommode you, I was going there with Miss Maitland, and we would keep you company."

Mr. Page was delighted. He rang for his cloth-boots, blushed as he took them into his adjoining bed-room to put them on; and presently appeared all ready for the walk.

It was great glory to Miss Martha, as they went up the village. She returned all the bows made to Mr. Page, even by the little ragged boys, who appeared insensible to cold, and were collecting a battery of snowballs to pelt 'Pickled Sam' with, when he went by after dinner, on his way to the church. After they had passed, Miss Martha felt one of them against her back, but she did not sink her dignity by taking notice of it, walking on as condescendingly as if nothing had happened. She knew, at the same time, that it was a sad idle urchin, Tommy Collier, that had thrown it, and resolved to be revenged by proxy as it were, upon his sister Jane, when she returned to school. For the malady of that hapless perpetually influenza'd-child had so increased

during the cold weather, that her feature appeared to be all going away in a rapid thaw.

Mr. Page was a charming companion—the type of those largely-informed tutors who walk out with little boys in story books, and explain that the bud contains the embryo of the future plant, and that sound travels, as they will see, if they watch the woodman. Miss Martha thought that he talked a little too much to Annie Maitland; but then his conversation was so interesting, that she could listen to it for ever. He caught a flake of snow upon his hat, and would have shown them, with his glass, that it was like a crystal feather, only it melted before he could get his glass in order; for Mr. Page, in a fashion common with good young curates, who blush and show much linen, always chose sad-coloured thread gloves, the fingers whereof were too long for him: so that in bitter weather, it was a matter of great distress, not to say impossibility, indeed, for him to take up small change from a counter. He also made little holes in the ice with his walking stick, that they might see the fish come up to them, for air; which, without doubt, they would have done, only there were none in the pond. And when they crossed the meadows, he got brave, and ventured on the frozen flood pools, and invited the ladies to come after him. Annie declined, but Miss Martha, in the spirit of advancing young ladies, who will always enter with avidity into girlish actions, and dance more furiously, flirt more desperately, talk more unceasingly, and behave generally more recklessly than their juniors by ten or twelve years—Miss Martha, we say, went on the ice, holding Mr. Page's hand—squeezing it, indeed—rather tightly, and making the meadow ring again with her laughter. And thus pleasantly did the journey go on until they came to their destination.

Dibblethorpe union workhouse was a large brick building, something between an Elizabethan mansion and a county gaol, situated at the edge of a common about a mile from Pottleton. The front of it, as seen from the road, was rather gay than otherwise, with its banks of new evergreens, and diagrams of grass-plots, and flower-borders of flints from the railway; but the gaiety stopped at the hall door. There was not a greater difference between the spangled drapery and trophied columns of the outside of a

dancing-show at a fair, and the dingy patched canvas and rude benches of the interior. Yet it was clean, and roomy, and, indeed, comfortable, albeit there were always letters in the *Dibblethorpe Messenger* every week, detailing dreadful enormities committed therein, which the Tower of London, the Bridge of Sighs, and the old original Bastille itself, all put together, could not have equalled in their chronicles. But the inmates all looked well. The old people were hale and hearty; the middle-aged ruddy and muscular; and the children as broad as they were long; and, above all, they were all clean, which is not a reigning attribute of "The People." Not being a literary philanthropist, nor addicted to stirring up wild paupers with a long pen until they become troublesome, we may venture to say this. Nor did the mildest correspondents in the *Dibblethorpe Messenger* look at the union in its true light, when they spoke of the misery that must follow on becoming an inmate. They regarded its wards and diet only in comparison with their own abodes and living—not with those of the cottagers who went there, to whom the increased accommodation and comfort must have been in the same degree, as if they themselves had been compelled to take up their quarters in a club, or any other great building where they met their equals.

But this by the way. If we go on in this strain we shall begin to write 'with a purpose,' which style, in a novellist, partaking somewhat of the somniferous, we leave to those benevolent gentlemen who prefer—and very properly—improving their readers to entertaining them. As Mr. Page and his companions arrived at the union, they met the indefatigable Mr. Blandy just coming out.

Mr. Blandy, as we have seen, was the parish-doctor, and, by dint of his horse's legs and his own, with those of an assistant, circumscribed more ground in a day than did the oxhide of Queen Dido. He greatly respected the guardians, upon whose votes on Easter Tuesday his appointment depended, and kept in with the master and mistress, who, accordingly, never sent for him without real occasion.

"A bad case," said Mr. Blandy, after the first recognition, as he took his horse from the gate-post, where it was accustomed to stand for any length of time. "A bad case. A poor woman has come in with a broken leg. She slipped

down in the long field belonging to Grant, walking from Dibblethorpe last evening, and lay there all night.

"During the snow-storm!" exclaimed Annie.

"Just so, my dear," said Mr. Blandy. "She was almost covered up when the little boy first found her this morning."

"This must be the person who wished to see me," observed Mr. Page. "You will excuse me, ladies," he added, with a blushing bow to Martha Twinch and Annie, "there is a famous fire in the board-room if you like to sit down, and it may amuse you to read the laws, which are framed, over the mantel-piece."

And then, feeling he had recommended a weak amusement, almost before he had finished, Mr. Page blushed deeper, and went into the house, whilst Annie and Miss Martha continued to talk to Mr. Blandy.

"Is there much illness about?" asked Miss Twinch.

"Pretty well, I think, for such fine weather," replied Mr. Blandy, complacently. "I believe, though, it is chiefly in my direction; I hear Dr. Keene was at the reading-room for two hours yesterday, in the middle of the day. That does not look as if he was very busy!"

"It does not, indeed," observed Miss Twinch.

"And for a 'doctor,' too," continued Mr. Blandy. "You see the diploma does not always carry confidence with it. Far be it from me to reflect upon a brother practitioner; but when it is so generally known that, in point of interest, the parishioners of Pottleton are as so many ciphers to the Fellows of the Royal Society—why—and pray understand that I speak in all absence of rivalry, because I know that Dr. Keene's position, although he is only a Fellow of the College of *Surgeons*, is still far above mine—what can one expect? I ask you, Miss Twinch, as being gifted with perception a little above the ordinary run — what can one expect?"

Miss Martha scarcely knew what one was to expect under such circumstances, and was puzzled to reply. So Mr. Blandy turned it off by pulling the girths of the horse much tighter, and then, getting on him, bowed, and went off quite in a gallant caracole—*chevauchant*, as old Monstrelet would have said, had he seen him—along the road, until he turned

the corner, when he dropped into the usual parochial trot, and so continued until he came to the next cottage halt upon his journey.

Meanwhile, Mr. Page had been introduced to the bedside of the female who had desired to see him; whilst Miss Martha and Annie had gone into the general infirmary to visit the patients. It was a cheerful room in the day time, albeit, in so remote a part of the country, it was, in some measure, a perfect hospital ward. The windows faced the south, and the sun came warm and bright through their swinging panes, and nourished the slipped geraniums and "creeping jennies" that the poor people had placed on the sills. But it was very sad at night. For then the dim lamp that burnt until morning, cast a sickly light upon the formal row of beds, each with its fevered and restless inmate. Here lay one—trembling—panting through the night, as she reflected upon the operation to take place on the morrow, that could alone save her from the grave—dreaming that the dreadful ordeal was past, and that she was well—and then awaking to the dreary reality of the ward. Further on, another could not stifle the low wail of pain and exhaustion that her hopeless disease forced from her parched lips, although she tried to keep it to herself, for the sake of the other sufferers. And at the extreme end, perhaps, there might be seen, through the obscurity, a screen placed round the bed, and behind it lay the body from which life had just departed, and which would presently be borne off stealthily to the chill dead-house, so that when the adjoining patient awoke in the morning, the neighbour she had assisted and tried to cheer would not be there.

Miss Martha went round to the beds and inquired into the wants of the patients, and what Mr. Blandy could order for them; also lending them some of the small periodicals (at fourpence a dozen for distribution) to enliven their weary hours with. But when she came to the bed of the poor girl, —who would be dead of consumption before her little baby was two months old,—she looked very stern, and marched by, to talk to the nurse. Annie waited there, however, and gave the broken-hearted sufferer some oranges, pressing her hand, and kissing her infant's soft cheek so gently, that the

mother burst into tears. For insult and scorn had so crushed her, spirits that now she could not bear kindness.

When Miss Martha had concluded her inspection, she went with Annie into the room which Mr. Page had recommended to them, and there awaited his return. He was not long coming; but when he arrived, his countenance was somewhat thoughtful, and he excused himself from walking back with them—"for," he said, "he had some visits to pay in another direction." And although Miss Martha still offered to accompany him, and even declared that she had not had walking enough by several miles, he could not think of taking her so far out of her way with him. So he started off, leaving the two ladies to return to Pottleton alone. To Annie this made very little difference—of the two, perhaps, she preferred it; but it caused much discontent in Miss Martha's bosom. She did not, however, inflict much of her anger on her companion; but vented it on the cottagers she chanced to call upon going home. And upon those who, having large families of helpless children, and unheard of household labours to accomplish every day, had not time to read the interesting little tracts she left with them, to be kept clean and called for again, her anger fell with especial severity. For most country spinsters, who have been kept too long, become rather tart; and none more sharply so than those who worry cottagers and bore medical men, under the guise of religious charity, which never, by any chance extends to beef and blankets.

Let us now, however, return to Mr. Page, from the time when he followed the porter of the union to the room in which the poor person who desired to see him was lying. She had been placed in a small room, on the ground floor, as it was found next to impossible to get her up stairs, after her accident; and here the curate was introduced to her, directly after the visit of Mr. Blandy, who had left her, as the nurse said, "quite comfortable." He found a female of about forty years old, lying on an iron bedstead, drawn near the hot-water pipe that warmed the building, and ordinarily produced the children's chilblains, from their feet being constantly kept on it. As he entered, she expressed a wish to speak to him alone, upon which the nurse withdrew, greatly

to her annoyance, and not until the desire of the poor woman had been twice conveyed to her by Mr. Page.

As soon as they ascertained that she was gone, by her departing footsteps along the stone passage, the woman spoke —faintly and in broken sentences, the nurse's notions of the comfortable, being rather formed upon comparative states than any fixed standard.

"I have something of consequenee, sir—at least so it may turn out—to speak to you about," she said. "But I must first beg that you will promise not to reveal it. It might bring some into much trouble, and perhaps cost me my life even, were it to be mentioned to a soul."

"You may rely upon my keeping sacred whatever you entrust to me," said Mr. Page, in reply; wondering what might be the important business that this poor woman could have with him.

She gazed at him earnestly for a few seconds, and then went on:—

"I was foolish enough to think—but only for an instant—that you recollected me, when you were looking at me just this minute. But you could not have been born when I first left Pottleton."

"You know the village then?" asked Mr. Page.

"I was born there," answered the other, sadly. "I married from there: and I am in hopes that I may, sometime, be buried there. All my family lie in the church-yard. There were tomb-stones once over them, but it is so long since I have seen the place, that I dare say they are all gone now, and so must be my friends—all gone!"

Tears had been stealing down the woman's lined and sharp features as she spoke. She now went off into an hysterical fit of crying, during which poor Mr. Page did not know exactly what to do, and would have recalled the nurse but for thinking that the patient would not wish it. So he sat quietly, awaiting the termination of the paroxysm, as he steamed his cloth boots against the pipe. The other soon went on again.

"You must know my name," she said, adding, in a low voice; "did you ever hear of Sherrard, at Pottleton?"

"Undoubtedly," said Mr, Page; "he lives, or lived, at

the Grange. And you are his wife?" he exclaimed, as a sudden thought struck him.

"They do not know that," said the woman, alarmed. 'They have not told you that I was—I mean the people here?"

"They know nothing about you, that I am aware of," replied the curate. "It was a mere supposition. I had heard, some time ago, that Sherrard had a wife somewhere in London."

"It is true, sir," returned the woman.

"And who are your friends?" inquired Mr. Page; "and what has brought you back to Pottleton?"

"I told you, sir, their names are in the churchyard," she went on; "do not ask me any more. As to my coming to Pottleton, it is concerning that I wished to see you."

"Speak freely," said Mr. Page, seeing that she hesitated; "you may depend upon my secrecy."

"Do you know the daughter of the old lady, Mrs. Maitland, who lived at the Grange?" asked Margaret, as we may now call Sherrard's wife.

"She is in the house at this moment," replied Mr. Page.

The woman started, and appeared wavering in some request for a few seconds. At last she said, as it were to herself, "No, no; not here—not here."

"You would not like to see her, then?" asked the curate, divining what was passing in her thoughts.

"No," she said, hurriedly, "no; but it is about her I wish to speak. Let her take care, for she is in jeopardy—not of her life—but of her happiness and everything belonging to her. There is a deep plan, in London, to get whatever her aunt left her."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Page, all attention. "I almost thought as much. Do you know a person named Flitter?"

"I am coming to him," she said. "He is leagued with my husband to lay hold of everything. I overheard all their plans by chance; and when I could leave London, I got away, and came down here as well as I was able. I should have come to you first, as the clergyman, for I did not dare to go to the Grange, where Annie Maitland lives, fearing to meet my husband."

"She is not there now," observed Mr. Page.

"As it is, I think he saw me," she continued, without heeding his last remark. "I came over from Dibblethorpe by the fields, last night, not even wishing to be seen, and perhaps recognised, at the railway; and in the snow-drifts I missed my footing, and this accident happened. I was in the snow all night; how I am alive to tell it is a wonder, unless I was spared by Providence to speak to you."

She was evidently becoming exhausted with the conversation. Mr. Page saw this, but was too deeply interested in the revelation not to prolong it.

"But what are these plans?" he asked.

"I cannot tell," she said; "but all that craft and safe villany can do will be employed. Only, do you watch over the girl, or she will be sacrificed."

"You may depend upon me," answered Mr. Page.

"And do not breathe a word of this to a soul, I again implore you. They do not know here who I am—they have not even got my own name. May I trust you?"

She asked this last question with so much painful earnestness that Mr. Page was really touched. He appeared to be the sole person in the world that this poor woman had to rely upon.

"I have told you that everything is safe with me," he answered: "and my acting upon your suggestions will be the best proof of the value I attach to them. You require a little rest. I will now leave you; but you will see me very often. In the meanwhile, you may trust to my discretion."

The good young curate, who, now that he was following up his serious duties had not blushed once, keeping that weakness only for society, bade the poor patient good bye in his kindest manner. And then, quite confused at what he had heard, and determining that a long walk by himself was necessary to arrange his plans for acting upon, he returned to Miss Martha and Annie, and parted from them in the manner we have witnessed.

Day closed in early over Pottleton, and the solemn wintry twilight stole rapidly along the valley, soon after the last pale glow of sunset left the old tower of the church cold and grey once more. Then, one by one, the windows were seen

lighted up; and the "Red Lion' enticed customers by the cheery glow that was seen dancing and flickering on the ceiling of the common room, above the warm red window curtains. The two candles in "the shop" sent their rays almost from one end of the village to the other, for lamps were as yet unknown; and when they were extinguished, such travellers as there were got through the village as they could. At present, this was no very difficult task, for the bright moon soon rose above the hill, and shone forth so, in the clear frosty air, that good eyes could see the white walls of the next station gleaming in the distance.

A little room had been allotted to Annie, in Mr. Twinch's mansion, on the ground floor, as a kind of boudoir, to which she retired when the enthusiasm of teaching the infants, or the difference of family opinion that sometimes prevailed promiscuously between the brothers and sisters, got too powerful to be pleasant. To this, something like a conservatory was attached, formed, it was reported in the village, of the shop windows of a refractory dealer who entertained different notions of paying his rent to those cherished by his landlord; and had been obliged to quit ultimately, after much tough resistance, by the establishment of draughts of air all over his house, consequent on the removal of the windows aforesaid. Within this small greenhouse Annie had collected her pet flowers for the winter, and the funnel of a small stove that ran through it sufficed to give it a little warmth. It was pleasant enough in the summer, when the vines were in full leaf on the roof, and the canariensis and convolvulus climbed up the rough fir trellis—that Whackey Clark had set up after the model the triumphal arch had afforded when the railway opened—through which glimpses of the bright flowers could be caught in the sunny garden. But now, in the morning, the frost covered the glass with its fairy groves; the vine looked like a parcel of straggling crooked dry sticks that no one would ever have accused of vitality; and the stumps that jutted forth from some of the flower pots appeared as likely to blow, on a future occasion, as a clothes-peg, or a stuffed-bird's perch would have done, planted in a similar manner.

On the evening of the visit to the Union, Annie had retired to her apartment, to finish some elaborate piece of woman's

work that she was perfecting for Philip; and had, as usual, opened the door between the room and the green-house, that the heat from the fire might pass into it. She had been working some little time—after the curfew, which was still rung at eight o'clock in the old tower, according to the cus tom of some country places, had sent its solemn voice of rest over the surrounding conntry—when she heard a sound like a person tapping against the glass of the conservatory. Thinking it might be some dry branch beating against the panes by the wind, she at first took no notice of it; but it was almost immediately repeated, and in too measured and distinct a tone for it to be the effect of accident. Somewhat startled, she rose from her seat, and, looking towards the glazed front, was still further frightened to see the shadow of a figure thrown by the moonlight upon the half-rimy panes. Her first impulse was to run and call the servants; but before she could gain the door, a small practicable pane was pushed open and she was called by her name. She knew the voice directly; it was Sherrard's.

"Hush!" he exclaimed, in a low tone: "do not move. It is only me; come here."

"Mr. Sherrard," cried the girl, her voice quivering with the alarm.

"Come here!" he repeated. Annie went towards the window.

"I must speak to you," he went on, "on business of the utmost importance. I have been trying all day to see you alone, and have only found you so this minute. You must come with me."

"With you?" cried Annie, all amazement.

"Yes, with me," replied the Ganger. "If I am seen here I shall be at once taken up and sent to gaol."

He spoke with reference to certain deficiencies at the pay-table of the railway, which had laid him open to unpleasant meetings, not only with the constabulary force of Pottleton, but also with the 'navvies' he had engaged.

"I am not going to hurt you, Annie," he continued: "you can trust *me*, I suppose; but I cannot talk to you here. Come with me. You may be sorry, by and by, that you did not, if you refuse."

"What do you mean?" inquired the now really terrified girl.

"I mean what I say," said the other, with a vulgar air of mystery. "I should not come in this way to find you, if my business was not of importance; I only want you to come to the Grange—ten minutes will be enough."

"I cannot do it," returned Annie. "What will they think here, when they find me gone?"

"There is nobody to think," said the Ganger; "the old man is at the Red Lion with the farmers, and his sister is at the school. You will be back long before either of them. Are you coming? If not—then good night, and repent some day you did not, as well as Philip."

He made a feint to retreat, when Annie exclaimed—

"Stop! I will come; only you promise that I shall be back in a few minutes?"

"Who can detain you?" asked the other. "I am not a murderer. You appear to have forgotten altogether what friends we once were. Hush! there are some people coming up the road. Follow me to the Grange."

He left the garden as he spoke, and Annie, trembling and bewildered, took her shawl and bonnet, and leaving the house by the door of the conservatory, followed him as he had desired. The shadows of the buildings fell on the path they were tracking, so that they were not noticed. When Annie got to the Grange she found the other waiting at the door to receive her. He led the way into the old room, and she followed him almost without fear. She had not been there since her aunt died, but the place seemed homely and familiar to her.

The Ganger threw some chips on the embers in the fireplace, and fanned them into a flame with his hat, after he had looked to see that a sack nailed across the window prevented the light from being seen in the road. But there was not much chance of interruption. The old building lay down a bye lane; it was late, also, for the village, and the snow was beginning to fall.

"And now, Mr. Sherrard," said Annie, "what do you want?"

"What lies and nonsense did *she* talk to you to-day?" asked the man, angrily.

"She!" exclaimed Annie—"Who?"

"Oh! you know well enough," he replied; "I have not

watched and slunk about the cold fields all day for nothing. Who did you see at the workhouse?"

"Those who have been there for weeks," returned the girl; "and I did not speak ten words to any of them. What do you mean?"

She spoke the last phrase so earnestly, that Sherrard was almost startled in his turn.

"Hush!" he rejoined; "and listen; there is no occasion for everybody to know what passes here. I don't much care to be found myself, if it comes to that. On your honour, have you not heard my name mentioned by any one to-day?"

"By no living soul."

"It is odd," the Ganger went on; "but I suppose I must believe you. I never knew you tell a lie, before you became a fine lady, and forgot all your old friends."

"I have never forgotten your kindness to me, when I thought I had not one in the world," answered Annie.

"I wish I could tell what game you are playing," said the Ganger, fixing his keen eye upon her with a searching glance; that falsehood would have been shrivelled by.

"I do not understand you," cried the girl. "Mr. Sherrard, pray tell me what you mean, and let me go."

"I thought I had more to tell you," he replied. "No matter; you will be sure to hear it. Now listen; you will probably, in a few days, hear your best friends spoken of as criminals, and those who are really bent upon your ruin cried up as angels."

"On *my* ruin!" exclaimed Annie; "I have no enemy in the world."

"Others have thought the same," said Sherrard; "and with less cause than you have to alter their opinion. You say you have no enemies; are you sure of your friends?"

"You are speaking in such riddles," replied Annie; "how can I understand you?"

"Pshaw!" the Ganger went on; "look here, then—if you must know all. You think your cousin loves you."

"He does!" she exclaimed. A low short laugh from Sherrard was the only reply.

"You know something, I am certain, that you wish to hide from me," she went on. "Oh, tell me; pray tell me!"

"I know nothing more than all the world knows," replied the Ganger. "I know that Philip Maitland is becoming the most dissipated man upon town; that he is getting involved far beyond all chance of redemption; and that his friend, Mr. Flitter, will soon get tired of freeing him from his embarrassments, as he has already done half a dozen times."

"It cannot be true," said Annie.

"Possibly it cannot," resumed Sherrard, "and yet it is Now, look here, and do not slight what I tell you; for I know his depth. You will hear—if, as you say, you have not already done so—fearful stories against myself and Flitter by a person that, I know, has came to the village for that express purpose. Do not believe a word. Philip Maitland is playing a deep game with you; it is your own fault if you are taken in."

"Have you anything more to say?" asked Annie, pale and trembling, as she gathered her shawl around her to depart, offering no comment upon Sherrard's speech.

"Nothing," was the reply; "only, think upon the hints I have given to you. As I have told you, you may trust *me;* and when you want a friend you will find me ready to assist you."

"And I may go, now?"

"Certainly. Stop—I will see you to the end of the lane. Look out of the door, and tell me if any one is about."

"There is nobody," said Annie, doing as he ordered her.

Sherrard gave her his arm, to which she clung—chilled and frightened at her mysterious interview—and they went up the lane towards the long main thoroughfare of the village. As they turned the corner, and the young girl prepared to wish Sherrard good night, two persons coming along the causeway met them. The moon was still shining brightly; and Annie was surprised to recognise, and be recognised by, Mr. Page and Mr. Twinch, returning home from some parochial festivity, at which, in their respective positions, they had been assisting.

The Ganger turned quickly away as he saw they were observed, and was almost immediately lost in the deep shadow of one of the houses; but Annie remained, trembling with confusion and fright, before the two others.

"Miss Maitland!" exclaimed Mr. Page, with astonishment.

"Halloo, Slyboots!" cried Mr. Twinch, who had been drinking the healths of all the parish ever since three o'clock, and was by no means to be trusted alone on the snow slides which the boys had made on the footpath. "So that's it—is it? Doing a little bit of courting by moonlight, eh? And very nice, too."

"Mr. Twinch," cried Annie, "let me assure you—and you, sir," she continued, turning to Mr. Page—"that a matter of importance alone brought me here to-night."

"I hope it is so," said the young curate. "But, Miss Maitland, is it not injudicious in you to be keeping appointments at this hour, and away from home?"

"Leave her alone, parson, leave her alone," continued the convivial Mr. Twinch; "you're only jealous that it is not yourself. I saw him—he'd make two of you. Come along; it's all right."

"Let me accompany you," cried Annie, as she grasped Mr. Page's arm. "Indeed, indeed you are mistaken! I have not come here by my own free will."

"I did not know that you were under constraint," said Mr. Page, somewhat coldly.

The good young curate was evidently hurt; but it is difficult to say how much some slight jealousy had hold of his feelings. Still he was very polite. He offered his arm to Annie, and they moved towards home.

"Always true what I say," continued Mr. Twinch. "Always true, as I was saying. Let's see—what was it about. Hold up!"

The last caution was addressed to himself, as he stepped upon the edge of the path.

"Ah—yes; that was it," he went on. "Always the way—your quiet ones are the real little gipsies after all. Never mind, young lady; when I was your age, I——"

"We are at home," said Mr. Page, as they stopped at the lawyer's door. "Miss Maitland—good evening."

And with a formal bow he walked off, leaving poor Annie to enter the house with her exhilarated companion.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LETTER, A DINNER, AND AN ADVENTURE.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter and Philip were alone in a secret connected with the duel, which may now be divulged. The pistols had never been loaded with ball. But the latter had promised, sacredly, by no means to betray this to a soul—not even to Mr. Spooner; and, indeed, it was not likely that such a revelation would be made. Brought up before a magistrate, they were both obliged to enter into recognizances to keep the peace, which the Oxford young gentleman easily found; and then they were allowed to depart, being joined by Mr. Flitter in the neighbourhood of the office. That great tactician had kept in the neighbourhood, after his breakfast at Spooner's rooms, to see which way affairs would go; and being informed by Mr. Jollands, of the hospitals, who ventured into the court, 'that they were both as right as ninepence, before either could say peas,' he had ventured forth to meet them. Mr. Spooner almost directly started for Oxford, to talk about the affair he had been engaged in, making Philip promise that he would come down to see him in the ensuing week; and Mr. Flitter went with his friend as far as his lodgings in the street running out of the Strand, and there left him, not caring just then to face Mrs. Docker, but appointing to meet him at Brainer and Clinch's, in the afternoon. In the meantime it was his intention to talk about the duel to everybody that he expected would spread it, and therefore he started to sun himself on the pavement of the clubs in St. James's Street, and catch such as he knew were the best chatterers thereunto belonging.

On arriving at his room, Philip found a letter from Annie, —written, we should state, before the events of the last chapter—which ran as follows:—

"My Dearest Philip,—It is so very long since I have heard from you, and they make me feel so uncomfortable here, by wondering every day why I do not have a letter, that I write to beg you will send me one, if it only contains a few lines. Sometimes I think that I must have offended you, and that is why you are so silent. I am sure such has not

been my intention; and you know, my own dear Philip, or rather you ought to know, that I would go through a great deal, silently and without complaint, rather than cause you one minute's annoyance; for I am sure you must have enough in great London to worry you. But a few lines, which you could write in two minutes, would make me very happy. Only tell me that you are well, and getting on, and think of me sometimes. I do not want to hear anything else. If you were only to direct an envelope, and send it to me, it would be something.

"I have very little news to tell you, for one day here is exactly like another. Miss Twinch is still in London. Have you seen her? but I suppose you do not meet folks when you go out as we do here. Young Mr. Grant has offered to lend me a pony if I like to ride with him sometimes to Dibblethorpe. Would there be any harm in it? because if you don't like me to, Philip, pray tell me. It won't cost me anything, as I can make a very good habit out of my old green cloak, which I never wear now. I do so wish the year was over, to know everything. But however it may turn out, believe me, my dearest Philip,

"Your very affectionate
ANNIE."

"P.S.—You will write soon, won't you?"

There was not a great deal in this letter, but every line of it went to Philip's heart. He knew that all the while he had been rattling on in London, scarcely thinking of his cousin (because he felt so sure of her), all this time Annie had remained in her present quiet home, day after day expecting to hear from him as the village postman went round to the different houses, delivering his letters and selling poultry,—and day after day being disappointed; and it would have been such a small sacrifice of his time to have written!

However, he determined upon sending her a letter that afternoon. In the meantime he had promised to see to some things for poor Mr. Scute, before he met Flitter at the printing-office. These he accomplished, and at the appointed time he went to the rendezvous. To his astonishment he found Mr. Scute there. The poor man was conversant with all kinds of troubles connected with difficulties. Executions in

the house, bill-miseries, prisons, and levanting from lodgings —borrowing mean sums in a mean manner, and undertaking degrading commissions—were all familiar to him, and he could face them. But he was unused to death, and he had to give up his front room for the poor child to lie in; so that he had sent his other little girl to a kind neighbour's, with her scanty wardrobe and battered doll tied up in an old Sunday paper, and, leaving the woman in possession of his dreary lodgings, without going to bed, had betaken himself to the nearest public-house. And here he had been sitting and drinking gin, go after go, until a miserable flush of spirits once more drove away the thoughts of his actual misery. But there was not, as at evening, anybody to talk to: so after a time he got restless, and wandered about the streets, looking at old book-stalls and talking to small actors and reporters whom he met about the theatres, until he began to tell his miseries and cry over them, when they adjourned to another tavern. And this kept on until he at length got to Brainer and Clinch's, where he met Flitter and Philip, to their astonishment.

"I have got a capital subject for you, Mr. Maitland," he said quickly as he entered, for he did not want them to allude to his trouble—"a serial, weekly, of two columns, to be called 'The Life of a Vagabond,' you could do it famously."

Philip smiled at what could hardly be considered as a compliment.

"Don't you think the subject would be too entirely amongst——"

And here Mr. Brainer was seized by a fit of sneezing that interrupted him for a minute.

"Too entirely amongst——," said Mr. Clinch, stopping dead short at the extent his partner had arrived at.

"The lower walks of life," suggested Mr. Flitter.

Mr. Brainer nodded his head, and so did Mr. Clinch.

"It's great success, sirs," answered Mr. Scute, whose eyes were staring and starting from his head with his excitement. "Reflect on the immense majority of low people over high ones. But what are low people, sirs? They are the brawny arms, and swart faces, and unshorn chins you see about—the giants of the world—the tax-oppressed and fettered engines of the great human system!"

The others knew that when Mr. Scute got on this subject, no one might tell when he would end. So Mr. Flitter and Philip turned to the partners, touching certain arrangements, and left him to go on alone.

And this he did, talking vast philanthropy, and alluding to the immense circulation "The Cracker" would get into: and the awful manner in which he, as editor, intended entirely to smash, put down, and annihilate therein, various persons and systems, beyond all chance of revival. For it is a singular idiosyncrasy with some literary gentlemen, that they regard their productions through a lens of mental delusion of a remarkable kind: inasmuch as the more chance their favourite work has of failing, the more they say abroad that it will go, or is going, by thousands—not in vanity and from a wish to impose on others, but to make themselves believe it. They have also notions that the lightest touches of their pens are sufficient to move the world from its axis, and that the smallest paragraph, the instant it appears, pervades the whole universe, and animates the minds of the entire human race with sentiments akin to its own. In this vein poor Mr. Scute went on.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" asked Mr. Wyndham Flitter of Philip, as, their business transacted, they left the printing-office, each with a cheque in his pocket from the proprietors.

"I was going home to write," said Philip: "I have had a letter from my cousin. I know you are good enough to feel an interest in my affairs, so I will read it to you."

And as they went along Philip read Annie's letter to his companion.

"You see I ought to answer that," he said. "I have been wrong in not writing before; and this has somewhat upset me."

"Pshaw!" replied Flitter, "a girl has got nothing else to do but write letters; she forgets that you have other things to think about. Don't be in such a hurry to answer."

"But you see she is hurt at my inattention. I shall answer it to-day."

"Now take the advice of an older man than yourself, my boy," said Flitter. "Never give in too readily."

"But there is nothing to give in here."

"Ah!" replied the other, mysteriously, "as you think. You've got a little of the world to see yet. Come into the city, and we'll change the cheques."

"We can leave them until to-morrow, when I shall be there."

"Never keep a cheque a day—not an hour, more than you can help," Flitter answered; "I never do. Suppose anything was wrong with Brainer and Clinch's?"

"Oh—there is nothing likely to be wrong there. They may be safely trusted."

"Never trust anybody," said Mr. Flitter, "except, perhaps, me," he added. "I don't think *I* should care to deceive you."

"I am sure you would not," answered Philip, warmly.

At this minute Mr. Flitter was hailed by name from a Hansom, which was immediately pulled up short in the centre of some coal-carts and omnibuses, provoking the usual compliments, and the head of young Rasper, of the Guards, protruded from it.

"Mr. Flitter," said he, "I have heard all about your affair this morning with the Count" (Wyndham had taken care to give M. Polpette a title) "and the Oxford man. I am on guard at the Tower to-day. Come and dine with us, and tell us all about it."

"Let me present my friend to you," said Flitter, "who was Spooner's second—Mr. Maitland."

"Perhaps you will give us the pleasure of your company, too?" asked the Guardsman.

Philip bowed.

"Very well—recollect the Beauchamp Tower; half-past seven—sharp. All right, cabby: go on. Guards' Club. Good bye."

And the Hansom was immediately lost in the ruck of vehicles.

"There!" said Flitter, as they went on again, "what do you say to that, Philip? I think the walk into the city has been worth something."

To dine with the Guards, and in the Tower of London! Philip's head was quite bewildered, and he scarcely knew whether to be pleased or frightened at it.

The cheques were changed, and then Wyndham took

Philip to lunch at a comical old tavern in the depths of the city, where they first bought their steak at the butcher's next door, and then carried it in to be cooked on the large gridiron in the eating-room. Philip was almost ashamed to do so, and thought if the Guards could see him, what they would think of him; but Mr. Flitter assured him it was the proper thing—even for noblemen and her Majesty's ministers—some of whom, without doubt, they should meet in the tavern. He knew the girl who superintended the gridiron, and pointed out to her, with almost affectionate confidence, where to put their portions to be cooked the best. Broiling hot and tender it certainly was, and the pewter plate made it hiss again; indeed, Philip confessed that he had never enjoyed anything so much. Then Mr. Flitter put him up to the secret of some excellent punch to be had there, which Philip also gave in to, still looking up at the clock every now and then, and saying that he must go home and write. On which Mr. Flitter assured him there was plenty of time; so they had more punch, and then agreed to go and call on Mrs. Wracketts. Here Philip sat some time and heard that lady try some new ballads, which perfectly enchanted him. At last he said he must go home and write; upon which Mrs. Wracketts was so sorry, for she was going out in her Brougham, and wanted Philip to accompany her. This was a fresh temptation not to be resisted. The Brougham was ordered, and they drove forth, Mrs. Wracketts making such wonderful eyes, and talking so fascinatingly to Philip all the time, that now his head was quite turned, and the post hour went by, so that he did not write to Annie after all.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter was staying at an hotel near London bridge for a few days "until his effects arrived from Ostend, which he expected by each packet," and here Philip met him at a quarter past seven, and they went on to the Tower. Mr. Wyndham Flitter did not appear to stand in any awe of the beef-eaters or sentinels; although Philip was somewhat nervous, expecting, as it were, for any breach of etiquette, to be called out and shot immediately by the authorities. But his friend boldly crossed the court yard and led the way up the steps of the Beauchamp Tower.

Nobody had yet arrived, so Philip, who was all eyes, had time to look about him a little. The appearance of the room

was somewhat in contrast to that which it must have presented in former times, when day after day the dying twilight closed in upon failing hearts, whose throbbings grew fainter and fainter in that dismal stony room until they ceased to beat; and every cold ray of early morning only announced another day of hopeless wailing and agony. Now the stony walls, it is true, remained, with all their sad memorials of anguish or resignation; but the one of the deep arches was shrouded by the gay colours of the regiment; a cheerful fire blazed and crackled on the hearth, reflected in tiny beacons on the plate and glass of the well-appointed dinner-table; and the air, instead of being imprisoned, was kept out by a screen covered with light and graceful subjects, that conveyed an idea of aught but solitude or despondency.

Presently an officer appeared. He did not know Mr. Wyndham Flitter or Philip, but he bowed politely to them; poked the fire; said it was colder than yesterday; and then proceeded to settle various straps and buttons of his uniform which did not appear comfortable. After him came an Ensign, who was young and mild, and not bothered with a beard—thinking there was no fun in life like never going to bed until six in the morning, and dancing himself to a lath at every public ball that was advertised. This young gentleman stood before the fire, and found out a likeness to a scene in the last ballet amongst the coals, which sufficiently occupied him. Anon more arrived, including young Rasper—who immediately introduced his friends—and Jack Poole, who was formerly in the 7th, and had also been asked. Mr. Wyndham Flitter now began to talk to every body, and Philip, in spite of his misgivings, felt quite at his ease, for there was an easy graceful courtesy about their new acquaintances—a knowledge of the most agreeable conventionalities of the social world, even amongst the youngest, and a gentle manner of availing themselves of it—that made a stranger feel immediately at home with, if not one of them.

They all sat down at table, Wyndham and Philip on the right and left of the commanding officer—Rasper next to Flitter, and Jack Poole on the other side—and then all the others, with the Ensign for vice. The duel formed subject-matter enough for dinner; and the lies that Mr. Wyndham Flitter told at last approached the marvellous. Philip, who

did not wish to be brought into this narrative, albeit he was dazzled by his friend's brilliancy, was engaged with the Colonel in a little sober talk about the inscriptions on the walls, Normandy, and, finally, about the French railways; so Wyndham had all the young men to himself, none of whom he found had ever been out, except Jack Poole; but that was in Ireland.

"Indeed," said Mr. Flitter, "I fought in Ireland myself once—a very ludicrous affair. Let me see—that was the fourth or fifth time I was out. First," and he began to count his fingers, "with a man who took my hat at an evening party and swore it was his own. I said if it was I'd spoil it, and I put a bullet through it, at twelve paces. Secondly, in America——"

"Ah! indeed," said one of the officers. "Do you know America?"

"As well as London," replied Mr. Flitter.

"I was in Canada with the Guards, in 1841," continued the other.

"Canada is the only part I don't know," replied Mr. Flitter. "California—anybody know California?"

Nobody did.

"Ah! that's America, if you please," said Mr. Flitter, quite relieved. "I fought a duel there, with a bear-hunter. We used rifles, and were to advance and fire. He fired first and missed. I walked up to him, and said, 'Look here, now:' being in devilish good practice, 'wait' till those two birds up there get in a line, and see what I'll do.' He was in a deuced funk, but he looked up, and when they did get in a line I fired. The bullet went through one and riddled the other as well, and they both fell dead."

The Ensign was beaming with admiration and astonishment.

"'Strainger,' said the man, continued Mr. Flitter, 'you are a screamer!' 'Tell me some news,' said I, 'or else we shall have another scrimmage!' Upon which he gave me this ring. The blue stone is a Californian pebble, found in the beds of rivers after floods. 'There,' he said, 'that belonged to Washington, and now it's yours.'"

The ring was passed round the table for inspection.

"You were going to tell us something about Ireland," said young Rasper.

"Ah! very true — yes; what was it?" replied Flitter, thinking for an instant. "Oh—I had a row with a man named Desmond Blake."

"What! Desmond Blake of Clonmel?" asked Poole. "He was in our regiment."

"No—one of the Blakes of Ballyshannon," replied Mr. Flitter. "It was a cold morning, and we shivered so that we could hardly hold our pistols: much less hit one another. So we kept popping away; and presently Morgan Ryan, who drove the mail for amusement, pulled up at the roadside, with all his passengers, to see the fun. He would wait so long that a gentleman quarrelled with him, and so they borrowed our pistols for a go-in of their own, whilst we went and had a drain at the post-house. This brought about a reconciliation between Blake and myself: but, by Jove, when we had got back Ryan had shot his man."

"Your friend has seen a great deal of life, I should expect," said the Colonel to Philip, quietly.

"A great deal, indeed," replied Maitland; "he is altogether a wonderful person. There does not appear to be anything in the world that he does not know something about."

And it appeared so, for Mr. Wyndham Flitter was already off on another subject.

"Never played Fly Loo?" he asked. "God bless me! you astonish me. Why, Fly Loo is the finest game going. You know *Lansquenet?*"

"Yes!" said several voices, eagerly. "Is it like it?"

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Flitter: "but it's quite as good: it's played in California immensely, but it can only be played in summer."

"Will you explain it?"

"Certainly," said the other. "Six people sit round a table and each puts a bit of sugar before him, and stakes a dollar. The owner of the first bit of sugar that a fly settles on has all the rest. It's amazingly exciting. I won enormous sums at it one year."

"You were lucky then," observed young Rasper.

"Not particularly. I trained a blue-bottle to keep near me. It was not exactly the right thing to do, I admit, but every Yankee is such a sharp blade, that you must be a sharper, if you would win."

The conversation circulated with the wine, until it became general, and then they all launched their favourite topics.

Young Rasper's chiefly related to "little parties" he felt an interest in. Thus, for instance, there was a little party had promised to dance with him at Weippert's on the following Monday; and his influence had got another little party into the ballet at one of the great theatres. His elaborate shirt-front had also been worked for him by a little party in Paris; and he furthermore knew a little party who was now engaged on some slippers for him, near Park Village—all which admissions were made in a dimly confidential manner to Mr. Wyndham Flitter, who flattered him in return by saying that he supposed there were few little parties with whom Rasper could not be first favourite if he chose.

Percy Hampden, (who sat next,) a fine handsome fellow, with muscles like iron and the chest of a dray-horse, was more inclined to sporting. He was always whip to one of the Guards' drags to Epsom, and usually had a horse there. He would be Lord Fairland by and by, so some of the tuft-hunters hung closely about him—took his guards, and got him good shooting. He was, however, just the same to everybody: that is, everybody he liked. He could thrash a snob, hit a woodcock, clear a double, blow a post-horn, tool a team, breathe a partner, and drink pale ale, with anybody in the household troops; and when Mr. Wyndham Flitter told him that he recollected the splendid way in which he cleared the bourne at the Great Purling Steeple-chase, they were directly friends for the evening. And in addition, Mr. Flitter made a great hit with everybody, by showing them how to balance a cork upon a pin, with two forks, which once set revolving on an inverted champagne glass would go on always longer than anybody would wager, and was a safe bank to keep against a whole table.

Archy Warren had just come back from the Cape, and was full of Caffres, Boers, and Bosjesmans: Jack Poole cared for little beyond Paris and Madame Doche; a supper at the Maison Dorée; dancing in an anti-*serjent-de-ville* style with a black domino at an Academie ball, and singing *argot* songs and parodies without end; whilst Mr. Down, the Ensign—who was a capital fellow when he came out after dinner—

The Beauchamp Tower.

had his mind tinged with various shades, from these different attributes, and delighted in a smattering of all.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter was wonderful that day. He talked South African politics with Warren, and laughed about the Bal Mabille and Mogadore with Jack Poole; and told the young ensign capital things on the sly, until he was nearly choked in his coat-collar with laughter. But he did more than this. Anxious for Philip to shine, as his friend, he drew him out upon all the subjects he knew him to be best acquainted with, with consummate tact, until his friend, in one or two instances, when he told a few local Normandy legends, or gave some capital imitations of the French railway workmen quarrelling, commanded the attention of the table. Dazzled with the light-hearted, creamy society in which he found himself—pleased with its courtesy, and flushed with the wine, the contagious mirth, and the associations generally, he had never been in better spirits.

The time flew on with swift and spangled wings; every minute that had once lagged drearily away in that old tower was longer than the laughing hours as they now passed. Scenes of some bright and dazzling future, formed of gay atoms, tossed together into a brilliant indefinite whole, half real and half phantasm, like the forms of a kaleidoscope, were conjured up before Philip's eyes. The future alone reigned, the throbbing present being made subservient only to its fancied glories. The chasms of doubt or failure—of the common-place and the inevitable—were cleared at a bound; and a vague but brilliant position was all in which he could see himself: and all this he owed to Wyndham Flitter!

At last, the time arrived for them to depart; for if they were not outside the gates by eleven, they would be locked up all night. They broke up with many regrets, and one or two of the officers came down with them to the outer gates, at which a succession of cabs kept hurriedly arriving, containing inmates of the fortress who wished to sleep in their own beds that night. There was a great quantity of shaking hands, and then they went off arm-in-arm, Jack Poole jumping into a return Hansom, and telling the man to go like fireworks to the Cyder Cellars.

"What a rush of cabs!" replied Philip.

"Nothing to what I have seen elsewhere," said Mr. Flitter. "I knew a man whom the cabs drove away from his lodgings. He lived up a court by Twinings, in the Strand—one of the Temple alleys—and never came out but a dozen always bolted up to him, crying, 'Here you are, sir!' from the stand by the church. He was a nervous man, and couldn't stand it, so he moved."

It was a fine cold night; so they determined to walk towards their respective homes. When Mr. Flitter got to his hotel, he said that it was much too early to go to bed, and voted for extending their walk towards the West End. The other directly complied, and they went on towards Leicester-square.

"Have you got any money with you?" asked Wyndham of his companion.

"A few sovereigns," answered Philip, "from the cheque."

"All right—so have I," returned the other. "You have seen a little life to-night—we will see some more. Let us go into a gaming-house."

"Oh no, no—not there!" exclaimed Philip, hanging back.

"Why not?" asked Wyndham. "I am sure you are lucky. Besides, it's a thing you ought to see, as a rising man upon town."

"I would much rather not."

"Pooh, stuff; here we are. There, you see it is nothing so terrible."

Mr. Flitter took Philip's arm and half dragged him into a house, the door of which was just ajar, and along a passage, at the end of which was another door. He knocked, and a man's head appeared at a little wicket, when the door was opened. Wyndham exchanged a nod of recognition, said something aside to the porter, and then went up stairs to the back drawing-room.

Two or three men, who were smoking strong cigars, and drinking whiskey and water, got up rapidly from where they were sitting, as the visitors entered, and began playing hard at the table, just as the thimble men, on the approach of a victim, used to commence their game so extemporaneously on the race-courses. Indeed, these fellows looked something as

thimble men might be expected to appear in their Sunday clothes, if they knew what such a day meant. They had a turn-table before them, and a variegated cloth; and the keeper began at once. "Five to one upon the blue; three to one upon the red; even betting on the black!" as he might formerly have done in a booth. Mr. Wyndham Flitter threw down half-a-crown, and so did Philip. They both won; in fact, there was some contrivance in the divisions of the wheel that the ball could be checked, almost to a certainty, into whatever division the man chose. Presently Mr. Flitter looked hard at the others, who played all at once, and talked loudly; and then he whispered to Philip to do as he did, and they might break the bank. Philip assented, getting additionally excited with the play, and placed comparatively a large sum on one of the colours. So did Mr. Wyndham Flitter, apparently, in notes; but a close inspection would have discovered them to have been issued by a self-confident *artiste*, who had such a vast opinion of his abilities, that he had backed himself to cut hair better than anybody else, to the extent of many thousand pounds.

The ball was wavering between the two divisions, one of which was the colour betted on, when the table-keepers gave the wheel a slight tilt, and turned it into the losing one; and quick as lightning the croupier swept the money from the table with the rake. But, swiftly as it was executed, the manœuvre was not made rapidly enough to elude Philip's eye. He immediately demanded his stake back again. This was of course refused, when, before the "bonnets" were on the alert, Philip rushed across the room, and, seizing the heavy poker from the fire-place, dashed the table to pieces, clutching at the bank, or at least as much of it as he could seize; then, hitting right and left, he fought his way to the door, and went down stairs. The porter tried to stop him, but Philip was desperate, in his danger, and the man was floored, as the other left the hall door open, and gained the street.

All this was so sudden, that Mr. Wyndham Flitter and his friends—for such, of course, they were—were completely paralyzed. Nor were they recalled to their senses, until the door-keeper, bleeding in the face from Philip's attack, bolted into the room, and said the police were coming. And then there was something like a scrimmage. Mr. Flitter jumped

completely through the window on to the leads, caring no more for the stained glass and transparent blind with the birds of Paradise all over it, than if he had been a rider in a circus going through a large tambourine of silver paper. Then he climbed like a cat to the top of a low wall, and from that crawled up a sloping roof to the highest leads of the houses — scrambling on from one slope to another, amongst the chimney-pots and along the gutters, as if he had been on the tiles all his life.

At last, he saw a door open on the roof, and down he went, rushing into the first room that he came to, which was the top attic of one of the bonnet-shops where the liberal proprietors provide assistants gratuitously, to stand at the doors all day long and point out the most fashionable bonnets to country ladies and gentlemen, which is a very kind and considerate proceeding

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED INTRODUCTION.

We left Mr. Wyndham Flitter, after his escape at the gambling house, and subsequent flight along the roof, rushing into a door on the tiles, at the summit of one of the Cranbourne bonnet stores.

We have been taught that "a thief doth fear each bush an officer," provided he be in a locality adapted to the growth of bushes. On the housetops he might be excused for falling into the same error with respect to each chimney-pot; and such was Mr. Wyndham Flitter's suspicion. For whilst he was half hesitating what course to pursue, a cowl on an adjacent chimney turned slowly round; and mistaking its outline over the the ridge of a house for the hat of an extra-energetic policeman, he darted through the doorway, and lifting up a fire-escape trap, which was slightly open at his feet, he dropped through the aperture into the chamber beneath.

There are several circumstances under which people experience sudden surprises, well-nigh tending to bring on great nervous commotions. A thoughtful gentleman walking near Smithfield, on a market-day, and finding himself suddenly impelled through the window of an optician's shop, by the head of a bullock whose horns are too wide apart to impale him, may be excused for uttering an exclamation of astonishment as he falls amidst the wreck of dissolving views, galvanic batteries, and barometers, caused by his intrusion: an old lady incontinently sent down the centrifugal railway: a poetical youth rowing his wager-boat against Putney bridge, as he thinks sentimentally of the moon: a gentleman taken for the first time behind the scenes, and discovering himself in front of the audience in his ignorant wanderings: a select couple going in a brougham to Epsom, with jibbing horses, and suddenly finding a strange pole dividing them, are all liable to express their surprise or terror with a fair excuse. But the astonishment of all these put together would not make a tithe of what was experienced by a single

one of the party amidst whom Mr. Wyndham Flitter so precipitately arrived.

The chamber into which he dropped, feet foremost, was a bed room, although the bed was now covered with plates and oyster-shells, and on the table, in the centre of which he alighted, were other signs of supper. Round about this table were five or six young ladies, mostly in high stuff dresses, with long tight sleeves, and all their cloaks and bonnets were in a heap in the corner. There was also a gentleman in a frock coat and white cravat—the ends of which were in open lace-work, after the pattern of the paper on the top of a French plum box—who had his hair curled and liberally anointed with some product of the distant Circassia; and he was the only beau of the party. As Mr. Flitter dropped down there was a violent scream from all the ladies, and one, in her agony, threw herself into the other gentleman's arms, exclaiming,

"Oh! Mr. Dipnall—save me!"

The Mr. Dipnall thus addressed seized an empty stout bottle by the neck, and appeared resolved upon selling his life as dearly as possible, when Mr. Flitter, casting one of his rapidly comprehensive glances round the assembled party, cried out—

"I beg your pardons. Do not be alarmed. I will explain everything. It is nothing, I can assure you. Rather let me beg of you, young ladies, to save *me*."

And thus speaking, he pulled the trap to, closely after him, and stepped down upon the floor.

"One instant," he continued; "hush! ruffians are tracing my footsteps. My life is in your hands."

The imploring, earnest tone of Mr. Flitter's voice, coupled with his mustachoes and effective appearance generally, had its effect. The young ladies unlocked their arms—for most of them had clung together as the intruder first broke in upon them, except one who had tried to hide amongst the cloaks—and ventured to look steadily at him; whilst Mr. Dipnall, having glanced into a glass to see that his hair was all right, rose and said, with a determination that was perfectly fearful:—

"Explain yourself, sir, if you are a gentleman. I cannot see these ladies insulted."

"Hush, Henry," said the one who had placed herself under his protection, speaking in a low tone.

"Oh, Mr. Dipnall, don't be violent, pray!" cried the others, as one or two placed their hands upon his arm.

"Ladies," said Mr. Dipnall, "I beg of you—Miss Newton, you must leave this matter entirely to me. Pray, sir, who are you?"

"An officer in her Majesty's service," replied Mr. Wyndham Flitter, twirling his moustache, and looking Life-Guards and Lancers at the inquirer. "And now, pray sir, who are *you?* What are you in?"

"I am not in the army," replied the other, in a less decided tone. He was flurried between his wish to appear the champion of the young ladies and his natural disinclination to enter into a row. Mr. Flitter saw this in an instant.

"You have a card, sir," he said, fiercely, to the increased terror of the girls.

"If you please, sir, we are all quite satisfied," observed the young lady who had been addressed as Miss Newton. "We are bonnet-makers, and this is Miss Harrup's room. and she asked us because it's her birthday."

"Permit me to have the pleasure of wishing you many, many happy returns of the day," said Mr. Flitter to the young lady indicated by the other, speaking with most effective politeness. "Although a stranger, no one's wish could be more sincere."

Mr. Dipnall, who had shielded Miss Harrup from the first, again looked very angry.

"Now, Henry," said the lady, who was a little sharp-faced black-eyed person, rendered additionally dangerous by the presence of pins stuck all about the body and waistband of her dress, which from time to time entered Mr. Dipnall's fingers—"Now, Henry, I wont have it. This gentleman, sir," she went on, addressing Wyndham, "is named Dipnall; and he's in the hosiery department at Leicester House."

"The first establishment in London," said Mr. Flitter. "My family have dealt at it for years, and I have no doubt, sir," he continued, "that they may frequently have had to thank you for your attention."

Mr. Dipnall's wrath was turned away in an instant, by Mr. Flitter's courtesy. And the next thought that struck

him was, how good it would be to go back to Leicester House and tell the other gentlemen that he had been passing the evening with an officer—one of the Life-Guards Blue, he thought he would say.

"The truth is," said Mr. Flitter, after a moment's pause, finding that he had ingratiated himself with all his new acquaintances—"the truth is—for I feel I am amongst friends—I have escaped from a serious riot in one of those blackguard hells, (I beg your pardons, ladies,) close here. A foolish young ensign in our regiment wished to see one, and I thoughtlessly took him in. Poor fellow! I hope he is all right."

The young ladies were quite touched, and really hoped so, too.

"Polly," whispered Miss Chownes, who was an artificial florist, and a very pretty girl, having been to school at Boulogne, and taking high ground amongst her companions, because she was sent two or three times a year to Paris to catch ideas from a *magasin*—(that is to say, a shop, but we should have liked you, in the most glorious days of French anti-respectability to have called it a *boutique* to the owner's face,)—"Polly," Miss Chownes breathed, in the ear of Miss Newton, of whom she felt slightly jealous, because she had first attracted Mr. Wyndham Flitter's attention, "he says an 'ensign' in his regiment; he ought to have said a 'cornet.' If he is in the Guards he would not wear mustachioes."

"I don't know," replied Miss Newton, very coldly. "I am not in the habit of meeting the Guards. I only know my equals."

There was a great deal of intended bitterness in this reply; so much so, that Miss Chownes answered:—

"Well, I'm sure I don't know, Polly, either; but I know those that know them all, and know I'm right, too—that they do."

And here Miss Chownes seized one of the cruets, and treated an oyster with such evidently-meant spite, that if no illustration of the unkind treatment, "giving him pepper," had ever before been offered, the present one was sufficient.

Meanwhile Mr. Wyndham Flitter was quite at home. If the police had been after him, he would have heard of them long before this, so he sat down upon the edge of a short

form—room having been made for him by some of the girls —and yielded to the entreaties of the assembly that he would have some supper.

"You are very good," said Mr. Flitter, taking six oysters, which Mr. Dipnall had opened, after sending the point of the knife as many times into the ball of his thumb—for a novice could play the fiddle before he could open an oyster—"but I have dined late, at the Guards' mess, in the Tower."

"There, now, he *is* in the Guards," whispered Polly Newton to Miss Chownes, in triumph.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Dipnall, with a hard struggle of tact to keep the would-be assumption of the knowledge of such proceedings from merging into the humility of the shopman before the ladies.

"A wonderful sight," continued Mr. Flitter—"I suppose the only remnant of the stirring times of old left in London. You dine——but I am boring you."

"Oh, *no!*" cried all the girls at once—Polly and all—leaning forward in intense attention. "*Do* tell us all about it."

"Well, then, you dine in that tall white place with the four towers, that you see from the Thames."

"I've often seen it, going to France by the boat," observed Miss Chownes.

"I suppose we all have," said Polly Newton. "The Tower's just as visible, if you're only going to Gravesend."

Miss Chownes never thought of her scissors in connexion with such a sanguinary business as she did when she reflected upon their inability to snip Polly's head off.

"All the dinner is served," continued Mr. Wyndham Flitter, "by men in armour—the most brilliant sight you can imagine—and the officers sit down in chain mail. A band is stationed at the end of the room, and the beef-eaters are ranged all round the gallery with trumpets, which they blow, as every fresh dish is brought on."

"Oh, lovely!" cried the girls.

"When the Queen's health is drunk," Wyndham went on; "if there is a strange officer present, who was expected, one of the early crown jewels is dropped into his cup after the manner of the ancients.—You remember, Mr. Dipnall, how beautifully the custom is alluded to in the song, 'Here's a

health to the King, God bless him!'—and he is allowed to keep it afterwards. *I* was the stranger to-night.

"There now, Polly, he is *not* in the Guards after all," retorted Miss Chownes to her friend.

"Hush!" answered the other—"listen!"

"This ring was the gift to-day," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter. "It is very interesting, being the same that the Countess of Rutland took to—pshaw—thingamyjig—who was it?"

"Essex," suggested one of the girls, with timidity.

"Yes—to be sure—into Essex, you know; and Queen Elizabeth and all the rest of it. Look here."

And, as usual, to prevent further investigation, Mr. Wyndham Flitter spun his ring to the delight of the spectators.

Miss Harrup—the founder of the feast—now began to think that it was time she said something; so she took advantage of the attention the others were bestowing upon the ring, to observe:

"We were going to finish card-playing after supper, if you have quite done, sir."

"Oh, quite," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter; "indeed, I did not require any. Let me assist you."

And, not at all proud, he immediately helped in clearing the table, and putting additional plates and oyster-shells upon the little French bed, leaving it a matter of some inquiry, altogether, as to where Miss Harrup was to sleep that night. For, as Miss Newton observed, "There was nothing so nice to eat in bed as Abernethy's biscuits, only the crumbs were dreadful; but what oyster-shells must be, she never did!"

The only person of the little party not quite at his ease was Mr. Dipnall; for hitherto the only gallant of the evening, he had held undisputed sway over the attention of his fair companions; but now there was another cavalier, and he was not that host in himself that he had, up to this time, been. But he had met an officer, and that was sufficient. Mr. Beans, of the outfit department, was always boasting of having ridden with noble lords, hunting, when his uncle, Mr. Ralph Beans, farmer, of Englefield Green, lent him a horse once, on a holiday; but now Mr. Dipnall would take him into the Park some Sunday and keep him leaning against the rails until Mr. Wyndham Flitter passed; and then wouldn't he

bow, and sew Beans up for ever! After all, this made up for a great deal.

The table was cleared, and the green baize put over it again—it was the green baize that covered another table in the back shop down stairs, where the last year's bonnets were laid out in state, with staring new trimmings, to catch the country customers who came up in summer to the May Meetings, and in winter to the Cattle Show—and then they formed again for cards.

"What shall we play?" asked Miss Harrup. "Van Toon?"

"With pleasure," said Mr. Flitter.

"I think *vingt-et-un* is the best game for a large party," suggested Mr. Dipnall.

He pronounced it 'vanty-un,' for he went to a French class at a Literary and Scientific Institution, and wished to show Mr. Wyndham Flitter that he knew the proper way to call it.

"*Oui, ma chère: vingt-et-un,*" said Miss Chownes, led, by Mr. Dipnall's reminiscence of French, into a momentary obliviousness of English.

"Shall we play partners?" inquired one of the girls.

"Oh certainly," cried the others: and they all had a hope that Mr. Flitter would choose one of them.

"You're my partner, you know, Kate," said Mr. Dipnall, in a most subdued tone to Miss Harrup.

Miss Harrup did not make a direct reply, but she kept counting out button-moulds, used instead of fish, and observed,

"Those large ones with the shanks are half-a-dozen."

"I say, Kate," continued Mr. Dipnall in the same whisper, as he pressed her foot, "we are partners, you know."

"Miss Newton," said Mr. Flitter, to the young lady, "shall we join our banks?"

The girl was too delighted.

Miss Harrup looked at her like Devonshire cream that has stopped too long at the terminus; and then replied to Mr. Dipnall:

"Oh, yes: we'll be pardners.

"What shall the counters be?" asked another.

"A penny a dozen," said Miss Harrup; "and you are not to bet more than six, or less than two."

"Charming," said Mr. Flitter, as he paid sixpence for

himself and Miss Newton, and received the button-moulds, which he put into the lucifer-box used for a pool. "Now then, the first knave deals; I wonder who it is."

By some singular chance, the first knave fell to Mr. Dipnall —almost as if Mr. Flitter had intended it—at which there was great laughter—such being an occurrence when it is always proper to indulge in ridicule at the luckless object, and to say that it was just what you expected. And then Mr. Dipnall, after apologizing for his hands, the nails of which were rather more of the chesnut than the filbert pattern, began to deal.

The game went on as games at *vingt-et-un* usually do. The timid stood at thirteen, and occasionally won; the brave drew at seventeen and got twenty-two. Dishonest people did not proclaim how much they ventured until the second card came, and then if it was a good one, surreptitiously put on a dozen; and those who had been doubled by the dealer, declared that the fish lying on their cards represented the original, or the two-fold, stake as suited their position and interests. When one partner had an ace and a three, and the other had a ten and a two, the ace was exchanged for the two —slyly and under the table—and a natural *vingt-et-un* effected. And when two paid the dealer, or it came to a desperate venture, one only had, having overdrawn and then kept quiet thereon, to throw any card under the table, to make whatever sort of hand was best suited to the emergency. For as cheating at a social round game appears to come under the same category of allowable villany as selling horses to friends when you know they are worth nothing—persuading relations to join new assurance offices of which you suspect the rottenness; or forming partnerships upon delightful ledgers and daybooks compiled with much care and industry to that end —it is always to be followed as long as you perceive there is not the slightest chance of being publicly found out, in which exposure alone, rather than the commission itself, appears to consist the crime.

In all these little tricks and dexterities Mr. Wyndham Flitter was at home. Indeed, he could have gone much further, and made especial court or plebeian guards get into whichever part of the pack or hand he chose; or even descending from the high art of gambling to the illegitimate,

could have caused the same to rise to slow music out of magic columns; or be shot into particular flowers of artificial rose-trees, or be found in alien pockets, or as the transmigrated forms of guinea-pigs, canaries, watches, pocket-handkerchiefs, or even the domestic split-peas of humble life. But at present he confined his necromantic energies to bringing all the button-moulds into Miss Newton's pool, which at last got so full she was obliged to change.

"Come sir," said Mr. Flitter to Mr. Dipnall, "we must have a little game of our own, I think; for we cannot ruin the ladies. Shall we bet?"

"With pleasure," replied Mr. Dipnall; for he had been sipping ale all this time, and now the glory of playing cards upon friendly terms with an officer, was coruscating before his eyes; and his contempt for Leicester House got more supreme than ever. Indeed he almost fancied himself an officer, too; and once, when he had gone to the Hanover-Square Rooms, to a fancy ball, as one of Mr. Nathan's popular military men, he had been told, by a fair friend, that he looked the character charmingly. It was but the same feeling that Philip had indulged in, the same evening, under similar circumstances. But the cheering blaze and smoke that rises amongst the clinking cinders, when you try to relight a gone-out fire with brown paper, is not more transient nor leaves a still drearier gloom behind, than the fancies of drinking. However, Mr. Dipnall was dazzled and he said:

"What shall it be?"

"A sovereign on the first natural," replied Mr. Flitter. "We are eight. You shall take the four on that side, counting yourself—I will take three."

"Content," replied Mr. Dipnall.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter cut the cards, for Miss Newton was to deal, and as he cut them, gave them a scarcely perceptible flash. They were dealt round, and the first natural came in Mr. Flitter's division.

"The luck is yours," said Mr. Dipnall, pulling a face longer even than the mechanical pasteboard performer on the violoncello is apt to achieve when supposed to be in the agonies of a difficult note. "You must give me my revenge."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Flitter. "Shall it be double or quits?"

"As you please," said Mr. Dipnall, in an off-hand way, thinking that owing him a sovereign was quite enough to establish a lively intimacy even with an officer.

"Henry!" quietly expostulated Miss Harrup, pressing his foot in turn, as she trembled at his rash daring. But he took no heed of her.

"Double or quits, then!" said Mr. Flitter, passing him the cards. "This deal goes for nothing. Now, fire away!"

Mr. Dipnall dealt out the cards, and again Mr. Flitter was the winner, he himself having the natural.

"Bless me!" observed Wyndham, "you are indeed unlucky to-night."

"I don't think I have got two sovereigns," said Mr. Dipnall, ruefully, as he fumbled in all his pockets, and investigating those most especially in which he knew there was nothing.

"Oh, never mind—never mind!" replied Mr. Flitter. Mr. Dipnall's face brightened a little, but fell immediately, as Wyndham followed up the words by asking—

"How much have you got?"

"I've a sovereign," replied Mr. Dipnall, "and half-a-crown, and a fourpenny-piece." And he put them on the table as he spoke.

"Very well," said Mr. Flitter, "that will do, you know; and you can give me your I O U for the rest. Or, stop, I'll take the sovereign only. You may want the rest for a cab."

"Oh! thank you," gasped Mr. Dipnall. Want it for a cab! Alas! cabs would henceforward be forbidden fruit to him.

The young ladies, who looked upon a sovereign almost as the treasure of a fairy tale, were aghast at the reckless manner in which so great a sum had been won and lost; and the circumstance cast a general gloom over the party, except Miss Newton, who from the establishment of the partnership, regarded Mr. Wyndham Flitter in some measure as her own property, and began to see a difference between his manners and those of Mr. Dipnall. Miss Harrup complained of her head aching; and her cavalier thought that it was really time to go.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter, thinking it manners, rose to depart: but as he quitted his chair, a card inadvertently fell from his

lap upon the ground. In his despair, Mr. Dipnall saw it, and darted upon it in an instant.

"Ha!" said Mr. Flitter, "we must take care of the cards."

"Do not say *we* must," cried Mr. Dipnall; "you have already done so. Sir, you are a swindler!"

"What does this mean?" asked Mr. Flitter, apparently quite astonished.

"You are a cheat, sir!" Mr. Dipnall went on, trembling with fear and fury.

"Henry!" cried Miss Harrup, "pray be calm! He will do you a mischief."

And all the girls began to express audible terror, especially Miss Newton, who was going to faint upon the bed, until she saw the dirty plates and oyster-shells, upon which she changed her mind, and drank a little ale that was in a tumbler on the drawers, which somewhat revived her.

"I demand the instant restitution of the sovereign," said Mr. Dipnall.

"Really, there is some mistake," observed Mr. Flitter, still completely cool. "There is the card, to be sure—a three of spades. What use could it have been to anybody?"

"Of this use, sir," Mr. Dipnall went on. "Look at this smear upon the back: I noticed it when I dealt it to you; but it was not one of those you turned up for the natural. You kept back an ace, sir—you know you did."

"Why, you miserable Snob!" cried Mr. Flitter, as he tried to approach Mr. Dipnall, who however kept dodging round the table, until Wyndham overturned it, bringing down cards, candles, and bottles in one general smash. And then advancing to Mr. Dipnall, amidst the screams of the girls and knocking from the room below, on the floor, as well as some corresponding blows against the wainscoat at the side, he seized him by his hair. It yielded suddenly, and the unhappy assistant at Leicester House stood before the company perfectly bald, as Mr. Flitter flourished his wig in his hand, and ultimately flung it at the only remaining candle on the mantel-piece, which it directly extinguished.

"Police!" shouted Mr. Dipnall, as he threw open the window, and bawled into Cranbourne-street, whilst the girls screamed every violent assault or accident, from "murder" to "fire" inclusive.

Mr. Flitter saw it was time to depart in the dark, so he banged open the door, and made the best of his way down stairs, meeting some people on the second-floor.

"Who's there?" asked a voice in the obscurity.

"Go up—go up," replied Mr. Flitter. "I'm off for the police. Go up; there'll be murder if you don't!"

The voice went on, and Mr. Flitter descended to the street-door, whereat, as he opened it, he met a policeman.

"Come in," he said; "come in. I was looking after you. Go right up to the top of the house, whilst I get a surgeon. There's a fearful business, I expect. Up as high as you can go."

And as the policeman began to ascend, Mr. Flitter closed the door after him—shot up the first court he came to—and then gaining the street at the other end, called a cab, and rode quietly off to the hotel near London Bridge, just as if he had been returning from the mildest party imaginable. And on arriving, being regularly dead beat, he told the waiter not to awake him under any pretence whatever; and if any one called upon him, to say that he was not there.

We must now return to Philip, whom we left in the street on his escape from the gaming-house. Once clear of it, he made the best of his way to his lodgings. With his pulses beating as though they would burst their channels, and his head still in a whirl with the excitement of the evening, anything like sleep was out of the question. He threw himself upon his bed without undressing; and there tossed restlessly about until the grey morning came through the window blinds, and wheels were heard again in the streets.

Unable to close his eyes, he got up and walked about the room; and as he caught a glimpse of his appearance, by chance in the glass, he was startled at the ghastly expression of his countenance. His face was completely white, and his eyes encircled by crimson lids, whilst his hair was wild and matted together, and his dress torn and in some places spotted with blood. Annie's letter was lying on his dressing-table as if in reproach; and the sight of it did not improve his present depressed spirits.

Scared at the spectacle he presented, he endeavoured to make such a toilet as might, in a certain degree, improve it: and this finished, not knowing what to do—hating to be

alone and giving up all thoughts of sleep—he once more went out into the streets. What had happened to Mr. Wyndham Flitter was the first thing he was anxious to learn; and he mechanically bent his steps towards Leicester Square, where, from the house he had quitted, he saw the police still engaged in moving some of the apparatus of the gaming tables. His presence did not attract any attention. They looked upon him as some late reveller returning home; and one of them went so far as to inform him that they had made a capture of gamblers that very night, and had them all in the station-house.

"Were any people taken besides the gang themselves?" asked Philip.

"None as we can find out," replied the policeman, who had accepted an invitation, quietly, to take a drop of something at a neighbouring gin-shop. "They said there had been two, but they had both got away. I expect they was all of a feather, though."

Philip's mind was to a certain extent relieved. Flitter had evidently made good his escape, and he determined upon joining him at his hotel; so he went on at once to London Bridge.

A coffee-room is not altogether an exciting place early in the morning; nor are waiters particularly lively at this period. On the present occasion, their denial of all knowledge of Mr. Flitter's return, made them appear extra stupid. But Philip resolved to stop until his friend appeared, albeit the place was not very cheering, for there was a dull hanging odour of over-night dissipation that all the open windows could not get rid of; and he felt as if he were there upon sufferance. This did not greatly tend to make him on better terms with himself; but he drew near the fire, ordered breakfast, and played with it rather than swallowed it, until an early copy of one of the morning papers—damp and inky—was slapped down upon the table before him, and this carried on the time until he, by chance, overheard the boots giving directions to one of the waiters to take Mr. Flitter's breakfast up-stairs. By this means, and the fee of a shilling, he at length got to his friend's bedroom.

"I wish I had known it was you down stairs," said Wyndham; "I heard that somebody had been asking after me, but

somebodies occasionally turn out very troublesome. Have some breakfast."

"I can't," answered Philip. "I ordered some down stairs, but did not eat any."

"What did you have?"

"Oh, some mess or another—coffee."

"Coffee!" replied Wyndham, with an air of contempt. "Pshaw! of course not. Try bitter beer—or brandy and soda. Have some with me."

The prescription answered to a certain extent; and Philip, as he listened to his friend's exploits of the night before, felt a little better. At last, when Mr. Flitter had finished, he said—

"I am getting very tired of this uncertain life. I shall go back to Pottleton, I think."

"Pooh! pooh!" observed Wyndham. "My dear fellow, what are you thinking about! Go to Pottleton! why you might as well bury yourself at once."

"I don't see that," replied Philip.

"But I do," said Flitter. "What does anybody do in the country, but always stick in the same place. Work there like a slave for fifty years, and you will leave off where you began precisely. What do you suppose you could do there?"

"Farm," answered Philip.

"Ho! ho!—farm!" cried his friend, with a laugh: "the very thing you have made fun of. Farm, indeed! yes—that's a brilliant prospect, to be sure. You'd sink gradually to a savage in corduroys and clumping shoes—pass all your time in squelching about soppy fields, or lifting clods after your legs that weigh a hundredweight—and learn to talk about nothing but 'oorts' and 'wut.' Ho! ho! yes, I see you farming!"

"But what am I doing here?" asked Philip.

"What are you doing here? Carrying everything before you; at least, about to do so. You could not have earned the money you got yesterday so easily by farming as you did by your pen."

"I am not grumbling at that," said Philip. "But, after all, is not a literary life rather an uncertain affair?"

"No. Uncertain! How?" asked Flitter.

"Why, it must come to an end."

"So must the world, or an Irish trial, or transportation for fourteen years, if you wait for it."

"That's all very well," replied Philip; "but this is what I mean. If you reflect, you will find that every literary man, however great his success, knocks up at last. His powers of invention get worn out by the constant drain upon them; or if he has made his name from any peculiarity or originality of style, the public, naturally enough, after a time, get tired of it, and wish for something else."

"Then, let him try something else."

"Ay, but that is not altogether so easily done. The sight of that poor man, Scute, and all his wretchedness, has made a great impression on me. I remember, when I was a boy, his books were run after far more even than ever I could expect anything of mine to be. And look at him now."

"Well, but he married."

"And so may I—nay, I shall be."

"Pshaw!" said Wyndham, anxious to turn the subject. "You are a cup too low this morning—seedy, hippish, down. Take the bright side of the question. Look forward to being popular—to having your name on every tongue—to finding every rank of society open to you."

"But rather from the absence, than the existence, of any recognised position of your own," said Philip.

"Ah! we'll drop the subject," said Mr. Flitter. "You'll be better, by and by."

Wyndham saw that Philip was getting mistrustful, and altogether not exactly in a state of mind to be lost sight of. So he kept him there until they went out together towards afternoon; and then he got Mr. Spooner to invite the Wracketts to dinner, and Mrs. Wracketts brought a single sister, if possible more attractive than herself; so that by the time dinner was over, and the wine was once more circulating, and Wyndham running over with anecdotes, and little scenes, and clever things generally, all Philip's gloom had disappeared.

"Well," said Mr. Flitter, as the party broke up at a late hour, "I think this is better than sitting up to watch 'turmuts,'—eh, Philip?"

CHAPTER XXV.

A CHANGE OF SCENE.

SEVERAL days passed, and Philip was too much occupied to recur again to the subject of the conversation he had held with his friend. "The Cracker" had appeared, and had been pronounced a hit: Messrs. Brainer and Clinch were in ecstasies; and poor Mr. Scute had been prevailed upon to turn out so clean and sober, that when he first called at the office, the people scarcely knew him.

Philip had found time to write to Annie, but it was a short letter enough, in which he told her he was very busy, but nevertheless always thinking about her, and that he hoped before long to be able to get down to Pottleton for a day: but the day was always put off by the post a little time before, as something arose to prevent him, until his presence was almost despaired of. At length, he settled upon the journey, and was preparing to pack up his things, when Mr. Wyndham Flitter, who was aware of his intention, came down to his rooms, the afternoon before his intended start, and thus addressed him.

"Here's luck, my boy—I've got you such a job to do—an account of the opening of the Amiens railway for the papers. See, here—tickets there and back, *viâ* Boulogne; and all our expenses paid by the directors, with their compliments."

"But when is it for, Flitter?"

"To-morrow—we must start to-morrow. We can put on a good price and make a day or two of it; besides something may turn up for 'The Cracker' on the way."

"I can't go."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm off to Pottleton."

"Ah! nonsense; you can go to Pottleton five times every day, if you please; but this is one chance of a thousand. You really must go; it is a pure matter of business."

"I don't know what Annie will think of it."

"If she cares for you, she will think how attentive you are to your affairs. I question much, though, if women do

think; and I question more, if they care for anybody, really and truly. I never met one that did. However, that is neither here nor there. You'll go."

And the prophecy contained in the last words turned out a correct one; for after a little more reasoning, Philip arranged to cross, with Wyndham Flitter, the next evening. And, accordingly, at the very hour that he expected to be at Pottleton, he found himself with his friend, and their carpet-bags, going down the hill that leads from the station into Folkestone, and finally stepping on board the steamer that was lying alongside the rude but tough rock and pile-work of the harbour.

Mr. Flitter's first glance was at the vanes of the different ships to see how the wind stood, and it was found to be dead against them, at which he expressed much discomfort; more, indeed, than the manner in which he frequently talked about his yacht voyages in the Mediterranean with noble lords would have led one to suppose.

But this was to an extent allowable. The channel is no joke, after all. Weather-beaten old gentlemen, with red, case-hardened faces, who have been backwards and forwards to India—as though Calcutta had been Herne Bay—a score of times: and have experienced the reality of all those wonderful tumblings about in the Bay of Biscay as imitated, in little, on the mechanical sea that rages in the hollow pedestal of a foreign clock, where the ship, like the Flying Dutchman, is perpetually rolling and pitching without moving from where she is—who have also been up and down the wave mountains "off the Cape," which Mr. Daniell delighted to paint, the journey over which can only, we are certain, be compared to sitting in a swing at the antipodes, or being impelled over a succession of *montagnes russes*—those tough, red-parchment-visaged ancient mariners have told us, that crossing the channel always makes them ill. They account for it in some nautical fashion that we are not clever enough to explain properly. There was always a "side swell" or an "oblique trough" or something of the sort. But we suspect the reason, after all, to be, that they never feel at their ease in a steamboat. They look upon it as a contemptible kind of floating boiler that ought never to be mentioned in

the same breath as a real Indiaman, and are prejudiced accordingly.

The sea-passage is not now, however, a very dreadful affair. There is none of that long dismal work in the dark, when the dim cabin lamp glimmered for so many hours over the worn-out inmates of the close saloon, stiving there ever since they left the Nore; and people used to hold tight by the polished brass rail, as they crawled up the cabin stairs to ask the first sailor they saw, "what time he thought they should get in," or look out for the Boulogne lights. Now, to be sure, the revolving lamps at Grisney mock the anxious gazers for an hour or so, by always seeming to be the same distance off, and the two Forelands and Dungeness never appear to diminish; but, except in a few of those gales that rush up the channel at times, rather late for some festival of the winds at the North Pole, the discomfort is transient. There is little of that tendency to tumble about all ways at once as the boat rolls—creaking, straining, and surging through the dark and leaping waters, when all the wine-glasses appear to be having a fight to themselves in the steward's bar, and the paddles hit the sea whenever they can get the chance, and when they can't turn round clean out of it, with an accompanying roar of steam from the funnel. Now, the channel is usually crossed in broad day-light, and frequently in that state of weather-conviviality which preceded "the return of the admiral," when the morning was all sunshine, and the wind was blowing free; and you are not long enough on board for the feeling to be carried on to the shore, and set you tossing and tumbling just the same, all night afterwards, as if you were in a French bed out at sea during a storm. Yet still, even now, there is a great deal of qualmishness, especially amongst your old conventional invalids.

For many folks think that there is an absolute duty and necessity for them to be sick, the instant they get on board a sea steam-boat. This they do in the same traditional spirit that prompts bridesmaids to look serious, and even moist-eyed at weddings; jurymen to take snuff round a corpse at an inquest; pit people at the opera to believe they are amused at the dragging *Nozze di Figaro;* and the world generally, at a scientific conversazione, to admire the in-

comprehensible objects placed about upon the tables. These good folks make ready for it the instant the boat starts, contriving couches and pillows from carpet-bags and leather trunks, in that curious spirit of extemporaneous upholstery and bedding that only steam-boat invalids can foster. But everybody, ill or not, is always delighted, more or less, when the packet turns from the open sea into the still water between the two long barricades of piles which bound Boulogne Harbour.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter took his place at the angle of the lee paddle-box as the boat left Folkestone, and never reappeared until the extremity of the Capécure pier sheltered the dancing waves into something like quietude. And then, as the boat came alongside of the port, all the passengers scrambled up on deck, and faces appeared from unknown cabins that had not been visible before during the voyage.

The view presented was a well-known one to all who had landed there before. Clusters of douaniers, and sturdy, thick-legged women, marked the position of the custom-house; touters had collected from the hotels in an impenetrable band along the narrow causeway from its egress; and the visitors who had kept pace with the steamer, as they ran along the pier by its side, in the hope of recognising, or being recognised by their friends, gathered against the cords which formed a sort of course, along which the voyagers were driven, like hunted dogs at Epsom, to the douane. Even the aristocratic family who owned the handsome travelling-carriage on board, and had shut themselves up in it all the journey—not so much to fancy they were still riding along the road, as to keep up a proper degree of exclusiveness consistent with their position—even these came upon deck, and looked out their tickets, to deliver upon going up the gangway.

There was the old routine of business—the waiting at the douane as the same soldier put his arm across to prevent too many going through at a time; the same gentleman inquired who had got passports and who had not, and took down full particulars of the latter's age, name, and intentions; and lastly, the same touters nearly pulled the travellers to pieces as they emerged from the building.

Romantically inclined individuals feel affected by planting

their foot, for the first time, upon French soil; enthusiastic ones tune the Marsellaise or begin to respect the memory of the Emperor; commonplace ones of feeble education repel the touters, and say, "Nong—lazy moi trankeel." Mr. Wyndham Flitter did nothing of either. He simply damned the touters, took Philip's arm, and walked straight over to the Hotel de Paris, where he was in the habit of stopping—in a little room, on the left as you enter, with two beds rather than apartments opening into the salon. And here, as they were somewhat tired, and Boulogne is not particularly lively in the evening, they retired to bed.

Philip forgot all his misgivings and felt quite at home again —more so than he had done for a long time since he left Normandy. For with all its annoyances there is something very pleasant in arriving at a French hotel. The perfect novelty of everything around you, even in the houses termed 'English,'—the unwonted feel of the tiles on the floors—the white crockery — the comical iron-work of the locks and window fastenings, and the windows themselves, which always open with a bang that knocks you down, and then blows you into the middle of the room if the door is open—the walnut-tree bedstead—the rustling mattress—the black marble mantel-piece and tawdry flowers and treacherous clocks with the large white closets on each side—the very shining key with its little feeble brass number-ticket hanging to it—the trim chambermaid speaking a language that you only associate, in its purity, with almost patrician refinement, so fluently: all this is very pleasant. And most comfortable are the French beds—not to be confounded in anywise, with the structures we know in England by the same appellation: only you can not get to sleep well the first night. The mere fact of being in a foreign land keeps you awake.

And the same feeling of novelty is equally strong in the morning. First of all you hear strange noises in the street—perfectly different to the out-of-door sounds of England. Odd, unnatural carts go jingling by, taking the wrong side of the road, and very like the Liverpool 'floats' in their two-wheel build. The women are again at work, carrying their loads about like ants, (and funny men would say, perhaps some or them are) with no perceptible object. Twenty men are doing the work of one, upon the port, outside the chains; and the

steamer that fought the sea so lustily the night before, and beat it, is lying at the quay, guarded by a soldier who looks as if he had walked from a toy-stall in the Lowther Arcade, and is put there to keep the bottles of stout and British manufactures generally, from marching ashore.

The opening of the new railway was very different to what it had been at Pottleton. There was no triumphal arch, nor band of music—no Sunday-school children, nor rosy country girls, nor bell-ringing, nor refreshment booths with fine cold rounds of beef and tubs of humming ale. For the whole business was too practical and solid for the French to get up a *fête* about. If it had been to fraternize and drink *vin d'honneur* with a lot of people they did not care the filing of a farthing for; or to plant a ragged old poplar bedecked with scraps of cheap coloured rubbish, in a hole in the pavement, and call it the tree of liberty, they would have been festive enough, being ever ready to worship the imaginary and evanescent. But now a few sober gentlemen with inches of ribbon in their lappel button-holes were bowed up to the station : some under-sized soldiers kept back the boys : a travelling merchant with a tin turret on his back, retailed possibly the nastiest compound ever manufactured, since the discovery of ginger beer made with powders, or spruce generally: a crowd of fishwomen, carters, and country people cried, "*Tiens! la machine à vapeur!*" as the locomotive went puffing off with its train, along the level bank of the Seine, flouting the distant road on the other side up which the diligence used to toil so drearily: and the railway was opened.

"Well," said Philip, "there does not appear to be much here to talk about. I don't see what can be made of it."

"Made of it!" replied Wyndham—"everything. You must talk of the mutual interests of nations—bringing two great capitals together, removing prejudices, and all that sort of business. Then touch upon Boulogne, its history and associations, the climate and soil, and those of all the principal stations along the line, the enthusiasm of the people——"

"But they did not strike me as being very enthusiastic," said Philip.

"Pshaw! what does that matter? Look to the description—the picturesque costumes——"

"My dear Wyndham," interrupted Philip, "there is nothing picturesque in those awful old women."

"Not upon paper? Why, they are all you want. You can finish your account of these lookers-on by saying, 'Whilst the bright and artistic tints of the *poissardes*, who, with their snowy lace caps, scarlet petticoats, and trim blue legs, lined the inclosure, as their heavy gold ear-rings flashed in the sun, formed a picture so thoroughly continental, that the spectator could scarcely believe two short hours had transported him from murky England to the plains of sunny Artois.'"

"Artois?" asked Philip. "Are we in Artois?"

"Most certainly."

"Oh!" returned the other, with an expression of disappointment, as he gazed along the "slow" Liane and the hazy harbour. "Sunny Artois! You would not think so, unless you were told, would you?"

"Not more than you would of any other continental place when you saw it," replied Wyndham, "after having formed your ideas from pictures and descriptions. But it is all right. If books of travels were matter-of-fact, the entire world might be described in six penny numbers, and none would ever pay for publishing. If you were to tell the truth, and say that the vineyards of France were nothing to our hop-gardens in appearance; or that the Rhine about Cologne was a great deal drearier than the Thames at Gravesend; or that Cologne itself was the most dirty, odorous city in Christendom, nobody would believe you. Follow the mob—never attempt to lead them: it doesn't pay."

"But you would not follow the mob, in speaking of Italy?" asked Philip, as they walked back, arm in arm, across the curious structure between a lock, a dock, a breakwater, a bridge, and a mill-dam, that connects Boulogne with Capécure.

"Certainly, I would, said Mr. Flitter; "inasmuch as the mob only believe in the Italy of the past, because they think it proper to do so. If you do not appear to do so as well, you will be called a snob."

"But I believe in the Italy of the past," replied Philip.

"Which past?"

"Why, what can I mean by saying so?"

"What you are not clear about. There are two pasts in

Italy. One which belongs to the stirring days of Venice—to the Florence of Boccacio—to the Naples of—pshaw! what was the fellow's name—the 'Behold how brightly, brightly breaks the morning,' and market-chorus man——"

"Masaniello."

"That's the bird; and the other past, which belongs to the fusty old fogies we were licked about at school. The last's the one to go in for, if you wish to win; Virgil, Horace and all the lot. Unless you have them at your fingers' ends, nobody will believe you can enjoy Italy simply for itself."

"But, surely the glorious poetry of the old authors will contribute to your delight, when in Italy," observed Philip.

"Conventional—all conventional," replied Mr. Flitter. "You learnt Latin and Greek at the Dibblethorpe Grammar School, with the notion that it would be of use to you in getting your living, didn't you?"

"Certainly," replied Philip.

"How many times, in society, have you wished that you had been taught Italian and German instead?" rejoined Wyndham. "French you have fortunately picked up. Look at Spooner: he has been to college, and can run off the classics as I can the two-year-olds. Put us in mixed society, where there are foreigners, and see who is the muff—eh?"

Philip could not reply, but Mr. Flitter saved him the trouble by turning into the Café Vermond, and taking him upstairs to a room which he denominated The Club.

It was a large dingy apartment, with a smoke-clouded panoramic paper round the walls, setting forth various skirmishes between French soldiers and Arabs, with lights and shadows of social existence in Algeria generally, such as cutting throats, stealing, firing houses, and drinking to intoxication. The object of the panorama was to lead the visitor to believe that he was in the middle of these exciting scenes, which he might have done had not the continuity of the view been interrupted everywhere by the doors, windows, clocks, and looking-glasses of domestic life, and a standard, inscribed "Soda Water," elevated in the midst of a terrible *razzia*; to say nothing of an intimation raised over a mosque, "*Bell's Life in London taken in here.*"

There were squab seats all round the room, and two tables. On one of these were some old English journals, read until

they had become quite limp; and on the other was a cardboard and counters, and some gentlemen were playing écarté and betting thereon.

There was something peculiarly the same in the appearance of all these men — a look of that mouldy flashiness always inseparable from dashing professors of social doism, who only lack means, manners, and morals to become the 'swells' they wish to be considered. They all wore mustachioes, although a glimpse was sufficient to show that they were not in the army; or if, by chance, any one addressed them by a military title, it was by virtue of some anomalous Spanish brevet, mysteriously connected with bills, billiards, cigar shops, and feebly transparent schemes for making money. When abroad, they walked on the port, and swam large dogs in the harbour, or lounged round the gateways of the big hotels, and were constantly expecting letters from England which never arrived. They were great in the Anglo-resident politics of Boulogne: and the balls, parsons, cliques, and scandal generally of that instructive locality furnished the entire subjects of their conversation.

There was great rejoicing as Mr. Wyndham Flitter entered, for he was evidently known to all of them; indeed, many might have been taken for his relations. But what was Philip's surprise to see Mr. Wracketts amongst the party, comfortably installed by the fireplace, with an enormous cigar in his mouth, and a lively bottle of beer on the mantelpiece at his shoulder.

"To be sure he is," said Wyndham, as if in answer to a supposed remark, glancing at Mr. Wracketts. "I forgot to tell you, Philip, that we should meet our friend."

"Why, how suddenly you have come over," observed Philip; "and you said nothing about it last week."

"No; I didn't know it myself; but really Mrs. Wracketts was so very poorly, that an immediate change was necessary."

"Oh, she is here, then?" said Philip.

"Yes; at Carpenter's Boarding House, in the Rue de la Lampe. We shall be delighted to see you there. We expect Spooner, too, before long; but really we came off in such a hurry, that I had no time to see anybody."

"Not in such a hurry as I once did," said Mr. Flitter.

"I had been let into a pecuniary difficulty—by a friend, of course—and was compelled immediately to absent myself, at two minutes' notice. How do you think I contrived to pack?"

"Tell us, Wyndham," said Philip.

"I emptied two of my drawers into a hamper—took my carpet-bag into the omnibus; and made my fellow get outside, and pitch the things down to me through the window. By the time I got to London Bridge, everything was packed in first-rate style, except my boot-jack, which I was glad to have an excuse for putting in my pocket, and throwing into the sea at the North Foreland."

"Why so?"

"Because it was an evil thing—'portable,' which is another word for painfully useless. It shut up, and either pinched your foot with it, or threw you heels over head backwards when you used it."

"Is this your first visit to Boulogne, Mr. Maitland?" asked Mr. Wracketts.

"It is," replied Philip.

"There is a great deal to be seen here, which, as I have had the pleasure of reading two or three little things you have done Mrs. Wracketts the favour of contributing to her album, you could describe admirably. Have you come here to show us up?"

"I wish he would," said Wyndham; "in fact, I was going to suggest it to him. I must be back in London; but if he would stay a week, it would pay him well." And Mr. Flitter gave a significant nod to Mr. Wracketts.

"Now, look here," said the latter gentleman, speaking to Philip. "We shall be delighted to see you at Carpenter's. There is just one room vacant. You will be charmed with our party, and Mrs. Wracketts will be too happy to have you next to her at dinner. Say you will come."

"I should like it," replied Philip, "but really I——"

"Pooh! stuff!" interrupted Wyndham; "now, there is not one earthly reason for your return. There—you will stay, and that's the end of it."

And then, not caring that Philip should argue the matter further, Wyndham led him away, saying he would dine at Carpenter's at six; and they went on the Port.

It was as lively as usual, and as noisy. All the stray dogs

were out in full force; and all the fishermen on the quay were loudly quarrelling with those in the boats—now sunk low on the mud of the harbour—with their customary frantic unintelligibility. There was an unusual influx of strangers, and the little shops on the Port were in high business, selling cheap eau de Cologne that scented the handkerchief with something between turpentine and peppermint; or huge Ostend oysters, as large as poached eggs, and something like them, if they had had greenish yolks; nine-and-twenty sous gloves—real Paris ones, which never fitted any known fingers; and, in fact, all sorts of things that people bought and secreted in their luggage, and trembled about all the way home, for fear the custom-house officers should discover them, only to find that they could get them cheaper in London.

The sun was shining and the wind blew about the thoroughfares with the peculiarity which the Boulogne wind possesses of coming from all points of the compass at once, and concentrating at the corner of the Rue de l'Ecu, or at the end of the harbour dead against the boat. But it was a healthy, invigorating breeze, and the people looked cheerful and ruddy—the young ladies blushing, in addition, as they whisked by the corners, and showed most enticing ankles; or turned round in dismay, and "really could not face the wind any longer—it was perfectly horrid!" This did not distress the fish-girls much: habituated to show any amount of legs at all seasons, they kept laughing on their way.

A pipe and tabor allured Mr. Flitter and Philip to the spot, where a wandering professor of dancing, as applied to the canine species, was beating up an audience. His little performing dog, who had put on that absurdly conscious expression of self-degradation inseparable from his race, when costumed in any fashion, was evidently a novice. He preferred his normal position to standing on his hind legs, and when told to jump through a hoop, first slunk down to the very ground in terror of the switch, and then crept underneath it—not in that spirit of pleasantry which induces Mr. Merriman to go under a horse instead of over him, when joining the vaulters, but from sheer lack of intelligence.

"He is not a promising pupil," observed Philip, as he lounged with Mr. Flitter against the posts and chains of the quay.

Tips degrinthlers

"I ought to know that dog," said the other, by that odd white mark over his eye. I am sure I have seen him somewhere before, and his name is Tip; but I totally forget where."

"Call him," suggested Philip.

"Hi! Tip, Tip!" cried Mr. Flitter.

The dog, who was about to walk round the circle with a waiter in his mouth, in such forlorn hope of contributions as a French audience held out, dropped it suddenly, and ran towards Wyndham Flitter.

"There! I knew I was right," he said. "Where can I have seen him? Stolen, of course."

The man, who appeared to think Mr. Flitter was not far from right, raised the siege of the pockets of his audience and retreated. For Wyndham had spoken with reason; it was indeed the original Tip of the Twinch hearth that they had been watching! If the virgin heart that still mourned his loss, even in the festive halls of Mrs. Cooze and her friends, could have known the chance of discovering him that had been lost, there is a question whether it would not have broken at once. But the opportunity was suffered to go by. The showman gathered up his things and moved away; the apparition of Tip had passed, and his little bark was once more lost in the great ocean of the world.

"We will take a turn along the pier," said Wyndham, "and then prepare for dinner. They have a little music and dancing in the evening at Carpenter's. Where the deuce have I seen that dog?"

Philip took his arm, and they strolled to the end of the north pier, to see the people and watch the waves rolling across the bar, and leaping over the fort, out and away in the sea, towards Wimereux. The sun was shining, and now and then the cliffs of England could be seen, even to their indentations and shades of samphire patches, across the channel. Philip looked at them, and was thinking of Pottleton and Annie, when Wyndham changed the current of his thoughts by simply observing—

"What an odd sensation it is, to be at Boulogne, with the power of going home again whenever you like!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COOZE JEWELS MIGHT STILL BEHAVE BETTER.

The researches of that ingenious butcher, Mr. Snoswell, after Miss Twinch's lost favourite were ineffectual; so also were those of the lady herself. But these latter were principally confined to scrutinizing the little pets, held for sale in Regent Street, and choking themselves as they inclined to different views with regard to running round whatever lamp-posts they chanced to be stationed near. Once Miss Twinch followed a private carriage, in a hack cab, to the distant frontier where the patrician Belgravia merges into the domestic Brompton, solely on the belief of having seen Tip looking out of a brougham: and another time she kept guard with a policeman at the door of a draper's shop in the Quadrant that ran through into Piccadilly, for upwards of an hour, because she had seen a lady enter with a similar Tip; and after waiting thus long, she ventured in, and found that the suspected party must long ago have departed by the other egress; and, indeed, was almost given into custody herself, upon suspicion of being a shoplifter, after all. For the attentive gentleman, who walked about the establishment and handed chairs to promote staying at the counter, and saw that the ladies were properly attended to, and that they did not pocket anything, had marked Miss Twinch watching through the glass door for some time; and when she marched through the shop, and, glancing suspiciously to the right and left as she passed, went out without purchasing, he naturally followed her. But nothing was missed, and he had seen nothing appropriated, so Miss Twinch was allowed to go her way.

Mr. Snoswell was not more fortunate. He went, at peril of his life, into fighting neighbourhoods, where dogs grew by hundreds in back-yards and cock-lofts; and made friends with his apprentices, who told him of matches coming off, kept dark to the world at large, between certain remarkable dogs—born quarrelsome, and bred up to foster their natural propensities—in the hopes of hearing news of the lost favourite. But it was all of no avail.

In vain Miss Twinch every morning looked down the second column of *The Times*, where the dissolute initials were requested to return home, that they might be forgiven; and people of a sanguine purity of mind expected that the purse of sovereigns they had lost between Chelsea and Islington would be cheerfully brought back again by the right-minded finder—the poor but honest peasant of the touching melodramas. A few noble souls occasionally advertised that they had found purses, which the owner might have by paying expenses and describing contents—such being usually crossed cheques and notes whose payment was stopped; and now and then, liberal people who had been followed by fine retrievers, which had been kept until they howled all night, and ate as much as an able-bodied man all day, announced the fact of that possession with some hope of the original owner applying. But beyond this there was no hope. Mr. Snoswell, however, sent in a bill for expenses and loss of time incurred in the search; and Miss Twinch settled it with the same feeling of indefinite dissatisfaction that attends the paying for something done to your watch, the extent of which outlay of labour or value is entirely regulated by the inventive faculties of the artificer. And so Tip was mourned as one loved but lost; and Miss Twinch felt that the tendrils of her heart which clung so fondly round him began to wither, and, like Arcite, felt inclined to weep when she heard touching music, so feeble were her spirits.

At this time, fortunately, Mrs. Cooze received an invitation from Mrs. Budd, for her children to a juvenile party, as Mrs. Budd's niece, little Minny Waring, was staying with her, and it would be her birthday. Mrs. Cooze was requested to bring Miss Twinch with her; and Mrs. Budd seriously begged that they would both come early to assist her in the tea and coffee department, and also to look after the little folks generally during the arrival, conjuring, and ball, which formed the excitements of the evening.

It was a trying time to live with the Jewels that elapsed between the first intimation they got of the party and the evening of its celebration; for every night a humble man came to rehearse Goodness knows what kind of figure polka with them, which they were to show off in at the ball!

and the ordeal this poor professor had to undergo was never exceeded by the Inquisition—"What a dirty face you've got, Mr. Puttick," Totty would observe, not in the frank observation of a child, but because she had some indefinite notion that it would make her teacher feel uncomfortable.

"For shame, Totty!" Mrs. Cooze observed, as poor Mr. Puttick bent down his head, and put his violin in a vice between his chin and his knee to tune it. "How dare you be so rude, Miss?"

"Well, Ma, you know you said you wished Mr. Puttick would spend half as much money in soap as he did in tobacco; and that was only yesterday, now."

"No, it wasn't!" said Lobby.

"Yes, it was!" retorted Totty.

"Now, that it wasn't, Miss!" continued her brother; "because it was when Papa came home and smelt the smoke, and said Miss Twinch had had a cigar. Oo-o-o-oo!"

The last prolonged monosyllable accompanied a grimace which Master Robert made at his sister, upon which Totty tried to clutch his face, but was prevented by Mrs. Cooze rushing forward, and Mr. Puttick knocking on the back of his fiddle, when the dance commenced.

The children went through some painfully absurd business with their arms and hands, and toes and heels; and then Mr. Puttick proposed that they should rehearse their quadrille.

"Poof!" said Totty, with a supercilious toss of her head; "just as if we did not know our quadrilles."

"What funny feet Mr. Puttick's are," observed Lobby; "and I can see all the joints of his great toes through his shoes."

"Now, my loves, the quadrille—the quadrille," cried Mrs. Cooze. "Miss Twinch and I will be your *vis-à-vis*." And the ladies stood up, as Mr. Puttick began to play.

"How funny you dance!" observed Lobby to Miss Twinch, after a while.

Miss Letitia's style was that of the primitive female quadrillers, or early fandango—that is to say, she rose on one elastic foot at each step, drew her chin back towards her neck, and presented her hand, with a graceful wave of the arm, describing the top arc of a circle, whenever there was an occasion. And she was especially mindful to do her footing in time to the music.

"Ah, I dare say little folks think it funny," observed Miss Twinch; "but your mamma will tell you we had the first masters of the day when I learnt."

"But that was such a long, long—oh, I don't know how much a long time ago," replied Totty.

"I think that will do for this evening, Mr. Puttick," said Mrs. Cooze. "To-morrow, at half-past six, if you please."

Mr. Puttick bowed, and prepared to leave the room, as Lobby ran up to him, and said—

'Please stop a minute, and then I'll show you something; but don't look."

"No, I wont look," promised Mr. Puttick.

"My dear Lobby, what are you going after?" asked his mamma.

"I know," said the Jewel, leaving the room, after exacting another promise from the professor not to watch him.

"He is such a fellow," observed Mrs. Cooze, in admiration. "Now, you'll see—something funny and original, I'll be bound."

Mr. Puttick smiled blandly, as if acquiescing with the lady of the house in her estimate of the dear boy's attributes.

"Yon can't play the piano, I know," said Totty to Miss Twinch, "else you would. Play that, now."

"Hush! here he comes," observed Mr. Cooze, as Lobby re-entered the room.

"Now you may go," he said to Mr. Puttick, "because it's nothing about you. Mamma, mayn't Mr. Puttick go?'

"Certainly, my love," answered Miss Cooze; as the Professor bowed his way sideways out of the room, and Lobby made a confidential communication to his sister; at which Totty laughed, as heartily as she was accustomed to; which ebullition might have been mistaken for a sneer, after all, by short-sighted people.

"Will you try that duett now, my dears, for the flageolet and piano," their mamma went on.

"Wait a minute. Hush!" said Lobby.

They listened; and then heard a noise as of some one groping about in the dark in the passage; and now and then a chair scrooped along the floor. Lobby and Totty indulged in little sniggers, at each sound.

"There he is," said the former.

"And he can't find them," remarked the girl.

"It is Mr. Puttick," exclaimed Mrs. Cooze; "and the lamp must have gone out. It's that bad, cheap oil again."

The lady took a candle and opened the door. The Professor was seen playing, to all appearances, a game of blindman's buff by himself.

"Can't you find your way out, Mr. Puttick?" asked Mrs. Cooze. "It's the little latch, and turn the handle at the same time."

"No, ma'am;" replied Mr. Puttick. "I can open the door; but I have lost something."

"What is it?"

"Oh, nothing—I dare say they are here—only my shoes."

It was Mr. Puttick's custom when he came to give the Jewels their lesson, to exchange his Alberts of every-day life for the pumps of society; and he usually left the former under one of the hall chairs. They had now disappeared; and in his researches after them, he had attracted the attention of the others, who now found him with his pumps in his hand, wandering about the stone flags of the passage in black-cotton stockings with white toes.

The servants were rung up, but none of them knew anything about it. It could not be the woman, either, who had brought the clean things home, because she was not alone for a minute; and the man who had come for the box of steel-pens he left the night before, never came inside the door.

"Lobby," cried Mrs. Cooze, with severity, "where are Mr. Puttick's shoes?"

Lobby, who was in the room, blew his flageolet very loud in reply.

"Now, I insist upon knowing," said the lady, who began to suspect a conspiracy of the Jewels; "if they are not found this instant, I shall not let you go to Mrs. Budd's party.

"Totty knows," at length replied Lobby, bringing his flageolet solo to a conclusion.

"You told me, sir, then," retorted the young lady.

"I would not let them go to the party, indeed," observed Miss Twinch, in an infant-school tone, delighted to get a chance of once more exercising her teacher's severity, "unless they say where Mr. Puttick's shoes have been hidden."

"I don't care for you—not a bit," said Lobby.

"No more do I—no more do I—no more do I!" chorused Totty, as the two performed a savage measure round Miss Twinch, joining their voices.

"For shame!" cried their mamma; "I wish your papa would come in."

And, as if to support the old adage, the latch-key turned in its lock at that moment, and Mr. Cooze entered.

"Septimus!" cried his lady; "will you speak to these naughty, naughty children?"

"I'll tell if he does," said Lobby, half confidentially to his mamma.

"What will you tell, sir?"

"I will!" replied the Jewel.

"And I will, too," added Totty.

"I'm ashamed of you," said Mrs. Cooze. "Septimus, if you don't punish them——"

"Then I will!" interrupted Lobby, with determination; "when I went with mamma to Leicester House, to-day, she told the man to put the new shawl down, because she was sure you would be angry if she paid for it just now; and he did."

"Robert, you wicked boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Cooze.

"Yes you did, ma; and she knows it, too," he continued, pointing to Miss Twinch.

Poor Mr. Cooze had been so suddenly beset on all sides, upon entering, that he was scarcely collected. But he watched the servants with their ears wide open, and Mr. Puttick, overwhelmed by the storm he had created, and the unnatural feud between the mother and children, so he put on a look as terrible as that of the ogre of old, and said, in a corresponding voice to Lobby—

"Where are the shoes, sir?"

The dear boy was quite awed by his father's presence:—he shuffled to the end of the passage, and pulled them out from a stove. They were directly restored to the expectant Puttick, and then the Jewels were ordered off to bed. This produced a fresh storm, which raged for some time in the upper regions of the house, finally causing great floods of tears, with which it terminated.

In little domestic scenes similar to this did the time pass until the night of the party; on which evening, at half-past

seven, Mrs. Cooze, Miss Twinch, and the Jewels, cleared outwards with cargo from their home, and were deposited at Mrs. Budd's, in Wimpole-street. The Jewels had been got up regardless of expense. Mrs. Cooze, as we have seen, thought that children's dresses could not be made too short for them, to be patrician, whatever their ages; and so Totty looked more like a teetotum than a little girl, when she walked into the still-room. Lobby had an embroidered frock-coat of velvet, the economy of which he sadly deranged by keeping his hands in his trousers' pockets, wherein he had a collection of chair-crackers, detonating balls, marbles, peas, and painful missiles generally, to be surreptitiously used, as occasion might present.

"This is very kind of you to come so soon," said Mrs. Budd, who was, with her pretty little niece, Minny, in the tea-room.

"Oh, I am too happy," replied Mrs. Cooze; "besides, I said I would be here early."

"But you wouldn't, mamma, if we hadn't made you," observed Totty. "I know what you said in the drawing-room."

"There, now, never mind, my love," said Mrs. Cooze, "you shall have some tea."

"Yes; but I know what you said," continued the atrocious child. "You said she" (pointing to Mrs. Budd) "always got you to come early, to make use of you, and——"

"Now, mind, you naughty boy!" cried Mrs. Cooze turning to Lobby. "See—your tea is all running down your coat."

Little Minny thought it was time for her to pay some attention to her guests, so she brought forward a little doll's service of cups and saucers, and said to Totty, with a smile: "Come and have tea with me."

The Jewel's only reply was a curl of the lip, and an observation to the effect that she had much better ones at home, and that only babies had tea from doll's tea-things. So poor Minny retired with her service, in much humility, and waited the arrival of more social little friends.

"That is a lovely collar you have on," said Mrs. Budd to Miss Twinch.

"'Tisn't hers—that's my ma's," exclaimed Lobby. "Ma lent it to her to-night, because she hadn't got one."

A knock at the door announced an arrival; for being a juvenile party, all the people had been told to come early. The Jewels would run out into the hall, to see the new comers, and then hurried back to give their mothers details of their appearance, more or less flattering.

"Oh!—there is such an ugly old woman come, ma," said Lobby. "Oh! so, so, so old—she is older than *her*, eversomuch."

The comparison was instituted at the expense of Miss Twinch.

"And she's got a cap like my doll's, that was bought ready dressed," added Totty. "Such a fright it is!"

The style of those primitive ready-dressed dolls, whose entire wardrobe is kept together so marvellously by two nails, one driven into the chest, and the other into the poll, did not appear calculated for modern evening costume. But the children were as disagreeably observant as was their custom to be, and not far from the mark. When the old lady came in, who turned out to be Mr. Budd's mother, they said, audibly, "Look at her, ma," and then burst out laughing.

The company kept arriving, and when the tea was finished, they were all marshalled up stairs to see the conjuring. Lobby and Totty immediately possessed themselves of the two best seats, obtaining one of them by violent means; and when they were all arranged, the folding-doors were opened, and the wizard was seen at his table. He introduced himself by some terribly hard words, so imposing that the small children stared at him in terror, with their eyes widely opened, and held tight to the rout-seats they were perched upon, far too nervous to dream of taking a card when one was offered. But the Jewels were not awed. They struggled for the pack when it came near them; and threw the conjuror out by small fiendish tricks of their own, denying what they had drawn, or refusing to give it up when appealed to.

"Now," said the wizard, "'ere's little Jack, the travelling doll, that goes 'ere, there, and heverywhere at once. Observe his 'ead. Which of you, my little gentlemen, will lend him a shilling?"

All the little boys felt enthusiastically in their pockets for the coin, but Lobby was first; and having presented it, with

great pride, to the showman, he looked round with an air that said—"See what I have done?"

"Hobserve the shillin'," the wizard went on; "I put it on 'is 'ead. Okus pocus crackafelto cockolorum jig! The 'ead is gone and the shillin' too. 'As it gone to Hireland or Hitaly? Which shall it be?"

The opinion of the little audience appeared considerably divided, as to its destination. Lobby did not interfere in the question, but merely informed the wizard, "That he did not mind his H's."

"The 'ead is gone to Hireland," continued the professor.

"No, it isn't," said Lobby, "I saw you put it in your pocket. Let me see."

And he ran from his seat, and pulled the wizard's tails, until he tore one of them.

"I know it's there; I felt it," he went on.

"Hanky-panky, peccavy, crinkum-crankum, perriwig and bobtail," exclaimed the wizard, "be'old the 'ead!"

"What nonsense he talks," cried Totty.

"I now take this little measure full of bird-seed," the wizard continued.

"It isn't full," said Lobby, "because I've got one like it. That's only a little glued on the lid, and it's got two tops."

"Well, my little gentlemen, I will use another," replied the wizard, going towards his apparatus.

"Don't go round the table, because there is a woman hidden under it," said Lobby. "I peep'd in, and saw her when I came up stairs."

"I shall be glad when this is over," observed Totty. "I want to dance."

"Hush, my dears! For shame!" said Mrs. Cooze, in a low voice.

"Well, I shall," Totty went on.

"And so will you, Ma," added Lobby; "because, you know, you said, coming along in the cab, you hoped there wouldn't be any conjuring rubbish; and that you did, you know. I say, Mister, where's my shilling?"

"I cut this horange," said the wizard, "and, lo! it his the shillin'."

"That's not the same," observed Lobby; "mine had the

Queen's head, hadn't it, Ma? The one you wouldn't give when you quarrelled with the cabman."

Poor Mrs. Cooze, who was amongst 'carriage people,' felt very mortified; nor was her vexation diminished when Totty cried out—

"Mamma, does it rain?"

"No, my love—why?"

"I hope it does, because you said, if it was fine, we were to walk home, and save the fare."

The wizard proceeded with his cards, and cups, and enchanted caddies, about all of which the Jewels had some remarks to make, until he concluded with a distribution of sugar-plums from his hat, which gave rise to some serious snatchings and predatory warfare amongst the children. The doors were then shut; the things cleared away; a meek performer of active hands and feet, who went out with a mighty piano, that played the drum, triangle, and trumpet at the same time, glided into the room, and took his place for the evening; and the dancing began.

It would have done anybody's heart good to see how these little people enjoyed themselves; for even the Jewels were, for a time, amiable. They did not talk a great deal to their partners; but they stood in pretty positions, and quite panted to begin their figures; and when they did, their eyes sparkled so with real enjoyment, and their cheeks so flushed with pure healthy colour, that the fairest *belle* of the season might have despaired of equalling such attractions; and when they laughed—which they did heartily at Master Palmer, who was evidently the way of the company, and could make such droll faces, and jump up and twist right round in pastorale, and then pretend to be suddenly frightened in the middle of cavalier seul, and run out of the quadrille—when they laughed at that, as well as at Master Wilson, who slily put on a false nose with a large red pimple on it, they made such a cheering, joyous, ringing noise, that no music, however fine, could come up to it. And it was infectious, too, amongst the elders, for they laughed as well—all except the old lady who was Mr. Budd's mother; but she was evidently re-decorated and embellished for the occasion, and built up so gingerly, and with such care, that there is no telling what effect a hasty

laugh might have had upon her constitution. Perhaps it might have shaken her all to pieces, like the skeleton in the Fantoccini.

After the dance the negus came round. It was not very strong, but very delicious; and the little girls sipped it carefully, as though they feared it would get into their heads; and of the rout cakes, the filberts and birds'-nests were supposed to have the finest flavour, and went first. Then, whilst they were resting, Master Palmer sang a nigger melody, playing the bones as well as boys in the streets, for which purpose he had kept them quietly, hitherto, in his jacket-pocket. Next, he and Master Wilson performed a little scene from a pantomime they had witnessed, wherein Master Wilson was supposed to be a shopkeeper, and Master Palmer, the clown desirous of taking his business, on those advantageous terms peculiar to such conveyances. Master Palmer provoked the impatience of the supposed dealer two or three times, by knocking at the door, and running away, until, having worked him up to a proper pitch of anger, he knocked and laid himself down; on which the maltreated tradesman fell over him, which was a piece of such exquisite humour that the tears ran down the little people's cheeks with laughter. Lobby and Totty alone saw nothing in it; they simply said it wasn't done so well as at the play.

At last, after many hints, thrown out not merely by the Jewels, but even by Mrs. Cooze, they were asked to perform their duet. After a great deal of squabbling at the piano, they began; then, in common with the performers of all instrumental pieces ever played, without an exception, they tired their audience out by the length of their exhibition, so that the children got fidgety and shuffled about; and when, at its termination Mrs. Budd said, "Thank you—very pretty indeed!" it was a difficult thing to decide whether she was grateful for its performance or because it was over. Clever, certainly it was, but it did not please anybody. The mothers generally disliked it because it seemed intended as a challenge to their own children. Mrs. Cooze disliked it, because she thought it had been thrown away, not having been sufficiently applauded; and the children all disliked it because they were obliged to keep quiet whilst it was going on, and, if it had

not been, Master Palmer and his friend would have done something else funny.

There was more dancing, and then the great event of the evening—the supper—was announced. Lobby and Totty struggled through the little throng to get the best places, as usual; and were first in the room, and seated down under the fairy yew that graced the centre of the table. It was a lovely tree, and almost struck the children dumb with admiration. Wax tapers innumerable, of every tint of the rainbow, twinkled like stars on its boughs, from which depended bonbons, toys, purses, and trinkets, in equal profusion. It had a perfectly enchanted appearance, as if some old fairy had sown all the contents of the Burlington Arcade in a rich soil, and trees such as this had been the produce.

"I should like that," said Lobby, seizing on a beautiful *carton* of bonbons that lay at the foot of the yew.

"Presently, my dear," observed Mrs. Budd. "The tree is not to be touched until supper is over."

"And then I may have it?"

"Yes;—we will see."

"Ah, but you wont see, I know. When will supper be over?"

"Hush! there's a dear. See what a pretty barley-sugar bird-cage that is."

And Mrs. Budd passed on to look after her other guests.

The elderly folks of the party had a table to themselves, looking down upon the one round which all the little people were arrayed. Miss Twinch, in the fulness of her heart, wished to attend to them herself; but as she was the greatest stranger of the party, Mrs. Budd would not allow this. And yet it would have made the lady very happy, for she was used to the business, having been well taught in the infant school banquets of Pottleton; although the little folks assembled on the present occasion could not be awed and corrected as the influenza'd Jane Collier and nervous Harriet Stiles of her native village.

For on the wrong side of thirty, with either sex—when the chance of partners is not so secure as heretofore, and a new and more dangerous race of rivals has arisen, to dispute the claims to hands for a quadrille, than existed in one's usual

dancing days, and gain their point, it becomes convenient to pay great attention to the little folks—to look upon them as camphorated amulets, whereby the approach of age may be warded off. And therefore is it supposed to be, that, in country villages especially, kind spinsters are always found, like Miss Twinch, to shut themselves up in stivy rooms on hot Sunday summer afternoons, (turned from a season of rest, and loitering in the fresh and sunny fields, and worship of the Creator through his rarest handiworks — the hedge and meadow flowers, into a time of thumbed and grubby spelling-books, and clogged atmosphere, and dread and weariness,) to swelter therein, in the sole hope, as it would seem, of catching youth by contagion.

This night, however, although Mrs. Budd would not allow her to attend to the little folks, Miss Twinch was happily placed; for she got next at the table to that calm haven for girldom's wrecked philanderings—a young clergyman. And the young clergyman of a London fashionable congregation—good-looking, intelligent, and well-connected, with an organ and a choir in his church, and a rush for pews—not like poor now-discarded Mr. Page, who preached in the old grey Norman church at Pottleton, to people who sang to a clarionet, and sat down wherever they found room as they came along the aisle. Mr. Sparks—that was the clergyman's name—was no more to be compared to Mr. Page, so Miss Twinch thought, than was the bonnet she bought ready-made in Regent-street, to the one that Miss Platt, of Pottleton, trimmed after the pictures in the fashion-book, which she received the month after publication, fly-spotted and curled, from Miss Roosh, of Dibblethorpe.

Under similar circumstances it is allowable for spinsters to commence a conversation. So Miss Twinch began by saying—

"What a charming sight this is!"

"Yes, very funny—very good fun indeed," replied Mr. Sparks. "Look at that little fellow—how he is walking into the raised pie, and how ill he will be to-morrow!"

Miss Twinch was somewhat taken aback. She had not expected quite such an off-hand answer, so she went off on another line.

"I have been accustomed to see little people enjoy themselves," she said. "I have an infant-school under my superintendence at Pottleton."

"Ah, indeed!—Pottleton!—why, I ought to know something of Pottleton."

"It is a charming country," said Miss Twinch.

"Oh, I don't know anything about the country," said Mr. Sparks; "but the name struck me. A man from St. John's is curate there, I believe. Page—Poppy Page."

"Mr. Abel Page, I think you must mean," observed Miss Twinch.

"Yes, Abel Page I believe was his right name; but we used to call him Poppy—first, because he told very sleepy stories; and, secondly, because he fired once at sixteen pigeons from the trap, one after another, without hitting one of them. Pop, he went, pop—pop! Just like that."

And Mr. Sparks imitated the exploit of Mr. Page, by twisting his hands into the semblance of a gun, and snapping the right thumb and second finger for a lock.

"He is very much liked," said Miss Twinch; "although, as you say, he does tell long stories."

Alack for human nature! Since the scene at the bazaar, Miss Twinch felt a petty satisfaction in helping on the depreciation of the individual for whose opinion, co-operation, or approval, she would before have given her most valuable treasure—even a tarnished old gilt chatelaine, that had been her grandmother's, and was only worn on especial Sundays and family anniversaries, with a watch thereunto appended, that might plausibly have been mistaken for one of those golden French walnuts, in which tiny scissors, thimbles, almanacks, and other Lilliputian affairs, absurdly useless, are revealed upon opening.

"He is a great favourite, though," continued Miss Twinch.

"Oh, that he is sure to be," said Mr. Sparks—"a kind-hearted, steady-going, sober old fish he always was, as ever lived. Ah! our positions have been somewhat different. He would not have done for London, though. He wanted the *savoir vivre*. He was a good creature, but too 'slow.'"

Miss Twinch would have liked to have heard something against Mr. Page more than had yet been expressed. But

just then the good and evil angels, who are constantly at see-saw in our dispositions, were so nicely balanced—for they are utterly independent of our own inclinations—that the slightest breath turned them. And Mr. Sparks so evidently had a kindly feeling towards his old college friend, from the way in which he spoke of him, that the warmth influenced the beam, and the charitable predominated.

"I am so happy to find that you were at college with him," said Miss Twinch. "Was he very studious?"

"Oh, very," replied Mr. Sparks. "We could never get him out for anything. If there was one of those foolish broils, which sometimes take place in the streets, *he* never was in it."

Miss Twinch believed it.

"We played him cruel tricks, though, sometimes. We sent him out hunting, one day, upon an unbroken colt—he was found in a willow pollard; and the week afterwards we persuaded him to drive the same horse—he never recollected it—in a tilbury: I thought he was killed. I went into the parlour of the little inn, near which he had been picked up when the trap upset, the same night, and I saw a bundle of something in the corner, that was not usually there, and I asked what it was, 'Oh! that's Mr. Page, sir,' said the waiter; and it was, indeed—poor fellow!"

Miss Twinch could scarcely conceive that this was a member of the same class Mr. Page belonged to, that she was addressing. It almost shook her faith in young curates. But Mr. Sparks had such a name, and was really so attractive in himself, that she was obliged to think him perfection.

"You are very much engaged in town, I have no doubt," she said.

"Oh, just as it happens. When the opera is open, three of my evenings in the week are usually taken up. Only, you know, on Saturday night, when the ballet begins after twelve, I am obliged to leave."

Miss Twinch perceived that he was not of Mr. Page's kind, and that she was not exactly upon the right tack for conversation. So she shifted it.

"You like parties?" she said.

"Pretty well—a polka is the most agreeable means of exercise. Do you dance it?"

"Oh, yes," replied Miss Twinch; but she told a wicked story. The administered flattery, however, of being taken for a polka dancer, salved her conscience.

"A little wine?" asked Mr. Sparks.

Miss Twinch looked pleasant acquiescence, and allowed the gallant curate to pour out a glass for her.

"Does Page dance?" he inquired.

"Oh, no; he is too steady," she answered, with playful emphasis. If she had known the steps that good blushing Mr. Page was at that very time taking to plunge into the gay world, her mind would have been less at ease.

"You must come to my church on Sunday," said Mr. Sparks, who understood his line, and was equally attentive to *belle* and spinster.

"I shall be most happy, if my chaperon, Mrs. Cooze, will take me," replied Miss Twinch.

It was a pretty girlish idea, considering the relative ages of the parties.

"We have admirable singing," continued Mr. Sparks. "All those fairies who sing the flying chorus so beautifully in the Christmas piece at the theatre, are in our choir. You would be astonished how neatly they turn out, and how admirably they behave."

"I dare say they do," said Miss Twinch, but she did not mean it. With her, fairies were only pure in type, on the pages of a book of magic tales. Apart from it, and palpably presented to the view, they were nasty impudent creatures in pink tights, who showed their legs.

Meanwhile, the little folks were getting up a great buzz of their own at that especial table. Small flirtations were already commencing. Little Minny had found a tiny beau who had kissed her openly before the juvenile company; and one or two little girls had squeezed the keepsakes of their partners—usually consisting of cakes—so tightly in their little puddy hands, that they were fit for nothing but the manufacture of bread seals. Master Palmer still continued to be the great gun of the evening—even to singing "Hot Codlins," which had hitherto been looked upon as an almost

sacred lyric, the sole property of clowns and Master Christmas.

And he found an admirable coadjutor, still, in Master Wilson, whose papa wrote for a Sunday paper, and so he got orders to see all the pantomimes when they came out, and understood their chief features to perfection, even to the gags of the boys in the gallery. So that when Master Palmer sang, after the true version of that ancient lyric—

> "She drank so hard that the bottle shrunk,
> And this little old woman, I'm told, got——"

and then stopped suddenly, for his auditors to supply the deficient rhyme, Master Wilson would suggest—

"Buffy!"

"No, it wasn't," said Master Palmer, putting his hands in his pockets, and searching far and near after vague or supposed property, in the manner of the clown proper. How the little people laughed! and how they looked at Master Wilson, until he was nearly devoured by their eyes, in expectation of what he would say next.

"Mops and brooms!" he continued.

"No it isn't—try again," said Master Palmer, with a fresh face, that sent a little girl into convulsions, as near a perfect fit as might be without danger. And then all the small audience gasped for Master Wilson's next funniment.

"I know what it is!" shouted Lobby, breaking down all the trellises of anticipation that they had been forming, "It's 'drunk'—that's the word—who couldn't tell that."

Master Wilson had prepared a little joke of his own, for the nonce, but now it was of no use. So he quietly seated himself again by his baby partner; and what with Lobby's forwardness and Totty's sneer, the whole fun of the song was spoiled, and no more verses were tried.

But the diversion caused by it had the effect of bringing the supper, as far as the practical eating part of it went, to a conclusion; and the Jewels immediately prepared to storm the tree, having kept their eyes on it all the while, and especially on those bonbons and trinkets they wished to appropriate. Mrs. Budd went back to the adult table to invite

Lotty and Totty behave dreadfully

her guests all to be present at the distribution, when the Jewels at once made the attack—one of them springing up upon the table and seizing the tree, whilst the other personally attacked a child of weaker purpose, bent upon the same errand. The result of the onslaught might have been anticipated. The treasures were attached to the tree with stronger silk than the aggressor had supposed, and a stout pull, in the anxiety to possess some particular one, brought the whole affair—wax lights, boughs, bonbons, and all, amidst the shrieking company.

There was a terrible excitement. The screams of the little folks could not have been exceeded by the simultaneous regulation and removal of teeth from an entire preparatory academy, and the friends contributed their share, as they rushed to the scene of conflagration. The entire evening was upset. The delicate emery cushions, and wheelbarrows, and barrels the glove-buttoners, and miniature mirrors, and scent-bottles; the crackers, and burnt almonds and golden walnuts were all upset and scrunched beneath the feet of the affrighted children; whilst the overthrow of decanters, and smash of plates, dishes, and tumblers, was frightful; especially when considered in relation to the new toilets that had come out new for the evening. The people began to think it was time to go; and the children seeing all the beautiful things they had looked forward to possessing totally destroyed, were of the same mind.

Sums of a vague and indeed impossible amount are frequently put forward as a representation of the actual value which people would not pay—not being asked or in any way called upon or expected to do so—for the privilege of using and occupying the shoes of certain individuals at the particular moment of the determination. This is generally done in a chivalric or determined spirit; but it would have been difficult to have collected the real ransom which Mrs. Cooze would have paid to have been delivered from her own shoes at that moment. For there was no sympathy with her, for reasons before perceived; and as the accident had put everybody in ill-temper, they began to think of going home; nobody having the heart to wish Mrs. Budd good night, or thank her for the very pleasant evening that the little people

had enjoyed; which, under ordinary circumstances it would have been proper to do.

And so the guests departed, and, as poets would have said, the hall was deserted—such being the odd locality in which festivities of all kinds are supposed to take place. Mrs. Cooze was amongst the early goers; and, with Miss Twinch, she hustled the Jewels out of the door and along the pavement, keeping up her plan of making them walk home.

"Oh, Letitia," she exclaimed, as they gained the tranquil off-side of Cavendish-square, "what shall I say to Mrs. Budd when we meet again—and they never danced their figure polka too! You naughty — naughty — naughty children!"

"It was all Totty's fault," said Lobby.

"Now, that it wasn't, sir," retorted the girl. "I got the sweetmeats, though."

And she pulled out a little pannier of sugarplums from under her cloak, which she had secured in the scuffle, and hitherto kept concealed.

"Mrs. Budd said I was to have that," cried Lobby, making a snatch at it.

"You sha'n't—it's mine," replied the girl.

"I will," was Lobby's retort, as he seized it.

"Robert! you naughty child!" cried poor Mrs. Cooze again, whilst her Jewels were in close warfare. "Give it up to your sister, this minute. She shall have it."

"That she sha'n't, if I don't," replied the boy; and seizing the case of bonbons, he pitched it down an area.

A renewed scuffle was the consequence; and the Jewels began to attack each other with savage enthusiasm, to the agony of the mother, and the perfect prostration of all ideas generally that Miss Twinch could command. At last, Mrs. Cooze forgot all her maternal affection, and took to slapping them indiscriminately as they clung to the area railings, and obstinately refused to move until the sweatments were recovered. A loud and prolonged wailing was the result: continued until a gentleman in a night-cap protruded his head from the second-floor window, and inquired what was the matter.

"Now come, none of this noise here," said a policeman, coming up at the moment.

"Well, you're a nice woman—you are!" exclaimed a gentleman, who arrived in another direction, smoking a cigar and singing a chorus at the same time. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to treat two poor children like that. Where do you expect to go to—eh?"

"By Soho Square—boo-oo-oo!" cried Lobby, bellowing through his words.

"Soho Square! Soho Round, you ought to say," replied the gentleman; and having delivered himself of this joke, after the manner of facetious minds coming home late, and looking rather to antitheses of words than duplicity of meaning, he went his way in the happy conviction of having said a fast thing.

The presence of the policeman, whom the children regarded with an awe only exceeded by that they felt for the Bogy of their earlier years, at once quieted them, and they walked with tolerable tranquillity all the rest of the way home, sobered down enough to think of the noise there would be when Totty's muslin dress was found to be burnt in sundry places by the wax tapers of the tree, and Lobby's new coat was discovered splashed with lemonade, and smeared with pink cream, as had occurred during the downfall at supper.

However, they arrived at home at last, to the intense gratification of Miss Twinch, who felt the street-door close her in, as joyously as though she had gained refuge in some Templar's stronghold, after being harassed within an inch of her life by Paynims, as a Christian maiden. Her discomfort, nevertheless, was not over, for she found a letter from her brother, which was anything but consolatory.

It is not a good plan to read letters found on returning home, at night. You gain nothing by it. The preponderance of unpleasant communications over agreeable ones is so decided, in every position, that you only prepare for yourself a night of worry and wakefulness, in ten cases out of eleven. All letters, however warm the weather, will keep for a few hours; and goblin evils that would haunt the bed in terrible dreariness all night, would be mere subjects for laughter at the breakfast-table.

But Miss Twinch did not follow this plan; and when she read a few lines from her brother to the effect that something very unpleasant had occurred with Annie Maitland, and that he wished her to return home immediately, she passed the entire night in puzzlings and surmisings of the most harassing and sleep-scaring description.

But she did not altogether keep awake. She had curious dreams, which would have appeared comical if told in the morning, but which sadly distressed her spirit at night. She pictured herself giving a party to crowds of curates, all of whom had been in search of Tip, with an army of infant scholars to assist them. Then she found herself in a forest of flaming German trees, with Lobby and Totty flying round in the fiery air, like huge dragon-flies, stinging her and darting off; and finally Mr. Page appeared riding on a dragon with Annie Maitland behind him, going up higher and higher, until at last she lost sight of them altogether, and a thunder-storm came on, as amidst its noise she started from her sleep and heard a voice of actual life exclaim, "Half-past eight, ma'am; and, if you please, here's the warm water!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A BOULOGNE BOARDING-HOUSE.

It was in the Rue de la Coupe—a street that runs from the bottom of the Neuve Chaussée to the Rue de l'Ecu—that Mr. and Madame Lurker had opened their establishment to offer the comforts of a domestic home, combined with the ease of an hotel, and the society of a constant large party, to any one who felt inclined to pay a certain weekly sum, graduated according to the brilliancy or desolation—the contiguity or distance—the level or altitude—of the bedrooms.

Mr. Lurker had been, in England, one of those luckless individuals who change their abodes as often as a hermit lobster; and when their names appear ultimately in connexion with an advertisement from the Insolvent Court, may be looked upon as gipsies of private life, from the number and varied localities of their addresses, as well as their innocence of payment ever made for occupation. For he had been first of Broad Street, and then of Brompton, then of Guernsey, then of Golden Square, then of Boulogne, then of Jermyn Street, then of Islington, then of Jersey, then of St. John's Wood, and finally, out of the way altogether, as Mr. Brown, in some remote village: until he turned up at Boulogne, with a Frenchwoman for his wife, as fresh as ever. He had been coal merchant, wine merchant, accountant, newspaper editor, tavern keeper, director of all sorts of forlorn boards, manager of two or three hopeless-from-the-first theatrical speculations, and had even been put up for a radical borough, and polled two votes; but at length, having married the daughter of a Café at Calais, had declared, for the fiftieth time, that he was now settled for life. How men of his class live, is a puzzle. Some have, it is true, known, although vague and precarious, methods of existence, by the gambling table, and small social frauds, and paltry venial peculations; together with those wondrous means of temporary support, afforded by drawing, and discounting, and stealing bills, which defy all honest calculation. But there are hundreds in London who have not even these chances—men whom we meet, day after day,

always well-dressed, and with a small sum about them, whom we know to have no possible means of earning a half-penny; whose credit is utterly and entirely gone; who are never met in anything approaching to private society; whom their very brother Doos fight shy of; and yet they live—nay, flourish. That somebody is done, somewhere, is certain; but where, or in what manner, is equally mysterious.

Mr. Lurker's house was always full. Some people lived there cheaply throughout the winter; and many came there regularly when the season returned. There was a large party there, at present, for the time of year; and when Wyndham Flitter and Philip arrived, the bell had rung, and some twelve or fourteen guests had assembled. A place had been kept for Philip by Mrs. Wracketts; and Wyndham sat by her husband. All the boarders looked at the new comers during a few moments of silence, and then the general conversation commenced.

"Been on the pier to-day, Miss Plummer?" asked Mrs. Bowles; such being, according to ancient usage, the first question always put at a boarding-house dinner.

Miss Plummer was an elderly maiden lady, with a flaxen front, which, being supposed to convey the notion of natural hair, was, by a perverted taste of the manufacturer, of a tint that no hair had ever been known to assume; and she also rouged. As to Mrs. Bowles, nobody had ever seen the equal to her, apart from the opening of a pantomime; she was so like a witch. Indeed, when she spoke of 'her Broom,' in London, the matter-of-fact article itself was first suggested, as her most appropriate means of transport. She had a bass voice, was very deaf, wore a head-dress all pins and black bands, and put something round her neck very like a stock. Being deaf, she used to join in conversation at awkward times; and she had also a habit of thinking aloud, which was terrible or diverting, as the case might be. And she never finished a sentence.

"What a remarkable old lady!" observed Philip, as he looked at her with curious amazement.

"Oh—she's nothing herself," answered Mr. Wracketts. "You should see her bonnet. It never could have been made. I believe it grew somewhere; eh, Sim?"

Mr. Sim was a little old bachelor, with a small quantity of

light pluffy hair on his head, and was always looking benignant at everything and everybody.

"Ha, ha!" he replied, with a short double laugh. "Good again! Grew! Ha, ha!" And Mr. Sim patted the edge of the table with the ends of his fingers, in approbation.

Just at this moment Philip felt a slight pressure on his foot. He turned instinctively to Léonie, and her large black swimming eyes appeared to be looking through his own.

"I am so glad you are come," she said, in her lowest, sweetest tone. "You must go to the ball with me to-night: and about with me. Wracketts is always engaged with those men at the café, and I sadly need a companion."

"I shall be too happy," replied Philip.

Another gentle pressure on his foot was the reply.

"This is the third day those stewed pigeons have been up," thought Mrs. Bowles out loud. "But then—ah—no—"

Mr. Sim, as usual, looked pleasantly at the old lady, until he perceived the remark was not calculated to promote the comfort of Mr. and Mrs. Lurker; upon which he dropped his countenance, and took a pinch of snuff.

"Wracketts—a glass of wine," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter, coming to the rescue, as everybody was silent.

"With pleasure. Any news to-day?"

"No—nothing particular. A dreadful fire at Smyrna, and a murder in the south of France."

"Well, I suppose there must be," observed Mr. Wracketts, counting his fingers. Yes—it's quite time."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Philip.

"Why, that's periodical news. If you keep an account, you'll find that every six months there's a destructive fire at Smyrna, and a horrid murder, with an axe, in Aveyron. I don't know why, but it is so."

"Ha, ha!" cried Mr. Sim, who had hung on this observation with the blandest interest. "Very clever—good again!"

"I knew Mrs. Fitzherbert when I was a girl," remarked Mrs. Bowles, under the impression that deep silence prevailed.

"A bottle of champagne she says something about the Prince of Wales!" cried Wracketts to Flitter.

"Done!" answered Wyndham.

"But it wasn't at her house. No. The Prince of Wales—"

"Good again!" cried Mr. Sim, in ecstasy.

" — was dining with Mr. Boehm, when the news of the battle of Waterloo was brought him, and he went—but it—fifty—no, no—"

" She talks just like Stoff," observed Philip to Wyndham.

" No — not exactly. Stoff always finishes his sentence in his mind, and believes that to be sufficient for you to enter into his meaning. Now, I can see she never finishes it at all, anywhere. Oh—you nice old lady!"

He said the last words quite out loud to her face, which, as she did not hear a syllable, was a highly diverting conceit.

" I saw you in the Grande Rue to-day," said Mr. Sim, quite delighted at such a chance, to Miss Plummer.

" Yes, I was there," replied the lady.

When she had said this, Mr. Sim felt that he had started a subject of conversation which he had not the power of sustaining, and became nervous in consequence.

" About twelve, I think," said Miss Plummer.

" I think it was," replied Mr. Sim. And here all hope of prolonging the dialogue departed.

" I wonder who these new people are that have come to-day," thought Mrs. Bowles, in her usual manner. " If I'm to lose my bedroom, I shall go; but I shall not tell the Lurkers, or they will make it uncomfortable to me."

" Come, it's as well to be candid," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter. " I mean, morally speaking. As a matter of interest, perhaps, it is not so desirable. I knew a young lady once—"

" The Prince of Wales called himself Florizel, and he addressed all his letters to Perdita," chimed in Mrs. Bowles, with another anecdote, as she believed, to an attentive audience.

" How I should like to hang that old woman; if it was only for half-an-hour," said Wyndham.

" Everybody thought it would last," Mrs. Bowles went on; " but they were separated in a year, and then—not at all—the Queen—no, no—"

" Pray ask your friend to continue his story, Mr. Wracketts," said Miss Plummer.

" Oh—it was nothing," replied Mr. Flitter. " I knew a young lady who was acquainted with a Mrs. Chick. I hope nobody here knows Mrs. Chick?"

Mr. Sim was the only guest who expressed his ignorance

of the lady in question. But this he did in kindness of heart to assist the narrative.

"Very well," Mr. Flitter went on—"one day she was sitting in her room, and heard a tap at the door. 'Come in, if you're not Mrs. Chick,' she said; for she hated her, and thought it would make fun with her sisters. But do you know, it was Mrs. Chick herself."

"How very awkward," said Miss Plummer.

"More than awkward," added Flitter. "When Mrs. Chick died, she left all her property to Exeter Hall; but not for a series of concerts—something quite in another line; missionaries, I believe—people who muddle savages' heads with such to them strange theories, that, at last, they go through life without any religion at all; except that which they think will get them most brandy and blankets."

"Oh, sir, I cannot agree with you there," said Miss Plummer, to whom the May meetings, in her little way, caused as much excitement as the programme of the Opera does to the great world in general. If Miss Twinch had been fifteen years older, and they had met, they would have been great friends.

"I can assure you it's a fact," replied Mr. Flitter. "It's as bad as teaching a man philosophy who has been brought up all his life at a dog-fancier's or rat-catcher's."

"How very clever," whispered Mrs. Wracketts to Philip.

Mr. Sim was about to knock the table, and say, "Good again!" but he saw there was a divided opinion, and remained quiet.

"Support our side of the question," continued Léonie; "I may call it *our* side, I suppose," she added, with another pressure on the foot.

Philip was about to speak, when a thought struck Mrs. Bowles, and she thus expressed it—

"I'm sure I've seen that woman in London in a Broom like mine, and that was the reason I never went into the Park with one horse and a servant, because—and the rain—though the Duke bowed to him—I know it—never mind——"

"Don't you think so, Maitland," cried Wyndham, long before the old lady had got thus far.

"There was a sort of example to-day on the Port," said Philip; "a little dog in a strange dress. He had been brought up like a savage—but, perhaps, with more inherent

notions of cleanliness and instinct—to move about according to his nature, and eat what came in his way. But now, some one else had taught him to stand on his hind legs, and wear an absurd hat, and assume attitudes. Very well; the dog's original nature was not changed thereby; but he knew he would get things to eat if he obeyed his teacher, and get thrashed if he didn't; so very properly he obeyed him."

"Oh, it was love," said Miss Plummer.

"Not at all; if he had been with a vast number of other dogs, free and famished, they would have eaten the teacher; the savages sometimes do the same. But that dog will come to an unsatisfactory end. His notions will be so perplexed between which, or how many, of his legs he ought to go on, that he will lose his own instinctive love of the natural, and therefore the beautiful, and become a nonentity."

Miss Plummer appeared quite overwhelmed by Philip's reasonings; so she turned it off by taking a little wine, out of a bottle of Vin ordinaire, with a piece of red worsted tied round it, which lasted her a week.

In the above manner the conversation went on; Mrs. Wracketts, however, keeping Philip all to herself, until the ladies rose; when the gentlemen drew up together.

"A good season, Lurker?" asked Wyndham of the host.

"Pretty well for winter; I can't complain. We're tolerably full."

"Um, ah!" said Flitter; "mostly old ladies, I see; no girls—give me girls!"

"And me, too, indeed," answered Mr. Lurker. "The old ladies in a boarding-house are the deuce. They make all the rows. They get peppery and irritated, and talk *at* one another, until they squabble openly. It happens every evening."

"Can't we get up a row to-night?" asked Philip, laughing. "It would be amusing!"

"You need not trouble yourself—there is sure to be one," returned Mr. Lurker. "Miss Plummer usually quarrels after tea with Mrs. Parker—that lady who sat at the bottom of the table."

"What a comical lot of old seventy-fours you must have in your harbour here," said Mr. Flitter; "and it always seems the case at Boulogne."

"You know Boulogne, then, well, sir?" asked a youngish gentleman, with an imperial.

"Ought to," said Mr. Flitter. "I lived here once—or twice, I may say—perhaps more.'

"Ah; I came over here yesterday, on purpose to buy a diligence; and because the railway opened all the way to Paris, there is not one in Boulogne. I thought, at this very time, to get one cheap."

"What did you want one for?"

"To go to Epsom in, next Derby-day," replied the gentleman, who was named Mr. Sparks. "I've got a fast-trotting mare that I think would show off well in one."

"A diligence is not the thing for a fast-trotting mare," answered Mr. Flitter. "You've seen one, of course?"

"No, I haven't!" answered the other.

"My goodness!" said Mr. Flitter; "let me look at you. See here — I'll cook you one up in an instant; as well as Soyer himself could, and after his style. Here goes: 'To make a Diligence.'—Take a broad-wheeled wagon, and separate carefully the wheels from the body, which put by. Then catch the body of an old-headed gig, as well as those of a post-chaise, a stage-coach, and a thick slice from the hinder part of an omnibus, two persons in breadth. Truss the back of the post-chaise to the front of the coach, the boots being perfectly removed; and at the back of all, skewer on the slice of omnibus. Set carefully on the wheels, and then add the headed gig to the top of the post-chaise, securing it by whatever skewers you please. Bake for twenty-fours hours on a dusty road; garnish with bits of cord and a screw-jack, and serve up with whatever sauce you may hear on the road. Your diligence is then completed."

"Good again—very clever," remarked Mr. Sim knocking the table.

"Let me add, 'Another way,' as the cookery-books usually do," said Philip.

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed festive Mr. Sim, lost in bland admiration of everybody.

"Divide an omnibus into three parts," Philip went on, "and turn the middle one sideways, making such doors as occasion may require. Place an old private cab on the top, and cover with a tarpaulin. Finish with a crust of gypsum-dust and rain-water."

After Mr. Wyndham Flitter had told a few more stories, some of them being those we have already heard, with variations, and exhibited his ring and watch, Mr. Sparks and Mr. Sim went off to play billiards, and the rest joined the ladies up-stairs. Mrs. Wracketts was at the piano, singing wicked French songs with irresistible effect; and the old ladies were playing audience, whilst Melanie, the good-tempered, fat, Flemish maid, assisted Madame Lurker in making tea. Philip and Mr. Flitter took up their places on either side of Mrs. Wracketts; and her husband read the proceedings of the Bankruptcy Court in the day before yesterday's paper.

This tableau of one evening would have done for all: not only at that especial season but at all times, and, with a few allowable variations of locality, at all places. The minds of folks who pass their lives in such circles, ought, at last, to arrive at a high and fertile pitch of cultivation; for there is very little strain upon their capacities to produce or invent, and hence their little squabbles and peckings are of some service, for they act as vivifiers to the blood, which might otherwise clog and stagnate from too great slowness.

Mrs. Wracketts had just finished the ballad,

"Tu m'aimes quand ma voix touchante,"

when Mr. Flitter caught up an English song from the music-stand with a lithograph, that to unthinking minds represented St. Paul's out at sea.

"Ah!" he said—'*Beautiful Venice.*'"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wracketts; "do you sing it? Oh, *do.*"

"Not exactly," replied Mr. Flitter. "But I know the original."

"Indeed! and you will sing that—won't you? I will accompany you."

And her fingers floated over the keys.

"No; it is too high."

"I can play it lower," she added, altering the chords, as Philip watched her in admiration.

"I will try," said Mr. Flitter. "It is a poor thing, but I wrote it myself. It may be almost termed an amateur composition." And then Mr. Flitter began, in a song which he termed—

BEAUTIFUL BOULOGNE.

I.

Beautiful Boulogne!
  I laud thee in song;
Home of the stranger
  Who's done something wrong
Doorway to Europe,
  Though Calais deplore;
Making of Folkstone,
  Ne'er heard of before:
Ramparts commanding
  A beautiful view;
Billiards and beer,
  In the Rue de l'Eçu.
I know some projectors
  Turn'd Doos, who to thee,
Beautiful Boulogne,
  Cut over the sea!

II.

Beautiful Boulogne,
  I laud thee in song,
What memories of old
  To thy paved streets belong.
I think on Miss Cruikshank's
  Fair liveried girls,
And Madame Fevrillier's—
  Their eyes and their curls!
And the fancy bazaar,
  Up the Grand Rue half-way
At that corner, so dear,
  Of the Rue Neuve Chaussée.
I've wander'd about,
  But the bathing for me
Is at beautiful Boulogne,
  Two hours by sea!

The song was very successful; indeed, everybody but Mr. Lurker thought it admirable. And then Mr. Flitter turned to put the sugar in the cups for Madame, at the tea-table, and Philip was lost in conversation with Mrs. Wracketts, who still kept up some desultory music, as her eyes went through him. If the days of magic were still flourishing, and we were a powerful baron, in league with spirits who could assume any shape we bade them for our purpose, and wanted to effect any young rival's ruin, by leading him into evil ways, we would put him in Philip's position just at this time. Let a pair of dark eyes, floating in their own liquid light, with pupils lustrous and dilated in the eventide, gaze on you; let a low soft voice be heard in some sweet ballad—not a shrill soprano, great in runs, and turns, and achievements of height, but a trembling soft contralto, breathing nought but simple notes, and melody, and passion; let taper fingers press the keys as though they felt the notes they were producing; let every body else be engaged; let champagne have sent your own pulses on at a little quicker rate than ordinary, and then say whether such a tempter, if wickedly disposed, could not lead you wherever she chose. If she could not, then it is a pity that you did not know St. Anthony or St. Kevin, for you might all have taken lodgings together, and congratulated yourselves upon being the only three of your kind in the

world. Philip gazed on Mrs. Wracketts, and thought he had never seen anything so beautiful. The two angels were busy at work in his ear, and as the good one told him that it was a crime—almost a double one—to admire her, the evil spirit wondered if Annie could sing so sweetly, or whether she was even so generally attractive. At the side of the room, Wyndham Flitter was watching them like Mephistopheles, and Mr. Wracketts still kept on at his paper.

But a little excitement amongst the old ladies diverted attentions generally. It began from a simple thing—Mrs. Parker had asked Miss Plummer to turn up the lamp she being at the table.

Now this lamp required some courage to turn up. It went by clockwork—that is to say, you wound a spring until it made a noise that frightened you into fits, and then the oil shot up in a fountain over the wick, which blazed like gas. Its management was not a thing to be attempted by nervous minds. As well might one have opened a bottle of soda water, or let off a cracker, or got into a racing omnibus, or taken a "header" from the bank through a thin coat of ice, or fired a cannon without proper notice.

"I think it gives a very good light, ma'am," said Miss Plummer, who being feeble as to her optics, but not liking to own it, learned knitting or crochet, or whatever the legerdemain with two sticks and a string consisted in, by heart; and then pretended to be watching it by difficult illumination. "A very good light indeed, at least for *my* eyes."

Mr. Wracketts looked at Flitter, who went to Philip, and touching him on the shoulder, said—

"I'm sorry to disturb you—yes, I know; perfectly correct, hush!—but a storm is brewing with the old ladies. Lurker has left the room. They say he always does when it commences, for fear of being brought into it."

Mrs. Wracketts and Philip turned round immediately, and one of them was blushing.

"Some people are favoured," said Mrs. Parker; "but I'm fifty-four and want glasses."

She said this, because she knew Miss Plummer was a little older.

"Indeed, ma'am," replied Miss Plummer; "you must have a wonderful sight—wonderful really."

"Nothing remarkable for my time of life," said Mrs. Parker; "you might just as well wonder at my wearing my own hair."

"Oh, do you indeed?" asked the other lady; "well, I always thought the bands you wore in the morning were false."

"If you were in the habit of taking a bath, perhaps you would know the advantage of it," said Mrs. Parker.

Miss Plummer began to ply her knitting-pins so furiously, dropping and casting off all sorts of unintentional stitches, that it is to this hour a question if what she was intending to produce turned out so in reality—the premeditated cuff might have been a baby's shoe, an anti-Macassar, or a Bohemian pelisse, with equal excuse.

"There is no bathing at this time of the year," she exclaimed, quite in a tremor.

"Oh, I did not know," said Mrs. Parker. "I thought the Hotel des Bains was always open. But I know how uncomfortable it must be for the complexion to bathe before appearing again in society."

Miss Plummer coloured up to the tint of her rouge, so that all her face became one uniform carmine; and then she coloured beyond it, and her cheeks paled to something like ochre by the contrast, as she said—

"I should think *you* found it rather awkward, ma'am. If your teeth chatter in the cold as much as mine do, I wonder they are not knocked to pieces. But I think you said they were natural, and not terro-metallic. I have heard that the last chip."

"Madame!" cried Mrs. Parker, in a voice of great excitement, to Madame Lurker, who all this time had been in a terrible flurry at the table, pouring the tea into the slop basin, putting five lumps of sugar in one cup, and none in the others, and committing various other eccentricities—"Madame! either this person or myself quits your house to-night."

The poor lady did not know what to do. All the others were enjoying the scene mightily.

"Did you apply the term 'person' to me, ma'am?" said Miss Plummer, in reply; "because I am no more a 'person' than you are. I have private friends of my own, thank goodness, that I am not ashamed to speak of——"

"Mrs. Fitzherbert lived on the Old Steyne at the time," interrupted Mrs. Bowles, with another little anecdote of the regency; "but I never saw Brummel but once, and that wasn't near Brighton. No—he was—they never—and Sheridan—ay, ay——"

"If they were all in the cheap grocery line at Mile End, I don't think I should speak of them myself," Miss Plummer went on.

"None of your balderdash here, madam," screamed Mrs. Parker. "Before visitors, too! I'm shocked at you! I'm ashamed of you! I'll not bemean myself in speaking to such a—such a sliperous—such a slanderous, I meant to say—viper. For shame! for shame!"

And here Mrs. Parker bounced out of the salon, and had an attack of her nerves, in her own bed-room, which lasted until Melanie had given her some very strong and hot cognac and water, which, as she said, "brought her tears," and considerably relieved her. Miss Plummer was about to commence her own justification, when Mrs. Wracketts whispered to Philip that she was going to dress, and left the room. The three men at the same time went down stairs for a cigar; and Wracketts declaring that he was too old to take the trouble of dressing for a ball, and Wyndham speaking of an appointment for piquet at the Café Vermond, Philip found that he was to escort the lady to the ball alone.

It was to be held at the Salle Delplanque, and when they arrived, the room was nearly full—too much so for dancing, so they adjourned to a small apartment set aside for refreshments. Léonie, always attractive, had never looked so lovely. Without ornament of any kind, except a single flower, gleaming on her dark and glossy hair—her long dark lashes fringing her shining, languid eyes, and almost sweeping her peach-like cheeks, and her dress, high and exquisitely fitting, of plain white muslin, provokingly transparent, over her neck and shoulders, she was, beyond all question of comparison, the belle of the room. Philip saw this at once, from the looks of admiration from the men, and envious contempt from the women, launched at her as they passed. Not exactly contempt, perhaps, but that mingled expression of disbelief, doubt, and dislike, with which a very pretty woman and a stranger is always regarded by her own sex. Accord-

ingly he was proud of being seen as her especial cavalier—possibly a very little conceited about his own appearance, for he was good-looking as anybody you would meet in a long summer day—and when, added to the excitement of the dinner and the conversation, his imagination was freshly kindled by the ice-bound fire of the Punch à la Romaine that he was sipping, every other feeling in the world was given up for that of the passing moment. He knew that it was wrong; but he was fascinated, spell-bound, and allowed the chariot of his passions to run on downhill with oiled wheels, rather than exert the strength or courage to arrest its progress.

Léonie told him that she was unhappy—that he was the only one by whom she ever felt that she was understood—would he always be her friend? If he would, she should be so proud and happy to acknowledge him as such. Philip's answer need not be recorded.

As the evening wore on, and the rooms thinned, they stood up to dance, and in the waltzing, Philip fancied that he almost felt her heart throb against him in her emotion, and in answer to his own leaping and fevered pulses. The brilliant lights—the splendid band—the mere feeling of being in a foreign country, and hearing little else but a graceful language spoken around, which, in its purity, we only associate with notions of refinement or gallantry, all combined to cast him into a whirl of emotions, far more bewildering than that of the waltz he was so recklessly pursuing.

At last the ball broke up, and Philip brought up the carriage they had engaged, as she stood muffled, in her shawl, in a corner of the corridor. As the door was closed on them she gave a deep sigh.

"Why is that?" asked Philip, as he seized her hand.

"Because a happy evening has passed," she said, "and now I have nothing more to look forward to. You are going to stay here though? You will?"

"I fear I must be in London," replied Philip, but in a tone that belied the words.

"Oh, no, you can stay, I know," she replied; "and I shall be so very, very happy. Say you will not go this week?"

"I will not," answered Philip, in a low, trembling voice.

"Thanks—thanks," she said, as she pressed his hand.

"Where are we?" she added, wiping the vapour from the window with her filmy handkerchief. "The Rue Neuve-Chaussée—oh! how near we are to home."

There was a silence for a few seconds, which Léonie broke by murmuring—

"Do not go home yet—it is quite early."

As she spoke, her fair head reclined against him, until her scented hair touched his cheek, and then her rosy lips turned towards his own, as he felt his own fingers in a vice.

"Coachman," said Philip, "go up the Grande Rue, and round by the Petits Arbres."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TWINCH FAMILY IN DEBATE.

One morning, just as the London sun, having found such a dense fog over that great city, had thought the shades of night still lingered upon the world, and had turned in again, which error he continued to commit at intervals during the day, until the roar of the traffic finally roused him—at this period, the postman left a letter for Miss Twinch, at Mrs. Cooze's, with the Pottleton postmark, and inscribed "Immediate." The authorities at the General Post Office had not expedited its special delivery upon this account; and, indeed, had they done so, it would have been of little avail; for Lobby and Totty, in a struggle to possess it at the door, had let it fall into the area; and their subsequent endeavours to clean it and dry it at the fire, in the course of which latter operation, the seal half melted and was re-impressed with the clock-key, detained its delivery still longer. But at last Miss Twinch got it. It was from her sister, and it ran thus:—

"My dear Letitia,

"I shall be very glad if you will come home *directly*, for we are in a sad dilemma. Miss Maitland was *found* by our brother, and Mr. Page evidently *keeping* an *appoint*

ment with some *man*, at the corner of Grange Lane, very late the other night, and Septimus is *furious*, as he says we have been sheltering a *good-for-nothing*. I know you will say you always had your suspicions on this point; but I must confess I cannot still bring myself to *think* there is anything wrong in her, although, to be sure, her general bearing towards Mr. Page might be *less affectionate*. However, you may imagine this has upset us *very much*, and, through the servant, is known in the village, so that we wish you to return as *soon* as you *possibly* can.

"We shall have a great deal to tell you. Mr. Page is *learning to dance*, but it is a great secret until he can find out what the rector will say to it. Mr. Blandy has been attending Harriet Stiles, who was frightened into *fits* by seeing two men, as she *said*, lift a dead body into a donkey-cart, and drive off on the Dibblethorpe road, when she was coming home from the public-house; but they have since found out that it was Gogmore's *pig*, which died naturally, and was going to London to be sold. I dare say you have heard of this.

"A man named Rutty has come into the village to sell *cheap* bread. He has a band of music in front of his house, and gives *a glass of gin* to everybody who buys *anything*. I am sorry to say Whacky Clark earned a shilling the other day here, in the garden, and he bought twelve *separate* penny rolls with it, and came back at four in a filthy state of *intoxication!*

"Jane Collier got the prize for catechism at the examination, which was to have been a *book*, but finding that *none* of the family knew their *letters*, I gave her four pocket handkerchiefs instead, which I hope will improve her cold. Mr. Blandy says it will never be better until they move from the canal, because the waters will come *into the bed-room* on flash days, at the upper locks.

"Old Mrs. Mousel died last night, and Mousel insists upon burying her himself; for he will have everything *comfortable*, as he says. Mrs. Baker, at the Red Lion, is going to marry a friend of that Mr. Finch's; and Mr. Bulliam was taken in a fit, *swearing* at the gamekeeper on Tuesday; on account of which, Mr. Page says, should it terminate fatally, that he will preach a sermon on the angry *passions*.

"Septimus desires his remembrances; and with the hope of seeing you *soon*, believe me to remain,

"Your affectionate sister,

"MARTHA TWINCH."

When Miss Twinch read this letter, she was not altogether sorry. She would certainly have liked to have remained a little longer with Mrs. Cooze; but then she perceived a chance of Annie Maitland getting into a slight scrape, which offered a cheering light on the Page horizon. So she hastily made her preparations for departure, promising Mrs. Cooze to return to town as soon as she could.

The journey home brought back a flood of recollections to Miss Twinch's mind, connected with her lost Tip. Had that dear companion died at a good old age, and been buried in the garden, decently and properly, in a coffin, perhaps, that Whacky Clark's ingenuity could have contrived, the blow would have been less severe. Two potted yew-trees might have been planted at the side of the mausoleum, and Miss Twinch could have mourned thereat, knowing her grief would not have been thrown away. But the present uncertainty as to his fate was terrible.

The train went on, screaming through the tunnels, clattering over the archways, and rattling along the cuttings, and at length got to Dibblethorpe; where, as before, Miss Twinch changed her carriage, getting from a second into a first-class one, to go to the last stage into Pottleton respectably. As her arrival had not been expected quite so soon, when she got to the latter place, there was nobody to meet her, so she left her luggage to be sent for, and walked up the village towards her home.

Every step still recalled poor Tip to the caverns of her memory. There was the little hole in the palings through which he used to run after Mrs. Cripsy's cat; and the same ducks that he hated so, and would bark round and round the pond after, always turning them away from the margin wherever he appeared, as though they had been magnetic, and he the red end of the magic wand. Then she passed an old shoe in the road, which she knew he would have stopped to have inspected; and when at last she saw

Toby, at the Red Lion, without Tip to run on to him and play until they quarrelled, she felt her desolation indeed.

But the arrival at home dispelled the feeling. Annie was not there, but had gone out to tea in the village. Miss Martha, however, was in the parlour, and so was her brother; and a cry of surprise burst from them as she entered. And then, after a rapid statement of the position of affairs, as she took her things off upstairs, she joined the family council at the tea-table.

Mr. Twinch did not say much about the matter. He evidently did not wish to be dragged into it, but was compelled, from time to time, to put down the *Dibblethorpe Messenger*, which he was reading, and reply to the direct appeals of—"Now, Septimus, what *do* you say to this?" made to him by the girls. He tried hard to stop the discussion more than once, by reading entertaining paragraphs aloud as they caught his eye; but these were either not attended to, or turned, with wonderful ingenuity, into something that had directly to do with the subject, however remote their apparent application.

"Alone! and at nine o'clock at night!" said Miss Martha, emphasizing every word. "I can assure you, my dear, it's a fact. When Septimus came home and told me about it, I went out with a lantern, without making any fuss, and traced her steps all down Grange Lane in the snow, accompanied by huge, clumsy, nailed footmarks."

"I don't see what else could be expected," replied Miss Letitia, "when you recollect the low set she came from. It is a pity, Septimus, you ever proposed having anything to do with her."

Mr. Twinch uttered a kind of low single grunt, and twitched his door-mat wig straight down to one ear, as he read—

"'As Mr. Soper, of Titbury, was returning from Dibblethorpe Market on Wednesday evening, he was stopped, near Chancey's mill, by two men, and——'"

"I have no doubt Miss Maitland knows something about *one* of them," said Miss Twinch, with great acerbity. "Never mind Mr. Soper, Septimus. It will be fortunate if *we* are not shown up to the neighbourhood."

"Pshaw!" was the curt reply.

"Everybody knows it," said Miss Martha; "and the Miss Medlars have not let it settle down for want of constantly stirring, you may be sure."

"But what does Mr. Page say to it?" asked Letitia. "She was his pet."

"My dear, it's the wonder of everybody. Mr. Page can't be got to enter into the matter at all. I called on him yesterday."

"Alone!" exclaimed Miss Twinch.

"My dear—the clergyman, you know, I have called on him frequently."

"Oh, you have! Well, I think, it would have been better if——"

"'Mildness of the season!'" observed Mr. Twinch, going on with his readings. "'There is now in the garden of Mr. Ripkey, at Tadler's End, a laylock in full blossom, a sprig of which has been sent to our office.' Bless me, it must be mild!"

"Mild enough to meet people in the snow," said Miss Martha.

"You might really take this matter into consideration, Septimus," observed Miss Twinch, "serious as it is; especially as you sent for me expressly about it."

"I sent for you, Tishy—stuff! 'The editor of the *Boston Buster* says he can't write a leader this week, because his child's cutting his teeth, his wife's run away, he's got corns and the toothach, all his ink's been knocked over, and the cholera's next door on one side, and a meeting of Howling Quakers on the other!' I should think not. Hegh! hegh! hegh! funny fellows those Americans must be."

"I am glad you can find amusement in anything at present," said Miss Twinch. "I was observing you sent for me, and you said you did not. Martha said so, at least, in her letter."

"Well, perhaps I did, or perhaps I didn't. I don't know, and I'm sure I don't care. Settle it all amongst yourselves. Heyday! what's this? 'Bolter Cove—outbreak of the natives, and increased consumption of missionaries.' Ho! ho!"

"Septimus!" exclaimed Miss Twinch, reproachfully. And then, turning to her sister, she added, "I understood from your letter, Martha. that our brother wished me home."

"Well, my dear, it was a sort of a kind of a wish. But we are going from the subject. Mr. Page told me in confidence——"

"Oh, indeed! in confidence. You appear to have got wonderful friends in my absence."

"Not more so than we ever have been," replied Miss Martha.

"Pooh, pooh!" said Mr. Twinch, still reading the paper.

"What do you say that for, Septimus?" asked his sister.

"Because you are nagging and irritating one another about that poor parson, who don't care a straw for either of you. Why can't you let the good man alone?"

"Why, Septimus, it was merely for the District Visiting that——"

"District Visiting, indeed! stuff! What is it? Nothing!"

"It is everything, Septimus."

"Pooh! It would be if it did them good, but it don't. It worries them. What do you do? Go and poke about amongst a lot of poor devils who haven't a halfpenny to bless themselves with, to see that their house is 'clean,' and their brats well 'brought up.'"

"But is there any harm in that, Septimus?"

"Not in the least, if you gave them anything to make up for the intrusion. It's as much their own private home as this is ours. But you don't."

"Don't!"

"No, don't! I don't call a bundle of dreary books, that you get wholesale at three for a penny, any present—books that they never have the time to, and sometimes can't, read. Why don't you give them bread, or bacon, or beef, instead? Besides, you hold out a premium for filth."

"Septimus!"

"You do. When you find a neat, clean family, you say to yourselves, they look comfortably off; and never send them a coal or a blanket in consequence. But if you come upon a hovel of dirty drunken never-do-wells, with ragless children, and every thing that could be sold parted with for liquor, you mag about their destitution, and work up sympathy. Bah! it's enough to make one sick."

"But, Mr. Page——"

"Fiddle Mr. Page! He would be a good fellow if you d let

him; but you've spoilt him. You hunt him to death. There is no reality in what you do; it's a clutch of despair at a floating straw, and poor Page is the straw."

"I don't understand what you mean," exclaimed both sisters at once.

"Yes, you do. Your feeling is not religion; it's perverted excitement. Out of every hundred district pokers, I'd be bound you would find a clear ninety old maids."

"Very kind, certainly," said Miss Twinch.

"Very brotherly!" echoed Miss Martha.

"I repeat it—old maids," continued Mr. Twinch, deliberately. "Why, you know you are—you are almost old enough to be that poor parson's mother."

The ladies were both so indignant, that they could scarcely speak. Mr. Twinch, now that his burst was over, became as calm as usual, and resumed his paper, until a fresh paragraph started his bile.

"Here,—look here," he said; "I haven't done with you yet. Here's something about opposition in certain quarters to the Dibblethorpe races. Why, you've had a hand in this, I do believe."

"We have!"

"Yes, you. The other day I routed out a whole packet of bills, headed with the question, 'Why do you go to the races?' Well, the answer to that was simple enough—to spend a pleasant day and meet one's friends. You've been to the races. Why don't you speak. You have, I say."

"It was several years back, Septimus," said Miss Martha.

"I know it was—when you could find somebody to take you, eh? Do up the Dibblethorpe races, indeed! I should like to see you try. I'd give a Missionaries' Plate myself, to be ridden for by converts—four hurdles with furze, and heats—if I thought it was in contemplation to oppose them."

The Miss Twinches knew that they might as well try to make a mill-wheel go the other way, as to alter their brother's sentiments when he gave them thus decisively. So they somewhat rejoiced to see him go on with his paper, while the conversation reverted to the great subject of that council.

"I wish Mr. Page would take some decided opinion with respect to Miss Maitland," said Miss Martha. "I tried to get him to speak, during a long walk I took with him——"

"Oh, indeed!" interrupted Letitia—"a 'long' walk. He appears to have had enough of your society whilst I have been away."

"What do you mean by 'enough?'" asked her sister.

"Nothing; what could I mean?"

"Only you said it so oddly. I never forced my society upon Mr. Page; nor even tried to draw out the school-children before him. What little attention he has paid me—for some little time past, I must say—has been entirely his own wish."

"I can imagine," said Miss Twinch, getting spiteful—"I can imagine you lost few chances of availing yourself of it. Certainly, that accident at the wild-beast show was one which required a great deal of pains to do away with any unpleasant impression remaining."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Miss Martha, in a like vein—"thank you, and thank you, and thank——"

"I won't have it," roared Mr. Twinch, putting down his paper with a sharp rustling bang that quite startled them, and increasing the confusion by knocking his flat candlestick off from the arm of his old easy chair, on which he had balanced it—"I won't have it. You, and Mr. Page, and the whole infant-school may go to ——"

"Septimus!" screamed the girls.

"And be ——

"For shame—for shame, brother!" again interrupted the ladies.

"Before I'll have my house turned into such an infernal bear-garden," continued Mr. Twinch, speaking through it all, and twitching his face about, so that his spectacles had the hardest matter imaginable to keep their seat.

He spoke so decisively that the girls were awed. They did not dare to peck at each other again; but they were, in their irritated feelings, utterly unable to be suddenly calm; and so, still tossed on the ground-swell of their passions, they began on another tack.

"We never had these quarrels once," observed Miss Twinch, in a milder tone.

"Never," echoed Miss Martha, appearing to know intuitively what her sister was driving at.

"Before other parties came to sow the seeds of discord in our little circle," said Letitia.

"And not only that, but expose us to the scandal of the country by their—oh! I hardly know what to call it."

"Why did you have Annie Maitland here, Septimus?" they both asked, one taking the cue from the other, but finishing at the same time.

"Why did I?" said Mr. Twinch—"why did *I*? Why did *you*, you mean?"

"We!"

"Of course. You went and asked her, did you not—the day you drenched all those poor children with spoiled hot water, and choked them with dough. Charity!—Hegh, hegh!"

"It was at your request we went," said Miss Twinch. "*We* never wanted her."

"And, I'm sure, if I had known what was to happen, I would have cut off my right hand first, Septimus," added Miss Martha; "but it *was* your doing."

"I'll settle this, and settle it at once," cried Mr. Twinch, jumping up upon his legs. "At all events, there shall be no mistake about who gets rid of her. There! she shall have a quiet hint to leave this very evening."

"But where is she to go, Septimus?" asked Miss Twinch, so glad.

"Go? Go anywhere—keep Mr. Page's house; that will do famously. Besides, it will shut up both your chances, and you won't persecute the poor man any more. I've said it, and I'll do it; and then, perhaps, I shall have a little more comfort at home."

The girls did not make any reply to his taunt about their reverend friend. They were too glad to find the determination Mr. Twinch had come to, and did not wish to upset it. But, whilst they were debating what was to be done, a knock at the door, which they knew to be Annie's, threw them into a terrible flutter, which did not cease when they heard her go on to her own apartment.

"Well, there she is," said Mr. Twinch. "Now, then, which of you will go and acquaint her with what we have settled upon?"

There was neither a disposition to speak nor move on the part of the girls.

"Why don't you answer?" asked their brother. "Why, you talked enough just now. Which of you is going?"

"I think Letitia should, as the eldest," suggested Miss Martha.

"Thank you," replied Miss Twinch; "but as you first mentioned the affair to me, and know all about it, it would, perhaps, be but right to finish up what you have begun. I owe Miss Maitland no grudge; she never crosses *my* path."

"Why, Letitia, it was only just this minute——"

"I'll put a stop to all this," said Mr. Twinch, "and go myself," and before the girls could reply, he marched off to Annie's room.

He found her looking over some papers in her desk, with a pale and anxious face; for she had heard that things had got abroad in the village about her, and could not but perceive, also, that her position in the Twinch establishment was becoming exceedingly uncomfortable.

"Sit down, sit down, my dear," said Mr. Twinch, as Annie rose when he entered; "I've not come upon any pleasant business, but it is as well for you to have it out all at once."

He spoke as kindly as his natural hardness would permit. Annie returned no answer, but looked at him with an anxious, half-frightened expression.

"You see this was an unpleasant affair, the other night; and it has been talked about. Our girls are much vexed at it."

"It is useless for me to speak more about it," replied Annie; "I have no one in the world to whom I can appeal. I can only give you my sacred word that you will find what I did was innocent and for the best; even though I was compelled to do it."

"Um! ah!" answered Mr. Twinch, with a grunt. "That I don't know anything about. But you see the girls are particular, and there will be no peace for me if everything goes on as it has done."

"You do not wish me to stay with you any longer?" said Annie, divining his object.

"Well, I believe that is about it," replied Twinch, delighted to find that Annie had herself broached the subject. "You see, Miss Maitland, as far as I am concerned, you

might live here for ever, and glad to see you; but the girls, (I mean my sisters,) they have curious notions, and——"

"You need not say any more," returned Annie. "That I am deeply grateful to you for the kindness you have hitherto shown me, I hope some day to be able to prove to you. But you must remember, it was at your own request I came here."

"Well, at that time I believe it was," said Mr. Twinch.

"I never intended to intrude," Annie continued; "much less to be the cause of an unkind thought or word between you and your sisters. I wish I had stayed at the Grange; miserable as the place was, it had been my home; and I could have been very happy there."

And as she added, "Where can I go now?" she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Damn the women," thought Mr. Twinch. It was an awful sentiment to nourish with respect to one's own sisters; but we fear, just at this moment, it was a hearty one.

"I did not mean you to think we drove you away, Miss Maitland," he continued; "but you see, really we have been in such hot water about it altogether, that I could not stand it—I couldn't indeed—with all I have to think of."

"It was wrong, I admit," said Annie; "imprudent—criminal—call it what you please; but I could not help it. I tell you that, one of these days, you will know all. But I shall not remain much longer to make you uncomfortable." And as she spoke, she took her bonnet and shawl from the table and proceeded to put them on again.

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Twinch.

"Not far off," replied Annie; "I wish to see some one."

"You are coming back again?" asked the lawyer, getting perfectly nervous;—"to-night, I mean?"

"Oh, yes; I shall be—I was going to say, 'home,' in less than an hour."

"But you would like some one to go with you? It is very dark."

"No thank you, sir," replied Annie. "It is light enough in the village, for the shops are not all closed yet, and I do not want to go beyond it."

Without any more explanation she left the room. Mr. Twinch remained staring at the door, which had closed upon

her, for several seconds, as though he expected something remarkable would take place thereabouts; and then, with a single shrug of his shoulders, he went back to the parlour, where the girls were expecting him.

"Well, Septimus; have you managed it? What did she say?" they both asked.

"Quite enough," replied Mr. Twinch.

"But what was it?"

"All nothing; she's gone out. Didn't you hear the door?"

"Gone out!" they exclaimed, again speaking together. "I wonder where it can be to?"

"Perhaps to meet her friend again," suggested Mr. Twinch.

"No," said Miss Martha; "I do really declare I shouldn't wonder if she has gone to call upon Mr. Page!"

"Well!" cried Miss Twinch; "the brazen! If ever I did!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

LADY FLOKES AT HOME.

We have already, more than once, alluded to old Lady Flokes. As that respectable personage may have something to do with the current of events in our story, it is necessary that you should become a little better acquainted with her.

Lady Flokes, then, lived in a mouldy house, on the first acclivity of one of the hills that bounded the valley of Pottleton. It was a charming situation. The house faced the south, and above and behind it were hanging woods of hazels, and oaks, and shady sycamores, through which deep dark paths twisted and ascended, until they ran through scented copses, still on a rapid slope, of firs, and hornbeams, through which the sun could scarcely dart his rays to gild the wings of the forest insects that poised themselves, in solitude, on the still air, or darted about in rapid and eccentric evolutions beneath the lower branches. Still higher, you came to ferns and little green plants, like box, from which the country children

gathered small blue fruits to eat, and called them 'herts,' for 'whortleberry' was a name trying to pronunciation. And when the fern was pulled up by its roots, if cut diagonally, where it blackened in the ground, you found a tiny oak pictured on the face of the incision, and as your fancy chose to slant the knife you might have a minute spreading forest monarch—a likeness, so tradition said, of the very one amidst whose deep autumnal foliage King Charles concealed himself—or a fine young tree, such as many of those around you. Quite high up, clean white sheep nibbled the short crisp grass, and corn-fields ripened and crackled in the glowing noontide sun. And from these was such a prospect of broad lands, and blue and distant hills—of silvery water, glittering here and there, marking at open places its long sinuous course, and large bare heaths, and straight pine plantations—making so brave a country, that when one once gave himself up to look at it, and think of nothing, the fine mists of evening that shut it out from the view, only caused him to come back to his ordinary thoughts of work to do, and common-place toil, and struggling.

But nature, ever fresh and ever beautiful when left to herself, had not the same chance lower down, about Monkscrofts, as the old estate on which Lady Flokes lived was called. She had been led from her path, and then deserted, and had accordingly ended in a sad wreck. The house was damp and tumble-down—except on the upper story, where the old lady lived—from the intrusion of the well-springs that had once filled the ornamental tank in the garden, but whose channels were now choked up with the leaves and rubbish of several winters. The turf grew rank and toad-swarming upon the lawn; the piece of water, which had once been ornamental, was clogged with spawn and unholy things, and carpeted with green weeds. As the limbs of the trees had fallen across the climbing avenues, there they had been suffered to lie, and the grass had sprung up under them, and wild climbers had clutched their withering branches, and strangled them. None of the gates would open or shut without great labour, and a knowledge of artful secrets connected with their capabilities. The flower-garden was wild and rugged; everything always appeared running to seed; and the vine-trees threw out their long sprangs across the paths, so that one

was compelled to put them aside as he passed. The only thing that kept up its original gaiety was a little rill, which commenced visibly at an old well, said to have belonged to some former convent, high up on the hill, and tumbled headlong down a pebbly watercourse to the fish-pond. At every fall it drove down the opposing air, to send it up again to the surface, imprisoned in crystal domes, which danced and jostled onward until they burst; but when it got to the old mantled piece of water, it caught the infection of dreariness, lost all its life, and became as stagnant as the body with which it was incorporated.

To the world at large, which meant that of Pottleton, the domestic economy of old Lady Flokes was a sealed book. We have said that Dr. Keene was the only person who was acquainted with the interior of her mansion. Not that she lived alone; but the three other individuals who existed at Monkscroft could not be counted as anybody, for their communication with the external world was limited in the extreme. The old houekeeper was a fearful woman, whose features a constant expression of the ogress had at last marked so for perpetuity, as boots and clothes eventually take their habitual wrinkles. Then there was a meek black servant, pertaining rather to the times of Hogarth, whose age was unknown, and who had not gone out and abroad since the boys in the village had made his life wearisome by personal allusions, on his return from making one of the bearers of the sedan-chair, that had carried her to the Pottleton ball. For then a number of idle lads, whose inclination to any sort of revelry in that quiet village was a great proof of the elasticity of the human mind under difficulties, had escorted him up to the gates at Monkscroft; and, it was said, under the guidance of Whacky Clark, (who had once tried for his place and failed,) had considerably annoyed him. They had not done this by physical assault, but by absurd allusion; inasmuch as they had requested him, being of the complexion of midnight when there is no moon, to wheel about and turn about, and also to get out of the way, in consequence of his being, as was asserted, too late to join in their evening meal; and also had chorused a peculiarly insulting lyric around him, the burden of which was, "Get away black man, don't you come anigh me;" and the injustice of which, at the

same time, was shown by the fact of they themselves being the parties who sought the approximation, by keeping so closely about him. He was the second of the Flokes' establishment; and the third was the elder sister of the nervous Harriet Stiles, who had been selected from the infant school to be the old lady's own servant and companion. The latter position, however, she did not arrive at until after much education; inasmuch as it comprised various accomplishments, such as playing at backgammon, cribbage, and double patience; retailing the news of the village, collected from the baker every morning; and listening to Lady Flokes's stories of what her late lamented lord used to do, when he visited London for the season thirty years before, and how she went to court, with many other interesting anecdotes, without yawning or going to sleep. Her name had been admirably chosen by those godfathers and godmothers who, in her baptism, had settled upon Patience.

Perhaps we were wrong in saying that Dr. Keene was the only person, besides these inhabitants, acquainted with the interior of Monkscroft. Good Mr. Page was a frequent visitor; but his knowledge of the domestic economy of that establishment was but small, as his visits and observations were usually confined to Lady Flokes alone. He saw her, however, in the winter; and his experience on this point would have been of great value in the village. But he was as discreet as the doctor; and not even the pets of his congregation, under the most enticing influences, could have got much out of him, as to the odd manner in which Lady Flokes was reported to hybernate.

But, we can let the reader into the *penetralia* of her mansion. It was a gloomy old room—gloomy from the objection which a cypress, that grew against the window, had to let any light enter; and old from its extra appearance of antiquity, its worm-eaten floor, only covered by scraps of old lordly stair-carpet, near the bed; and its discoloured ceiling and primeval paper—a white ground, with lead-coloured foliage, and small black dots.

This was old Lady Flokes's general apartment. Her bed was a gaunt erection, of tall posts and faded heavy rustling serge; and on the top of the posts, were black feathers—black from dust and age, that is to say—which gave it the appearance

of something belonging vaguely to a funeral procession. The whole affair ought only to have been seen at Hampton Court or Windsor Castle; and then, with a railing interposed—for there is no telling what solution of continuity in its furniture intrusive hands might have achieved; or what visitation a rude shake of its draperies might have induced.

Opposite to this, was an equally tall press, in which various antiquated dresses were hung, that smelt like old books and cathedral pews, when the door was opened. But in a side cupboard of this contrivance—not a closet, but a regular cupboard—was stowed the greater part of Lady Flokes's economy. Here she kept her cooking utensils on brackets and shelves, and hanging on nails in the boards. In its dark depths, once used as a well for thrown-by clothing, could be seen toasting-forks and gridirons—tongs for steaks; bellows; brown jars of unknown mess, and dabs of lard and Dorset butter hastening to rancidity. And, if one had dared to have pulled open the deep drawers that opened under the press, there might have been found two or three oddly-matched plates and dishes; and the chilled remnants of what had formed the meal of the day before.

On a certain day Mr. Page had called upon Lady Flokes, by appointment; and on being ushered into her room, which she never left, he found the old gentlewoman waiting to receive him. Her attire was very peculiar. She looked as if she had been tied up in an old satin patch-work counterpane, with sleeves made to it, for the nonce, and then had enveloped her head in an enormous quantity of old green veils. But she was inclined to gaiety, nevertheless. Her cheeks blazed with the hue of festivity, and (as we firmly believe that old women who rouge never wash) had done so possibly for a long season. All her old ringlets, too, were in fine order.

What makes old women rouge? Do they suppose that the carmine cloud upon their cheeks, uniform and circumscribed as it always is, can ever be taken for the blush of health and young blood? Is it the lingering love of some old habit which forty or fifty years back was conceived to give as great a charm to the complexion as the mantling flush of youth and modesty which a racketing season-life had jaded away? Are they acting a part, and think that the detail of their assumption must be carried out even to throw-

ing up their eyes to a level with those before the glaring footlights? Or is it, that, to assist festivity, they wish to provoke the same pleasant thoughts which the witches and duennas in the opening scenes of pantomimes always call up? At all events we do not quarrel with the fashion. The appearance of an old lady, painted up for the occasion, always promotes honest fun; and fun being, in a degree, a phase of happiness, we hope they may long flourish. We know two or three old ladies, whom we would not have appear with clean faces for all our chances of future merriment.

Having encountered the old lady often, under similar circumstances, Mr. Page was not at all astonished. He simply made his obeisance, and sat down, whilst Lady Flokes finished the superintendence of some mysterious cookery that was going on in a stewpan on the hob, and with the smallest possible quantity of coals and cinders that could keep one another alight.

"I am in a sad way—a sad way, Mr. Page; robbed and pillaged right and left—right and left. Ah dear!"

"I shall be most happy to serve you, madam," replied Mr. Page, "in any way that you may think advisable."

"Well, well—ah dear! you shall see," returned the old lady, pulling a skinny bell-rope of old picture-cord, which, after many tugs—until the slackened wires clattered all round the room, and made the mice scuffle away behind the paper—produced a dull tinkle outside. It was, however, loud enough to summon Patience Stiles to her ladyship's presence; and that maiden came in, and, making a curtsey, stood before them. Patience was the only thing about the house, except the black footman, that was not skinny and old. She was plump, and fresh, and well-favoured.

"Now, Mr. Page," said Lady Flokes, "look at her—look at her well."

Mr. Page did as he was desired; and, indeed, the task was not an unpleasant one.

"Does she look starved, Mr. Page? Would you suppose she was kept so hungry that she was obliged to steal?"

"I should be starved if the hog's-puddings mother sent me hadn't——"

"Silence," cried the old lady, interrupting the girl. "Now, Mr. Page, what do you think?"

Lady Flower, Mr Page, and Pawse

It was difficult for the curate to return a positive answer, so Lady Flokes went on.

"That abandoned creature took advantage of my nap, yesterday afternoon, to finish the whole of a rabbit pasty Mrs. Braybœuf had sent me, and of which I had not eaten so much as a finger."

"I am sure half of it was gone," replied the girl, "when I put it by in the bandbox."

"There!" said the old lady; "you see she owns to putting it by, Mr. Page. Oh! but that is not all; I can never get dressed of a morning, because she will talk to the baker—a horrible fellow!"

Patience did not mind being attacked herself, but it was evident that the baker was, with her, a tender subject, for she coloured up, and exclaimed—

"I'm sure I don't get too many people to talk to, and I don't see why my tongue should be tied along of the baker, though he is such. If other people had as little to be said against *them* as——"

"Hush! my good girl," observed Mr. Page, seeing that Patience was beginning to lose all right to her name.

"Thank you, Mr. Page, sir—thank you," replied the girl, dropping several curtseys. "I am glad there is somebody left to say a kind word to me; for though I am only a poor servant, yet I've got my feelings as much as my betters and I won't—I won't be put upon any longer, I won't!"

"Why you—you," hesitated Lady Flokes, waiting for an epithet—"you hussey!"

And the old lady raised herself quite up from her chair, and then fell back again in her indignation.

"Go along!" she continued; "go along, and never let me see your face again, you ungrateful, bad girl! I am sure I don't know what will become of you."

"I don't know what will become of *you*," sobbed Patience. "Don't be afraid, my lady," and here she curtseyed ironically, "*I* shall never darken your door again."

"Now, Patience," said good Mr. Page, "I really must insist that you will not——"

"No, Mr. Page, sir, I will not; for you're a good, civil spoken gentleman; but I've lived here too long. Yes, my lady, now I will talk to the baker as long as I please. And

I'll tell them in the village how you kept us all upon the pig, that died in a fit, for a week; and how you made the beef-tea in the warming-pan, because you wouldn't pay for the frying-pan to be mended; and how you kept the Devonshire cream in your looking-glass drawer 'till it turned bad, because you couldn't eat it yourself, and wouldn't give it away; and then sent it to old Mrs. Raddles, with your love —your love, indeed—*that* for your love!"

And here, Patience Stiles, who had been gradually working herself up to the highest pitch of excitement—in spite of the alarmed interjections of Lady Flokes, and the mild attempts of Mr. Page to stop her—swept a bandbox full of tea-things off the drawers, with her hand, and flounced out of the room, banging the door to after her with a concussion that increased the confusion, by shaking down a sixpenny black figure in plaster, holding a candlestick, in which Lady Flokes burnt a tiny beacon all night, constructed so as to give the smallest possible speck of blue light that could exist without actual and utter obscurity.

"There, Mr. Page!" said Lady Flokes, as soon as she recovered herself, upon the maiden's angry departure. "There! now, you see what I have had to pu tup with! It has taken twenty years off my life."

This was to be regretted, apart from other considerations, for the reason, that had the extra scope been allowed to run its natural career, Lady Flokes's age would have approached the incredible.

"There is no knowing," she continued, "what a shocking girl of that kind would not do! It is a mercy I have not been burnt or murdered in my bed, long before this."

"Oh, no, my dear madam," said Mr. Page. "I do not think that you have anything to fear on that score."

"Ah! I don't know—I don't know," replied the old lady. "She will live to come to the gallows, Mr. Page; and she might bite off her mother's ear there, like the boy in the book, for not having taught her better. Oh! dear, dear. What am I to do? That is what I wanted to see you about, Mr. Page."

And, here, the cookery—whatever it was—on the hob, boiled over, and produced a fresh annoyance.

"I am obliged to dress everything myself, Mr. Page," continued Lady Flokes; "if I sent it into the kitchen, they would steal one half and poison the rest. Now, you must know what I want. I will have no more hoity-toity dab girls. No; I will have a respectable young person; a comfortable, educated, respectable, young person. Do you know of anybody?"

"Why, dear madam," answered Mr. Page, "such things do not tumble into one's way the instant they are wanted. And yet—I really ought not, perhaps, to speak decisively on the point—but, I think I know the very thing. You want, if I understand you, a companion, superior, so to speak, to the usual class of such persons."

"Precisely."

"Then I believe—I speak with all reservation, in the event of my suppositions being futile—but I believe I do know the very thing—that is to say, if she is not disagreeable to the matter."

"And who is that?"

"The daughter of old Mrs. Maitland, who died last summer at the Grange," replied Mr. Page.

"I have heard she is a very correct young person," observed the old lady.

"That I can safely answer for," said Mr. Page, and warmly, too. "She has been living with the Twinches—for certain reasons, which it is not now necessary to enter upon; and I believe that latterly they have not agreed very well."

"Ah, indeed!" said the old lady, delighted at the chance of a little bit of scandal, that had not yet reached her through the baker and Patience channels; "and what is that?"

"Oh, a mere nothing, I believe," replied Mr. Page—"a mere nothing! You know, my dear Madam, that ladies—that is to say, ladies like the Miss Twinches (though I hold them, indeed, in great respect) sometimes take strange fancies into their heads, and little whims, and — but never mind, she would, I am persuaded, if it was agreeable to her to come, be the very person to suit you."

"And will you see about this for me, Mr. Page?'

"I shall be delighted," replied the good curate. And he really was very happy at the chance of doing so. "I will see about it forthwith."

This point settled, old Lady Flokes began to entertain Mr. Page with various reminiscences of her late lamented lord, and more or less interesting anecdotes connected with her present domestic economy, to all of which the young curate paid proper attention, albeit they effected but a slight imprint on his memory. And then, after Lady Flokes had insisted upon his taking a minute glass of curious wine—of a dry flavour and dubious vintage, which had lived alone for some time in an old decanter—he departed on his new mission, quite pleased at the chance Annie might have of finding a new, and certainly respectable home, despite its comicality, until the period should arrive, when the position of her affairs could be more clearly laid down.

When he was gone, old Lady Flokes finished her cookery, made a light dinner, and then called up the houskeeper, to scold her slowly, for an hour and a half, for ever having permitted any flirtation between Patience Stiles and her friend the baker.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. FLITTER AND THE MANAGER.

LEAVING Philip at Boulogne, where he appeared to be in a fair way of bringing about a sequel to what was wished, Mr. Wyndham Flitter returned back to town.

His determination was to go to Pottleton and make the best use of the opportunity thus afforded him. But for this a little ready money was essential. The thousand-and-one minute ways that he had of collecting, or getting credit for, small sums in London, would not avail him in any way in the country village. And so when he got to town, and was put down about noon from the omnibus at the Regent's Circus, he stood a few minutes at the door of the coach office, undecided as to where he should go.

"Carry yer bag, sir?" asked a young gentleman, who appeared like magic at his side, apparently through the cellar grating. "Take it a long ways for a penny, sir."

"Catch hold of it," answered Mr. Flitter. "Take it to the stage-door of the—pshaw! what's the name of the theatre—go on a-head. I'll follow you."

The boy trudged off, and Mr. Flitter after him, until they came to the mystic portal in question.

There was an old mouldy man sitting in a side nook of this entrance, who looked as if he had grown out of the grimy atmosphere of the place, like a small fungus from a mildewed wall. That old man sat there always. Whether the theatre was open or shut—whether the dirty door, that gave to a push either way with the cord and pulley, was still all day, or swinging every instant with the anxious-looking, seedy people who passed in and out, was of no consequence to him; there he was obliged to be, for ever lifting up and down the flap of the scored and notched, and once raggedly painted, desk before him.

His corner, for it was no more, was in a certain degree decorated. There were one or two portraits of popular performers cut from the pictorial papers, and some more of

artistes that nobody ever heard of, from small-priced dramatic periodicals, pasted against the wall. There was also a bill or two of the benefit of some subaltern of the company, who was not of sufficient importance to figure in the ordinary placards, but who, to his great glory, had issued private bills of his own, which were displayed at the bar of the nearest public-house—perhaps, by a favour, in the parlour—and also depended from legs of pork, bundles of cheap cheroots, door-posts of eel-pie shops, and other establishments which the fettered genius, who that night was to appear before his friends in a character of his own choice, patronised.

These were the people who were the vampires of the theatrical profession — who, instead of understanding that their province was to be paid a certain sum to amuse the public to the top of their bent, made their mistaken profession an excuse for sponging, in a humiliating and offensive way, upon those whom the merest introduction had thrown in their path. But, at the same time, these were the great bringers-forward of miscellaneous talent. It was on their nights that wonderful dogs, who tore down crusaders and Highland drovers with equal ferocity—that painful infants who put their angular limbs into absurd attitudes in the Cachuca and Cracovienne—that latent talent which, at last, blazed for one night in a great character, and then went out altogether — that Miss (some patrician name be sure, or rather the conventional cognomen of the half-century-ago novels, as "Belville," "Clifford," "De Courcy," or "Montmorenci")—"of the nobility's concerts"—a vague species of entertainment to define, but still persevered in in programmes —sang some great air of the greatest Italian singers, upon that occasion only: it was on their nights, that there were rows, and hisses, and disobedient orchestras—that people always came away disappointed, and promises were unfulfilled.

These were also the people who called skies *skee-eyes;* and garden, *ghee-arden;* and kind, *kee-eynd.* They always left out their *h* in *'umble,* and thought it was proper. They were the uneducated and socially-unplaced ruck, who sink the profession from being one of thought, study of the real and natural, and education, into a mere vehicle for mean begging and dreary exhibition of incapacity.

"Well, Coffey, how d'ye do?" said Mr. Flitter, as he dismissed his porter with the proffered penny, and spoke to the janitor of the *coulisses.*

"Ah! Mr. Flitter, sir, how d'ye do?" replied the man. "We haven't seen you for a long time."

"No, Coffey; I've been abroad. Is the governor in the house.

"Yes, sir; he's in the treasury, I dare say. Leave the bag with me, sir."

And the man took Mr. Flitter's carpet-bag and put it under his old desk, to keep company with two umbrellas of the *corps-de-ballet* that had been left there. The desk itself was, as we have said, a rubbishing old affair enough, but it contained important things. Apart from the applications to actors for orders, which formed the majority of its contents, there were many notes, redolent of patchouli, with crests on the seals, and bouquets of the most exquisite arrangement, (when hothouse plants were things to look at only through glass,) that had cost more than those for whom they were intended earned in a week.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter passed by a few dingy people, who were waiting to have messages "sent in"—the most hopeless transmissions known—and went up at once to the treasury, where the manager at times received his *employés* of various kinds—carpenters, authors, and other necessities, to make arrangements with them for forthcoming attractions.

"Hah-h! Vyndham!" cried the director, in that fatal accent which we, in a spirit so remote from the Christian, associate always with hired fancy-dressers, old clothes, and bad things generally—"Hah-h! Vyndham, how d'ye do?"

"How are you, governor?" was Mr. Flitter's reply. "And what are you doing?"

"Doing?—vot am I doing? Don't know vere to put tho people—they vill come. That's your sort, eh?"

And here Mr. Shem, as he was called, winked at himself several times successively. He had been in the habit of misleading the opinions of others so frequently and so successfully, that he was obliged to do so, to get rid of the superabundant joy he felt at his deceptions.

But it was a horrible wink; not one that bore witness to an honest social joke, but one that spoke of deep deception,

and victories gained by chicanery and double-dealing—at least, anybody might have been excused for thinking so.

"Got anything for us?" continued the manager.

"Yes," said Wyndham; "some first-rate pieces. Saw them in Paris last week."

He had seen them at Boulogne; but he had bought the books, and knew the Paris casts; so it was all the same.

"Very well—all right," said the other, winking again. "Come out and take a turn. I vant to buy some potatoes."

He was about to leave the room, when an aged woman—the last thirty years of whose life had been passed in fanciful conceptions of the dresses worn by the peasants in Switzerland and Bohemia, and who, as she still cheerfully believed, tended cows and trimmed vines in spangles and pumps—came to the door with a feeble knock, and ventured in.

"Vell! vat do you vant?" asked the director.

'If you please, sir——"

"Vell, I don't please, so be off," he replied; adding, in the same breath, "Go on; vot is it?"

He always thought it necessary to repel everybody at first, for fear they came to ask a favour; in order that thus frightened, they might ask a less one, or perhaps not muster up courage to proffer the petition at all. And he carried the same feeling out, in all his transactions.

"If you please, sir, Miss Wirey wants silk velvet for her page's tunic."

"Vot!" almost screamed Mr. Shem, "silk velvet! I von't have it. I never had silk velvet for a page in my life."

"If you please, sir, she says Madame Trilli had it."

"Very well; I dare say she did—because she vos vorth it. And you may tell Miss Virey, ven she can draw as much money as the other, she shall have silk velvet. There, go avay—go avay. Cotton velvet's very good—beautiful. Every bit of cotton velvet I use costs me ten shillings a yard. Now don't come again."

As the woman departed, Mr. Shem winked at himself and Wyndham conjointly. And he was about to start, when another knock was heard.

"And vot do *you* vant?" asked Mr. Shem again, as the head scene-painter approached, "Eh?"

"I think we shall want some more canvas for the last scene," he said. "There's a moon in it, and you wouldn't like the large horizon cloth cut."

"Cut the cloth—vy you're mad," again shrieked the manager. "I von't have a moon at all. Vot is the moon? all trash and nonsense. I von't have it, I tell you?"

"Very well: that's just as you please," said the artist; "only the scene is by moonlight, and all the allusions are about it."

"Bah!" continued Mr. Shem, with his scream, "vot's allusions; vot's moonlight; vot's anything—all nothing: eh? Vyndham."

Wyndham knew the scene-painter, and expected he knew the author, so he poked the fire by way of reply, as the artist bowed and departed.

"They cheat you all manners of vays if you don't look after them," said Mr. Shem. "They'd ruin you in a veek. Hullou! vot next?"

There was another rap at the door, and a man entered with a parcel. Mr. Shem winked at himself so rapidly, that the motion of his eyelid was almost galvanic.

"Vell, Mr. Tweed," he exclaimed, "is that the coat—eh?"

Mr. Tweed bowed and unpacked the parcel, producing a Caucasian-looking frock-coat, with a fur collar, which he proceeded to try on.

"Just the thing, sir, I think," said Mr. Tweed. "Very nice in the back—stop, a little crease,—that's it, sir: nothing but the folding. I think, sir, this is a lovely fit?" he added. turning to Wyndham for his opinion.

But Mr. Flitter, at the first appearance of Mr. Tweed, had stepped into the next room. He appeared to know him, and not to wish himself to be recognised; but he heard what passed.

"You call that a fit!" exclaimed Mr. Shem; "a fit! go on vith your fit. It's like a sack. I von't have it. Vot vas it to be—eh?"

"Five pounds ten, sir," replied the other.

"Vot!" again screamed Mr. Shem; "five pun' ten. I von't have it. Take it away—it don't fit. Take it avay, I say. Go along—go along! Never let me see it again. Eh?"

Mr. Tweed was afraid of giving his customer a different

fit—of apoplexy—for he looked upon the verge of it, in his rage; and so he departed.

"Vyndham!" cried Mr. Shem, as the other left; "see how they all do you! Everybody does me almost. My actors vould if they could, but they can't. Ven the theatre pays, all vell and good, and I keep it on; ven it don't I shut it, and say the season's over—eh?"

And he dug Mr. Flitter in the ribs, and winked at him.

"They must play for my season," he added; "but I needn't pay for theirs — eh? Oh! you're obliged to look after them—eh?"

"Ha! ha! capital! What a knowing one you are!" exclaimed Wyndham.

"Ain't I?—eh? Now come and take a valk, eh?"

Seeing there was, at last, a chance of being permitted to go out, Mr. Shem took Wyndham by the shoulder affectionately, and they left the theatre. Two or three of the dingy people, who still haunted the stage-door, tried to speak to the manager as he passed, but he wouldn't have it.

"I've no time now," he said. "You must write vot you vant—eh?"

A small pony-chaise was in waiting at the stage door, and Mr. Shem called the attention of Mr. Flitter to it.

"There, Vyndham, vot do you think of that?" he asked. "There was a bargain. The man wanted fifteen pounds for it, as it stands—eh?"

"And not dear."

"No; but I did better than that. I gave him five in money, and ten pounds' vorth of box orders for two. That vos the agreement, and vot do you think I did? Eh?"

"I'm sure I can't tell," replied Flitter.

"I gave them all for the same evening, and didn't let vun into the dress-circle. I had him there, I think. But it's the vay vith all of them. They'll all do you, if they can."

Wyndham looked admiringly at his companion—they were kindred souls.

They walked on together, and at last came to a great market, the appearance of which would have entirely silenced all those honest people, still existing, who think that country productions are easier to be obtained in the rural districts.

It was yet winter; but delicate and choice exotics flourished in the windows; thousands of roots, bound in wet moss, and already bursting with the petals of the crocus, the anemone, the faint clematis, and the pale lily of the valley, were heaped upon the stalls; and countless packets of all the seeds that were to spring into light and life in May, and add to the deeply-glowing glories of the summer flower-garden, were sorted at such prices, that a penny would have produced a bower in July. The world had poured its vegetable treasures into that teeming spot. Fiery oranges, from Tangiers and Malta; bursting grapes from glowing Spain; smart cranberries from icy Russia, and solid cob-nuts from the thick country woods of England were there; Normandy, America, the two Indies, and the scented Arabia, had all sent their produce, in gallant ships, across the world of leaping waters. The healing fruit that was brought in an instant on the enchanted carpet of the Arabian Nights was outdone. In a second, any one who chose could command there every product of the earth, not only that administered to the exigency of disease, but embellished the table of luxury.

Mr. Shem was not much affected by these notions. He only looked upon oranges as things to be eaten in the pit or gallery; for the privilege of selling which, in his opinion, certain individuals paid important sums. And he saw in bouquets nothing but elements of popular success, when showered upon a favourite at the fall of the curtain. The other things did not concern him, so he did not regard them, potatoes alone excepted.

"Ho d'ye do, Mrs. Punnett?" he exclaimed, to a dealer in the latter articles, as he came up to her stall. "Vell, how's potatoes?"

"Beautiful, sir," said the woman.

"Yes, I know; but vot's the price?"

"Three halfpence a pound, sir."

"Vot! Never heard of such a thing! Three halfpence a pound? Three pound for a halfpenny, you mean."

Mrs. Punnett did not enter into the merits of the reduction.

"Vell, seven pounds for sixpence. No? Then weigh me out two pounds."

The woman got the scale, and heaped in the potatoes. As she went to get some more, Mr. Shem took two or three large ones in his hand, and then cried out—

"Vot do you give me these big vuns for? You know I don't like them. Get me some little vuns."

The woman obeyed; and when she put them into a bag, Mr. Shem pushed the large ones in as well, on the sly, and without her looking.

"There's a fourpenny-piece," said Mr. Shem. "Now give me a penny, eh?"

"That's a quarter of a frank, sir," replied the woman.

"Pooh—pooh!" said Mr. Shem, taking it up. "So it is. Did you ever see, Vyndham, how you're cheated if you don't look after people? Now, my boy, come along, eh?"

They walked away from the market, Mr. Shem winking at his potatoes all the way, in frantic delight; and at length, Flitter thought he might broach the object of his visit. So he pulled a French vaudeville from his pocket, that he had bought at Boulogne the day before, and commenced—

"There's a charming piece, governor; just out. I saw it at Paris on Friday. Now, look here—it's sure to make a tremendous hit; and if you'll give me a ten-pound note, I'll do it for you off hand.

"Let me look at it—vot is it?" asked Mr. Shem. He saw the name, which, with him, was to recollect it, and then gave it back to Wyndham, saying—

"I had that piece over last week, my boy. I've got it done already. My man Croon has two guineas a week to do all my interludes,—eh?" And he winked at his own sagacity, as he determined to order the vaudeville at Jeff's that very evening.

"Don't you want a burlesque?" asked Wyndham.

"Vant a vot?—Burlesque! My boy, I have had five of the cleverest you ever saw sent in—capital subjects, too; well known, and never been done,—eh?"

As they had walked on, they had arrived opposite the shop of Mr. Tweed. Mr. Shem paused an instant—although Wyndham would fain have walked on—and pointed to his window. There were several garments, of what tailors facetiously consider to be the latest fashions, hanging over the wire blind; large patterned check trousers, gentishly-cut,

plaid and shawl waistcoats, and offensively staring specimens of various fabrics. Amongst them, however, was the coat which Mr. Shem had rejected that morning.

"I knew it, my boy," he said, with great glee to Flitter, as his eye winked like a star. "It's put there to sell as a misfit. I shall send somebody down to-morrow to buy it at half price,—eh? Had 'em there! Oh! if you don't keep your eyes open, you're done all vays."

"I wish you would lend me a sovereign, by tne way," said Wyndham; "it will save my going into the city."

"My boy, I haven't so much as two and sixpence about me, else I vould directly."

"Well, never mind," replied Wyndham, "just give me a box for to-night." He thought he might make a little of it.

"A box!" cried Mr. Shem. "There now, if the queen vos to come down to me herself this afternoon, and say, 'Mr. Shem, can you oblige me with a box?' I should be compelled to refuse her."

Wyndham began to see that it was throwing time away, for Mr. Shem was not evidently disposed to accommodate him; so wishing him good morning, he turned off towards Mr. Spooner's. But he did not call upon that gentleman until he had formed several plans of the manner in which it would be best to attack him; for he had borrowed so many small sums, the promised immediate repayment for which never took place, that some new form of application was necessary. At last, he decided upon one which he thought tolerably certain to answer.

"Is your master in, West?" asked Wyndham, as the servant came to the door.

"Yes, he is, sir; he's dressing; but he won't mind you."

But before he had got thus far, Mr. Wyndham Flitter was at the top of the flight of stairs, and had rushed into Mr. Spooner's bedroom.

His morning toilet took that young gentleman a long time to make, but it was nothing to the evening one; if he got off under two hours he had been hurried, and dressed rapidly. This was its order. First of all he had a long consultation with West, as to which of his waistcoats he should wear; and when this was settled he had it laid in state upon the bed,

together with his other clothes, and then sat ten minutes with a cigar in his mouth looking at them. Next, all his studs, of which he might have had twenty sets, were passed in review before him; and after one pattern had been fixed in his shirt-front, he thought another would look better, and had the first altered. Then, perhaps, these were changed again and again, until after the plain coral had been removed for the blue-bottle flies made of precious stones, and these had given place to the Neapolitan fancy periwinkle shells, which were in turn superseded by the pearls hanging from the coiled serpents' mouths, only to be put aside for the turquoise raspberries or the enamel shields, the shirt-front was crumpled and useless, and another had to be chosen, which, when fitted up, was found not to correspond with the waistcoat, and everything had to be gone over again.

But Mr. Spooner's hair was his chief care. Had one tenth part of the attention been given to the inside of his head that he bestowed upon its exterior, he would have been a wonderful fellow. For the regiment of bottles and pots, all connected with certain mysterious operations to be performed thereon, would have stocked a stall at a bazaar. When one came to think that Columbia, Madagascar, Russia, and Circassia, had all been considered necessary to supply balm, oil, grease, and cream, for the sole object of nourishing and beautifying the hair, the enterprise of the spirited importers could not be too highly lauded. And yet, with respect to Mr. Spooner's hair, they certainly had not produced those pleasing effects which one might have supposed from the public records of their virtues. For it still remained wiry and wavy, and would stick up here and there, in unseemly places, in small locks that turned the wrong way, and which nothing could subdue. One night, to be sure, going to a party, Mr. Spooner, with much bandoline and a strong-minded tooth-brush, had reduced one or two of these rebellious "feathers" to obedience; but from the very nature of the remedy, his hat had stuck to his head, and when he arrived at the house he could not remove it, until the butler got him a pair of scissors, which at the same time took away the cause, and left him for some weeks afterwards with two little stubbly tufts rising from his crown.

He was also very particular in shaving twice every day,

not because he had a beard, but because he had not. And to this end he had seven razors in a box, with the names of the days of the week on the back of each. He did not, however, use them regularly, for he had a favourite Thursday which usually took the lead. Next to this blade in favour came Monday, but Friday and Sunday had been out of use altogether for some time, never having gone well since Willy Sprott tried to cut the wire of some bottled stout with them. With one of the first named he was removing the lather very easily from his smooth chin when Wyndham burst into the room, and threw himself into a large arm-chair.

"Halloo, old fellow!" said Mr. Spooner, "how you frightened me; you almost made me cut myself. What's up?"

Finding Mr. Flitter did not reply, he looked round, and saw him with his face buried in his hands.

"Wyndham, I say, what's the matter?" continued Mr. Spooner, almost alarmed.

"Don't ask me!" exclaimed Mr. Flitter. "I cannot tell you. I am ruined—lost—for ever!"

"Lor, I'm sure I'm very sorry," returned the other. "How do you say—lost? Pshaw!"

"Spooner!" cried Mr. Flitter, violently, jumping up from the large arm-chair, "this night will see me, not as I am now, but a shattered corpse, awaiting the inquest! I am resolved——"

He said this in a deep low tone, followed by a gulp of air, to look hysterical, and make it effective. It had its effect.

"Oh—come, come, Wyndham," said Mr. Spooner; "that must not be, you know. Quiet yourself, old fellow: here, drink this water, and tell me coolly what it means."

He gave Mr. Flitter a tumbler of water, who chattered it against his teeth so desperately, that it is strange one or the other did not crack.

"There," he went on; "now then, take your time, and tell me all about it."

Mr. Flitter looked at West, who, at Spooner's sign, immediately left the room.

"Tiddy!" said Wyndham, as the servant departed; "there is no other man in the world, that I would have told this to, but you. There is no other shall know beforehand of my intentions. Ah-h-h!"

Here, Mr. Flitter shuddered fearfully, and pressed his handkerchief to his eyes, as though to shut out the horrid visions that were flitting before him.

"Well—what is it? Come, old fellow," said Mr. Spooner, in a petting manner, putting his hand upon the other's shoulder.

"I have been wronged by a villain!" cried Mr. Flitter. "A man that I had loved and trusted as my brother—as I would have loved and trusted you."

He grasped Mr. Spooner's hand, who returned the pressure, beginning to be deeply affected.

"I was security for him, for one hundred pounds. Now, you see it all. He has absconded; and to-night, I must pay the recognizances, or be cast into a dungeon! But no! they shall see that the body of Wyndham Flitter shall be as free, as is his soul. At twelve o'clock to-night, I shall blow my brains out."

"Oh! nonsense! nonsense! You mustn't do that, you know," said Mr. Spooner.

"It is fixed," continued Wyndham; "but I have one favour to beg of you. We have been friends together (as the song which we knew in happier times, so beautifully expresses it) "through many roving years." I have a last and earnest favour to beg of you."

"Name it, Wyndham; but—no, no—you will never——"

"Hush!" he interrupted. "We once, you may remember, had a talk about ghosts; and we said we would enter into a compact, that whichever of us died first, should appear to the other, to prove if there were any truth in them, or otherwise. The time is now come to put it to the test. At twelve o'clock, this very night, skull-shattered, and brained, and bleeding as I may be, I will appear to you. Let me beg, at this terrible moment, that you will be alone."

Mr. Spooner began to get very nervous. His alarm at Wyndham's violence was changing into terror at the anticipated visitation. For he believed in ghosts.

"But, stop!" he said; "stop, Wyndham. Perhaps it is not so bad as it looks. Can't they be induced to wait a little while."

"No! no!" cried Mr. Flitter, in assumed desperation. "The harpies would tear the flesh from my bones with red

hot pincers first, as they are now scrunching my heart with their heels. Just as I was thinking, too, of taking a theatre ——a theatre for ballet and spectacle."

"You were!"

"Oh yes, yes; but that has past: a theatre, where my friends would have been in the green room, as in their own drawing-rooms; and had their own pieces played by the first actors." And suddenly, changing his expression to one of deep calm, he added: "No matter! my mind is made up."

He knew Mr. Spooner's available point, when all else failed. He knew his attachment to the ballet, generally; his public balls and *petits soupers* with 'little parties;' his notions of an *entrée* behind the scenes. And he knew also, that Mr. Spooner had a cherished farce, which he had often threatened to read to Wyndham, and been as often prevented by great tact and contrivance—which had been rejected by every theatre in London, 'on account,' as Mr. Spooner said, 'of the suicidal jealousy of theatrical people, of young and fresh talent;' and which, however, a friend—a member of the Garrick's, had at last promised that he would show to Harley.

"Nonsense, man," said Mr. Spooner; "we have bright years still before us."

"I might have had," said Mr. Flitter. "Next week even, hundreds would be to me what sovereigns are to day. But where shall I be next week. Ah-h-h!"

And Wyndham here shuddered again, fearfully.

"Now, just be still, old man," said Mr. Spooner, with pleasant banter. "We can settle it all in two minutes. See here. I will give you a cheque, and you shall pay me next week. It is a pity the bank is closed; but my name's good anywhere. There! there's your hundred! Now, then—how about your brains!"

"My preserver!" cried Wyndham, grasping Mr. Spooner's hand between his own.

"Don't say a word more about it," replied the other. "And now, what will you have?"

"I think some sherry and soda-water," returned Mr. Flitter, quite in his old tone of voice. "Oh! if you knew the load that was taken off my breast."

And to prove the change that had taken place in his feelings, Mr. Flitter sang an air from a popular opera, and per-

formed a little *pas* of his own about the room; finally, stopping at the toilet-table to brush his hair, and put a little gloss upon it. Then he combed his whiskers, curled his mustachios, and finally announced that he was himself again.

All his peril was past; and, indeed, had he not got the money, it would have been just at present a serious business to him in the furtherance of his schemes. With all his assumed gaiety, the entire morning had been one of great anxiety to him; but now he found himself, for the present, safely landed. A man who comes up from a coal mine once more into an inexplosive atmosphere; a curious visitor, who finds himself on firm ground again, after making that frightful journey in the basket along the site of the suspension-bridge at Clifton; a stranger landing from an American steam-boat, a balloon, or a diving-bell; a traveller arriving unattached at the end of his route between Naples and Terracina, or Madrid and Seville; a quiet man tranquilly finishing a month's sojourn in the Faubourg St. Antoine; a foreman at a powder-mill on Saturday night; an amateur hunter finding himself still on his saddle on the other side of an ox-rail; the summit of a human column of street-acrobats when he finds the paving-stones under his feet again, instead of the crown of his companion's head,—all these persons can imagine Mr. Flitter's delight at this relief to his embarrassments. Instead of his dejection, an almost supernatural gaiety took possession of his mind. He kept on singing, spouting poetry, and flourishing about the room, until his friend's toilet was completed, when he shook him again warmly by the hand, told him he had saved his life, and then went back to the theatre for his carpet-bag, which he was about to re-arrange, intending to start the next morning for a place of no less importance in our history than the quiet Pottleton.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PHILIP GOES TO EPSOM, TO HIS COST.

PHILIP was in no hurry to leave Boulogne: nor was it Wyndham Flitter's intention that he should quit it a day before such departure was absolutely necessary. And therefore he commended him more than ever to the care of Mrs. Wracketts, who was evidently not at all displeased with her charge: and by getting him to write a few sketches of a local character for "The Cracker"—which Mr. Scute commended to Messrs. Brainer and Clinch, as first-rate—and setting him to translate a few high-pressure French novels for a cheap publisher in the regions of Holywell-street, he gave him a pretence for staying; whilst Mr. and Madame Lurker, glad to catch anybody at such an out-of-the-way time of year, took him, by the week, for a sum certainly as small as, if not less than, he could have lived for in London.

The time did not hang very heavily on his hands. Flitter and Wracketts returned to England, so that he was left to be Léonie's sole companion. They found enough to amuse them, even at Boulogne. They had long blowing walks on the edge of the cliffs, or on the level sands at low water, to Wimereux: and strolls round the ramparts, and lounges about the streets, where the shop windows were always attractive. For there was the delicately carved ivory of Dieppe, in brooches, studs, and buckles: the latest music from Paris, with its fanciful lithographed title pages: the large tin gloves, and barber's brass basins, and novel signs to the shops, altogether—nothing in themselves, but making up a strange foreign ensemble, that it was pleasant to find oneself amongst. The market, too, with its ocean of white caps, and dainty wares fresh from the country about, was a favourite resort: and when they were tired, they would turn into the Cathedral; which is not a very imposing affair, to be sure, but still worth a visit when it comes in one's way. For you do not have to wait for the keys, hunting up the clerk or

sexton, and tagging round after him wherever he chooses to take you, with payment in anticipation. The doors are always open, and people go in and out just as they please, from the market, the promenade, the sea, or the country. They cheat and bargain—put down their baskets—go in and pray, and come out again: and commence cheating and bargaining as before. When you have seen one French church you have seen all. Old women and young girls make up the congregation: and a sprinkler of holy water at the door guards the entrance with a doll's broom. Quantities of tiny lights, like the "Christmas candles" of the children, flare, gutter, go out, and smell, on triangular metal stands about the interior. You will not be noticed by any one, unless you take a chair; and then the owner emerges from behind some pillar, and is pretty soon down upon you. So are the chairs also if you go to move one yourself from the stack in which they are so artfully piled. They come down with the slightest touch—sooner than anything else in the world, except the corner articles on fragile stalls in the Pantheon and Soho Bazaar.

It must not be supposed in these long saunters that Annie was never mentioned. On the contrary, Philip was constantly talking about her, because Mrs. Wracketts said "she took such an interest in her." But the interest which one woman takes in another, under similar positions of flirtation and engagement, is somewhat of a doubtful character: especially if she admires the man herself. And although she may soften down the nature of her regard by calling it "sisterly," yet such is all nonsense, experience having discovered that style of affection to be only existing in its most matter-of-fact state of consanguinity. Philip was, however, disarmed by it: and day by day fell deeper amongst the meshes laid for him.

And so, in this easy life, the cold weather passed away; the rough channel waves subsided, and the limes and acacias burst out into leaf again, when Mr. Flitter once more made his appearance at Boulogne; and the party at Lurker's was broken up. But it was only to meet again, a day or two afterwards, in London; and Mr Spooner's establishment was the one favoured for the *réunion.* That true-hearted young gentleman had asked them all to tea and lansquenet—a de-

lightful game, which Mr. Wyndham Flitter had been kind enough to teach him; and which, to be sure, he lost at, just at present; but then, he did not know it perfectly.

Mr. and Mrs. Wracketts were there, the lady being invited to do the honours, and order everything, as Mr. Spooner intreated might be the case, exactly as if she were in her own house. Mr. Wyndham Flitter was also there, of course—and Philip was expected to drop in, from his office, where he had been at work with Mr. Scute, every minute. One or two of Mr. Spooner's most immediate college friends —Willy Sprott and Co.—were also of the party; and Mrs. Wracketts brought with her a young lady as handsome as herself, whom she introduced as her cousin, Miss Courcy, lately from Paris, and therefore rather an acquisition to the lansquenet table than otherwise. So that, altogether, they made, what Mr. Spooner considered, rather a fast party, which it was his great wish that the assembly should be considered, and about which he was most anxious, inasmuch as he was constantly putting secret questions to his friends, one after the other, with an air of great earnestness, as to how they thought it was going on.

Philip at last came, and was invited to join at the lansquenet table. He refused at first, but Mrs. Wracketts made a space by her, for his chair to come in, and he assented immediately: we must add, not altogether to Mr. Spooner's taste, as that gentleman directly began to pay great attention to Miss Courcy. The game went on, with alternations of fortune to the company, and perpetual ill-luck to the host, until Philip, having lost rather more than he thought was proper, rose to depart, on the score of having to go down to Pottleton early the next morning.

"Pottleton!" cried Mr. Flitter. "Come, Philip; what are you going there for? You might just as well talk about Nova Scotia, or Jericho, or the Great Desert."

"I ought to have been there before," said Philip. "No—I must really be off—and by the first train."

There was an appealing look from Léonie.

"Why—man alive!" continued Mr. Flitter, "it's the Derby day!"

"I know that," quietly answered Philip. "I ought to, for I have heard nothing else talked about for the last month.

But I suppose a man could still live although he had not been to the Derby."

"Yes; and so he might without smoking, or drinking pale ale, or lying in bed in the morning, but it would be existing rather than living. Besides, this will be to your interest. Look here."

And beckoning Philip towards him, he added, in a low tone—

"You can work up an account of it for 'The Cracker,' don't you see?"

"Oh, yes," said Léonie, catching the words. "And I am sure, from *you*, it will be capital fun."

"I should not object to go," replied Philip. "How could I?—on the contrary; but I know nothing in the world about the matter. Tattersall's is as great a puzzle to me as the foreign funds."

"Scute won't want you to do the racing," answered Wyndham; "I'll look after that—only the road; there and back, you know. Your mission will be finished as soon as you get on the course."

"But it has been done, over and over again," said Philip.

"So has every salmon-cutlet you order at Greenwich or Blackwall," responded Mr. Flitter: "and yet people always like it."

There was a laugh at Mr. Flitter's rejoinder, and Mrs. Wracketts and Miss Courcy looked large bright eyes at one another, and showed their teeth—in appearance, to appreciate Mr. Flitter's talents; in reality, to exhibit their own beauties. And then they both looked at Philip.

"But how are we to go?" he asked, already wavering.

"Wracketts and Spooner are going to play écarte for a barouche," answered Wyndham." "It's all ordered—we've only got to settle who shall pay for it. There—that's all arranged—you go."

"You go—all right," echoed Spooner and Wracketts.

"Yes—you *must* go," softly added Léonie, making sure that Spooner was not looking.

Mr. Spooner's friends were going down in several Hansoms, so they did not interfere with the arrangements, but promised to join them on the Course. And therefore the party was settled to be Léonie and Miss Courcy, Spooner

and Philip, inside; and Wyndham and Mr. Wracketts on the box. A fresh game of lansquenet commenced: hock, champagne, and Seltzer water, came up in fresh quantities; and once more Philip found the journey to Pottleton set aside. Then came supper: and then Léonie produced her guitar, and sang—not only solos but duetts with her cousin, and, with these, the spell was perfected, scarcely dissipated in dreams when the morning arrived.

And a famous day it was when it did come; with a glorious sunshine from its very break. Whatever disgrace the clerk of the weather might formerly have incurred from treating the race to a snow-storm, his character was fully redeemed on the present occasion. No threatening morning, no untoward shower, not even a heat-drop, to form a little patch of mud upon the new bonnet or parasol wherever it fell, to mar the beauty of the day. The morning opened splendidly; and the sun rose evidently on the right side of his bed, and appeared with a bright, good-humoured face, which proved at once that he meant to keep so all day. And so he did.

Long before Mr. Flitter or his friends were awake, the traffic had commenced upon the road. For then did little wagons, filled with ginger-pop, and long barrows, covered with nuts, take their departure; together with many trucks of forms and benches, which their toiling owners pushed before them all the way from town, in the hope of reaping a harvest from visitors of short stature who had no available carriage, and could not afford to go into the stand, yet wanted their heads elevated a little above the rest, to get a glimpse of the great race. Mr. Punch, too, might have been seen here and there upon the road, now quiet and sleeping in his box, for he had a hard day's work before him. Anon, the carts belonging to the large refreshment booths thronged the way, filled with articles that required a late carriage from London, to come out to advantage,—blankets full of ice and crisp cool lettuces. Then came the large unwieldy advertising machines to create a sensation by blocking up the turnpikes, and to creep about the Downs as if they had elephants inside them. These all went on until the first visitors took the road—regular holiday-keepers, who had looked forward a whole year to the day—starting thus early, either with the determination of making a long day of it, letting their horse

or horses take it easy, or getting a good place on the hill, or near the ropes, or in the free ground, as the case might turn out to be.

London also was alive at early morning. Resuscitated post-horses and exhumed post-boys waked from their long hybernation into light and life again, like butterflies. Already idlers were collecting about the West-end hotels, in front of which imposing arrays of first-rate drags were to be seen; or about the Regent-circus and Grosvenor-place, by which for four or five hours the stream of vehicles was to pass. Carriages and four were waiting at the doors of the houses in the patrician squares; stage-coaches, drawn forth again, like the post-boys, from next door to oblivion—whose very windows blinked in the bright sun from long inaction—were being mopped into as good an appearance as they were capable of putting on, in the coach-office yards. At many of the inns, omnibuses, properly destined for any part of the suburbs but that in which they were about to proceed, ruthlessly dragged from sober Upper Clapton to make the acquaintance of strange Surrey turnpikes, or forced to try other "climbs" over the Epsom hills, instead of those of Highgate and Haverstock, were denying their course of life, by suffering themselves to be placarded all over with "Epsom;" and in by-streets and humble neighbourhoods were vans, which, as far as their capabilities of extension of accommodation went, might have been made of Indian rubber for aught we know. They were all vans bent upon going out for a lark. There was a flashy air about their very curtains, and the scarlet streamers that tied them, that meant mischief. They were for one day at least going to cut temperance and Hampton Court, and plunge into the rollicking, fermented festivities of the Derby day. Nay, down by the Thames curious pedestrians might have come upon certain old coal wagons, turned out quite clean and respectable, with a table down the middle, and a nine-gallon tub—mark that—nine gallons!—stowed away up at the end; and arched over with such evergreens as were available. But these would only be seen by the many, when overtaken far on the road; for they left betimes, requiring five hours at least to accomplish the journey in.

It had been settled down that Mr. Spooner's rooms should

be the trysting-place. Mr. Wyndham Flitter arranged this for various reasons—because it was a good locality; because he was certain Mr. Spooner would have, any how, to pay for everything; because his own residence was, as usual, somewhat vague; and because breakfast would be provided, and anything packed away in the landau that might strike them at the last moment as likely to prove serviceable, over and above the different things they had each been appointed to bring. And to all this Mr. Spooner had not the slightest objection, being delighted with the chance of going in such fast society. So he had prepared the most elaborate breakfast ever known—pies, prawns, hock, claret, sardines, and pale ale—and perfectly filled his passage with hampers.

The party assembled with tolerable punctuality about ten o'clock. Mrs. Wracketts was something to see, had nothing of her been visible but her parasol, which was of shot silk covered with lace, and of a shape entirely different to the normal fashions. And her lemon-coloured lined muslin was worked so beautifully that scarcely a square inch of the simple fabric was visible; whilst her Albanian shawl almost dazzled one with the brilliancy of its tranverse bands of colours. And her bonnet appeared to have been made by spiders, so delicate was it; indeed, but for the look of the thing, she might as well have discarded it altogether, except that she would have lost, at the same time, the effect of the small bouquets of poppies, wheat, and corn flowers that lay against her cheeks. Miss Courcy was also imposing and brilliant to look at—rather more subdued, in tone perhaps, than Mrs. Wracketts, as was proper.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter, too, was got up at a great expense, and had a blue scarf round his neck, with a huge pin in it, that was sure to make him be accosted as "my noble sportsman" by all the list vendors upon the road; and Mr. Wracketts' whiskers appeared to have taken a fresh growth entirely for the occasion. As for Philip and Spooner—who with all his feebleness was a gentleman—they had simply an ordinary morning costume.

Mr. Spooner was very anxious to take a post-horn, which hung in a wicker case over his boot-stand: but in this he was overruled by Philip, who decided that they had not

in their party any one of sufficiently high moral courage and tractable lips, to ensure them from the liability of exposure to the contempt of the great world, by an immature performance thereon. There was a little time occupied in stowing away the things; for race-course refreshment is always put in impossible hampers, that will not, by any exercise of human ingenuity, go anywhere except under the seats, and not always there. But at last, what with filling the sword-case, and the folds of the head of the landau, and the pockets, and in fact every available corner, they got off. The departure, however, caused great excitement. The unquenchable boys, always so festively inclined, cheered everybody separately as they entered. The maid, on the door-step opposite, paused to look round, as she rested on her hearth-stone, and quite forgot the baker: fair heads peeped round the curtains, and peered through the wire blinds: a courteous young gentleman, in a paper cap and apron, with his shirt-sleeves tucked up, hoped the company generally would win their money, and then said to the postilion, looking at the horse, "Hit him over the head! he's got but one friend, and he's behind him." And with this recommendation they departed.

Bent on pleasure themselves, it was human nature to wonder how shops were being calmly attended to on the Derby day. They pitied the shopkeepers; they pitied the ordinary passengers; and, above all, they pitied the mild clerks on the inevitable omnibuses, all bound towards the Bank, who were doomed to sit in dark offices, upon high stools, all the goodly day, doing sums, copying letters, and listening to the chirping of their own pens.

There was plenty to look at and talk about on the road. All along Clapham Common the inhabitants had turned out to look at the multitude which, now thickened at the different roads from the various quarters of town, met at Kennington. All the villa-gardens were occupied; all the balconies; nay, all the front windows. And where the walls in front were high, the gates were open; and they caught glimpses of smooth velvety lawns, and groups of nice-looking persons, and such crowds of pretty girls! Mr. Spooner declared he never saw so much beauty in his life as was collected in the space of a mile thereabouts. And then Léonie looked

at him, and said she was afraid that he was a wicked fellow, at which Mr. Spooner was very much pleased, more so than he would have been had he seen her foot on Philip's all the time.

Mr. Flitter and Mr. Wracketts knew an immense number of people upon the road, but they were all of the same class, heavy-looking fellows in cumbersome phaetons, or flashily dressed passengers of very miscellaneous four-in-hands. And many were Jews. But Mr. Flitter spoke of all of them as very remarkable men, of enormous wealth, or unbounded talent; and to several he gave titles.

The schools all along the road came out uncommonly strong. They were drawn up as advertisements behind all the play-ground walls, great care being taken to put the fat pupils in front, in order that the spectators might be impressed with notions of the liberal feeding of the proprietors; and hereat Mr. Wracketts made great merriment by saying, that he almost wondered they did not adorn the healthiest-looking scholars with placards, labelled "In this style at five guineas a quarter." At this Mr. Spooner laughed loudest; less, however, from appreciation of the joke, than from the fact that Mr. Wracketts was the husband of such a beautiful lady.

"I was very lucky to fall into this party," said Wyndham: "for I had a good many offers of a seat from all sorts of friends. Young Rasper, of the Guards—you know Young Rasper, Philip: we dined with him in the Beauchamp Tower?"

Philip was glad to admit the intimacy before the ladies and Mr. Spooner.

"Well—he keeps a cab, and two horses, and all sorts of things, upon his lieutenant's pay: and he wanted me to be 'shooter' to his drag, and chaff the snobs coming back."

"And why did you not go?" asked Philip.

"Because he said I must wear a purple veil and white paletot, as they were going in livery, to cut out the Second Life Guards, who were coming over from Windsor in straw hats, regularly thatched to a man. Now I did not see that as he did, so I declined."

"And who were the others?" inquired Léonie.

"Oh! Jack Brixy offered me a perch on the hind seat of

his dog-cart, which tipped back last year going up Piccadilly, and lifted the horse in the air, from being wrongly balanced."

"How absurd, to be sure!" said the ladies.

"Then my laundress's husband launched a van, and wanted me to take a seat—eighteen inside, six on the front, and one or two on the top, with a pair of horses, and to start at six in the morning, with liberty to bait at every public house on the road. And, lastly, my friend Barker, of Lyons Inn—you know Barker of Lyons Inn?—wanted me to join him in a landau."

"And, of course, you did?" observed Mr. Wracketts.

"Rather. I know what joining Barker is, in anything. Very like betting gloves with a woman, or taking a share in a Frankfort lottery, or accepting an invitation from an Irishman about town to dine at Blackwall, or lending money through an advertisement. It all comes to the same."

The usual halt at the turnpike gave a fine opportunity for the wind instruments to show off, which they did with more or less effect—all playing at once, and all different tunes. Just at this minute, a drag with some stylish young men on it, came up alongside the landau, and Philip was somewhat surprised to see two of the passengers wink distinctly at Mrs. Wracketts; and this he perceived even through the purple veils which the others all wore, which in some measure bore out Wyndham's story—but liars are at times uncommonly lucky—evidently by an arrangement, and not altogether without its advantages. For the dust flew in heavy clouds; the whole of the road appeared to have taken up its abode in the air; the hedges were the same colour as the ground; and the white chalky powder, settling on the reeking horses, gave them the appearance of zebras; whilst the whole country to leeward appeared to be choking, and gasping for a heavy shower.

Mr. Spooner, who had not seen the recognition—if it was one—from the drag (which would have kindled all his ire), here attempted a small joke, feeling that it was time he said something smart; and intimated that the crowd was raising the dust in order that the losers might come down with it handsomely on settling day. But Mr. Flitter very properly reproved him for this unseemly conduct, in a jocular way, though, and with great pleasantry; otherwise there is no

telling where he would have ended. They might have been treated with the whole host of conventional jokes allowed on the occasion, which, if not nipped in the bud, get to such dangerous lengths with people who will be funny under natural difficulties.

There was more and more to look at, however, in lieu of talking, every minute. The pedestrians from short distances now began to increase, strapping away at the rate of four miles and a half per hour, with hedge-stakes in their hands and their coats under their arms—real amateurs of the race—fellows who had seen the Derby run every year since they were children. They received many salutations from the passers-by, such as, "You look precious tired, old fellow; why don't you run behind your boots?" or, "Throw your legs over your shoulder to rest yourself." But they were working too hard to reply.

Epsom was, as usual, crowded: in fact, in front of the Spread Eagle the road was almost impassable; and both Mr. Flitter and Mr. Wracketts had enough to do to acknowledge the many tokens of acquaintance from the freckled-faced men, without gloves, who formed the greater part of the throng. Beyond the town, the recognitions were still kept up, but not so frequently. Mr. Spooner did not notice them so much, as he was all eyes for the scene about him. The wide, open country, the rich foliage of Woodcot-park—the "hill" blackened with carriages and human beings, and dotted with colours, as if different huge paint-brushes had been spattered down upon it—the mighty clouds of dust flying far away over the country—the long lines of carriages and foot-people crossing the Downs in all directions—joined to form a panorama at which Philip, no less than Mr. Spooner, was completely bewildered.

By some acquaintance with the constables, Mr. Wyndham Flitter got one of the best positions on the course for their carriage: and then, after brushing one another, and entering into a desperate combat of eight to prevent their horses from being taken to all parts of the course by bands of stable brigands, they prepared to enjoy the race.

Of course, there was to be a sweepstakes, amongst themselves; and of course, Mr. Spooner had to bet a dozen pairs of Houbigant's gloves—six and three quarters—with Mrs. Wracketts, upon some horse secretly recommended to him

by Mr. Wyndham Flitter. Philip was not worried much to bet. Mr. Flitter had other views respecting him, which required to be gradually and calmly carried out. So he talked unconcernedly about the people and the weather—paid compliments to Miss Courcy, and did other things that only required surface attention. He was rapidly turning over his scheme in his mind, when his eye caught that of a tall man standing in the crowd of tag-rag-and-bobtail that surrounded the carriages. He directly recognised the ganger, Sherrard. An almost imperceptible gesture of the other drew him from the landau. He made some trifling excuse about seeing after the latest betting, or something of the kind, and then followed the other, at a little distance, to the outskirts of the Course, amongst the encampments of the various tribes of vagrants who follow the races about from one county to another, all over England.

When they got apart from the throng, they both sat down upon the turf, in the shade of a tilted cart, shut out from the gaze of loiterers by a furze hedge: and then commenced their talk immediately.

"I expected I should find you here," said the ganger: "and that was half the reason of my coming up. I've got a bit of business though, with it—a booth and stabling affair over yonder."

"Are you from Pottleton, then?" asked Wyndham.

"Yes: and a hard fight I've had with them there. They pulled me up to the Bench at last; but I got off though, somehow or another, and now they can't touch me. My wife's down there, in the workhouse; but I haven't bothered her. The parish can afford to keep her better than I can. Why should I?"

"Very true—why should you? But what did you want with me?"

"You must keep constantly down at Pottleton if you wish to do anything," replied the ganger. "Old Twinch appeared for me at the Bench, and, when it was over, asked me about Philip Hammond. What do you think I told him—that I had heard of him in town; but that I did not think he was going on very well."

"Quite right: but do you think the girl does not suppose

to the contrary. She's very tough in that respect, and I know he has written to her frequently."

"I know it too," said Sherrard; "but, somehow or other, the postman must have made a mistake in the delivery of the letters. They came to me."

As the ganger spoke, with a grim smile, he took the handkerchief from his neck, and unfolding it, produced two or three letters from the envelope, which he showed to Wyndham.

"How on earth did you come by those?" inquired the other.

"I found the black servant at Monkscroft, unwiring a hare one morning—they don't get paid over-well there, and I suppose the servants look after the stray game to sell to the railway poulterers. I told him I'd inform; and so got *him* in my power. He went every morning for the letters, and those I told him to keep back, he did. There they are.

"You are wonderful," said Wyndham. "I can't see how she can do any otherwise than mistrust him. I know I've done my share to make her."

"But it is time that it came to a head," observed Sherrard. "Can you get Philip into any out-and-out mess to-day: something that there shall be no mistake about?"

"It is difficult. He is so damned prudent, in general. Léonie is our only chance. He is rather gone in that quarter already: and a hot sun like this, upon champagne, will do a great deal more."

"At any rate, don't put off your visit to Pottleton. If you don't go, he will: so start to-morrow, and make the best use of your time. Dazzle her—you can if you choose. Talk *at* Philip—hope he is getting on well, but fear that he is too apt to be led away by company."

"But I have done all this."

"Well—do it again; you can't too often. Marry the girl, get the chink, and share it with me. The whole concern lies in a nut-shell."

"But rather difficult to crack," added Wyndham. "However, faint heart never won a good fortune. I suppose, at last, it is to be done."

"Done!" returned the other, in a tone of slight contempt,

at the practicability of the affair being for a moment questioned. "Done!—pshaw! What did I do with the old woman by a little management and nursing? Why, I got her to alter her will altogether."

"I don't care if the matter is hurried on," said Mr. Flitter; "for the state of my pocket is getting a good deal too interesting. Money is running away like sand. I must work some more from young Spooner. The worst is, with it all, Wracketts sticks to his commission, if Léonie works all our plans."

"Ah! very well—never mind him," replied Sherrard. "Quite an after consideration. However, you had better get back to them, only keep what I have said in mind."

"Devil doubt it," replied Wyndham, "and make hay while the iron is hot, or whatever it is—you know. All right, old fellow. Good bye."

And he then left his companions to rejoin the party on the Course.

The race was what it always is. A great deal of expectancy and preparation, and an enormous amount of noise; much eye-straining and contradiction as to the position of any colour or horse; a plague of parasols, always in the way; a mighty surging murmur, ending in a roar of voices; and then the whole business is over; at least, with the generality of the visitors; but this day Mr. Flitter's was just commencing. Beginning with the light skirmishing of getting up bets for gloves, and making small sweepstakes, in which Mr. Spooner was singularly unfortunate, and Maitland got rid of all his money, and then sending the champagne round so rapidly, that the strongest brains in the world must have quivered under its influence, he got his victims into precisely the state that he desired.

Philip had made great resolutions not to drink much; but such cannot be kept at Epsom, on a hot afternoon after the race. For everybody around is in such a state of wild hilarity; there reigns such a perfect thoughtlessness everywhere with respect to any other world but that collected on the Downs, or any future consequences dependent upon whatever may be done there, that reflection is scared away as intrusive and out of place. Mr. Wyndham Flitter was less excited than the others, for it was not altogether such a new

scene to him, and he had much to attend to—constantly whispering in Philip's ear how lovely Mrs. Wracketts looked, calling attention to the object of admiration that she evidently was, and finally getting Philip over to his way of thinking, to the discomfort of Mr. Spooner, who was gradually approaching the fever heat of winy jealousy.

Miss Courcy kept very quiet—so much so, indeed, that she discouraged Mr. Spooner's advances, even under the influence of race-course champagne. That is to say, she was not proud, but she appeared frightened, in spite of all the excuses that Mrs. Wracketts made for her; or that lady's endeavours to draw her out. And once, when asked to take wine with Mr. Spooner, she said, "No, thank you—I have just had some;" and, at another time, he saw her put her knife to her mouth in connexion with some gravy from a pigeon-pie. But, in his state of mind, these observations were obliterated the next instant by those which succeeded.

"At length the time came to be off. Amidst the confusion attendant upon the breaking up of this mighty assembly —the people looking after their carriages, and the carriages looking after their company; with post-boys frantically persisting in trying to get through impossible places, believing that where their horses' heads could go the rest of the equipage could easily follow—amidst one thousand post-horns blowing at once, to the utter bewilderment of those to whom the note of some particular one was to be a signal—amidst jibbing cattle and tipsy whips, and the roar of the brass orchestra on the large show, combined with the score of smaller bands about the Course; with splitting panels and shivering poles, locked wheels, unworthy linch-pins, red-hot axles, imbecile spokes, and dissipated felloes—amidst all this whirl of wild recklessness did the journey home commence.

They were all ready for anything, and the larking began at the very edge of the race-course. There were two large vans there, advertising some cheap crockeryware, with specimens of the dishes and basins affixed, and placards of "Halloo! look here! here's a dinner-set for ten shillings!!" or, "What! only a pound for that service? it's impossible!" This was too tempting a mark to be overlooked; and as the landau came near, Mr. Spooner, who felt that it was time he did something to keep up his reputation of being a fast man

before Mrs. Wracketts, took aim at it with a musical pear, which he had brought down from one of the sticks, and knocked off a devoted milk jug. Philip was not in the humour to be behind him in anything, and threw a shell at the sugar basin. The first blows had been struck, and the war against china was determined on. From the masked batteries of the carriages near them there came such a shower of toys—such money-boxes, wooden apples and snakes—such Jacks, pincushions, and lemons, that in two minutes every vestige of the crockery was cleared away, a shout of triumph shaking the air as each cheese-plate, pie-dish, and slop-basin fell smashed upon the turf. In vain did the proprietor, mad with rage, remonstrate—he was driven back by a discharge of grape from a pea-shooter, at least a yard long; and, when the ruin of his citadel was completed, he remained, as Mr. Spooner observed, "Marius-like, amid the ruins." Mrs. Wracketts did not clearly know who Marius was; if Mr. Spooner had said Mario, she would have understood him much better—but she smiled and squeezed in her eyes, and showed her lovely teeth, and threw a tint over her face from her parasol, which did just as well, and made Mr. Spooner quite happy again.

And everybody else was the same. The remarkable idiosyncrasy now most observable amongst the company was a propensity to sit on the vehicles any how but in the proper and appointed position. Those on the hind parts of the drags preferred turning their backs to the horses, and lolling their legs over the boot, as they blew a defiance at the throng following them from their post-horns and cornets-à-piston. With the omnibuses the roof was the favourite perch; so it was even with one or two Hansoms: and in the landau, Philip and Mr. Spooner had scrambled into an insecure sitting on the doubled-up head, in preference to the normal seat. In the vans, of which there were many, the passengers sat over the sides, turning the vehicle into a species of extended jaunting-car.

But the philanthropist and well-wisher to his species might have been chiefly delighted with the good-fellowship that reigned amidst the masses. For gentlemen on drags challenged others on 'busses to take wine with them, whom they had never met before, and whom the chances were, they

would never see again, nor, indeed, would wish to. And stoppages at the turnpikes established temporary intimacies of the most wonderful description, which usually commenced in insult and speeches calculated to wound the feelings, and ended in pledging one another. And as regarded the insults, Mr. Spooner was a frequent recipient of them, but, ever and anon, when he began to be savage, the aggressor would pay him a compliment by saying, "I say, old feller, you know—you're one of the right sort; let's have some sherry together." Whereupon Mr. Spooner's flushed and contracted brow would relax into pleasantry, and he would incontinently abandon his intention of taking off his coat, even before Mrs. Wracketts, and getting down "to fight the snob," which, terribly against his will, even full as he was with champagne, he felt called upon to do. And then he forgot all past grievances, even to having been told "that his mother couldn't know he was out, because he never had one," which otherwise might have engendered great ire, and been considered, by touchy dispositions, a reflection on their pedigree; and drank with his new acquaintance some "Derby sherry" (which is the race-course name for artificial cape)—the said new acquaintance pledging him out of a mustard-pot, with every token of warm-hearted friendship.

The fun was now at its full height, and Mr. Wyndham Flitter was in his glory; for no matter what a man's social position is—like the grave, the return from the Derby levels all distinctions. Philip was also ripe for anything, and Mr. Spooner essayed imitations of the two—daringly feeble, but which gave him great satisfaction when the ladies laughed.

"I say, Sir," cried Wyndham; "Yes, you on the grey mare. Don't you think you'd be more comfortable if you was to get inside and pull down the blinds."

The Gent on the grey mare, which, for this day at least, was not the better horse, tried to look pleasant, but was exceedingly angry nevertheless, thinking he had not made the hit that was intended.

"Now, then, you muff!" exclaimed Mr. Spooner, "just make up your mind where you want to go—that's all!"

The "Muff" addressed, who had been trying to break the line, got nervous, and backed half round against the off

fore-wheel of a Whitechapel van. There was great recrimination, and then a tableau of general confusion.

"Halloo!" cried Philip; "Sir! I say, Joseph Robins, general salesman."

Joseph Robins, who was not aware that the person who now addressed him had read off his name, calling, and address, from the back of his cart, turned round, with a pleasant face, as if to meet a friend.

"How dy'e do?" continued Philip. "You may be a devilish clever chap at 25, Handley-street, Commercial-road East, but you don't come out strong at Sutton."

"Sir—if you please, sir," cried Wyndham, to another victim, "whip behind!"

An old gentleman from Tooting, who was driving his family nondescript at six miles an hour, believed that bad boys were hanging on behind, and commenced flogging the spikes at random, until the lash caught round one of them, and he was obliged to dismount.

This is but a specimen of what was kept up the whole way, and through it all the heat was tremendous. The very dust was almost red hot; the ponds were smoking, to a degree that would have parboiled the fish had they contained any, and there was no shade anywhere. The sunbeams themselves appeared to have warped with their own heat: and twisted under tilts and parasols, trees, marquees, and awnings, and all sorts of usually impenetrable places. But still the throng kept pouring, and shouting, and striving on—the horses looking like zebras, with their stripes of dust and perspiration; and all the grass that could be seen seemed to be making itself into hay. In fact, nothing was cool except an ostler at one of the inns, who asked a shilling for a pail of water. It was fortunate for the ice that it was all eaten. What it would have come to, packed up in double blankets, it is scarcely possible to think about. In fact, the races were one grand heat, which lasted all day long.

All this went on; and at last they stopped at The Cock at Sutton—who does not, under similar circumstances? And here the Gordian knot of carriages was wonderful; and Mr. Flitter and Mr. Wracketts appeared to know everybody upon the imprisoned vehicles, many being without the slightest chance of ever again getting out from the mass, with fresh

ones stopping, until the very road was blocked up. It must have been a wonderful harvest for the inn, had it only consisted in the consumption of pale ale; for everybody drank it, and the landau party not having had enough, did like the rest. And it must have been a harvest for the ostlers as well; who ran about from one horse to another, with a whisp of hay which lasted all day. Had it been alight, and they had merely wished to singe the animal, they could not have applied and taken it away more rapidly.

There are certain places which, from only being seen on particular days of revelry, we do not believe to exist at any other time. The Cock at Sutton is one of these; Sunninghill Wells is another, and Hampton Ferry is a third. Without doubt, they constantly exist where we see them at race-times, enjoying a certain existence, independent of these great days of the year; but we confess that we do not lend our minds readily to this probability. We rather incline to the opinion that the lives of the inhabitants must be a succession of Derby, Cup, and Plate days; and that when these are over, they fall into a torpor only to awake again next May or June.

The pale ale was finished, and, in the eyes of Mr. Spooner and Philip, Mrs. Wracketts became more lovely at every sip. It was a sad thing to think that Annie had been forgotten by Philip nearly all day; but it was so. When they got away from the ruck of carriages, the events of the road did not give any more time for reflection; and "chaff" was again in the ascendant, promoted by all the readiness that pale ale upon champagne dashed with cheap sherry, can institute.

Before long, they came up to three hack-cabs, each of which had the name of Birch conspicuously printed on their backs. Of course this was an opportunity not to be lost, and Mr. Flitter began accordingly. "Now, then, Birch; hop your twig!" An old gentleman inside, who was a man of portly figure, looked cross, and was immediately saluted by Philip with a wooden apple filled with tea-things, which broke against him, scattering its contents like canister shot.

"Now, Birch," cried Mr. Spooner, in the pride of saying a good thing, "Don't spare yourself, and spoil the old gentleman—flog him on."

Philip thought of a sum. "If five yards and a half make

one rod, pole, or Birch," he said, "what time do you expect to get home?"

Just then four City men came up on a dog-cart, and connecting the name of Birch with something to eat, asked him if he had got a ticket for soup? And next, the dog-cart passed the Birches by turning one of them half round, upon which the driver was recommended, the next time he came out, to bring his other pair of hands with him that he had left at home. And on they all went again.

And now there was more telegraphic health-drinking, more chaff, and many more post-horns. But the post-horns were getting uncertain in their notes; indeed the high C appeared to be now beyond the reach of everybody, even "when other lips" that had rested all the time, tried to bring it out. There was another general pull up at the Buck's Head at Mitcham, after they had passed the Red Lion, which appeared to be the *rendezvous* of all the vans; and the horses which had pulled all the way thirty people from Shoreditch to the Downs, and were going to take them back again, were having a bait as well as the inmates, who, indeed, had been at it all day. For it is a curious thing that the passengers of vans upon a trip are always eating. They nibble all the way they are going—they lunch directly they get to the Course—they dine after the Derby—and they take every advantage all the way home, of picking a bit, now and then, just to stay their stomachs till supper time.

Off they went again, and the schools at Mitcham formed fresh matter of fun; for Mitcham is the region, *par excellence*, of academies. You will never see so many anywhere as are gathered together in this village. All the same pupils were still drawn up behind the walls, or stood upon benches to look over the palings and see the company go by. It was, nevertheless, a great holiday for them; and most especially when Philip threw things at the usher, usually selected for the target.

It was now getting dusk. Lights were beginning to appear in the road; and when they once more got to Clapham-common, the whole place looked as twinkling as the area of Buckingham Palace does from Piccadilly. Pots of grease had been lighted on all the shows; and the illuminated lamps, hung upon the roundabouts, were twirling about as if Vaux-

hall was having a waltz all to itself. But still the road was densely bordered with lookers-on. You might almost have imagined that the Course, like one of the India-rubber bands, had been stretched out the whole way from Epsom to Kennington.

At last they came to the turnpike, and here, from the ticket nuisance, the crowd of vehicles was tremendous. For some little while Philip had noticed some men upon a four-in-hand directing most especial attention to Mrs. Wracketts and her cousin: and when they came up alongside, in the stoppage, the driver flicked his whip at her parasol, accompanying the action with a peculiar noise, something like a smack, from his lips.

"Do you know this lady?" cried Philip, going off like a rocket, at the implied salute.

"Beg your pardon—wh-at?" drawled the dragsman, with patrician unconcern.

"You are a blackguard!" continued the other, losing his temper altogether, and springing up in the carriage to seize the offender, as the vehicles were now close together.

A few violent blows were exchanged like lightning between them, when the postilion of the Wracketts' equipage, seeing the way clear through the gate, whipped on, to cut out the other vehicles pressing towards it. Still Philip had clutched the man on the drag, when one of the friends of the latter aimed a sharp blow at the fingers of the aggressor, with a post-horn, handed over from behind, which had the effect of making him loose his hold. At that instant the horses sprung forward, and the drag was left behind.

All was, however, not over, and there was still a chance of the ladies fainting. For the tollman appeared bent upon entertaining a different opinion to everybody who passed, as to their having been through before: and Mr. Spooner, believing that he was still doing the fast thing, and excited by the fracas just over, exclaimed, as he passed by,

"That's the ticket!"

But he soon found out that it was not, the voracious pike requiring something either way.

"Oh! it's all right, stupid!" cried Philip, boiling over with excitement. And then he continued to the postilion, "What the devil are you stopping for—go on!"

"No you don't," cried the man, running to the horses' heads, and backing them.

"Leave the horses alone," cried Philip, "unless I am to come and make you."

"Not till you have paid," said the man.

"Lend me your whip," cried Philip, to the driver of a tax-cart at their side. The stranger was very glad to have the chance of making a turnpike-keeper uncomfortable, so directly handed the whip to Philip, who climbed round to the edge of the box, and commenced lashing the pikeman most furiously, as though he wished to give him the full benefit of the thrashing he had intended for the other adversary. The man still kept hold of the horses, however: and Philip getting more furious every minute, and heated with the liquor he had been imbibing, disregarding the remonstrances of his companions and the shrieks of the women, jumped down and struck the other with his fist.

Philip was an admirable boxer, but he had found his match. For powerful men are commissioned on Derby days to look after turnpikes, in the anticipation of troublesome customers; and the present occupant being a professed bruiser, he struck at Philip in an instant, driving his hard sledge-hammer fist full in his face. His adversary tried to follow up the attack, but he was overpowered, and in a few rounds fell bleeding and almost senseless in the road.

A regular row was beginning generally amongst the crowd; and Mr. Wyndham Flitter, seeing a body of police in the offing, got out of the landau to his friend's assistance; not to fight, however, but to pick him up, and, with Mr. Wrackett's assistance, to lift him into a cab, in which, lying along the seat almost like a corpse, he was rapidly driven off, the second payment of the gate having been made, as usual, by Mr. Spooner, who was generally appealed to under similar circumstances.

The Return from the Races.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANNIE GOES TO LADY FLOKES'S.

As Miss Twinch had suspected, the visit paid by Annie, when she left the house so suddenly on the evening of the quarrel, was to Mr. Page. She had explained everything: and the good young curate, who might now be considered her only real protector, had promised at once to see about something for her. We have found out how the bad conduct of Patience Stiles fortunately provided an opportunity: and, within a day or two, Annie had left the Twinches, and was installed in her new abode.

The apartment provided by Lady Flokes for her new companion adjoined her own, and was not a very lively one. It looked against the portion of the hill which had been cut away for the house to be built on the slope, and which here rose perpendicularly within a few feet of the window, so that there was no look out, except upon the holes made by the sand-martin, and a few hanging brambles from which depended some melancholy reddened leaves that lasted throughout the winter, and always had a drop of condensed damp at their extremities. The room was wainscoted with oak, which the taste of some former owner had whitewashed: and there were great cracks all about it, which let in currents of air in every direction, and served to ventilate the territory of bricks and cobwebs behind. When rain was expected, huge spiders made their appearance from these openings, crawling along the wall with a noise perfectly audible: and at all times the mice kept up great activity amongst themselves. Where they got their food, in an establishment like that of old Lady Flokes, was curious to consider: for nothing was ever left about to nourish them, except the cheese-rind in the trap. They were frequently heard grating away at the wainscot; but this must have been from mere wilfulness and lack of occupation. They had great commotions among themselves though, nevertheless. Now and then one might hear them

all rush round the wainscot in a great body: after which they would keep quite still for a minute, only to get ready for another charge, or fall down apparently from the ceiling to the skirting, making the very bell-wires rattle in their course. This, at first, disturbed the rest of the occupants; but it was so constant, that after a time they got used to it.

On the first night of Annie's arrival, Lady Flokes had ordered a fire to be made in the old rusty grate, from some damp green wood picked up in the park, and a few fir-apples to give it a start. This, at its outset, had choked everybody with the smoke, which curled out in front of the mantelpiece and pervaded the room instead of going up the chimney: nor was it until Julius, the black servant, had probed it with a clothes-prop, and brought down a conglomeration of soot and old bird-nests that a draft was established: and a little pile of crackling sputtering fuel got up to welcome the new inmate. Annie had secured the services of Whacky Clark and his barrow to transport her boxes: and Mr. Page accompanied her—a proceeding upon his part not lost on the Misses Twinch, who commented in severe terms on such impropriety. The good curate had tea with the two ladies, and then left them alone.

"Now Mr. Page is gone, my dear," said Lady Flokes, when the young clergyman had departed, "I've got a little treat for us; but there was not enough for three. Ah! dear me—where is it? Reach me down that roundabout thing."

This was one of the Patna boxes, which had been presented to Lady Flokes by Mrs. Spink, of oriental celebrity in the village. Its colours were bright red and yellow, and it opened in half-a-dozen different places, so that everything in it was sure to tumble out, without caution. But as Lady Flokes gave it, in this case, Annie was successful in exposing its treasures.

In the top division—for its compartments were arranged like those of a conjuring toy, which shows eggs, and no eggs, and black balls, and red ones, according to the solution of its continuity fixed upon in opening it—in this top division were only a few cloves, some tin tacks, and a hair pin. In the next, which was deeper, were the kernels of all the wall-fruit Lady Flokes had partaken of during the autumn, put by, from some old domestic superstition that they contributed a

certain useless flavour to brandy: and from the lower and larger compartments were turned out some little bundles of a dry dingy material—some of which might have been taken for very small cigars, an inch long; and others were screwed up in knobs of paper of a yellowish hue, like large detonating balls.

"There!" said Lady Flokes: "those are parcels of the finest tea known, and were given to my dear lord by Sir Poonah Bangles, when he dined at the India House. I will tell you all about that some day. Ah! there is no such tea now."

Annie thought them very curious. But there was a withered bloomless look about them, which might have made one pause to consider whether the last words of Lady Flokes were matters of regret or congratulation.

"Now we will put two into this little teapot," said the old lady, reaching down another relic of antiquity from the mantelpiece. "There! and now some water. Ah! the urn's got quite cold."

There was no prospect of the iron becoming hot again in the present fire, so the old housekeeper was rung up—or rather a nervous tremor of the bell showed that she was needed, more than its sound, as the wires had all loosened into festoons.

"Margery," said Lady Flokes, as the old woman appeared, "make the heater red again."

"There's no fire, my lady," replied the woman: "them green boughs from the copse won't burn a bit. I'll take it over to the blacksmith's."

This appeared to be the usual practice under such circumstances: so Julius was dispatched with the urn and heater, to Mr. Rung's, who kept the forge close to the gates, and had been appealed to, before this, to cook, in the summer-time when household fires were less necessary. As this took some little time, Lady Flokes entertained Annie with anecdotes of Bath in her young days, and stories about remote elections, when Lord Flokes contested the county for a fortnight, and his pretty nieces, the Honourable Miss Wellsbys, gave a kiss a piece to all the young farmers who voted for their uncle, or even brought up a plumper. And then, next, she hunted in an old dingy pocket-book, that shut with a clasp instead of

a tuck, and produced a quantity of old squibs and paragraphs, from the local papers of the time, which she read to Annie. But they had a spirit difficult to enter into: for the allusions referred to people and things long passed away, which even personal explanation could not render clear. As well might any one have endeavoured to have understood the cutting sarcasms which some dirty little boy of Pompeii chalked on its walls, to be discovered after a lapse of centuries, the influence of which nothing but the pickles in the Museum at Portici has withstood.

At length the urn and its heater returned, steaming like a plum-pudding in a pantomime, and it was placed on the table, when Lady Flokes commenced the brewing. As soon as it was supposed to have drawn enough, she poured out a slightly tinged fluid, into two minute cups, and then invited Annie to taste it.

"There:" said the old lady. "You must drink it as it is—no sugar: that would ruin it: indeed, I never take sugar at all with my tea; and I like it rather weak, or else it affects my nerves. Don't you think so?"

Of course Annie did not entertain a contrary opinion, but tasted the beverage. It was not very good—something like an infusion of brown paper.

"I think the strength must have gone, by keeping," said Lady Flokes; "but still it is a great curiosity, or else Sir Poonah Bangles would never have given it to us. Margery!"

There was no reply to Lady Flokes, so she told Annie to ring a small-hand-bell over the stairs, whilst she thumped on the floor with a walking-stick, or crutch, at her side. These combined signals had the effect of bringing the housekeeper to her room.

"Margery," said the old lady, "don't throw away these tea-leaves: they're very curious. Put the pot very carefully by; that will do: and now, my dear, open that bureau top. I can amuse you."

Annie did as she was commanded, and revealed a quantity of dingy old letters, pocket-books, scent-bottles, and small parcels thrust into the pigeon-holes of the piece of furniture.

"Ah, dear me!" said Lady Flokes. "I could tell you long stories about everything there, and I will, some day. That

was my patch-box when I went to court with my dear lord: and that—ah! never mind that; put it by."

It was a book of Chinese rouge, that looked green and rubbed crimson, which Lady Flokes was anxious to put aside.

There were next produced a quantity of old souvenirs—double nuts, broken merrythoughts, and crooked coins, each of which the old lady particularized; and at last Annie turned out a gilt chatelaine, with an *etui* hanging to it, made of china in the shape of a woman's leg.

"Ah!" said Lady Flokes: "now that *is* a curiosity. It belonged to my grandmother, Lady Brankley, and was given to her by the young Pretender. It isn't a story I could tell everywhere, or before everybody, but I don't mind you."

Annie wondered what it could possibly be about, that the old lady had put in so peculiar a light. But her speculations were put a stop to by the commencement of

LADY FLOKES'S ANECDOTE.

My grandmother, Lady Brankley, whose picture you will see on the staircase, was Miss Stuart, of Lauderby, and her father lived in an old moated house, almost as large as a village, on the border. There's a picture of it on a screen in the library, just as it was a hundred years ago, at the time of this story.

It was after the battle of Culloden that a great price was set upon Prince Charles Edward's head—I think it was as much as thirty thousand pounds: and King George's troops looked everywhere after him. Amongst other places they came to my ancestor's, who, although a royalist, was suspected to be a relation of the abdicated family: and so they left a handful of soldiers there, to keep a look-out, commanded by Captain—afterwards Sir Arthur—Brankley. He fell in love with Caroline, and they were privately married one fine morning at Lauder Church: which, I think, was the best thing they could have done, for the officers were just the same then as they are now—ah! dear me: sad fellows!

Let me see—where was I? ah—to be sure: they were married on the sly, and were obliged to keep their honeymoon on the sly, too: for neither could leave the castle. But they

made a Romeo-and-Juliet affair of it; and Caroline was always with her husband, for she could get to his apartments by the terrace: and nobody but an old woman who had nursed her father, as they said, was in the secret.

One night—and in the middle of the night, too—there was a sudden uproar at the moat bridge-gate. Some silly report had reached the head-quarters that the young Pretender had come to Stuart's house, and was then concealed there: so when the troops were admitted, under the command of Captain Edward Wuthering, there was a regular search. Brankley, who had been called up on the first alarm, took them all over the house (and even into the maids' rooms, about which there was terrible talk with the idle beaux at court); but of course they found nobody. They could not, you know, because nobody was there. They went into the cellars, and the wood-houses, and the entrance of some old passages which were said to go under the moat, but were choked up with rubbish after a little way: however it was all of no use.

At last Captain Wuthering said to Brankley, "Captain Brankley, we are quite satisfied, and I am sorry that I have disturbed you. Of course we have respected Miss Stuart's chamber, but—only by way of form—I must walk round yours, and then I will draw off with my men." Well—do you know, this was terrible—the worst of anything that could have happened: for the young bride was in his room—and, I do believe, her father, who was a terrible temper would have shot them both on the spot, had he known it.

As Wuthering said this to Brankley, he saw him start, and his suspicions were directly excited.

"I think this is your room," he said, advancing to the door, which was at the end of a long corridor.

"Captain Wuthering!" cried Brankley, nearly beside himself, "you must not go in there!"

You may suppose how dreadful the moment was: for the other now made sure that the young Pretender was there, and determined upon going in, and Brankley was as determined to prevent him.

"I give you my word of honour, as an officer in the King's service," he said, "that there is no cause for suspicion in that chamber."

"Will you give your word that there is *no one* there?" asked the other, who saw that he was not speaking with a straightforward meaning.

"No!" cried Brankley, out loud and at once, placing himself in the doorway, for he was a fine and bold young gentleman. "But you shall not go in." And, do you know, he drew his sword.

Captain Wuthering drew back, and was silent for a moment or two; for Brankley's behaviour quite astonished him; and then he said, "Sir, let us understand one another: and, for God's sake, do not mistake the spirit in which I address you. It would embitter all my future life to know that I had been the cause of the death of so gallant a gentleman as Captain Arthur Brankley: but I must obey my orders. If you will not let us pass by you, we must scramble over you."

"Stop!" cried Brankley: "one moment—and you shall enter. You need not fear an escape: the window of the room is thirty feet above three yards of walls, with goodness knows how much mud below that. Captain Wuthering—by the time you have counted out thirty sheep from this fold, you shall enter."

The other put back his men, who were getting ready the dreadful clattering guns they carried at that time, and Brankley went into the room. It was lucky for him that the Laird had over-toped that night, and was slow to be aroused. If he had come down no one can tell what would have happened.

"Now, sir, you can come in," said Brankley, when he appeared again at the door.

"Captain Wuthering entered, and ten or twelve of his men with him, who formed, all in a line, along the wainscot where the door was. He advanced first to the bed, and there he saw, beyond all doubt, a human form lying on it, but covered up like a corpse. He went towards it, to turn down the sheet that was over the face, when Arthur Brankley stopped him once more.

"You must not do that," he said. "On my honour, you must not."

"Our notions of honour may be different, sir," replied the other, with a half-sneer.

"You will not say that to-morrow, Captain Wuthering,"

exclaimed Arthur, almost trembling with rage, as he left the bedside, and came to the foot. "Now, look here," he added: "and respect me."

Well—do you know, he took the clothes at the foot of the bed, and rolled them gradually back, and back, and back; until he showed Captain Wuthering—and I have heard that his heart beat like a gong as he did it—the most beautiful pair of feet and ankles in the world; for they were—and generally acknowledged to be so: and that is why all our family have been just the same. There could be no doubt on the matter: they were not those of Prince Charles Edward, thorough-bred as he was.

"There!" said Arthur Brankley: "I think, sir, *this* does not look much like the young Pretender."

Captain Wuthering saw how affairs were in a minute: for I have heard, that he was a gay fellow in his day; but he was an old, grey-headed gentleman when I knew him. He did not press the investigation farther. He bowed, and said he was perfectly satisfied; and then, as he had looked all over the house, he withdrew his men.

After a time Caroline's father knew all about it. There was a great to-do at first, for Arthur Brankley had no money; and they say that people whose names are properly recollected never have any. But when, in after times, he earned a great name with Colonel Monckton, in America,—(where indeed we were terribly beaten; and that is the truth, as my dear lord often confessed, but a British defeat is always called a negative victory) — when this came, Caroline's father thought greatly of him; and, I am sure, he was exceedingly proud at last of his son-in-law, Sir Arthur Brankley. But there was a joke against Lady Brankley, about her beautiful legs to her dying day.

Old Lady Flokes concluded her story to Annie's great admiration. But she did not tell it exactly as we have written it down. On the contrary, she made it six times the length, not from any introduction of fresh points of interest, but from frequent commentaries and links, with alien matters during its progress, none of which ever came to a proper termination; but, stopping suddenly, had to be retraced to the starting

place. In fact, her anecdote, as it was told, was very like a labyrinth in its course: and its final point as troublesome to reach as the trees or temple which form the paradise of such arrangements.

"I think we'll have just a little more fire," said the old lady, "to last till bed-time. My dear, will you reach the coals?"

Annie took up the small scuttle, and was going to throw its contents upon the grate, in the usual way, when Lady Flokes suddenly stopped her.

"No—no!" she cried; "not so. Bless me! you would burn me out of house and home. This is the way I like my fire made up."

The scuttle was placed before the fender, and then Lady Flokes took an instrument which hung at her side, made in silver, and very like the piece of parallel mechanism on which soldiers and poultry are made to march out and draw up together again, in the boxes of cheap toys. With these "lazy tongs," as they were termed, she picked out six or seven knobs of coal, about the size of walnuts, and placed them as carefully on the fire as one would try to make a needle swim on a tumbler of water.

"There!" she said: "now we shall have a nice fire; when coals are crowded on, they put themselves out. The dust does for Julius to make his puddings with, and they are excellent."

Annie was, for a minute, entirely at a loss to comprehend the old lady's meaning. Some remote notion of black men subsisting upon such diet crossed her mind, but this was very fugitive. Lady Flokes, however, explained, that to economize fuel, Julius would mix up the coal-dust with clay, into spherical shapes, which burnt admirably when piled together, and started by more ardent combustibles. The task had formerly been given to Whacky Clark; but that idle lad had been known, on occasions of village revelry, to make the balls of clay merely rolled in the dust, that he might get away soon; and for this reason had been superseded.

"And now, my dear," said the old lady, "we will have a little comfort. Ah! ah! you don't know what I've got. Go to that wardrobe, and take out what I tell you."

Annie went to the wardrobe and opened it. She did not find any clothes, as she had expected, with the exception of a

few dingy old robes, fashioned after the taste of the last century, but an extraordinary collection of glass and crockery—all having been the recipients of certain things sold in them: such as marmalade, Dalby's carminative, rouge, anchovy paste, pomade, medicine, salad oil, smelling salts, and pickles. What they were hoarded for, it was difficult to tell—it was not from their use, either present or probable, but rather from an indisposition to throw away.

"There," said Lady Flokes: "that bottle with the long neck. Bring it down." It was an eau de Cologne bottle, and was half filled with some transparent fluid.

"Now, that is a great treasure," continued Lady Flokes. "It is fine Hollands, and belonged to some given to my dear lord at the time of the truce of Copenhagen. Ah! we had a gay season then."

Two diminutive tumblers were next found, and some sugar produced from an old Pope-Joan board, which formed a species of cruet-stand, containing salt, pepper, and other condiments in its compartments. Some hot water was next poured out from a comical little kettle on the hob, and Lady Flokes manufactured two glasses of beverage—for it could not be called grog—one for herself, and the other for Annie. It was not a more successful brew than the tea had been: the rinsings of a gin-bottle warmed up over a smoky wood-fire could alone give a notion of its taste: but Annie drank it, and then Margery was rung up, and Lady Flokes prepared to go to bed, dismissing Annie to her own cheerless chamber. The old housekeeper, who regarded her as a sort of interloper likely to prove troublesome, had not made any special preparations for her comfort; but Julius believed greatly in Annie, from village report, and had filled the old closet beside the fireplace with chips, and fir cones, and dead branches, so that there was soon a brisk fire, which made the wainscot crack again, with its warmth. And she was soon in bed and asleep, a prey to winged dreams, which in the course of the night troubled her exceedingly, as she more than once imagined that royalist officers, under the command of Young Rasper and Jack Poole, formerly in the Seventh, whom she had met at the Pottleton ball, were searching the house for the Young Pretender, and insisted upon seeing her legs, as coolly as though she had been one of Miss Twinch's

nasty impudent creatures in pink tights, who thought no more of their knees than properly brought up and well-conducted people did of their elbows.

In this manner several days passed in the establishment of Lady Flokes. The old gentlewoman always dined in her bedroom—which, like the convenient abode of the cobler mentioned in a metrical ballad extant, served her for parlour and kitchen and all—and the *carte* was invariably furnished from the products of the Monkscroft estate, inasmuch as she seldom bought anything. And so, although March was gone and past, hares were yet accounted good, and the aberration of intellects popularly ascribed to them in that month, considered no bar to their being jugged as in ordinary. The inscrutable ponds in the garden furnished large carp—an admirable fish well stuffed, and served with red wine gravy, which may be considered in the same light as the brown bread and butter is to whitebait, but less epicurean as Lady Flokes dressed it, plainly boiled; and the hills above, and sunny banks, swarmed with rabbits. The old lady also entertained great notions of apples, throughout the year; and considered hard dumplings fine things, and very filling at the price. Pigs also furnished many a hearty meal: and there was a story that she never gave but one dinner party, which was upon the occasion of having killed a pig. And then she treated her guests, eight in number, to a roast griskin at top, and a boiled leg of pork at bottom, with sausages and black puddings for side dishes, and an *omelette au jambon*, made from the same animal, as a conclusion. And this was told by a person of no less veracity than good Mr. Page, who had been present, and said grace upon the occasion.

In the evening Annie had to listen to her stories, which she was apt, from lack of memory, to tell twice over, and even more frequently than that: but as no great attention was needed—a bow of comprehension, more or less feigned, being all that was required occasionally—the listener could, all the time, indulge in private meditations. Backgammon and double patience required, to be sure, a little more attention; but these games brought a certain degree of interest with them, which relieves the monotony of the level existence. And the volumes of the Pottleton book-club, to which Lady Flokes subscribed, were forwarded on, with great regularity,

by Mr. Wolly, the retired grocer—who being a radical, and believing that every snob had a right to sit down by him, as a brother, yet kept a servant, in what the writers of his side termed "the motley of degradation," (which was the virtuous indignation for "livery,") and delighted in sending him with the books to Lady Flokes's, that she might haply observe how much more expensively got up he was than her own Julius. Thus, altogether, Annie felt tolerably comfortable—far more so, indeed, than she had done amongst the squabbles and jealousies of the sainted spinsters in the Twinch establishment. As the fine weather came on, too, her small pleasures increased: for Nature knew no distinction of position. The scented violets that peeped from the sheltered patches of mould, and the heavy lilacs that bent down their bloom-laden stems, and heralded in the life and heat of summer, flung their odours about as sweetly for her, when she passed, as they would have done for the Queen herself. There was not a bursting germ, or glowing petal, which did not seem to spring into sunny existence for her alone as she regarded it.

And now the fine weather came upon Pottleton. The fruit-trees showered their twinkling blossoms upon the turf below; the furze covered the common with a film of gold; and the chestnuts unfolded the glutinous buds that had sheltered their delicate leaflets from the by-gone frosts; and these last stretched themselves out in the warm light, as did the butterflies their powdered wings, when they had burst their winter cerecloths. All was life and activity: men even felt new blood within them, and, for a season, reversed the wheels of their lives and became younger; and amidst this general progress Mr. Wyndham Flitter came forth again, with renewed force, and arrived at Pottleton.

It was silent sunny noon as he strolled into the village from the station. Cows stood in ponds with their eyes half shut, so still that all the circling ripples had died away; and the horses mumbled hay under the tree in front of the Red Lion, and now and then jangled their bells, as they winced from the flies, or tossed their nosebags into the air, to get the last grains they contained. Everything was very dreamy—very still. One could almost have heard the beat of the clock in the old Norman tower of the church, as he sat upon the low tombs in the grave-yard.

As Mr. Wyndham Flitter strolled along the road towards Monkscroft, a noise broke the quietude that reigned, and attracted his attention to the end of the village, which was not a great way off; for a man might stand in the very centre of its single street and call back another, with a shout, from either extremity. He then perceived a small cavalcade crossing the green, preceded and surrounded by boys labouring under some excitement, which a sedan chair in the centre appeared to have caused. And his supposition was right.

Old Lady Flokes had determined upon paying her usual visit of state that day to the Brayboeufs, at Pottleton Court: and with this view the sedan chair, employed on such occasions, had been brought out and aired. Julius was to be one of the bearers, and Whacky Clark, for lack of a better, was the other. Whacky, however, although promised a shilling for the job, still entertained feelings of rancour towards his black companion: and as such had quietly informed one or two ingenious boys of the start : hinting indirectly, that if they chose to honour Julius with any attention, he should not stand in their way. And thus, when Lady Flokes set off, in company with Annie, who walked at the side of the sedan, a handful of evil urchins were ready to form part of the procession.

It had been an evil hour, as we have shown, for Julius, when a party of wandering minstrels on their way to Dibblethorpe races rested at Pottleton, with sooted faces, to illustrate the music of Ethiopia. Hitherto the boys had been content to ask him the latest news from the Prince of Darkness, under his more plebeian and shorter title, with facetious allusions to Day and Martin, and various witticisms, acquired during the representation of 'The Padlock,' in a barn at Pottleton, from the character of Mungo, who, up to a certain period, shared with Friday, in Robinson Crusoe, the honour of promulgating all that was known about black men. But when these sable troubadours arrived, the notions of the boys, with respect to the aborigines of Eastern Africa, were greatly expanded. The old and touching picture of "Am I not a man and a brother?" no longer affected anybody, beyond the children of Miss Twinch's school. They looked upon slaves henceforth as anything but people constantly kept chained and whipped with many-tailed cats. In them they saw only

rollicking holiday-keepers who invited girls out to dance by moonlight—who revelled and rowed under similar pleasant circumstances on the waters of the mighty Ohio—and who performed curious dances, of a fashion that spoke as much for their leisure to learn such steps, as it did for their physical indefatigability, when acquired. So their respect for Julius as a bonded child of the sun vanished altogether: and henceforth he was received with acclamations, more or less complimentary, whenever he came abroad.

Accordingly Lady Flokes was accompanied by an escort she never expected. The boys had waited at the lodge, and as soon as the sedan had fairly emerged from the gates they began their dance, headed by Mark Stiles—an evil fellow, who considered the discharge of his sister, Patience, from Monkscroft, a sufficient excuse for doing anything to the old lady, short of murder, that might occur. He was naturally a boy of an atrocious disposition. He always threw the first lighted cracker into the shops on Guy Fawkes' night: and whenever his nervous sister Harriet had been awed beyond her natural endurance at the infant school, so sure was there to be a runaway ring that evening at the Twinch's. And when, on those not restless Sunday afternoons in church, before spoken of, the stick of 'Pickled Sam' the sexton, fell with a thwack that echoed throughout the entire building from the vestry to the belfry upon the shoulders of some ill-regulated urchin; many knew that it was Mark Stiles thus punished—most probably for making faces at the clerk, or conversing, by signs, through the window with Tommy Collier, who was performing gymnastics on the tombstones.

It was to no effect that Lady Flokes ordered the sedan to stop, and told Whacky Clark and Julius to put the offenders to flight. Although an excellent hard-working servant, the latter individual was strangely deficient in antagonistic courage: and as for Whacky, when he told them to be off with one expression of face, and winked at them with another, he only encouraged the attack.

Getting bolder by degrees, the boys ran up and tapped at the windows of the sedan, or hustled one another against Julius, until, from his instability, there appeared to be a great chance of the whole affair being toppled over. Annie really became alarmed, not knowing what to do: and Whacky

Clark showed immense diplomatic tact, in blowing up the boys on one side of the sedan, whilst Annie was looking on, for their bad behaviour, and encouraging them, with a sly wink, on the other, when she could not see him. Indeed, as far as Lady Flokes's perfect balance was concerned, the affair was becoming serious, when some doubtful genius brought Mr. Wyndham Flitter to the rescue, and by the aid of his stick, and imposing presence, he had, in twelve seconds, completely routed the enemy.

"Be off! you young miscreants," he cried, as he dealt a final blow to Mark Stiles, that made a fierce mark across his blade-bone for a week afterwards. "Madam," he added to Lady Flokes, "let me have the pleasure of being your *cavalier servente*, as far as you may be going. Miss Maitland—I am too happy in having quelled this annoyance. The young scamps! look at them scudding away."

Lady Flokes—who had not for the moment recognised Wyndham, but perceived, as she afterwards told Annie, "that he was evidently a very superior person"—looked inquiringly towards him.

"Will you present me, Miss Maitland?" he said to Annie, who immediately introduced him. "I had the honour of meeting your ladyship at the Pottleton Ball. Let me compliment you on looking so well."

The old lady bowed very graciously, as Wyndham went on:—

"You are come out to enjoy this charming weather."

"I am going to call on the Braybœufs, and the Court," returned Lady Flokes.

"Oh! indeed! the Braybœufs," returned Wyndham, speaking of them in as intimate a tone as though he had been connected by various marriages with their family, and had a knife and fork at their table every day. "Ah! the Braybœufs: I shall have the very great pleasure of accompanying you."

Now Wyndham knew no more of the Braybœufs than he did of the aristocracy of central Africa; but he recollected their names: for he always made a point of asking the history of everybody he came in contact with, never knowing of what use they might be to him afterwards. Lady Flokes was quite at ease to find she had a further escort: and then

ordering Julius to shut her up again in the sedan, they moved off towards the court, Wyndham walking with Annie, and pouring forth a stream of that pleasant unmeaning small-talk, at the production of which he was so very clever.

When they arrived at the court they found all the family at home; and the delivery of Lady Flokes from the sedan was a proceeding of great importance, requiring several persons before she was finally inducted into the arm-chair of the library. In this affair Mr. Flitter came out uncommonly well: and when the old lady was settled, he immediately began to chat with Constance Braybœuf, even to imperceptibly luring her into the conservatory. Everybody, however, thought it was all right. The family considered him to be an intimate *habitué* of Monkscroft, and Lady Flokes supposed that he was an old friend of the Braybœufs, so that in ten minutes he had all but realized their speculations.

"A fine fuchsia, indeed!" he observed to Miss Braybœuf and Annie: "a charming flower. My uncle, who was consul at —— pshaw! I shall forget my own name directly—brought a plant over, and gave it to a gardener at Chelsea. It made his fortune: and this very ring, with the blue stone, which I now wear, was given by the man to my uncle, in acknowledgment."

The ring was duly admired, and Mr. Flitter went on.

"Ah! I see you have the Canariensis. How very like the birds its flowers are. You should see them, though, in the tropics; for there the most remarkable thing occurs connected with the flower. When this little bird-shaped blossom,—which there grows to the size of a real canary,—is ripe enough, it flies off, to carry the seed to distant spots. At this time you would think the air swarmed with birds, with the exception that it does not sing."

They went on to the end of the conservatory, where a statue was standing in the midst of some evergreen shrubs.

"Venus—the immortal *chef d'œuvre* of Praxiteles!" continued Wyndham. "Ah! it is, indeed, beautiful. You have been to Florence, Miss Braybœuf?"

"I was there two winters," replied the young lady.

"Ah! then you know it well, *Firenze la bel-la!*" he went on, pronouncing the words with a fair accent. "And that glorious room, the Tribune, in which the original Venus

stands; with the Apollino!—the dancing Faun!!—the Scythian Slave!!!—and the Wrestlers!!!!"

As he mentioned each of these, he increased his tone of enthusiasm, as if he was reading the various characters sustained by one actor, in a playbill, which always progress in notes of admiration—or alarm—as the case may turn out.

"And the splendid cabinets of the different painting schools," he went on: "all except the English. When I find the high-art folks, at our academy, giving themselves absurd airs, I think of this and laugh; oh—how I laugh!"

Annie was regarding Mr. Flitter with astonishment—he appeared to know everything. They went round the conservatory, and he kept on making remarks, in the same style, about everything: and they then returned to the library. Here he met Mr. Braybœuf, with whom he directly began to converse about deep draining, liquid manure, and subsoil ploughs; meeting the old gentleman's views with respect to the abolition of hedge-rows, and promising to come over the next day, and see his new homestall. Then he talked to Mrs. Braybœuf, about the London season, and the drawing-rooms: and, finally, kept up a conversation upon everything with everybody at once; until when he departed, the family at the Court hoped they should soon see him again, and agreed that he was the most charming person they had met with for a long time.

The visit over, Mr. Flitter returned to Monkscroft with Lady Flokes, and when he got there, he was, of course, asked in—a piece of hospitality only shown to visitors, in summer, when fires were not obliged to be kept in the rooms for their reception; and Lady Flokes's own apartment was not exactly the place to see everybody in.

Wyndham was as much at home in the old dingy rooms at Monkscroft, as he had been in the elegant conservatory at Pottleton Court: and met Lady Flokes upon all her subjects of conversation, as well as listened to her anecdotes, with consummate tact. He then admired the grounds from the window. There was not a great deal to fall into raptures about, in the rank lawn, and corroded images—of plaster of Paris well painted, in the belief that they would look and wear like stone—but Mr. Flitter had his object.

"You *must* let me see the park, Lady Flokes," he said.

"But pray do not let me discompose you. Miss Maitland, I am sure, will accompany me."

Annie readily acquiesced, and they started off together for a walk round the grounds, which Mr. Flitter had kindly called the park. And then, when they were alone, Wyndham recommenced his game. It were tedious to recount all that passed between them: its import, based on the conversation held with Sherrard on the racecourse, may readily be guessed. But he so well managed his hints and bits of advice, his facts and indirect allusions, that when he departed he left Annie very miserable, retiring to her melancholy room to shut herself up alone with her tears, and a newspaper given her by Flitter, in which appeared a police report of the fracas between Philip and the man on the four-in-hand coming home from the races. The day, with her, despite the summer glory of its dying sunlight, closed sad and gloomily. She did not appear to have one friend left in the world, except her somewhat new acquaintance, Mr. Wyndham Flitter.

But there was one, besides him, still watching her fortunes; quietly enough to be sure, but still very narrowly. Good Mr. Page, ever mindful of the information he had received from Sherrard's wife at the Union, was constantly at Monkscroft: so frequently, indeed, that the Miss Twinches, by no means satisfied at the attention, promulgated evil things whenever they had a chance at a suitable tea-table. And this they were all doing at Miss Medlar's academy, a few evenings after Wyndham had met Annie.

The Miss Twinches loved to take tea with the Misses Medlars, (as they were called in the prospectus,) inasmuch as they, the former, felt that they kept their school merely as amateurs, whilst the latter did so from compulsion: and we all like to feel ourselves leaders, if possible. On the present evening the Misses Medlars had prepared a little treat, the exciting cause being the reception of a tin of clotted cream and two half pounds of white fresh butter, from the parents of one of their young ladies in the West of England. To these they added some strawberries; and then invited the Miss Twinches to come and partake of them, extending their hospitality also to the pupil in question, the French governess, and Mr. Augustus Medlar, from the brewery, who

brought his flute. So that, altogether, it was a nice little party, and not an expensive one.

For, generally speaking, an edible gift entails a serious outlay of money in the wish to do honour to it, and astonish your friends. We have before dwelt on the cruel sufferings you inflict upon a happy family to whom you send a barrel of unopened oysters; these are bodily; but you put them to similar pain mentally, if you present them with a haunch of venison; for they must ask people to eat it, which they sometimes cannot afford to do; and so they had better have kept to the domestic leg and themselves. We once knew a family who went into the Gazette from having won a large twelfth-cake in a raffle; their friends were asked; wine was had in; the consumption of candles, supper, and the hire of rout furniture was as the last ounce of gold that broke the back of their credit, and in another fortnight they were ruined; and less than the sum alluded to would have kept the most importunate creditor quiet.

The young lady, to return to the Medlar festivities, whose parents had sent the cream, was the pretty pupil of the school. It was supposed to be more especially towards her that young Grant allowed his eyes and thoughts to wander when he sat opposite to them at church; although the French teacher would never allow this, even whilst she deprecated the behaviour of the gentleman. She had soft brown chesnut hair, and deep dark dreamy eyes; and her sweet figure—in her high dress, that only allowed space for a narrow black velvet band round her curving neck, and tight sleeves, that set off, whilst they concealed, her rounded arms—was the cause of many jealousies, not to say cruelties, on the part of the teachers, including the Misses Medlar themselves. For the pretty pupil was a half-boarder, and they domineered, for that reason, in a small way, over her: but, make her dress as they would, they could not render her otherwise than very attractive, and so they took to calling her forward and impudent, because people looked at her. Mr. Augustus Medlar was, truth to tell, very much struck—"hit hard under the wing and crippled for flying," as young Grant said—but as they, in a degree, supported their brother, and thought what a fine thing it would be if he could contrive to marry one of the Bulliams, they set their faces decidedly against it.

The Miss Twinches, understanding that it was to be quite a homely evening, brought a little work with them—a collection of small mathematical figures cut out in linen, which they sewed together after various fashions, to contribute, as they said, to the wardrobes of Jane Collier and Harriet Stiles, whose parents were in difficulties. Mr. Augustus came with his flute—people who play that sad instrument, indeed, never being without it—and last of all, Mr. Checks, of the new railway hotel, arrived. But he had not been mentioned, as about to form one of the party, for it was quite a secret at present that he was paying his addresses to Miss Amelia Medlar. The intimacy had commenced in the advent of Mr. Checks' daughter—he was a widower, be it understood, to clear his character from any imputation—to the academy, upon terms of mutual accommodation, the same being full permission for Miss Checks to imbibe as much French and English grammar, reading, writing, arithmetic, and the use of the globes, as her head was capable of holding, in return for the equivalent amount of table-beer consumed by the pupils generally. And when he came, ruddy, good-hearted gentleman as he was, he put a square plait-covered flask on the table, and told Miss Amelia that it was only "Ody Colone," at which she blushed and laughed; but, after investigation, proved it to be Maraschino. Miss Checks was not of the party, of course; under such a position of parties, it was not proper that she should be. The parent and the teacher might both have sunk in authority by her presence.

Mr. Augustus Medlar, being the only single gentleman of the party—for Mr. Checks didn't count—was uncommonly funny; and the repartees he made were things to recollect. At the end of each the Miss Twinches said, "You droll creature!" For he told all the little scandal of the village—how the schoolmaster's son had married his housemaid, which rather detracted from the glory of the family, who had some other connexion with a broken-down Irish peerage, of which they constantly talked, and so had perpetually fought up at Pottleton to be considered amongst "the families," under all the antithesis of so much per quarter, spoon, fork, and six towels; and how old Mrs. Must, at her last party, had not plates enough, but was obliged to have them perpetually washed, out of the room· and how, at her ball, she made

the negus in the tea-urn, hid the fifteen shilling wine until supper under the still-room tea-table, and had a cheap band of a fiddle and harp, that was well known on the Gravesend steam-boats in summer, and before the London gin-shops in winter, for her distinguished guests to dance to; and how she had been to town to have a tooth out, without pain, by the new discovery, and that when the gentleman who operated put a damp cloth over her face to bring her round, he brought all her rouge off as well—a frightful thing—the old lady being of Lady Flokes's class, and presumed never to wash; or if she did, to spend a more frightful sum in face-plaster and red ochre generally, than would have repaired and arabesqued her tumble-down conservatory, to the delight of all beholders. And then he diverted them with an account of all those who were doing well in the village, and those who were pushed for ready money, (for it is a blessing that these things are always known in a small country place, whereby a just estimate of position is the more readily formed;) and by the time he had told them who was going to be married, and who was not—where the new people who had taken Shiner's cottage meant to deal, and why the Shiners themselves ran away in the middle of the night—how Mr. Wolly meant to vote at the next election, and where young Grant's sheep went to market, that were slaughtered one evening for fear they should die before the sun got up again—by this time, the tea, and strawberries, and cream were all gone; and that awful time commenced—with people not accustomed to give parties—when they feel that the occupation of fancied refreshment no longer offers an excuse for the lack of other amusement. So after a small pause, Miss Amelia Medlar said to the pretty pupil—

"Miss Lechmere, will you play that fantasia from I Grabati?"

Miss Lechmere immediately went to the piano, for the request was an order, and commenced the fantasia, which was "on themes" from the above celebrated work, and lasted twenty minutes.

Fair reader, allow us to pause and profier one small piece of advice; it is this—if ever you see a piece of music announced as a "fantasia on themes" from some popular opera, *never buy it,* no matter who may be the composer, or however his name

may be celebrated, in getting over more miles of keys in sixteen pages than any other of his kind can accomplish. You will not find the favourite airs of your beloved opera ready to your hand—no bouquet of the choicest melodies in their simple beauty—nothing but a wearying series of scampers and variations, in the highest style of musical snuff-box composition, in which your well-remembered movements are altogether lost sight of for the composer's offensive commentaries thereon. But you will find that the names appended to these twiddling catchpennies have, with few exceptions, never originated anything of their own that has caught the public ear; and you will judge of them accordingly. They are as poor cooks, who, procuring a basin of good *consommé*, dilute it forthwith into trash, to raise money thereon.

Miss Lechmere finished, and Mr. Augustus would have complimented her, but he feared his sisters, who were looking. Just then, Mr. Checks cried "Bravo!" as he would have done to any other clever accomplishment; for not being a high-art musician, he looked upon all piano performances as on a level with those of equally clever people at the Circus, who spin basins, toss knives, and catch balls, or do anything else simply requiring hard mechanical practice to accomplish. And then the Miss Twinches requested Mr. Augustus to play the flute, which he forthwith prepared to do, after tasting the ends of the joints, stretching out his arms, apparently to see if he had room enough for his exertions, and being unable to reconcile his own music with the piano accompaniment—a grief that flute-players invariably arrive at. But just as he was at the height of his performance, who should come in but Mr. Page. The pretty pupil, who was accompanying him, stopped; so did Mr. Augustus, and the company generally rose to receive the good young curate. Even the Miss Twinches regarded him with a fond greeting; and Miss Martha even pushed a chair for him to sit down upon. But he did not take the hint; on the contrary, he sat down by the pretty pupil, and begged he might not disturb the music, upon which the duet went on, but what between some slight nervousness, and a little excitement at the attentions paid by Mr. Page to the young lady, Mr. Augustus could not tootle so well as he was wont to do. He pressed wrong keys, and did not cover the right holes, so that he brought his performance to a premature conclusion. The Miss Twinches,

however, admired it very much—now that Mr. Page had seated himself by the pretty pupil—and told him, very quietly, a short time afterwards, that they wondered how he got through it at all with such an accompaniment.

"We did not expect to have the honour of seeing you this evening, Mr. Page," said Miss Medlar: "or we would have kept back our little banquet."

"To tell you the truth, I have been taking tea with Mr. Twinch," replied Mr. Page. "I found he was alone, and so I dropped in."

The Miss Twinches scarcely knew how to take this—whether it was a compliment to the terms of familiarity upon which he stood with the establishment, or a painful reminder that he had purposely called in their absence. It is supposed that the latter feeling was uppermost, for they simultaneously turned away from Mr. Page, towards Mr. Augustus Medlar. But, most unfortunately, just at that moment, the Curate addressed the latter gentleman.

"Rather a nice day, Mr. Augustus," he said; "the corn looks well."

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Medlar, who was a small domestic wag in his way, "but mine don't feel very well. Ha! ha! new boot—excuse me,—yes."

"Very clever!" said Mr. Page, "not a bad play upon words. Oh! I understand it—excellent!"

And good Mr. Page laughed approvingly, and looked round at the ladies, who smiled as well. But the Miss Twinches drew down their lips demurely at the same time, as though they thought the subject was questionable, inasmuch as Mr. Augustus Medlar's funniment treated of things they ought to know nothing about.

"How is poor Mrs. Millard?" asked Miss Medlar of the curate. "What a shocking thing it was—to think of her husband being taken up for beating the tax-gatherer on his wedding day. Well, it was wrong, to be sure, but I do think the man might have taken some other time to call."

Mr. Millard was a restless spirit in the village, who believed (from reading radical prints, and the works of talented wandering tinkers, cobblers, and other artizans, whom ambition on their own parts, and credulity on the side of the people generally, had led from their honest callings,) that he was as good as anybody else, even with an uneducated mind and dirty

hands. And for this reason he made a noise at all the vestries, and opposed all the rates; insulted the collectors, and was, in all respects—in common with his class—not an overgood paymaster; and he especially hated "parsons," as he termed the clergy generally; so that Mr. Page, cautious always of offending, did not in this instance speak much in his favour. So Miss Medlar opened the conversation upon another tack.

"I don't think the hooping-cough is so bad in church, Mr. Page, as it was a few Sundays ago. Really, at one time I thought the children would never have ceased."

"One afflicted little pupil of mine," observed Miss Twinch, "Jane Collier, has been ill with the hooping-cough for several years; or, if it is not the hooping-cough, I don't know what it is, but it is exceedingly annoying."

"I think your parish might be called Barking, instead of Pottleton, Mr. Page," observed Mr. Medlar.

"Indeed! and why, Mr. Augustus?" asked Mr. Page, with serious interest.

"Don't you see?" asked the other. "Barking, you know —'coughing'—the same thing."

"Ah! very clever, indeed!" returned the good curate, with another smile. On this, Miss Medlar looked at her brother, and said, "Now, Augustus!" And then she hoped Mr. Page would excuse him.

"Jane Collier has improved, though," said Miss Twinch, who did not like that the subject of the infant schools should be dropped; for through all, she still felt that it was a tie in common, between her and the Reverend Mr. Page, of her former autumn. "You have not heard her lately, Mr. Page. I believe really that much of her influenza was owing to the pence table. She could not compass it for months, and her constant crying always merged into a cold in the head. But she is now perfect."

"Owing to your kind endeavours, I am sure," observed Mr. Page, bowing, with another smile.

All Miss Twinch's change of feeling towards the curate at once turned back to its old state. She almost fancied him again as she had known him, when she thought that he had a heart which gushed towards her. The little compliment had reassured her, and she resolved not to lose the chance of again enlisting his attention. So she went on.

'I often think it was a blessing that Humphries was sent

to gaol for poaching in Mr. Bulliam's river. The children, now that they are not kept entirely on fish, look quite healthy. Before, they really were so—so—I scarcely know what they were."

"Scaly," suggested Mr. Augustus.

"Now, Augustus!" observed Miss Medlar.

Mr. Page began to find the waggery somewhat oppressive—not in itself, but because he could not always understand it at once. So he started another subject—the one he had called in upon.

"Do you know anything of the tramps that have pitched their cart in the lane beside your brewery, Mr. Augustus?" he asked.

"Only that I believe them to be a bad set," replied the young gentleman. "They tried our hen-house the other night. They didn't get in, but they spoilt the lock."

"I expected as much," said Mr. Page.

"I was obliged to lecture our servant," chimed in Miss Medlar, "for having dared to bring one of the women, dressed up like a gipsey, to the school. And what do you think for? To tell the fortunes of my little ladies! The hussey! filling their heads with dark men, and fair men, and presents, and journeys, and other ribaldry, instead of their studies. What right have girls, indeed, to think of such trash?"

And here Miss Medlar looked at the pretty pupil, as she called to mind the bad behaviour of young Grant. But the allusion was not taken by anybody, and Mr. Page went on.

"I am anxious, Mr. Augustus, that any man you have in your employ, sleeping in the brewery, should watch these people. My reasons are these. I have gone home rather later than usual, for two evenings, on my way from the Union; and each night I have seen Mr. Flitter—that gentleman I met at your brother's, Miss Twinch—apparently in communication with them. Last night he was at the corner of the road that runs up to Monkscroft, with that man, Sherrard, (of whom I have my own opinion,) and he goes in daily to call on Lady Flokes."

"He does not go to see the *old* lady, surely?" said Miss Twinch, indulging in flinging a pepper-corn at Annie.

"I can't tell any of his motives," answered Mr. Page; "but it is a fact; and Mrs. Baker at the Red Lion, says he

is out every evening to smoke a cigar. But he must smoke a great many, by the time he stays, and he knows nobody in the village, except your brother, that I am aware of."

"It is very strange!" observed Miss Medlar.

"Quite a romance," said Miss Martha Twinch, who recollected the attention that Mr. Wyndham Flitter now paid to her at the Pottleton ball, and almost fancied herself a gitana already.

The company began to speculate upon the subject of Mr. Page's communication, after the provincial fashion generally, until they had indirectly implicated everybody in the village in the business, whatever it was. Then there was a little more music, and Mr. Augustus played, "We're a' noddin," with variations, until the air nearly bore out its claim to the title. Afterwards some mixed biscuits and grape-wine were introduced, the pretty pupil having a glass filled for her by Miss Medlar, (which it was supposed would constitute her portion, but which Mr. Page caused to be repeated on his own invitation;) and then the party broke up. Mr. Augustus offered to escort the Miss Twinches home, and afterwards stayed gallantly under their window, until he saw a light in it, when he played them, "Wake, dearest, wake." But this delicate attention was somewhat roughly crippled, by his discovering it was the housemaid going to turn down the beds that he was serenading, almost at the same instant that Mr. Twinch threw open his office window, and, not knowing who the musician was, cried somewhat sharply,

"I wish you'd be off with your confounded noise:" which forced Mr. Augustus to an explanation unbefitting the mystery of romance.

Mr. Page returned home by himself, notwithstanding various manœuvres on the part of either Miss Twinch to get the offer of an escort. But as he passed the spot he had alluded to, where the bright fire of the tramp encampment was flashing its rays upon the under part of the sycamore leaves that waved above it, he again saw Mr. Wyndham Flitter, at a little distance from the circle, in conversation. As they were conscious of his approach, they separated, and Mr. Wyndham Flitter, passing by the curate, said, "Good night, good night, Mr. Page," with a light off-hand air, and was soon lost in the gloom of the evening.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. SPOONER'S UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

"It don't strike me that I shall make much of a parson, after all," observed Mr. Spooner to Willy Sprott, as they had brought the pillows from the bed, and having placed them on the window-sills, were leaning upon them, and looking at the people in the street.

"Then I'll be shot if I would be," replied his friend. Being away from home, Sprott had recommenced his bubble-blowing: and filling the soap balloons with smoke from his cigar, as was his custom, was sending them off by dozens about the street, to a large audience of admiring idlers, who cheered as the shining globes sailed away over the house-tops, in the afternoon sunlight, or burst into a small cloud of vapour against the chimneys. "Then I'll be shot if I would be."

"But I rather funk the governor," replied, in turn, Mr Spooner.

It was not without reason he did so, for he was an austere gentleman—this governor of Mr. Spooner, by which term he designated his father. He had always stood in exceeding awe of him, and, consequently, corresponded almost entirely with his mother, to whom he was really very much attached. Mr. Spooner, sen., was a clergyman, with a fine living in a rich old monastic tract of land, where the grass grew thick and deeply green, and the sheep on the hill-sides looked like so much of the bodies of full-grown silk-worms as a comparing mind might portion off, so fat and white were they. It had always been the gentleman's wish that his son should succeed him, with the same honours, presence, and religious politics: and to this end had all Tidd's education been directed. But up to the present period he had betrayed no great liking for the path appointed—his uncle's bequest having still further alienated him from serious thoughts: and his father would long ago have seen this, and brought things to an explanation, but that, as usual, his mother made the best of it.

"I feel I could never make a parson," Mr. Spooner went on. "It isn't in me. First of all, I hate white neckcloths: and, you see, you must wear them. It wouldn't do to go into the pulpit with a single-tied Joinville on."

"Not exactly," observed Willy.

"No—and then they don't like a parson to hunt, now: or, if he did, not in scarlet. And he mustn't run a horse, nor cut about on a dog-cart, nor do anything fast and proper. Oh, bother! blow it!"

"It is blown," said Willy, launching a large soap bubble into the air. "Half-a-crown, it goes out of sight."

"Done!" said Mr. Spooner, quite forgetting his last subject of conversation.

"There!" cried Willy, as the bubble sailed against a bird-cage hung from a third-floor window, and, after terrifying the bird out of half his feathers, burst, and half choked it with the smoke it contained. "Now, then, Tiddy: half-a-crown."

"Oh, nonsense! you said it would go out of sight."

"Well, and so it has. Your eyes are better than mine if you can see it. Come, Tiddy: you always try to get off your bets. Cash up. I should have paid you directly, if I had lost."

Mr. Spooner paid Sprott the half-crown, being perfectly used to such a proceeding: and then the latter, thinking he ought to humour his friend, in consequence, said—

"Oh—you'll never make a parson, Tiddy: you're too good for it. We couldn't spare you."

"But what am I to do? you see—that's it," replied the other. "I have been getting rid of such a devil of a lot of money: and that, in some degree, keeps me quiet. It wont do to be out with the governor. For instance: it wouldn't do for him to see such a scene as this, just at present."

Perhaps, looking to his father's peculiar notion of things, Mr. Spooner was right: for something of an extraordinary kind was evidently intended. The room was covered with fancy costumes, refulgent with the slightly-tarnished brilliancy of a masquerade warehouse: wigs, of various tints and fashions, were hung on the clothes-hooks; false noses were lying about on the table and mantelpiece; and all round the looking-glass were large tickets, of different tints, purporting

to admit the bearer to a Bal Masqué, at the theatre that evening. On a side table were bundles of cigars, tall Rhenish-looking bottles, soda water, and a troop of decanters and glasses, promising also festivity of another kind: and on Mr. Spooner's toilet table—we should not have betrayed the secret, were it not absolutely necessary—were quantities of black hair pins, packets of white gloves, labelled from six and three-quarters to seven and a-half: and three or four bouquets, fresh from Covent-garden, and all in handsome Bohemian glasses, full of water, awaiting their fair owners.

A masked ball had been announced, and Mr. Spooner had been prevailed upon to make up a party—that is to say, to do it well: not to push in with the crowd, and have nowhere to sit down between the dances, with nothing to eat but the half-guinea glue jellies, and moist-sugar champagne, of a masquerade supper; but to take a box, with an ante-room, their own servants, and refreshments sent from Gunter's in a proper manner. Everybody said to Spooner, "Look here, old fellow: you manage these things better than we do, and had better settle for everything, and then we'll pay you again:" and Mr. Spooner, proud of the position, undertook to do so, and to give everybody coffee at his house, before they started.

But there was one thing, from the first announcement of the ball, that had been uppermost in his mind—it was the possibility of getting Mrs. Wracketts to accompany him thither. To be there with her—to watch her bright eyes scintillating through the holes of the mask, whereby eyes of any kind always acquire such marvellous expression—to hear soft words murmured through the black lace fall: and all this in the midst of the music, the lights, and the whirl of a Bal Masqué, was worth ten years off his life. And so, as soon as the party was decided on, Mr. Spooner began to put his scheme into operation. There was not a great deal of real difficulty in carrying it out, even from the first flat refusal, and surprise at his thinking of such a thing, to the following milder objections, and final acceding to his request. It was fortunate, too, that Mr. Wracketts would be from London, Léonie at length said, but that Mr. Spooner was the only one in the world she would trust herself with, because she knew his honour and discretion: at the same time her cousin, Miss

Courcy, must accompany her, for propriety. Of course, Mr. Spooner swore the most inviolable secrecy: which meant, that he privately told every one of his friends—too proud, of course, about the matter to keep it to himself—saying, "I don't mind telling you, old fellow, but you must not breathe it to a soul, or the consequences would be frightful." And as these, in turn, imparted the intelligence to their immediate acquaintances, under a like charge, all the world was soon acquainted with it: which, after all, perhaps, did not greatly matter.

"I wont have that young Hammond," said Mr. Spooner, as he was arranging the party with Sprott. "He's a pushing fellow, and is always boring Léonie. No—let us have only our own party."

This was agreed to; and at last the party was arranged. Some half-dozen pearls of the ballet, delighted to put on fancy dresses, really for the fun of the thing, and, "in private," as they called it, readily accepted Mr. Spooner's invitation: and for these young ladies the hair-pins and gloves were in readiness. Otherwise they were to come dressed—the last finish being all that was required to put in their appearance, in his rooms. Willy Sprott hunted up the cavaliers of the party, he himself settling to go as a footman, with a monkey's face; and the others chose such costumes of Pierrots, charity boys, Don Cæsars, and foreign aristocracies generally, as best became them, or as they fancied did. Léonie and her cousin did not like, of course, to mix with this party, but were to meet Mr. Spooner, in black dominos, under the orchestra, after the third quadrille: and Mr. Wyndham Flitter had sent up a note, to say he would come if he could; but that he feared important business would take him some way into the country on that very evening.

The party was not without its expenses, to be sure, apart from those actually inevitable. Cabs had to be sent to all the young ladies, at a tariff of payment, which settles that a mile in plain clothes is equal to three in costume; and a brougham was despatched for Mrs. Wracketts, her own having gone, as she said, to be new lined. Some of the young ladies—nay, nearly all—lived in the wilds of London; remote spots, where omnibuses turn round at the end of their journey; and none

of them were ready when sent for. However, they all contrived, somehow or another, to get to Mr. Spooner's by eleven: and then West had something more than enough to do to attend to all the wants of the company. He was a handy fellow in his way, and had the power of producing nearly everything that was asked for, but he was not quite supernatural. Hence, as far as pins, buttons, needles, and thread went, he was available; but when it came to *fixature*, and such like, he was not so entirely to be depended on.

The noise was at its utmost. The masks were in high spirits, laughing at one other's appearance, attitudinizing about the room, drinking, complimenting, and flourishing generally: and Mr. Spooner was sitting on the ground, having succeeded in getting into an elaborate copy of the costume vulgarly assigned to the devil, on the authority of the old legend in the magic lanterns which points so grave a moral to dishonest bakers; when a rattle of wheels was heard, and a cab stopped.

"Here's Wyndham, I'll be bound, after all," said Mr. Spooner. "Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" repeated the entire company, in the enthusiasm of the moment.

"Let's throw things at him, as he comes up stairs. Coals?" suggested Willy Sprott.

"No, no—don't," said Mr. Spooner. "They make such a mess on the white drugget. Try biscuits—shy an Abernethy at him."

But the young ladies had eaten every crumb available. Pearls of the ballet, far from being of that ethereal nature, all wreaths and tarlatane, with which the world invests them, are great consumers.

"Put the sofa-squab over the door, to tumble on his head," added another.

"Squirt some scent in his eyes from this tube," said a fourth, "just as he comes in."

"Stop!" cried Mr. Spooner: "don't begin yet. Wait till I am ready to see it."

It was lucky that some trifling hitch in Mr. Spooner's costume, as he sat on the floor, delayed the intended comicality. For whilst they were awaiting his being in perfect readiness,

the door opened, and an old gentleman, of a clerical appearance, made his entrance, with a look of the most intense astonishment at the scene before him.

"He's been gone away ever so long, sir," cried Willy Sprott, whose first impression was, that some stranger had mistaken the rooms.

The look of wild bewilderment which the old man assumed, might have led all the company to suppose that he had come to the wrong establishment, as Sprott had suggested. But this idea vanished when the stranger exclaimed,

"I beg all your pardons; but does Mr. Tidd Spooner reside here."

Willy Sprott, whose notions of visits from people one did not know were confined to tradesmen having large sums to make up on the ensuing Saturday, was about to return another impertinent answer, accompanied by an absurd direction as to Mr. Spooner's whereabouts, when a movement on the part of that gentleman restrained him. For, had Mr. Spooner been, in reality, the personage he was now representing in masquerade, and the old gentleman St. Michael, his discomfiture could not have been greater. He started from the floor, upon which he was sitting, and, to all appearance, taking off his head, pitched it behind a sofa as he went to meet the visitor, whom he had at once recognised to be his father.

"How d'ye do, sir?" he said, with a great mixture of fear and familiarity—the first, on account of consequences; the latter, to appear in a brave light before his friends.

"How do I do?" asked the old gentleman. "How do *you* do, sir? and what is all this tomfoolery? What is it, I say?"

He did not evidently mean to be trifled with. He spoke as severely as only grey hairs and black eyebrows can speak; and Mr. Spooner wished he had kept his mask on. He was not the irrascible old man of a play, who abuses his son for falling in love, all through the piece, and at last says, "There, Jack, you dog, you've fairly got over me—take her and be happy; but mind, not a penny till I die;" but a regular, severe governor, who evidently stood no nonsense.

"We are a few friends," observed Willy Sprott, coming in to the rescue—"you see, sir, who—"

"When you are addressed, sir," said Mr. Spooner, senior, looking at Willy in his costume with an air of the most su-

Mr. Spooner meets his father

preme contempt, "perhaps you will have the kindness to tell me who you are; but, until then, I am by no means curious to know."

Willy made a face at the old gentleman, which, being behind his mask, lost much of its purpose; and retired.

"Well," continued Mr. Spooner, senior, looking round, "this is a pretty scene. And you call yourself a rational human being—do you? You apes!"

"Apes!" faltered Tidd, thinking he would be lowered for ever before his acquaintances, if he did not make some little show of self-possession.

"Yes, sir—apes!" thundered the old gentleman in reply. "What is the mission of an ape, but to put on an absurd dress and jig to tom-fool music. Oh! you are here, West—are you?"

The man servant addressed came forward.

"Pack up everything belonging to Mr. Tidd, immediately," continued Mr. Spooner, senior, "and take it down to the Spread Eagle, in Gracechurch-street."

"Hang it!" thought his son, "he might have been at a West End hotel, any how;" and then he continued aloud, "but my friends?"

"Oh, friends!" replied his father. "Well, I am glad you told me what they were. Is *that* a friend?"

He directed his son's attention to a little coryphée, who was frightened to death at the interruption to their festivity; and was crouching down to make her sylph's muslin petticoats as long as might well be, in the eyes of so anti-Terpsichorean an old gentleman.

"Come, old gentleman," cried Willy Sprott—for the little coryphée was an especial favourite of his own whom he would not see made uncomfortable—"none of that."

"Sprott," said Mr. Spooner, "don't."

"Now, sir," continued his father, "you come with me. You've chosen to rig yourself out like a mountebank, so of course you do not object to the dress. West, call a cab."

"But, sir—"

"Silence!" cried the old gentleman.

"I don't care who or what you are," exclaimed Willy Sprott, coming forward; "but I won't see Tiddy bullied in this way. You may be a parson. and I dare say you are—

you look like one—and an uncommon great man in your own parish, but you're nobody here. Tiddy's a good fellow; and if you want to pitch into anybody, pitch into me; don't be afraid, I can bear it well enough."

"Mr. William Sprott," said Mr. Spooner, with gravity, "you must respect my father."

Willy retired at the reproof; but as he disappeared amongst a cloud of muslin and ribbons, the expression of his features and gestures plainly showed that he did not altogether respect the cloth when he considered it in the wrong.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Spooner, senior, "you will follow me. West—you will do as I have told you. Look after these persons; and as soon as they have gone—which, if they do not do within a quarter of an hour, must be intimated to the police—as soon as they have gone, I say, pack up the things and follow me. Now, sir—go on."

The last words were addressed to Mr. Spooner, who thereupon essayed a final remonstrance, but it was of no avail.

"You put this dress on for your own whim, sir," said his father; "and you shall keep it on for mine. I can assure you that it amuses me very much. Now, if you are quite ready."

With a parting look at his friends, at whom he winked with would-be comicality—but it was a failure—Mr. Spooner preceded his enraged father down stairs. A cab was in waiting, into which they directly got; but of all the sad devils ever known, since the day when the good St. Anthony first defied them, Mr. Spooner was perhaps the most melancholy type of a crestfallen spirit of evil ever imagined. The cab drove off to the Spread Eagle; and we grieve for the heartlessness of human nature to record, that in a few minutes after, several other cabs drove off also, with Mr. Spooner's late companions, to the halls of dazzling light then glittering for them at the Bal Masqué.

That very afternoon, Philip had called on Mrs. Wracketts, and finding her from home, had returned to a solitary dinner at his lodgings. He was debating with himself, whether he should make use of some tickets for the ball which Mr. Scute had forwarded to him, when a pencilled note was brought to him, which ran thus:—

"Come to the ball this evening. You will find me in a

rose domino, under the orchestra, after every dance. Not a word of this, I implore yon. I have something of the *utmost* consequence to tell you. *Soyez sage et discret.*

"LEONIE."

The bearer did not wait for an answer. Philip, however, determined to go at once; and, merely disguising himself with a mask, about twelve o'clock, he entered the boarded area of the theatre. It was a very gay sight: one that, ten years ago, no one would ever have expected to see in steady-going England. It was not, to be sure, the masquerade of the old school, such as we read of in by-gone theatrical works, where the principal business consisted in drinking bad champagne—the true nectar of the gents; and the chief fun was to shout and scream, in the spirit of illustrations still extant, where many are drunk, and more are noisy, and huntsmen are whipping clowns across the supper-table, with similar pleasantries. At all events, there was some degree of order. The costumes were effective—the reign of the clowns, and Irishmen, and huntsmen, had terminated—the music was such as Almack's might have coveted; and the gents would have been kicked and turned out, had they given any of their snobbish propensities full play.

A waltz was going on as Philip entered. In a large circle, the inner boundary of which was formed by the wands of the masters of the ceremonies, making a ring-fence, shoals of masks were hurrying on, and whirling round and round. There was not that assemblage which the conventional writers of *la vielle presse* affect to see in masquerades, when they think it a piece of humour—and it is astonishing how they cling to it year after year—to say, that "Turks who had foresworn wine might be seen indulging in the juice of the ruby grape; that Quakers and nuns "poussetted" (there is already an inquiry as to what "poussette" means) together; that barristers who never had a brief, sailors who never saw the sea, and Don Giovannis, to whom the Spanish, in any sense, was unknown, attempted intrigues." All this was "smart writing" once, but it is no longer funny nor true. For none of the above types were present; possibly they never were, but existed only in the imagination of some inventive artist, who drew a picture of a masquerade without ever having been to one. But there were debardeurs and vivan-

dières—characters which our old press friends did not know in their own fast days, and are therefore slow to acknowledge —sylphs, Pierrots, and Normandy peasants—seigneurs of the *moyen age*—foreign postilions and Robespierres, or rather those of his time; and all these were whirling round, and round, and round, in a gay human kaleidescope, that formed as pretty a sight as any one might care to witness. And when the wonderful band poured forth all its strength, and the pealing cornet, that Belgravia might have diplomacized to have possessed, made the very chandeliers quiver again with its resonance; and all the lamps, and lights, and heads, and colours, in the house appeared to be whirling round as well—any one who did not feel thankful that at all events some little relief was afforded from the mill-horse routine of every-day matter-of-fact life, must have been either a misanthrope, a parvenu, or a lover of high art.

With some difficulty Philip contrived to get past the bewildering throng, and, by the time the waltz was concluded, reached the orchestra. He had not remained there more than a few minutes, when a rose domino also came to the trysting place, after some little difficulty in getting rid of a Don Cæsar de Bazan (formerly Rochester), who was somewhat persecuting in his attentions. Philip stemmed the current that was rushing towards the refreshment-room, and found himself at the side of the mask.

"Léonie?"

"Philip?"

The countersign was sufficient. They recognised each other, and at once glided from the throng of people, and took possession of one of the most remote tables, to which a confused waiter immediately brought two sherry cobblers, intended for somebody else.

"I am so glad you are here," said Léonie, after she had looked half-timidly around, to see that they were beyond earshot; "and yet I scarcely know what I ought to say, or how to act, in this affair. Oh, Philip—you would pity me, indeed, if you knew all: and, perhaps, respect me."

Deeply masked as she was, the tones of her voice were sufficient to show that she was suffering from extreme agitation —in fact, affected even to tears. Before Philip could reply she clutched his arm earnestly, and continued:—

"If I am mistaken in you, the punishment—the heavy punishment—will be my own; but I trust in your own fine nature. Can you believe, in turn, that anything so fallen as myself can still have some redeeming point—that I am not altogether sunk beyond all hope of sympathy or kindness?"

Philip was amazed at this burst of excitement. Perfectly unable to imagine what Léonie was about to confide to him, he could only return some commonplace answer.

"I have been used," she continued, "to ruin you. I have been made the bait to destroy you—to blast all your pros pects; and not yours alone, but those of some one who ought to be very dear to you. And I have been bitterly punished. You have made me love you; and I know that it is without hope: but I do love you—madly, devotedly. Every other feeling has been some idle passion—madness—call it what you will: but now, every thought—every action of my life—tends towards you."

She spoke this in a low, quick tone, tremulous with agitation; and Philip saw that the tears were falling quickly from beneath her mask, which she had slightly raised from her face, upon the table. He scarcely knew how to reply.

"You may be sure, Leonie," he said, "that I shall never entertain other than the kindest feelings towards you."

"Oh—thanks, thanks—a thousand times!" she continued: "it is too good of you—if you knew all; and I have not deserved it. Only let me know that you do not despise me."

"Despise you, Leonie! I have told you that I have the deepest regard for you."

She clasped his hand as though it had been in a vice, as she replied:

"You should not judge of those in my own wretched position, only when you see them in a whirl of false pleasure and excitement. Oh, believe me, that every minute of what appears to be happiness is bitterly paid for by hours of misery and lonely remorse—as, step by step, the darkening future comes nearer and nearer. But it is not yet too late. They tried to make me ruin you—to drag you with me beyond the stern barrier of society; and they have only made me love you. All I can now do in atonement, I will. I do it from my heart. I require no return, but to see its end achieved. I

never even wish to meet you again. I only shall entreat of you to feel, that even in a social outcast like myself, gratitude, honour, and some slight traces of affection may still exist. Now, listen."

In a voice broken by hysterical sobs, and betraying intense emotion, Leonie then proceeded to explain to Philip the schemes that had been woven about him by Wyndham Flitter, Wracketts, and the man Sherrard. Nothing was concealed. As she went on, and the circumstances kept opening before Philip's eyes, each instant in a clearer light, his excitement almost equalled her own, and an almost sickening feeling took possession of him, as he saw the dupe he had become, in every instance, in their hands—the follies he had been drawn into, and the cruel manner in which he had wronged his cousin. The spot, the lights, the music, and the whirl of masks, had faded away. His whole being was absorbed in the confession which Leonie was making.

"And now," she continued, "you must not lose an instant in going down to Pottleton, for they are about to play their largest stake. Your cousin Annie is living with an old lady whose house Sherrard is about to rob; and the others, although they will not appear in the matter, are accomplices. She will be made use of as well; and Flitter is already on visiting terms at the house. I know nothing more, for they have been more than usually cautious—but of this be sure—that something terrible is brooding."

"We shall be glad of the table, sir, if you have finished," said one of the waiters.

Philip started at the fresh voice, and somewhat recalled, saw that they had ordered nothing: whilst crowds of thirsty masks were standing about them. He rose directly, and taking Léonie's arm, plunged once more into the throng, which was the best plan to avoid further observation. Not that any recognition could have been possible, albeit he felt that the whole of the vast crowd had singled out Léonie and himself, as the especial objects of their attention. Wild as the galoppe was, in which hundreds of masks were now tearing onward, tumbling, jostling, and almost madly flying, round the area, it was nothing compared to the whirl of thoughts that were occupying Philip's brains. He determined at once to start for Pottleton, by the very earliest

train: and as soon as he had decided upon this he parted from Léonie, who was really very ill, and hung heavily on his arm, trembling from the excitement of their late conversation. He saw her into a cab at the door of the theatre—having promised inviolable secrecy as regarded her name, and a report of what had occurred at the first available opportunity, and then left the house, feeling little inclination, as may be conceived, to keep with the revellers, who were by this time beginning to get rather noisy

To make out the time, until the hour came for the first train to start, he entered a coffee-house in Bow-street—a low place where the friends of prisoners, at the adjoining police office, were accustomed to await their acquittal or commitment; preferring to sit there by the fire—for the early morning, although a summer one, was cold and chilly—than to go home just then for his things, and stand the chance of falling asleep in his own solitary room. Still confused and oppressed by what he had just heard, he was gazing vacantly round the room, when his eye fell upon a figure with which he thought he was acquainted. A more observant glance assured him that it was the Ganger, who was engaged in subdued talk with a couple of as ill-looking fellows as any one might have met during a summer amongst the rookeries of London. Philip directly changed his place, and cautiously took possession of the next box, where, whilst he appeared to be studying a begrimed and greasy periodical, he could contrive to catch a few words of their conversation. They spoke with caution, but from what he could understand, it appeared that some appointment was about to be made for the next evening; and in the country, After a while they got up and departed: and then Philip going back to his lodgings, changed his clothes, packed up hurriedly a few things for his journey; and leaving a note on the staircase to say that he might not return for a day or two, went at once to the terminus. A train of those airy conveyances, which the liberality of the directors, and the thoughtfulness of government allows for the lower orders—who must not be "fast" in anything upon limited means—was about to start: and by the time that the sun had got through half his work, he found himself, pale and jaded, at the Pottleton station. Young Grant, whom he met in the train, took his luggage

on to the farm, saying, that he must make that his quarters: and Philip himself at once directed his steps to Mr. Twinch's.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ROBBERY AT MONKSCROFTS.

All this time of gaiety and excitement in London—whilst the West-end, towards afternoon, became a perfect whirl of carriages, and the heart of mighty London was throbbing at more than feverish rate—whilst the early sunrise caught the latest revellers returning home, with split gloves and blinking eyes, from parties, and the latest twilight half concealed their starting forth again—all this time Annie was living the same quiet life with Lady Flokes, at Monkscrofts. "The season" there was ordained by nature rather than fashion. Had the whole world been submerged in one universal deluge of bankruptcy, and rendered totally unable to give parties, go to operas, or patronise wonderful exhibitions, yet the time of year would still have been shown by the thick-leaved trees, now waving their deeply-green summer foliage in the warm wind—by the tall meadow-grass, that would soon be cut, powdered with daisies and buttercups—by the blue forget-me-nots, that trembled in the clear, pebbly watercourse which glanced by them: and, above all, by the blue sky, from which the glorious sun brought Heaven to the world, and drew forth the gorgeous children of the ground to raise their glowing petals to his light, in the gardens and hedgerows; or ring their scented bells upon the heaths and hills, in his life-swarming glory.

The goodly earth was bursting with its beauty. Far away in the deep woods and copses the tall foxgloves kept their honey-laden, pendulous flowers for the bees, and the wild convolvulus clung to the young trees, and marked them by its close embrace. Now and then the sunbeams broke through the canopy of twinkling leaves, and where they shot down upon the turf in a bright ray, myriads of insects, in goodly armour of gold and sapphire, danced and floated, or spread their filmy wings

as they bent down the blade of grass towards the crystal water that collected in a little pool, on a level, from the tumbling rill. Beautiful, indeed, the world was: but this beauty could not be perceived in London—either in its choking, blazing streets by day, or its stifling, glittering rooms by night. It could only be found amidst the scarlet poppies and purple corn-flowers of the fields—the wildly-tossing hops in the hedges—the "lords and ladies" of the shady lanes; or the delicate lilies of the valley and timid violets that grew from the mossy ground of the thick coppice.

With Annie the days passed on with little excitement. One was so like the other, that Robinson Crusoe's post would not have been out of the way to have marked their course. She had learned, mechanically, to bow in the proper place at all the anecdotes, whether she listened to them or no: she was also inured to the distress of Backgammon and Double Patience, or Dummy, as the case might be: and she had, in her own quiet, unobtrusive manner, contrived to work a few reforms in Lady Flokes's style of cookery. Indeed, altogether, and as things went, she was tolerably comfortable.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter was constantly at Pottleton, and in great feather, in spite of the decidedly uncomfortable manner in which Mr. Page always treated him when they met. He did not, at the same time, often trouble Mr. Twinch with his company. Miss Martha had fought up greatly for him, upon the recollection of his attention to her at the Pottleton Ball, until she found his admiration of Annie become too palpable, when she went as powerfully against him; and, as her brother had always entertained misgivings as to the exact steadiness of Flitter's position, his fall in the household estimation was soon accomplished. But he visited at Pottleton Court, and got young Braybœuf, who was reading for the bar in London, orders for the Opera; and, lastly, was considered, by old Lady Flokes, to be a very agreeable gentleman. But when Mr. Wyndham Flitter was admiring the curiosities in old jewellery and plate, which Lady Flokes at times unfolded to his gaze, each with a corresponding history attached to it, the interest with which he regarded them was of an entirely different character to what she supposed. He could, at last, have written an inventory of anything worth possessing in the house; and all this information was regularly conveyed to the Ganger,

in those interviews, during one of which Mr. Page had in a measure surprised him.

The evening had closed in, dark and stormy for a summer night, and few people were about in the village, for a heavy rain, with thunder and lightning, had driven the majority within doors. Annie had been in attendance, throughout the evening, upon Lady Flokes, to whom a thunder-storm was a matter of serious alarm. On its first approach, the old lady had moved to the middle of the room, having sent all the fire-irons into the cellar, to get rid of them as conductors, no less than to place them across the tub of feeble beer, which she feared might be turned by the elements; and, indeed, despite this precaution, such was eventually found to be the case. Next, she had stuffed her ears with cotton, that she might not hear the thunder; after this, enveloping her head in the lined green bag, used to preserve the tea-boards, to exclude the lightning, and then sending for Julius to sit in the room (regarding him in some degree as an antidote to electric fluid generally)—she had at last felt perfectly safe, as much so as does the ostrich, when he hides his head in the sand, against his pursuers. In this state she had kept, under the surveillance of Annie and the black servant, until the storm had passed away, when, being gradually unpacked, by a mummy-like process, she had consented to go to bed, having partaken of a little supper, but with a silver spoon and fork—fearing that the steel knives might still retain a portion of electricity, and go off by themselves, in some alarming manner, in her hands.

Annie also retired to bed, and had been asleep an hour or two, when she was roused by a noise outside her window, and a fitful flash of light plainly visible, now and then, upon the chalk cliff, which, we have said, rose up opposite her apartment. No other window looked against this cutting, except one below, from a room used as a dairy; and believing that some of the tramps who had been loitering about the neighbourhood had come to steal the fowls in the outbuilding, she quietly approached the window, and putting aside the blind, looked out. She now distinctly saw the figure of a man letting himself down by a knotted rope, already near the ground, and carrying a small lantern with him, and she also found one of her windows broken—the noise of which had possibly awakened her. The next instant, the form

reached the ground, and then she could hear a signal exchanged, in a low tone, with some one over-head, most probably amongst the foliage that edged the top of the chalk wall, along which a bridle-path, open to the public, also ran. Scarcely breathing, she listened to catch every sound. Before long, the peculiar, sustained grating of a centre-bit at work was plainly audible—the broken window, in this case, assisting her; and then she heard the shutters of the dairy scroop on their hinges, as they were put back against the wall. Throwing a cloak hurriedly about her, she ran to Lady Flokes's room to arouse her; for the servants were altogether in another part of the house. She was a minute or two shaking the old lady, and endeavouring to make her understand what appeared to be taking place; and when such was effected, her alarm appeared to render her as helpless as her slumbers. One thing, however, Lady Flokes retained possession of her senses sufficiently to effect—and this was, to tell Annie to hide her keys in the teapot, which was still half full of the evening's brewing.

"Mercy preserve us!" exclaimed the old lady, "what can we do? We shall all be murdered! Call out from the window. No, don't do that—nobody can hear you, and you may be shot dead. Dear me! there is no bolt to my door."

The old lady had removed her bolt when she was in the habit of ringing Patience Stiles up at all hours of the night; and the room in which the bell was hung was now empty.

At this moment, there was the sound of a heavy fall below, as though some one had knocked over a piece of furniture in the dark.

"They are in the parlour!" exclaimed Annie. "What can we do?"

"Murdered—murdered in our beds!" cried the old lady, rocking herself backwards and forwards, as she sat upright. At the same time, there was something in her appearance, packed up as she was in all sorts of lappets, and bands, and old shawls, to have frightened anybody from the room, arriving under ordinary circumstances, at first sight.

"Hush!" replied Annie. "Stop one minute, and I will ring the turret-bell. It can be heard all over the village, and, at all events, it will frighten them."

"Don't leave me to be murdered!" Lady Flokes again exclaimed. "Help!—Julius! Margery."

Annie did not attend to the old lady any longer, but left her room, and ran to the end of the gallery to a closet through which the rope of the bell passed on its way from the kitchen to the turret, and where it was rung every day at luncheon-time, in the facetious pretence that numbers of guests were strolling about the grounds, awaiting the summons to a fine collation. As she flew along the gallery, some one was visible by the moonlight in the passage below. The stronger gleam from a lantern was now turned full upon her, and a harsh voice called upon her to stop, or she would be shot. To this command she paid no attention, but as she crouched down, still moving on, a pistol was discharged at her, and the ball struck the wainscot above her. On gaining the end of the passage, she opened the closet and felt for the rope—but it was not there!

With a cry of alarm, she flew up a narrow flight of stairs, which led to the lofts of the house, and from which there was an egress on to the leads, whereon the bell-turret rose. To reach it was a matter of exceeding danger—a false step would have precipitated her down upon the stones of the stable-yard; but it was the only chance. In her night-dress, and lighted only by the moon, the brave girl clung, rather than walked, along the gutter of the roof, and gained the wooden turret. She seized the wheel of the bell, and rang it violently, crying as loud as she was able at the same time, that she might arouse the servants. She had scarcely done this when a figure appeared at the loft-door, which was somewhat below her.

"Keep away!" she cried. "If you come near me, I will throw these at you, and you will be killed."

The bricks upon which the turret stood were loose, and easily to be pulled away; Annie seized one with one hand, and kept working the bell-wheel with the other.

The man, whom she now plainly recognised to be the Ganger, was emerging from the loft, when he was suddenly pulled back, and disappeared. There was a struggle and a fall; and next a noise of several persons shouting, as she saw more people run round the stable-yard.

"Annie — my own Annie!" cried another voice, well remembered, even without Philip's appearance at the loft

door. "For God's sake be careful; you are within an inch of the parapet. Wait until I come."

The girl shrieked with delight as her cousin crept out upon the roof, and giving her his hand, brought her back through the door. As she gained the loft, she found eight or ten persons there, some of whom had lights, and in the centre of them Sherrard was struggling upon the ground, held down by a few of the most stalwart, directed by Farmer Grant.

"What does this mean?" she cried, as she saw the assemblage.

"Here is your cloak, Annie," said Philip, as he picked up her mantle from the ground, and put it over her shoulders. She had forgotten her appearance; but now, with an exclamation of confusion and fright, she gathered it closely round her, and crouched into a corner of the loft.

"No harm, Miss," said Farmer Grant, as he saw the movement; "we wasn't thinking about that. Ah, would you? Lay down!"

The last words were addressed to Sherrard, who was still kicking desperately in the grasp of his captors. The Farmer shouted to him in a harsh imposing tone of voice, such as he would have used to a large troublesome dog.

"Philip," continued Annie, "pray tell me, what is all this about?"

"Directly, Annie: let us first see this gentleman in safety. Hold away, boys. He's a nimble one, if he gets the chance."

"Has anybody thought of the poor old lady?" asked Annie.

Nobody evidently had, for there was no reply. In the hurry and scuffle, Lady Flokes had been entirely overlooked.

Philip, his cousin, and one or two of the people directly started for the room; when they got to the door, it was fast closed—evidently by something heavy against it: and not a word of reply was made to their cries and knocking.

"Round by my room," said Annie; "you can get in by the other door."

They directly followed her directions, and on entering the old lady's chamber found her, with Julius and Margery, sitting, scared to death, upon a bureau, which, somehow or another their united efforts had contrived to push against the

door. The two of the weaker sex screamed as the others entered, and Julius shut his eyes, and put his hands before his face, expecting to be immediately massacred.

A word, however, reassured them, and then Philip observed:—

"It is all over. Pheugh! It was a tough job, though, whilst it lasted. There is no more danger. Captain Whacky Clark has got the charge of two of our friends in the large corn-bin: and you may all go to bed again."

"But, Philip," said Annie, who, now that the danger was all past, was quite trembling with the fright, and completely bewildered: "pray explain ——."

"Everything to-morrow, Annie. Come, boys; who's for knocking up Mrs. Baker, at the Red Lion, and telling her all about it?"

There was a ready acquiescence to the proposal.

"I shall take the blackguard upstairs under my own wing," said Farmer Grant. "I've been looking out for him this ever-so-long.

"Won't you put him in the round-house?" asked a man.

"The round-house!" replied the farmer, with contempt. "Why, young Humphreys got through its roof, when he was only in for dragging the court ponds, as easy as if it had been the open door: and this fellow could shake it down altogether with his feet on one side, and his back agen the other. No, no: bring him round to me."

"Now, if you don't go and get into bed directly, Annie, I'll never speak to you again," said Philip; "and look, your foot is bleeding. My good woman," he continued to Margery, "will you see to Miss Maitland?"

The old housekeeper vaguely understood Philip's request. All her senses had been scared away, like birds from an ivy-bush, and had not yet returned. But she, half mechanically, followed Annie to her room.

"You can rest in perfect safety, madam," said Philip, addressing old Lady Flokes: not without a smile at her comical appearance. "All danger is over, and, if you please, some of these good folks shall watch the house until morning. For the present, we will wish you good night."

And so speaking, he collected his companions, and they were shown down to the door by Julius, who, however, took

care to interpose as many of them between the Ganger and himself as was practicable.

Rapid, and perfectly astounding to the inmates of Monkscroft, as the whole affair had been, it had been very simply arranged. Philip had told Grant of his suspicions immediately upon arriving at Pottleton; and the worthy farmer, who had been burning to get some of the tramps into his hands, went heart and soul into the business. For some years past, he had rented the stabling and outhouses at Monkscroft, using them as store-rooms, and having his own entrance from the mill; and here, as soon as it was dusk, he had quietly ambushed all those fellows upon his farm that he could best depend on, taking up his own place, with Philip, in the conservatory, of which he also possessed a key, and wherein, for another small consideration, the trumpet-fuchsias, and giant cactus, and tree geraniums hybernated, that made the glory of Farmer Grant's garden in the summer, and caused passengers to stop and admire, as they crossed the mill-bridge on the public road, which overlooked it. Lady Flokes, with her limited income, turned everything to account about her estate. She would have allowed the very roof of her house to have been covered with mould, for mustard and cress to grow upon, if she could have made anything by it. In this light she was by no means proud.

None of the servants at Monkscroft had been told of their intention, for the farmer was afraid that the business would get whispered about, and their ends defeated, although Philip was anxious to put the inmates on their guard, which indeed was not without reason, as has been shown. And no beer was to be allowed to the watchers, inasmuch as Farmer Grant knew that as soon as it began to take effect, the convivial propensities of the British peasantry would lead them first to harmony, and then to fighting, both of which demonstrations were hurtful to secret watches. As it was, they had all been true to themselves, and to one another, and the result has been seen.

But all this time there was one especial gentleman who had, in a degree, known of the intended robbery, and watched its progress, without in any degree compromising his own high position, up to the very moment of its failure. He had, under pretence of admiring the lovely country from the roof

of the house, that very morning cut the bell-rope with his pearl-handled pen-knife; he had, with a curious interest, become acquainted with all the rooms of the mansion, and the disposition of their inmates: he had been charmed with the dairy, as he saw that a thin shutter only closed it in; and he had thought the chalk cliff decidedly the most picturesque thing he had ever seen in his life, as he found out how it joined the public road, and withal came close to the house. And looking to all this interest taken in Monkscroft generally, it is not to be wondered at that, if any inquisitive person had poked through all the thickets that edged the cliff, he might have found, amongst the broad fern, no less a person than the ingenious Mr. Wyndham Flitter.

So it, indeed, was. That gifted gentleman had been lying amidst the foliage for several hours, with a patience that, exerted in deer-stalking, wild-duck shooting, chamois hunting, or debtor-catching, would have been truly exemplary. He had not been ignorant of the ill success of the attempt, for from his eyrie he could command a view of all the outbuildings: and at the first revelation of the ambuscade he had endeavoured to withdraw himself from the scene of the adventure. But the road, which the belt of fern and coppice bordered, just at the edge of the chalk pit, was otherwise broad and open, and the moon was sufficiently bright for him to have been seen a quarter of a mile off. So he preferred lying still, until the excitement was over, and he could quietly steal off unperceived.

The party, under the Farmer's direction, having trussed, rather than pinioned, the Ganger, were now proceeding back to the village, no longer silent, but indulging in all the noise and excitement that such an affair, successfully terminated, might be supposed to have given rise to. Each, in his own opinion, had brought things to their present auspicious conclusion; and all were talkers, except Sherrard, who was walking sullenly amongst them, with two clothes props under his arms, by which he was hoisted up and hurried forward by his active captors whenever he evinced any disposition to lag behind.

"Hold hard, boys!" cried Philip, as they came to that part of the road on the top of the cliff. "This is where the blackguards let themselves down. I dare say we shall find something left."

The throng pulled up, and Philip dashed amongst the fern, to see if there remained any traces of the thieves.

"Steady! Master Hammond," cried Farmer Grant. "You'll go down forty or fifty feet all at once, if you get beyond the edge."

"All right!" was the reply.

Just as Philip was speaking, he started back, having trod upon something that had palpably moved beneath his foot. And the same instant a form rose from the fern, and almost before the others could observe what had happened, darted across the road, into a hollow surrounded by firs that grew together thickly enough to exclude the moonlight entirely.

"Gone away!" cried Farmer Grant, with a sporting whoop that rang again through the coppice. "After him, lads."

Philip had caught but a glimpse of the figure, but he could not be deceived. At all events, to make sure of it, he dashed through the hedge, and was the next minute going helter-skelter down the hollow, along with the other pursuers. Meanwhile the object of their chase had crossed the shaw and gained a gravel-pit, which was on the other side of it, some twenty feet steep. With astonishing alacrity, assisted by the holes which the martins had made in its side for their nests, he gained the top of this, which formed a sort of cornice from being undermined, and skirted another thicket. This he forced his way through, breaking down the nut trees, and pulling away the long ten feet brambles of the blackberries, which clung round his legs, and then gained the open country.

The party, headed by Philip, tried to follow; and with some trouble contrived to scramble up the pit, not without the infliction of sundry injuries upon the head, arms, and legs of their fellows. But when they gained the ledge, their combined weight was too heavy for it, and the cornice gave way altogether, precipitating eight or ten of them to the bottom, surrounded by an avalanche of clattering pebbles loosened by the fall. Philip had reached firm ground, however, and now started off again with one or two of those nearest to him, as they could see their game crossing a large corn-field on the slope of the hill.

Wyndham Flitter—for, as may have been imagined, it was that personage—was hard put to it. He calculated, how-

ever, that his identity might not have been clearly established, and so was the more anxious to get away. Moreover, he knew he was a good runner; he had put his legs to the proof on previous occasions, and they had never failed him; and therefore away he went, in the moonlight, across the corn.

By degrees his pursuers gave up, for the agricultural frame is rather adapted to slow continuous labour than condensed energy; and their "wind" was no match for that of the well trained man about town. One by one they tailed off, and at last Philip found that he was left with a representative of the Stiles' family—a brother of the Patience who had lately quitted Lady Flokes's service, and who possessed lighter limbs and tougher lungs than his fellows.

"Dang un—he can run like a ferrut," gasped the young peasant, as he kept even with Philip. "I wonders if he can leap."

"Why?" asked the other.

"Because he'll come to the bourne directly, and that's a goodish seven foot."

"Never mind," replied Philip: "don't flag."

They were not in a condition to waste more breath in talking than was necessary, so they kept on, in the wake of the other, through the corn, vaulting over the rail at the bottom of the field, and then crossing the gardens of some cottagers, at one of which an awkward check took place. Flitter had found that he had met his match in point of speed —in fact, that they were gaining on him, and hit upon a bold stratagem to detain them. There were some bee-hives in the last garden he passed through to get to the bit of meadow that skirted the bourne. Turning round for an instant, after he had cleared the low turf-wall, he took up a large clod, and hurled it at the nearest hive, with so true an aim, that he immediately upset it. And then, without pausing the fraction of a moment to see what effect the shock would have upon the enraged inmates, he darted off again towards the stream

"Don't'ee go there!" cried Mr. Stiles, as Philip was rushing on to the very spot. "You'll be stoong to death. Round by the ditch—that's it."

It was not the path, or rather the water-course, one would

have taken by choice, but there was no time to hesitate. They skirted the garden, and came into the pasture, just as Mr. Flitter, with a run and a leap, cleared the brook, in most steeple-chace fashion, and was off again across another meadow. His pursuers were less fortunate. Philip, to be sure, got over, but the other trusted to a soft bit of ground to spring from, and so fell short of his mark, and came plump into the middle of the stream, with a splash that sent the water flying up all round him in the moonlight. What he could not leap, however, he waded through; and was soon by Philip's side again.

But now another object attracted their attention. Far away on the common they perceived a bright red light: and the noise of an approaching train was next audible. Flitter saw it, too; and directly changing his course, made at once for the point where the lamps betokened the Pottleton station—knowing that the up-mail train, now coming on, would stop there, and he, perhaps, might get off by it. Collecting all his energy for this last push, he doubled his speed. The train came screaming on, and the bell at the station announced its near approach. Then it slackened, and as its gleaming lamp was hidden by the house, Wyndham rushed into the office, took a ticket, and, without waiting for his change even, bolted into one of the carriages. The letter-bags were pitched up—the engine whistled—and the train moved on again, just as Philip and Stiles got to the line.

There was but one chance left—it was a desperate one, to be sure, but it would not do to be foiled in this manner. Running to the end of the palings that began at the station, and were continued a little way on each side of it, Philip vaulted over the rails, and gained the line. The carriages were still moving slowly, and, clutching at a piece of the iron-work of the last one, which was a horse-box, he contrived to perch himself, although in a frightfully insecure manner, upon the buffer at the side of the rear light.

The porters at the station shouted to him, but it was of no avail; and he was borne away, leaving the panting Stiles aghast at the perilous feat, which, coupled with his exertions, entirely took away what little breath remained in his body.

And now they were off, humming and screeching along, with a ricketty-racketty noise, as the glowing cinders flew

about in all directions, lighting up their course. Philip held on with the grasp of a drowning man—more, however, to keep along with his object than from terror of falling, since, had he done so, the train would only have gone away from him, instead of running him down. In three or four minutes they were approaching the Dibblethorpe station.

Philip now debated whether he should take his place in the carriages, or remain where he was; but he perceived the train was not going to stop, as it shot past the building, ingeniously hooking the mail-bags from a post as it passed. Suddenly, however, he found the speed diminish, and about fifty yards beyond the station he came to a dead stop—very easily, and without any of the scrooping or vibrating that usually accompanies a pull-up. Looking round the side of the carriage he perceived the cause in an instant to his dismay. The horse-box had been dropped from the train, by the guard on the carriage before it, to be left at Dibblethorpe, and he also was left with it!

As the men came up to "shunt" it, Philip hurriedly explained what had happened; and, being known to one of them, met with immediate attention. Fortunately there was a telegraph station at Dibblethorpe; and the clerk was immediately roused, to send word up to town that Mr. Wyndham Flitter might be expected, and to beg that every care might be taken of him on his arrival. This was done; and before the object had passed half-a-dozen lengths of the wires along which the message flew, the answer came back that it was understood. and should be attended to.

"So," thought Philip, "that is one comfort; and now I'll just lie down in the empty horse-box till the morning train starts, for I am dead beat. However, we've nailed him."

But they had not; for the weasel-like nature of Mr. Wyndham Flitter kept him always very wide awake, and, therefore, the first notion that had struck him was the possibility of his being telegraphed upon the strength of a supposed recognition; acting upon which he preferred getting out at the last station before he came to London, rather than trusting himself to the observant eyes of the officials on the platform. So that at the time Philip imagined he was in their hands, he was quietly progressing, in a carrier's cart, to his own lodgings.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SOME FAMILY MATTERS.

THERE was grand excitement at Pottleton on the morning after these events. Never since the railway opened had the people so neglected their own business to go about commenting upon that of somebody else.

The attempted robbery at Monkscrofts was the all-absorbing topic; and from the barber's shop up to Pottleton Court the folks thought of nothing else.

Whacky Clark, who was released from his guard in the morning, when his two prisoners were removed from the corn-bin to the round-house, was the head authority at the Red Lion. Seated on a pail in the stable-yard, he went on with his descriptions, over and over again to fresh audiences, like an attendant at a panorama. And as his listeners successively asked him to drink, and Whacky never refused, and as his imagination took bolder flights with each half-pint, towards afternoon his story of the attack became perfectly marvellous; until at last, just as he was about to fight the ostler, who appeared inclined to doubt portions of his narrative—having taken his coat off for the sixth time to do so—he tripped himself up by his own energy, and was borne off to the hay-loft, where, in a heavy beery sleep, he concluded the evening.

It was a good thing, upon the whole, for Mr. Blandy, the surgeon; he had not booked so much in one day since the influenza. For, having been sent for, at early morning, to old Lady Flokes, whose nerves required steadying after the shock, he had called afterwards upon all his patients successively, to tell them about it; and artfully turning the conversation from this subject to their own domestic state of health, had contrived to send something, on his return, to everybody. How he proceeded may be understood by a few examples.

For instance: he first went to Mrs. Spink's, and told her and her tall nieces all about it, with such mild heightening as he thought proper, for the effect of the thing. And then Mrs. Spink observed—

"How dreadfully frightened the poor lady must have been."

"You can imagine so," said Mr. Blandy; "and her inquietude was not diminished at hearing that the rascals belonged to the tramps, amongst whom the small-pox is raging so furiously in the lane."

"Indeed!" cried all the ladies.

"Oh! perfectly frightful, even to me," answered Mr. Blandy. "I cannot vaccinate everybody quickly enough. I have only six ivory points left here"—and as he spoke he took a small glass tube from his pocket—"and these are bespoken over and over again."

"We have all been vaccinated," observed Mrs. Spink.

"Within seven years?" asked Mr. Blandy.

"Oh, no!—I should say not."

"Ah, then, my dear lady, I fear you are not altogether safe. Now, if you like to undergo the little operation, I will make some story to my other patients. The points are charged from as fine an arm as you ever saw. But you must not say a word about it, or I should get into a sad scrape. Ah! here is a beautiful lancet—quite new!"

Mrs. Spink thought this so kind of Mr. Blandy, that she seized the golden opportunity, and the gentleman, on his return, booked three guineas in consequence.

Mr. Blandy then went on to the establishment of the Misses Medlar, and all the story was told over again; at the end of which Miss Medlar remarked, "Poor old Lady Flokes! It was enough to have been her death."

"Very nearly so, I can assure you," replied Mr. Blandy. "For, independently of the fright, she is suffering, as all the world is, from the hay fever."

"Oh," said Miss Medlar, "I did not know that."

"I fear you will," replied Mr. Blandy. "The prostration it induces is most extraordinary. I cannot mention names; but I have at present an entire family laid up with it, even to the servant. They would not take my advice, and—so—there it is."

Mr. Blandy shrugged up his shoulders, with an expression that meant, "their obstinacy serves them right."

Miss Medlar was alarmed. She did not exactly understand what the "hay fever" was; but she knew that a

fever of any kind, reported in a school, was enough to ruin it, and so she directly begged Mr. Blandy to take such measures as he thought proper, to combat its invasion. Whereupon the three dozen draught bottles (which Mr. Blandy's assistant had purchased of an old tramp, and washed clean that morning, with shot and potash) were all refilled, capped, directed, and sent to Pottleton House Establishment that evening. And here the assistant indulged in a delicate little attention. He tied over the corks of the pretty pupil's phials with rose-coloured paper, whilst the rest had only the ordinary white demy of common life. The talk this made in the bedrooms was tremendous, until the teacher came up, after supper; and then all were as still as mice.

In this manner Mr. Blandy went on from house to house; and at last he came to the Twinches. He did not, to be sure, do a great deal here, in the way of business. The old man never took any physic at all, and never allowed his sisters, if he could help it; and the medicines which they were accustomed to distribute in great plenty, to the infant school, were all paid for by contract, so that Mr. Blandy was rather averse than otherwise to their exhibition. The Misses Twinch, however, although they worried him to no small extent, after the usual fashion of rustic religious spinsters, still were accustomed, on the other hand, to laud his talent and attention at their various small parties—"tea-fights," as young Grant called them—so that it was as well to keep in with them.

"Well, Mr. Blandy," said Miss Martha, eagerly, as the gentleman called in, on this same morning; "here is a pretty to-do, indeed!"

"And that Lady Flokes's house should be so singularly fixed upon for a robbery!" observed Miss Letitia.

"I have no doubt you have had strange suspicions, Mr. Blandy," continued Miss Martha, with excitement. "But it certainly is remarkable," added Miss Twinch, quickly. "Don't you think so?"

"Why—I don't exactly know, ladies," replied Mr. Blandy, not feeling clearly in what light he was to meet these observations; "you see the old lady lived by herself—Miss Maitland to be sure——"

"Well?" anxiously asked both the ladies at once, with a suddenness that almost made Mr. Blandy start.

"I was going to say that Miss Maitland could hardly be considered a protection."

"No, scarcely!" replied the ladies bridling up, and looking at each other.

Mr. Blandy, with professional tact, saw that he was floundering in the dark about some conversational swamp, the bottom of which he was unacquainted with; and therefore thought it would be best to hold his tongue. But this the ladies would not allow.

"Some persons have told us," said Miss Twinch, "they think it very strange that the house should never have been attempted until Miss Maitland went there to live."

"It is a startling and dangerous thing to say," Miss Martha went on; "that Mr. Flickers, or whatever his name is, was constantly there. In fact, Miss Maitland encouraged him."

"Hey-dey!" cried Mr. Twinch, who came into the room just at the moment, and caught up the last words. "What! at it again? What's the matter with Miss Maitland now? Has she been murdering anybody, or turned Chartist?"

"Not exactly," answered Miss Twinch, with a sneer.

"Well, how near has she come to it, then?" continued their hard brother, not to be daunted. "Eh? I suppose she let in the robbers, at Monkscroft last night. I shouldn't wonder —loaded their pistols, too, I dare say; and held old Lady Flokes upon the fire until she gave up all her money."

"Brother," said Miss Letitia, "many a word spoken in jest finds——"

"Now don't preach," answered Mr. Twinch. "Keep all that for your infants, and old women. Well, what is it?"

"Did it never strike you, Septimus," asked his sister, "that the cause which withdrew Miss Maitland from our roof might have something to do with this robbery!"

"What?" cried Mr. Twinch, so loudly and suddenly, that the girls were both frightened. "The cause, as you call it, was this: she was seen meeting a man one evening, after dusk. I have no doubt you would have done the same, if you could; but there is not much chance of that."

"Septimus!" they both exclaimed; "pray do not be so coarse."

"Coarse! what do you mean? It's the truth," continued their indomitable brother, as his spectacles, pushed up to the

top of his head, looked like another pair of eyes gazing at the ceiling. "You sent the girl away. She was a very good girl, and might have stopped here always, if you had left her alone."

"The contamination was too painful to anticipate," remarked Miss Twinch; and Miss Martha shrugged her shoulders, in approval of her sister's sentiments.

"Contamination, indeed!" continued Mr. Twinch: "so it would have been, if you had turned her into a crawler like yourself. Contamination! Why, you are old enough to take care of yourselves, I should think. The youngest of you might have been her mother."

"Come, Mr. Twinch," said poor Mr. Blandy, mildly, not having known what to do during this uncomfortable conversation. "I think you have allowed a little too mnch licence in that respect."

"Not a bit, sir," replid Mr. Twinch: "not a bit. There's the Bible, sir; and all our ages are down there on the fly-leaf. And if you look, you'll find that, if Tishy's a day old, she's forty. You are, you know. Now, am I wrong?"

Fond as Mr. Twinch was of crossing his sisters, whenever they fussed and fidgetted, or annoyed him with their spinsterial propensities, yet he was not often so rude, before others, as upon this occasion. He had been, however, much put out that morning at breakfast, by the arrival of a heavy bill, from the Committee of the Pongo Enlightenment Mission, for tracts and reports ordered by the Miss Twinches, during a recent May visit to London, at the time when Exeter Hall becomes, as it were, the mighty reservoir for distributing gold to all parts of the uncivilized globe. They had sweltered amidst the enthusiastic friends of distant cannibals, to the utter oblivion of their own neglected native destitution; they had rallied round all those clever schemers who so craftily turn our pure and holy religion into a matter of snug situations and lucrative popularity; and they had turned out, all heat and piety, into the bustling Strand, in the stream of hard-featured, umbrella-loving, queerly dressed, usually crafty, double-dealing, joy-hating individuals who at such seasons block up the pavement. And in their ecstasy they had ordered bales of tracts, not only for the use of the two million savages in the Pongo islands (who were gradually being reclaimed, according to the reports,

from eating every missionary upon his arrival, and now only devoured them when their own hunting grounds failed), but also, "at fourpence a dozen, for distribution" amongst the Stiles, and Colliers, and Humphreys of their own infant academy. Had they possessed clear matter-of-fact observation, and followed many of their companions in charity to their homes, they would have found them to be persons who neglected their children, and were dead to kindly domestic feelings—who covered their own inferior intellect by a saintly coat, as a doubtful tongue is made saleable by the glaze—and who were, now and then, frightfully unveiled. But they did not wish to be undeceived; for, as their brother had once told them, it was not religion that allured them—it was only recognised excitement, in the absence of other sympathies, or the chance of inducing them. They were rapidly approaching that state of old maids who vacillate between cats and tracts, and adopt the latter.

Hence was Mr. Twinch unusually angry; and hence, as he saw Mr. Page approaching, to join the party, he maliciously said:

"There! here comes another of your late friends. Now, you shall tell him what you think of Annie Maitland. And mind, I have always said she was a good girl."

"Now, Septimus: let me entreat of you not to expose yourself in this manner," said Miss Twinch.

"Expose *my*self!" replied their brother. "Well, I have a different notion of it altogether. Now, hold your tongue; for here he comes."

Good Mr. Page entered, all blushes and benignity, as usual, having called in reality to see Mr. Blandy, whose little terrier, waiting at the street door, was as good an advertisement as a gig would have been, as to the extent of his practice. But before he had well seated himself, Mr. Twinch exclaimed to the girls:

"Now, perhaps you would like to give Mr. Page your opinion upon Miss Maitland."

Neither of the ladies replied for several seconds. At length, Miss Twinch mustered up courage to say:

"Septimus, do not be so absurd."

"Oh," returned her brother: "you want to shy over the winker, do you? What do you think they have been saying, Mr. Page?"

The young curate could not possibly tell.

"They have been doing their best to make people believe that Miss Maitland was the robber, last night, at Lady Flokes's. Yes—you have: so don't contradict it."

"I am sure you are jesting, Mr. Twinch," replied Mr. Page, with a good-natured laugh.

"Did you ever know me joke, sir?" asked Mr. Twinch, severely.

Certainly Mr. Page never had; but it seemed an ill compliment to say so; so he held his tongue awhile—at last observing—

"I do not think Miss Maitland will have much difficulty in finding a champion, if she needs one. Besides, in a very short time, she will, in all probability, be entirely her own mistress."

This was altogether such a settler to the question, and said in such a firm, although mild, manner, that nobody felt inclined to follow up the conversation; and the girls were heartily glad of an opportunity to slip out of the room, leaving their brother, the clergyman, and the doctor, to settle what little business they had amongst them. And this related to a poor person, on the point of death, in the workhouse, about whom Mr. Page appeared to be more than usually anxious.

In the meantime, the Ganger had been kept all day in Farmer Grant's strong room, which had formerly been the counting-house, attached to his mill. Savage and sullen, he had not opened his lips to a soul: and had refused all the refreshment which the farmer had offered to him, even going so far as a horn of beer. Two or three of the men guarded him in the passage; having little fear of his escaping by the high window, which looked down on the mill-tail, foaming and roaring sufficiently to deter any one from wishing to drop into it upon an ordinary occasion.

Indeed, the mill altogether was a trial to common nerves; and when young Grant sometimes took ladies over it, they were usually in such a fright all the time, that few were enabled to describe it, when, to their joy, they got out again. Independently of the violent noise and vibration, which gave one an idea that the whole place was being knocked down about their ears—the huge wheels and cogs, and grindstones,

and driving-bands, and flying ropes, and revolving barrels—there were gaping holes in the floor, through which could be seen the lashing headstrong water, tearing along the mill-race with a deafening roar, to move the mighty wheel that checked it. On Farmer Grant and his family all this had little effect: indeed, the only restless nights they had, were those when the mill was stopped: its noise had become essential to their rest.

The Ganger had been drinking heavily before the robbery: and when he was put into the room, he had thrown himself upon some sacks, and there, in a state of scowling stupor, had remained until the next day was far advanced. Not so the rustic constables outside. Promoted from their ordinary occupation of beggar-driving to a post of some importance, they had made merry on their position; and, visited by many of their friends, had got through the afternoon somewhat in the same style as Whacky Clark, with the exception that they were a little more careful of their heads, and what with allowing the superior sort of village idlers to peep through a little sliding wicket in the door, upon the chance of being pecuniarily recollected, they had contrived, one way and another, to make a good thing of it.

At last, the sun went down behind the hills, and the purple twilight once more gloomed up the valley after him. The constables were relieved by two other men, and a rude bed of sacks was made for them in the passage, so that, had the Ganger tried to escape that way, he would infallibly have tumbled over them in the dark. He had, however, a different plan in view. He found, as soon as it got dark, that, by dint of some squeezing, he could pull himself through the window towards a stout gutter running under the eaves of the roof, directly below which the window was placed. This gutter, after going some little distance, joined a pipe fixed against the side of the mill — which was, as usual, boarded — emptying itself into the water, close to the wheel. He could not, however, see its termination from the window.

Knowing that if he could once get free, his late associates would shelter him, or join him in flight altogether to some remote part of the country, he determined to run the risk of an endeavour to escape. He knew, from the enormous power of his hands and wrists, he could hang by them for any

reasonable time, and that the jolting of the mill would cover any noise he might make in the attempt. As soon, therefore, as he conceived that his guardians had made their last visit, he forced up the window, leant out of it backwards, and, clutching the gutter, drew himself through the opening. In another minute he was sustained by his hands only, above the mill-race. With a grasp of iron, he contrived to shift himself cautiously along the gutter until he got to the pipe, and to descend this was an easier task; for, as it was placed against the boards, and these overlapped one another, there was beneath the lower edge of each a space left behind the pipe, in which he could fix his fingers. Lower and lower—every change of hands brought him nearer the level of the ground, when he found his feet suddenly touch the water as it rushed violently past him, instead of some sort of landing, as he had anticipated. He had not expected this difficulty, and, drawing up his feet, he fixed them upon the lower fastening of the pipe and looked round. Had he been a swimmer he might have dropped into the stream, and made his way on well enough to where it ran through the meadows; but this he could not do. One only way presented itself to him—desperate enough to be sure, but it was not a time to measure chances. The huge wheel was turning slowly round close to him; and he conceived that if he caught hold of one of its beams as it revolved, he could be borne for a third of its revolution to where a plank, or bridge of the rudest description, crossed the stream, close to the outside edge of the paddles. Once here he was free. Fixing his foot on the fastening of the pipe, and leaning away from it, he caught hold of one of the enormous spokes as it passed. His grasp was, however, scarcely firm enough, and he would have let go but for his other arm, which he twisted round the beam, and held tight to one of the floats. In his hurry he missed the plank, and the next moment was borne high in the air, to be plunged, with a half-turn, once more into the boiling water.

It was all over with him; he knew it at the instant. The headlong current swung him amidst the float-boards, as he was forced from his hold; and then, whirling him round, caused his head to strike against some of the fixed wood-work. Entangled in the wheel, again he was carried round, and

again hurled, like a bunch of weed, against the piles. His clothes got caught by the corroded iron of the floats, so that he could not free himself; and then, as his position changed on each revolution, he was grated and crushed along the bottom of the race, or beaten against the other timbers. He was soon dead; but the mill-wheel still kept on, raising his body in the air to drag it again through the water; and so it continued until the earliest workpeople in the morning perceived it, frightfully mangled, still going round and round, and alarmed the constables, who had fuddled and smoked themselves into an almost apoplectic sleep. The ghastly corpse betrayed no sign of blood, although it was completely blanched, for all had been washed away. But it was nearly denuded of it clothes; its very flesh had been torn away in strips; and itself had been forced and jammed between the float-boards and the spokes so firmly, that when the mill was stopped it was with the greatest difficulty the people could get it away.

And then it was put into a cart, and taken up to an outhouse of the Red Lion, to await an inquest, where the country people flocked all day to see it, and, in most cases, had its ghastly image before their eyes — not only that night, in their dark beds, but for long afterwards.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR. FLITTER'S DILEMMA.

Although Mr. Wyndham Flitter had "bilked the battery," as he termed it, when he escaped from the clutches of that common informer, the Electric Telegraph, yet he was anything but easy in his mind upon arriving in London. For he still had some idea that he was well known—and by Philip, too—and when he got to his lodgings, his first business was to collect his thoughts, somewhat scared by his journey, and to decide upon the best method of proceeding.

But it will be necessary to show where Mr. Flitter's present lodgings were—his home being a locality nobody could make sure of beyond a day. Out and away over the bridges, on a

The Ganger's lot

large thoroughfare that terminates on Kennington Common, the observant traveller will see a pair of small lodge gates, such as he might not look for now within twenty miles of London. Once, without doubt, these were led up to by hedges or parkish palings; but now, the ground on each side having been disposed of for building leases, formal "Terraces" and prim "Places" have encroached to their very gate-posts, which look as harshly in contrast as the entrance to an old galleried inn in the Borough between two railway omnibuses. On going through these gates you find a few detached cottages, as primitive in their fashion as though they had been on the outskirts of a village—not hovels, be it understood, but small houses, such as, in the country, might be inhabited by moderate annuitants and middling London tradesmen. They have little dingy gardens about them, bounded by stagnant ditches. Beyond these there are large plots of nursery ground, with their greens all in regular and diagonal rows, as if they were going to play German tactics; and, finally, are the backs of tall houses, which, from the plenitude of lights towards evening in their windows, both high and low, betoken that they are let in lodgings.

It is curious to speculate upon the prospects of the proprietors of these plots of nursery ground; for everything that comes up is a miniature copy of the production commonly known by the same name. The cabbages are like Brussels sprouts; the asparagus resembles hop-tops; the potatoes always appear new; and a mind led away by first impressions would take the carrots to be radishes. The only thing that flourishes is the smallest salad; and then, looking to the quantity offered on the stall for a penny, the return of capital appears questionable. Long reflection on the subject has in duced the opinion, that the owner once found this to be prolific land, and that he still clings to the same belief, from habituated conventionality, despite the total change of circumstances that has been steadily operating—as other individuals, who have let time run by them, yet believe in Daffy's Elixir, stage-coaches, high-art plays, Bath gaiety, and the Ancient Concerts.

Certainly Mr. Wyndham Flitter did not trouble his head much about these things. He chose the situation because it was cheap and retired, with the advantage of a bedroom open-

ing by a French window into the nursery plot. And here he arrived, very early in the morning, after his escape from Pottleton.

"Well, Mrs. Pittlestun," he said, as he came up to the door, and found his landlady watering a black geranium without flowers. "Well, Mrs. Pittlestun, here we are, again: how are you?"

And upon this Mr. Flitter stood like a clown, and made a face, on which Mrs. Pittlestun put down the water-pot, and screamed with laughter.

"Lor! Mr. Flitter," she said; "you are such an odd gentleman! And where *have* you been?"

His landlady might well have asked the question, looking to his appearance. For his hat was crushed, his boots were split, and covered with clay, and his coat torn and dusty.

"Hush!" said Mr. Flitter. "Hush! Mrs. Pittlestun. It's a secret. A little raking, I'm afraid; but I can't help it: until you make me a happy man, I cannot keep at home."

"Well—I never did!" said Mrs. Pittlestun, with a simper.

"No—but I wish you would," replied Mr. Flitter. "By Jove! any joking apart, I really do. Has anybody been for me, in my absence?"

"Nobody, at all, sir."

"Very good," said Wyndham. "And now, Mrs. Pittlestun, I want breakfast—strong coffee, to keep me awake, and settle my nerves. Yaw—w—ugh! I shall go tremendously to bed, to-night."

Mr. Flitter went into his room, and soon heard his landlady bustling about the house, after his breakfast. She was a smart little woman enough, and hitherto had not worried Mr. Flitter for any money, being simply content with his extreme attentions, and such orders for the play as Mr. Scute afforded him.

"How are haddocks, this morning, Mrs. Pittlestun?" asked Mr. Flitter.

"Very fine ones for threepence, up the road," replied the hostess.

"Ah!" rejoined the other. "Um—yes—no. Mrs. Flitter—bless me! what am I about? Mrs. Pitt, what is your opinion of bloaters?"

"Oh! they're very beautiful, sir."

"As beautiful as you are, Mrs. Pittlestun? Would your roe was as soft!—I beg your pardon—I mean your heart. Heigho! never mind: get me a bloater. I suppose you can't change me this cheque?"

"Never mind, sir—I will pay," replied his hostess.

Close inspection would have shown the cheque which Mr. Flitter pulled from his pocket to have been the copy of a writ. This, Mrs. Pittlestun did not perceive.

"How are eggs?" he inquired. "Have those fowls laid, which were given to me by the Marchioness of Flokes, of Pottleton Castle?"

In effect, the old lady thus nobly alluded to, had presented Mr. Flitter with some bantams—they being a race of fowls everybody is glad to get rid of—who had since struggled for a melancholy and precarious living amongst the nursery plots.

"Yes, sir; but do you know all the eggs are soft."

"Ah! give them some chalk, Mrs. Pittlestun, that will make them shell out—eh? Come, that's not a bad specimen, after sitting up all night. Never mind, Mrs. Pitt, go to the shops; only don't get any over sixteen a shilling. I mistrust the twenty-fours."

And with this commission his landlady departed.

As soon as she was gone Wyndham went into his bedroom, and changed his dress. A clean shave, a thorough wash, and, indeed, a careful toilette generally, as far as the capabilities allowed, completely brought him round; and he was once more the man-about-town usually recognised. He next wrote a hurried note on the back of another he had in his pocket, turning the envelope inside out to form a fresh one, and walking down to the gate, caught a boy, and promised him sixpence, on his return, to take it to its destination. This done, he came back again, and quietly awaited his breakfast. But the minute of its being ready also brought Mr. Wracketts, to whom he had written; and who, from being compelled just at present to live within a certain limit imposed by the laws of the Queen's Bench, was easily sent for.

"Well, Wyndham?" asked the latter gentleman, as soon as they were alone—"how is it?"

"Blown—sold—U. P.," replied his friend. "I can't tell

how, beyond knowing that young Hammond had something to do with it. But I had to run for it, and I expect Sherrard is nabbed."

In a brief manner—which, nevertheless, would have been a lesson to those magnifiers of simple adventures who occupy attention and generate yawns for prolonged periods in social life—Wyndham proceeded to inform his fellow scamp of the affair at Monkscroft, detailing it down to his very arrival in London and the precautions he had taken.

"What you must do is this," he continued. "Hammond will be up in town, beyond all doubt, by the next train, and he will also, in all probability, come to you first. Now, you must tell him that I am over at Boulogne—that I shall be back in a day or two, and that then I shall be staying with you. You understand?"

"All right," replied Wracketts, with a wink. "He doesn't know you are here, then?"

"Not a soul does but the landlady; and she—ha! ha!—she's in love with me, or something very like it. Where's Léonie?"

"Ah-h-h!" replied Mr. Wracketts, with a long expiration. "Where's Léonie, indeed; I wish I knew. I believe the day before yesterday witnessed the break up of our marriage."

"Cut?" asked Wyndham, briefly.

"No! don't say 'cut,'" returned the other. "I don't like it. But I do not know where she is; and that's the truth of it, *entre nous*."

Mr. Flitter gave a peculiar whistle of mingled surprise and embarrassment.

"Stay!" he exclaimed directly, "I've an idea. Was she really spoony at all upon Hammond. Such always struck me to be the case."

"Well, I suppose she was," said Mr. Wracketts.

"Very good," replied Wyndham; "I shall run the risk, and go back to Pottleton. I was a fool to bolt at all. How do they know that I was not looking out for the robbers as well as they were? Besides, how can they tell that I was not with you all night—at billiards, or hazard, or something or another?"

"Yes; but you cannot be both," observed Wracketts: "you must either be there or here, you see."

"Ah, to be sure: so I must," returned Wyndham.

Like all scamps, if allowed plenty of rope, he was beginning to get entangled in knots of his own making.

"I tell you what I'll do," he added, after a moment's reflection. "The game is too nearly won to be lost. I'll go down. It's mere heads and tails; and they can't hang me."

"Hang you, Flitter! No, no: that day hasn't come yet, old man. You're quite right; go down, and settle it by a *coup-d'état.*"

There was an unusual heartiness in Mr. Wrackett's manner, induced by the fact, that he knew he should get nothing if Wyndham gave up the business altogether, and therefore preferred the chance. If Flitter failed, he was only in the same position.

"Quite right," he went on: "and I would not lose any time. By the way, before you go, how are the funds?"

"Just what I was going to allude to," returned Wyndham. "Well, I think we can transfer a little—just a trifle."

"That will do," said Wracketts. "What can you let me have?"

"Let *you* have," exclaimed Flitter. "My boy, I thought you were going to offer *me* a trifle. I haven't a rap, except an old half-franc; and that won't pass."

"Nor have I. What can we do?"

The position was very uncomfortable, for each had reckoned on the other. Mr. Wracketts had hurried to see his associate, indeed, principally upon this account; thinking, without doubt, that affairs were flourishing at Pottleton. And they sat for some minutes gazing intently upon two plaster stags that adorned the mantel-piece.

"I tell you what," said Flitter, "this won't do. We shan't find money here. You might rub that old solar lamp, to be sure; but I expect it would be long enough before any geni answered your summons."

"Isn't the landlady game?" asked Mr. Wracketts.

"Not for anything above five shillings," replied Wyndham. "Hush—here she is!"

And as the hostess entered with some eggs, Mr. Flitter thus addressed Mr. Wracketts—

"Lord Edward—there's a woman! Did you ever see anything like her?"

"Lor, now, Mr. Flitter!—there you are again."

"But never too often, Mrs. Pittlestun," said Wyndham, with mock tenderness. "I cut, it is true, occasionally, but I always come again. Mrs. Pitt, are you going near Herries, Farquhar, Davidson, Chapman, and Co. to-day."

"Why, sir!" asked the landlady, with a stare, wondering what she could be expected to have to do with such an elaborate morning call.

"Pshaw! the bankers, I mean, in St. James's-street," Mr. Flitter replied.

"No, sir; anything Brixton way I can do for you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Pitt—never mind. Lord Edward will take me round in his bruffum; only I haven't a farthing to bless myself with—that's all. Stop: Mrs. Pittlestun, I want you to be witness to a wager."

The landlady, all astonishment, stopped as Mr. Flitter had requested.

"Now, look here, Mrs. Pitt—'Pitt' is a term of affectionate brevity, my lord; don't mind it—*we* don't."

"I never did see such a gentleman in all my life," observed the landlady.

"No, nor you never will again, Mrs. Pitt," continued Wyndham, "until the patent for making anything like me expires, which will not be for several thousand years. But, look here. That small piece of money is a French coin—a half franc, worth fivepence. Some day, Mrs. Pitt, you shall see *la belle France.* Oh! I've promised it."

"Come, the wager, Wyndham—the wager," said Mr. Wracketts.

"To be sure—the wager," replied the other. "Reach me that wine-glass, Mrs. Pitt. Thank you. Now, my lord—two half crowns."

"I have nothing but sovereigns," said Mr. Wracketts, feeling in his pockets.

"Mrs. Pittlestun," continued Wyndham, "have you two half crowns?—new ones, if anything."

The landlady produced two from a select party of some halfpence, keys, and a thimble, in her pocket.

"Now, look here," Wyndham went on. "I put these half crowns on the table-cloth, so that the wine-glass may stand upon them, upside down; and under it, and between them, I

put the half-franc. Now, I have bet Lord Edward a pony, that I can remove the half-franc without touching either the glass or the money."

Mrs. Pittlestun, who took the wager literally, wondered where the pony was to come from.

"You will get me to lift up the glass," observed Mr. Wracketts.

"No—honour!—no!" replied Wyndham.

"Well, I can't think how that is done at all, sir," said the landlady.

"Now observe, Mrs. Pittlestun, the bet is made. You shall have a dress for being a witness. Look here, my lord!"

Mr. Flitter commenced scratching the tablecloth with his nail in a line with the coin, which gradually jogged itself from under the glass."

"Well—I never did!" observed the landlady.

"You have done me," said Wracketts.

"Not 'done' you, Lord Edward," replied Wyndham. "It was a fair bet. But we must show it also at the Horse Guards. Mrs. Pitt—you will trust us with these half-crowns?"

"To be sure, sir."

"Then on we goes again," said Mr. Flitter, in playful badinage. "We will walk up there, if you please, my lord. It is a fine morning, and I want a little fresh air and exercise."

In all truth he had had enough of those advantages but a few hours previously. He did not, however, think proper to allude to this: and starting off with Wracketts, with five shillings between them, they threw themselves on the world of London, to see what chance would turn up of improving their finances.

"Well!" said Mr. Flitter, as they emerged from the gate. "We have five shillings, and the world of London is all before us. Not so bad: and now for Spooner's. Cab!"

A Hansom was called, and they rattled away to Mr. Spooner's late abode, where they were shocked at hearing of the rapid act by which the young gentleman's fast career had been closed. A bill was up in the window, and the servant was packing up his things.

"West," said Mr. Flitter, "was there no message left?"

"None, sir," replied the man. "You see he had no time; the old gentleman was in such a way."

"It's very awkward," continued Wyndham. "The wine account for the Derby has been sent in to me; and we have all paid our shares except your master. The man says he shall send it down to his father—which had better be avoided. I would pay it to-morrow, when the West India mail arrives, myself; but as you know, West, I am usually hard up just before it comes in."

He said this with a jaunty smile, to show West that he was a good fellow, and not proud. The man did not like the intelligence; for as much of the wine had been left, he had made away with it; selling some, giving more, and drinking the remainder himself. And, therefore, he dreaded the old gentleman's investigation, should the bill arrive.

"How much is master's share, sir?" he asked.

"Five pounds," said Mr. Flitter, as decidedly as though it had been.

"Because I was thinking, sir, Mr. Tidd would rather have me pay it, than his governor know about it, you see; and he would pay me again."

"Oh, that will do—perfectly," replied Flitter. "Where's a bit of paper? I will give you a receipt."

"Yes, sir: but ——" said the man hesitating.

"But what, West?"

"I haven't got so much money, sir."

"Dear me! that's awkward. Deuced unlucky—isn't it. How much have you got?"

"Two sovereigns and some silver, sir, beyond what I want to take me back with the things," said West.

"Very well," observed Wyndham: "that must do. I will try and make up the other. I dare say Mr. Sprott will be at home. Stop—let me give you the acknowledgment: there—make our best regards to Mr. Tidd, West; and tell him you know"—and he began to speak confidentially—"if he has any little private business he wants arranged in London, to let me know, and I'll do it for him."

"Thank'ee, sir," said the man. "I'm sure Mr. Tidd will be obliged to you."

"Oh—no more than I ought to do!" replied Mr. Flitter. "Good-bye, West."

And rushing down stairs again, he got into the cab and told the man to go to some theatre, the name of which he mentioned.

"Do you know Shem, the manager," he said to Wracketts, as they went along.

"No—never saw him in my life."

"Then I dare say he don't know you," said Wyndham: "so much the better. You can speak like an American—can't you?"

"I raythér calc'late I can," replied Wracketts.

"Very well," said Flitter: "mind, you've got a wonderful dwarf with you—that's all. Do you see?"

"Quite fly," replied Wracketts. He was like his class, very perceptive: the slightest hint was sufficient to show him what rôle he had to play.

Leaving them for the present, we will return to Philip Hammond. He arrived in London, by the first morning train, and discovered, to his disappointment, that nothing had been seen of his suspected object. He made the most minute inquiries—found that the faithful wires had sent their message direct to the terminus, and that the officials had been put upon the alert to detect the individual described; but that nobody like him, in any way, had appeared upon the platform. And therefore, not knowing in any way what to do, he had loitered about until the next opportunity arrived of returning to Pottleton.

The tall shadows of the trees were slanting across the road when he got there; and the village had resumed its usual tranquillity. For now the railway had ceased to be matter of bustle. The villagers no longer made festival on Sunday afternoon to see the trains come up; nor did the boys, throughout the week generally, hurrah the carriages and their inmates as they passed under tho Dibblethorpe Road bridge. Even the cattle, that for months after the opening had been scared by the passing trains, no longer cocked up their tails, and scampered off in all sorts of directions, but quietly kept on their grazing as the engine went by, minding its sharp yell no more than if it had been the lowing of a cow in another field.

Philip proceeded directly to Monkscrofts, where Lady Flokes had held great state all day long, as every body of position in

the village, and even near it, had called upon her to know how she was after the terrible events of the night. The old lady was still receiving friends; and Annie, glad to escape from the task of being compelled to repeat the same story over and over again, to people who did not care a straw about her, and, in the same spirit, complimented her presence of mind—had retired to an old summer-house in the grounds, one of those tumble-down temples which our forefathers thought picturesque in ornamental gardening, and display nothing within but a damp-stained ceiling, a bare floor, two or three skinny chairs, and a tarnished mirror.

Philip was not sorry to find his cousin alone. As he came to the glass door of the pavilion, he called her by her name.

"Philip!" she cried; and on the first impulse was going to rush towards him. But, as if suddenly recollecting herself, she drew back, and the greeting sank into a few somewhat cold words of recognition.

"This is not the welcome I looked for, Annie," said Philip, as he noticed the sudden change in her manner; "and after all that has passed!"

"After all that has passed," she said, "I do not see what you could have looked for otherwise. Oh, Philip, how I have loved you! how little I found you cared for me!"

She burst into tears as she spoke; for the suddenness of the meeting, and her own pent-up emotion, had overcome her.

"My own dear Annie!" he exclaimed, as he flew towards her, and seized her hand, "I deserve it all—everything that you can do to make me wretched. I was a fool, an idiot, not to have seen all this before—to have known how entirely I had neglected you. But I have not been my own master. I have been played the fool with, duped, and made a toy for others. You must hear me."

"No!" she said, "it is better not—better for both of us; for I cannot see what good would come of it. Oh, Philip, a very little of your time given to me would have made me so happy. If it had only been one line a week to tell me you were getting on, and well, as you used to do, when you were in France. Besides, there are other and more serious reasons that we should part."

"What do you mean, Annie?"

"I should be to blame," she answered, "if I concealed anything from you that I have heard. I know, Philip, that you have a fixed, and to say the least of it, not a very honourable attachment in London.

"Who has told you that?" asked her cousin eagerly.

"I am not at liberty to say," she replied. "I do not, however, make this of the first importance. Of course, if you saw any one whom you thought you should like better than myself, you were free to do so. You never wrote a line to me; and I, long ago, considered our engagement—if such it was—entirely at an end?"

"I never wrote to you Annie!" exclaimed Philip, with an expression of inquiring astonishment. "There is some terrible mistake here."

"I fear not," replied the girl. "At first, I used to look forward for the letters, and watch the postman from house to house, as he went along the village, like a child who expected a fairing. I had no one else in the world, you know, Philip, to look to: and at last I grew sick with finding you had forgotten me altogether."

"Will you hear me?" asked her cousin, as Annie had gone on speaking rapidly. "I was going to tell you that you have been deceived—I do not know who by, although I can well imagine. I own, when I first went to London, dazzled by a new life, harassed by work, and led away by the thousand temptations that lure a young man at every step of his career, I did not write to you so often as I ought to have done. But I never forgot you, Annie: when I neglected you in this way, I was always bitterly punished by my own reproaches. And then, when I saw my way a little more clearly, I never let a week pass without sending you a letter—whether you wrote to me or not."

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the girl, confused and tearful.

"It means that we have both been duped," replied Philip, earnestly—"that the letters have been kept back by some one interested in nourishing a bad feeling between us: and that you ought not to have been so led away."

There was a trace of bitterness in his last words: for he perceived that the scale was slightly turning in his favour.

"I could not help it, Philip," she replied. "If I had

been left to myself I might never have allowed the good opinion I always had of you to change. I see now I should have been guided only by my own impulses."

"Who dared to influence them, Annie?" asked Philip. "Pshaw! I see it all—Wyndham Flitter."

"No, Philip: he has been everything that was kind and attentive to me."

"He is a scoundrel, Annie! He has been using us all for his own ends; and it is not my fault that he is not now in custody, as being concerned in this affair last night. I know everything. He has been paying you attention, to get hold of whatever you may come to own. He had tried in every way to bring about my utter ruin in London and elsewhere; and he was about to play his last stake, in which you were to be the victim."

"Can I believe this, Philip?"

"You *shall* believe it, Annie. You shall find everything I have stated clearly proved, and before this week is over. You shall know that, thoughtless as I have been, I still love you beyond everything else in the world. My own dear Annie, will you forgive me?"

He threw his arms round her as he spoke, and looked at her with such an earnest, beseeching expression, that every doubt vanished in that instant. She bent her sweet face towards him—her bright chestnut hair brushed his cheek; and the most perfect reconciliation ever made was accomplished in a moment.

And now that the state of excitement in which they had just conversed was calmed down, long explanations took place on either side. Time was altogether forgotten; and it was only when they found that, during their long talk, the twilight had come on, and they were almost in the dark, they returned to the house, where Lady Flokes received Philip with great honour; and, timid at being left alone, begged he would stay at Monkscrofts that night: to which end, Mrs. Margery had orders immediately to prepare a room for his reception, which, although not an example of what the homes of the aristocracy might be supposed to furnish, was delightful from association, and, practically, much better than the empty horse-box which had furnished Philip with a resting-place on the preceding evening.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN UNFORESEEN NIGHT'S JOURNEY.

We left Mr. Wyndham Flitter and Mr. Wracketts, on their way to the theatre, in a cab.

They drew up at the stage door, and went to Mr. Shem's private room, where he was engaged, as usual, in getting into frantic passions with all the subordinates of the theatre.

"Vell, vot is it now?" he asked, not perceiving their entrance in his rage, of a small pale girl who was standing at the door.

"If you please, sir, the droppings from the tallow torches spoil all the dresses, and the ladies want to know if they can't have wax?"

"Oh! they vant vax, do they? Vell, who finds the dresses—the vardrobe or the ladies, eh?"

"Please, sir, we do ourselves."

"Oh, vell, then, they shan't have vax. I don't know vot they'd have—it's the best of tallow. There, go along, go along. Ha! Vyndham, how d'ye do? Here, look here; vot do you think of this?"

Mr. Shem took up a MS. lying by him, and continued—

"You know Brown, that writes the newspapers? He abused me the other day for my management; but I've been down upon him. I offered a guinea for a song upon him; and Scum wrote one. I did *him* too."

Wyndham never doubted it.

"Vot do you think I did? I put my copyist behind a screen, and he took it down as Scum read it. Then I said it was all bosh, and I vouldn't have it; so I got it for nothing, eh?"

And here Mr. Shem winked first at Wyndham, then at Wracketts, and then several times successively at himself; concluding—

"Vell, and vot's the matter now?"

"This gentleman has just landed from New York, and has a wonderful dwarf at Liverpool," said Wyndham. "If you engage him, you won't know where to put the people."

"Vot's he like—eh?"

"First-rate stuff," said Mr. Wracketts, with an American twang, "and a regular screamer."

"Ah! vell—I'll come down and see him," replied Mr. Shem. "Vere is he?—Liverpool, eh? Vell, I suppose you'll pay my fare there and back?"

This was not altogether what Mr. Flitter intended to do.

"Vorth your vhiles," continued Mr. Shem. "I go third class, and my servant goes as he can. Last time he went in the calf-pen. They didn't charge him nothing for that, and gave him two shillings into the bargain, for looking after the animals. Not bad, that—eh?"

"I'm downright sure he'd be a go," said Wracketts, "and burst up all the other houses."

"I don't see it," replied Mr. Shem. "Vot's he to play in? There's no dwarf in Shakspeare's plays."

"But he's not obliged to appear in one of those," said Wyndham.

"Yes, he must," the other went on. "I want to revive the drama. Nobody like Shakspeare—noble man! never comes to the treasury on Saturday."

"I don't know much about him," said Wracketts; "but my dwarf will knock creation into a pint pot, and beat the solar system in a canter."

"Vell—if you'll pay my fare, I tell you, I'll go and see him; and if he's worth anything, I'll let him come out here for a week, and charge you nothing for him. Eh?"

"Wont do, governor," said Wyndham, rising. "You've missed your chance—never mind, it's not *our* fault."

And getting up he left the room, as if to take high ground, with Wracketts. But Mr. Shem did not call them back. On the contrary, he was very glad to get rid of them; and as soon as he thought they were well off, sent a message to the stage-doorkeeper not to let them through again.

"No go, there," said Wyndham, as they went down stairs. "I wanted to have got a small sum down, to have clinched an engagement, and we could soon have found a dwarf—I know a dozen. What shall we do now?"

Mr. Wracketts couldn't tell at all.

"Stop a minute," said Flitter, suddenly, as they passed through the porter's hall; "here's somebody I know."

A friend of the departed Mr. Spooner—for he might now be considered in a measure dead to London life—was waiting at the door. Mr. Flitter immediately recognised him, having met him now and then at the rooms of his former acquaintance, and immediately went up and spoke to him.

"Mr. Sprott, I believe?" he said.

"No, Morley," replied the young fellow.

"To be sure; Mr. Morley: I meant to say Morley," observed Wyndham; "but we had just been talking of Sprott. But what brings you in the regions of the drama, Mr. Morley? A play?"

Wyndham saw the gentleman had got a roll of MS. in his hand, and guessed what it was. He was right.

"To tell you the truth, I have written a play," he said, in a low mysterious tone; "and I am going to send it in to Mr. Shem. They say he'll play anything, he can get for nothing."

"Stop, stop—not so fast! For nothing! pshaw! Why should you use your brains in that way. Don't be in a hurry. If you have five minutes to spare, I should like to have a bit of talk with you."

"You are the very person I wanted to see," replied Mr. Morley. "I called at your old lodgings, but you had left. Where shall we go?"

"Oh, anywhere, for a little time; we can't talk here. Let me present my friend, Mr. Wracketts to you. A man of great influence," he whispered, "in the dramatic world. Stop, we can turn in here."

They entered the handsome coffee-room of a tavern in the neighbourhood, and so contrived that Mr. Morley ordered luncheon—chops, stout, and sherry. And then Mr. Flitter began to talk about the play.

"Let me look at it," he said. And glancing at it, he added, "Ah! five acts — a work of mind! But it wants putting ship-shape."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Morley. "It isn't a nautical drama."

"Ha! ha! 'ship-shape;' very good!" laughed Wyndham.

"Not a bad play on the word," added Mr. Wracketts.

"At any rate," said Mr. Morley, pleased, "it's better than a bad word on the play."

And then they all laughed again.

"No," said Wyndham, in continuation. "What I meant by 'ship-shape' was, that it had not a technical appearance. Now, for instance: it should be written on one side only of the paper; and these speeches of four pages are too long. They should be divided by exclamations of the other characters, such as 'Go on,' or 'Proceed,' or 'Your story interests me.' And it has no stage directions. Oh! all this may be immensely improved, and you may get money for it."

"Do you mean that?" asked Mr. Morley. "How much?"

"Two or three hundred pounds," replied Wyndham.

The young author was quite aghast.

"Now, look here," said Wyndham, after a moment's pause. "With my experience as an author, and the influence of Mr. Wracketts with all the managers, what you were going to give away may become a valuable property: don't you see?"

"Oh, of course," replied Mr. Morley.

"I am a man of business," Wyndham went on; "and I am sure you are. If you were not, you could not write a five-act play. Short reckonings make long friends, and a labourer is worthy of his hire. You shall, if you please, give me ten pounds for my time (of which, I need not tell you, every minute has its value); and I will undertake to have the piece properly arranged, well cast, and brought out; and —well paid for."

"Certainly," said Mr. Morley, beaming with a notion of being called for, and bowing from a private box.

"Of course, if these conditions are not fulfilled, the money will be returned, or you shall give a dinner with it. Is it a bargain?"

"I am perfectly satisfied," replied the other. "I will write you a cheque now."

"Oh, never mind the money! If you please, though, I will take it—perhaps it will settle the affair at once."

Mr. Morley called for a pen and ink, and wrote a cheque. Mr. Wyndham Flitter took it and put it into his waistcoat pocket: after which, he rolled up the MS., and placed it in his hat.

"It is odd we should be talking about plays," he continued, after another glass of wine. "This ring was given to me by a great author of the day, on the hundredth night of a play I got in order for him. I hope I may some day have another."

And here Mr. Wyndham Flitter bowed courteously, and with a pleasant smile, to Mr. Morley.

"I should be too happy," said Mr. Morley, in reply. "How very fortunate that we chanced to meet to-day."

"Very," said Mr. Flitter. "And now you really must let me pay for another pint of wine."

Mr. Morley had, in effect, said nothing about paying for the first: but the offer was so adroitly made by Wyndham, that he contrived to fix the young gentleman with the lunch, even under the guise of generosity on his own part. The wine was ordered: some more pleasant chat took place: and when at length they parted, Mr. Morley was absolutely enchanted with his new friends and prospects.

"And now," said Mr. Wyndham Flitter, "we'll make a night of it. Let us be boys again. Fortune evidently smiles upon us. I shall go to Pottleton to-morrow."

"You will?" asked Wracketts, somewhat surprised.

"Most certainly I shall. You'll see it will be all right. I've thought the matter over: what can they say against me? —nothing! I wasn't found in the house. I had heard of the robbery, and was watching to protect the inmates. Don't you see?"

"Not very clearly. How about your running away?"

"Oh—that's soon got over. How was I to know it was not the gang in pursuit, to break my head? I shall do well enough. Now, where shall we go?"

"The play," suggested Mr. Wracketts.

"No—I can't stand plays—nothing bores me so much. It's always the same story. Mediocrity, a soporific, in five acts: or Polished Feebleness, an adaptation from the French, in two. I wish it was opera-night."

Mr. Flitter could always get into the opera. Nobody knew how; it was a question that the director himself might have been puzzled to have replied to.

"Vauxhall," again suggested Mr. Wracketts. "There s something new there: great improvements."

"Too early," answered Wyndham. "Besides—I know what 'great improvements' are at Vauxhall. The orchestra fresh painted; a view on the Rhine stuck up somewhere; and bad singing. The enterprise of the lessees consists in, season after season, seeing that what amused people thirty years ago doesn't do so now. They are remarkable men, sir."

Here Mr. Wracketts had exhausted his invention, when, by chance, they saw a bill, something about Cremorne Gardens and a balloon ascent, and this decided them. They would go there and dine, said Mr. Flitter, and see it all out.

It was a holiday afternoon—that is to say, it was Monday, when The People, according to philanthropical imagery, go forth rejoicing to breathe the pure air and expand their minds; and when, according to common-place observation, they return tipsy, to squabble in gin-shops and abuse their wives. The river was alive with boats—the steam piers were crowded with passengers; and there was such a coming and going, such scuffling and bumping, and heaving a-head, and turning astern amongst the steamers, that if anybody eventually got to where they intended to go, they were fortunate. But this chance did not deter them from clustering about every available corner of the boats like bees: and amongst a dense mass of these holiday-makers Wyndham and Wracketts soon found themselves hopelessly wedged. At length, they landed safely, and then plunged amongst the waving foliage of Cremorne.

It is a very comical place. The traces of its former aristocratic existence jumble up oddly with the arrangements for its present festivities. It reminds one of a reduced nobleman compelled to turn clown for his livelihood—of a feudal baron retailing brandy-and-water to the Gents, instead of carving for his retainers. One takes refreshments there with awe; and you would not be surprised if the ghost of some former proprietor were to rise up out of the ground, and order you off his premises.

Mr. Flitter and his companion dined in the mansion, and were introduced to Mr. Speck, the aeronaut, whose balloon was the great object of attraction, as it swayed backwards and forwards, looking like the dome of St. Paul's standing on its head to those who were immediately beneath it, and ran away in a mass when it inclined towards them.

Mr. Speck was a very remarkable man; like the chameleon, he might be said to live upon air, passing the greater part of his life, which was nothing but a series of ups and downs, in it. His importance was large: he had been so long accustomed to regard men as dots, that it was impossible to tell how far his own sense of greatness went. His views

of things generally were grandly comprehensive: and he was upon unexpected visiting terms with all the country-houses within sixty miles of London. He had a wife and family, and they were all as flighty as himself. Master Lunardi Speck, Master Garnerin Speck, and Miss Rosière Speck, (aged four,) had all been up in his balloon, upon great occasions, whenever the Licensed Victuallers, or Floriculturists wished extra excitement. Mrs. Speck herself was a daring aeronaut, whenever maternal duties permitted; and had herself been up with fireworks: and every living thing in their establishment was similarly experienced. The cats had all been sent down in parachutes from enormous heights, and forwarded back from Essex, Kent, or Surrey, as the case might be; and the very pony that drew the Speck family about, had been up for their annual benefit, when Mr. Speck climbed up outside the netting of the balloon, at an elevation of seven thousand and fifty feet, and on arriving at the top drank a bumper of champagne to the health of his patrons.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter, Mr. Wracketts, and Mr. Speck had a glass together, and were at once excellent friends: indeed, the aeronaut offered them seats in his car that evening, for which the fashionable world would have had to have paid large sums. But Mr. Wracketts positively declined: and Mr. Flitter would have liked it, but—"hang it—no," as he observed, "he would rather look at the fireworks from the ground." They, however, obtained permission to be within the ropes, when the machine ascended; and then the party divided, Mr. Speck to look after his balloon, and the others to disport in the grounds.

The usual routine of entertainments went on, and Mr. Flitter was enjoying the gyrations of the dancers, when Mr. Wracketts suddenly observed, in a tone of alarm:

"I say, Wyndham: look there!"

"Where?"

"The other side of the platform—isn't it Levi?"

"Not a doubt about it," replied Flitter. "He can't be after me."

"I don't know," observed Mr. Wracketts. "Perhaps it's me."

There was cause enough for fear with both of them. Writs perpetually floated before their eyes; like spectral motes after looking at the sun.

"I think we had better go," said Mr. Wracketts.

"Nonsense. I tell you we have luck with us to day. "We will be valiant."

"The better part of valour is discretion," replied Mr. Wracketts, as he pulled Flitter away, rather than took his arm. "It is best to be safe."

They went towards the gate: when, just as they were approaching it, Mr. Flitter perceived some one else, with whom he was acquainted, in the light of the gas-illuminations that decorated the entrance.

"Then this is not the way to be so," he answered. "That's one of Levi's men: and I'll be bound there's another at the other end. Something's up."

"We are done," murmured Mr. Wracketts.

"What a pump you are," replied his friend; "throwing cold water on everything in this way. Let's go back and enjoy ourselves."

And, with a melancholy resignation, Mr. Wracketts allowed himself to be led back again.

It was now dusk: and the people were crowding round the space roped off for filling the balloon. Mr. Wyndham Flitter and his friend joined the party, and were admitted into the circle where Mr. Speck was all important, directing the movements of a quantity of men who were holding on to the car, and allowing the balloon to carry them here and there a little distance, to the terror of the beholders.

The hour arrived for the departure. The band came to play "Off she goes." Mr. Speck saw that his fireworks were all properly arranged upon the drum-like frame that was to hang from his car: and was giving his last directions as to letting go, when a scuffle took place between some of the attendants who were keeping the ring and a person who wished to break through it. The latter, however, gained his point, and walking up to Mr. Wracketts, immediately arrested him. By his own good luck, Mr. Flitter was amongst the men on the other side of the car, or he would, without doubt, have shared the same fate. But he saw it, and just as the intruder appeared to be beckoning to some of his fellows, he exclaimed:

"Hang it—never mind. One can but die once. Mr. Speck, I'll go with you."

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Speck, who was already in the car. "Jump in: that's it. Stop—we must throw out a sand bag. Stand clear, all."

The sheriff's officers were advancing to the car, but Mr. Speck's caution restrained them. They fell back, as the daring aeronaut pulled the releasing trigger. The band struck up: the people shouted, and Mr. Flitter was borne upwards and away, when within the very grasp of the bailiffs!

His first feeling was that of wild exultation—his next, one of deep awe as the view below opened upon him. Hundreds of thousands of lamps were visible, marking all the localities of London, as though one had pricked out the lines of a map and put a light behind it. In the obscurity and distance, all traces of the houses and enclosures were lost sight of: and as the balloon still kept ascending, the position could be compared to nothing else than floating over a dark and boundless sea, spangled with countless myriads of points of light. They could be seen stretching over the river at the bridges, edging its banks, forming squares and long parallel lines of light in the streets, and solitary sparks—further and further apart until they were altogether lost in the suburbs. Above, the sky was deeply blue, studded with innumerable stars: in fact, above, below, and around they appeared sailing through a galaxy of twinkling diamonds, incalculable and interminable.

"By Jove, this is fine!" observed Mr. Wyndham Flitter, as soon as his excitement allowed him to speak.

"Ah!" said Mr. Speck, "it's nothing to the fireworks. Look here."

And lighting the quick-match, which ran down to the frame some twenty feet below them, the cases began to throw out coloured fires, with a strange noise in the vast space. Good as the effect was, it was not to be mentioned in the same breath with the view. But Mr. Speck evidently was of a different opinion. Like all people connected with theatres or exhibitions, he believed greatly in the superiority of art over nature.

"It's getting devilish cold!" observed Mr. Flitter to Mr. Speck, who hung over the car watching his fireworks with the intentness of an angler looking from a bridge at a fish stream. "I shall have a cigar."

"Goodness me—don't do that," cried Mr. Speck, recalled by the light of the match, which Wyndham had rubbed against his boot. "It's destruction!"

"How so?"

"Carburetted hydrogen gas is inflammable," replied the daring aeronaut. "The whole balloon would go off with a bang if it caught. Throw it away!"

"Not until I have lighted my cigar," observed Mr. Flitter, coolly pulling at the match.

"Indeed—indeed you must not," said the other: "the cigar is just as dangerous. Pray throw it away."

"Oh! very well," answered Wyndham. "It's all the same to me."

He pitched his cigar over quite composedly: it really appeared to make little matter to him whether the balloon burst or not. And then the view faded away into a haze of light, and he and his companion found themselves sailing on the wind, in the dead silence of night and the heavens.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE LEGACY.

At last the eventful day arrived—the year having elapsed since the broiling July morning on which the railway engine first screamed into Pottleton—when the treasures of the cabinet were to be unfolded. The breakfast had scarcely finished (and it was remarkable that very little was eaten by anybody except Mr. Twinch, upon whose nature the excitement did not make the least impression) when Mr. Page arrived to give up his trust, with the old key. The Misses Twinch intended it should be a day of great ceremony, for, of course, every body in the village knew what was going on as well as they did themselves—and had put the parlour into fine order for the occasion: whilst Whacky Clark had so rubbed the furniture, and supported himself inwardly during his labour, that the consumption of oil and table-beer, bees'-wax and cheese, mechanically and physiologically, was diffi-

cult to be believed. When this task was concluded, he was put outside the door; and there employed in a constant conflict with the boys, who, hearing something was going on, kept climbing upon one another's shoulders to look in at the window. There was no infant-school that day. Miss Twinch gave all the children a holiday, with permission to those who liked, to weed the garden and pick snails at a half-penny a quart. And those who did not avail themselves of this privilege, joined the group at the door, and jostled and squabbled with the rest—all sympathy with the sentiments of "Let dogs delight" vanishing when they left the school-room.

Miss Twinch would have been deeply grieved had she known this, for that excellent moral song was always sung once a-day by her flock. Hence it spread in the village, and hence Whacky Clark had got hold of it. But his knowledge of its beauty, vaguely picked up, was very limited. He had, somehow or the other, confused it with another popular lyric, and was accustomed to hum it to himself after this fashion:—

"Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
For 'tis their nature to do so.
But he had a man Friday to keep his house tidy,
A treasure for Robinson Crusoe.
Oh! poor Robinson Crusoe!
Oh! poor Robinson Crusoe!
Let bears and lions growl and fight,
With a ring-a-ding Robinson Crusoe!"

And in this version he persisted under all circumstances and in spite of all corrections. He even sang it in the intervals of his conflicts with the children, on the eventful morning in question.

"Get down, Bill Simmuns!" cried Whacky, stopping his lay, and advancing with his broom towards an urchin who was climbing up the iron rails.

The youthful Simmonds hastened to obey, but, in his flurry, he caught a part of his dilapidated costume on a palisade, and there hung, in great distress, whilst Whacky administered a few corrections, which he defined by the somewhat antithetical name of "socks on the head." This over, Master Simmonds was released, and deposited in grief on the footpath, after threatening Whacky with a mother's retribution,

which, however, did not deter the other children from linking hands in a ferocious dance round the weeping culprit, and singing:—

> "Oh, fie; fie for shame,
> Every body knows your name,"

to a nursery air, and with a great enthusiasm of tyranny, until Mr. Page was seen in the offing, when they were, for the time, quiet; or rather, they expended their energies in making him low bows.

Mr. Page went first of all into Mr. Twinch's office, with whom he had a little conversation: and before he had finished, a sedan chair was observed coming up the village, which immediately created a diversion of the popular attention. For never having seen any one but old Lady Flokes in it, the boys directly conceived that Julius must be one of the bearers, and they, accordingly, all started off, with warlike shout, to meet the cortège, and resume their wonted pleasantries whenever the black servant came abroad. They were, however, doomed to disappointment. Neither Lady Flokes nor Julius were there; that is to say, the absence of the latter was sufficient to prove that of the former: but the bearers were two able-bodied, out-door relief paupers, who walked with a grave, determined air, that quite subdued any tendency to rebellion on the part of the boys, and went straight up to Mr. Twinch's. The sedan was admitted by the garden gate, and went round to the back of the house: and then the boys lost sight of it altogether.

The cabinet had been moved on the preceding evening into Mr. Twinch's company parlour: and there the inmates were now assembled, Mr. Page joining them, and giving up the key just as twelve o'clock at noon sounded from the old Norman tower. Then Mr. Twinch read some papers, and various people acknowledged signatures to be their own—as if there was any doubt about what they had palpably written before everybody just that minute—and Mr. Page now proceeded to open the cabinet.

Some ancient stuffs—faded with time—fell out as the door was unlocked: and then Mr. Page was enabled to take down its contents more carefully, after being covered with dust, and surrounded by moths, as the old things tumbled over him. A wonderful collection of treasures it contained. Yards

The Legacy unfolded

of old point lace, and stiff rustling brocades—that would have done for the dress of the gentleman who married the ghostly lady, and one day found her clothes all standing up by themselves, after having some words with her, that drove her back to the grave he had wedded her from; boxes of antique jewels, rare beads, and embossed chatelaines. There were, also, old silver drinking cups and flagons, with many other articles of plate—peg-tankards, with Queen Anne crown-pieces let into the lids, and ladles similarly ornamented with ancient money, quaint sugar-basins, salt cellars, and waiters—but all dull and black with age. Then Mr. Page produced, with great care, several rare old drinking glasses, carefully swathed in more old stuffs, with stems of wondrous workmanship, within which other old coins had been blown, and rattled loosely about: and one which had been broken, contained a ring with a signet on it, which Annie, laughingly, put on her finger; but it would have gone over two of them.

"I will give you that, Philip," she said, with an arch look, to her cousin. "It will fit you better. Besides, I don't wear rings."

"Wouldn't you wear *one*, Annie?" asked her cousin, slily.

Here Annie saw the Miss Twinches making uninteresting faces at each other, as they turned their attention, for a minute, from the articles that Mr. Page was giving out.

There appeared to be no end to the contents of the cabinet. Next they found many pieces of money, of reigns long gone by, tied up in folded scraps of silk and mouldy bags; and at the back of the shelves some bundles of parchment, the ink of which was pale, and the skin mouldy, from damp and time. The assembled party held their breath, with surprise and expectation, as the wonders, one after another, again came to light and air. How on earth old Mrs. Maitland had contrived to collect such treasures, was beyond the powers of everybody to conceive.

"There is not much more," said Mr. Page, "except some old books. What is this one, tied round with ribbon?"

"I know it," said Philip, as he saw it. "It is the *Pilgrim's Progress*—one we used to read in when children."

"To be sure it is," said Annie: "give it to me. Oh! how long since I have seen the dear, old book."

"It is, indeed!" observed Philip, half to himself, and some-

what seriously, as a rapid review of intervening years shot, for an instant only—but intense and comprehensive—through his mind. In a minute all the treasures about the room were forgotten, as he looked upon his old friend of childhood.

"To be sure," he repeated after Annie, as the struggle between them for it made the Miss Twinches wonder, such a dirty, aged thing as it was. "To be sure—how well I recollect the old woodcuts! There's Christian climbing up the hill, after he dropped his roll—"

"And we used to think, at first, it meant a roll from the baker's. And—oh, see—there's Pliable and Christian at the Slough of Despond."

"Don't you remember, Annie, when we thought the Slough of Despond was that bad bit on Dibblethorpe Common? and how we started off, once, with bundles, like Christian, and frightened poor aunt?"

"And there's—stop—what's this, Philip?"

As she spoke, she drew a folded paper from the book, on which Annie immediately recognised her aunt's handwriting. She handed it over to Mr. Twinch, who began to read it. It set forth that the treasures had belonged to the family who had brought her up, and with whom she lived when quite young: and that, at the time of the riots of '80, the heir to the property had been executed, under an assumed name, as one of the most violent of the rebels. He was the last of his race; but the family, to avoid the confiscation of the goods, had, after much secret legal proceedings, made everything over to her, thinking her comparative humble station in life would be a protection against suspicion. They never recovered the blow they had received. The chief members of the family went abroad, broken-hearted, and there, one after the other, died, until the house was extinct. Both the brother and sister of the old woman were aware that she was in possession of some property of considerable value; but all their efforts to induce her to part with it had been in vain: and the subsequent death of Maitland, in Southern Africa, and evil career and unknown end of old Hammond's wife, left her almost alone in the world. She had first bequeathed the treasures equally between Annie and Philip: but this had been erased; and some little time before her death, the will that placed everything in the girl's hands had been made.

The entire party were listening to these disclosures, with breathless and trembling interest, when a double knock at the street door, sudden and violent, made their hearts jump into their mouths; and the next moment, to the astonishment of everybody, Mr. Wyndham Flitter entered the room!

To account for the appearance of this ingenious gentleman, it is necessary that we should go back to where we last left him—very high up in the dark night air, with Mr. Speck and his fireworks. With sandwiches, brandy, and great coats, they had contrived to keep themselves tolerably comfortable, until the first red blush of dawn peeped from the eastern horizon: for it had been impracticable to descend before, the chance of coming down upon a windmill, steeple, or poplar, not being altogether desirable. And then, seeing afar off, a desirable-looking country-seat (which it is the aeronaut's first care to select, in order that he may be hospitably entertained), with a large park surrounding it, Mr. Speck prepared his apparatus for descending.

"I wonder where the devil we are," he observed, as he looked abroad for some landmark.

"I don't know," replied Mr. Speck, "but west from town. Halloo-o-o-o!"

This cry was addressed to two men, who were about in the fields thus soon. But they did not reply to it: on the contrary, as soon as they looked up, and saw the balloon, they ran away as fast as their legs would carry them.

"After no good," observed Mr. Speck. "Poachers. Hold hard: the grapnel will catch directly."

And as he spoke, the anchor which had been leaping along the ground after the balloon, giving it a jerk and a tug every minute, not remarkably pleasant, laid firmly hold of a gate.

"Halloo-o-o-o!" cried Mr. Speck, again, and this time with better success, as two or three people came from the farm, and caught hold of a line which Mr. Speck dropped. "Now we shall do," he said: "and we are sure of breakfast at the house. Steady, men—clear the brook—all right."

The balloon touched the ground, and the two voyagers once more stood upon the earth. By this time, more people had come up; and the gas being liberated, Mr. Speck directed the packing up of the machine; saw it safely into a car, and then went towards the house. The family were

soon assembled at breakfast, for the bustle of the arrival had called everybody up; and in another half hour Mr. Wyndham Flitter was talking upon everything to everybody, whilst Mr. Speck was deeply in conversation with the master of the house—who fortunately, for once, chanced to be a philosopher—upon gas and barometers. The ring and the watch had new legends attached to them—the former having been worn by the unfortunate Pilatre de Rosiere when he fell from the Montgolfier Balloon, near Boulogne, and the latter having been presented to Mr. Flitter's grandfather by the great Guy Lussac, who went higher than anybody else had ever been—except the daring Mr. Speck, as he thought proper to add. All this quite delighted the ladies of the family: and the old gentleman would have his horses out to take them—balloon and all—over to the nearest railway station, distant some ten miles.

"Furzely!" said Mr. Flitter, as he heard the name. "Why—that's on the Pottleton line."

"To be sure it is."

"The very thing," he went on. "Oddly enough, I was most anxious to get there. This is capital.

"You know Pottleton, sir?" asked the eldest son.

"Oh—well," replied Mr. Flitter. "The Braybœufs and Lady Flokes—in fact, every body. I have some property there, which I want to see my agent, Twinch, about."

"You know Constance Braybœuf, then?" asked the young man, with animation, but in a subdued tone.

Mr. Flitter saw the state of things immediately, and replied:—

"Most intimately—ever since she was a little girl. A charming person. I shall see her to-night: and be too happy to undertake any little commission you may have."

"Hush!" said the young gentleman, cautiously; and then he added, "Let me show you our fuchsias."

Mr. Wyndham Flitter was an invaluable visitor to country people: for he was always ready to look at flowers he didn't care about—admire poultry in which he felt no interest—walk over land that could possibly be of no earthly avail to him—or hear plans of improvement that he could not understand; and, in fact, do anything else essential to keep in with

provincial friends. So he started off, with the young gentleman, through the French window, into the garden.

"I am going to take a great liberty with you, as a stranger," said the son; "but I hope you will excuse me."

"Oh, certainly—pray don't mention it," said Wyndham.

"I think you said you should see Constance Brayboeuf to-night. The fact is—but it is a great secret—we are engaged; only neither of our fathers and mothers will consent to it; so we are not allowed to correspond."

"I see," said Wyndham, in an instant. "You want me to take a letter."

"If you would be so kind," said the young gentleman, "I should never be able to thank you enough."

"Not another word," answered Wyndham. "Let me have the note, and Miss Brayboeuf shall get it this afternoon."

"But nobody must know it."

"Did you ever catch a weasel asleep, and shave his eyebrow?" asked Wyndham. "Rely upon me. And now I am going, in turn, to take a great liberty with you—I was about to say, as a stranger; but I hope we are not strangers now."

"Oh, no—I am sure we cannot be," replied the son, enthusiastically.

"The truth is," said Mr. Flitter, "this foolish balloon excursion was a mere freak, last night—a whim that seized me in the gardens, immediately before the ascent; and I came away without any money; little expecting to be so far away from friends and home in the morning."

"From home—not from friends, I hope," observed the young man. "There is my purse—pray take what you wish."

Mr. Flitter felt that such frank generosity was quite refreshing. He had hitherto believed that purses were only proffered in this manner by people in plays.

"If you can spare five pounds," he said, "I shall be——"

"Pray take it," interrupted the other.

"And how can I return it?"

"Don't return it at all," replied the young man. "Further oblige me by buying a ring with it—I leave it to your taste—and give it to Constance Brayboeuf from me."

Mr. Flitter promised to do so, and they went back to the house. In a short time all was ready for their departure.

The old gentleman rode over with them to the station, and here they parted—the latter individual returning to his home, Mr. Speck going to London, and Mr. Wyndham Flitter, by the down train, to Pottleton, where he arrived, as we have shown, at Mr. Twinch's, shortly after noon.

It required all his consummate impudence to face the company in the lawyer's parlour. But things had arrived at a neck-or-nothing state, and he felt that the time for throwing the last stake had come. And, therefore, to the astonishment of Philip, who for the instant was staggered at his coolness, he walked into the room, and, crossing over to Annie, said, "Well, I am here, you see." After which he recognised the other persons present, in an off-hand manner, and then swept the appearance of the room with a quick but searching glance, and perceived the state of things in an instant.

"Leave Miss Maitland's hand alone," cried Philip, as Wyndham had ventured to take it, at the same time putting Annie's hand forcibly back.

"Why, Philip, old fellow! what's all this about?" asked Flitter. "There must be some mistake here. I don't think you exactly understand the state of affairs."

"There is no mistake, and I understand everything," replied Philip. "You are a liar, a thief, and a scoundrel."

Mr. Twinch got all his pens and ink in readiness, and looked from one to the other in rapid alternation.

"These are strange words, Mr. Maitland," answered Flitter, pale as death, and speaking with a slightly tremulous voice. "I do not understand you. You must be mad. Fortunately we are in the presence of one gentleman who always has his senses with him."

This was meant as a compliment to Mr. Twinch; but it did not have the desired effect.

"If you have any regard for your own life or freedom leave this room directly, sir, or you will be kicked out of it," shouted Philip, making a step towards him, and being immediately pulled back again by Annie. "Leave the room," he cried, in a still louder tone.

"Pshaw!" answered Wyndham, trying to smile derisively, but he had a hard matter to get his quivering lip into duty: "Pshaw! I tell you, you are mad. My business is not with you, it is with Miss Maitland."

"You! you cur!" responded Philip.

"Hear me," cried Wyndham; "hear me all. I come to denounce this man as a ruined profligate; as the plotter of a deep scheme to get all this property into his own hands; as the associate of all that is dark and infamous in London; as a mercenary trifler with the affections of that young lady! Now, who is the liar and the scoundrel?"

Again Philip would have sprung across the room to get to him, had not Mr. Page interposed.

"One minute, my dear sir," said the good curate: "pray restrain yourself. I think we shall be able to explain things without violence."

As the others looked in wonderment at each other as to Mr. Page's intentions, that gentleman went into the next room, and presently returned, wheeling in a castor chair, in which a female was reclining—apparently suffering from extreme illness. A glance assured Wyndham that it was Margaret Sherrard: to the others she was unknown.

"Do not be alarmed, my good woman," said Mr. Page: "you are with friends here. You know that person, I think?" he continued, pointing to Wyndham. The woman shook her head—not in the negative, but with an air of mistrust and sorrow.

"Mr. Page tells me you know Pottleton," observed Mr. Twinch: "or rather you did formerly?"

"I was born here," the woman replied, speaking in a faint, laboured manner. "You may remember my husband: his real name was not Sherrard—it was Martin. He was to have married Emma Maitland—*his* mother."

She pointed towards Philip as she spoke.

"But she broke off the match, and he married me out of spite. God knows he repented it, often and often, and yet I did all I could to serve him."

"We do not question that, my good woman," said Mr. Twinch. "But to our more immediate business. I am given to understand that you know something of an arrangement, or a scheme, or a plot, in fact—in which some of these persons have been concerned."

"I heard it all," replied the woman, "but it was not intended that I should do so. It is nearly a year back now—one terrible night that they met at our lodgings. I will tell

everything. I may not have much longer to live, and it will ease my mind, now *he* is gone."

With a faltering voice, but yet in a collected and straightforward manner, in spite of the repeated interruptions and violent outbursts of Mr. Wyndham Flitter, Mrs. Sherrard then proceeded to detail the whole of the conversation she had heard on the evening in question, when, with her ear against the wainscot, she had listened, in the next room, to every word that had passed between Flitter and her husband relative to Annie and her property. And then Mr. Page joined in the revelation, and showed how he had known all this for some time, but a solemn promise had sealed his lips, from which he was now released; and how his suspicions of Mr. Flitter's hand in the robbery at Monkscroft were more than slight: all which together was pretty well as much as he could face. He contrived to do it though, and preserved an expression of calm contempt upon his face that was perfectly marvellous.

Not so with Philip. In spite of all Annie's intreaties, his blood had been rising, far above fever heat, during these disclosures: and now he fairly boiled over. One after another, he brought forward the most palpable proofs of the secret villany which Mr. Wyndham Flitter had so long been engaged in perfecting: and which had now been fortunately thwarted, just as the end was attained. With a strange eloquence, which only his highly-wrought and half-maddened feelings could have endowed him with, he pointed out to the company present how Annie had been deceived throughout, and he himself betrayed: how the acquisition of everything he could get was all that Mr. Flitter had in view: and how, if his intentions with regard to Annie had been carried out, she would have been deserted, and most probably left in absolute want the instant he had obtained possession of her property. In fact, he brought forward so many desperate charges against him, that, at last, Wyndham, who had been almost taken aback by the sudden attack, rushed towards Philip, and aimed a heavy blow at him. Philip stooped to avoid it; and it fell, with all its force, upon the hard but unoffending head of Mr. Twinch. Had they been practising for a pantomime, and the latter gentleman had been cast for Pantaloon, he could not have received the blow more plumply.

A terrible scene ensued. Amidst the screams of the women, and the cries of Mr. Twinch for a constable, Philip flew at Wyndham. With the feeling of right on his side, and the force which a hearty disposal of all his pent-up rage endowed him with, he seized the other by the throat, twisting his gaudy satin scarf until he almost choked him, as he shook him like a rat, and ending by hurling him against Mr. Twinch, over whom, chair and all, he fell heavily, in a second unintended assault. This was amidst the renewed shrieks of the women —Miss Martha striving to faint in Mr. Page's arms, until violently shaken back to consciousness by her sister, and the cheers of the boys outside, who, with Whacky Clark, forgetting all order in the excitement of the scene, formed one general audience as they swarmed about the window.

But their astonishment and excitement, great as it was, was increased tenfold when the street-door opened, after much noisy and convulsive shuddering of the knocker, as if disturbed by a great conflict and divided intention within—and Mr. Wyndham Flitter, with a bleeding face and torn apparel, was ejected by some one whose leg could only be seen, half across the road, followed by Toby of the Red Lion, who always made a point of being present at any commotion in the village, yelping and snapping at his heels with the most intense ferocity.

Mr. Flitter's pluck had failed him. He would have stood up to the most diabolical charges before an audience of the world, or even faced an adversary's pistol, with, at all events, an appearance of calm composure; but the outbreak of Philip's direct physical violence was too much for him, and he had ignobly cowered before it.

He turned round for an instant, and looked towards the door; which, however, had closed upon him the minute he was clear of its posts. He then shook his fists, with terrible intent, at Mr. Twinch's spectacles, which could alone be seen staring through the window after him—and a moment after knocked down several of the boys who were within his range. He next kicked the unlucky Toby, as though he had been a football, on to the top of a shed adjoining the road; and, finally, with a loud promise that they should hear from him again, he bolted away along the village as fast as his legs could carry him.

The boys, with a cheer, started after him at full cry, but he soon distanced them, and was last seen under the arch of the railway, as he turned round its corner to make for the station.

The only trace of his departure thus left was a manuscript five-act play lying in the road, which Tommy Clark picked up and sold for threepence to the man at the shop to wrap up his wares in; whereby its ultimate purpose was far more useful than if it had been represented, to send an audience away cross and gaping, after the manner of the "legitimate" drama generally, as at present represented. And in this manner did Mr. Wyndham Flitter make his last appearance at Pottleton.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

And now all was explained and all forgiven on every side: and Philip started off to London, with a heart so light that the novelty of the feeling was almost too much for him—to arrange his affairs before he came back to Pottleton to turn countryman, and take the management of the land (which Mr. Twinch's investigation discovered some of the old papers put into Annie's possession) into his own hands.

Leaving Annie to be the sole topic of conversation in the village; and doing no more than just alluding to how the Miss Twinches strove to outvie each other in offering her their room; how Mr. Bulliam swore and condemned his own eyes, and those of all his sons in succession, in the most dreadful fashion, because they had let Annie slip through their fingers, and then drank two bottles of port, and was obliged to ring up Mr. Blandy to bleed him in the night—how Mrs. Spink and her half-cast nieces sent a hideous, nodding, tongue-lolling, squatting figure, from the temple at Jaggerbedam Ghaut, upon the Muckaraboo river, with their kind love to Miss Maitland, and would be glad to know how she was—how Jack Poole, formerly in the 9th, when the Brayboeufs told him about it one night at the opera, thought

he had missed a chance, because young Rasper had informed him, at the ball, that Annie was "slow and provincial;" and drowned his remorse by supping with a *coryphée* afterwards off lobster salad and champagne,—all this, and much more, in detail, would occupy more room than we can at present afford. So, only observing that Annie preferred going back, for the present, to stay with old Lady Flokes, to whom she showed many of the old curiosities from the cabinet, and started the aged gentlewoman upon all sorts of recollections and legends thereby, we will follow Philip to town.

He had not a great deal to arrange. His prudence, through everything, had kept him from running into debt; and, when uninfluenced, his expenses were very moderate. His chief business was to see Mr. Scute, and endeavour to make some arrangement, by which he could write anything for "The Cracker," without being in London; and so, in some measure, add to his income. For this purpose, he first called at his lodgings, but found that he had left them some weeks, and that the people did not know where he had gone. Then he went on to Brainer and Clinch's printing-office, where he was distressed to hear that poor Mr. Scute's irregularities had led to his final dismissal, although every chance had been given him, and every allowance made, as long as it was possible; and that they could not exactly tell where he was likely to be found, but probably the foreman knew something about it. From him Philip learned the likeliest spot to meet him, and he went on thither immediately, chiefly taken by a feeling of compassion for the poor little child.

It was a small public-house, in a dingy court, close to one of the great theatres; and behind the bar there was a sort of parlour into which some murky light contrived to force its way through a clouded window that looked against a grimy wall. Low actors—whiskerless men, with no shirt collars, who were all remarkable for that state of mouldy dirt which characterizes those who are perpetually in theatres, and know no other life—loitered about the bar. Playbills, announcing benefits of unknown performers were hung up at its side; and there were two or three fly-spotted pictures, at the back, of professionals striving to get into notice, by having their portraits taken and published. It was, in addition,

a sort of inferior house of call for clowns, and before pantomime time, one or two could always be found loitering about here. They were sad, wan-looking men, and were all known by abbreviations of either their Christian or surnames. No one of the external world could have recognised in them the funny personages who announced their own presence once more, to the delight of the gallery, at the commencement of a harlequinade.

Philip found Mr. Scute in the parlour, sitting at the table, —it was still morning,—with an empty glass and a small pewter measure before him; and perceived, at once, how matters stood. His hair was uncombed and straggling—his shirt-collar dirty and ragged, and his eyes bloodshot and dull: and when he stretched his hand out to Philip, after a lingering recognition, it vibrated as though from palsy. When he was spoken to, he passed his hand over his forehead, whilst he tried to catch the sense of the words addressed to him; and then scarcely answered. He was evidently approaching a state of imbecility.

"Here! wai'er!" he cried, "what's your name?—bring another go. You'll have some, too?" he added to his companion.

Philip declined, and, under pretence of choosing some other refreshment, went to the bar.

"Mr. Scute seems in a very bad way," he said to the landlord.

"Yes; he wont last much longer," replied the man. "He's worse of a morning, though; if you saw him at twelve o'clock to-night, he'd be quite another person. He lives entirely on gin—never eats a crumb. But that's of no consequence, for all his inside's clean gone."

"How do you suppose he subsists?" asked Philip.

"That's what I was saying, sir—gin," answered the landlord.

"No; I mean, how does he pay for what he has?"

"Well, he don't, sir. Most of the bar customers know him, and they stand treat. They need: yesterday, he drank thirty glasses of gin and water!"

Philip went back, and tried to persuade Scute to eat something; but this was useless. Drink—drink! that was all he wanted; and as measure after measure was ordered, his faculties

appeared gradually to return. He then told Philip that he had quarrelled with Brainer and Clinch, but he did not say that they had discharged him; but that he was doing much better, with more work than he could get through. Poor creature! that was little enough. An occasional address, or low song for a small actor, repaid in more gin; or a theatrical paragraph, or scraps of dramatic intelligence, picked up from the frequenters of the bar, and sent to a Sunday paper, made up the sum of his work in question.

He had sunk so irretrievably low, that Philip saw it was useless proposing any plan that might put him in the way of earning a trifle. He was, however, glad to make out from his rambling account of himself, that the poor little child had been taken care of by some charitable person. Where Scute himself now lived no one could tell. He always remained until the last at the public house, which, being theatrical, kept late hours, and then would turn out into the streets, sometimes to walk about all night, sometimes to go into a coffee-shop, and doze in a box until morning came, and the public house once more opened its doors. After he had left Brainer and Clinch, he would, now and then, in cold weather, steal into the engine-room, when night-work was going on, and crouch down near the furnace; but this chance was uncertain.

He asked Philip to lend him a small sum, which the other directly did, although he knew it would all be swallowed up within an hour of that time. And then, in the hopelessness of being able to accomplish anything for him, he left, somewhat depressed by the sad spectacle: and convinced that in a few weeks' time the closing scene would be found in a hospital dissecting-room—for nobody would be likely to claim his body—and perhaps, after that, a workhouse funeral. But even this latter was a chance, depending more or less upon the honesty of the students.

He was gazing for an instant, after he had left the tavern, at a flaring bill, announcing some new speculation in a neighbouring theatre, when a voice at his side exclaimed—

"Fiddleshtickl! all ver goot; but vare ish Mr. Shtaudigl? zo."

There was no mistake—there could be none—as to the owner of the voice. Philip turned round, and immediately

recognised Mr. Stoff. But he had not his ordinary shabby genteel appearance; on the contrary, his clothes were of radiant continental cloth, which always looks as if it had just been revived—probably it might have been in this case.

"Ha! ya! zo!" exclaimed the Herr. "Mr. Phillips, vot he vos. Wie befinden Sie sich?"

"Very well," replied Philip; "and you? But I need not ask. And what are you doing, Stoff?"

"Oh, dere ish singers, zo, in costumes—ya, pewtiful. Mr. Shtaudigl vos heard them at Innspruck."

"Indeed!" observed Philip, not having the slightest notion of Stoff's meaning.

"Ya!" resumed the other, nodding. "Secretary, zo. Mr. Punn vos vot he vos, he vos; and oather beebles vos tolked to him. Fiddleshtickle! eh?"

"Certainly," said Philip; and then he shook hands with his old acquaintance, and left him; not understanding, even to this day, what it was all about, beyond the haziest notion that Mr. Stoff was secretary to some Tyrolese singers, recommended to him by Mr. Staudigl, and somehow or another wound up with Mr. Bunn; which two personages appeared to exert, together, some dimly defined but powerful influence over every thought and action of Mr. Stoff's existence.

Philip's next visit was to Mr. Polpette. He found that ingenious foreigner at his usual post—the kitchen on the housetop, in conclave with several other foreign gentlemen—members of the family of the great unshaved—all in a high state of ferment at some news from abroad, which they had been reading from the *Constitutionnel*, borrowed at the neighbouring hotel, and each laying down some plan for what they called the "regeneration of their country." This curious epidemic, so prevalent amongst foreign gentlemen of dirty aspect residing in London, has of late been remarkably prevalent. With them "regeneration of a country" appears to be ruining its commerce, blowing up its houses, shooting its inhabitants, scaring away its visitors, hanging its authorities, and committing all those atrocities generally, which combined, form what they call "a struggle for liberty."

The notion of this had so completely turned the heads of M. Polpette and his friends that Philip could not get a word in edgeways; and so leaving them to regenerate their coun-

try at the earliest possible opportunity, he wished the party good day, and thought what a comfort it was that "struggles for liberty" in England were all confined to pot-house parlours; or if, indeed, brought forward publicly, rapidly ended in a consummation entirely different to that which they were expected to achieve, the "struggles" simply taking place with intelligent and decisive policemen, well termed "crushers" by the people, as far as their aspirations were concerned.

Finally, he returned to confer with Messrs. Brainer and Clinch, and was fortunate enough to get a regular engagement to write for them, at a higher salary than he had yet received—poor Mr. Scute having been kept on, even up to the very latest week, more from compassion than the services he rendered to the "Cracker," which was gradually making its way, thanks to the railways and steamboats.

Philip left the office with a light heart, for he felt that he should now be able, on his part, to command a certain income, and not appear, or indeed consider himself to be, entirely dependent on his cousin. At the same time, he had seen enough, even in his short experience, to feel that it would not do to trust to writing alone for his subsistence. He knew the terrible uncertainty of literary popularity—how like the life of an author was to a firework, which sparkled and burnt itself away amidst the applause of the multitude, and then tumbled into obscurity, a worn-out, useless case. And so he was not carried away by any of those dreams of success to the end which dazzle most young writers; but determined to use his abilities prudently, and only as an auxiliary to some more substantial and steady occupation that might arise hereafter.

A day served to arrange what other affairs he had to settle; and then he returned to the village. Let us pass over a few intervening weeks, and walk up the road together on a lovely September morning. Something is evidently going on, for Pottleton is all alive, and there is great bustle about the church. All the old village loiterers who attend the christenings, marriages, and deaths are there; so also are all the children, tumbling heels over head in the long grass, and cheering every body who arrives with much hilarity, from Mr. Mousel, whose red plush is perfectly dazzling in the

bright morning sun, to old Master Harris, the pieman, who has come out with a large stock of cunning confectionary, and his spinning arrow, which he assures the young crowd, for this day alone, is only to point to prizes.

At the Red Lion there is also much bustle. Two or three flys are drawn up in the yard—the two grandest, which are regular glass coaches, have come over from Dibblethorpe; and two pair of post-horses have been sent up to Pottleton Court, to bring down the Braybœufs' carriage. Mrs. Baker had found these the most difficult things to get; for since the railway opened nobody had ever wanted any; but young Grant and his friend Dick Finch had sent their hacks, which were both used to the collar; and some trademen in the town supplied the off-horses, from their tax-carts. The team might have been better matched to be sure, but what else could be done?

Perhaps it is at Mr. Twinch's, both in and about his house, that the greatest excitement is going on. From an early hour the children of the Infant School have been assembling, in white dresses; and are now in the parlour, partaking of some tough cake and milk and water, which, however, they find most delicious. Last night Mr. Twinch had a round or two of verbal combat with his sisters; and it was upon this account. We suppose it is useless to disguise the fact any longer, nor do we see why we should—that all the bustle in Pottleton this morning arises from the day being fixed for the wedding of Philip and Annie; and it had been arranged by Mr. Page, Mr. Twinch, and indeed Philip himself, that it would be best for Annie to go from the hard, but really well-meaning, old lawyer's house, as he was to give her away. The choice of bridesmaids had been the next matter of consequence, and here the Miss Twinches, who had forgotten all their old animosities and jealousies, now proffered their claims—not to Annie herself, but, by suggestion, to their brother.

"Pooh! stuff!" said Mr. Twinch: "what do you mean?"

"Our meaning is not difficult to understand," observed Miss Martha. "There must be some bridesmaids."

"And so there will be," answered Mr. Twinch. "There's Miss Braybœuf—and very kind of her, too—and her two little sisters; and that good-looking girl at the Medlars, that Mr. Page wished to be of the party."

"It would be as well, for our own position, to form part of the ceremony."

"So you can," said Mr. Twinch. "Go as friends; but, bridesmaids—pshaw! look at your age. I won't have it. The boys would huzzah you."

This was dreadful; for the Misses Twinch had been all along intending to appear as such, and provided their dresses accordingly, having in a measure arranged it with Annie, who, in extreme good temper, fell into everything. But they knew their brother's decision, and were directly quiet.

"You will have enough to do with all the children. Besides, our position is quite good enough; and if it wasn't, this wedding would not alter it. It don't move the world, though you think it does. I have no doubt, if we took the trouble to go after them, there are one or two persons at New Zealand or Kamtschatka, or the place where they toast your friends, the May-meeting missionaries, who will not have heard of it. No; be friends—not bridesmaids—and talk to old Lady Spokes, or Blokes, or whatever her name is. Then, perhaps, I shall get her affairs to transact, instead of Clutchit's people, at Dibblethorpe. That will give us position, if you please."

The ladies did not dare to reply; but they went sorrowfully and looked at their bonnets, which they had ordered to be made precisely like those of the little Misses Braybœuf, aged seven and nine; and hoped after all they might be taken for an official portion of the ceremony.

Philip, and indeed Annie, had not wished for any publicity in this marriage. They would have preferred going with a very few friends to some quiet village-church, where they were all unknown, and there having the service tranquilly performed, to all the Pottleton excitement. For it is a bold thing to say—there is something inexpressibly dreary and absurd in a conventional wedding. The evident assumption of some vague feeling, not knowing whether to feel sad, or convivial, or bold, or ashamed, which characterizes everybody; the palpable struggle there has been to scrape together the most imposing carriage-connexions of either family; the twaddle talked at the breakfast, and the slightly-more-wine-than-usual eye-piping of the Feebles, at the touching bits in the speeches; above all, the dismal reaction after

the bride and bridegroom have departed, and the people are sent about their business, in broad afternoon sunlight,—all this makes a wedding very unpleasant.

Let us return to Pottleton. The crowd is increasing, and presently old Lady Flokes arrives in her sedan, from which she is deposited in a pew near the chancel. Mrs. Spink and her nieces are in the organ-loft, peeping between the curtains; and all the young ladies from Miss Medlars are in their accustomed pew, intensely anxious, and wondering how Miss Lechmere will look in her bonnet; whilst "that Mr. Finch" is opposite, and staring wickedly at them, whenever Miss Medlar turns round to speak to Mr. Blandy, whose professional skill would be good-for-nothing that day, in the opinion of his patients, if he could not tell them all about the wedding. Old Mousel is fully occupied dodging the boys, who have stolen in, amongst the free seats, and routing them out from under the pulpit; and Whacky Clark is putting down some of the matting which he has been beating, for a small consideration, in the churchyard.

Presently Mr. Page arrives, and soon after him, Philip, with young Grant. The latter hurry into the vestry immediately, not that there is anything there requiring their presence just yet, but to get away from the gapers. Then comes the bride and Mr. Twinch, got up so gay, and with such a new wig, that he is scarcely recognised—followed by the blushing, pretty, half-frightened bridesmaids: and they all go into the vestry, too: whilst the Miss Twinches follow, and still hope they may be taken for bridesmaids also. By this time, Mr. Blandy has left the gallery, and comes down and takes his place by old Lady Flokes, who inquires about everybody, and will have all their names, and who they are, explained to her aloud.

The parties return from the vestry, and the ceremony commences. The sun streams through the eastern window above the altar, and throws its tints upon the different objects below, making Mr. Page's head look blue, and dyeing Mr. Twinch's white waistcoat all sorts of colours; but one especial ray bathes Annie's head in gold, gleaming through her soft tresses, which are seen trembling in the light—for she is all emotion. The window is open at one of its casements, and a butterfly is fluttering over her in the sunbeam.

During the ceremony, which good Mr. Page is performing admirably, Miss Twinch gradually leaves the altar, and edges away towards one of the side windows, through which she looks with an expression of some anxiety. After a while the cheers of the boys are somewhat too audible, upon which Miss Twinch nods to her sister, as much as to say that all is right, and returns to her place much relieved in her mind.

The service concludes and the whole party bustle back to the vestry again, which is a dreadful poking little place, like a cell in the Tower of London with the advantage of a window. Old Mousel pulls a bell, that rings in the belfry, and such a peal immediately strikes up, that the old Norman tower rocks again. Then Whacky Clark, according to orders, begins to thrash the boys outside, into forming a lane from the porch to the lych gate; and on each side of the former are ranged the children of Miss Twinch's infant-school, in their white frocks, with baskets of flowers—being punnets borrowed from the market-garden, and trimmed for the occasion with ribbon.

It was to see if they had arrived that Miss Twinch cast the anxious glances through the window. All the wedding party go back to the vestry, and something is written in a book; then they leave the church, walking in different order, and Annie and Philip are married.

And now it is that the pageant commences. The children throw flowers on the path along which the young couple pass, and their blue, and scarlet, and yellow petals cover the half shuffled-out inscriptions on the grave-stones that pave the walk. The boys scramble along the church-yard, and tumble over one another in their anxiety to get to the lych-gate, where the carriages are in waiting, cheering all the time; and the old people say, "God bless her!" as Annie passes.

The distance to Mr. Twinch's is not so great but that Whacky Clark, standing at the porch, could break a window at the lawyer's with a stone, if he chose; but they must go in the carriages, or else what was the use of hiring them.

The boys still keep cheering, most especially excited by the white bows of the post-boys; and some run behind the flies, whilst others remain to scramble after the flowers, and fight generally, to the great terror of old Lady Flokes, who emerges last of all, in her sedan, protected by Mr. Blandy.

Next to Mr. Page, the boys stand in great awe of Mr. Blandy, as they reflect that he can physic them, or draw their teeth, or take fish-hooks out of their fingers; and so they allow Julius to pass by unmolested.

It is a great day for Mr. Twinch's establishment. Philip has arranged the breakfast: and they have had all sorts of presents towards it. Young Grant has sent them lots of birds, and his father contributed the poultry: Whacky, with his little brother, collected nearly a hatful of plover's eggs; and whilst the Braybœufs sent the wine, Mr. Augustus Medlar begged their acceptance of a four-and-a-half-gallon of fine humming ale, which did not find least favour with the guests, we can assure you. Even old Lady Flokes sent a pine-apple, which had been forwarded to her by the Flokes Witherbys, of Tringham Park—distant relations: and, indeed, altogether an elegant repast has been achieved. The rooms, however, are not large enough for the guests, and so the club-booth from the Red Lion has been built over the grass-plat, and forms a perfect bower, with the beautiful flowers that have come in from all quarters: so grand, indeed, that the village people have been admitted all the morning to look at it.

The party is a large one for Pottleton, and Mr. Page is at the head of the table. Mr. Twinch does nothing but draw corks, and get apoplectic; and the Miss Twinches simper, and look juvenile, and hope that all the village knows who is at the table, and that their family can visit wherever they please.

Anon the club-band arrives, and strikes up "Haste to the wedding," of which little is heard, through the conversation and canvas, but the trombone and drum, who both play with great spirit. After that come the set speeches, which being as empty and hour-serving as set speeches always are, need not be alluded to; and finally the carriage-and-four is drawn up at the garden gate. Annie has quietly slipped away to change her dress, and now is handed by Philip into the barouche; the children and guests set up a shout; Miss Twinch girlishly throws a slipper after the happy couple, and the carriage starts off for the Dibblethorpe station on the railway, at a tearing gallop, with the groom and lady's-maid, from Pottleton Court, in the rumble.

There is no occasion to go to Dibblethorpe, for the train will stop at Pottleton some minutes sooner; and there is no necessity for taking the two servants, as they will both return again, and the porters could look after all the luggage quite as well. But as all this is part of the conventional fiddle-faddle pertaining to weddings, there is no avoiding it; and so Philip and Annie mildly resign themselves to their fate. But they are much happier when they get rid of everybody, and find themselves the next day steaming across the bright and dancing sea, to visit some of Philip's old haunts, and admire the fine old cities and lovely tracts of the sunny Normandy, together and alone.

CHAPTER XL.

WHICH DISPOSES OF EVERYBODY.

We cannot expect that the reader would think well of us, if we did not give some information as to the destinies of the other personages who have, from time to time, figured in our story. And, therefore, begging our friends to suppose that a year or two has elapsed, let us see what the remainder of our *dramatis personæ* are now doing.

We will commence with the Misses Twinch.

The elder of these two ladies is still living in single blessedness, and devoting all her attention to the infant-school. The nervous Harriett Stiles, and the constantly-influenzaed Jane Collier have outgrown her domination, and gone to service: so she has been driven to find fresh objects whereon to exercise her severity. And this she has done by the fortunate discovery of the youngest Humphreys, who is never without chilblains, even in the dog-days; and a small production named Patty Clark—a sister of Whacky of that family—who never can recollect anything beyond five minutes.

Miss Martha is now Mrs. Grant. The farmer paid her such great attention, that she was at last prevailed upon to accept him, and then had no idea that he was such an improvement upon what she had always supposed him to be.

She is very happy; visits the poor as formerly, and is greatly beloved by them; because, instead of only calling, as heretofore, to lend them the small tracts (at fourpence a dozen for distribution) she gives them small comforts, from a fund which she has instituted herself, and to which she contributes greatly, in company with the charitable well-to-do folks of the village. Young Grant is going to be married himself, so he does not interfere much with the domestic arrangements of his mother-in-law.

Mr. Page, a short time since, married the young lady who had been the pretty pupil at the Misses Medlars' establishment: and this was to the intense disgust of every spinster in the village. To be sure they were not all found dead in their beds, with disappointment, after the fashion of the catastrophe which is reported to have followed the wedding of Mahomed: but they were terribly cut up. And many indeed went to meeting instead of church, out of pure spite: until the new organ and the better accommodation for displaying the fashions, in the latter building, brought them back to their allegiance. Good Mr. Page has now a house of his own—a little building that looks exactly as if it had been made for a dwarf to live in, and thrust his arms and legs through the drawing-room and ground-floor windows, as he would do outside a show. But it is quite large enough for them, and condenses their happiness.

Old Lady Flokes is still very wonderful. Every year, with the first approach of autumn, she goes into her *hybernaculum* (which is a curious fire-side hovel of old green baize, bed-curtains, and unpicked articles of by-gone apparel, somewhat resembling the nest of the Long-pot, so snug is it, and so small its aperture), and there she remains until the chesnuts blossom; when Mr. Blandy is consulted as to the propriety of her coming out. Then, before the world sees her, many mysterious preparations go on, but these are only known to Margery, who is now her sole attendant. For as increasing years bring with them increasing infirmity, even Patience and Double-dummy lose their charm; although Annie oftentimes goes up to the old lady to pass the evening with her, and tell her the little news of the village, and even play with her if she wished it. She is very fond of Annie, and has quietly confided to Mr. Blandy, that Philip's pretty, gentle wife will have most of her property.

Poor M. Polpette has come to a sad end. Taking advantage of one of those scampish ebullitions which The People of all countries are apt occasionally to give way to, and call the formation of a young republic, he went abroad to swell the popular demonstration. But a difference of opinion as to the manner in which the country was to be regenerated, ending in the victory of the opposite party, placed him in more than unpleasant circumstances: and he was condemned to imprisonment, in common with many other foreign gentlemen, whose bosoms were constantly agitated, because, being born to nothing, they were not elected kings and emperors whenever impending bankruptcy or approaching ruin in general made such an appointment desirable.

Mr. Wolly, the retired grocer, cannot attain the position he desires; and the more he fights for it the more he is left behind. Indeed, he is so disgusted at the want of respect shown to him in the village, that he talks about going away from his own country to some other, where he may have a better chance of becoming a prophet.

Mr. Wracketts is yet upon town, and figures at races, billiard-rooms, and sometimes at questionable public meetings. His "receptions" on Sunday evenings are no longer held, for there is no mistress of his establishment. Léonie disappeared shortly after her last interview with Philip, and left no clue to her destination—at least to Mr. Wracketts. When we last saw her, it was by mere chance, whilst paying a visit to a distant relation, in the parlour of the Convent of the Ursulines, at Boulogne.

Mr. Wyndham Flitter, under all sorts of names and occupations, is still about the world. Now he is heard of at Havre, and anon at Baden; at one time opening some hopeless theatre, and never paying his company, at another importing some wonderful sight, or batch of marvellous professors of anything, from foreign parts, in the hope of gulling the public. His schemes are, also, still abundant. Whether they be for establishing a new club or founding a new weekly paper, boring for coal in Madagascar, or working a vein of silver in Ireland, he has always something ready that will pay ten thousand pounds down on the nail, and many more per annum afterwards. We have only just heard, however, that a circumstance has been made known to the police, which in

all likelihood will bring about a rapid termination to his career in his native land. We forbear from entering into particulars, as by so doing we might defeat the ends of justice; but some awkward transactions, in which gambling and forgery are concerned, have come to light; and if Mr. Wyndham Flitter has not already left England of his own accord, the chances are, that he will be, before long, compelled to do so by the order of others.

But there is yet one name, amongst those of our story, which the readers may possibly have recalled from time to time, with a painful incertitude as to the fate of its owner. We must hasten to relieve their anxiety: and to do this we must beg them once more to accompany us to the village.

It was on a bright sunny afternoon, at the commencement of the golden autumn, that two figures, (reader, let us remind you that we are concluding a story, not commencing one; and, therefore, acquit us from the charge of plagiarism,) that two figures entered Pottleton by the Court Green. One of them carried a Punch's show, the other bore the deal home of the puppets, and was followed by the meek and degraded Toby of that popular domestic-drama establishment. They came up the village, after halting for some beer at the "Fox under the Hill," and pitched their show opposite Mr. Twinch's.

It would have done you good, if you had been always pent up in a great populous city, to have seen Pottleton that afternoon: how the trees, with their heavy August foliage did not move a leaf in the golden sunlight—how the clear sky, that looked like a mighty dome of blue glass covering in the world, threw up the outline of the hills bounding the valley, and came in such pleasant contrast with their green summits —how Tommy Collier coming up the straggling street (and yet it was not a street, for Pottleton never possessed one, but the village thoroughfare generally) how that little lad, going after Farmer Grant's cows, saw his shadow before him, progressing up the road in giant proportions, raising his wonder as to what it would be like if it stood upright, quite able to look down the cowl of the malthouse. Just as Tommy got to where the show halted, and the pandæan pipes struck up—which was, altogether, a fatal thing for Farmer Grant's cows, especially if they were impatient—Miss Twinch's school con-

cluded for the day, and the children came buzzing and hurrying out like bees. In a minute the showman had an audience; other idlers joined the group; shopmen came to their doors, and branches of families, who looked good for twopence twisted up in paper, appeared at the windows. It was all right.

The early scenes of the drama passed with their usual success. Mr. Punch, before he appeared, had amused the company with the progress of his toilet—betraying such aberration of a naturally acute intellect, in putting on his shoes before his stockings, and superimposing his shirt upon his coat and braces, as must have acquitted him of the murder of his wife and child before any intelligent jury at the present day: all the opening had been enacted to a delighted crowd, when Toby was suddenly pushed up on the ledge to take his part in the action. He was a small dog, and he exhibited to a great degree that peculiar feeling of self-contempt which his race inclines to, when attired in a costume intended to designate a festive and waggish disposition. But scarcely had he yelled the first reply to some thoughtless question put by Mr. Punch, when Whacky Clark, who, being amongst the audience, had laboured under great excitement from the instant he appeared, exclaimed:—

"I know'd it was! Tip!"

As he called the name, the dog suddenly turned round. He looked down, for an instant, timidly at the showman, who held his tail to give him the cues for his answers; then he gazed with an imploring air at the face of Mr. Punch, who had obtained some supernatural influence over him; and lastly, with a bold leap, cleared the heads of the first row of audience, and came whining and fondling at Whacky's feet. The surmise was correct—it was, indeed, the long-lost original Tip! There was a hurried difference of opinion as to ownership with the man; a threat of the constable; a rush across the road, and in another minute Miss Twinch had burst into a flood of tears over her long-lost favourite.

This is the last event that we shall chronicle. Since that time Pottleton has improved daily. The houses are letting all about, and new ones are being built. Smart shops are here and there appearing; a large assembly-room is talked of, to join the Red Lion; and Farmer Grant is red-hot about

a cattle-market, close to the railway, on his five acres. Indeed, altogether, the folks at Dibblethorpe are getting jealous of the rising village, which will before long, we expect, have a market on a Wednesday.

But with all this its beauty is not destroyed. The sun still shines all day on the valley; the bourne still babbles on, between the pollards to the canal, and the water-lilies still tremble on its surface; and, although the loiterer on the hills can hear the humming vibration of the train passing far under ground, yet it has not disturbed the broad ferns and glancing shrubs, the smooth, almost polished, grass, scented fir-woods, and nut copses on the summit. The harebells and lilies of the valley throw their slight and quivering shadows on the moss; and the children find plenty of tall foxgloves, from the honey-tipped flowers of which they make thimbles and helmets for their fingers, now as formerly.

Even on the unromantic railway, which people said would spoil the country, there is something to admire; for the cuttings are now slopes of larches, heaths, and sycamores, looking at the curves like some small leafy gorge; and round about the pretty Swiss-looking *chalet*, which forms the station, there is such a fine garden, that it is quite a sight on the line, to be looked for as the Man-in-chains and Vale of the White Horse were, in bygone travels. About the house are roses, always in bloom, and porches of clematis; the very signal-mast rises from a bed of fuchsias; and the telegraph-posts have their bases hidden by American plants. When the vine grows along the luggage shed, and the gleaming acacias rise above the rails, it will be almost like a scene in a play.

A few of the old inhabitants are grumbling, but this is always the case under similar circumstances. Mr. Eweman, the butcher (who, being the only one, charged eightpence for mutton), has been terribly discomfited by a spirited fellow from Dibblethorpe, who brings over a cart-load of prime meat twice-a-week by the rail, and sells everything a penny a pound under his rival. So also Mr. Durham, the coal-merchant (who used to have his stock down by the canal, and make his customers pay what he chose), is violent against young Grant, who has built a shed close to the line, with a private tramway, and finds a fair market-price amply remunerate him. So also the man at "the shop" hates the Lon-

don traders who send down coffee in tins at one-and-four, just as good as he got two shillings for. But all this benefits the community at large, and brings little monopolists to their senses. At the same time, an increased facility of intercourse with the metropolis and the large county towns; and the early arrival of the newspapers in the reading-room, which the Rev. Mr. Page has been instrumental in starting, expands the minds of the Pottletonians, and furnishes them with better subjects for conversation than the miserable twaddle, and concoctions, and surmises, with respect to the affairs of their neighbours, which have hitherto formed, in common with most country tea-tables, the staple topics.

Only one failure has to be recorded, in the aspirations of Pottleton, and that has been—also in common with other places—the Literary Institution, which several ardent youths founded over the carpenters' shop, for the purpose of playing at committee, giving lectures, and reading dreary periodicals about "progress," and general equality; by the constant study of which young Snobson, Mr. Grub's apprentice, who had dirty nails, and dropped his *h*'s, thought himself as good as Clarence Braybœuf, because decomposition would bring their material to the same ultimate particles. So it would the Venus de Medici, and the puffy cherubim on a country church monument. Young Snobson was only a type of the members, who believed much in the poetry of gaunt, unfeminine women, and scared anxious-looking men, always in difficulties; and wrote verses, such as "Come, sit down by me, thou art my brother," supposed to be addressed by a philanthropist in high life to a Monday mechanic, coveting his society. The institution struggled on for a while, and at last ended in a species of convivial meeting, for songs, recitations, and the flowing bowl; under which form, should the early-closing movement be carried, it bids fair to prosper.

All the improvements have, however, only affected the main thoroughfare of the village. One has but to turn down any of the lanes, and he is at once in the Pottleton of the dark ages, before the railway was even thought about. The fine old oak, mentioned in Doomsday, throws its deep, noontide shadows over the saw-pit, near the wheelwright's; and passengers by the public path through the farm-yard are just as much awed as ever they were by the ill-tempered old

turkey-cock, and occasional bull, that dispute their right of way. Once in the fields, nothing has altered. The old foot-path to Dibblethorpe passes under the same trees, and is accompanied all the way by the gurgling water-course: the stiles are as unpleasantly dreadful as formerly, to the laughing girls with nice ankles: and the cowslips and buttercups in the bright spring grass, the primroses on the warm banks, and the wild hops and blackberries of the hedgerows render the way as flowery and life-teeming as ever it was.

Philip and Annie have, for a comparatively small sum, bought back the Grange from the parish, and also, through Mr. Twinch, reclaimed some of the land once surrounding and belonging to it. They are gradually putting it in order; taking one room at a time, and commencing with the hall. The partitions have been knocked down, the old broad staircase brought into use again; the brick-work that blocked up the different door-ways and passages cleared away; and it promises, in a year or two's time, to be once more a fine old mansion. Now and then, an artist is seen taking a sketch of it. and upon inquiry, he is found to be from London; so that it is possible that, before long, reproduced in some way or other, the public at large will become acquainted with the village; and look with some degree of interest upon the old grey building, which, acquired by the property left, formed in some measure a portion of THE POTTLETON LEGACY.

THE END.

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