THE

STEP-MOTHER.

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THE STEP-MOTHER.

CHAPTER I.

certain county of England, which cannot exactly be called a mid-county, because at one point it comes within a few miles of the there is a village, with a somewhat detailed description of which must trouble the reader; as in this village and its immediate neighbourhood took place the principal incidents of the story about to be told. The scene is narrow, certainly, but very important things are often enacted in a very confined space; and though amongst the personages to be introduced appear neither kings nor statesmen, yet there are as strong passions stirred and as deep interest affected in private life, as in the movements of parties or governments.

The village is situated upon the slope of a hill, extending from the top to the bottom. A few houses, indeed, are scattered along the valley, by the side of the river, swarming with fine trout; and there, too, in a pleasant and sheltered situation, stands the church, with the clergyman's house, a low-roofed but neat and comfortable residence, at the distance of about a hundred yards from the gate of the churchyard.

Half way up the hill is a white house, with a brass knocker on a mahogany door, and the traveller as he passes by, if he be not shut up in close carriage, may see, through the left-hand window, ranges of bottles and gallipots upon numerous shelves, and a lad, with an apron before him, pounding in a mortar, or pouring liquids from one bottle into another. Written in letters so large that those who run may read, is inscribed upon a brass plate, "Mr. Nethersole, surgeon, &c.:" and very often, before the door, is seen standing a neat one-horse chaise with a very respectable, plump, and well-conditioned horse figuring in the harness.

At the top of the hill, and at a short distance from the actual village, is a large red-brick dwelling-house, raised upon a bank formed by the cutting of the high road, along the side of which runs the wall of an extensive and well-stocked garden. The mansion has every appearance of comfort and opulence, the windows are numerous and large, the spaces between wide, the chimneys many—indicating at least twenty rooms possessing the advantage of a fire-place—and the state of repair in which the whole is kept is exact and perfect. A high brick wall, with broken glass bottles upon the top—very unpleasant for the hands of urchins possessed with the spirit of appropriating other people's apples

—encircles the premises, containing, perhaps, a couple of acres; and in this wall are three different entrances to the grounds: one a small door, reached by a flight of steps up the bank; another at the north side, presenting two large gates and a gravelled road; and the third on the side directly opposite to the small door above the bank, and communicating with a path, through some pleasant fields and lanes at the back of the village, which leads down to the church and the rectory.

On the other side of the valley, and of the river, is another hill, higher, though less abrupt, than that on which the village stands. The thick trees of a park, which lies on that side, hide the face of the ground from the lower part of the village; but the windows of the mansion which I have just described, looking over these giants of the forest, give a view of the interior of the park and of a fine old grey building, known in that part of the country as "The Hall."

At the time at which the events I am about to relate took place, the Hall was not in the very best state of repair, though by no means dilapidated. The old stones were rather green and mossy; a part of the copings might be seen here and there suffering from the ravages of time; the doors and windows had not been painted for more than thirty years; and the latter, though perfectly sound, were seldom cleaned. It was a large, rambling, irregular edifice, with a vast door and porch in the old style; many curious, ancient halls within; and having, without beauty, a grand and imposing air, from the gravity of its colouring and from its extent.

The park, however, and all that it contained—its long winding walks, the lawn before the house, the broad gravel terrace at the back, the gamekeeper's cottage, the kitchen garden, the very wilderness—regular in its irregularity—were kept with the utmost neatness and propriety. The secret of this difference between the appearance of the house and the grounds was simply this: the proprietor was a nobleman of somewhat singular character, immersed in the politics of the day, passing the greater part of his time in London, and rarely spending more than six weeks in the course of each year at his house in the country. He was reputed to be avaricious, and was certainly haughty. That he was stern and reserved, he made sufficiently apparent during his short residences in that neighbourhood, never associating with any of the gentlemen around, seldom exchanging a word with any one, and when forced to do so upon business, making his communications as laconic as might be. He was, also, it must be remarked, without wife, or child, and never brought any party down with him to the Hall. A cook, a valet de chambre, a butler, and a footman, together with a personage who performed the offices of both coachman and groom, with the occasional variation of a three-cornered hat and a round one, were the only people who accompanied him; and the old housekeeper, with a coëval housemaid, and a girl from the village hired while he was there, and discharged when he was gone, were found sufficient to do the work of the house during his stay.

Thus it will be seen why the dwelling, though not suffered to go to decay, was not kept in a high state of repair. The dining-room, the library, and his own bed-room were the only chambers of which he saw much; and the old housekeeper declared that there was many a

room in the house which his lordship had not set his foot in for thirty years. He did not, indeed, take much greater heed of the arrangements of the park, though he used apparently to find some pleasure in rambling through the wood-walks with his hands behind his back, and his eyes bent upon the ground; but it is much to be doubted whether he would have discovered any little marks of negligence which might have taken place during his absence, had they been apparent. There was a person, however, who took a pride in the neatness and propriety of everything about him; and this was the park-keeper, a blunt straightforward Englishman, clean and regular in all his habits, doing his duty faithfully and exactly, whether looked after or not, and having no great reverence for any mortal man, so long as he thought he was pleasing God, and satisfying his own conscience.

The poor old housekeeper, who was frightened out of her life at her lord, seldom ventured to point out that this or that required repair and did so, when absolutely necessary, in so low a voice that she was often interrupted by a cry of "Speak out, woman;" but the park-keeper went boldly up to his master whenever anything was wanted, told his story plainly, and generally got what he required. In the management and arrangement of the park, and all that it contained, he took great delight, and often did he say to himself, "If my lord does not choose to live at it, that is his fault; I will keep it fit for him."

The noble owner of the property, however, never rewarded him with any praise of his exertions, or any observation upon their success, for, in truth, he never remarked them; coming down, as he called it, for relaxation, and yet bringing all the thoughts and cares of London down with him into the country, so that his mind had no more opportunity of resting upon the things that surrounded him than if he had still been in the capital.

Now, doubtless, the reader may imagine that because we have introduced this noble lord before any one else to his notice, and have spoken of himself and his dwelling somewhat at large, we intend to make him one of the principal characters in the story, and introduce him frequently upon the stage; but such is not at all the case. You have seen him, dear reader, and you will never see him again. You may, indeed, hear his name mentioned, but he will never more appear upon the stage.

The large red house, which, as we have seen, was pitched upon the top of the opposite hill, was possessed by a gentleman as different in every respect from the owner of the Hall as it is possible to conceive; and we must go some way back to trace his history before the actual commencement of the tale; for this chapter must be taken as a sort of proem or introduction to what is to follow, in which I wish to gather together all that might be cumbersome or difficult in after-details. The gentleman of whom I now speak was the son of a lawyer, who had risen to eminence in his profession, and obtained a seat upon the bench. The judge had not died very wealthy, however, and his eldest son followed his father's course, till he was elevated to the office of one of the Barons of the Exchequer; but the second and youngest, whose history we are about to hear, after having pursued a course of liberal education till he was about eighteen, was then placed in the house of a great merchant, and in due time became a partner in the

firm. He was well to do when his father died, and the sum which he then shared with his brother made some addition to a fortune already considerable. He was a quiet, unobtrusive, and somewhat timid man, but clear-sighted in most cases, and possessed of a fund of strong good sense, which would have been very serviceable to himself and others, had he not been withal, if not indolent, at all events very fond of peace and tranquillity. He had a great aversion to strong emotions of any kind, loved the ordinary course of business, was as great an enemy to adventurous speculation as the oldest partner in the house, and a great deal more so than the youngest. He did, however, make one bold speculation; and it proved a successful one—he married, and having chosen well, had every reason to be satisfied. His wife had everything but one to recommend her: she was very handsome, she was a lady by birth, and, what is of far more importance, by nature; she had accomplishments enough to make time pass pleasantly, and to bear her full part in interesting and entertaining others; and she had a kind and affectionate heart, as well as a strong sense of all the duties of life. This was everything that he wanted, and though her fortune was very small, he paid no attention to that point. Though a very good-looking man, Mr. Charlton was nearly forty when he committed this act, and his days passed in uninterrupted tranquillity for about ten years, with wealth increasing, a happy home, a cheerful and amiable companion, and one fair daughter, "whom he loved passing well."

But his felicity was to have a turn, and in one week he lost his brother, for whom he had always entertained a deep affection, and his wife, to whom he was bound by all the strongest bonds of the heart. The Baron of the Exchequer had never married, always declaring that he had no time; and consequently his wealth, which was considerable, devolved to his brother. But the disaster which Mr. Charlton had sustained affected him deeply; and though he lingered on for about a year and a half in London, he was seized with a great distaste for business, and began to talk of retiring upon the ample means he possessed. Perhaps this design might have passed away had not the younger partners of the house overruled the elder, and entered into a speculation which seemed to the more prudent members of the firm extremely hazardous, and which proved somewhat detrimental, though to no very great extent. It acted, however, in deciding both the gentlemen who had opposed the scheme to retire, which they consequently did, and Mr. Charlton, after having sought through various parts of the country for a house to suit him, pitched his tent upon the top of the hill which, with its dependent village, I have already described.

He carried with him, into the country, his daughter, all his old servants, many of his old habits, his powdered hair and his pigtail, though a renowned minister had nearly banished powder from society some years before, and royalty itself had set its face against all manner of queues.

His daughter was by this time about ten years of age, and had already received such an education from her mother as to ensure good foundation for whatever afterwards might be done to improve her mind. She had by inheritance her mother's heart and warm affec-

tions; and for two years after her arrival in the country, her father devoted himself entirely to cultivate her understanding, and give her right and just views of everything on which she might be called to exercise her judgment. I have already said that he was a man of strong good sense, and that quality went so far as to teach him his own prevailing fault, though not to correct it. Men of clear minds, but of no great decision of character, are generally given to analyse scrupulously their own feelings and motives—to examine, as with a microscope, their own characters, as objects which they can pause on and contemplate without fear or trouble. The result of their research may be right or wrong, according to their powers of intellect; but the investigation is still going on, and has but this inconvenience, that from all which they discover in themselves, they are apt to judge of the conduct and motives of others. The bolder and firmer analyser of the characters of those who surround him, escapes, perhaps, that error, but is likely to fall into the still greater one of not knowing himself.

Mr. Charlton, however, was of the former class; and in turning his mind inward, like the eyes of the sages of Laputa, he saw and acknowledged that he had too strong an inclination to do many things which his judgment condemned, in order to save himself trouble and annoyance, and he strove diligently to impress his daughter's mind to judge rightly at first, and to adhere to her decision when once it was formed. He did not fear to render her obstinate or headstrong by such lessons, for her character was naturally gentle and yielding, like that of her mother: and he also guarded it with all care, by showing the necessity of using every power of the mind to ensure that the course we choose be the right one. Thus were formed within the bosom of Louisa Charlton certain principles of action which proved her safeguard at an after-period, and the good sense of her father turned his very faults to her advantage.

Although the education of his child, the arrangement of his dwelling, the improvement of his grounds, and the various amusements of country life, afforded Mr. Charlton some occupation, and at first filled up his time to his satisfaction, yet, after the first little bustle of the change was over, he began to feel lonely and listless. Two great wants were felt in his course of life—business and society. He had no companion—he had no constant employment. In London he had felt that every object which he saw around him recalled the memory of her he had lost; and though it was not forgetfulness he sought, it was to escape having painful remembrances continually forced upon him.

Now, however, he would often have given much to have recalled his hasty decision; for though grief subsided gradually, as it does somewhat too rapidly, indeed, with those who may be termed easy-minded people, he felt the want of the companionship to which he had been accustomed, and the employment which had become natural to him, more and more every hour. He might often be seen walking up and down the longest gravel walk in the garden, with his hands crossed behind him, and his eyes bent sadly upon the ground. Then he would roam out into the country, or take a quiet canter upon his round, short-legged horse, or drive out with his daughter to see some object of

interest in the neighbourhood; but still at his return he would fall again into listlessness.

The village afforded no society except that of the clergyman of the parish, the surgeon, and the lawyer. The former was an amiable, learned, and thoughtful man, doing all his duties well and zealously; but, having long been accustomed to live almost totally without society himself, he had lost the taste for it, and spent his time either with his books, in the cottages of his inferior parishioners, or in dispensing justice, healing quarrels, and deciding differences, in his capacity as a magistrate. Thus, although he was always very happy to see Mr. Charlton, every now and then returned his visits, dined with him once or twice, and showing a strong prepossession in favour of his daughter, he did little to supply the place of all that the worthy gentleman had lost or given up.

The surgeon was still less serviceable in this respect; he was a busy little man, clever in his profession, active, bustling, round, fat, and generally dressed in knee breeches and black silk stockings. He was always cheerful, especially when he could rub his hands, and say to a brother practitioner in the neighbourhood, "A pretty sprinkling of fever about, Mr. Stubbs;" but he was too busy, too small in mind, and too full of rhubarb, magnesia, jalap, and calomel, to be any companion for a man of high intellect and wide information such as Mr. Charlton. He did, indeed, occasionally dissipate half an hour by bringing him the news of the neighbourhood, and sometimes more effectually interested him by introducing to his notice a case of distress, to which the heart and the purse of the worthy gentleman were always equally open.

The lawyer afforded still less sources of amusement or interest: he was a shrewd, clever, calculating, very silent man; each word that he uttered, and they were very few, was well weighed and pondered, although he had the reputation of occasionally helping his neighbours into disputes, from which it required his own assistance to deliver them; but, nevertheless, whatever he did in this way was well considered, and he seemed on all occasions to ask himself, before a sentence was suffered to pass his lips, whether it was actionable. With him Mr. Charlton was often obliged to act in matters of business, but their intercourse went no further, though the lawyer was always profoundly civil to his wealthy neighbour.

Though there were several other persons, in various ranks of life, living at the distance of a few miles, some of whom I may have occasion to introduce to the reader at an after-period, these three formed the only society which the village of Mallington afforded, and the very retired and quiet situation, which had been its great attraction in the eyes of Mr. Charlton at first, now proved a source of discomfort to him.

It is not improbable, indeed, that, under these circumstances, he might, sooner or later, have returned to London, and, indeed, he was beginning to argue himself into a belief that the masters which he procured for his daughter from a large town, about seven miles distant, were not so good as could be desired, when an event occurred which changed the whole course of his ideas, and fixed him on the spot where he was. But I must not introduce an important character at the end of the chapter; and the one who is now about to appear well deserves a clear stage and no favour.

CHAPTER II.

In walking up the village of Mallington, from the rectory towards the mansion which was called Mallington House, we forgot to notice the linendraper's shop, kept by two maiden sisters, somewhat past their prime, but very respectable women in their way. They were, it is true, rather apt to inquire into and report the affairs of their neighbours; but this must not be attributed to them as any great sin, for, to say truth, the village afforded so few sources of amusement, that, as they neither fished, shot, nor hunted, they had very little else to do during, at least, three quarters of their time. The Misses Martin, then, employed a portion of each day in settling the business of every one in the place, and as their tongues were somewhat feared, and they had the reputation of being wealthy, they were courted by their neighbours, invited to take tea at the surgeon's, and held a hand at cards with the solicitor. They were, however, thrifty people, notwithstanding the elevated position they held in the society of the place, served in their own shop, and let the first floor and part of the second, when any one seeking a pure and salubrious air came down to find it at Mallington.

One afternoon, then, about two o'clock, in the spring of the third year which Mr. Charlton spent in the country, a post-chaise drove into the village, and stopped at the little public-house—for it could not be called an inn—named the Bagpipes, which had been established from time immemorial at the end of the street nearest the rectory.

The Misses Martin went to the door of their shop and looked out; but they could discover nothing but that a lady in mourning and a boy of about thirteen got out of the vehicle, and entered the place of public entertainment. After they had paused for a minute to see what more, they returned into the shady retreat formed by cloths and printed calicoes, and were busily engaged in wondering who the strangers could be, when the lady and the boy walked with a slow and sauntering pace up the street, looking at the houses on each side of the way as they came.

"Lor, Mathilda!" cried the eldest Miss Martin, as she saw them pass, "perhaps they are looking for lodgings. Tell Sally to put up the bill."

The youngest sister hastened to obey, and then passed out between two pieces of muslin to see the further proceedings of the visitors.

"I declare they have gone into Dixon's," she cried; "the creature keeps her bill up always; but I am sure they will never be contented with that nasty place."

"If they are," said Miss Martin, in the true philosophical spirit of a certain fox who once had to do with the fruit of the vine, "they would not suit us, that's clear."

In about a quarter of an hour, however, the strangers came down the hill again, looking about them as before, and, much to the satisfaction of the two ladies in the shop, they walked in as soon as they perceived the bill. Inquiries were made—the rooms to be let were looked at; no haggling about the price took place, but some additional

conveniences were required, and, especially, a fourth room for a servant. All was promised by the Misses Martin that the lady demanded, and the next day she and her son were safely installed in the apartments over the shop, with a private door quite to themselves. A prim and tidy girl was hired to wait upon them till the lady's own servant could come down from London; and several costly articles of dress, with a handsome dressing-case, fitted up with silver, a writing desk to correspond, and numerous applications to know where certain luxuries and conveniences were to be procured, showing habits of expense, if not affluence, convinced the Misses Martin that they had obtained as their tenants a very respectable family indeed.

The lady did not look more than two or three and thirty, although she was dressed in the unbecoming garb of widowhood—not, indeed, in deep weeds, for her fine flaxen hair was shown, but in such garments as many a woman feels inclined to wear long after the customs of the country require her to bear about the external signs of her bereavement. She was a very pretty woman, moreover, with bright blue eyes, fine teeth, a good complexion, soft clear skin, a chin somewhat too prominent perhaps, a beautiful hand and arm, and as smart a foot and ankle as ever was seen. She was tall, and though not absolutely graceful—for real grace depends as much upon the mind as upon the body—yet she was well formed, plump, but not stout, with a very charming fall of the neck and shoulders, and a waist of a mere span. Her son was, as we have said, about twelve or thirteen years of age, with his mother's complexion and features: tall, strong, and active, but with something unpleasant in the expression of his face; still he was a handsome, good-looking boy; and no sooner was he in the house than out again down to the stream, over the hill and through the lanes, leaving his mother to arrange their rooms to her own taste, and take the trouble of unpacking the numerous trunks and portmanteaus which had been crowded upon the chaise.

Though the lady seemed a little thoughtful as she proceeded with this task, Miss Mathilda Martin, who gave her every assistance in her power—to see what was contained in the packages—remarked that she could occasionally laugh with a gay and merry laugh, as if she had once been possessed with what is called, in vulgar parlance, the spirit of fun, and as if, moreover, that spirit had not yet entirely gone out of her. She acquired also, even earlier than her sister, various pieces of information of which she was desirous, and amongst them, the name that was engraved upon the boxes, which, as they had been carried up under the lady's own eye, she had not previously been able to discover. There it stared her in the face, every trunk that was opened, "The Hon. Mrs. Latimer!" and with this grand intelligence she hurried down to inform her sister, as soon as she had satisfied her curiosity in other respects.

Now, had Mrs. Latimer lodged at Dixon's, and had the good mistress of the house ventured to attach Honourable to her name, the two Misses Martin would instantly have pronounced the lady an impostor, and asked, with a triumphant sneer, whether lords' daughters ever travelled without a single servant in yellow post-chaises, and had but one maid, who was left in London. But Mrs. Latimer was their own lodger; and that made a wonderful difference. She was for the time

a part and parcel of themselves; and their importance, the ve[illegible]portance of their lodging, was vastly increased by the Hon[illegible]s. Latimer lodging there. They looked forward into futurity; [illegible] thought of speaking, for many years, to all persons viewing the rooms of their last lodger, "the Hon. Mrs. Latimer;" they even saw a likelihood of mentioning her to their acquaintances, in more familiar conversation, as their friend "the Hon. Mrs. Latimer, who had been spending a few weeks with them."

[illegible] same night they told it to Mr. Nethersole and to their [illegible]cated to t[illegible], right and left; and when, on the day but one after, the of her [illegible] herself appeared at church, everybody was prepared to open the door of his pew to give her admission: and all declared that she was a very beautiful creature, and looked "quite the lady." She was ushered, however, by the clerk into the rector's pew, which, as he had no wife, and his sister was absent, generally stood vacant. Her demeanour was composed and decorous; she looked little around her, except once, when a man in the gallery began to play upon a hautboy, beginning with a dismal squeak, to lead the congregation in singing; and, to do them justice, they followed him exactly in the same tone. She then turned round with an expression of surprise, but speedily fixed her eyes upon her book with a grave look, and joined the rest, though with more music in her tones than the other members of the choir. Her son did not, indeed, preserve the same decent solemnity, but laughed aloud; and, to say truth, through the whole service, displayed a sort of indifferent, careless inattention, which would have shocked the good clergyman not a little, but that luckily, both in the pulpit and the reading desk, his back was turned upon his own pew. The next seats, however, were those of Mr. Charlton and his daughter; and the worthy gentleman remarked his young neighbour's want of decorum with displeasure; but as he walked up the hill after church, he perceived, well satisfied, that the fair widow, who was just before him, spoke seriously and evidently in a monitory tone to her son, who, for his part, held down his head and said nothing.

About a week after this occurrence, in writing to a friend in London, Mr. Charlton added in a postscript the following words:—"We have had an addition lately to the society of our little village, which, indeed, it much needed: a widow lady, who styles herself, or whom the people where she lodges style, the Honourable Mrs. Latimer. I have fallen into a sort of acquaintance with her; but, before I enter into anything like what people in general call friendship, I would fain know who she is, and something more of her history. See if you can find out, in case you cannot tell me yourself."

An answer to the letter came in the course of a few days, and on this head the writer afforded full information. Mrs. Latimer, he said, if it was the same person he meant, was a young widow, formerly the wife of the Honourable Captain Latimer, who had been a gay, reckless young fellow, and had terminated a career of thoughtless folly and extravagance, by shooting himself one morning in his dressing-room about two years before.

"She is but poorly provided for, I believe," continued the writer, "for his family disapproved of the match, as she was the daughter of a singing-master; and though she has always conducted herself with

p[illegible]t propriety, they do nothing for her, so that she only has the i[illegible]st of a younger brother's fortune, sadly shattered as he left it. [illegible]eric Harvey, who has seen her, says she is a monstrous fine woman."

All these particulars roused Mr. Charlton's best feelings in her behalf. He pitied her deeply for the shock and distress which her husband's rash conduct must have inflicted; he felt sympathy for her, and indignation at her husband's family for the harshness with which they had treated a person who, placed in difficult circum[illegible] had always acted with perfect propriety; and he compassionat[illegible]pense, if probably accustomed to affluence, and even luxury, had [illegible]tained as denly reduced to very limited circumstances; and he admi[illegible] the equanimity and right feeling with which she bore the reverse, and adapted her style of living to her means.

A passing bow or an occasional word was all that had yet taken place between Mr. Charlton and Mrs. Latimer, but he now walked down to call upon her, with the determination of showing her every attention in his power. The lady received him with grave politeness, thanked him for his civility, and easily smoothed down the first roughness of new acquaintance. She talked well and sensibly upon various subjects; never referred in the most remote degree to her own state and station, but spoke a good deal of Miss Charlton, and praised her beauty and grace of demeanour with discrimination and delicacy.

Mr. Charlton went away even better pleased with what he had seen than with what he had heard; felt convinced that the society of such a person would be of great advantage to his daughter, and, after some hesitation, determined to ask her to dinner, taking care to invite some of the distant neighbours who had wives and daughters, to meet the fair widow at his house. To her he bore the important request in person, and prefaced it by some apology in regard to having no lady of the house to receive her.

Mrs. Latimer smiled somewhat sadly, replying,—"Oh, my dear sir, when people come to our time of life, and have seen many sorrows, though they may have lost many bright things with youth, yet they have gained freedom from those restraints which youth is wisely, though unwillingly, forced to impose upon itself."

"Our time of life, my dear madam!" said Mr. Charlton, shaking his head, "you must not class yourself with the good old people yet."

"Oh! I am older than I look," replied the lady, "and look, I am afraid, younger than I could wish. But to speak to your invitation, my dear sir. I really seldom go out. Indeed, I have not been anywhere since—since—for a long time I mean."

"Nay, I will take no denial," rejoined Mr. Charlton, kindly; "and your young gentleman must come up, and amuse himself as well as he can."

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Latimer, thoughtfully; "but really—yet, for the boy's sake, I must get rid of such feelings of reluctance."

"Certainly, my dear madam," replied Mr. Charlton; "you have duties which must be performed, and it is far better not to suffer feelings, however natural—however laudable—to interfere with their

execution at the commencement. I shall count upon you, then, and will now take my leave.'

The day of the dinner arrived. After some of the more distant guests had made their appearance, Mrs. Latimer was announced. She was dressed more plainly than usual; her widow's cap was brought further over her face; her hair was less shown. She was grave too, and seemed a little agitated; but if such was the case, Mr. Charlton's kindness and good breeding soon put her at her ease, and everybody showed her attention and civility; for her worthy host had communicated to those in the room what he had heard regarding the propriety of her conduct, and the sad circumstances in which she was placed. Before dinner, and after dinner, she showed great fondness for Miss Charlton; talked with her, smiled upon her, and, admired in her, to her father, all those things which Mr. Charlton himself most admired in his child

In the course of the evening there was some music; several of the young ladies were requested to sing; and one of them, after having done so, inquired if Mrs. Latimer would not favour them in the same way. She answered that she never sang anything but sacred music now; but she was prevailed upon to try a song from some favourite oratorio of the day, and nothing could be more beautiful than the manner in which she executed the task. It was chaste, high-toned, and sweet, without any effort or exuberant ornament, and every one listened, rapt and delighted, till it was done, when a murmur of applause spread through the room.

From that day Mrs. Latimer became a great favourite in the neighbourhood, and several invitations to dinner immediately followed, but she had chosen her course by this time, and replied, without concealment, that her means were too limited to admit of her going out far for society.' In one or two instances, a kindly—though, perhaps, considering the shortness of the acquaintance, not a very delicate—spirit prompted the inviters to send their own carriages for her; and in these cases she accepted. She also went out to several other dinner parties to which Miss Charlton was invited, taking a place in Mr. Charlton's carriage; but her principal intimacy was at Mallington House, and circumstances soon arose to make her almost a daily visitor here, as I shall proceed to explain.

CHAPTER III.

It very often happened, during the month or two which followed, that Mr. Charlton, sometimes accompanied by his daughter, sometimes alone, dropped in for half an hour in the morning to see how Mrs. Latimer and her son were going on; and on more than one occasion the conversation turned upon the education of children, in regard to which the lady seemed to have thought deeply, though, to say the truth, her own offspring did not afford a favourable specimen of her practice. That circumstance, however, was easily and naturally explained by her one morning, when the boy was absent,—"I have a hard task before me, my dear sir," she said, speaking of this subject. "Poor Alfred has been so terribly neglected, and so sadly spoiled, that

the efforts to restrain him, and make him apply, are almost too much for me. I long foresaw what would be the result, and foresaw it with fear and trembling; but the will of those who had the best right to speak was, of course, obeyed, and between contending duties I yielded to that which appeared paramount. I did not, indeed, think," she added in a low tone, "that I should be left alone to struggle with the faults encouraged by indulgence I could not counteract."

"Do you not think, my dear madam," asked Mr. Charlton, "that the best plan would be to send him to school?"

Mrs. Latimer shook her head with a rueful smile. "I cannot afford it," she said, in a low tone, and then added, a moment or two after, as her words had thrown her worthy visitor into a train of thought, "No, I must be contented to do what I can myself, and for the rest must trust to masters, when I can hear of any good ones."

"There are some very fair masters in the neighbourhood," replied Mr. Charlton. "With the exception of music, which he does not want, you will find all that you require. The music-master, indeed, is a very indifferent teacher, and I have, on more than one occasion, thought of going back to London again, in order to give Louisa better instruction."

Mrs. Latimer turned a shade paler, but the next moment she exclaimed,—"Oh! Mr. Charlton, I have thought of something that will indeed be delightful. You must let me be your daughter's music-mistress. It will at once be a great pleasure to me, and it will afford me the only means I ever shall have of showing you how deeply grateful I am for all the kindness you have evinced towards me."

Mr. Charlton hesitated and was embarrassed, said he could not think of Mrs. Latimer taking such trouble, and made a number of other apologies; but the lady persisted in her plan, and, as she had no piano at her lodging, it was agreed that she should come up every fine morning to give Louisa Charlton some instruction. Louisa herself was delighted, and every day Mrs. Latimer became a greater favourite both with father and daughter. She was often a companion at their breakfast table; often stayed to dinner. Her son was frequently at Mallington House, and though by no means much approved of by Mr. Charlton, was tolerated for Mrs. Latimer's sake. She was the greatest resource to the worthy gentleman that could be imagined—his companion, his friend; and he was very well inclined that matters should go on in the same way to the close of his days, but Mrs. Latimer did not intend that it should be so.

When she had been about nine months in the place, Mr. Charlton observed, with real concern, that she grew graver and more thoughtful than ever; that she seldom smiled, and when she did so it was faintly, and not from the heart. He inquired of himself what could be the matter, for some time before he inquired of any one else. But at length, one day, when he had, during a morning call upon her, remarked that she was more serious than ever, he asked her maid, who opened the door to give him exit—a calm, staid, shrewd-looking woman—if Mrs. Latimer were ill, observing that she looked out of spirits.

"Really, sir, I do not know what is the matter," said the abigail.

"I see clearly enough that my mistress is fretting about something, but I cannot tell you what it is. She has had sorrow enough, poor thing, for one so good and so beautiful."

"Pray were you with her when her husband died, Mrs. Windsor?" asked Mr. Charlton.

"I was, sir," answered the maid, "and a terrible day, too. He was a wild, rash, violent man, and treated her ill enough. But still he was her husband, sir; and although as to loving him very much, that was not possible, yet the shock nearly killed her."

"Well, pray, Mrs. Windsor," rejoined Mr. Charlton, feeling that it would not be proper to push his inquiries any further in that quarter, "if you find out that I can be of any service to Mrs. Latimer, let me know. You may be perfectly sure I should be delighted to render it."

The maid promised to do so; but nothing resulted from this conversation for some time, and Mrs. Latimer still continued grave and sad. At times, indeed, when walking on the common with Mr. Charlton, or sitting with him alone, a burst of happier feeling would take place. She would give way to some playful sally: appeal to him upon some light matter of taste; discuss the subject with him eagerly; perhaps oppose his opinions at first, but, in the end, yielded invariably, and then would turn her fine blue eyes upon him, and exclaim, "We women are not capable of arguing, my dear friend, and I believe we had better never attempt it." Then, the moment after, she would fall into sad thought again, and at times her eyes would fill with tears.

At length one morning a note arrived from her, at the hour at which she usually appeared, excusing herself for not coming, on account of matters of business which would occupy her all day. A second day she excused herself, a third she had a cold; and Mr. Charlton went down in person to inquire after her. At a little distance from her door he met her son Alfred, and, stopping to shake hands with the boy, naturally expressed a hope that Mrs. Latimer was not seriously indisposed.

"Oh! mamma is well enough," replied Alfred Latimer. "She is only moping. She has been moping these three or four days; but you must not tell her I said so, for she forbade me."

Mr. Charlton went on and rang at her door, nor was he refused admittance. He found her seated reading, and, thinking it better to begin upon the subject that he had at heart at once, he said,—"My dear lady, I have remarked that you have been much out of spirits of late. Now you must not think me intrusive; but, feeling the very sincere regard for you that I do, I may be permitted to say that, as you have no one here with whom to consult, if you require advice or assistance in any way, I should feel it a slight if you did not apply to me."

Mrs. Latimer coloured, and seemed a good deal agitated: but, after a moment's pause, she pressed Mr. Charlton's hand in her own, saying emphatically, "Thank you! thank you! best and kindest of men. But, alas! I fear that you can give me no assistance, and that your advice in this instance would but confirm the resolution which I have already taken, with bitter regret. Oh! had I had your advice and

support long, long ago, how many sorrows might have been saved me!"

"Well, but take them now," said Mr. Charlton, "and first tell me, my dear madam, what this determination is."

"I will," replied Mrs. Latimer," but you must hear a word or two of preface. Married very young, partly at my father's persuasion, partly from the giddy thoughtlessness of youth, to a man of whom I shall only say that even then I should not have chosen him had I had opportunity of selection, or time for thought, I endeavoured to do my duty well—indeed I did, Mr. Charlton; nay, more, I tried to make my duty pleasure. The rest I must pass in silence—the memory of the dead is sacred; but I have known little peace in life till I came down here. In this quiet place, and with your kind and beneficial society, I have enjoyed my first happy moments since girlhood; but, alas! now I must leave it."

Mr. Charlton started, as if she had struck him, so completely was the possibility of such an event absent from his thoughts. "But why, Mrs. Latimer?—why?" he exclaimed.

"Because," she replied, "and you will own the reason to be a good one—my means are not equal to living even in the moderate way in which I live here. I have shaped my expenditure by my income; but a sudden claim upon a part of the small property my husband left, having started up, even that poor income is diminished."

"Nay, but let me look into the claim on your behalf," said Mr. Charlton; "it may not be fair—it may not be just."

"Yes, it is," replied the lady, "I have been forced to become a better woman of business than you give me credit for being. I went into all the details at once about a month ago; I found that it was indubitable—though the lawyers said I might contest the validity of the documents—that the money had been received, and therefore I ordered it to be paid immediately. It is already done; my income is reduced by so much; and I have only to wait till I can receive a sufficient sum to pay a few little bills here, and then, I fear—I must—yes, indeed, I must leave you," and Mrs. Latimer burst into tears.

Mr. Charlton soothed her kindly and tenderly, and when she was somewhat more composed he said, "Indeed, this shocks and grieves me deeply; and if you would but consider me really in the light which you have often said you do—namely, that of a friend, a sincere true friend—and make use of my purse as if it were your own, till this little storm be passed——'

"Mr. Charlton!" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, drawing herself back, as if greatly surprised. "Impossible! But no," she added the next moment, "I know you meant it kindly, graciously, nobly, as you do everything. But that is quite impossible. A woman cannot receive money but from a father, or a husband—nay, say not a word more on that score, or I shall think you do not respect me. As to the money, I care not for it. There are countries where I can live at a cheaper rate than here, and I am ready, willing, to live on bread and water—ay, to work for that bread, should need be; but to part with the only people who have been really kind to me—to quit the only spot where I have known tranquillity—is bitter indeed;" and Mrs. Latimer wept again.

What Mr. Charlton might have replied at that moment had he not been interrupted, who can tell? but just as he was about to answer, Alfred Latimer burst into the room, laughing at something he had seen or done in the village. The boy was surprised to see his mother in tears, and turned a look quickly, and almost fiercely, upon Mr. Charlton, as if he had been doing something to grieve her.

Mrs. Latimer, however, held out her fair hand to her friend, saying, "Forgive me for thus giving way, and say no more upon the subject at present. We will talk about it more hereafter, when I am calmer."

"Well, then, my dear lady," replied Mr. Charlton, "I shall take it for granted that you will not rashly act in this matter till we have spoken further."

"I will take your advice in all things," answered the lady; "where should I go for counsel if not to you, my best—I may, indeed, say—my only friend?"

When Mr. Charlton returned to his own house he found his mind much more perturbed than was ordinary with him, or at all agreeable. That Mrs. Latimer might quit Mallington had never entered his imagination. She had never hinted such an intention; she had seemed so happy, so contented with the place, that he had taken it for granted everything would go on just as it had gone on for an indefinite time, and the idea of losing her society, and being again reduced to the state of listless apathy in which he had been when she arrived, seemed to him a second widowhood. Yet what could he do to prevent such a result? She had reasonable grounds for her resolution; she was evidently resolved to receive no pecuniary assistance; and, though he might think her a little too scrupulous with so sincere a friend as himself, he honoured her scruples too much to strive to shake them. The term second widowhood, which he had employed in his own thoughts, ran in his mind. He began to fancy that he should find his time still burdensome to him through life, unless he married again; and the expression which Mrs. Latimer had herself used, saying, that a woman could only receive money from a father or a husband, was one of the first things that made him ask himself, if he did marry, who could he so well and wisely wed as herself?

At first he wished that he were ten years younger, their ages, then, he thought, might not have been so out of proportion. As it was, people would only say that he had been caught by the eye, and laugh at the old gentleman for marrying the fair young widow. Yet, after all, he recollected that he was not so very aged as grief and want of occupation, and the dark views they had engendered, made him fancy. He was barely fifty-four; Mrs. Latimer might be thirty-five, or thirty-six, for she had told him that she looked younger than she really was. There was a difference, certainly, of fifteen or sixteen years, but what of that? There was many a more disproportionate match every day; and, let the world say what it would, he was conscious that it was not for beauty, or any ephemeral advantage, that he chose her, but merely for the sake of an amiable and pleasant companion, who had soothed his melancholy, and whose high qualities he knew.

Thus Mr. Charlton went on, diminishing some objections in his own eyes, and boldly meeting others with a flat negative, till dinner time; and yet he was by no means satisfied, and still less decided. He

affection—who had been the sunshine of his home, the light of his steps, the pride, as well as the darling, of his heart; and when he looked into his own bosom he found nothing like the same feelings there towards Mrs. Latimer that he had experienced towards her. True, it was not to be expected—true, perhaps, it was better not. This ought to be a marriage of reason, whereas the other had been a marriage of love. But then, again, he thought of his daughter; and why or wherefore he could not tell, his heart misgave him. It was but a prejudice, he fancied. One heard so much of step-mothers, and perhaps they might occasionally act ill, but there must be exceptions—indeed, he had known them himself, and Mrs. Latimer already showed for Louisa almost the affection of a mother.

Yet he was not satisfied; and at dinner he was thoughtful, absent, almost fretful. Towards nine in the evening, as he was trying to turn his mind to other thoughts, with the prudent resolution of sleeping over the matter, and just when Louisa had retired to bed, one of his old servants announced to him that Mrs. Windsor, Mrs. Latimer's maid, desired to see him.

"Show her in!" cried Mr. Charlton, in some agitation; and when the abigail appeared, he exclaimed, "Good evening, Mrs. Windsor, I hope your lady is not ill!"

"No, sir," replied the maid; and then waiting till the door was closed, she added, "but you told me, sir, to inform you if I found out what made my mistress so grave and sad, and as I discovered to-night, I thought I would come up and tell you, especially as you are somewhat concerned, sir."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Charlton, in some surprise; "how is that, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Why, sir," answered his companion, pausing and thinking for a moment, with a grave and embarrassed look, "it is an unpleasant thing to tell, but yet, as I was saying, I think it is but right that you should know, for I am sure you, who are quite the master of the place, as I may say, will soon put a stop to it."

"If it be anything unpleasant to your mistress, and I have power to do so," replied Mr. Charlton, "I certainly will; but what is it, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Why, sir, it is just this," the maid proceeded, after another hesitating pause—"those two old cats at whose house we lodge, the Miss Martins, are the greatest gossips and scandal-makers in the world, and they can't even keep their tongues off Mrs. Latimer, who never had a word said against her in her life."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Charlton, with a tremulous emotion of the lip, "and pray what can they find to say against her now?"

"Truly, they must needs talk about your coming so often to see her, sir," rejoined Mrs. Windsor, as if with an effort, "and about her coming up here to Miss Charlton, sir—that's what they say; and I have found out that three or four days ago that old tabby, the eldest one, had the face to go up to my lady and speak to her about it, and to say it was not respectable."

"She did, did she!" exclaimed Mr. Charlton, his cheek growing very hot; "well, my good lady, I will soon settle that business!"

"They are cunning old creatures," continued the maid, with a scorn-

was going to leave them, and then they chose to begin. However, sir, I thought it right to let you know, for I never like any one to be spoken ill of behind his back, and to have things put upon him that he never dreamt of—especially a gentleman so kind and good to every one as you are."

"You did very right, Mrs. Windsor," replied Mr. Charlton, "there's a guinea for you. Do not say anything to Mrs. Latimer about your having seen me. I suppose she did not know you were coming here?"

"Oh! yes, sir," said the maid, "she had told me to take a note to Miss Charlton, which I have given to your man; but she did not know that I was going to speak with you, and for Heaven's sake, don't tell her, sir. She would be so angry."

"No, no, make yourself easy, Mrs. Windsor," replied Mr. Charlton, "I will not betray you; but I will find means to put a stop to their idle gossip, depend upon it, and now good-night. I shall call down before luncheon to-morrow."

Thus they parted, and Mr. Charlton walked up and down the room for at least half an hour. A new and powerful motive was given to him for doing as he wished to do; nay, it was better than a motive—it was an excuse. Mrs. Latimer's reputation was affected by his friendship for her: there was no means of remedying that evil but one, and Mr. Charlton from that moment determined to put it in her power at least to do so. He was somewhat anxious and nervous upon the subject, indeed. She might take a different view of the matter—she might look upon the difference of age as an insurmountable bar. She might like him very well as a friend, but not think of him as a husband. Yet, when he had retired to rest, and thought over a thousand little traits which he had perceived, he began to hope that he was not altogether so indifferent to her. That she had a great regard for him, was evident; that to abandon his society was painful to her, she had acknowledged; and he remembered more than once having caught her eyes fixed upon his face with an expression of interest. He was conscious that he was a good-looking man of his age, and now he began to wish that he had not continued to wear powder and a pigtail. That, however, could not now be helped, for he would not venture upon the ridicule of cutting off the latter encumbrance upon the eve of a declaration, and, thinking that a sleepless night would not improve his personal appearance, he turned upon his side and courted the drowsy god. As usual, in such cases, the god was somewhat slow to come, and Mr. Charlton was up early the next morning refreshing himself with a walk in the garden. At breakfast his daughter sat opposite to him, and entertained him with her young conversation; but every time his eyes turned upon her his heart smote him. However, his resolution was taken, and about eleven away he went to execute it.

He found the fair widow looking, he thought, more fascinating than ever, and, luckily for his purpose, alone. Her eyes beamed when she saw him; and she held out her soft delicate hand with a smile so enchanting that Mr. Charlton began to feel emotions of tenderness which carried him on wonderfully after a while, though they interrupted him a little at first.

"You seem busy, my dear Mrs. Latimer," he said, looking at her writing-desk, which was open before her, and at the table covered with papers. "I hope I do not disturb you; but even if I do I must still intrude a little, for I have one or two things to say."

"I was only putting my desk into order for a journey," said Mrs. Latimer, with the smile passing away, and giving place to a look of sadness; "for I see, my excellent friend, it must come to that."

"Nay, I think not," replied Mr. Charlton, seating himself beside her on the little hard-stuffed rosewood sofa of the lodging. "I think not," he repeated, "unless, indeed, you be very resolute to go. There is such a thing, my dear lady, as a choice of evils in this world, and I am going to put such an alternative before you. You have expressed great unwillingness to go from Mallington, and I believe you to be quite sincere, for where one is loved and esteemed, there one generally finds some sort of pleasure. You have, also, been kind enough to say that the loss of my daughter's and my own society had no slight part in causing your unwillingness."

"A part, my kind friend, so great, that the alternative you propose would be a very painful one indeed if I did not choose it to avoid such grief. For yourself, I can only say that you have acted towards me a part that has ever made me look upon you as an elder brother."

"Well, my dear madam," said Mr. Charlton, "I tell you the alternative is but one of two evils: it is for you to judge which is the greater. I wish you, then, to stay at Mallington—to change your present residence, and to come to mine."

Mrs. Latimer looked all amazement; but Mr. Charlton proceeded with more calmness than he had himself expected—"This, my sweet friend, can but be done at the expense of a great sacrifice. To render it right—to render it possible, I may say—you must consent to give your hand to a man much older than yourself, and to make him happy at the expense, perhaps, of some regrets."

Mrs. Latimer pressed her hand upon her heart as if its beating were too much for her; and then, bending down her head, she hid her eyes in her handkerchief and wept.

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Charlton, taking her hand somewhat alarmed, "I did not intend to grieve you."

"Grieve me! grieve me!" cried Mrs. Latimer, raising her beautiful eyes swimming with tears, but with a smile upon her lips. "Oh! my noble and generous friend, you know not what I feel;" and she placed her other hand in his also. "But I cannot suffer you," she said, after a start. "No! I cannot suffer you to make such a sacrifice yourself. You know that I am poor; but you do not know how poor, my good friend. Debts I have none, but at this moment I have less than one hundred per annum. You can, you ought to look for a wife far better endowed than I am. Still in the prime of life, with large fortune, and everything to make a woman happy, you have every right to expect——"

"Hush, hush, hush!" said Mr. Charlton, interrupting her, "I will not hear another word upon such subjects. If you can feel that you will be happy with me, if you will be a mother to my daughter and a companion to myself, the journey from Mallington is at an end."

"For ever!" said Mrs. Latimer, leaning her head upon his shoulder,

"Oh!" she murmured in a soft tone, "Oh! that I had known you earlier in life, as I said the other day, what misery it would have saved me! But how rarely is it that one meets in early years the only person who can make one happy!"

We have, however, intruded somewhat too far upon scenes that are generally private, and we must therefore leave Mrs. Latimer and Mr. Charlton alone to settle all about the marriage without our presence. We have not been the only ones, however, dear readers, who overheard that tender conversation. Ah, no! Miss Mathilda Martin, having first ascertained that Mrs. Windsor had gone out as soon as she had let Mr. Charlton in, was upon the stairs close to the door—so close, indeed, that sometimes her ear, sometimes her eye, very nearly touched the keyhole. So it was, however, that after a certain time Miss Mathilda descended to the shop, with a cheek highly coloured, and an eye full of excitement. "Oh! yes, indeed," she said to her sister, "it is just so! quite as we thought. Don't say a word, Winifred. I heard it with my own ears. He is now going to forget all decency and to keep her up at his own house. I heard him, I can assure you. He said these very words, 'I wish you to stay at Mallington—to change your present residence, and come to mine.'"

"And what did she say?" cried Miss Martin, eagerly. "Will she go?"

"Oh, to be sure!" replied Mathilda; "no doubt of it. There were plenty of 'dear friends' and 'sweet friends' going, I can assure you. Ah! the nasty old man, how I hate him!"

"She's the worst of the two," answered her sister: "a trumpery minx, with her high airs. Why, she has never once asked us to take a cup of tea; as if we were dirt. I should not wonder if she were no widow at all, but just some cast off, with her boy."

Mrs. Latimer was evidently lost in the opinion of the two Misses Martin; and after having thus discussed the mistress they proceeded to assail the maid. Of her they said what was true enough, that she was an artful jade; for though they had not exactly hit upon Mrs. Latimer's real faults, she being, perhaps, the last person on earth to be misled by any man, young or old, yet their closer observation of good Mrs. Windsor had given them a good insight into her character. As they were in progress, however, they were suddenly interrupted by the entrance of good Dr. Western, the rector, who, after ordering a few articles of clothing for some of his poor, went on to ask if Mrs. Latimer was at home.

"Oh dear, yes, sir," said Miss Martin, "she has got Mr. Charlton with her, as usual, sir."

"She is soon going to quit, however," added Mathilda, "and I cannot say I am sorry."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the clergyman, with considerable surprise, "may I ask why? Mrs. Latimer is a very respectable person, though not rich, and I trust that you have too much good sense and good feeling, Miss Martin, to value any one merely as they may be wealthy."

"Ay, but is she so respectable, doctor?" asked Miss Martin, with a significant look.

"I have the best assurance that she is so," replied Dr. Western. "I will add something more, my good lady. Knowing the propensity of

all small places to deal uncharitably with the characters of strangers, and having last week heard something that did not please me of reports set about respecting this lady, I took the trouble of writing for information, and find, as I supposed, that those reports are without foundation, and that she is in every respect what she seems; in a word, one who has acted through life with perfect propriety, even though placed in very painful and difficult situations. I trust, therefore, that we shall hear no more of this, for it is neither christian nor generous."

Dr. Western, who had purposely given the Misses Martin an opportunity of drawing this reproof upon their own heads, then proceeded to pay his intended visit to Mrs. Latimer; and it was remarked by the ladies of the shop that he and Mr. Charlton walked out, and proceeded down the street together.

A vague rumour, in the course of the subsequent week, spread through the village that Mrs. Latimer was not long to be Mrs. Latimer. Louisa Charlton or Mr. Charlton were always with her; the carriages of neighbouring gentry were frequently at her door; sempstresses and dressmakers were busily employed; and the Misses Martin, beginning to find that they had made a very great mistake, were her most humble servants, fawning egregiously on even Mrs. Windsor, and declaring that "Dear Mrs. Latimer was certainly one of the sweetest creatures that ever was seen."

Dear Mrs. Latimer, however, did not forget them; she was perfectly civil indeed; but she bided her time.

At length, one Saturday night, an elderly gentleman, who was reported to be an army agent, came down to Mallington, spent the evening with Mrs. Latimer and Mr. Charlton, and took a bed at the house of the latter. The next day the lady appeared at church divested of her weeds; and on the Tuesday following, at an early hour, the widower and the widow stood together before the altar, to be made man and wife. The army agent, who had been a friend of her former husband, acted as father upon the present occasion; a small party of the country neighbours were witnesses to the ceremony. Louisa Charlton and Alfred Latimer were invited to spend a few days with a friend who lived about seven miles from Mallington, and Mr. Charlton and his fair bride set out upon a tour into Warwickshire.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS was a great discoverer, as the reader is undoubtedly aware; but he never made half the discoveries that Mr. Charlton did within one year from the time that Mrs. Latimer gave him her hand at the altar. Not that she behaved ill to him; for, on the contrary, she redoubled her affectionate manner; exerted herself to be more enchanting than ever; soothed, flattered, fondled him. But Mr. Charlton had now nearer means of observation, and he was naturally a clear-sighted man. He was as fond of her as ever—he would not have lost her society for the world; but he was neither old enough nor young enough to be blind to all the little traits of character which presented themselves in his fair wife; and all these traits tended to show that Mrs. Charlton was one of those ladies who never

act without an object. She calculated her game with the most precise and definite computation, and worked boldly towards the result which she wished to arrive at by the means she thought most likely to attain it. From her earliest years she had been taught to consider her own interests in the first place, and had willingly seconded her father in ensnaring the son of a noble family into a connection which all his friends disapproved. His first object was to seduce her, but though not without strong passions, they were not of that character which were likely to make her fall a sacrifice to the designs of any man. She could hate heartily, but love was not one of her weaknesses; and thus she skilfully led him on to make her his wife as the only means of possessing her. His fortune, never very great, she aided to impair, for she had tastes and habits as expensive as his own; and as he was of a violent and irritable disposition, and she had no object in soothing him, the coldness with which she listened to the details of his difficulties, and the little care she displayed in extricating him from them, often drove him into fits of passion, which produced scenes that caused all but very close observers to pity the sweet creature his wife very much. She had an admirable art, too, of always putting him in the wrong, and as she was certainly ill-treated—for he was known more than once to strike her—and as she resisted, without any effort, many an attempt to seduce her from the right path, made by that husband's dissolute associates, the world in general gave her credit for forbearance only equal to her virtue. Thus had passed her younger days, till, at length, in a fit of rage and despair, Captain Latimer lost the use of his reason, and raised his hand against his own life.

Mrs. Latimer had then, as we have seen, set up the interesting young widow, and had visited various parts of England in that capacity before she touched upon Mallington. At the latter place, she only proposed at first to look about her for a month; and finding there a clergyman apparently well to do, and a single man, her first thought was that, perhaps, in course of time, she might become Mrs. Western. Perceiving very soon, however, that Dr. Western was not very accessible, and learning that the large house at the top of the hill belonged to a widower of great wealth, she determined to change her plan, inasmuch as a campaign against the heart of Mr. Charlton seemed open to more easy tactics, and because the object to be gained was greater. Affluence and ease, carriages, horses, servants, were things that Mrs. Latimer liked very much, and it was well worth a little study and art to obtain such advantages. The disposition of Mr. Charlton was easily read—Mrs. Latimer shaped her conduct accordingly; her maid, Mrs. Windsor, without any full explanation being necessary between mistress and servant, seconded her skilfully, and the result has been already seen by the reader.

It is an invariable rule, however, which often tends to bring down retribution on the head of deceivers, that we undervalue the good sense of people whom we have once taken in. Never cheat any one, dear reader; for depend upon it you will think him a fool ever after, till perchance he cheats you in return. Now, Mrs. Latimer, or, as we must henceforth call her, Mrs. Charlton, did undervalue the good sense of her second husband. She only recollected the result, that she had deceived him into thinking her all he wished, and she forgot the

art she had displayed in making him think so. She forgot, also, that she was now placed before his eyes in the microscope of matrimony, and she did not exactly guard all her sayings and doings with that scrupulous care which would have been necessary to keep up the illusion. One great object was gained—she was his wife—and she thought she might have a little repose. She had another great object, it is true: to induce him to leave her at his death a large share of his fortune; but she trusted to habit and natural tenderness, and her own skill in pleasing, to obtain that very satisfactory result. Mr. Charlton had, indeed, settled upon her, previous to their marriage, an annual sum sufficient for her maintenance as his widow, in case of his decease, but Mrs. Latimer had, on various accounts, not exacted as large a jointure as, perhaps, she might have obtained had she, to use an angler's term, "played her fish" after she had hooked him. But two causes prevented her doing so: in the first place, the character she had assumed, and which it was necessary to keep up, was repugnant to such a course; and in the next, she was naturally of an impatient disposition, and eager to enjoy the fair prospect before her. Thus, though she delicately hinted to her friend the army agent that some settlement might be necessary, yet she left the matter entirely in his hands; and he, for his part, thought the proposal of Mr. Charlton on that score very liberal.

After a bridal tour of somewhat more than a month, Mr. and Mrs. Charlton returned to Mallington House; and the lady's taste for expense and display began to show itself. Her husband, however, did not object; he could well afford it, and, indeed, had somewhat reproached himself in days gone by with living too far within his income, solely from not knowing how to spend it reasonably. His former wife had no such habits indeed, and the contrast struck him not altogether pleasantly; but he said nothing, and only insured that his expenses should be kept within due bounds. Then Mrs. Charlton thought it right to see the trade of the village improved by the establishment of a rival shop, in opposition to the Misses Martin. Encouragement was given to a speculative tradesman of the neighbouring town to break in upon the monopoly so long enjoyed by those ladies, and as he had all Mrs. Charlton's custom, and her strongest recommendation, besides smart new articles, which had never been seen in Mallington before, the old shop was soon neglected, the dull-coloured prints and muslins hung unpurchased in the windows, and the Misses Martin, growing every day sourer and more sour, rued the hour when they had put up the bill of lodgings which had caught the widow's eye, and mentally gave her over to ruin and condemnation.

Neither of this did Mr. Charlton wholly approve, but his fair wife took care to conceal the animus of this proceeding from his eyes, and he was, therefore, obliged to content himself with her notions of free trade and anti-monopoly. One thing, however, did annoy him; he had forgotten that, in marrying the widow, he ran a great risk of marrying her son too, and Alfred Latimer soon gave him cause to repent of having done so. He proved a wild, capricious, rash, unfeeling boy, and it became evident, very speedily, that his spoiling had not been entirely on his father's part. He was very ignorant, very arrogant, and with none of those principles which, implanted in

very early youth, prove sooner or later the correctors of follies and the tamers of passions, he seemed to have no idea of anything but indulgence and amusement.

After having given way for about six months, Mr. Charlton, moved by a sense of duty to the boy himself, shook off his desire of ease and tranquillity, and represented to his wife the absolute necessity of sending him to school. He proposed Eton, and offered to provide liberally for his expenses there, saying, that of course he looked upon her son nearly in the light of his own. But Mrs. Charlton was in despair at the idea: she showed in feeling terms that he had been so long brought up at home that the change to a public school would be more severe and trying to him than to other lads; and all that her husband could obtain by his most reasonable arguments was, that he should be sent to a private school some fifteen miles off, where she might be at hand herself to watch over him.

Not long after this Mrs. Charlton hinted to her husband that it might be better if their dear Louisa were sent to a finishing school in London. She suggested that it would give a polish to her manners, a tone, a style to her appearance and demeanour that never could be acquired in country society; that all the accomplishments which she possessed wanted the perfecting touch of the first masters, and that it was good for all young people to see a little of the world before they had to play an active part in it.

Mr. Charlton heard her to an end with perfect composure, but then replied gravely, but not unkindly, "No, my dear. She never sets her foot in a school."

He said no more at first, and Mrs. Charlton was inclined to argue the point; but he stopped her abruptly, adding, "Her mother never was at a school; she had a great abhorrence of them. I promised her that Louisa never should be sent to one, and that promise I will keep."

Mrs. Charlton burst into tears, and Mr. Charlton quitted the room.

She found that she had injured herself, however; and hastened to retrieve her false move by renewed kindness to her step-daughter, towards whom, to say sooth, she had somewhat cooled since her marriage; but she did not love Louisa the more for being the subject of her first dispute with her husband. In manner she was sweet and gentle to Louisa Charlton, always calling her either my love, or my dear Louisa; but there were many small traits which showed to Louisa herself, and, what was of still greater importance, to Mr. Charlton also, that there was little sincere affection. Often in a kindly tone, and with numerous professions of regard and assurances that she did it for the child's own good, she would reprove Louisa for one little act or another, and lecture her upon her conduct and demeanour. She affected to think that it was her duty to do so, and therefore did it before her husband; but Mr. Charlton was very keen-sighted in regard to his child, and the first question which he asked himself was, whether the censure was just, before he inquired whether his new wife was only actuated by a sense of duty or by some other motive. He generally found reason to think that Louisa was in the right; for though she made no defence, yet she had an advocate in her father's heart, and a

judge in his sense of justice which did her right, contrary to Mrs. Charlton's expectations. That lady, indeed, only strove to produce an unfavourable impression on her husband of his daughter's conduct and character; but she was not at all aware that Mr. Charlton was silently, and in his own mind, trying them both, and generally giving judgment against her. She did not at all understand at first, and, indeed, never fully understood, the exact nature of his love of quiet and his abhorrence of discussions. She often thought that she had gained her point, and produced the result she intended, because he said nothing. She fancied he did not see and comprehend, because he did not oppose or reprove; but, in truth, Mr. Charlton was always analysing and forming his estimate by the accumulation of facts which he observed. Thus, on one or two occasions when his quietness had induced Mrs. Charlton to go on to a point where he felt it his duty to oppose decidedly what he thought wrong, and some little dispute took place in consequence, Mrs. Charlton believed that it would all be soon forgotten; but she deceived herself. It was a new page written in her history—a fresh line in the portrait which her husband was constantly drawing in his own mind.

Sometimes, too, in spite of all her skill and self-command the strong and violent passions which were in her bosom would burst forth with a vindictive fire, which startled and alarmed her husband. Thus, one day, about a year after their marriage, her son was brought in by the head gardener (who had often complained of the destruction he committed in the garden) for a more unpardonable offence. The man appeared in the hall, where the young gentleman's mother was then standing, holding him firmly by the collar, notwithstanding his kicking, struggling, and biting; and he at once informed the lady that Master Alfred had that moment destroyed the whole melon beds, and broken the glasses of the frames, in revenge for having been prevented from knocking off the blossoms of a fruit-tree with a switch. The man spoke calmly and respectfully; but the boy, furious with passion, accused him of striking and maltreating him, and soon made his mother a participator in his anger. The idea of her son dragged in by the collar by a simple gardener, was enough to excite her indignation; and ordering the man to quit his hold immediately, without making any answer to his complaint, she took her son by the hand, and, with raised colour and flashing eyes, sought Mr. Charlton in the library. Trying to subdue her voice to some degree of calmness, she demanded that Blackmore, the gardener, should be immediately dismissed for daring to strike poor Alfred for some of his little follies in the garden; and she proceeded to make out as aggravated a case against the man as possible.

Mr. Charlton heard her calmly, but with his eye resting more firmly on her flushed cheek than was pleasant to her, and then called the boy to him saying, "Come hither, Alfred, and tell me how all this has happened. But, before you speak, remember I must have the exact truth, which, I am sorry to say, you do not always give. Now, what occurred between you and Blackmore?"

The boy went on, detailed the circumstances according to his own version, admitted with apparent frankness that he had been switching the blossoms on the wall, but declared that the man had taken the

stick from him, and struck him with it, and that it was in running away from him that he had jumped upon the melon beds and broken the frames. The story was not well arranged, for a very short investigation would have shown that three frames had been destroyed, with all the wanton fury of passion; but Mr. Charlton made no investigation, and remained silent for a minute after the boy's tale, broken by tears of rage, had come to an end.

"Well, my dear," cried Mrs. Charlton, impatiently, "have I not a right to demand that he be discharged immediately?"

"No, Emily," replied Mr. Charlton; "he cannot be discharged."

"And pray why not, Mr. Charlton?" asked his wife.

"Because, my dear," was the answer, "Alfred has told a most gross and shameful falsehood. I was standing at that window at the time, and saw the whole affair. If you will follow my advice, you will send Alfred back to school this very day, as a punishment for the lie he has told, and the bad spirit he has displayed. As to discharging Blackmore, for simply doing his duty, that is out of the question."

Mrs. Charlton made no answer, but it was a terrible struggle between prudence and passion. She burst into tears, however, and, taking her son by the hand, quitted the room. There was another line drawn in her picture; and a darker one still was to come. Blackmore remained for about two months more in the service of his old master, and then gave warning. Mr. Charlton asked no explanation, and the man offered none; but the former was well aware that the place had been made too uncomfortable for the man to remain in it.

Although Louisa Charlton had not sufficient knowledge of the human heart to analyse and examine as her father did, yet she felt the character of her step-mother, if I may use the term. She knew that she was not loved by her, and that her tenderest tones and sweetest terms were not real. She avoided her as much as possible, then, and Mrs. Charlton was very glad of it; for she was somewhat too apparently anxious to be free from Louisa's society. If she were going out to drive or to walk she always contrived to believe that "the dear child" was busy about something—that she had this to study, or that to do. But Mr. Charlton, in his quiet way, soon put a moral restraint upon her in these respects. When such excuses for not taking his daughter were made, he remained at home, saying he would wait till she had done and then walk with her. This was a course which his fair wife did not at all approve of, as by that means the daughter became her husband's companion, not herself; and when she found that it was systematically pursued, she altered her conduct, not without some apprehension of having made another false move.

Louisa was always gentle, and kind, and affectionate, and treated her father's wife with perfect respect; but even that Mrs. Charlton did not like, for she would fain have discovered something substantial to find fault with. As the sweet girl grew up, however, and displayed promises of great beauty, Mrs. Charlton thought of a change of plans; and in her own mind laid out a scheme for uniting Louisa to her son—thus securing possession of the whole of Mr. Charlton's wealth. The great obstacle, indeed, was the boy's own disposition, of which she well knew neither father nor daughter approved; and from that moment she strove eagerly with the lad—not to make him amend, but rather

conceal his faults. Advice, exhortations, reproaches, were all employed in vain, and her own indulgence tended to frustrate her object. Each day as he advanced in life, Alfred Latimer showed himself more headstrong and wild, and a taste for low society began to display itself when at home; for the quiet cheerfulness of Mr. Charlton, and even the gayer gentleness of Louisa, were not at all to his taste. Towards the latter, indeed, he showed some affection of a particular kind; but even after they had become the young man and the young woman it never assumed the character of love. It was, in a degree, that of a brother for a sister, by which name he always called her, in spite of all Mrs. Charlton could say; but it was less strong, less elevated. At times he would be angry and sullen with her for days together; at others would forget her entirely in his own pursuits; at others would tease and give her pain. But whenever he was in trouble or distress, he would fly to her, even in preference to his mother; and often, by her advice, assistance, or intercession, she would extricate him from the difficulties that his own faults and follies had brought upon him. Louisa approved neither his character nor his conduct; she disliked his society; she shrank from his conversation, except when he sought her for counsel or aid; and the more she saw of him, the more unworthy she thought him, till she learned at length to regard him with something like fear, though it was more fear for himself, and for the follies and evils he might commit, than for the annoyance he might bring upon her.

I have said above that Mrs. Charlton was not pleased at his giving Louisa the name of sister; and the reason was, that she wished to bring Mr. Charlton and Louisa herself to look upon him in a very different light. She strove for this object steadily, shutting her eyes to all the many motives which could make her husband reject such a son-in-law. She endeavoured to persuade him that all Alfred's faults would pass away in time, that they were but errors of youth, and over-indulgence; and she attempted to rouse pride in favour of the alliance she had in view, by casually speaking, at different times, of the probability—which she represented as great—of her son succeeding to the title and estates of his cousin, whom she declared to be a sickly and feeble youth, not likely to see maturity.

Mr. Charlton had by this time gained deep insights, and he heard her without any marked reply, waiting to discover her object; for he now knew that she always had one. At length, one evening, when Louisa had gone to bed, and she and her husband were sitting alone, Mrs. Charlton, as he seemed in a cheerful and yielding humour, ventured to say, "I know not what you feel, my dear; but if I could see my poor boy united to a woman who would guide him aright, and, by occupying all his affections, give him those high objects which I am sure are all that is wanting to correct his errors, I should think the great end of life attained."

"I fear such a one would be difficult to find, Emily," replied Mr. Charlton; "and for her sake, poor thing, if ever he is destined to meet with such a one, it would be better to let his passions be broken by the hard struggle of the world, or tamed by their own excess."

"Such a one is our dear Louisa," said Mrs. Charlton, in a hesitating

"She is certainly one to make any man happy," replied her father, gravely, "but she is out of the question, and her like is not easily found."

"But why is she out of the question?" asked Mrs. Charlton, a little irritated. "Suppose they loved each other?"

"That cannot be supposed," said Mr. Charlton. "They are brother and sister, indeed, and may love each other as such, but my curse would follow any other tie between them."

He spoke in a tone that the lady had never heard him use before, and, as he did so, he rose as if to put an end to the conversation.

The next morning her husband was up somewhat earlier than usual, and went down into the village before breakfast. He had not been long gone, however, before one of the lawyer's clerks came up to ask for a memorandum book which Mr. Charlton had left in his library. The servant could not find it, and applied to his mistress, who was now making breakfast. At first she told Louisa to go and look, but the moment after a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and she exclaimed "No; I know where it is. I will go."

She did, and found the book; but before she gave it to the man, who was waiting, she unclasped it, and looked at the first page as if to see that it was the right one. Her eye instantly lighted upon the words "Mem. for Will:—If, contrary to my express commands, Louisa should by any chance marry A. L., everything to go to next heir."

Mrs. Charlton restrained herself with pain while she handed the book to the man, but the moment he was gone she gave way to a burst of indescribable rage. Her pretty features assumed the expression of a demon; and, in her wrath, she threw off the table, and broke to pieces, an inkstand which she knew her husband valued greatly;—it had belonged to his first wife. When she returned to the breakfast-room she was still under the influence of the same feelings; she scolded the servants, she spoke angrily to Louisa, she fell into fits of sombre thought; but the moment Mr. Charlton's step sounded in the hall she was changed as if by enchantment. Her sweet smile came back like sunshine returning to a stormy sky, and she was all grace and gentleness when he seated himself at the breakfast-table.

Alfred Latimer was now frequently absent; for Mrs. Charlton had found it necessary, for the success of her own plans, to prevent the follies and vices, which were becoming more conspicuous as he grew towards manhood, from being obtruded upon the eyes of her husband; and he had been placed under the care of a clergyman at some distance to prepare him for college. But his stay there did not tend, in any great degree, to improve his disposition; for the tutor was an indolent man, with whom he might study if he pleased, or remain idle if he liked, and, as the reader may well suppose, he showed strongly his affection for "the mother of vice."

Louisa had commenced her nineteenth year, and her birth-day had been celebrated with affectionate joy by Mr. Charlton, when, the morning after, as he was rising from his chair, he fell back insensible. The surgeon, Mr. Nethersole, was sent for in haste, and, by copious bleeding, relieved him for the time; but he remained ill for some months, and never fully recovered his health.

Alfred Latimer was at Mallington at the time, and remained there while his step-father was obliged to keep his room, wandering about the country, no one knew whither—coming home late at night—and making constant demands upon his mother's purse. One day, however, Edmonds, the park-keeper of Lord Mallington, appeared at Mallington House, and demanded to speak with Mrs. Charlton. He was shown into her presence, and, in his usual bluff and straightforward manner, proceeded to inform her that her son had been seen, on the preceding night, in the preserves of the earl.

"He had two other young fellows with him, madam," he continued, "and I dare say the young gentleman only did it for a spree; but there were guns fired, and pheasants killed, that is certain. Now, I thought it best to come and tell you, madam; for these fellows he was with are not fit company for him, and will get him into mischief: and, as he has been always very civil to our people when he has called in at the cottage, I thought it a pity to see him go on so."

Mrs. Charlton was really shocked and alarmed, for she had previously entertained no idea of the length to which her son's taste for low society had been carried. She thanked the man sincerely, then, for his warning; and in order to break through such dangerous connections, as well as to remove him before Mr. Charlton was well enough to come down and resume his usual habits, she acted with more firmness than usual where Alfred was concerned, and sent him back to his tutor's with the most serious admonition she had ever bestowed upon him in her life. He might, perhaps, have resisted, for he seldom showed any great reverence for his mother's authority; but the fact of having been discovered by the game-keepers frightened him, and he obeyed.

At the end of about a month after his departure, Mr. Charlton had sufficiently recovered to go out and walk about the village and the neighbourhood, as he had been accustomed to do, and his daughter Louisa was now his constant companion; for Mrs. Charlton, who had got into habits of great self-indulgence, had by this time grown marvellously stout and heavy, and loved exercise in her carriage better than on foot. His conversation was now generally serious, and sometimes sad; and he often referred to the probability of his death taking place at no very distant period.

"I speak thus, my dear Louisa," he said one day, "because I would have you prepare your mind for such an event, as mine is prepared. I know how terribly the loss of one we love comes upon those who have never looked forward to it; and, after such a fit of apoplexy as I have had, one always lives with a drawn sword hung over one, which may fall at any moment."

Louisa wiped some drops from her eyes; but only replied, "There is one favour I have to ask, my dear father, which is this:—whenever you are ill again, do not let me be kept out of your room. You know that I will be quiet and not disturb you; and the anxiety and pain of being absent from you, and not knowing really and truly how you are, is too terrible,"—and poor Louisa wept.

"Were you kept out when I was ill lately?" asked Mr. Charlton, gravely.

"Yes, my dear father," replied Louisa, "several times. I was told

when I came, that you did not wish to be disturbed; that you would rather not see me then:—as if I would have disturbed you; when I would sit by your bedside for hours without noise or movement if they would let me. I can bear anything but to be kept from you."

"*You shall not, my sweet child!*" *said Mr. Charlton.* "*I thought there was something of the kind, from not seeing you so often as I wished.* But I understand it all, and it shall not occur again."

Whether the attempt might or not have been made to exclude the child once more from the bedside of her sick father I cannot say, for it was never put to the proof. Mr. Charlton went on, apparently regaining health and strength, for some months. The winter and the spring passed away without any event; Mrs. Charlton was all kindness and tenderness to her husband; and Louisa was giving way to the full hope of seeing his dark presentiments remain long unrealised. About the month of June news reached the village that the Earl of Mallington had been taken very ill in London, and three days after came the intelligence that he was dead. But what horrified the attorney in the first instance, and also puzzled both the servants on the estate and the gossips of the place, was, that he had died without a will, so that all his estates would go to the next male heir. Who was the next male heir then became the question; but the only house in Mallington which possessed a peerage was Mr. Charlton's. The solicitor begged leave to borrow it for a day; even Dr. Western looked into it; and Mr. Charlton himself examined it with some curiosity, to know who was to be their new neighbour. It afforded little satisfaction, however; for it there appeared, that the late lord had no brothers or uncles living, and in tracing back the ancestry the lawyer declared, that the nearest male heir was the Rev. Mr. Wilmot, a gentleman born about sixty years before, who was particularly marked as having no issue. "And yet," he added, "it would bear a question between him and the heirs of his uncle, Thomas Wilmot of the Grange, if he had any.

He seemed to derive satisfaction from this view of the case, but more especially from the probability of there being great difficulty in settling the claims to the personal property, as the late lord had made no will.

Whether Mr. Charlton had or had not made a will, or whether he intended to alter one he had made, or to make a new one, this fact seemed to occupy much of his thoughts; and, during three days, he visited the solicitor's office every morning. It was remarked that he grew more grave about this time; and, as if to dissipate unpleasant imaginations, he made several little excursions, sometimes for a day, sometimes for two or three. Thus passed June, July, and part of August; but towards the close of the latter month, Mrs. Charlton ventured to have a few friends to dinner. The ladies had not long left the table, when a loud ringing of the dining-room bell startled the servants in the hall. When the butler ran in, and the footman followed, they found one gentleman supporting Mr. Charlton in his chair, while Dr. Western untied his neckcloth. Mr. Nethersole was instantly sent for, and came with all despatch; but Mr. Charlton was quite insensible: and when the surgeon attempted to open a vein, no blood

followed the lancet. He was a bold and skilful man, however, and he instantly cut the artery of the temple. Some relief appeared to be afforded, and the sick man was removed to bed. The visitors, with the exception of Dr. Western, withdrew; and he waited for the office which he saw he might soon be called upon to perform—to console a daughter for the loss of her father. The moment was nearer than he thought; for in about an hour after Mr. Charlton had been removed to his own chamber, Mr. Nethersole came forth leading Louisa in tears to the drawing-room. Dr. Western questioned him with his eyes; the surgeon gravely nodded his head, and returned to Mrs. Charlton, who had remained in the chamber of death.

The solemn quiet of a great change fell upon the whole house. About eleven Dr. Western took leave of his fair young companion, and she retired to weep in her own chamber. Mrs. Charlton had already disappeared; and the servants, with the exception of one watcher, soon after went to bed. All was still—all was dark; but about three o'clock a faint light was seen in the library, by the man who drove the mail-cart from the neighbouring town.

The usual proceedings on such an occurrence were gone through with due solemnity; and the lawyer having given notice to Mrs. Charlton, on the day subsequent to Mr. Charlton's death, that he possessed a signed and attested copy of her late husband's will, by which Dr. Western was appointed one of the executors, that lady instantly sent to the worthy clergyman, begging that he would take the whole arrangements on himself, as she was totally unfit for the task. She requested him also to take possession of her husband's keys, and especially those of the library, in which he kept all his principal papers. Dr. Western did as she desired; and in due time the will, in the hands of the attorney, was opened, by which it was found that Mr. Charlton had raised the income previously secured to Mrs. Charlton to one thousand per annum; and then, after a few legacies to his old servants, and marks of kindness to his friends, had left the whole of his property, with the reversion of the principal sum from which his widow received her annuity, to his daughter, making it an absolute condition, however, that she should not marry Alfred Latimer.

Mrs. Charlton declared herself perfectly satisfied; and, having left the room with her step-daughter, the two executors, of whom the late partner of Mr. Charlton was one, together with the attorney and one of his clerks, proceeded to examine the papers of the deceased. In the strong box, amongst the first things that they found was the duplicate of the will; but what was their surprise when, on opening it, a paper headed "Codicil" dropped out. By it Mr. Charlton confirmed his former will; but premising, that heiresses of considerable property were too often the dupes of sharpers, he went on to make it a condition, that his daughter should obtain the consent of Mrs. Charlton to her marriage, whenever that event took place; and that if she proceeded to contract matrimony without the said consent, he revoked all bequests in her favour, and transferred the whole of his estate to his widow. The codicil was not witnessed, but it was dated and signed: and the lawyer, after examining it attentively, and comparing it with some memorandum books in Mr. Charlton's own handwriting, pronounced it good in law.

Here ends that introductory history which it was necessary to relate for the better understanding of what is to follow; and henceforth I shall content myself with the depiction of scenes rather than pursue a continuous narrative.

CHAPTER V.

A YEAR passed, when, on one bright summer evening, about seven o'clock, the only coach that passed through Mallington appeared as usual at the top of the hill. Two countrymen, going from some village not far off, being the only tenants of the roof, the inside being vacant, and one gentleman seated by the coachman on the box. The coachman, as may be easily conceived, was not very well pleased with his cargo, and looked for but a scanty supply of shillings and sixpences as his share of the spoil. Nor had the demeanour of his companion on the box by any means tended to lighten his spirits, or make him better pleased with his situation. He had found him in that position, when he himself assumed the ribands at the half-way house from London, some five or six and twenty miles off, and from that moment till their arrival at the top of Mallington hill, not more than ten words had passed between them, and those uttered by the passenger were mere monosyllables.

When the guard had put on the skid, however, at the top of Mallington hill, the coachman was astounded, as he turned round his head and raised his left hand with a slight shake of the reins, to hear his companion's voice pronouncing a whole uninterrupted sentence.

"Pray, what village is this, coachman?" he said, gazing down the hill, apparently well pleased.

"This is Mallington, sir," the coachman answered; and then he felt a strong inclination to punish his co-occupant of the box for his long taciturnity, by relapsing into silence; but his natural loquacity required vent, and he proceeded to inform the stranger that the great house on the right was old Mr. Charlton's as was.

"Has he changed his name?" demanded the other.

"No, sir," replied the coachman. "He's got no name at all now, for he's dead. A very good gentleman he was, too, and wore a pigtail."

"And who does the house belong to now?" demanded the stranger.

"Why, to his daughter," replied the Jehu, "some say; some say to her step-mother, the widow. Howsoever, the young lady is a great heiress, that's clear; and has as much as six or seven thousand a year of her own."

To the astonishment, and somewhat to the consternation, of the coachman, for he had himself nearly twenty miles to go, the stranger replied that he was booked for Mallington, and should alight at the Bagpipes.

Nothing could be more accurate than the young gentleman's whole appearance. He was dressed in black, with a narrow band of crape round his hat, which showed, as the coachman internally observed, that he was in mourning for somebody. Then he had a black handkerchief—not a stock—round his neck, which proved he was not a

clergyman, for clergymen did not wear black handkerchiefs in those days; and then he had black gloves, fitting neatly to his hand, which proved he was not an undertaker, for the gloves of undertakers are always too long in the fingers; and then, again, he had a very good hat, glossy in spite of dust and journey, and very well polished boots, which went very far to prove that he was a gentleman. He was not what would be generally called a very handsome man, for colouring, which is what first strikes the eye, was wanting. His countenance had not the slightest resemblance to any face that ever was painted on a sign-post. His complexion was dark, with hair, eyes, and whiskers nearly black, and the eyebrows strongly marked. His forehead was both wide and high, rising straight from the brow, and surrounded by wavy curls; his nose was straight, with a somewhat wide nostril, and his mouth was beautifully cut, though somewhat stern, while the chin was rather prominent, but well rounded, Though he could not be called exactly pale, yet he had little colour; but his lips were red and healthy, and his eye clear and bright. In height he might be a little above five feet ten, broad in the chest and shoulders, and in age, perhaps, six or seven and twenty.

All these particulars were gathered by the rapid eye of the coachman before he pulled up at the door of the inn: and he had concluded, from his survey, that "the gentleman was quite a gentleman notwithstanding:" when the object of his examination got down from the box, and confirmed the judgment internally pronounced upon him by giving coachman and guard each half-a-crown, when the usual fee for "an outside" was rarely eighteenpence.

"Those two portmanteaus," he said, pointing to the roof, as he stood before the inn-door; and with great alacrity they were handed off, and with greater alacrity received by the porter of the house as indications of a visitor. He put them down, however, and in a quiet common-place way looked at all the five sides that were visible, as if it were a matter of course to ascertain the gentleman's address; but there was no ticket to be seen, nor brass-plate either, and remarking that the proprietor of the portmanteaus remained looking about him, the porter stepped up to him and touched his own hair—hat he had not—saying, "Any more luggage, sir?"

"An umbrella in the inside," replied the stranger: and after having turned the portmanteaus on their other ends, for the convenience of carrying them, and of looking for the name; and having taken them into the passage disappointed, the porter came forth again, and searched the coach for the umbrella. He found one with an ivory handle; and to his great satisfaction, for he was just going to give up the inquiry in despair, he found two capital letters engraved upon the ivory. Those capital letters were E. M.

CHAPTER VI.

THE stranger was shown to his rooms; they were clean, tidy, and comfortable: the little bed-room, with its white boards and white dimity, looking up the village street, towards the top of the hill, and catching a glance of the green fields at the back of Mallington, over the tops

of some low houses; and the sitting-room looking down upon the calm picturesque stream, beyond which appeared the park with its thick trees, and the several habitations of gardeners and gamekeeper dotting the edge of the woodland. He gazed forth with much pleasure; he seemed to take great delight in the beauties of nature, for his eyes wandered up the stream and down the stream, and over the large rounds of oak and elm with an expression of satisfaction which had something almost melancholy in its very intensity.

After dinner, he pursued his way, at an easy pace, up the neat broad elm-shaded road, and looked up for an instant at the pretty little village church, about which there were some good old bits of Norman doors and buttresses, and then turned an inquiring eye upon the rectory.

"Yes," he said, after pausing for a moment, "it must be so. There is no other house near. At all events I will see;" and opening the neat gate, he walked along the carriage-road bordered with evergreens, up to the porch covered with ivy and China roses, and rang the bell.

An old white-headed man-servant appeared without making him wait, and the stranger inquired,—"Am I wrong in supposing this the rectory?"

"No, sir," replied the man; "it is the rectory."

"Then is Dr. Western at home?" demanded the stranger.

"Yes, sir," answered the servant; "but——"

"He is at dinner, perhaps?" said the visitor.

"Oh dear! no, sir," was the answer, with a smile; "he has dined these three hours; he is at tea."

"Well, then, my good friend," rejoined the stranger, "will you let him know, with an apology for interrupting him by so late a visit, that I wish much for a few moments' conversation with him?"

"Will you step into this room, sir?" said the man; and he ushered the visitor into the doctor's library.

The clergyman finished the cup of tea which had been poured out for him, and then, leaving his sister with a young lady who was passing the evening with them, he walked with a slow step to the study, where, opening the door, he regarded the stranger with his calm and thoughtful eyes—not long enough to make the glance unpleasant, but sufficiently long to afford the worthy doctor those physiognomical indications which he was fond of obtaining in regard to every new being of the same species as himself with whom he came in contact. The result was, in this instance, highly satisfactory to him.

"This is a fine countenance," he said internally, "thoughtful, and yet frank."

"You wished to see me, sir, I think?" he proceeded aloud; "pray be seated;" and he himself took his accustomed arm-chair, leaning back in it, but bending forward his head in an attitude of polite attention.

"I have the honour, Dr. Western," replied the stranger, "of bringing you this letter from Sir Henry Scarsdale, who was once, I think, a pupil of yours at Oxford. If you will read it, you will see what is my object."

"Delighted to hear from my young friend," replied the old gentle-

man, his face lighting up; "he was always a great favourite of mine, and any friend of his must be always so——"

As he had spoken he had torn open the letter, and was going on reading it; but something that he saw therein made him stop suddenly in his speech, and fix his whole attention upon the contents. The letter was somewhat long, and the doctor said nothing more till he had got to the end, except such words as "certainly"—"with the greatest pleasure"—"indeed!" but when he had concluded the perusal, he rose, held out his hand to the stranger, and said,—"I am delighted to see you, sir. If you will do me the honour of taking up your abode in my poor house, it will give me great pleasure, and any assistance I can afford is, of course, yours to command in any way."

"I feel very much obliged to you, my dear sir," replied the guest, "and obliged to Scarsdale for procuring me the pleasure of an introduction to you; but I think it will be best to retain my quarters at your little inn here, where I have two comfortable rooms enough, and the landlady seems a good woman."

"An excellent creature!" replied the clergyman. "Were you sick, you would find what a kind motherly being she is."

"Now, my dear sir, I will not detain you longer," said the stranger: "you are at tea, I know."

"May I not ask you to join my little party?" said the clergyman: "there are but my sister, and a very sweet young lady, whom we love almost as a child—the cynosure of neighbouring eyes, indeed—Miss Charlton."

"What! the fair lady of the house upon the hill?" asked the visitor.

The good doctor answered in the affirmative, adding,—"My ward, though she will soon escape from tutelage."

The stranger willingly accepted the rector's invitation, and Dr. Western rose to show him the way, but paused at the door, and turning with a smile to his new acquaintance, said,—"I had forgotten to ask the name."

"Edmond Morton," replied the young gentleman; and the clergyman leading the way, they were soon in the drawing-room, where Mr. Morton was introduced first to Dr. Western's sister, Mrs. Evelyn, and next to Miss Charlton. Louisa had now expanded into the beauty of womanhood, but yet it was that of young maturity. The flower was no longer in the bud, but it was not full blown. She had inherited not only all her mother's features, but her mother's grace, as well as a fine mind and lovely person; and though her dress was very simple, and still mourning, yet there was that look of dignity about her, that calm repose which may be occasionally found in all classes, but which, wherever found, speaks one character of heart and spirit. The rich waving brown hair fell without art into the forms that sculpture has loved to give it, and in the whole cutting of the features, the eye of Edmond Morton, and he was no mean judge, could discover scarcely one flaw. If there was anything, perhaps it was a want of animation that struck him at first as a defect; but yet there was a deep light in those soft and somewhat sad eyes, which made him think that the whole face might become full of expression when the bosom was moved by any powerful emotion. However, he had seen many a very

lovely girl before that, and was not very easily to be captivated. His was too gentlemanly a spirit, also, to examine the person of a lady as he would have criticised a horse; and thus he was neither so much struck with Louisa's appearance at first as many might have been, nor did he remark all the beauty of her form and face till he had been some time in her company.

On her part, Louisa paid little attention to his appearance. He was a friend of Dr. Western's, and that was enough to gain her favourable consideration. She thought him a very good-looking young man, also; and, perhaps, drew comparisons between the tone and carriage of the stranger, and those of the good folks of the neighbourhood, rather to the disadvantage of the latter, but it went no further. She thought not of flirting with him, or attracting his attention, and, for some time, while he sat talking with Mrs. Evelyn, entering at once, with a peculiar sort of bienséance, into the position of a friend rather than a new acquaintance, Louisa remained silent, or only said a few words to Dr. Western. The good rector, however, was not pleased with her reserve: he was, to say sooth, somewhat proud of his fair ward; he thought her, in his heart, the loveliest and the best of girls, and his very indignation at Mrs. Charlton, for differing greatly with him on that point, made him anxious to have all the rest of the world upon his side. He was determined, therefore, that he would draw her out; and though Louisa was, indeed, somewhat sad that evening, from various unpleasant things which had occurred in her own house, yet Dr. Western, who well knew her, soon won her to a gay smile, and then to a laugh. He changed the subject, then, and spoke of his parish and his poor, and dwelt upon one or two of those scenes of distress which every clergyman who does his duty must witness, without being able to alleviate, or, at least, not much: the dying mother—the reprobate son—the broken-hearted parents—the anguish of remorse; and as he went on, to Edmond Morton's surprise, that calm and placid countenance, which he had thought inanimate, showed that it could express with intense feeling every different emotion of the mind. She forgot herself too, entirely: conversed eagerly and well on every topic that was brought before her, and poured forth the pure high feelings of a noble and generous heart in sympathy for sorrow or for joy. Towards Morton himself, too, her reserve died away, and finding in him stores of thought and information, such as few possessed around her, joined with a grace and ease of demeanour which can only be gained by long and intimate communication with the truly noble and the really high, she gave herself up to a new charm, and almost forgot the passing hours till the change of light warned her that day was coming to a close. Then starting up, with a smile, she said,—"I must away, dear Mrs. Evelyn, or I shall be scolded by my mother for wandering so late."

"Nay, but my song, Louisa—my song!" cried Dr. Western.

"Oh! it must be for another night," replied Miss Charlton: "see, it is really growing dark."

"Well, we will walk with you up the village," said the rector, "if Mr. Morton has no objection: and as we return I will give him a full, true, and particular account of all the villagers whose houses we pass, that he may learn to esteem the inhabitants of Mallington properly."

"Oh! pray do not," replied Louisa; "you are so severe upon us, dear friend, that I fear, if you give him your views of our faults and failings, he will run away from the place to-morrow morning."

"Nay, I will be just, my dear," answered Dr. Western: and as soon as Louisa's shawl and bonnet were adjusted, they set out upon their way.

CHAPTER VII.

THE rector of Mallington gave his left arm to Louisa Charlton, and Mr. Morton walked on the other side of that fair lady. A shade had come over her face as they passed close to the churchyard, and as the low cold dwellings of its silent tenants met her sight. It was not exactly the shade of grief, indeed, but of calm serious thought. The conversation of her new acquaintance had been of many things—various, rich, fanciful, amusing; and, though she did not know or perceive it, the deep current that lay beneath the sparkling surface had tended to promote reflection, even while it seemed only to excite the imagination. It had, of course, been all of worldly things; but it had led the mind, by a natural and quiet course, to find the latent relations between those very worldly things and the higher, the more spiritual, with which they all have some mysterious connection.

Dr. Western remarked the shadow, but he took no notice; and their young companion saw it also, but remained silent: so that they had reached the end of the village street, and were beginning to walk slowly up the hill, before either of the three spoke.

"Had we not better go by the field path?" said Louisa Charlton, turning to her guardian; "it is so much more beautiful, and so much quieter."

"No, my dear child," answered the old gentleman; "that would be hardly fair:" and he smiled as he spoke.

Louisa looked in his face with an inquiring glance; and Edmond Morton went further, asking, "How do you mean—not fair, my dear sir!"

"Because, I think, it would almost amount to robbery," replied the good doctor, "to deprive the people of my parish of the high delight they will experience in seeing you and Miss Charlton and myself walking up the village together as familiarly as if you had been living here for ten years. You cannot imagine, sir, what a source of innocent delight this walk of ours will afford to some hundreds of people in Mallington; what an inexhaustible fund of conversation it will supply to persons who have nothing else on earth to talk about; what a diversion it will effect, as you soldiers call it, in favour of poor Mrs. Pilkin, who took a Sunday walk the other day with a gay bachelor, whose banns with her fair self I have to publish for the first time on Sunday next—but the people know nothing of that; and how you, and I, and Louisa, without our own consciousness, or any effort on our part, but merely that of walking up this hill instead of going by the fields, will enliven every tea-table this night."

Both Louisa and Mr. Morton smiled; and the latter inquired, "Is it really such a gossiping little place?"

"Just in proportion to its idleness," answered Dr. Western in a graver tone; "as, indeed, is always the case. Being a place of no trade, and I might almost say no society, the people, for one-half of their time, have nothing to do but comment on their neighbours. The residence of half a dozen respectable families in or near the village would speedily work a great change in these respects; for idleness is the parent of gossip, as well as of most minor vices, and of many great ones also."

As they walked up the hill but slowly, they were passed at a quick pace by Mrs. Charlton's maid, Mistress Windsor, who, still in as great favour with her lady as ever, had been elevated to the rank of housekeeper, and, to use a vulgar expression, had both feathered her nest and tricked out her plumage handsomely during the three or four last years of Mr. Charlton's life. Though not so young as when first she was introduced to the reader, and bearing certain traces of it in wrinkle and line, she was still a very active woman, and had lost no portion of her shrewdness. She was as keen as her mistress: even, perhaps, a little keener, and she had always made it a point of showing herself especially respectful towards Miss Charlton, both before and after her master's death. It had been her common observation that nobody could tell what might happen. Now this was not a maxim of particular application, but a wide, broad, philosophical axiom, which was the basis of one-half of her conclusions; and when Mr. Charlton first fell ill she redoubled her attention to Louisa, saying to herself, "No one can tell what may happen." When Mr. Charlton died, she was still more attentive, repeating, "No one can tell what may happen;" and when she heard the will read, and found that the deceased had left the great bulk of his property, except the annuity to his widow, to the young lady, Mrs. Windsor was satisfied with her own conduct; and, although she did think it strange that Mr. Charlton should have so strictly tied his daughter's hands in regard to her marriage, she still determined to show herself devoted to Louisa, observing once more, "No one can tell what may happen." She had, indeed, taken care at the same time to give no just cause of offence to fair Mrs. Charlton, but was quite as ready at all times to do everything she could to forward that lady's views as she had been from the first. Mrs. Charlton, indeed, saw through her --yes, through and through her, reader. She was not merely diaphanous, but quite transparent to the eyes of Mrs. Charlton; and yet that worthy lady was not at all inclined to let Mrs. Windsor see that she bore any ill-will towards her for courting Louisa, even if she did feel annoyed at it, which I do not pretend to say she did not. Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Windsor had known each other for many years. Mrs. Windsor had served Mrs. Charlton very well and very faithfully, as has been shown; and M.s. Charlton had every inclination to pass over any little faults, but not from gratitude; for if Mrs. Charlton could have strangled Mrs. Windsor with her own hands, and nothing more said about it, who can tell if she would not have done it?

As the respectable abigail now passed by Dr. Western and Louisa, she paused, half turned round, and dropped a low courtsey, then resumed her quick pace again, and reached the house some time

before them. As soon as she had entered the doors, instead of be taking herself to the housekeeper's room, as she usually did in ordinary circumstances, she inquired of one of the footmen whether her mistress was alone in the drawing-room; and finding that such was the case, she walked straight up thither, without taking off bonnet or shawl.

"What is it, Windsor?" demanded the lady, as soon as she appeared speaking in a querulous tone, and putting a pen with which she had been writing into the inkstand.

"Why, ma'am, I thought I would just tell you that Miss Charlton is *coming back,"* replied Mrs. Windsor.

"Well, I suppose she is," answered her mistress, still crossly; "it is time she should, for it is getting quite dark, I can hardly see to write."

"Yes, ma'am," rejoined the housekeeper: "but there is a gentleman with her as well as Dr. Western, and I thought you might like to know."

"A gentleman!" said Mrs. Charlton, with a greater degree of interest: "what sort of a gentleman, Windsor?"

"You can see him, ma'am, from the window," replied Mrs. Windsor: "he's a fine-looking young man, who came down by the coach to-night, I heard, and has put up at the inn; and he took the two rooms there for a fortnight, and then went to Dr. Western's direct."

By this time Mrs. Charlton reached a western window which looked down the hill, and was gazing steadfastly upon the group which was slowly walking up. The remaining light fell full upon them, and she could see them pause, and look round over the scene below, with the high old trees of the park on the opposite side of the valley, and the sunset glow in the sky above; and she remarked that the stranger pointed with his hand, and seemed to make some inquiry, and that when they came forward again Louisa's fair face was raised towards him with a bright warm smile upon her lips.

Mrs. Charlton smiled too; but it was not with a very pleasant, though with a pleased expression. It seemed as if she said to herself, "That will do," but yet as if that which was to be done was not very full of human charities. "Go down, Windsor," she said, "and tell Edward when Dr. Western comes to beg him to walk in, for I wish to speak with him and the young gentleman who is with him, of course. And hark ye, Windsor, I wish you would find out who he is, and all about him; for, of course, I am very willing to show attention to any one who visits Mallington—and yet, of course, I must be careful of whom I bring into Miss Charlton's company—but, of course, I must wish Mr. Latimer to have some more and some better society than he finds here—and, of course,—but run down Windsor, and tell Edward what I have said, for they are coming near."

Mrs. Windsor hurried away with a grave face to do as she was bid, but her grave face only lasted to the back of the door, and then she murmured to herself "As if I did not know!"

The footman received his instructions in terms that he was well disciplined to understand, and the next minute the great bell rang. He walked with slow and stately step to the door, and having opened it

drew back to let Miss Charlton pass, but as she shook hands with Dr. Western, and wished the stranger good-night, the man stepped forward again and said, "My mistress, sir, told me to say, if you came, that she wished to speak with you for one moment if you would have the kindness to walk up."

"I will wait for you here, my dear sir," said Mr. Morton; but Louisa, with colour slightly rising in her cheek,—for she did not always know how her fair step-mother would view her proceedings,—interposed, exclaiming, "Oh, no; pray come in, Mr. Morton; Mrs. Charlton will be very happy to see you, I am sure."

"Perhaps"— replied the visitor, but before he could conclude his sentence the rector kindly laid his hand on his arm, saying, "Nay, come in, my young friend; if Mrs. Charlton has any matter of business to speak of, we can find another room in this house. It is not like my little rectory, and there are plenty of council chambers.

Edmond Morton could only bow, and follow whither the doctor and Louisa led: and in a moment after he was formally introduced to Mrs. Charlton. The fair widow was all smiles and graciousness, though, to say sooth, some part of her youthful grace had fled, for she had become rather fuller in her proportions than was altogether consistent with exact symmetry. As she was not a very tall woman, the difference of the breadth in relation to the length, as compared with what she had been when she changed from Latimer to Charlton, was not to her advantage—in personal appearance, at least—and yet she was a very pretty woman, très bien conservée, as our French neighbours term it: fair, smooth-skinned, delicate-featured, with nothing that could indicate a year more than forty, or anything else than the sweetest possible disposition, the most placable and considerate mind. She was delighted to see Dr. Western; she was charmed to receive Mr. Morton; she was tenderly affectionate to dear Louisa. She was the pink of step-mothers, and the pleasantest of friends. All that she had to say to the rector was, that she had for the time given up her intention of going to Cheltenham, in consequence of letters that she had received that morning; and although Dr. Western had never heard of her purpose, he expressed himself very well satisfied that she had abandoned it, saying, that he was not fond of Cheltenham, especially in what is termed the season; he thought it a bad place for young men, and a worse place for young women.

Mrs. Charlton smiled sweetly, and accused him of being too severe in his notions; and then, turning to Mr. Morton, she inquired if he did not admire their quiet little rustic village, so beautifully situated amongst its woods and fields.

"I have really seen very little of it as yet, madam," replied the young gentleman, "having been here but a few hours; but as I am a great lover of the beauties of nature, I have no doubt that I shall find enough to admire."

Mrs. Charlton was delighted that he was a lover of the beauties of nature; and declared that they would show him plenty of the sweetest scenery in the world, and appealed to Dr. Western whether they would not. She must positively, she said, make a party to take him to the waterfall up the glen, and insisted that he should not venture to visit it without her presence; and she ended by asking the rector, and his

friend, and Mrs. Evelyn, to dinner the next day at an early hour, that they might take a walk before tea.

"Hang it!" thought the worthy clergyman. "the widow is looking for a third husband already." But he did her great injustice. Mrs. Charlton was no longer Mrs. Latimer, and though she always had her objects, they were very different from what they had been, and from what Dr. Western imagined. For himself he accepted her invitation, but declined for Mrs. Evelyn, who never went out to dinner, as Mrs. Charlton well knew: and Mr. Morton promising to accompany him, the two gentlemen took their leave just as the lady asked Louisa to ring for lights.

"Well, my dear sir, what do you think of my fair neighbour?" asked the clergyman, when they were fairly out of the house: "having seen her yourself, you will need no explanation."

"*I think not*," replied Edmond Morton, drily. "May I ask, my dear sir, if she is really that sweet girl's mother?"

"You see signs of a different race, eh?" said Dr. Western, with a smile. "Very different, indeed, I can assure you. I never saw Louisa's mother; but from what I have heard, she was very like her daughter, both in person and mind. I need not tell you that Mrs. Charlton is not. Nevertheless, she is a very good and respectable woman."

"A very artificial one, I should think," replied Edmond Morton. "Should I be wrong, my dear doctor, if I said a very artful one?"

"Nay, nay," cried the rector, "that is a somewhat harsh term. She seems worldly, it must be confessed, and so far, I believe, you have judged right, though how you have formed your opinion in so short a time, I cannot tell. It took me longer to form mine."

"I have been all my life accustomed to observe small traits," replied his companion, "and have seldom found their indications fallacious. I know, indeed, that they may be so used, that the habit of remarking them begets in us a particular sort of vanity in our own penetration, which makes us unwilling to admit that we are deceived when we really are so. Therefore, I never allow myself to act from the impressions first received, till they are confirmed by further observation. Yet I think I cannot be mistaken in my estimate of either of the ladies we have just left."

"And what of Louisa, then?" asked Dr. Western.

"Hardly fair, my dear sir," rejoined his companion. "She is wonderfully beautiful when she is animated; but I should think that she was a flower that required very tender usage, and that she has not had it always."

"Yet she is of a firm and high mind," answered the clergyman, eagerly; "I know not any one in whom such gentleness is blended with such a strong sense of what is right."

"I am sure it is," replied Morton; "in truth, my dear doctor, hers is a neighbourhood of which one may well be afraid."

"You know she is an heiress, and her fortune very large," said Dr. Western, in a peculiar tone.

"I have heard so this evening," replied the young gentleman; "but I once heard a very noble and amiable friend declare that if it rained heiresses he would go out with an umbrella, and I have always been

very much of his way of thinking." The rector laughed, but Mr. Morton, changing the subject, reminded him that he was to give him a sight of some papers; and they both quickened their pace towards the rectory.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Misses Martin had discovered all about it; the Misses Martin had settled it all in their own minds—they were mighty minds for settling other people's affairs; but when Mrs. Windsor, on the following morning, walked into their shop, as she called it, "promiscuously," to buy a piece of narrow tape—thinking that if there were in all Mallington any person or persons who could gather the whole particulars of Mr. Morton's history, the Misses Martin must be the people—they proved obdurately silent, notwithstanding every hint and question she could devise. Had she asked no questions, had she given no hints of a wish to discover more of Mr. Morton, the Misses Martin might very possibly, from a desire to hear what that gentleman had been doing at Mallington House, have proved communicative themselves; but as soon as the two ladies perceived that Mrs. Windsor was on the search for information, they resolved not to give it, for there was war between Mrs. Charlton and the Misses Martin—civil war it might indeed be called, for it was more real than apparent, and conducted with all politeness. Mrs. Charlton had triumphed over the Misses Martin—she had married the rich widower—she had surrounded herself with wealth and splendour—she had been raised into the first position in the society of the neighbourhood, in spite of all the Misses Martin's inuendos and slanders—and she had set up a rival in a shop. These were things not to be forgotten by the Misses Martin, and, as I have said, they remained obdurately silent, although they had settled the whole affairs of Mr. Edmond Morton an hour or more before Mrs. Windsor appeared.

But Mrs. Windsor was a skilful general, and, by a well-conceived manœuvre, she turned their flank. There was a neighbour of the Misses Martin just three doors off; he was a bookseller and stationer, well to do in the world—an elderly bachelor, a very respectable man. He differed from the Church of England in several of his religious notions, and occasionally preached his own doctrines himself to a select congregation; but, nevertheless, he was just the sort of man to be very high in the esteem of the Misses Martin, who, though they belonged to the Church of England, had no objection to marry any one—only nobody asked them. Mr. Sowerby was fond of news, and Mrs. Windsor, remembering well that the Misses Martin were in the habit, one or the other, of running into Mr. Sowerby's shop every hour in the day, conceived that ere the period of her visit they must, by an inevitable necessity, have told that gentleman all that they had gathered of Mr. Morton. The moment, therefore, that the tape was bought and paid for, she turned her steps to Mr. Sowerby's, and asked for some note paper. The worthy master of the shop was delighted to see her, and began at once by telling her that it was a pleasant day, but warm—very warm. As Mrs. Windsor had discovered this interesting

fact before, she assented without any long consideration, and then went on to say that the night before had been very warm likewise, to which Mr. Sowerby agreed; but then Mrs. Windsor proceeded to relate how warm she had found it as she walked up from the bottom of the hill, and ended,—"I declare I thought I should have dropped just as I was passing Miss Charlton and the young gentleman she brought up with her from the rectory."

"Well now," cried Mr. Sowerby, "that is just what I wanted to speak to you about, Mrs. Windsor. It is very odd you should mention it, isn't it? Let me shut the door:" and, stretching over the counter, he pushed it to.

"Well," he said in continuation, "I saw Miss Charlton, and the young gentleman, and Dr. Western, go up the village together, for I was standing at my door, and I wondered who he could be—the young man I mean; but when I found out who he is and all about him, I said to myself, says I,—'that is no bird for Miss Charlton's money, for if Mrs. Windsor should chance to look in, I'll just give her a hint—it is but kind and neighbourly.'"

"I'm very much obliged indeed, Mr. Sowerby," replied the housekeeper. "I did not much like the look of him myself; but then I could not say anything to my mistress, because I had got nothing to go upon."

"Well, then, I'll tell you all about it," said Mr. Sowerby. "He's no more than an artist, take my word for it, Mrs. Windsor; and you know my word is good for a thousand pounds at any time: an artist, going about the country sketching."

"But how did you find it out?" asked Mrs. Windsor. "I know you are a shrewd one, Mr. Sowerby; not easy to take you in."

Mr. Sowerby laughed and shook his head, with a look as wise as that of the Athenian fowl, saying, "No, no; but I'll tell you all about it. Last night, when the boy brought in my beer for supper from the Bagpipes, I asked him what was the name of the gentleman who had come by the coach. He could not tell a word about it, only that Boots said there was E. M. marked upon his umbrella. Well, I could make nothing of that; but I told the boy to find out and let me know, and I gave him a penny for himself, Mrs. Windsor: so this morning—for gold is the key to everything, Mrs. Windsor, gold is the key to everything—he brought me word that the gentleman's name is Edmond Morton, for a letter had come for him by post. Well, that was something gained; but I could get no further, till just about an hour ago, in comes Mathilda Martin, and you know how she talks. Well, she did run on enough to deafen one: but she told me that their girl, going across the park to carry a gown-piece that the old housekeeper at the Hall had bought yesterday, saw this Mr. Morton in the park as early as seven o'clock this morning; and that when she came back, about half an hour after, she chanced upon him again sitting under a tree, with a large book on his knee, drawing away as hard as he could draw—taking a picture, in fact, of the old place."

"But many a gentleman draws now-a-days," answered the housekeeper. "Our young lady draws quite beautiful; you would almost think they were real houses and trees."

"Well, you shall hear, you shall hear, Mrs. Windsor," continued the

stationer. "As soon as I heard what Mathilda Martin told me, says I, 'Oh, ho! Edward Morton' I think I have heard that name before:' and, reaching up there to the shelf just behind you, Mrs. Windsor, I took down that long book—no, not that one—the one with the blue back, gilt and lettered—and there I saw—just look into the title—'Sketches in England and Wales, by Thomas Morton, R.A.' Well, you know what a giddy thing Mathilda Martin is; and she immediately fancied that this young man must be the very Thomas Morton, R.A., and that the boy must have made a mistake about the first name. 'But,' says I, 'look at the date, Miss Mathilda;' and there it stood, sure enough, twenty years ago. Now this young man can't be more than five-and-twenty I should think; and it is not likely he should publish sketches in England and Wales when he was five years old, unless he were a phenomenon. 'No, no, Miss Martin,' said I, 'he is that old Morton's son. He had a son, I know, and his name was Edward, I am very sure.'"

"You are quite right, Mr. Sowerby," replied Mrs. Windsor, "and I will tell Mrs. Charlton all about it, and how you found it out, for I think it is very clever:" and after a little more gossip Mrs. Windsor left the shop with a well-pleased smile, saying to herself, "This will be quite the thing, I fancy."

As soon as she reached Mallington House she sought her mistress, who was in her dressing-room, and reported progress. Mrs. Charlton smiled likewise, and drew in her eyes a little; but the next moment she looked grave, and said, "It must be all nonsense, Windsor; I do not believe a word of it. Pray tell the people that I think it is all nonsense."

"I will ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor, and was going: but her mistress called her back, and added, "Make further inquiries, Windsor, but more quietly—you understand. I wish to hear about it, but without seeming to know."

"Very well, ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor; and she fulfilled her lady's orders with due discretion, discovering further confirmation of Mr. Sowerby's views. But, to the surprise of all Mallington, the more strong became the presumption that Mr. Morton was an artist, the more marked became Mrs. Charlton's attentions towards him; and Dr. Western observed, with some wonder, that both that evening, during dinner and afterwards, and on an excursion planned by the lady next day, Mrs. Charlton threw Louisa almost entirely upon Mr. Morton, while she endeavoured to monopolise the rector to herself, so that he mentally inquired, "Hang it! the good lady can't want to marry me, surely?" But Mrs. Windsor knew her mistress better, and watched the game that was playing with some interest.

Mr. Morton did not understand it at all, but found it, as far as it went, not at all unpleasant. With a lovely girl upon his arm, in that very sweet stage of acquaintanceship when first impressions of esteem are warming into intimacy, where each with the other is, like an intelligent traveller, wandering through a fresh country, and discovering new beauties at every step, where conversation is neither oppressed by deep feelings, nor restrained by strangeness, but all the doors of thought are open, and the heart itself every now and then peeps out to see the sunny world without—it is a pleasant thing, a very pleasant

thing indeed, to walk through fair scenes with a fair being like Louisa Charlton, and to listen to a sweet musical voice, and to read a world of fairy tales in bright young eyes, all the brighter for friendly words and kind companionship. Very pleasant indeed! But, perhaps, the reader may ask if it is not somewhat dangerous too. I can but answer, "That is as it may be."

CHAPTER IX.

In the early morning of a summer's day, with the dew still upon the grass, and the light wind destined to die away like youthful graces in the sun's meridian light, Edmond Morton walked out of the little inn at which he had taken up his abode, and bent his steps over the bridge to the fine old park which I have noticed in the commencement of this work.

On the old stone bridge, of three irregular arches, he paused and gazed for a minute or two into the stream, on the bosom of which numerous dab-chicks and water-hens were swimming about, undoubtedly thinking that no man with a gun would feel inclined to annoy them so early in the morning. They might have found themselves mistaken; but certainly in regard to Edmond Morton they were in the right, for he did not feel disposed to do them any harm, and they appeared to understand it well; for, as he looked over the parapet upon the water, though they turned up towards him the shrewd inquiring eye, they did not hurry off to their sedgy lurking places as they would have done at a later hour, nor dive down in eager haste to escape the anticipated shot. He was not bloodily disposed, indeed; and yet there was a stout old trout who, having escaped many perils, and grown to aldermanic bulk, now lay head against stream, at the tail of a pleasant ripple, which did move a little in his bosom the tiger that is more or less in the hearts of all men. He thought it would be a pleasant thing, on a fine May morning, to bring that fellow to the landing-place; but neither rod nor line had he with him at the moment, and, even if he had, it was getting somewhat late in the year to trifle with trouts, so that the tyrant of the stream would have been safe.

Now, Heaven only knows what connection there was between the sight of that trout and so different a being as Louisa Charlton. The mind rarely jumps, though it runs up many a ladder with surprising swiftness; and there are general links, or, to pursue the metaphor, steps of association between each thought that presents itself and another. Certain it is, however, whether it was that he thought it would be agreeable to withdraw that fair girl from all that surrounded her, and carry her away with him, as he had proposed to do with the trout, or whether angling for a pretty wife was a sport he found pleasure in, or whether anything else in the wide expanse of possibility linked the two together,—certain it is, that the next thought that presented itself to his imagination was Louisa Charlton. It served him all across the bridge and up to the park gates, which lay at the end of a short avenue, of not more than two hundred yards in length. But there, just as he was about to pull the cucumber-shaped

handle of an old bell that hung beside the wrought-iron trellis-work, he paused and looked at the windows of the lodge, saying to himself, "It is needless to rouse the good old dame before her hour."

The dimity curtains were closely drawn across the lattice, and taking that indication in good part, he walked back to the bridge again, and gazed once more into the stream. The trout was still there, just where he had left it; but Morton did not see it at all, for he had now got something else to think of, and he went on with Louisa Charlton very pleasantly, as if he were taking a sunny walk with her through the fairy land of fancy.

In about ten minutes he turned round his head towards the gates, and saw the old dame who kept the lodge open the casement and hook it back—her summer morning's first task,—and sauntering gently on, he now rang the bell.

"Oh! is it you, sir?" said the good lady, who had seen him there more than once before, putting out her head; "I will come in a minute;" and after she had fastened her gown she came to the gates and unlocked them, with a courtesy, saying, as she did so,—"The other gate up the stream is always open—ay, and must be too, for some one broke the lock off—a mischievous young rogue he must have been—and ever since my lord's death the bailiff says he has no orders."

"And pray who is your lord now, my good lady?" asked Mr. Morton.

"Ay, sir, that is hard to say," answered Dame Witherton. "An old gentleman, I have heard tell, of the name of Wilmot—a parson, it seems, and very fond of money."

"He ought to spend some here to put the house in better order," answered Morton. "It is truly a pity to see so fine a place as this might be, if well kept up, falling into decay."

"Ay, that it is, indeed," answered the old woman with a sigh. "I remember it quite a different thing; but even Edmonds, the park-keeper, is falling out of heart. He can't get the work-people paid, and is obliged to discharge them, poor man; though it breaks his heart to see the gravel-walks getting weedy, and the trees all straggling, and the people stealing the game. But he cannot pay men himself—that is impossible. It is bad enough for him, with a family, to live here without his own wages; and work night and day for people that don't say 'Thank you.'"

"Quite enough, indeed, and too much, I should suppose," replied Mr. Morton; "but I suppose this Edmonds is fond of the place."

"Ay, that he is," answered Dame Witherton, "it is all his delight, sir—his hobby, as Dr. Western calls it. Why, I remember him—Lord bless you, sir!—a little curly-headed boy, born in that very cottage where he now lives, for his father, poor Tim Edmonds, was park-keeper before him."

"And where does he live, my good dame?" asked the visitor at Mallington.

"Bless you, sir!—why, don't you know?" exclaimed the lady of the lodge. "Why, you have seen that pretty house just hidden from the Hall by the tall trees in front. That's where John Edmonds lives."

"I will walk up and see him," answered Morton. "I want to have a ramble all over the park from one end to the other."

"Then he is just the man to show it you," rejoined the old lady: "for there is not a rabbit has a burrow in the place but he knows all the ins and outs of it."

Thither, however, he now bent his steps, and at the end of about a quarter of an hour, perceived the lodge amongst the trees. Everything was neat about it; and the evidences of man's careful spirit gave the place a cheerful look, though it was actually somewhat decayed, and one of the chimneys had a strong inclination to fall. The door had no bell, but as Morton had a very great disinclination to intrude upon any one, high or low, he knocked before he entered. A voice said, "Come in," and accordingly Mr. Morton did as he was bid.

The interior presented a scene somewhat difficult to describe; for it had so many relations with antecedents, to the feelings of those who bore a part in it, that all its interest lay in things that were gone. Abstracted from those, it was but the house of an English peasant, at meal time—one not ill to do, either. At a round oaken table, in the midst of a low-roofed thick-raftered chamber, which had five pots of flowers in each small-paned casement, were seated John Edmonds, his wife, a son of about ten years old, and a daughter of somewhat less than double that term. There had been three children between the two; but the sicknesses of childhood had reduced them to that number; and those that were lost had stored memory with regrets which rendered those that remained doubly dear to the park-keeper and his wife.

Edmonds himself was still a hale, well-looking, stout man of fifty, long-limbed and active, clothed in a green coat, somewhat the worse for wear, with yellow buttons adorned with a rusty fox, corduroy breeches, and leathern gaiters up to his knees. A checked handkerchief was round his neck, quite clean, like the collar of his shirt, but with a hole in the corner. There were other holes not shown: but the time had been, not long ago, when he would not have worn a handkerchief with a hole in it on any account. His wife was a plainly but very neatly dressed woman, about three years younger than himself, with considerable traces still remaining of beauty, worn away by daily toil and constant exposure to sun and wind. The boy was a stout, rosy urchin, very like his father, with a merry round face, black eyes, and curly hair. The daughter was one of those sweet flowers sometimes seen in cottage windows, which instantly make one think that they ought to have some better shelter against the wintry wind and burning sun. Her features were fine and delicate; her hair beautiful, and shining like new-spun silk; her eyes full of tender and confiding light; her complexion warm yet soft; and her form full both of youthful grace and womanly contour. Small hands, small feet, small lips, all were as symmetrical as if the blood of whole races of patricians had flowed in her veins. Her dress was very plain, and even coarse, but neat and clean. The time had been when it had been a matter of fatherly vanity or love, to deck that fair form in garments more becoming; but that time had passed, and Lucy Edmonds did not give them a sigh. Her father did, however.

The fare before them was plain but good, and though it had once been better, none of them cared much about that; but two or three of

the lozenges in the casement had been broken, and were filled up with paper neatly cut and pasted in, and that was a sad eye-sore to the park-keeper. In other days he would have paid the replacing of the missing panes from his own pocket, if his lord had not done it; but now he could not afford the expense, and he felt the want of neatness bitterly. At that moment he felt it more than ever, when he beheld a stranger, and he had recourse to a little artifice to hide it as much as possible.

No sooner did he perceive who it was that entered, than, rising, he gave the young gentleman "Good morning," and taking a bundle from a chair, which he placed for his visitor with its back to the lattice, he laid the bundle on the window sill, and returned to his seat.

"Good-morning, Mr. Edmonds," said Morton, in reply to the park-keeper's salutation. "I beg your pardon for breaking in upon you at this hour, but I am fond of an early walk, and——"

"Don't mention it, sir," said Edmonds, interrupting him, but not rudely; "very happy to see you. Is there anything I can do for you, sir? I have seen you taking your walk before now, and looking about. I am always glad to see any one that takes notice of the park: it was a mighty pretty place once, but it is getting a little out of order now, for want of hands."

"Why, I wish, with your permission, to walk all over it," answered Morton, "and should feel very much obliged if you would accompany me. I do not know whether you are aware that there is some talk of the place being sold, and a friend of mine is thinking of buying it."

"I did not know that it could be sold, sir," he answered; "but I have seen so many things I never thought to see, that this does not surprise me. However, sir, I am quite ready to walk with you this moment."

"No, no, finish your breakfast, Mr. Edmonds," replied Morton; "do not let me disturb you. I am in no hurry," and entering into conversation first with one and then with another, in a kindly tone; frank, but not too familiar, cheerful, but not jocular, the young gentleman was soon upon good terms with the whole family.

In about five minutes Edmonds and his visitor were upon their feet, and walking out into the park. Up one alley and down another the young gentleman was led, round the walks, across the leas and lawns, through the wilderness, to the obelisk on the hill behind the house.

Much to the satisfaction of the park-keeper, Mr. Morton observed everything with the eye of taste, admired the natural beauties of the place, and again and again expressed his regret at seeing it running wild. At first his companion was well pleased to hear his lamentations over the neglect; but as Morton repeated them several times, he felt as if there were some covert reproach to himself in his words, and he replied, "Well, sir, it is a pity, surely—a very great pity; but I cannot help it. In my lord's time I had seven pair of hands under me in this park, besides the three game-keepers who lived outside, and who used to do a turn now and then in the spring and summer; but now there is not a soul to help me, and I myself have no call to do any thing, for I am no man's servant now; only I can't bear to see it all going to ruin, so wherever it seems most needed I work away. But I can't keep things right altogether anyhow, all by myself."

"That is quite impossible," said the young gentleman; "but yet it is a terrible pity, indeed, to see so much pains and labour, and so much good taste, as have been employed upon the place, altogether thrown away and lost for want of attention. Why, whoever buys the property, if it go on at this rate, will have to spend many hundreds of pounds to put it right again."

"That he will, sir," answered Edmonds. "Before six months be over it will be quite a wilderness: for I must look out for something to do myself. Here, my lord has been dead a good bit more than a year, and I have had but one month's wages from that time. I cannot go on so, sir. All my earnings are going fast enough, I can tell you."

"Well!" exclaimed Morton, as if in a sudden fit of enthusiasm. "I declare I will not see it fall into such a state. I will tell you what, Edmonds—I will lend a hand."

"You, sir!" cried the park-keeper, looking at him with a smile. "Lord bless you, you would do little enough. Not that I mean to say you are not a strong man, very: for you are just the sort of made person who would get through a good deal, but you have never been used to such sort of work, I'll warrant."

The young gentleman laughed merrily. "No, no; you mistake me, Edmonds," he said. "I am not going to take your place over your head. I should have said, I will lend the money, not lend a hand. Then, if my friend does not buy the place, why I suppose I must have it myself—that's all.'

"Ay, sir; I thought there was something of that," replied Edmonds, shrewdly. "Gentlemen do not come down to look at places for other people, unless they be auctioneers, and such like. Well, I am glad, if it must go, that a gentleman should have it, who seems to like it and value it, and cares about such things."

"But remember, Edmonds," said the young gentleman, putting his finger on his lips, "not a word about this to a living soul, unless it be good Dr. Western—not to your wife or daughter, even; for the matter is not yet quite settled. But now to business, Edmonds," and he took out a pocket-book. "You must get four or five hands—not more; for the matter may go off yet, and then, you know, I should be a loser."

"Five good hands at twelve shillings a week, sir, will make a strange change in no time," answered the park-keeper, "and we have many a poor fellow about here that is now out of work since my lord died."

"Ay, the loss of one wealthy man in a place like this is a misfortune, indeed," said Morton. "Then there are your own wages, Edmonds?"

"Why, I used to have seventy pounds a year, and the house and garden, sir," observed the park-keeper; "but now——"

"Well, call it one pound ten a week," rejoined Morton—"that will make four pounds ten. There are twenty pounds, which will pay all for the next month; and if I should be away when it is done, speak to Dr. Western. He will settle with you. But remember!—not a word to any one else."

"No, no, sir; I will be as mum as a mouse," replied the park-keeper; "but what am I to say, if people ask me?"

"Oh! merely that you have your orders and your money, and that is all you care about,' replied Morton.

"But now I should like to see the house, if we can manage it without letting the folks know what it is for."

"Yes, sir," said the park-keeper, "that is easily done;" and leading the way down, he had soon introduced his companion to the old housekeeper, and the three walked over almost every room of the Hall together.

Here and there Mr. Morton stopped and examined everything closely. He looked at the old pictures of the Mallington family. He gazed round the deserted drawing-room with feelings which every one must have known when standing where gay multitudes of happy hearts, long cold, have once tasted the bright hours of life; but he paused long in the library: took down several books and examined them, seeming especially interested in a manuscript volume, which bore upon its back "History of the Mallington Family."

While he was thus employed, the housekeeper and Edmonds stood at the window and looked out. Some of their observations caught the gentleman's ear, and he suddenly turned round, when, through the casement, he perceived a young man in a shooting-jacket crossing the park at a couple of hundred yards' distance. He was a tall, powerful handsome youth, and Mr. Morton inquired, "Who is that?"

"Why, that is Mr. Alfred Latimer, sir," answered the park-keeper, "the son of Mrs. Charlton on the hill. It's a pity he goes on so, for I do not think he is so bad at heart after all; and he has always been very kind and civil to me ever since I looked over his shooting a pheasant or two when he was a boy."

"Ah! he is a bad one," said the old housekeeper; "you always took his part, Edmonds, but he is a bad one, and you'll find that out some day. Would you like to look at the kitchens, sir?"

"No, I thank you," replied Morton. "Now, Mr. Edmonds, I will go;" and walking out with his guide he took leave of him, adding, ere they parted, "I could wish the house taken better care of. They seem to have been cutting off the leaden pipes at the corners."

"Ay, that was done by a pack of blackguards last winter," answered Edmonds.

"They will commit further depredations if they be not checked,' replied Morton. "I wish we could have the place better protected, for I am likely to have it just as it stands; but we will think of that hereafter.—Good-day."

CHAPTER X.

Instead of turning his steps to his own-house, Edmonds, the head park-keeper, who had in former days not only acted in that capacity but as head gamekeeper also, and had, moreover, superintended the arrangement of the gardens - for he was a sort of Gilpin in low life—stood upon the terrace before the house for some minutes, as if he were enjoying the beauties of the prospect. The housekeeper, too, remained at the door without closing it, looking after Mr. Morton as he walked away.

"That's a gentleman, whoever he is, Edmonds," she said at length, after having passed about two minutes in contemplation.

Edmonds started and turned round; but he agreed heartily in her commendation saying, "Yes, that he is, indeed, Mrs. Chalke; we seldom see such a one in these parts."

"I wonder who he is," rejoined the old lady; "do you know, Edmonds?"

"No, I don't," answered the park-keeper. "Now I think of it, I did not even recollect to ask his name. But Dr. Western knows, Mrs. Chalke; for he talked a good deal about the rector, and said he was an excellent man."

"And so he is," replied the good old lady; "but," and the old lady went on to communicate to Edmonds all her fears and apprehensions regarding her stay at Mallington Hall with none but one housemaid, whom she was obliged to keep herself. "I declare," she said, "that whatever comes of it, I won't stay another winter here in this way. I am sure I was well nigh frightened out of my life last winter; and if the people who cut off the pipes, and tried to find a way in at the back-door, had known that there was such a quantity of plate in the house, they would have broken in to a certainty—that they would."

"Well, before the long nights come," said Edmonds, "I will think what can be done; and, if we can't manage better, I will come up here and sleep myself."

Taking his way through the park towards the gate which, as the old lady at the lodge had said, always stood open, he went leisurely on, meditating with no little satisfaction upon the events of the morning. He had by this time become reconciled to the idea of Mallington Park going out of the family, and visions of a thousand pleasant changes, under the auspices of Mr. Morton, presented themselves to his imagination by the way. When he was about two-thirds through the park, he caught a glimpse of the very man he was thinking of seated at the foot of a tree, employed with his paper and pencil in sketching the bridge.

"He takes a mighty delight in the place, surely," said the park-keeper to himself: "I should like to be able to draw in that way.—Why, there's Mr. Latimer coming up to him. I hope he won't be saucy; for he's just as likely to say an uncivil thing as a civil one. No, he seems to be polite enough; he's talking to him about his drawing, I dare say. Ay, there now, he's looking at it,"—and a moment after Morton rose, put the sketch-book in his pocket, and walked away with Alfred Latimer at an easy and sauntering pace.

In the meanwhile the park-keeper pursued his way, passed through the gate, and following the road which ran from the bridge along the stream under the park wall, reached, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, a small cottage, built upon the bank of the river, with a little garden round it, occupying the whole space between the highway and the water. It was neatly and beautifully kept; for Blackmore the gardener, after quitting the service of Mr. Charlton many years before, under circumstances which the reader may recollect, had soon found another place; but at the end of two years had fallen from a tree and broken his thigh, which threw him for many months out of employment. He had then, nearly crippled by the accident, devoted himself to the cultivation of this little piece of ground, and made a

scanty livelihood by selling the produce at Mallington. Another great misfortune had befallen him. His son had proved wild, intractable, and idle; and the abilities which had once made his father's heart glad, had, by inducing an overweening self-conceit, proved a bane instead of a blessing. At almost any hour of the day, from sunrise to sunset, Blackmore was to be met with in his garden, and there Edmonds now found him labouring away, in his ordinary working dress, with a sad and thoughtful countenance.

"Well, Blackmore," said the park-keeper, after the usual country salutations, "I think I have got some good news for you."

"Indeed!" said Blackmore, looking up. "I shall be very glad to hear them, Mr. Edmonds; for I have got some bad news for you, and for every one else in the neighbourhood."

"Ay! what is that?" demanded Edmonds. "I was in hopes it was going to turn out a lucky day."

"There's but little luck for me, anyhow," answered Blackmore; "but my news is that Master Alfred has come back again."

"Pooh! is that all?" exclaimed the park-keeper. "You are too harsh with that lad, Blackmore; his mother has spoilt him, that's all. He will soon sow his wild oats, and turn out better than you think."

"He's a bad-hearted young villain!" answered Blackmore, sternly. "He was bad as a boy, is bad as a youth, and will be bad as a man. There's no good in him, Mr. Edmonds; he's as vain as he's vicious, and that's what makes him like to associate with people below himself. It is because he wishes to be flattered and made a miracle of, and be cock of the walk, that makes him keep company with such folks as my son and Billy Maltby, and others like them. I can forgive and forget all that he did when he was a boy, and all that his mother did too, but I can't forgive his having corrupted my lad John and made a drunken idle vagabond of him."

"Well, perhaps he will behave better now," said Edmonds. "He has been away for five months, and may have improved."

"Improved!" said Blackmore, in a sullen tone, "he'll never improve. What was the first thing he did when he came back? why, instead of going to his mother's house like any other gentleman, he went down to the Clove Tree, and there he sat drinking and playing dice till two o'clock this morning; so my good woman tells me. Poor thing; he's helped to break her heart, however; for our boy would never have gone on so if it had not been for him: and there he sat winning money from one or two, but losing it preciously to Bill Maltby, and I dare say not very fairly either. Then he went back to the inn to sleep, but Mrs. Pluckrose had had the house shut up, and would not have her people let him in; so he was forced to go home, I suppose. though, they say, he swore at his mother like a graceless young villain, and damned her I know not how many times before the whole of the raff of the Clove Tree; because, he said, she had grown stingy, and would not give enough to keep him like a gentleman, or pay his debts."

"That's bad, that's very bad!" said Edmonds. "However, Blackmore, there's no use of talking about him; I shall give him a lecture when I see him, and he always listens quietly enough to what I say. —What I have to tell you is, that I have got orders at last from some

one—I don't know who, but as the money came with them that's all I have to care for—to put the park in order, and I dare say the garden is meant too. Now I don't see why you shouldn't come up, and see to getting the garden to rights, with any help you can have. Then, being on the spot, you know, you will have a chance of the place."

Blackmore held out his hand to him with a glad smile, exclaiming, "Now that's kind of you, Mr. Edmonds, that's very kind of you; it's just like you; and I'll be very glad of the job, whether it goes on or not: for nothing is doing so well as it used to do, and that boy will be the ruin of me, as well as break my heart—that he has done well nigh already. Oh! Mr. Edmonds, if any one had told me of him that I was so proud of, because he could do anything almost that he turned his hand to, that he would one day be an idle, worthless vagabond, I would have little believed it."

"We should never try to make our children gentlemen, Blackmore," said the park-keeper. "It's a great mistake: it's only grafting a twig on a stock that won't bear it. If there's anything really above the mark in them, it will come out without our help."

"Ah! it was all that Alfred Latimer," said the poor gardener; "he ruined him. I remember well enough when he and I had the quarrel about the melon beds up at Mallington House, and I took him in by the arm; and his mother took his part, though the good old gentleman took mine, and found him out in all his lies. He said he would be revenged some day; and revenged he has been indeed. But here comes John and Bill Maltby. I shan't say much to him, for if I do I may say more than I intend;" and once more shaking the park-keeper by the hand, he walked into the house.

"I'll say something to the young scamp, however," said Edmonds to himself, as the gardener retreated; and waiting calmly at the little wicket of the garden, he watched John Blackmore and his companion sauntering leisurely up with a grave fixed look that neither of them seemed particularly to like.

The first was a young man of about nineteen, with an air of dirty vulgar finery about him which was anything but prepossessing. The other was of a very different aspect. He was, perhaps, two or three and twenty years of age, strongly built though spare.

Edmonds, as I have said, eyed them sternly as they came forward, and his fixed gaze was not pleasant to either party; but the younger of the two felt it most, and he looked down upon the ground, while the other returned the stare unabashed, though he whispered a word to his companion with a smile curling his lip, as if in contempt of the good park-keeper.

The latter, however, was not a man to be checked by either looks or speeches, and his eye never winked after it had once settled upon John Blackmore and his companion; and when they came near he said at once, "Well, John, the same courses I find. What will come of it, think you?"

"What should come of it, Mr. Edmonds?" asked the youth.

"Dishonesty, beggary, wickedness, and the gallows, I should think," replied Edmonds.—"Here you are emptying your poor father's pockets, and breaking his heart, and wasting your time; losing your character, if ever you had any; and ruining yourself, body and soul, with a pack

of scamps and vagabonds, who first make a fool of you, and then laugh at you."

"What is that, master keeper, you said about scamps and vagabonds?" demanded Billy Maltby, walking a step or two closer to Edmonds, with a look of cold daring.

"I said," replied the keeper, without moving an inch, "that he keeps company with nothing but such."

"Then you mean me amongst the rest," said Maltby, in the same tone.

"At the head of them," replied Edmonds.

"Then take that for your pains!" exclaimed the other, aiming an overhand blow at his head.

But if he was strong and scientific in the noble science of the ring, the park-keeper was stronger and no less skilful; and, instantly parrying the blow with his left hand, he returned it with the right, striking his opponent so hard on the eye, that the surrounding bone seemed to crack under the stroke, and in an instant he was lying on his back on the road. He was up in a second, however, and springing at his opponent with fury, was knocked down again before he could plant a blow. Old Blackmore rushed out of his house at the sound of contention: a stout fellow, who had been one of the under-keepers, ran up from a cottage hard by; and Maltby, with a furious oath, pulled off his coat, called for a ring, and challenged Edmonds to fight it out on the spot.

The park-keeper hesitated for an instant, for the bull-dog spirit of John Bull was strong within him: but, after a brief consideration, he said, "No, I won't—I'm a father of a family, my lad, and have given over such tricks; but I'll tell you what I will do. If ever you are saucy to me again, or if ever I find you lurking about the park or the covers, I will give you such a hiding as will save some one a deal of trouble: so take care of yourself, that's all; for you've had a taste, and only a taste; but you shall have as much as you can carry the next time. Come along with me, Wilson, I've something to say to you;" and he walked away with the under-keeper, turning a deaf ear to the taunts and insults which Billy Maltby judged it expedient to pour upon him.

CHAPTER XI.

I MUST now beg the reader to step back with me to the spot where Mr. Edmond Morton sat under a tree, sketching the bridge. There he remained intent, till, turning his eyes a little to the right, in the direction where the keeper's house lay in its little glen, hidden by the trees, he beheld Alfred Latimer coming, with a quick and hurried pace, towards the spot where he had placed himself.

Like many other men who have an overweening opinion of their own merits, Alfred Latimer was shy of people at all in his own station of life. His class is a very common one, where pride and vanity are mingled together in such portions as to exacerbate each other, and where the opinion of our own merits is not of that calm and comfortable sort which renders us perfectly sure that every man of sense will

esteem and appreciate us as we do ourselves; but, on the contrary, is of the irritable and suspicious kind, which leads us to fear that our qualities will not be so readily recognised as we think they ought to be. He would not have thought of speaking to Mr. Morton first for the world; that gentleman's dress and appearance, and the high-bred air about him, would have been an impassable barrier against such a proceeding. But Morton himself had his own views and purposes; and as he saw the widow's son walking on with a shy glance towards him, he first beckoned to him; and, as Alfred Latimer did not choose to see the sign, he raised his voice and called, taking care not to rise.

"May I speak with you for a moment?" he said; and the young gentleman, with a quick but unwilling step, approached.

"Pray, can you tell me," continued Morton, pointing with his pencil to a spot in the distance, where, following the course of the valley, the eye rested on a tower which seemed that of a church, and then to his sketch, where the same object was represented in a few bold light strokes, "pray, can you tell me what is the name of that place?"

"That is called Steeple Melford," replied the young man, set at once at ease by the familiarity of the stranger.

"Is it a town or a village?" asked Morton, going on.

"Nothing but a little village," replied Latimer, looking at his progress. "How quick you draw."

"Habit, habit!" answered Morton; "but I think that will do," and he rose.

"Why, you do not call that finished, do you?" demanded the young gentleman; "you will never be able to make anything out of that."

"Oh! yes," replied Morton, "as you will see, if you call upon me in a day or two at the inn. This is all I want; and so now I will go back again. You reside here, I think."

As he spoke he took a step forward, and Alfred Latimer followed him, while replying, "Yes, I generally do. My mother has a house at the top of the hill there, and when we are good friends I live with her—when we are not I go away."

"Why, you never quarrel with your mother, do you?" said Morton, in a good-humoured tone.

"No, we don't exactly quarrel," answered Alfred Latimer; "but sometimes she does not choose to give me money enough, and then I go away, and that is sure to bring her round."

"But, perhaps, she cannot afford to give it to you," said Morton.

"That is what she says," replied the other, "but it is all an excuse. Why, the old man left her very well off, and the guardians allow my sister Louisa twelve hundred a year, and the whole of that, except two hundred that she keeps for her dress, goes to my mother for the house, so that she could let me have more if she liked, I am sure."

"Perhaps not," rejoined Morton, thoughtfully. "We young men do not always calculate very accurately what our parents can afford. I know your mother; and her establishment is expensive."

"Ay, why does she keep up such a one?" said Alfred Latimer. "It is upon that and her dress that the money goes. But she won't be without anything that she has a mind to have, and yet grumbles when I want a few pounds. Here, she has had two or three dinner-parties this last week, and pic-nics, and all sorts of things, they tell me, and

yet when I wrote to her to send me fifty pounds, she vowed she had not got as much in the world, and sent me ten."

"But in that case why don't you apply to some other relation or friend?" inquired his companion. "If the money is absolutely necessary to you to pay a bill, or anything of that kind, I dare say you could easily borrow it."

"Necessary enough, by Jove!" cried young Latimer, "for a fellow in London to whom I owe a small sum threatens to arrest me, so I was obliged to make myself scarce: and, as to borrowing the money, I know no one who has got it to lend. Louisa would let me have it soon enough if she had it; but she sent me all her last quarter's, except ten pounds, six weeks ago, and she will not have any more till the 29th of September, for those old screws, her guardians, are as hard as flint. None of my friends have a sous to bless themselves with, and my relations—a set of proud blackguards—take no notice of me because my father chose to marry my mother against their consent—devil fly away with them!"

"You would find it a good plan, Mr. Latimer," said Morton, "to make friends amongst people who can give you assistance in whatever way you may want it; and there are many sorts of assistance much more important and valuable than such a trifle as forty or fifty pounds."

"Ah! I understand what you mean," answered Latimer, "to make acquaintance with fashionable people; but they are all so d—d stupid. They are as cold and dull as lead, and up to no fun; and I doubt much whether they would think forty or fifty pounds such a trifle as you fancy, for they are stingy enough, I can tell you."

"I have not found them so," replied Morton, "and for my own part I am always willing to lend a friend what he wants, as far as my means go; and so," he continued, pulling open the iron gate of the park, and going out first, "if your mother cannot let you have the fifty pounds you want, I will: for she has been very kind and courteous to me since I have been here; and I should like to make her any return, by assisting her son."

"Upon my life you are an excellent fellow!" cried Alfred Latimer, who had not the slightest hesitation in regard to borrowing money wherever he could get it. "I will pay you as soon as I can; for I have my own annuity, and in the meantime I will give you my I O U."

Morton smiled, but made no reply, for his young companion's words showed that he was not altogether unaccustomed to the trade of borrowing, and confirmed him in the belief which he had entertained from the first, that the money he was about to lend would never be repaid; and yet, strange to say, he was even, perhaps, the more willing to lend it on that account. "If I can obtain a hold upon this youth," he thought, "and by the loss of a few pounds, lent him from time to time, render him in some degree bound to me by necessity, if not by gratitude, I may, perhaps, disentangle him from his low and vicious companions, and gradually lead him at all events into a better way of life, if not into higher and nobler thoughts. It is worth the while."

Who was he thinking of when he indulged in these meditations? I suspect, dear reader, that once more Louisa Charlton had something to do with the matter.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was a large dinner-party at Mallington House, and the drawing-room was in the usual state in which drawing-rooms are when all the expected company have arrived, and yet dinner has not been announced. There was in the room a great variety of the human animal: Mrs. Charlton, now certainly growing the "stout lady," but still not ungraceful; Louisa Charlton, looking as lovely as one of those gleams of happiness which sometimes come across a monotonous existence, like a sudden burst of sunshine on a chill hill-side, could render her fair face; a fox-hunting country baronet, a portly man, as fat in his ideas as in his person; his wife, a very fine lady indeed, and all the finer because she had not always been a fine lady; their daughter, who was what people usually call a sweet interesting girl—I can describe her no better, for although this book is written for posterity, and it is very probable that posterity (if society improves) may not define a sweet interesting girl exactly as we should at present, yet will there not be dictionaries of the dead tongue of the nineteenth century! Besides these persons, there were in the room a country gentleman who hunted foxes during the autumn and spring, and found the rest of the year very heavy; his two sons, who trod in their father's horse's steps, and both of whom intended some day to marry Miss Charlton. There was, moreover, a widow lady of mature years, with her niece, Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and Alfred Latimer.

The next instant the fox-hunter and his two sons were ushered in; and the graceful mistress of the mansion advanced a step or two to meet the thin wind-cutting elderly man (who came forward with no slight idea of his own importance), and to welcome his two family jewels. As she passed, she heard Louisa say, in a low voice, "For pity's sake, Alfred, defend me from either or both of them. I think they are the two most unpleasant young men in the whole county."

"What wretches must they be, then!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, laughing aloud; "but I will defend you, Louisa;" and the moment the elder of the youths approached to pay his respects to Miss Charlton, her step-brother addressed him in a jeering tone, but not without a touch of pride in his manner, saying, "So, Mr. Middleton, you broke your fine horse's back last March, I hear."

"He broke his own back and nearly my neck," replied the young gentleman, somewhat nettled.

"Ay, but it was all your own fault," answered Alfred Latimer; "if you had not pulled him in when you found yourself at the top of the bank, he would have gone down as easy as if he had been treading on a Turkey carpet; but he was resolved to go, and you were afraid to let him, and so between you he was killed and you half killed."

Louisa Charlton felt somewhat painfully that it is at times a dangerous thing to trust one's defence to a person on whom we cannot depend: and she could not refrain from saying a few kind and courteous words to medicate the wounds which she had been unwillingly art and part in inflicting on his own particular vanity.

"Well, Louisa, you are an odd girl!" said Alfred Latimer, as the guest moved away; "you declare you wish to be rid of him, and when

I send him away you say all in your power to make him stay. But here comes the other brother, Edward, and there comes Mr. Morton in at the door. On my life, I have a great mind to deliver you over to Ned Middleton, and exclude the favourite."

Louisa Charlton was silent, but by no effort that she could command was she able to prevent the warm blood from once more mounting into her cheek at his words, any more than the peach or the nectarine can command its sunny side not to blush under the sun's rays.

Morton and Edward Middleton advanced almost together, and Louisa observed that Mrs. Charlton whispered a few words to the former, which were merely, "Will you have the kindness, when we go to dinner, to take Louisa?" He bowed his head, with a well-pleased smile; and as the young and inexperienced but clear-minded girl, by a mere casual glance, withdrawn as soon as given, marked his carriage as he crossed the room towards her, she could not help comparing his whole appearance and demeanour with those around, and distinguishing the gentleman, that rare and excellent thing—the gentleman by feeling and by habit, by nature as well as education, by heart as well as by position—from those who conventionally took the title but did not possess the character.

Alfred Latimer kept his seat by the side of Louisa Charlton till Morton advanced and shook hands with her in silence, while Mr. Edward Middleton was saying something he thought very fine; then rising, and leaving his place vacant, he drew the young fox-hunter aside, and inquired after his black pointer-bitch, adding, with a laugh, "You had better let me have her, for you do not know how to hunt her."

While he communicated this pleasant sentiment to his acquaintance, Morton took the chair he had left vacant, and, while he said a few words upon indifferent subjects, Louisa gazed in his face earnestly for a moment, as if there was something of more importance on which she would fain have spoken. She answered somewhat at random too; and Morton, with easy self-possession, which is only acquired by much mingling in the world, took advantage of the first of those little bustles which do enliven occasionally the dull ten minutes, to give her the opportunity of saying anything she might think fit.

"You seem as if you had a tale to tell, Miss Charlton," he said, as Dr. Western and several others moved away to look at some fine drawings to which Mrs. Charlton called their attention.

"No, indeed," answered Louisa, with a warm smile; "but I have heard a tale which would be very gratifying to me if I had not a warning to give. Mr. Latimer, who is my half-brother, you know—at least, Mrs. Charlton's son—has told me your great kindness to him this morning; but, Mr. Morton—I do not really know how to explain myself."

Morton gazed into her beautiful eyes for a moment with a smile, till he saw the colour in her cheek begin to grow a little deeper, and then he said, "Will you let me help you, Miss Charlton?"

"I am afraid you cannot," replied Louisa; "and yet I think it but right to say that which—which——"

"Well, let me try," rejoined Morton; "you know not yet how much of the seer I am; or, in other words, how much insight one honest

heart has into another, and how quickly a man of the world perceives the circumstances of those with whom he mingles. You would warn me, then, my dear Miss Charlton, that the money will never be repaid."

"No, no," said Louisa. "not exactly that, for that I could insure myself: but I merely wished to hint that Alfred might trespass upon your kindness too far, and inconsiderately borrow more than he could ever repay. He is already much in debt, I am sorry to find; and I feared that you might be a loser, perhaps, of more than——"

Once more she paused: and Morton finished the sentence for her, saying, "More than I can afford. You will think me a strange personage, Miss Charlton, when I tell you that I lent this money with the full knowledge, or at least belief, that it would never be repaid; and I should be quite ready to lend a much larger sum, with the same conviction, for the same object."

"Nay, why should you do that?" exclaimed Louisa Charlton.

The servant almost at the same instant announced that dinner was on the table; and Morton merely replied in a low voice, "Do you not think I would do much more to save from perdition a person nearly connected with one I love?"

Louisa's hand trembled as she took the arm which Morton offered, and her steps tottered as he led her towards the door. All the three Misters Middleton looked surprised and offended at the young stranger taking such bold possession of the heiress: and the father asked his eldest son, "Who the devil is that fellow?"

"Some painter, they say," replied the heir-apparent, with a shrug of the shoulders: and he walked forward to give his arm to the baronet's daughter, the sweet interesting girl, while his father advanced to escort the baronet's wife.

Poor Louisa Charlton!—At the first step of the stairs her head whirled, and her thoughts were all in confusion; at the second, her heart beat so vehemently she thought she must have fallen: at the third she asked herself if her ears had not deceived her; at the fourth, though she was quite certain Morton had spoken those words, she felt sure that she had mistaken their import: at the fifth she recollected that Alfred Latimer was nearly connected with many persons whom she did not know, and that Edmond Morton might very likely love one of them; at the sixth, she had quite settled the matter to her own satisfaction; and though she did not believe one word of the hypothesis she had set up, and did believe that Morton loved her a little, and would have been very sorry to have believed that he loved any one else more, yet, as it suited her purpose to fancy that she had mistaken him, she persuaded herself that it was so.

By this art Louisa Charlton made herself quite comfortable for the time, and the last steps down stairs were passed calmly and quietly. She had even recovered herself so far ere they reached the dining-room door, as to say, "You are very kind; but I fear Alfred is more deeply plunged in debts and difficulties than you think."

"Perhaps they may be made the means," answered Morton, "of rescuing him from worse evils. I will try to explain how during dinner, if I have an opportunity."

The meal passed over as such things usually do. The appearance

of the crops was discussed. Some of the cases at quarter-sessions were talked of. There had been an earthquake about that time in the West Indies, and a pig had been born in a neighbouring parish with two heads. Both proved very serviceable on the present occasion: but while the pig was upon the carpet, Morton found the moment he was looking for, and explained to Louisa Charlton his views and his plans in regard to Alfred Latimer. He showed her that the love of low society had taken possession of Mrs. Charlton's son; and he went on to express a hope that if he could obtain some influence over his mind, he might either lead him without discussion, or persuade him by reason, to seek the company of men in his own station. He was compelled to be very brief; but everything was clear and definite, just and reasonable; with a sufficient portion of enthusiasm, subdued and studiously kept out of sight, to excite admiration and regard in his fair hearer, and with sufficient tenderness of tone and manner to make her heart beat a very little, but not to agitate her enough to be at all unpleasant.

The private tone in which Mr. Morton and Miss Charlton had been speaking during dinner had not escaped observation, and some of the younger gentlemen at the table, who would have preferred enjoying the same degree of intimacy themselves, were rather inclined to be impertinent to the supposed painter. The baronet himself, and the elder Mr. Middleton, treated him coldly and proudly—condescended to address a few words to him, indeed, but affected to confine them entirely to the subject of the arts. Morton was exceedingly amused, and humoured them to the top of their bent; for he had heard the report of his supposed profession, and had done his best to encourage it.

Good Dr. Western, however, was destined to spoil his sport, with the gentlemen present at least; for the worthy rector could not make up his mind to say or imply what was untrue, even for a jest; and when Sir Simon Upplestone asked him directly who and what Mr. Morton was, adding, "People say, doctor, that he is merely a poor artist. Now you know, doctor—" the rector interrupted him, for fear he should say something more disagreeable still, replying, "He is a gentleman, sir, in every respect, by birth, education, and fortune; though he certainly deserves the name of an artist, as far as drawing better than many who make it their profession can entitle him to that distinction."

Morton caught the sense of the doctor's reply, if not the exact words, and was vexed with him; and the evening, as he expected, passed very dully from that moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOUISA CHARLTON slept little during the night after the dinner-party of which we have just spoken. While conversation was going on around her, and lights dazzled her eyes, and the siren songs of her step-mother who had not yet lost one note of her sweet voice, rang in her ears, and Morton was by her side, the delusion which she practised on herself lasted with sufficient power to prevent her from examining closely the realities which she hesitated to contemplate. Let it not be

supposed that she fully believed that which she thought fit to fancy for the time. Louisa Charlton would not know what she knew—would not believe what she actually believed—would not (contrary to all her usual habits) look the truth in the face. But as soon as she was alone and in silence, and the curtain of darkness drawn around, the communing with her own heart began. First, what was it that Edmond Morton really meant? She could no longer deceive herself—she was loved! It was not alone the few words he had spoken before dinner, but many others—not so plain, but plain enough—which he had spoken before. It was not alone words either, but looks, and tone, and manner. She could not doubt it—she did not doubt it; and, turning her face to her pillow with a glowing cheek, she asked herself if she did not love in return. Oh! what a tumult then was felt in her young breast: how confused and wild seemed all her thoughts! Mind would not answer what the heart spoke clearly enough; and for many minutes she dared not admit, even to herself, how deeply, how wholly, how warmly she returned the affection of one whom she had not known a month. The truth, however, made itself heard at length; but then she blamed herself that it was so. There seemed something to her eyes rash, imprudent, almost wrong, in yielding to such sensations: for she knew not that they are not dependent upon will, but are gifts—ay, bright and excellent gifts from God who made us—to be regulated, not to be resisted—to guide us to happiness, if wisely exercised. The truth, however, on this score also made itself felt ere long, and when she thought of him she loved—of how different he was from every one she had previously seen—how high, yet gentle in his bearing—how noble and generous in his words and thoughts—how graceful in person and in manner—how perfect in all the qualities which win attachment and ensure respect—she almost ceased to blame herself for loving, and loving hastily.

Imagination—fertile in ways of tormenting, as well as in ways of blessing—filled her mind with a thousand other agitating thoughts, and kept her waking till the shrill drawing-room clock struck three. She did not hear the next hour, but, some time after, she started up as if in fear, and saw the morning light streaming through the shutters.

Looking at her watch she found it half-past five, and rising, with a mind still troubled with the thought that even yet Edmond Morton had not justified her in feeling as she felt towards him, she dressed herself without ringing for her maid, resolved to walk down in the fresh early morning, and take breakfast with Dr. Western and Mrs. Evelyn. She thought that their society might calm her. The morning was bright, though there were passing clouds. Her head ached a little with a restless night, and she thought of the fresh air and the cool shade of the tall trees with eager longing; but she was obliged to wait for a time till some of the household were up, for she was dressed before half-past six. At length the sound of moving tables from below, and feet upon the stairs, told her that the housemaids at least were stirring, and, as her own habits were early, her maid soon after appeared. She was not surprised to find her young mistress up, and prepared to go out, for it had happened often before from other causes; and leaving word that she was gone down to Dr.

Western's, Louisa issued forth, and walked quietly through the lanes and fields, pausing every now and then, with her cottage bonnet in her hand, to enjoy the morning breeze, and the prospect that opened here and there through the trees to the river and Mallington Park. But ever and anon, together with the sensation of enjoyment, came a certain undefined feeling of apprehension.

At length, as she came close upon the edge of the stream, choosing the green border of turf that separated it from the road, she saw a little fisherman, some nine or ten years old, casting his line into the water. The boy turned his warm face at her step, and recognising the son of Edmonds, the park-keeper, she gave him a smile and a nod, and was walking on. The boy, however, put his hand to his hat, half swinging round to bow to the young lady, when missing his footing, after a momentary struggle to save himself, he fell headlong into the stream. On the impulse of the moment, without pausing to consider how deep the river might be in that part, Louisa darted forward with a scream for help, and plunged in. She knew, indeed, that it was shallow above, but a mill-stream joined the little river a few yards higher up, and in a moment she felt the water circle over her head. Giddy and confused, with the green light flashing in her eyes, and the water rushing in her ears, she was rising again to the surface, when suddenly she felt a strong arm cast round her waist, and ere she well knew what had happened, was laid gently upon the grass.

"Oh, Louisa! Oh, my beloved girl!" cried the voice of Edmond Morton.

"The boy! the boy! the poor boy!" exclaimed Louisa, raising herself on her knees; and without further entreaty Morton plunged into the river again. But young Edmonds was in little danger comparatively. He knew something though not much of swimming, and he held fast by his fishing rod, showing both skill and presence of mind in so employing it as to keep his head above the water. With two strokes Morton reached him, and, catching him under the shoulder, soon landed him in safety. The boy shook himself like a wet dog, and seemed in no degree the worse; but Louisa was pale as death, more, indeed, with fear than anything else. To her Morton turned then, and, supporting her tenderly on his arm, he led her gently towards the rectory; but as they went he whispered words which were better calculated to restore the quick beating of Louisa's heart than any of all the excellent inventions of the Humane Society.

CHAPTER XIV.

Her heart beat—oh, how it beat as he led her on! She could not answer a word, for if faintness and dizziness had not taken from her the power of speech, the overwhelming sensations which his words called forth would have left her voiceless. They were all joyful, it is true; but yet, while they made her very, very happy, they showed her how much she had doubted, how much she had dreaded—they showed her, more than all, how much she loved. Even that was enough to agitate and overpower her, and for several minutes she seemed as it were in a dream. The drowning boy, the plunge into the stream, the

waters closing over her head, the sudden and unexpected rescue, the words of earnest and passionate love,—all seemed parts of some wild strange vision: and twice she turned faintly round, and gazed in Morton's face as if to assure herself that it was all true indeed.

The languid fall of her eyelids, the feebleness of her step as he supported her onward,—all made her companion conclude that she was scarcely able to proceed; and as they came to a spot where a rustic bench had been placed upon the bank of the stream, between two tall elms, he led her to it, and, kneeling at her feet, held her hand in his, gazing up into her face with looks of tenderness and apprehension.

"Speak to me, my Louisa," he said, "but one word to tell me you are better! Oh! you do not know what it is, Louisa, to see the being you most love on earth nearly perish before your eyes! You know not how one longs to hear the dear voice again! You cannot tell, you cannot comprehend, what are my feelings towards you this moment, just saved from death."

"Not now, Morton, not now," answered Louisa at length. "I do comprehend, I do know, but do not agitate me now."

"I will not," he said, pressing his lips upon her hand, "I will not utter another word of love. I have been wrong—I have been unkind. I should have chosen a fitter season; but it burst forth without my will. I will be so selfish no more."

"Selfish!" exclaimed Louisa, the tears rising in her eyes. "You selfish! Oh, no, you are all that is generous and kind."

She said no more, but Morton was content, as well he might be, for he knew her who spoke, and was aware that those words could not be light ones. He might be anxious, indeed, to hear more—to tell the tale of love fully, and to win the kind reply—but he really felt what he had said, that it was ungenerous to add anything to her emotions at such a moment; and, turning from the topic of his love, he sought, tenderly and wisely, to soothe and calm her; and knowing well where the great source of all mental strength, the only fountain of true tranquillity and confidence, is to be found, he said, "For how much have we to thank God, Louisa, that one who was able to save you should be wandering accidentally by the river at this early hour. How much comfort, how much joy do those lose who attribute—I may say madly—every event of life to accident or some blind necessity!"

"They do, indeed," said Louisa; "and that you should be the person, too," she added, thoughtfully; but she did not end the sentence, feeling that she was approaching that upon which she feared to touch. Not, indeed, that her heart at all wavered; not that she was doubtful. She loved with the first full confiding affection of woman's nature; she loved the only man whom she had ever met, who seemed in her eyes worthy of her love; and she had no hesitation in the present, no dread for the future. But yet there was a something that made her shrink from the avowal of all she felt.

Morton pressed her not to say more, and after some few words to while away a moment of repose, he asked, "Can you go on now, Louisa; or shall I run to Dr. Western's and bring some conveyance for you? I fear to let you sit here longer, wet and agitated as you are."

"Oh, no, no!" she answered; "do not leave me. I shall be better in a moment."

But even as she spoke they were joined by a third person, a perfect stranger to both; but one who seemed not inclined to be long a stranger in any society into which he might be thrown. He was a slim man of about five or six and thirty, with a profusion of dark hair and whisker, curled in the most exquisite manner, a sweet and simpering countenance, and a complexion peculiarly delicate and clear: in short, a pretty, a very pretty man. He wore a blue coat, rather pale in the hue, with gilt buttons, a yellow waistcoat, and a blue satin handkerchief round his neck, spotted with amber flowers. The rest of his dress was in the same fine taste. His air was perfectly jaunty and self-satisfied, and as he walked along the bank of the river, before he perceived Louisa and her lover, he rose upon the tips of his toes, as if his elevated opinion of himself required some external demonstration.

As soon as he cast his eyes upon the young lady, however, and perceived, from the very evident signs displayed by her dripping garments and dishevelled hair, that some accident had happened, he approached with a hurried step, exclaiming, "Goodness, ma'am! you must have tumbled into the water!—you are not drowned, I hope!—what a mercy! But your complexion will be spoilt if you sit in the sun all wet. I dare say you are faint, too: let me recommend you some of the unparalleled Droitwich smelling salts;" and regardless of some impatience in Morton's look, and some surprise and reluctance in Louisa's, he brought forth from his pocket first a corked and sealed bottle, then a small steel cork-screw, and having opened the precious vial, held it to her nose till she gently removed it, saying that she was better.

"Pray hold it yourself, ma'am," he cried; "I know I am clumsy: it will revive you in a moment, I am quite sure it will!" and, not to seem ungrateful, Louisa took it at his request.

But no sooner had she done so than his hand dived into his pocket again, and forth he brought another bottle, longer, thinner, and wrapped up in paper covered over with talismanic signs.

"Let me call your attention to this article, ma'am," he said, "and yours too, sir. This is Mrs. Grimsditch's vegetable anti-corrugent dew of jonquille, a sovereign preservative against wrinkles, sun-burning, freckles, moles, discolorations, heat-spots, scars, or any other of the great enemies of beauty. It softens, refreshes, nourishes, polishes, and blanches the skin, gives an agreeable coolness to the complexion, against which the sun of India itself cannot contend, and——"

"The lady does not require it, sir," said Morton, somewhat sharply "and, at all events, this is not a moment in which she can attend to its virtues."

"Nay, sir, no offence, I hope," said their undesired companion. "As to not requiring it, every one requires it; the young and beautiful to preserve their loveliness, and others who are somewhat faded to restore the charms they have lost."

Morton felt inclined to knock him down; but he remembered the barber of Bagdad, and took patience while the other went on.

"I did but wish to offer my poor services, sir, either to the lady or yourself; and seeing you both in a——"

"The only service, sir, you can render us," said the young gentleman, interrupting him, "is to run as fast as you can along that path,

past the church, on to the rectory; and to beg Dr. Western to send his carriage, saying that this lady, his ward, has met with a little accident, and——"

"Oh, no, no; you will alarm them!" cried Louisa.

But the stranger, without attending to her, set off good-humouredly at full speed towards the rectory; and Louisa turned to Morton with the first smile that had brightened her face that morning, saying, "Let us go; I can go now, and that strange man will frighten our good friends."

"He seems an impertinent puppy," answered Morton, "though a good-humoured one. But are you really able to walk, dearest Louisa?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "he has done me good, do you know; for he has made me laugh, when I felt more inclined to cry."

"To cry!" said her lover, drawing her arm through his, as she rose to proceed.

There was both surprise and sadness in his tone; and, fearful that she had grieved him, Louisa answered, "Yes, Morton, to weep. But do you not know that we women as often weep when we are happy as when we are sorrowful? and I am very happy; happy in all that has occurred; happy in my deliverance, and that you effected it."

The warm blood glowed in her cheek as she spoke, and the last words were uttered with downcast eyes, and in a low tone. They were somewhat similar to those she had before spoken; but the repetition of them was very pleasant to her lover's ear.

"It was indeed most fortunate, my Louisa," he said, as they walked slowly on, "that I was passing at the time; and yet it was a mere accident, brought about by repentance for a fault I committed last night."

"Indeed!" cried Louisa, with a look of surprise, "I saw no fault."

"And yet I was guilty of a great one towards you, dearest girl," replied her lover. "The thought of it broke my rest, and made me rise at daybreak, and go out to wander about till I could repair it. I felt that I was wrong, Louisa, to speak words of love at such a moment as I did last night, when I could tell nothing, explain nothing, and you could make no reply. I feared that I might have agitated, perhaps pained you; and that, whether my hopes were false or true, I might have disturbed your repose. You know all now; and of one thing be sure, my Louisa, that I would never have ventured to seek your love, if by station and fortune I were not in a position to justify me in so doing."

"And do you imagine, Morton," asked Louisa, with a look almost reproachful, "that station or fortune would make any difference in my regard? It is true I am not a romantic person, and I know that competence is necessary to happiness; but where it is to be found on one side it is sufficient. My dear father taught me to value other things than wealth or rank, and I have not forgotten his lessons."

"I am sure you have not, my Louisa," replied her lover, "and of you I entertained no doubt; but there are friends and guardians to be thought of too, dear girl, and they judge alone by the customs and conventionalities of society. The poor artist, which the good people here, it seems, give me out to be, would be naturally, perhaps not improperly, rejected as the suitor to the wealthy heiress; while the man

of fortune, to whom her riches are no object, would be accepted by the wise men who have her happiness in trust, though the one might be worthy of her, the other not."

"It seems to me very strange and very wrong that it should be so," replied Louisa, thoughtfully; "for to the one her fortune might be beneficial, enabling him to pursue a high and bright career, to cultivate his abilities, and to advance the very arts which are a glory and a benefit to his country; while in the hands of the other it would be but of little service to himself or his fellow-creatures."

"It is as well in our case," answered Morton, "that, as objections might be raised against your desire by those who would think they were acting conscientiously in opposing your marriage with a poor man, no valid obstacle of that kind does exist; and I tell you that such is the case at once, dear girl, not because it would make any difference in your eyes whether I were the poor artist or not, but because I think it may set your mind at ease in regard to the opposition of others."

"I must not take credit to myself," answered Louisa Charlton, "for having thought you the poor artist, Morton; for though I did so for a few days, I was soon convinced that report was false, and yet, I think, Mrs. Charlton believes so still."

"Do not undeceive her, my Louisa!" exclaimed Morton, eagerly; "I have my own views on that point, and have encouraged the idea. Pray, do not contradict it to any one. You shall hear, whenever we have a moment or two for private conversation, every particular of my fate and history; for from her I love I can have no concealment. But we have not time now; for here comes the good rector's carriage at full speed. In the meantime, Louisa, know me as nothing but as report gives me out, and let me see what will be the end of the game that is playing; for you as well as I must perceive, that the conduct of some persons very near you is not altogether natural."

He had no time to say more, for at that moment the carriage of the worthy rector pulled up beside them, and the doctor himself got out in eager haste, followed by the stranger of the smelling-bottle and cosmetic.

"Why, what is this, my dear child?" exclaimed the worthy clergyman. "What is this, Mr. Morton? Both wet; but I see how it is, I understand it all."

"Not all, I think, my dear sir," replied the young gentleman; and he proceeded to give their friend a brief account of all that had occurred.

"Ah, Louisa, Louisa!" cried the good rector, shaking his finger at her, "impulse, impulse! you women always act from impulse, and peril your ownselves without a chance of assisting others. But what has become of the poor boy? He might be drowned while Morton was assisting you."

"Oh, no!" replied Louisa's lover; "he remained struggling gallantly, and seemed to have some idea of swimming; but his fishing-rod was his best friend, keeping his head above water till I could return, and draw him out. He is the son of Edmonds, the park-keeper, I think; and as soon as he was on dry land set to work to wind up his line as if nothing had happened."

They were by this time so near the rectory that Louisa would not

get into the carriage, but walked on still leaning on her lover's arm, and accompanied by Dr. Western; while the man in the blue satin handkerchief coolly mounted the box of the carriage and rode back, apparently making himself quite at home.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Louisa Charlton went out in the early morning, she believed that no one in the house was up but the servants. Such was not the case, however; for Alfred Latimer was already in the library, with an aching head and irritated heart. On the preceding evening he had left his mother's house, very soon after dinner, to seek his old haunts, and to lose a considerable portion of the money he had received from Morton in the morning at play; and now he sat, with his cheek resting on his hand, in sullen silence, ready to quarrel with any one that might present himself. The door of the library was partly open, and he saw Louisa come down and go out. At first he thought of following her, and rose to do so; but the moment after he sat down again, saying to himself, "No, I won't. I'll stay, and bring my mother to reason. It is time for her to rise. She shall find that I will not be trifled with any more;" and ringing the bell sharply, he told the servant, who appeared at its loud summons, to send his mother's maid up to her room with a message to the purpose that he wished to speak with her immediately. The man retired to obey his orders; but nearly half an hour elapsed without any one appearing, and Alfred Latimer's impatient spirit wrought turbulently within him at the delay. At length, working himself up into a fit of passion, he hurried out of the library, and was mounting the stairs, when he met the maid coming down to give him notice, that Mrs. Charlton awaited him in her dressing-room.

"In Heaven's name! what is the matter, Alfred?" demanded Mrs. Charlton, as soon as he entered. "Something must have gone wrong, or I am sure you would not have disturbed me at such an early hour ——"

"As nearly ten o'clock?" asked Alfred Latimer. "Well, you are quite right: something has gone wrong, everything has gone wrong, and I must have it put right. You know I asked you for fifty pounds yesterday——"

"And I told you, my dear boy, that I had not got it to give,' answered Mrs. Charlton, in a soothing tone.

"You have plenty of money to give parties with, and fine wines, and all sorts of things from London; and to keep horses, and carriages, and servants enough, to do nothing," replied her dutiful and affectionate child.

"Alfred, Alfred!" cried his mother, "I never thought I should hear my son, for whom I have sacrificed so much, speak such words. You know quite well the horses and carriages are Louisa's, not mine. Almost all the servants are hers; and does my own son grudge me the comforts of my home, and even the respectable appearance which I am obliged to keep up?"—and Mrs. Charlton wiped away a tear

"This is all very good, mother," replied Alfred; "but necessity has no law, and money must be found; for money I must have."

"If I could have found it," said Mrs. Charlton, "you should have had it. Do you think, if I could have procured it, I would have put off my journey to London" But every farthing I had, except just enough for the expenses of the house, I was obliged to pay, because those people, the Marsons, chose to fail, and force me to pay the horrid bill I had there—four hundred pounds at one blow! Only wait till Louisa is of age, or till I have carried out what I have in view with regard to her, and you shall have as much as you can desire."

"I cannot wait, and will not wait," replied Alfred Latimer, fiercely. "I have bills to pay as well as you, and they must be paid too. Why should you not sell, or pawn, some of all your smart jewels? They would soon raise the money; and you are a widow now, and don't want them."

Now Mrs. Charlton was fond of jewels, and had accumulated no inconsiderable store; but still she thought that if the sum required was but fifty pounds, she could part with some for her dear boy's sake.

"You are unkind, Alfred," she said; "but to show you that I would do anything I can to help you, I will raise the fifty pounds upon some of the trinkets poor Mr. Charlton gave me."

"Fifty pounds!" cried her son. "That would have done yesterday, but it will not do to-day. I have many bills to pay that cannot be put off. One man threatens to arrest me, and another has actually taken out a writ. Now I will be free of all this without further delay. I will have my debts paid; I will have something over to start upon; and then——"

"But what is the amount?" demanded the lady, in consternation.

"A thousand pounds will do, I think," replied Alfred Latimer, coolly.

"A thousand pounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, and throwing herself back in her chair, she added, in an altered tone,—"You cannot have it, Alfred."

"Indeed!" he said, with his eyes flashing fire.

"No!" she replied, decidedly. "I have told you—and so it must be. You cannot have it; and if you think to frighten me into supplying your extravagance and folly at this rate, you are mistaken. I wish you had not disturbed me out of my sleep to hear such nonsense;" and Mrs. Charlton yawned.

There was some reality in her demeanour, and a good deal that was assumed; for she thought that he had taken a peremptory tone merely to alarm her, which could only be met by a cool one; but she was not quite prepared for what was to follow. His manner, too, altered; he set his teeth close, as if afraid of giving way too far to the strong passion within him, and approaching his mother's chair, he said in a low bitter tone,—"So you will not sell your diamonds for the relief of your son?"

"Not one," answered Mrs. Charlton.

"Well, then, you will never see him again," said the young man.

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Charlton, "you know better;" but without an

other word he turned to the door, and went out, closing it quietly be hind him.

Mrs. Charlton was somewhat alarmed; for, though she had often seen fits of violent passion in Alfred Latimer, she had never beheld any effort to repress the expression of his rage. If he had cursed and sworn, she could have felt quite easy; if he had banged the dressing-room door as he retired, it would have been a relief. But the stern low tone, the shut teeth, the quiet exit, had something awful in them; and after pausing for a few minutes in consideration, she rose and rang her bell. Before the maid could appear, she heard a horse's feet over the gravel, and, looking out, saw her son riding away from the house on a horse that was always kept for him at Mallington; and when her abigail entered, Mrs. Charlton merely said,—"Do my hair."

In the meanwhile Alfred Latimer rode on down the village, and approached the road that ran along by the bank of the stream; but as he was in the act of turning his horse's head as if to follow that path, he suddenly pulled up, thought for a moment, and then, crossing the bridge, approached the park gates. There he dismounted, tied his beast to the iron bars, and walked with a rapid step in the direction of the park-keeper's house.

CHAPTER XVI.

In a shady grove in Mallington Park, about the hour of eleven, or a little after, on the day of which I have just been speaking, two persons were walking on slowly together along the paths in earnest conversation. Hither and thither they went from one walk to another, but never issued beyond the cover of the rees. They went hand in hand, too, and one spoke eagerly and rapidly, while the other replied little, but by sighs. They were Alfred Latimer and Lucy, the fair young daughter of the park-keeper, Edmonds—a dangerous companionship for her. He seemed pressing her vehemently to some step which she was unwilling to take, and ever and anon she raised her eyes, full of tears to his, and answered,—"No, Alfred; no, I cannot. Oh, do not ask me, Mr. Latimer. It would break my father's heart, if I were to leave him without telling him where I am going."

"And you will break mine if you refuse, Lucy," replied Alfred Latimer; "you can write to him to-morrow, and tell him you are with me, and that we are going to be married as soon as ever we can be."

But Lucy shook her head mournfully, saying, "He will not believe that."

"And you doubt it, too, Lucy!" cried Alfred Latimer, vehemently; "you think I would break my oath! You do not love me, Lucy, that is very clear. Nay, do not cry now; you will make your eyes red, and every one will see."

Lucy Edmonds wiped the tears away, and replied in a low voice, "You know I love you—you know it too well, or you would not ask me to do what is wrong."

"But it is not wrong," answered Alfred Latimer; "I tell you that I have had a quarrel with my mother, so that I cannot stay any longer

here, or we would be married at once; and yet you refuse to go and marry me as soon as it can be done."

"Oh, no," said Lucy; "I only refuse to go with you without my father's knowledge. You know, Alfred, it would be very wicked, and I should never be happy after."

"And so you will really make me unhappy for ever, Lucy?" asked the young gentleman; "for you will never see me more, after I have once gone away. Come, Lucy, come—go back quietly to the house, get some few things ready, and meet me in two hours at the other side of the park;" and bending down his head, he kissed her.

"I cannot—I cannot," answered Lucy Edmonds, weeping. "Without my father's leave I cannot come."

Alfred Latimer's cheek was somewhat red; and even to her he could not repress the quick and angry flash of his eye at anything like opposition. But before he could utter many words, issuing suddenly from one of the side paths, Lucy's father himself stood before them. The good man's brow was stern and dark, and his lip quivering with many mingled emotions.

"Let go my daughter's hand, sir," said Edmonds, after gazing at him for an instant; "and never you set your foot in this park again."

"Indeed!" cried Alfred Latimer, with a sneer. "Methinks I shall require to be warned off by some better authority than Master Edmonds, formerly Lord Mallington's park-keeper; if you come to that, what business have you in this park yourself?"

"I have business enough, and authority enough for my purpose," replied Edmonds, taking his daughter's hand, and drawing her to him, "and that you will find, sir. I knew you to be bad enough long ago, but I did not think you were so base as to seek to ruin this poor girl."

The young gentleman gazed at him for an instant with a fierce look, and then turned his eyes to Lucy, who stood by her father, with her limbs shaking, and her face drowned in tears. That sight seemed to move him, and he said,—"I did not seek to ruin her. It is not true. I intended to marry her—ay, immediately."

"False! false!" cried Edmonds. "You told her you would marry her, I don't doubt, but when you had once got her in your power it would have been a different tale."

"No, it would not," replied Alfred Latimer; "I would have married her, and I will."

"No, that you shall not,' replied Edmonds, sternly. "You are no husband for my daughter, sir; keep in your own station—marry in your own station. So shall she, please God. I would a great deal rather see her the wife of an honest labourer than the wife of a dishonest gentleman. I don't mean to say you are so—that I know nothing about; but I do know that you would not make her happy, and so you should not have her, even if all your fine speeches were true. Come along, Lucy—come with me;" and, drawing her away, he turned his steps towards his own house.

At a quick pace Edmonds hurried on in silence. He noticed not, he did not seem to perceive that the trembling limbs of his daughter could hardly bear her on, and that he dragged her along with him, rather than supported her, as she hung upon his arm. But when they came to a little clump of trees behind the garden at the back of the house,

he suddenly stopped, and turning to Lucy, he said, "I will not tell your mother, my child, for it would make her wretched."

"Oh, father! I did not intend to do any wrong," replied Lucy Edmonds, with the tears streaming down her face; "I would not have gone with him. Indeed, I would not."

"I know it Lucy, love," replied her father, throwing his arms round her, and pressing her to his breast. "I heard a good deal as I came up the walk, Lucy, and I know that though you have been a silly girl to listen to him at all, yet it was not in your heart to do any wrong—the more base he for wishing to make you. But there is one thing, Lucy," he continued, "you must promise me upon your word,—you must promise me never willingly to see or speak with this young man any more."

"Oh, father!" replied Lucy Edmonds, "he loves me—indeed, indeed he does. And I—I——"

"You think you love him," answered her father; "perhaps you really do, and if so I am very sorry for it, Lucy, for his marriage with you is not even to be thought of. I would not give you to him, my girl, if he were the richest and the highest man in the land."

"But perhaps you may change, father," said Lucy—"perhaps he may change."

"When he does, I may, and then I will tell you," answered Edmonds; "but in the meantime I must have your promise,—Lucy, you would not surely disobey me?"

"Oh no, father, no," replied Lucy Edmonds; "I will do as you bid me in all things, and I promise you that I will not see or speak with him without your knowledge and consent—but yet I am sure he loves me."

Edmonds shook his head with a sad and painful smile. "So thinks every woman," replied he, "of the man that ruins her. If she does not, she is worse than he is. But come, my child, keep your promise, and that promise will keep you safe. Wipe your eyes, or go and walk in the garden for a while. Your mother has had one sad fright this morning, and there is no need she should have too many at once, Lucy."

"Oh! what has happened?" cried Lucy, drying her own tears, and looking eagerly in her father's face.

"Why, your brother fell into the river, and would have been drowned if Mr. Morton, the gentleman who came up to the cottage the other day, had not plunged in and got him out," replied Edmonds; and then added in a somewhat bitter tone, "Ay, he is a gentleman, indeed; but this young fellow——"

He did not finish the sentence, but Lucy Edmonds cast down her eyes, with a cheek glowing like fire. It was her own heart accused her, and she asked herself, "Have I been listening to tales of love, without my parents' knowledge, from the lips of one whom they disapprove, while sorrow and care have come so near their dwelling?" and as she thus thought she raised her eyes to her father's face again, saying aloud,—"I will go to my mother at once. I am very sorry that I was wrong, and I will tell her, too, all that has happened, but not now, father. I will tell her to-night or to-morrow. Indeed, it will be better, for then she can always tell me what I ought to do."

"That's a good girl," replied her father; "act this way always, Lucy, and you will be in no danger. To-day you have been in more than you know of;" and, taking her hand, he led her on to the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

For at least five minutes after the park-keeper and his daughter had left him, Alfred Latimer remained standing in the grove, giving way to the vehemence of his passion, muttering vain curses, and rash and angry threats, against the man who had interfered only to save his own child. "I will have her," he said at length; "I will have her in spite of him; and I will have revenge, too—curse me, if I won't;" and stamping on the ground, and shaking his fist, he walked slowly away towards the lodge. His eyes were bent down, and, in bitter meditation, he saw little or nothing that passed around him. When he reached the gates, he opened them, and went out without noticing that two men were standing at the corner of the park wall; and, unfastening his horse, he had got his foot in the stirrup when one of the two watchers ran forward and laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying, "Alfred Latimer, Esquire, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young gentleman, turning first red and then pale. "Who the devil are you?"

"Only an officer of the sheriff of Middlesex, sir," replied the man, "with a writ against you, backed by the sheriff of the county, for a trifle you owe to Mr. Jones, of Piccadilly. Don't doubt but your mother will soon settle the matter."

Alfred Latimer gazed at him with a look of hesitation for a moment, but gradually his face assumed a more determined and a fiercer aspect, and he replied, "No; I will not beg of my own mother. I'd rather go to gaol."

"Oh, sir, I've got nice apartments; quite at your service, sir," replied the officer. "Airy situation, sir, looking upon the river. Do you travel by coach, sir, or would you like to have a shay?"

"I travel on horseback," cried Alfred Latimer, springing into the saddle, and striking his horse with the spurs. The bailiff made a snatch at the rein, but missed it, and the horse dashed on, hitting him on the shoulder with its chest, and knocking him back upon the road.

"Stop him! stop him!" shouted the officer to his follower; but long ere the other man came up, the young gentleman was far upon the road.

"I shall be followed," thought the young man, who, unaccustomed to such proceedings, saw in imagination the sheriff's officers pursuing him, like a hunted hare, with a whole troop of mounted constables to back them. "I shall be followed! I will take to Wenlock Wood. Then let them catch me if they can." Thus thinking, he spurred forward, till passing the cottage of Blackmore, the gardener, and the mill beyond, he came to the end of the park wall on that side, and turned up a narrow sandy path, which ran over the hill between Mallington Park and some corn-fields. It soon led into a green lane, and along this he spurred at a rapid pace, till the banks opened out, and gave him egress upon a wild and desolate looking common, with a thick wood about half a mile to the right.

At the mouth of the lane, Alfred Latimer pulled up his horse for a moment and listened; but he still thought he heard the sound of horses' feet, and spurring on again across the common—often obliged to turn to avoid this great mass of bushes, or that rock or large clump of trees—he reached the edge of Wenlock Wood. He had soon passed the outer belt of planting, where the trees were younger but closer together, and reached a wilder part of the wood, where tall immemorial oaks, with young saplings scattered between, rose far apart from each other, some still green and flourishing, some in various states of decay. The ground from which they sprung was rugged and uneven, in some places covered with high fern, in some rounded with masses of thick brushwood. Here appeared a deep pit, with the little shining pond in the bottom; here rose a tall rock or a high bank, bearing ashes and beeches on the top; and ever and anon a piece of green sward appeared in the midst, affording free footing for the horse. To look upon it, it seemed at first sight an inextricable maze, through which no chance traveller could find his way, but to the eyes of Alfred Latimer the whole scene was familiar, for thither had he often resorted from the days of his boyhood, exploring its recesses with dog and gun.

Cutting as straight across as the various obstacles would permit towards the highest bank which the scene displayed, he skirted it along to a spot where a number of old oaks had congregated themselves under the bank, concealing its rugged face from the view. The trees above stretched forth their branches to those below, and several clumps of a younger growth stood forward before the rest, making the mass appear one close and impenetrable thicket; for though the wood sometimes came forward in bold prominence, sometimes retreated, leaving a deep glen or glade between the two nearest points, yet still at the bottom appeared a thick woody screen hiding the crag. To Alfred Latimer, however, the place was, as I have said, familiar, and he rode along for about a third of a mile without pause or examination.

In the end, he drew his rein just at the mouth or entrance of one of the glades I have mentioned, gazing round on every side. Then, dismounting, he took the beast's bridle on his arm, and led him down amongst the trees, apparently at the very closest and thickest part; but just at the end a little path was to be discovered on the right, so small that the entrance was not easily discernible amongst the tangled brambles and thorns, which in that place rose high up the bolls of the trees. Alfred Latimer, however, knew the precise spot, by an old holly which stood forward, as if to protect and conceal the mouth of the path; and, leading his horse round, he pulled him unwillingly into the little road. The path soon led to a more open space behind the screen of oaks; and the young gentleman proceeded between the trees and the high craggy bank till he reached the mouth of a deep cavern—whether the work of nature or of art, who can now say? Many such are to be found in various parts of England, some well known to the geologist and the wanderer in search of the picturesque; others unrecorded by tourist and traveller, and only familiar to the midnight assassin of game, and the still more free speculator in the property of others.

Without fear or hesitation, however, Alfred Latimer led his horse in, who fancying it, apparently, a newly-invented kind of stable, followed very willingly under the rocky arch; and still holding the

bridle over his arm, the young gentleman seated himself upon a large stone, saying aloud, with a laugh, "Now let them catch me if they can, the scoundrels."

As he said so he thought he heard a rustle in the further part of the cavern, and turning round, he gazed into the depth with some trepidation. He knew that it was of considerable extent, for he had explored it more than once, and, what with a turn, about thirty feet from the mouth, it might run into the cliff some fifty or sixty yards. But the darkness of the interior was so profound at that time of day that he could see nothing. The next instant, however, a voice from within exclaimed,—"You seem mightily put out, Master Latimer. What is the matter?"

The voice was followed by the sound of steps, but it was not till the person who had spoken had come forward, that Alfred Latimer could see anything through the darkness. He then perceived advancing towards him a short square figure, which gradually assumed the appearance of a man dressed in a sailor's jacket and trousers, with a striped shirt, and no waistcoat. A black handkerchief was twisted lightly round the neck, and the bushy dark whiskers extending under the chin, and almost covering the throat, at first gave him the appearance of having another handkerchief bound round his jaws. His head was covered with strong curling dark hair, and his face was bronzed with exposure to sun and wind.

At first the young gentleman did not recognise the personage who seemed so familiar with his own name; but, after a moment's consideration, he exclaimed,—"Ah! is that you, Jack Williams? Why, it is so long since you have been here, and the place is so dark, I did not know you. You have not shown yourself since that night when we shot the pheasants in the park, and were obliged to run for it."

"That would not have made me run far," answered Williams; "but I had other matters on hand, Mister Latimer. What's in the wind now, sir, that you are hiding here? Tell me if you like—don't tell me if you don't like. Only if you want help, here's your man."

"Why, I have had a quarrel with my good mother, Jack," replied Alfred Latimer. "She keeps me shorter of money than ever; and I have determined to leave her, and seek my fortune where I can."

"I hope you have brought some stock in trade with you," answered the other; "for fortune can't be bought and sold without fortune, as I have found out long ago."

"No, indeed," answered the young gentleman, who was restrained by certain doubts as to his old acquaintance's habits, from acknowledging that he had money about him. "I have got nothing but a few shillings and my horse; but that I intend to sell as soon as I can."

"Ah—well—you are not up to things yet, I see," replied Williams. "I would not have come out of such a house as that, if I had been you, without bringing away enough to live for a year or two, at least. But what are you hiding for?—are you afraid she will send after you?"

"Oh, no," said Latimer, who saw that the tale of his adventure with the bailiffs would confirm the representation he had made of the state of his purse. "She would not even give me enough to keep me out of prison, and just as I was at the park gates a fellow came up, and

tapped me on the shoulder. But I jumped on my horse and rode over him."

"Well done! well done!" cried Williams, slapping him on the shoulder; "on my life, you will turn out a capital fellow. Just at the park gates, eh? I suppose you had been up to bid good-by to the pretty little girl there. Why the devil did you not bring her with you? A man is always the better for having a woman with him; but I suppose it was want of money, Master Alfred. If that's the case, speak out. You were kind to me once, and one good turn deserves another. So, as I've got a little prize-money here, if a ten pound note will help you, it's quite at your service, sir; and we can send a message to pretty Lucy to join you where you like."

"No, no, Williams—you are a good fellow;" and he grasped his hand; "but I will not take your little money from you, I will sell my horse, which is worth fifty pounds anywhere, and I think I can get some more from a friend. But it was not want of money stopped Lucy and me. It was that—as the devil would have it—up came her father just as we were talking about it; and he found out all, and took her away. He has made her promise, I dare say by this time, not to go."

"Such promises are soon broken," answered Jack Williams, with a laugh.

"Ay, so they are," said Alfred Latimer; "but I have a scheme in my head, if I can get some good fellows who don't stand upon trifles to help me. When I have got together a little money so as to be sure that she and I will have enough to go where we like, I will tell you more of it.—But how did you know anything of this affair? I thought I had kept it very close."

"Ay, ay," rejoined Williams, smiling, "but I have been hereabouts for a fortnight; and there have been more eyes in Mallington Park than Edmonds thinks of. But what is your plan, sir? I am no bad hand at scheming, and you are a young one."

"Why, I have not yet quite made up my mind," replied Alfred Latimer; "Lucy is willing enough to go, and would have been far away with me by this time if her father had not come up; but now he will preach to her, and forbid her to see me any more, though I offered him to marry her at once."

"Why, the man must be a fool!" exclaimed Williams in great surprise.

"Ay—but he threw in my teeth that I was fonder of bold, wild fellows," answered the young gentleman, "than of a set of puling coxcombs, such as one meets in society, and a great deal more of such cant. Now, I dare say Lucy will be watched and looked after, and persuaded not to come out to see me."

"Oh! we will soon manage that, sir," said Jack Williams, "if he won't let her come, why, I would go and take her. If you mean to marry her, the fool of a father should be forced to what is good for her and him too."

"Hark!" said Latimer, in a low voice. "There are steps coming near!"

"I dare say," answered the other, "it is Bill Maltby; I expect him soon, and if it be any one else, I will break his head. But you get

further back into the shade — you can take your horse into the turning."

"I know, I know," answered Alfred Latimer; and retreating towards the back of the cavern, he stopped where he judged that neither he nor his horse could be seen.

There, for the first time, a question suggested itself somewhat difficult to solve, but not very pleasant to leave in doubt. What was Jack Williams's motive for lying concealed in Wenlock Wood? He had been in former days anything but famous either for good conduct, or timidity in the commission of evil. One of the most notorious poachers in the country, though the son of a respectable farmer, he had filled the whole neighbourhood with his exploits, and had only escaped punishment by mingled boldness and skill. Once, indeed, he had been detected in the act, and taken, after desperate resistance; but he was at that time a mere lad, and his father's entreaties to the owner of the game had saved the son from the consequences of his offence, though only on the condition that he should be sent to sea. To sea he accordingly went, and returned, after a short time, with his moral health, at least, not at all improved by his marine excursion. All these things, and many more not very creditable to his friend, Alfred Latimer remembered; but he had no time to carry his speculation far before the steps he had heard sounded close to the cave, and another figure darkened the mouth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As Alfred Latimer stood in the shadow of the cave, he could see without being seen; and he very soon perceived that the visitor was no other than his dissolute companion Bill Maltby. An unusual degree of eagerness appeared in Maltby's manner as he first met Williams, but their voices soon dropped almost to a whisper. Knowing both parties well, Latimer did not think it necessary to use much ceremony in joining them, and with the foot of his horse announcing his approach, he advanced to the spot where they were standing; catching a few words which Williams uttered in a louder tone.

"No, no," the man said, "he is not up to that yet. He will be one day, when he learns a little better."

By this time the young gentleman was close to them; and Williams turning round, as if he had previously forgotten his proximity, and had been talking of some one else, proceeded, "Ah, Mr. Latimer!— You see I have got a companion, Bill. But I think he is frightened about nothing;" and he proceeded to relate to the other the story of Alfred Latimer's adventure with the bailiffs.

"Pooh!" said Maltby; "I saw the two fellows drinking at the Bagpipes, and waiting for the coach to return to London. You can go back quite well now, if you like, Latimer, for the old Blue always passes at eleven, and it is well nigh one now."

"He is not going back at all just yet," answered Williams, speaking for his young companion; "but you can go on in safety, if you like, sir; for you hear what Bill says."

"I am sure they followed me part of the way," said Latimer; "and I saw some people riding on the common."

Bill Maltby laughed. "So did I," he said. "I saw Squire Middleton, and his two sons, and the keeper, on their ponies. But I saw the two fellows who came down last night drinking a glass of brandy and water in the coffee-room of the Bagpipes, and one of them told me they were waiting for the coach. So you can go now quite well, Mr. Latimer; there's no risk in the world."

It needed no great penetration on the part of Alfred Latimer to see that his two companions wished to get rid of him; a very unpleasant perception it is, which is almost sure to touch upon some tender point: but vanity does not always resent the injury in the same manner.

Nevertheless, several motives induced him to beat his retreat; they were two to one, and not persons to be lightly quarrelled with: he proposed also to employ them afterwards, and it was not worth while to have any disagreement with them then: the town, too, towards which his steps were bent was at a considerable distance, and he wished to reach London as early as possible on the following day. Deciding upon his course, then, he led his horse out of the cave, and walked on, with the bridle over his arm, between the old trees and the high cliffy bank. The man Williams accompanied him, giving Bill Maltby a sign to stay behind; and when they had got a sufficient distance to be out of earshot, he said, in a civil and kindly tone, "Well, Mr. Latimer, when you have settled your business, and like to go on with that little affair of pretty Lucy Edmonds, you have nothing to do but to come and let me know. I did not speak of it before Bill Maltby there, for there's no use in telling him anything about it now; but you see, as it's very likely that I shan't be just where I am now when you come back, you must ask Bill where I am, for he'll know."

Thus saying he held out his hand, and without any consideration of all with which that hand might be stained, and probably the spots upon it were not few, Alfred Latimer took it, receiving the contagion of a foul mental disease, mortal to the better life of the heart.

He then rode on upon his way, and Jack Williams returned to his companion in the cave, whose first question was, "What have you done the young cove out of, Jack?"

"I have done him out of nothing, Bill," he said; "first, because I did not want, and next, because he has devilish little to be done out of."

"Why didn't you want?" asked Bill Maltby; "he had money enough last night, and it's no bad joke to clean out such a gull as that."

"He's not such a gull as you think," answered Williams. "There's a good deal of determined devil in him, I can tell you, as you'll find out one day. Then, as to money, he said he had got very little. But if he had had the Mint in his breeches pocket I wouldn't have put my hand in; first, because he's always been civil and kind to me, and, next, because he's one of us in some sort already, and will be more so before long."

"Ay, ay, so you think," said Bill Maltby; "but you'll find yourself twisted there. His mother will give him money enough when

she finds he's resolute with her, and then he'll see us all at the devil."

Williams looked at him with a grim smile. "You are mistaken, Bill," he said. "There are some roads on which, if you take but two or three steps, you never can go back again, do what you will, and ours is one. This lad has already got his feet upon it, and there's no going back for him.—But let us talk about this other job. When did you say the fellow would pass by?"

"Why, I told him to meet me over at Sturton at three," answered his companion, "and that I would get him a good sale for his stuff; so he'll pass here about two. Now you see, Jack, we must settle what's to be done; for I suppose you won't like to finish him exactly?"

"No," said Williams, thoughtfully; "no, not unless he shows fight. Then, when one's blood is up, no one can tell what may happen. But what of that? I don't see what difference that makes. The law says it's all the same whether you relieve a fellow of the superfluous and let him go, or cut his pipe, and stop his whistling. One's hanged for it all the same, if one's found out."

"Ay, but I'll tell you what difference it makes in this matter," said Bill Maltby. "You see, if you intended to do the thing out and out, I must stay with you, and lend a hand; but if you do not, I had better go on to Sturton, and speak to the fellows there about taking some of his stuff. Then I can meet him, and be quite civil to him."

"Ay, ay, Bill, take care of yourself," replied Jack Williams. "There —don't look cross at me— I think you are quite right. There is no use of putting two heads into a noose, when one will do. What has he got about him?"

"A cool hundred, I should think," replied Billy Maltby; "I saw him flash a five pound note of the Huntingdon bank; so I just gave him a hint, as a friend, that he had better get them changed, for that there was a talk of that money-shop going. He answered, he had sold for a hundred at Huntingdon and Kimbolton three or four days ago, and then he had heard nothing against the bank. He thanked me, however, for my advice; and said, he would get all he had changed before he went further."

"He seems to be no fool, then," said Williams, in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes, he is—and no, he is not," answered Billy Maltby. "He seems quite a ninny in some things, and shrewd enough in others."

"A sort of man to remember the cut of one's jib well—eh?" asked Jack Williams; "and to swear to it stoutly afterwards, I dare say?"

Maltby nodded his head, and his companion mused for several minutes. His next words showed upon what his thoughts had turned; for at length he said abruptly, "No, I won't do for him! It's not come to that yet, Bill: but I'll take care he sha'n't see me. You go on to Sturton, and leave the rest to me.—You are quite sure of the way he will come?"

"Quite; unless the devil puts his foot in it," answered Bill Maltbye "for I told him of the red post, and of the three roads, and that if he went either to the right or to the left he would lose himself. So h

said he would take care; that he was fond of a country walk, but did not want to be one of the babes in the wood."

The scoundrel laughed gaily at his own conceit; some further conversation took place, and at length the younger man took his departure for the little town, humming a slang song, as carelessly as if the dark weight of crime rested not on his heart—no thought of punishment here or hereafter troubled the enjoyment of the hour.

His companion displayed a different aspect; for, going a little further into the cave, he seated himself, crossed his long sinewy arms upon his broad chest, and with his eyes bent upon the ground, and his brow gathered into a frown, remained in gloomy thought for the next half hour.

At length, rising quietly, he said, "It is time to be jogging, the fellow can't be long first;" and going into the recesses of the cave he put a brace of pistols into his pocket, a powder flask, a small bar of iron like a marlin spike, and wrapped up a pair of thick boots in a bundle with some clothes. Then taking a heavy stick formed of a sapling oak, with the rounded root at the end, he thrust it through the tie of the handkerchief, which contained his goods and chattels, laid it on his shoulder, and walked out of the cave.

With a slow step, and looking round him on every side, he advanced, forcing his way through the trees, till he reached the side of a small path, which ran from Mallington to Sturton.

He lay and listened for the coming foot-falls, and moodily he pondere over the past and the present. Yet he thought not to forbear. Why should he forbear? he asked himself. His lot was drawn, his fate sealed, his road chosen. There was no returning. Nevertheless, when a thrush sitting on the tree above his head began to pour forth its afternoon song, there was something in the sound that seemed to touch him. It was like the voice of an angel in pity calling to him to forbear; and, whatever were his thoughts, he murmured, "I will not hit him hard."

A footstep was coming near; and rising up he looked through the branches upon the path. There was a gaily-dressed man—he whom we have described as coming upon Morton and Louisa Charlton as they sat by the stream—walking slowly forward with a sauntering and self-conceited air.

Williams grasped the thick stick he had brought with him, the bundle had been cast down long before. He set his teeth, compressed his lips, and hardly breathed. His heart beat, though he would have stilled its beatings; his temples throbbed, though in moments of greater danger his bosom had been calm, his brain cool. It was not fear, it was not doubt that was upon him—it was the troubled expectation of crime.

—Two or three more steps, and the wayfarer was close to him; he passed the tall tree and the low bushes, and then a thundering blow upon the head dashed down his hat upon his brow, and laid him on the ground. The bludgeon was raised again to strike him as he lay, but he was silent and motionless—so still that his very tranquillity seemed to plead for mercy.

"I hit him harder than I intended," said his assailant, running round the bushes, and gazing upon his victim. Then, bending down his

head, he listened. "He breathes! He is but stunned;" and quickly putting his hands into the traveller's pockets, he drew out a heavy purse crammed well nigh full of gold; there was a pocket-book also, with some bank-notes in it, but that he threw down again, and, satisfied with his prize, gazed round him for a moment.

Then darting back behind the bushes, he snatched up his bundle; but before he went, returned to take another look at what he had done. He bent down his head again, but now he could hear no breath; and with a quick step he hurried away up the path for a couple of hundred yards then turned into the wood again, and, pursuing a circuitous course, came out upon the common at the back of Mallington Park, some two miles from the scene of his crime, and quite on the other side. At this time, indeed, it appeared as if he were rather going to, than coming from, the spot where the deed had been committed; but there was close by a small country road leading down, under the park wall, to Mallington, and scarcely had his feet entered upon it when he beheld two labouring men walking on before him.

His first impulse was to quit it again, but a second thought made him quicken his pace and come up with them. He knew neither, but one gave him good-day as he went, and entering into conversation, he proceeded in their company till they reached the bank of the river. There the course of his two companions led them to the right, while his went to the left, for he had already told them that he was going to Mallington, and, leaving them, he walked stoutly on till they were out of sight; then seating himself on the bank, he took off his shoes and stockings and washed his feet in the river, looked round to ensure that he was not observed, and taking the thick boots out of his bundle, put a stone in each of the light sailor's pumps, and cast them into the water.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE man lay quite still, with his head partly turned on one side, and his hat beaten down till it reached his eyebrows. The back of the hat, indeed, was quite knocked in, for there the blow had fallen. His eyes were closed, too, when his assailant walked away, and his hand remained extended, with a little memorandum-book fallen from it on the grass. But as soon as the retreating footsteps become somewhat faint, the eyelids were slightly raised, then fully lifted, and he gazed down the path which the robber had taken. Williams was still in sight, but was lost the moment after behind the trees; and the traveller lifted his head and listened. Then raising himself slowly on his arm, he sat up, and put his hand to his brow, pushing off his hat. A stream of blood from the back of his head, where one of the knotted points of the stick had cut the skin, followed and trickled down his neck, while his eyes rolled somewhat dizzily, and he leaned his cheek upon his hand. He uttered not a word, however, for several minutes, but once or twice put his left hand up to the spot where he had received the blow. He then rose, but he soon sat down again, with a faint look; and, after a little, crawling to the spot where his pocket-book lay, he took it up, and looked over the contents. None of the notes

had been taken, and he murmured,—"Thank God, it is no worse! He has got all the guineas, though—the villain!—but I must get back home somehow, and have my head looked to. It's a bad knock, but I think the skull is safe. I wish I could have got a good look at him. It was not that young fellow, Maltby, as he called himself—that's clear enough. I wonder if I can walk now;" and, rising once more, he kept his feet better, and looked about him.

Gradually, as he recovered from the first effects of the blow, and his ideas became more clear and collected, he began to feel a stronger desire to punish his assailant, and to think of the means of doing so. Though a fop of the lower school, and as vain as a nightingale, Mr. Tobias Gibbs was by no means a coward; and if Williams had met him face to face, although the latter was by far the stronger man of the two, a severe contest would certainly have taken place ere Mr. Gibbs parted with the money of his employers; for that respectable gentleman was the country traveller for a large and wealthy wholesale perfumery house in London. Nevertheless, as he knew not by whom he had been attacked, nor how many confederates might be near, he hesitated a little as to his proceedings, and was deliberating upon the next step, when an approaching footfall, and the sound of a light air of the day whistled clear and merrily, made him turn round and look the other way. A moment after a man, whom he had seen the evening before at Mallington selling fruit, appeared through the trees, walking quietly homeward.

"Stay a moment, my good fellow," said the traveller, feeling himself re-assured by his aspect; "I wish you would help me a little, or at least let me walk home to Mallington with you, for I have been knocked down."

"Lawk-a-mercy, sir so you have!" cried the man, looknig at his head: "why, who the deuce did you find to quarrel with in Wenlock Wood?"

"Nobody!" replied Mr. Tobias Gibbs. "Nor did any one quarrel with me."

"They must ha' been poachers, then?" said the peasant.

Mr. Gibbs contented himself with replying, "Worse, my good friend, a great deal worse; for he has first broken my head, and then taken my purse."

"What sort of a fellow was he?" asked his new friend. "I know most all the people about these parts."

"I can hardly tell," answered Mr. Gibbs; "for I only got sight of him just as he was going through the trees yonder, and then only saw his head and shoulders. He seemed a tall stout man, though."

"Well, the best thing for you, master," said the peasant, "is to take hold of my arm, and toddle back to Mallington, to have your head looked to. It's a bad knock as ever I see."

"Oh that is nothing," answered Mr. Tobias Gibbs. "A few dressings of Grimsditch's famous vulnerary salve will set that to rights in two days."

CHAPTER XX.

In a small house upon the Kentish side of the river Thames, to which dwelling you entered by a door between an old iron-shop and a rag-warehouse, there was a front room, with bars over the windows. The passage by which the foot of the stairs was reached was long and narrow; and, besides the outer door, was an inner sort of wicket, which was kept always locked. A step or two further in than the wicket was the door of a small room on the left hand side, usually containing a turn-up bedstead—an old man, shaved once a fortnight—a young woman, washed not much oftener—and three small children, who generally went without ablution. All the accessories were sallow, the passage was of no colour but that of dirt, and the fragments of a piece of oilcloth which had once carpeted it only served to make the visitor stumble.

The chamber was only tenanted by two persons; the one occupying a chair, with his arm leaning upon the mahogany, and his whole figure cast back in a sort of reckless daring attitude, as if he felt himself perfectly at ease where he was. The expression of the other's features was very different; it was anxious, thoughtful, annoyed, and yet displaying an effort to cast off the load of care. He leaned back on the sofa, with his head somewhat bent forward, his brow slightly contracted, and his eyes looking at the face of his companion from under the drooping lids with a steady and thoughtful glance.

The other was short—very short—but remarkably broad set; his brow was high and wide, but the back of the head, though somewhat concealed by a quantity of thin light hair, that floated in graceful waves all over it, was as round as a ball, somewhat protuberant above and behind the ears, and large where the base was joined by the thick neck. His complexion was pale, as if with that sort of sickness which proceeds from intemperance of some kind, blanching the cheek and hollowing the eye without diminishing the corporeal powers, at least in its earliest stages.

Between the two stood a bowl of strong brandy punch, to which each helped himself from time to time, without filling the glass full, or drinking it off hastily; but sipping the contents quietly and leisurely, while they conversed. It was evident that they had not met to drink, but drank merely because they had met.

The one tenant of the spunging-house—he who sat upon the sofa—the reader need hardly be told was Alfred Latimer; and the other, who sat near him, was a prisoner whom he had found there when the clear-sighted officials of the sheriff pounced upon him and bore him off, and to whose conversation he had been indebted for several cheerful hours, which might otherwise have been passed drearily enough. But he was indebted to him for nothing else; for, sad to say, the conversation of the debtor's prison, call it by what name you will—Fleet, King's Bench, Whitecross-street, or spunging-house—is full of nought but contamination and evil. Dark and sad is that companionship found there; and during the ten days that Alfred Latimer had spent within those walls, one after another, as they had come and gone, the passing

tenants of the prison had each taught him some lesson of fraud—had each habituated his thoughts to the contemplation of some new vice. But the man who was now beside him had been his constant monitor, had first made him acquainted with the ways of the place, and had afterwards informed him of a thousand horrible antecedents, which are constantly befalling the men who end in the prison at last. He himself was an epitome of all the faults, follies, and vices—nay, I would say crimes—which can be committed in society without actual punishment; and he had arrived at that state where evil "becomes man's good," and he boasts of the wickedness he has done. The younger brother of a man of station and wealth, he had set out in life in an honourable profession, with powerful friends, and sufficient fortune, but the latter had been soon spent, and the former soon alienated. One vice followed another, and with a combination of headstrong violence and shrewd cunning, he had avenged himself upon the connexions who had abandoned him, both by using their names to procure the means of his own gratification, and by rendering their relationship with him a disgrace to themselves. Through many a long afternoon he had amused his young companion with tales of what he had done in former years; of the duels he had fought, and the honest men he had slain to shield himself from the consequences of other deeds; ay, and of the tricks and devices he had used to make the shot take effect, and to anticipate the fire of his adversary. It was all true, too true, and yet he boasted of it! Then he spoke of those whom he had swindled, and of all the cunning arts he had used to cheat and rob without calling on his head the arm of the law; and many a wild adventure and narrow escape was told between, which, seasoned with wit and eloquence, for he possessed both, and gilt with jest and sophistry, for he spared neither, were full of interest to his hearer.

The effect upon the mind of Alfred Latimer was what might be expected. It was not to incline him to follow exactly the same course—for the difference between the two characters marked out a separate path for each; but it was to sweep away every vestige of principle. He went into that foul place, reckless, vehement, full of fiery passions and dangerous weaknesses, but with some hesitations and some doubts. In ten days his doubts and hesitations were gone; virtue was his scorn, honour was a name, and pleasure of one kind or another was the only good.

He had been telling his companion his circumstances and situation: and, oh! how merrily the other laughed to hear that he had suffered himself to be refused money by a wealthy mother.

"Why, what would you have done?" demanded Alfred Latimer, somewhat ashamed of his ignorance in the eyes of his companion.

"Done?" exclaimed Captain Tankerville. "There were twenty things to be done. Just write a cheque in her name for the money she ought to have given you; or, if you did not like that, supply yourself from the plate chest. We should always make our relations do what they ought to do—it is a duty we owe them. Or, if you did not like to do that, why not come up to town, and order three or four thousand pounds' worth of things in her name—have them sent home to your lodging, and transfer them to a fence or a pawnbroker? I could tell you a dozen ways of making fathers and mothers, and brothers

and uncles, perform the duties of relationship!" and again he laughed merrily.

While it was still ringing upon his lip the door opened, and the master of the house put in his head, saying,—"*Mr. Latimer here is a gentleman wishes to see you;" and, looking towards the door* the young man beheld Mr. Morton coming forward from the top of the stairs.

CHAPTER XXI.

MORTON looked round with an expresion of countenance not altogether easy to describe. There was pain in it and surprise; but as his eyes rather wandered round the miserable room he was entering, than turned with any feeling of commiseration towards its tenants, it was easy to perceive that his feelings were more general than particular: and, in truth, he was at that moment asking himself—"Does the law of England really and truly consign unhappy wretches who have contracted debts, which—often by the result of accident or misfortune—they cannot pay, to such an abode as this, to be preyed upon by a set of harpies who wring from them all that they have left? The old punishment—if ever there was such a one—of throwing a man into a pit full of serpents was better than this."

Whatever were his reflections, Alfred Latimer started up to receive him with a very different air and manner from those which he usually bore.

"Ah. Morton," he said, "this is very kind of you, to come to see me: for I suppose you are not grabbed yourself; and so that must be your motive."

"That alone," replied the young gentleman. "I wish to have a few minutes' conversation with you, however, when you are at leisure."

"Oh! by-and-by will do," said Mr. Latimer; "come, sit down and take some punch."

"No, I thank you," answered Morton; "I never drink punch. But, by your good leave, I should be glad to speak with you soon, as my time is very short."

"Well, you can speak now," replied Alfred Latimer. "This is only my friend, Captain Tankerville.—Captain Tankerville, my friend, Mr. Morton."

Captain Tankerville rose and bowed with a cold air; for it is wonderful how soon men, much accustomed to the world, contrive to separate the classes of mankind one from the other,—the wheat from the chaff,—and appropriate to themselves that which may serve their purposes, and none other. In an instant Captain Tankerville perceived that Morton was a man neither to be gulled nor to be led—neither to be his dupe nor his companion. It was not worth while either to be civil or to be rude, however; and, after having received a slight inclination of the head in return for his bow, Alfred's fellow-captive sat down again, resolved not to quit the field without necessity.

Morton cut the matter very short, saying, "What I have to communicate, Latimer, must be in private; for it refers not only to your own affairs, which you might not care about entering upon before that

gentleman, but to those of others, who might not judge such a course expedient. Can we not go into another room?"

"No, no," said Captain Tankerville, rising at this strong hint. "If I am in the way I will beat my retreat. Good-evening for the present, Latimer;" and he walked towards the door. The young gentleman accompanied him so far, saying something about his conference not being long, and then returned to Morton.

"Well, what news from Mallington, Morton?" asked he, ladling himself out a little of the punch that remained. "I suppose my good mother has heard of this affair, though I did not tell her. I'd have died upon prison-allowance rather than have written one word to her."

"There you are very wrong," replied Morton, in a grave tone. "Whatever may be Mrs. Charlton's faults, want of affection for you is not amongst them; and it is at her request that I came to town last night."

"But has she sent the money?" demanded her excellent son. "What the devil is the use of sending you, unless she has sent the money."

"That she could not," replied Morton, feeling his cheek begin to get a little warm at the perfect heartlessness which the youth displayed. "Mrs. Charlton, in her tenderness for you, and in the distress of mind which your situation occasioned, was induced to lay before me the state of her affairs in a manner which has proved to me, and would prove to you, the utter impossibility of her paying your debts. She has not the money! She has only her jointure, and—nay, do not interrupt me till I have done—and that I am sorry to say has been encumbered very considerably in consequence of her having kept up since Mr. Charlton's death the same establishment which existed during his life. Your debts, it seems, amount to nearly a thousand pounds, and it would require the sacrifice of several years' income for her to pay those and her own also."

Alfred Latimer leaned his head upon his hand, evidently not liking at all the idea of being left a prisoner for years. All his dreams of pleasure and adventure when he should have regained his liberty were put to flight; and after having remained for some moments in silence, he said, "Well, then, I suppose I must go into the Bench and get the rules."

Morton purposely made no reply; and the next instant his young companion looked up laughing, as if a new thought had struck him, exclaiming, "Morton, I have a better plan than that. You get your marriage over with Louisa as soon as possible, and then lend me the money out of her fortune."

"My marriage with Miss Charlton!" said Morton, gravely, and in a tone of surprise, for he had entertained no idea that Alfred Latimer had so completely settled the matter for him in his own mind. "My dear sir, you are speaking of a matter as determined which is very far from being so. Doubtless Miss Charlton is worthy of the affection of persons much higher in station and fortune than myself; but——"

"Pooh—pooh, nonsense, Morton," replied Latimer. "Do you suppose I have not got my eyes? You are in love with Louisa, and Louisa with you, and my mother has made up her mind that you shall

marry her; but," he added, *after thinking for a moment, "I should* not wonder if she made you pay for it. You know Louisa when she is of age can marry any one she likes, with my mother's consent: but if that consent be not given, and she does marry, the whole property goes to my respectable parent, and I don't know her if she does not make whoever does gain her consent come down pretty roundly."

This was a ray of light to Edmond Morton, which served to illuminate at once every dark point in Mrs. Charlton's conduct towards him. Art seldom veils itself so completely as to pass altogether undetected, unless the passions or foibles of those on whom it is practised lend it very vigorous aid. Such had not been the case with Morton, for though no man is without some touch of vanity, his was not of that degree or kind which could make him believe that Mrs. Charlton had been so completely fascinated with his good mien or high qualities as to make him her own frequent guest, and her step-daughter's constant companion, without some secret motive. Nevertheless, to set up her husband's child for sale to the best bidder was something almost too gross and shameless to be believed.

"Come, come, Morton," said his companion, after indulging him in a reverie for a few minutes, "whatever you may have expected with Lousia, it would be well worth your while to give my mother a good sum—ay, even as much as half her fortune—and the old lady cannot well ask more, I should think. You would then get four thousand a year at least, and a very beautiful girl into the bargain—ay, and the best girl in all the world too."

Morton listened to him to the end, and then replied, "I think, Latimer, you mistake your mother's views, and I am quite sure that you mistake me altogether. You will find that, whatever may be my feelings, I am not one to make a matter of merchandise of Miss Charlton's hand; that you may depend upon. But to return to other matters. There is an easier, a more honourable way of relieving you from the difficulties that press upon you, and of delivering you speedily from this place. I informed your mother that I thought I could arrange the matter, and during this morning I have ascertained the fact."

"Ay!" said his companion; "how is that?"

"The money can be borrowed," replied Morton, "on the property which is settled upon you. My solicitor has a client who will advance it."

"Ay, at ten per cent., I suppose," said the youth; "and eat up the whole income with interest."

"No, not so," answered Morton, "at four per cent. I would not meddle with any usurious transaction, and I have told him to have ready twelve hundred pounds, in case you like to take advantage of the proposal. Then, with all debts paid, you will have somewhat more than two hundred pounds to go on with, and I trust that with the somewhat severe warning you have received, you will see the necessity of limiting your expenses by your income."

"Whatever I do, you are a capital fellow, Morton," replied Alfred Latimer, "and have set the matter right for me a devil of a deal better than Tankerville would have done. He would have had me set these

creditors at defiance, take the rules, and live jollily upon what I have got."

"Perhaps he might wish to help you to spend it," observed Morton.

"Take care what you say of him!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, laughing; "he is a fire-eating fellow, and has shot several men upon lighter words than those."

"So I have heard," answered Morton, calmly; "but I am not very much afraid of such things, and gentlemen before they fight always take care that the persons whom they so honour are those who are justified in requiring it." His tone and look were perfectly composed, but proud—almost haughty; and Alfred Latimer was a good deal struck with an air which he had never before seen his companion assume. "Were it not so," continued Morton, "every blackleg and sharper would carry all questions at the pistol's muzzle. But what do you say to my suggestion? Does it meet your views?"

"Oh, of course it does," replied Latimer, "and the sooner I am out of this cursed place the better. I declare the room stinks of broken mahogany."

"Rum-punch and cigars," added Morton, with a faint smile. "However, you cannot quit it to-night. To-morrow we must get you bail; and then I will leave you to settle the rest with my solicitor, for I have business that calls me back to Mallington."

"What, have you not done sketching?" said Alfred Latimer, with a gay laugh; "but I shall join you there as soon as all is arranged, for I have some sketches to take, too, of objects as pretty, to my eyes at least."

Morton was silent, for the words of Alfred Latimer might have several senses; but he could hardly venture to take them in one honourable to the speaker. "God grant," he said at length, somewhat abruptly, "that some honourable attachment may bring and fix you there. It would be the very best thing for you. However, I will direct my solicitor to find you bail, and will be with you about twelve to take you to his office. So good-day to you, Latimer."

They shook hands, and Morton departed, leaving Alfred Latimer in a deep fit of thought. What was his mind revolving so earnestly? Did he feel grateful for the kindness he received? Was he touched by the interest taken in his fate? Was he busy with good resolutions for the future? Alas! no. His first question to himself was,—"Who the devil can this fellow be? He speaks as if he were the Prince of Wales. A poor painter!—pooh! I should not wonder if he were the son of some rich East Indian, who has smothered a Begum, and brought over her money chests. It is a capital country, that India."

CHAPTER XXII.

In a street not far from the inns of court, though not exactly within their solemn precincts—a little more airy and cheerful than those dark recesses of the law, but still smelling strong of red tape and blue bags—are numerous houses inhabited by solicitors, whose doors, like those of a place to which in some respects they bear a considerable resemblance (inasmuch as those who once get

into them have a difficulty in getting out again, and are pretty well tormented while they are in), stand ever open to receive the poor sinners whom fate or folly lead to enter. One of the best and cleanest houses in this street was number forty-three, but yet the passage by which one entered would have puzzled Œdipus if the Sphynx had asked when it was washed; and in the midst, just beyond a large door-mat, which appeared to have been placed there to prevent people from carrying any of the dirt away with them, there was—nay, there is, for it is impossible it can have been removed—a large black stain of ink, which must have been spilt nearly at the same time as the blood of David Rizzio on the floor of sad Holyrood, that store-house of tragedies. At about ten o'clock on the morning succeeding the day of Morton's visit to Alfred Latimer, a gentleman, mounted on a handsome bay horse, stopped at the door of number forty-three, and instantly a groom rode up to take his rein.

Dismounting slowly, he entered the passage, and walked on to a room at the end; and opening the said door he found himself in the presence of eight or nine clerks, shut up in boxes or pens. He was not the least abashed, however, and when the head common-law clerk advanced from the stall, with a sweet smile, the gentleman only inquired whether Mr. Quatterly had yet arrived?

The clerk assured him that Mr. Quatterly had been there for an hour: and, without more ado, Mr. Morton, for he it was, walked up the stairs, and opened a door on the first floor to the left. Within was another door covered with green baize, impervious to wind and sound, and it also opened under the young gentleman's hand, disclosing a comfortable room within, ornamented with a large table, covered over with innumerable packets of papers, all tied up and labelled; a large book-case, filled with books, in brown calf, all looking so like each other that they might have been taken for one family; and an elderly gentleman, besides sundry chairs and a lamp, the flame of which, like that on Vesta's altar, was kept ever burning by certain virgins, who lived in the penetralia of the temple. The elderly gentleman at the table, Mr. Quatterly, had passed his meridian by several years, being now fifty-eight, or fifty-nine. To see him sitting one would have said he was six feet high; to see him standing one soon perceived that he was not more than five feet seven. The upper part was large, round, and bulky; the lower part minute enough to make an almost ludicrous contrast with the rest. See how round, and smooth, and almost soft his face seems, with its rosy cheeks and its little nose. Gibbon himself, notwithstanding Madame da Deffand's terrible mistake, had never such a pair of cheeks as that; and then those merry little twinkling black eyes, with something both of high manly sagacity in them, and of childlike fun, how they peep out from under the thin eye-brows. You see he is as bald, too, as a haddock, except just over the ears, and in the fat back of his neck, where the grey hair flows away in a pig-tail. He is a stout man, too—rather too stout, inclined to be a little corpulent, yet active. Then his clothing is somewhat peculiar: a black coat powdered on the collar, a neckerchief as white as snow, a white waistcoat without a speck, though somewhat yellowish from London washing; but those drab knee-breeches, and those grey worsted stockings!—surely that is not in kee[illegible] Mr. Quatterly. But per-

haps he may consider his legs unworthy of their trunk, and treat them accordingly; or is it that from their littleness he regards them more tenderly, and wraps them in all that is warmest? That is probably the right solution of the enigma; and I declare the man has got a pair of silver buckles in his small shoes.

Such was the gentleman in whose presence Mr. Morton now appeared: and, when the latter entered the room, Mr. Quatterly was looking steadily at the shagreen case of a pair of spectacles which lay upon the table before him.

"Ah! good morning, sir; good morning," he said, as soon as he beheld Morton, at the same time rising and putting a chair for him, though, as he moved about with a light step, he seemed so top-heavy that it was hardly possible not to think every moment he would topple over. "Be seated, my dear sir, be seated. What news from his Majesty's country seat in Surrey? You saw your lost mutton, I suppose, last night. Pray, did you find him shorn to your hand? as, according to all rules—and those of the King's Bench especially—he ought to be, though the fleece of those who get in there one would think were hardly worth plucking."

"There are always persons quite ready, my dear sir," replied Morton, with a smile, "to gather up the gleanings which more legitimate husbandmen have let fall."

"A cut at the lawyers!" cried Mr. Quatterly, "that's unkind; that's unfair. 'Nemo repente fuit turpissimus.' It takes five years to make an attorney, hey? I know what you mean. But, pray do not call us all husbandmen. I have nothing of the husband in me, though I think I know some one who has;—ha! ha! ha!"

There was a merriment, a joviality in his laugh that was not to be resisted; and Morton joined in somewhat more quietly, adding, as soon as the cachinnation of the lawyer would allow of his being heard—"But, my good friend, have you got the deed prepared as far as possible? for I would fain have it settled at once."

"Settled!" said the solicitor; "he is thinking of the settlements already. How these young men's wits do get inflamed with matrimony as soon as the spark is blown into a blaze—that's not a pun, mind you—it's a fine light of imagination beautifully expressed; for though you may be a spark, and a gay spark too, yet you have not shown yourself easily fanned into the necessary state of combustion."

"But an answer—an answer, my dear sir," said Morton. "Is this deed ready, as far as may be? for I wish to carry the young man out of the temptations of London as soon as may be."

"Pooh! leave him alone, and he'll come home, and most likely bring a fat tail behind him," answered the lawyer, having recourse to one of his favourite illustrations. "The temptations of London! Did ever one hear a sane man talk of such things? I never found any temptation in London. All mine have been in the country. By the way, I hope you have thought of me this year. I must have a pop at the birds, and you, or your late father, have always provided me."

"Oh, yes!" replied Morton, "you shall have enough. Come down to me at Mallington, and I will give you enough to do."

"To draw the settlements, hey?" cried Mr. Quatterly, with a new

burst of laughter: "but from what I hear, you have already bagged the best of the game there before the season, you poacher. But I'll come, and if I leave you a single cock pheasant my name's not Quatterly. Can draw the settlements after dinner, fall asleep over them, send them up to Bell, get an opinion that nobody on earth can read, and leave a whole generation of lawsuits for the benefit of my clerks and their children. Must take care of the poor boys in the office, you know. But come, I see you are impatient. Now to business. What does the young fellow say? That is the first question. I have known young dogs so fond of that kennel, that nothing would get them out of it, and there is no use of drawing deeds unless one is sure they will be signed."

"But, my dear sir, I told you I was sure," replied Morton, in a tone of vexation; "he will sign it willingly—he was transported at the very idea."

"No, no, no—not transported yet!" cried Mr. Quatterly: "soon may be! for aught you or I know. He's on the high road, it would seem; and taking the high road is one step to transportation, if not to the gallows. He's in a spunging-house, I think you said. No fear of his not being well cleaned out, then, and fit for white-washing. Had he got any one with him?—a poor parson, who had spent too much in gin-and-water, and seven children, or anything of that sort; or a maiden lady of nine-and-thirty, who had been ruined by lawyers and sal volatile? Those are the sort of companions that make a man transported to get out."

"No, indeed," answered Morton; "he had with him one Captain Tankerville, a very dangerous person, I believe."

"Oh, the villain!" cried Mr. Quatterly; "if he's in, it is, indeed, high time to get the other out. If he carried in with him a single virtue, or a half-crown piece, that fellow will pick his pocket of it. But to set your mind at ease, I sat up last night for half an hour, and drew up a little memorandum, as good as a deed, which one of the clerks is just now writing out. It will be done before twelve, and you can pack him up in a hamper as soon as it is signed, and send him off to Mallington by the night coach, taking care to put him in head foremost, and write upon the other side, 'Keep this side up!' it is his only chance of having his brain turned right again."

"But, my good friend, we must contrive to get bail for him before I can bring him here," said Morton.

"Why, bail him yourself, or bring him in the sheriff's custody," said Mr. Quatterly. "My name will make them all compliance; but, I forgot—your mystery—your mystery!—and, methinks, you forgot too. If you come with him here, you will have your name shouted from clerk to clerk to split the welkin. That will never do. Let me see;" and turning to a book with two brass clasps, he read:—"Mr. Twistleton at eleven—Johnny Dunmow at three—Sir Arthur M'More at half-past. Well, I can go to him at half-past eleven, for Twistleton only wants to borrow fifteen thousand pounds on a mortgage in the moon. That's a property easily conveyed, and then I can go to the lad myself. You can meet me there, for he might prove refractory about leaving me to settle with the creditors, and then, as in the ring, it is as well to have a backer."

"But he cannot get out without the creditors being paid, or having security," replied Morton.

"Oh; people get out wonderfully," answered Mr. Quatterly; "and, as to security, there is nothing so safe as a hackney-coach and a ten pound note, but one sometimes breaks down, and the others turn out forged. However, it is as well not to bail him at all, for then he must either both sign and pay, or remain where he is, but you will never get your money, I can tell you, for his mother has the property for life."

"The loss will not be great," replied Morton, "and I shall be well satisfied if we succeed in rescuing him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Alfred Latimer and his dear new-found friend, Captain Tankerville, sat at their breakfast at about eleven o'clock, and the table was covered in a way that the drawing-room of the spunging-house seldom saw. What a curious sensation that very collocation "drawing-room of a spunging-house" gives. Perhaps nothing on earth brings forth the painful points in any painful subject more than when some image is accidentally combined with it to which we have been accustomed to attach ideas of pleasure. The drawing-room of a spunging-house! The drawing-room of a prison! The place where we have been accustomed to spend pleasant hours, to enjoy our allotted portion of relaxation with those most dear to us, the name of that place connected with a prison! —with suffering and sorrow, and want and captivity!—What a contrast in that strange combination! However, there they sat; the money which Latimer had got for his horse was not yet gone; and with the true spirit of his class of men, he thought that as he was soon to be free and have somewhat more than two hundred pounds in his pocket, it mattered not how speedily the sum he had was spent. He had therefore invited Captain Tankerville to breakfast, and had ordered and paid for all sorts of things—broiled ham and fish, coffee and tea, muffins and rolls, sweatmeats and honey. The Cerberus of the house, at the first mention of his wants and wishes, had divined, from long experience, that the gentleman who had visited his prisoner the night before had come to announce his speedy liberation, and he consequently determined to make the most of his time. He got everything that was required, therefore, with great promptitude, and charged him three times the value for all. Never were such dear eggs set down upon a table; never did York or Westphalia produce such extravagant ham; never did a fishmonger ask such a price for fish. But it was then, and is in a degree now, a part of the law of England that all its officials should have a privilege of skinning the unfortunate, and trading in the follies of the foolish.

Alfred Latimer had told his evil counsellor almost all that had taken place between him and Mr. Morton. He had not, indeed, told all, for Louisa's name had never been mentioned. There was something so pure, so sweet, so good in the very idea of the sister of his boyhood, that, bad as he was, and hardened as he was growing, he shrunk from the very mention of her existence in the presence of one whom he instinctively felt to be coarse in mind, and gross in habit of thought.

"So," said Captain Tankerville, with the slightest possible sneer upon his lip, "this Mr. Morton, it seems, wants to take you back and tie you to your mother's apron-string again. If I were you, I wouldn't go; I'd stop here in London as soon as I had got the money, if it were only just to show them that they couldn't make a baby or a fool of me any more."

"So I should," answered Alfred Latimer laughing, "but I have other things that draw me to Mallington besides my mother's apron-string. I've got some business to do there, Captain; but as soon as that is done I shall come back again."

"Well, I wish to Heaven!" said Captain Tankerville, "that while you are getting this money you would get fifty pounds for me. I can pay you in three months, but in the meantime it's a great bore to be kept in for thirty pounds all that time."

"Oh! I'll lend you the fifty pounds," replied Alfred Latimer, "for there will be more than two hundred after paying all my debts, which I am to have to start me again."

"You are a devilish good fellow, Latimer," said his companion, "and I'm very much obliged to you; so much obliged, indeed, that I'll just give you a hint which you may take or not as you like. Here you are to get twelve hundred pounds. It is nobody's giving to you, but raised upon your own property; and so it is your own, therefore you may do what you like with it. Now, Timson, the officer, tells me that all the detainers against you do not amount to two hundred pounds, and if I were you I'd just pay them off, put the other thousand in my pocket, take a start for the Continent, and let the rest of the scoundrels who have bills against me whistle for the money. Beyond doubt they have cheated you out of two-thirds of the amount, and I'd see them all —— before I paid them."

"Oh! they have cheated me enough, I know," said Alfred Latimer, "and what you propose isn't a bad plan. I could easily run down from Mallington to Southampton," he continued musing, "and get over to Havre."

"To be sure you could," answered Captain Tankerville. "I did it once myself three or four years ago. Instead of going over to Calais, where I thought they would be on the look out for me, I went round to Southampton and got clear off. The fact was, I had been called out by Green, of the Dragoons. He was a devilish good shot, I knew, and so was I. Now I, being the man called out, had by right the first fire; but my fool of a second gave that up, as they are getting into the habit of doing, and agreed that we should fire together. Both Green and I looked out sharply for the word; and I am sure enough that we should both have gone head over heels together, but somehow or another I fired just half a second first, before the word was well out of Fitzherbert's mouth. I suppose I was a little nervous"—and he laughed with a low, unpleasant, meaning laugh. "However, they swore that I had fired before my time, and as Green was as dead as a door-nail it was expedient that I should take myself off as fast as possible. The two seconds, however, kept their own counsel, thanks to the law, which makes the seconds principals if the matter is brought in murder, so the affair was hushed up, but the two fools would never speak to me afterwards, just as if I were going to stand still and be

shot through the head. Green would not have gone a bit the less for *that*, so it was just as well to take care of myself."

What might have been Alfred Latimer's reply to this very candid communication cannot be told; for just as the other brought it to a conclusion, the Cerberus came up announcing Mr. Quatterly; and the young gentleman had only time to ask "Who the Devil's he?" when the large head and shoulders of the worthy solicitor appeared, with the little legs walking busily underneath them. He looked at Captain Tankerville with a sardonic grin, *his small black eyes sparkling unpleasantly, and the corners of his capacious mouth turning down.*

"Ah, captain!" he said, "you here? You've changed your lodging I see—you're right, you're right—'To fresh fields and pastures new.'"

"Of course I did not come here willingly, sir," replied Captain Tankerville, "but I shall soon be out, that's one comfort."

"No, no, no," said Mr. Quatterly, "it may be a come forth, but not a comfort, surely"—and he laughed at his abominable pun—"but stay where you are, stay where you are. The Surrey side is best. Better air even in King's-bench-walk than Horsemonger-lane, captain."

"Sir, do you intend to insult me?" asked the other, with his brow darkening; "if so I shall know "

"No, no, not at all," replied Mr. Quatterly, "not at all, captain. I'm a great coward; I never fight—I'm too big to fight; I never fought but once, and that was with my fists. Didn't mean anything unpleasant, but you know the place where one last sees a man naturally recurs to one's mind when next we meet him. You know my way, and how I rattle on, and you should only laugh at it—'The little dog laughed,' you know, 'to see such sport, though the dish ran away with the spoon.' But this is Mr. Latimer, I suppose. Sir, my business is with you."

"Well, then, Latimer, I will not interrupt your business with this person," said Captain Tankerville, with a very savage air; and he walked out of the room, finding the presence of Mr. Quatterly by no means a relaxation.

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried the good solicitor, sitting down. "Well, Mr. Latimer, adversity does make us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. But to business, sir. I wait upon you at the desire of a client of mine, Edward Wilmot, Esq., and another client of mine, Mr. Morton. The one has a sum of money to lend, the other has requested that it may be lent to you. He has explained the nature of the security; and as the deed cannot be properly drawn up for some time, I have brought a little memorandum of agreement which will serve the purpose in the interim, being unwilling to keep you in such a place, and amongst such a set of scamps, a moment longer than is necessary. I thought I should find Mr. Morton here."

Mr. Latimer at once commenced inquiries directed to find out how Mr. Quatterly intended to pay the money; but that gentleman informed him that it would be requisite to pay all the detaining creditors in the first place, and then to discharge the bills of all the others, a list of which had been obtained from Mrs. Charlton, to whom they had all at various times applied concerning her son's debts. "That done," he said, "I will hand over the balance to you."

Alfred Latimer, however, demurred to the payment of his debts by

any other hands than his own, saying, "You do not think I should like to be arrested again, I suppose?"

"Not at all," replied Mr. Quatterly, "not at all. Can have no objection to your paying them yourself; but you know, my dear sir, the detainers must be discharged, or you cannot get out."

"Yes, I know that," answered the young man; "but it would look as if I could not be trusted, if I were to have any one else pay the rest of the people but myself."

"Very true—so it would," said the solicitor, who perfectly saw through the whole manœuvre, and suspected who had prompted it. "Well, we will pay the detaining creditors first, and then leave you to settle with the others. But the sheriff's office must first be searched, and we may as well have that done while we are waiting for Morton. I will go and send the man below to do it;" and he walked out, and closed the door behind him.

"Be so good," he said, as soon as he got into the den below, and had closed that door too, "to send round as fast as possible to all those persons named in that list, and tell them, with my compliments, to lodge detainers against Alfred Latimer, Esq., for the amount of their bills before one o'clock, or they won't be paid. Then, at half-past one, search the office, and come up and report. Don't go to the people yourself, that would not be regular. Send some one you can trust. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Quatterly," replied the man, winking his left eye, "I twig;" and the solicitor returned to the young gentleman above, and entered into pleasant conversation with him.

"Airy here!" he said, looking out of the window; "airy, Mr. Latimer: and, doubtless, good society."

"Why, you do not seem to think the only society I have got very pleasant," replied the other, "if one may judge by the way you spoke to Captain Tankerville."

"No offence meant, I can assure you, sir," replied the lawyer; "he has been twice accused of swindling, it is true, and once of forgery—all through a mistake, no doubt—all through a mistake: but, nevertheless, character is a very funny thing. It is very like a certain gentleman mentioned in history, and named Humpty Dumpty, about whom there is this legend:—

> 'Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
> Humpty Dumpty got a great fall;
> All the king's horses and all the king's men
> Cannot set Humpty Dumpty up again.'

And so it is with a man's reputation, Mr. Latimer. It takes a great many horses and a great many men to set up a character once fallen; friable materials, sir,—friable materials—easily cracked, and not easily mended."

Mr. Quatterly meant well, very well; and had Alfred Latimer been, as he supposed, a young man standing on the brink of evil, his observations would have been as well directed as they were meant; but there is a particular point of moral degradation where the sight of the dark gulf into which vice plunges man is more dangerous than serviceable, and that is when they are in it

Such was the state of Alfred Latimer. He knew more of his own conduct than the man who spoke, and his only reflection was, "Well, then, there is no use of trying. I'm in for it, and must go on."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Mr. Morton was ushered in. After a few minutes had passed, the solicitor seemed to grow somewhat impatient, and inquired if Mr. Latimer knew the amount of debts already appearing against him in the sheriff's office.

The young gentleman answered boldly, "About two hundred pounds."

Mr. Quatterly replied, "Oh! if that is all, I have money enough at my banker's to give cheques for the amount; if it had been much more I must have gone home to get it. But this fellow is so long that I do not know what to do; I shall be too late for my next appointment."

"Perhaps you had better go to your appointment, my good sir," answered Morton, "and return with the amount."

"Well, perhaps I had," said Mr. Quatterly. "It will be better, too," he continued, looking at Morton, "because Mr. Latimer wishes to pay all the other bills himself."

"Indeed!" said Morton, gravely. "I thought you intended to return to Mallington at once, Latimer?"

"And so I do," replied the young gentleman, sharply; "but I intend to stay a day in town first. There is no objection to that, I suppose?"

"I have no right to object, though I am sorry for it," answered Morton, gravely.

"A letter, sir," said a dirty-faced, sallow-gowned maid, putting a note into Mr. Latimer's hands; "eightpence, if you please." Those were days when penny postage had not been invented, and Alfred Latimer, paying the postage without further inquiry, except how the letter came to be so late, which was explained by the fact of its having gone to his former lodging, looked at the back as if the handwriting was strange to him.

Mr. Quatterly at the same time took his departure, saying he would soon be back, and Morton walked to the window to leave his companion to read the epistle he had just received at his ease. The contents, whatever they were, seemed to produce a strange change in Alfred Latimer, for, after having vented an oath, and the exclamation, "That she shan't, by —— !" he began to walk up and down the room in a state of great agitation.

"I say, Morton," he continued, after a pause, "that d--d coach does not start till nine, I think. Would you mind joining me in a chaise down?"

"I cannot wait till to-morrow," replied his companion, "otherwise I should be very happy."

"Ay, but I have changed my mind," said Alfred Latimer; "I shall go down to-day as soon as this fellow returns. What a time he is! Do you mind starting at once?"

"No," replied Morton, a little embarrassed. "I must, indeed, go home for an hour, but I will rejoin you in that time, with a chaise, if you like."

"Well, do, do, there's a good fellow," cried Alfred Latimer. "You can go and get ready at once, if that's all."

Morton smiled almost sadly, for he could conceive no very good motive which could have operated so sudden a change in a man of Alfred Latimer's disposition; but, agreeing to his proposal, he took his departure, and left him alone. The moment he was gone the young gentleman hurried to his dirty bed-chamber, gathered together the few clothes he had with him, and placed them in a portmanteau, which he had brought from the lodgings where he had been arrested.

At the end of that time there was a knock at the street door, and the voice of the sheriff's officer was heard speaking to his man as they entered together, almost immediately succeeded by another knock and the tones of Mr. Quatterly. The sheriff's officer and the solicitor then walked up stairs together, and Mr. Latimer was called out of his bedroom.

The officer was a very different personage from his man—a very tall, thin, neat personage, in a blue satin cravat, tied tight, and his voice was sweet and complacent. "Happy to hear it's all arranged, Mr. Latimer," he said. "I have been down to search the office, and find a few little matters lodged this morning. Let me see, I'll just run them up:" and, sitting down, he soon made out an account, amounting to nine hundred and seventy pounds, which, with costs, charges, &c., swelled the whole to about one thousand and nine.

Alfred Latimer gazed with astonishment.—"Why, Tankerville told me, Mr. Quincy," he said, "that there was but two hundred."

"Ay, sir, that was the day before yesterday," replied the officer. "These have come in since;" and he ran his finger down a long list at the bottom of a paper he held in his hand.

"It does not matter, you know, my dear Mr. Latimer," observed Mr. Quatterly, putting on a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles. "As they were all to be paid, it is better to get it all over at once; save you trouble, you know, and be sooner done. There are few men who ever, like the man in the moon, come down too soon to find their way to Norwich; and you'll have more time to amuse yourself if you do stay in London till to-morrow."

"I am going down at once, sir," said Alfred Latimer, in a sullen tone; "Mr. Morton is to bring a chaise directly."

"Ay, a sensible man, Mr. Morton," rejoined Mr. Quatterly; "a very sensible, excellent man, indeed. Few like him, sir; few like him.—But now, Mr. Quincy, to business."

And that business was soon settled. The bills were paid in full by Mr. Quatterly; the costs in part, for he thought fit to dock some excessive charges; and the sheriff's officer knew his character too well to make aught but faint resistance in his own case, and contented himself with Mr. Quatterly's engagement to pay the rest of the amount, if it could be legally enforced, in the case of others.

When all this was settled, the worthy solicitor turned to Mr. Latimer, saying, "And now, sir, there's the chaise, I hear: Morton is the most punctual man on earth—always to the tick of the clock. After the little expenses of the agreement, &c., Mr. Latimer, there is a sum due to you of one hundred and—let me see—call it one hundred and ninety

pounds. We can settle any other little matter afterwards. Will you have it in money or a cheque?"

"All in money," answered Alfred Latimer; and Mr. Quatterly's pocket-book instantly disgorged the amount. Morton was in the room a moment after; and though there was a little anger in Alfred Latimer's heart at being frustrated in his hopes of receiving the larger sum, yet he was even more eager than ever to return to Mallington without a moment's delay, and, as soon as it was announced that he was free, he descended the stairs, and sprang into the chaise, without giving one thought or one word to Captain Tankerville. Such are the friendships of the bad. The other saw him depart from the window; and, clenching his fist, with a fearful oath, he exclaimed, "The blackguard has bilked me; but, curse me! if I don't do for him some day."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"It is strange," said Morton, as they rolled through the crowded streets of the city, "and yet beautiful as strange, that if one could trace each of the multitude that is passing by us, and examine his fate and history, we should find, as a general result, that the cheerful and happy face, the light and easy heart, is the property of one who has his passions and his conduct under due control."

"I do not know that at all," answered Latimer; "we find plenty of very good people who are very miserable."

"Not long, and not often," answered Morton; "of course I mean in the aggregate. It is undoubtedly true that sorrows and misfortunes do affect the best, and from that very fact one author of great talent, but no very strong religious feelings—I mean Voltaire—has drawn an inference of a future state where there shall be compensation for such suffering; yet, when griefs and anxieties do fall upon the good, how much more easily do they bear them, with how much more resignation and calmness, than the wicked!"

"I do not see why that should be," answered Alfred Latimer; "if I were a good man, and I never pretend to anything of the kind, I should only be the more angry and indignant at being punished for no offence."

"That is not the usual course of human nature, Latimer," replied Morton. "We always bear chastisement which we have deserved more impatiently than that which we have not."

"But I do not see that you have any cause to judge from all these people's faces that the good are a bit happier than the bad," rejoined his companion; "look at that fellow there, coming along with such a dark, eager look, as if he would cut everybody's throat that stopped him. Now, from his dress and his manner, and from the low bow which that shopkeeper is making him, I would bet any money he is some rich merchant or man upon 'Change, with his pockets full of gold, and everything on earth that he can desire."

"Not improbable," replied Morton; "he looks very much the sort of man you have described."

"Well, then, I am sure he does not look happy," rejoined Alfred Latimer.

"Most likely he is the reverse," said Morton, with a smile; "but that is quite consistent with what I said. It was, that those who are the happiest—ay, and who generally look the happiest too—are those who have their passions under due control. Now, a man may have everything on earth he can desire, as you say, and yet be rendered miserable by not having his passions under due control. For aught we know, that very merchant or banker, or whatever he is, may have the passion for wealth upon him to such an extent as to be as much or more a vice than the love of women or the dice-box is to others. I spoke of all passions, not of one or two; and one of the great mistakes which the world in general makes is to select a certain class of vices from the many, as the objects of reprobation and punishment. We are full of conventionalities, which render us more tolerant to some classes of evil—ay, even to greater or more heinous crimes—than others. Some are even the objects of praise and approbation; and many, very many, vices, as society is constituted, are the sure roads to worldly prosperity—but, mark, I do not say to happiness; that is a very different thing. What is a greater vice than the greed of gold—not the honest desire of independence, not the honourable effort to rise by genius, industry, and perseverance! I look upon that man who devotes his whole soul to the accumulation of wealth, who stints and wears down the inferior drudges who aid him in its acquisition that he may have the greater share, who refuses to open his hand or his heart to misery and want, or only undraws his purse for the world's applause—even if he commit no fraud, no deceit, to gain his ends—I look upon that man, I say, as more vicious than the mere libertine."

Alfred Latimer relapsed into silence. His companion's reasoning did not convince him; for he had never formed to himself any other idea of happiness than the satisfaction of his wishes, nor could he form any conception of it. He had found, indeed, that even where he had the power of attaining that which he believed to be all he wanted, it had not produced content. Morton's words served, at least, to show him that there were other sorts of happiness than any he had dreamed of, and he mused over the suggestion, assailed by thoughts to which he would not give admission.

At length, however, the observations of the solicitor came back to his memory, and he drew from them a long train of reasonings in his own mind, all tending to confirm him in the course he was determined to pursue. "It is never any use," he said suddenly, "for any man who has once taken a way for himself different from what the world calls right, to seek to change it; for, as that Mr. What's-his-name remarked, no man can ever get himself into good repute again; and even were that possible, he would himself always have a hankering after the things in which he had indulged himself, which would get the better of him sooner or later."

"Oh dear, no!" exclaimed Morton, laughing; "if that were the case I am afraid half of our young men in England would only go on from bad to worse all their lives. Few in the unbridled days of youth

do not commit many errors. Many, very many, even in more mature years, fall before some overpowering temptation; but God forbid that either the one or the other should shut us out from all return. It is only against the man who wilfully and deliberately chooses the wrong course as that which he is determined to follow, that the door can be said to be closed. For every other there is always an opportunity of retreading his steps—of abandoning evil, and seeking right. He may have to struggle against habit as well as passion, that is true. It is a natural consequence of his faults, and, if he thinks rightly, a well-deserved punishment. Then, as to what was said by Mr. Quatterly, I think you must have mistaken him. He could only allude to persons who, by some base and dishonourable action, had deprived themselves for ever of the esteem of honest men."

Alfred Latimer fell into thought again. He asked himself, perhaps, if he were in that position, and he might feel that if he had not all the symptoms of the disease, he had at least caught the infection. The reflection was not pleasant to him; but yet he indulged it till it became too oppressive to bear, and then casting it off he roused himself to converse on anything else.

On they went, then, with the rain falling fast, the sky quite covered with clouds, the sun down, and the moon far below the horizon. It was as dark as pitch, not a ray of light served to guide them, and the very road was hardly to be distinguished from the grass beside it, the drenching torrent having changed its colour from a light yellow to a dark brown. The storm pelted against the windows, and rattled upon the top of the chaise, and large drops of water found their way in through the crevices. Still the postilion rode on in his jacket, either following the invariable custom of his fellows, never to put on a great-coat till they are wet through, or fearing to leave his horses, one of which was somewhat unmanageable, in order to get at it. At length, going on at a furious rate for little more than an hour, they reached Mallington Common, and there, apparently thinking that, as they had nearly arrived at the end of their journey, it might be as well to protect himself from the storm, the driver stopped and got down.

Instantly Alfred Latimer thrust his head out of the window, demanding, "What the devil are you stopping for now? You are just at Mallington. Go on to the inn."

"I'll only just get my great-coat, sir," replied the driver, and at the same moment he advanced towards the splinter-bar.

The young gentleman swore a loud oath, and whether the horses heard it and did not approve of it, or took it for an intimation to go on, they started off at once, broke from a trot into a canter, and from a canter to a gallop.

Morton sat calmly in the back of the carriage without moving hand or foot; but Alfred Latimer exclaimed aloud, "Confusion and the devil! they will break our necks down the hill, or have us into the river! By —— they are off the road! They will be into the gravel-pit. I will jump out."

But before he could execute his purpose, or Morton could beseech him to desist, the chaise received a violent jerk, then plunged forward,

leaning to one side, as the near fore-wheel went over a bank, then rolled over and over with a terrible crash, and at length fell on its side, and lay with something striking hard against the front panels, like the feet of a horse in agony.

CHAPTER XXV.

"LATIMER!" said Morton, raising himself partly in the carriage, with great pain, for he was severely bruised. But Alfred Latimer made no reply; and, putting his arm through the broken window, his companion opened the door of the carriage and got out. The darkness was profound, the rain falling in torrents, and it was impossible to see anything but the dark outline of a steep bank, down which the chaise had rolled, the vehicle itself, nearly broken to pieces, and the two horses, one lying perfectly still, the other still kicking in the traces, but more and more faintly every moment. A sound, however, was heard above, as of some one running, and Morton raised his voice and shouted aloud. At first he was not heard, but he called again, and then the post-boy answered from the bank above, exclaiming, "Good heaven! where are you, sir?"

"Here, at the bottom of the bank," answered Morton; "Mr. Latimer is much hurt. Run as fast as possible to Mallington House, bring down several of the men, and a large chair or board, and lights. Lose not a moment; but bid them not alarm Mrs. Charlton till we ascertain the truth. Be quick, be quick!"

The man ran off again, knowing that he could render no assistance, even to his horses, without the means of seeing where they were; and Morton remained by the side of the vehicle. He himself felt that, though severely bruised, he was not seriously injured, and tying a handkerchief round his hand, which had been cut by the glass, he leaned over the chaise, and tried to discover how Latimer was lying. A moment after he heard a step, and then a voice exclaiming, "Did not some one halloo out just now? Who's there?"

"We have been overturned into the pit," answered Morton. "Is there any place nearer than Mallington where we can get help, my friend? for Mr. Latimer here is much hurt, if not dead."

"The devil he is!" cried the man, who had now come near, and seemed, as far as the darkness would allow Morton to judge, to be a stout-built, short man; "that's a bad job indeed. But we'll get help very soon from Widow Brown's cottage; 't is but a stone's throw. I'll be back directly."

"Bring a light," said Morton, "if you can get a lantern."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the man, and away he ran. In five minutes, the gentleman who remained by the chaise saw a dim spark like a will-o'-the-wisp, moving at a little distance, and then heard voices. Then, coming on through the rain, with their figures becoming more distinctly visible by the light of a horn lantern which one of them carried, he perceived two men and a woman. They did not, indeed, seem of a very prepossessing appearance, by the yellow glare that fell upon their countenances when they approached; but, with good fore-

thought, one of the men had brought a large rug, in which to move the gentleman who had been most injured.

The first thing to be done, however, was to ascertain his exact condition; and taking the lantern, Morton held it into the chaise, and by its light discovered Alfred Latimer lying just where he had fallen, with a good deal of blood about his face. His hand was still round one of the holders in the inside of the vehicle, and his companion could perceive that the fingers seemed every now and then to tighten and then relax their grasp.

While he was making these observations, one of the men said in a low voice to the other, "That horse that's under is as dead as a stone, and this has broke his fore leg right through."

"Here, lend me a hand to make this rug into a sort of hammock, to carry Mr. Latimer up to the cottage," said the other man. "Is he living or dead, sir?" he continued, addressing Morton.

"He is living," answered Morton, "and I trust only stunned. Cut that strap which keeps the door from going further back, and then, if one goes to the top and another kneels on the side, we can lift him out without shaking him much."

"Now, sir, let us carry him to the cottage, and lay him flat down on a bed," said the short sailor-like man, who formed one of the party; "that's the best thing for him till the doctor can be fetched."

"It would be better to carry him home at once," replied Morton; "Mallington House cannot be far, if I judge rightly where we are."

"It's more nor a mile, and that a good un," said the woman.

"Besides, the cottage is just in the way," rejoined the man: "he can be moved after the doctor comes, if he thinks it safe."

"If the house be as far as that, the cottage will be best," replied Morton; "but I thought this pit was close to Mallington."

"You're thinking of what we call the first pit," replied the other man; "this is the third."

Alfred Latimer was then placed in the rug, which by this time had been gathered together with twine at the two ends, and the woman going before with the lantern, the two men carried him forward on a little path, which was scarcely traceable along the bottom of the gravel pit. The party then issued out upon the common, but they had not reached the higher ground when two or three lights were seen coming a little to the right, and a horse's feet were heard upon the road.

"Here are the people from Mallington House," said Morton.

"Ay, and that's the doctor's horse," rejoined the woman; "I'd know his trot among a thousand—I'll give him a call;" and raising her voice to an unearthly shriek, she shouted, "Hie! doctor, doctor! Dr. Nethersole."

The horse's feet were checked in an instant, and as they paused they soon saw the worthy surgeon leading his horse carefully across towards the spot where he perceived their light.

"Goodness gracious, sir! this is a sad affair," said Mr. Nethersole, as soon as he saw Morton. "You seem to be much hurt yourself. But how is Mr. Latimer? Is he dead?" he continued, gazing anxiously at the burden carried by the two men.

"No," answered Morton; "he is not dead. That, at least, is certain; but he is quite insensible. These good people say there is a cottage

near, where he can be taken. Will it be better to go thither or to proceed to Mallington House?"

"Oh! to the cottage on every account," said Mr. Nethersole. "No time is to be lost; and besides, Mrs. Charlton, who is luckily out at dinner with the Markhams, would be dreadfully shocked if she arrived just as her son was being brought in, in such a state."

According to Mr. Nethersole's desire, the men proceeded at once to the cottage, which lay in a little nook of the common, not a hundred yards further on; and the young gentleman having been laid on a bed in the back room of the lower story, the surgeon proceeded to examine him, while the room became gradually crowded with servants and other people from Mallington. Morton stood near while the surgeon pursued his investigation, and gave him every aid in his power while he felt the head, traced the position and line of the limbs, and ascertained that no fracture had taken place; but Morton could not, even while thus occupied, avoid hearing the remarks of several of the inhabitants of Mallington who had come up with the servants of the house, in regard to the general character of Mother Brown, as she was called, her son, and their associates, which were not very much in their favour.

Mr. Nethersole, after due perquisitions and a little touch of medical mystery, declared that no bones were broken, but that, though the skull was not fractured, yet he feared concussion of the brain had taken place, for which bleeding would be immediately necessary, and, after that, perfect quiet. It was quite out of the question, therefore, he said, to remove the young gentleman to Mallington, as, if done in the first instance, venesection might come too late, and, if attempted afterwards, fever might be superinduced. After this oration, he ordered the young gentleman to be undressed, and placed in the bed where he lay. He then bled him somewhat largely, and the effect was certainly such as he could have desired, for, as the blood flowed, Alfred Latimer drew two or three deep sighs, opened his eyes, and looked about him.

Mr. Nethersole placed his finger on his lip, saying, "Not a word, my dear sir. Lie perfectly still; take no notice of anything; open not your mouth, or I will not answer for the consequences. Let the room be cleared, and open that window. Now one of the servants must stay with the young gentleman till I can return. I will sit up with him myself to watch the symptoms as they appear; but he must not be left while I am necessarily absent for an hour or an hour and a half. Here, Wilkinson, you are the very man. Sit by Mr. Latimer till I return; do not let him speak or move till I come back; and you, Widow Brown, keep the house quite quiet. No gossiping, no talking, no drinking and squabbling, remember. I know you all, you know; and I will have my orders obeyed."

Widow or Mother Brown promised compliance in a very humble tone; for Mr. Nethersole, or "the doctor," as he was called, was a very important personage with her class. After having given these directions, and seen the room disencumbered of the crowd, the surgeon again sat down by the sick man's side, felt his pulse, nodded with a well-satisfied look, and then rose, saying, in an oracular tone, "The circulation greatly relieved. I will be back soon, my dear sir, and bring something to compose you. Now, Mr. Morton, if you like we

had better walk back to Mallington; I think you will need a little attention yourself, and the fewer persons round Mr. Latimer the better."

"Very well," replied Mr. Morton; and, bending down, he added, "Good-by, for the present, Latimer; I will see you early to-morrow."

"Why, what the devil is all this about, Morton?" asked Alfred Latimer; "I have broke my head somehow."

But Mr. Nethersole instantly interfered, holding up his finger with a grave look, and saying, "Not a word. not a word, as you value your life. Come, Mr. Morton, come;" and, walking out with the young gentleman, they issued forth upon the common.

Morton's first question was in regard to Mr. Nethersole's real opinion of Alfred Latimer's situation; but who ever got a direct answer from a medical man? However, he made out from the cloud of pros and cons in which the surgeon enveloped his opinion, that he did not see any very dangerous symptoms at that time, but that the young gentleman having decidedly received a slight concussion of the brain might at any moment during the next three or four days become suddenly worse. Mr. Nethersole would then have fain ascertained exactly how the accident had occurred, remembering duly that he had an account to render to all the old ladies of Mallington. But Morton, in the first place, thought fit to satisfy himself as to what was the state of affairs at Mallington House, inquiring whether Mr. Nethersole could tell at what hour Mrs. Charlton would return, and whether there was any chance of the news being carried to her where she was dining."

"No," answered the surgeon, promptly; "the man you sent acted with great discretion I find: for, on hearing that Mrs. Charlton was out,—what a sweet creature she is! don't you think so, Mr. Morton? —he made two men-servants come down with him to me without going in at all, lest Miss Charlton should by some means hear of the event, and be frightened out of her life."

"Then Miss Charlton did not go with Mrs. Charlton?" asked Morton.

"No, my dear sir, she declined," answered the surgeon. "You know the young gentleman there has been rather particular in his attentions, and people do say that he is not very agreeable to the young lady. Ha, ha, ha!—you understand."

"Perfectly," replied Morton, drily; "but I think it might be as well if I were to go in, as we pass Mallington House, and give Miss Charlton the first news of Mr. Latimer's situation myself. She can afterwards break it to his mother in a more gentle manner than any man could do."

The surgeon agreed fully that such a plan was a very proper one, and perhaps he had some faint notion, that the young gentleman might wish to have five minutes of Miss Charlton's company alone, and that she might not object to grant it. Whatever was Morton's view, they walked straight up to the gates of Mallington House; and there, while Mr. Nethersole was urging his young companion to come down to him as soon as his conference with Miss Charlton was over, and have his own injuries examined, all their plans were disarranged by the rush up of Mrs. Charlton's carriage, and by her instant recognition of the two gentlemen, as the butler came forth with a light to open the outer-gates in answer to their summons.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Ah, Mr. Morton! is that you?" cried Mrs. Charlton, letting down the carriage window: "pray, come in."

The carriage dashed on up to the house; and, though the distance from the gate to the door was not more than twenty or thirty yards, the lady had descended from her vehicle, tripped into the house, and walked up stairs, before Morton and Mr. Nethersole arrived. The latter gentleman, understanding that, in the changed circumstances of the case, he would not be one too many, thinking, too, that if Mrs. Charlton were by any chance to faint at the tidings of her son's situation his assistance might be necessary, and, having his lancet ready, and his bandages in his pocket, he judged that he might as well walk in with the young gentleman, and take his share of things to come.

Morton advanced first with a grave air, and asked the butler if he had said anything to his mistress regarding the accident.

"No, sir," replied the man. "She asked why I came out to open the gates; and I only replied, because Wilkinson was out. I thought you could tell her better than I could, sir."

It was a task, however, that Morton could gladly have dispensed with; for he was neither fond of inflicting nor of witnessing pain: but nevertheless, fortifying his mind for the undertaking, he proceeded slowly up the stairs, and entered the drawing-room, the door of which Mrs. Charlton had left open behind her. The lady was standing in a graceful attitude, with her hand leaning on a table, while a sweet and courteous smile illumined her countenance, and welcomed Mr. Morton before he appeared. Louisa, who had exchanged a few words with her step-mother, was seated on a sofa, with a book before her, and her lovely face, too, was raised towards the door, with a look of well-pleased expectation—ay, and something more than expectation; for there was a light in her deep eyes, that let one see beyond them to her heart far more than she intended—the light of Love, beaming from two as sweet lamps as ever he kindled! The moment, however, that Morton appeared, with the blood still upon his face and his hand tied up, her cheek turned deadly pale. She spoke not a word, but she rose at once, and then feeling her knees tremble caught the arm of the sofa for support. She knew how she loved him then, if she had never fully known it before.

Mrs. Charlton, on her part, uttered a pretty little scream, and exclaimed, "Good Heaven! Mr. Morton, what has happened? You have met with some accident! You are hurt!"

"Very little, my dear madam," replied the young gentleman; "indeed, scarcely at all. My face has been scratched with some broken glass, and my hand cut; but we have every reason to be most thankful that the accident was not worse, for it might well have proved fatal to myself and my companion, instead of inflicting a few wounds and bruises, which will be well in a few days."

The sound of his voice, and the firm tone in which he spoke, comforted Louisa a good deal; but still she felt very faint, and she sat down again, not at all sure how long she could stand.

Now, Mrs. Charlton was alarmed too, for she was very quick in the combination of her ideas; and there were three distinct facts before her, from which she drew a deduction very near the truth. There was Mr. Morton hurt; he acknowledged having a companion in misadventure; and that companion was not now with him. If that gentleman had nothing of very great importance to communicate, he would not have thus presented himself at Mallington House, she thought, till he had washed his face and hands. If her son had been able, he would have come with him. Her son was unable, and that was the important fact Morton came to communicate. All this passed through her mind in a moment, and she felt very much alarmed; but Mrs. Charlton was not a woman to faint. It was a thing that she never did; and this was certainly not an occasion on which she would have commenced the practice. She was very fond of her son, it is true, and she had spoiled and indulged him very greatly in youth. But it was not for his sake she had done so, it was for her own. She loved him as her right hand, or her right eye, because he was a part of herself; and, perhaps, she would sooner have lost her right hand or her right eye than him, if she could have done so without any pain or danger. Limb against son, she would not have hesitated, I think; but if suffering—personal suffering, or risk—were thrown into the scale with mutilation, I'm afraid Alfred Latimer would have had but a poor chance.

"Speak, my dear sir!—speak, Mr. Morton," she said; "you have more to tell—Alfred was with you, is it not so? Alfred is hurt?—tell me the truth, my dear friend. I can bear it."

The last were nearly the same words which she had used when the servant ran in to inform her that her first husband had destroyed himself; and she did bear it with wonderful philosophy.

Morton answered in a manner to remove anxiety as far as possible without deviating from truth.

"He is much better, my dear Mrs. Charlton," he said; "he was apparently a good deal hurt at first, but he recovered wonderfully as soon as Mr. Nethersole bled him. There are no bones broken, happily, though he was for a time stunned by the fall."

"Thank God!" cried Mrs. Charlton; and Louisa echoed her words with truer devotion.

The surgeon advanced to play his part; for, during the short dialogue which had taken place, Morton had purposely put himself forward, fearing that Mr. Nethersole might so overload his account with medical terms that the two ladies might be left in ignorance of whether Alfred Latimer were dead or alive. That worthy gentleman now proceeded to justify his caution by explaining to Mrs. Charlton, in the darkest possible manner, the situation of her son; and what he had at first apprehended, as well as what was now to be guarded against. For aught that the mother could gather from this communication, Alfred might have been a marmalade; but Morton stepped in to her help, saying, "I see you do not exactly understand Mr. Nethersole. It is merely that Latimer has now quite recovered both his speech and his senses; and though our good friend thinks it would be imprudent to remove him from the cottage to which he was at first taken, yet there was no great chance of any danger resulting from the accident. Is it not so, Mr. Nethersole?"

"Precisely, sir," replied the surgeon; and Mrs. Charlton, sinking into a chair, gazed in Morton's face, thinking what she ought to do next.

"I should very much like to go to him," she said, after a moment's pause; "but the carriage has gone away, I fear, and——"

"It rains dreadfully," said Mr. Nethersole, finishing Mrs. Charlton's sentence nearly as she would have finished it herself. "Do not think of it, my dear madam; I will stay with him all night. I propose to return immediately."

"I do not see any necessity for your going," added Morton, "for he is so much better that I doubt not a few hours will remove all chance of danger, and Mr. Nethersole particularly recommends quiet. One of your servants—Wilkinson, I think, is his name—is with your son."

"Thank you, Mr. Morton—thank you," said Mrs. Charlton; "you are very kind to me, in every respect—kinder than any one of my own relations, I am sure; and how I can ever be grateful enough I cannot tell. But pray let me hear how this accident has happened."

"I beg pardon for interfering," said Mr. Nethersole, with a smile, "but I must really here exert my authority as a disciple of Galen. Mr. Morton is hurt, Mrs. Charlton; we none of us know how much—for he has given himself up entirely to Mr. Latimer, and has taken no care of himself whatever."

Louisa, who, as the reader has remarked, had not spoken a word, raised her eyes to Morton's face with a look of tenderness mingled with fear, as if imploring him, for her sake, to attend to his own safety; but Mr. Nethersole went on,—"He is wet through, too, so that it is high time that he should change his dress, and allow me to inquire into the injuries he has received. Wounds and bruises, apparently slight at first, are often the most dangerous if not attended to. Before he gives any account of what has taken place, then, I say authoritatively, let him go home."

"Home!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, in a fit of enthusiasm, "can Mr. Morton have any home in Mallington but this house, after all that he has done for its inmates? I will take no refusal, Mr. Morton; ring the bell, Louisa, my love."

Louisa rang without an instant's delay; and as Morton was excusing himself on account of having no change of dress there, saying that his portmanteau had been left with the chaise on the common, she joined her all-persuading voice, exclaiming, "Oh! do, Mr. Morton. Clothes can be soon got from the inn."

"Well, I must obey," answered Morton, with a smile; and as the butler entered, Mrs. Charlton exclaimed, "Tell Windsor to have the yellow room got ready for Mr. Morton directly."

"And send down to the inn for what Mr. Morton wants," added Louisa, for the first time giving any orders in her own house.

"I think your portmanteau is here, sir," said the butler; "I told the gardener to bring everything out of the chaise, for Widow Brown and her people are not to be trusted where they can pilfer."

"You are a wise and prudent man," said Mr. Nethersole; "they are, indeed, not the most honest set in the world; but have Mr.

Morton's things taken up, and while the room is getting ready, I can examine how far he is hurt."

"I am really not hurt at all," replied Morton, addressing Louisa, more than the last speaker. "I am an old soldier, accustomed to knocks and bruises, and not made of very fragile materials originally. But if it must be so, I submit; and if I find you up when I return, my dear madam, I will tell you how all this unfortunate affair took place."

"Up!" cried Mrs. Charlton; "why, it is only a quarter to ten yet. The truth is, those Markhams are such bores, and one hears so little of anything but dogs and horses, partridges, pheasants, and foxes, that I always order the carriage a quarter before nine, and in such a night as this one could not keep the servants out."

While Morton and Mr. Nethersole were gone, Mrs. Charlton questioned the butler as to what he knew of the accident, and obtained the general facts, as far as the man knew them. The chaise had been overturned into the gravel-pit, he said, both the horses killed, and the carriage broken all to pieces, having fallen down a bank full fifty feet high. This, indeed, was an exaggeration, but it served with the rest of the story to make poor Louisa's heart feel cold, and her cheek to turn deadly pale. Mrs. Charlton went on questioning him, however, for nearly a quarter of an hour, not at all minding, perhaps not comprehending, the mental torture which her step-daughter was enduring; and at the end of that time Morton returned with the blood washed from his face, and his fine hair waving over his forehead, brought a little more forward than ordinary, to hide a wound upon his temple, which Mr. Nethersole had just covered with black plaster.

That gentleman accompanied his new patient; but after a few words of assurance to Mrs. Charlton and Louisa that Mr. Morton was not severely hurt, and giving a warning to him that he had better keep himself as quiet as possible for the next two days, for fear of producing feverish symptoms, he retired to visit his own house for a few minutes, and then once more cross the common in the midst of the drenching rain, to sit up through the night with Alfred Latimer. Truly the life of a country apothecary is a hard one.

Leaving Mr. Nethersole, however, to pursue his way, we must sit down with Mrs. Charlton, Mr. Morton, and Louisa, in the comfortable drawing-room at Mallington. The reader can very well divine how Morton explained what had occurred without our entering into the details of what he said. He was not, indeed, one of those men who love to be the hero of their own story, nor would he on the present occasion linger, with painful minuteness, over every point of horror and dismay; for he well knew that poor Louisa had already suffered more on his account than he ever wished to inflict upon her; but he told the tale briefly; stated how the man had imprudently got down, and left his horses—how they had run away—and how, in a few seconds, the chaise was dragged over into the pit.

Mrs. Charlton was greatly touched at his account of her son's condition; now that she found she should not have to go out over the common to nurse him; and she was in high good humour with Mr. Morton, expressing her gratitude again and again for all he had done.

But Mrs. Charlton gave proof of her gratitude in the way which Mr.

Morton could have most desired; for, after talking with him for half an hour, she rose suddenly, as if recollecting that he had had no refreshment, and, blaming herself for her negligence, declared she would go and order some supper to be instantly prepared. Now, she could quite as well have ordered it where she sat: and, therefore, it is but fair to suppose that she considered the feelings of the two lovers, which she knew them right well to be; and giving a hint that she had two or three little things to do, she retired, bidding Louisa let her know, in her own room, when supper was announced.

A faint smile came across Louisa's lip at conduct which she did not very well understand. But she had soon to turn her thoughts to other and sweeter things; for Morton immediately came over, sat down on the sofa beside her, and, taking her hand in his, pressed his lips upon it.

"You have been grieved and agitated, dear Louisa," he said: "but I trust that good rather than evil may result to Latimer from this accident; and I, you see, am unhurt."

"I can scarcely think it possible even yet, Edmond," she replied. "When I think on that awful fall it makes my heart still beat;" and she closed her eyes for a moment, with a shudder. Morton gazed at her as she sat with the long black lashes resting on the soft pale cheek, for she had not yet recovered her colour; but when she opened her eyes again, and they met that warm yet tender gaze, the rose came brightly back.

"Nay, nay, Morton," she said, "do not look at me so. There, you are smiling at my fears; but you cannot tell what a woman's feelings are in such cases. I dare say if we were accustomed to go through dangers as you are, we should treat them lightly too; but we are always left at home, with nothing to do but to ponder over the perils of those we love;" and she bent down her head for a moment, while a tear sparkled upon her eyelids. It did not roll far down her cheek, for her lover's lips brushed it away; and he soothed her tenderly with assurance that he never did, and never would, expose himself to unnecessary danger.

"And yet," she answered, "I shall never see you leave me without, I dare say, conjuring up all sorts of perils. But tell me, Edmond; what is the real state of poor Alfred,—and have you contrived to disentangle him from those difficulties into which he had plunged himself?"

"I have, my beloved!" replied Morton. "He is now freed from all embarrassments if he will keep himself so. I fear that will never be the case, however; for he has been brought up in habits of extravagance in which he has no right to indulge. But I should propose to you one thing, dear girl, which I know will be agreeable to you. The income he had at first is so much diminished, that, with his habits, it will never be sufficient. I can supply him for the present as far as he needs it, but it is always a humiliating thing to be under obligations to one who is nearly a stranger; and I think, when Louisa will consent to be my wife, it may be as well for her, as her own act, not only to make some addition to Mrs. Charlton's income, but also to settle such a sum upon him as will put him beyond all ordinary temptation

to incur fresh debts. You may well do it in your quality of sister; and perhaps it might rouse any better feelings within him to merit your kindness."

"You are always generous and thoughtful, Edmond," replied Louisa Charlton; "and it shall be just as you please. I can only say that you go before my wishes, though, perhaps, I might not have ventured to ask you to make such a sacrifice."

"I wish to make none, dear girl," replied Morton; "this should be done before you are my wife, that it may be all your own act. Otherwise it will lose part of its effect upon him. It will be enough for me to cancel the bond he has given for the money I have furnished, and that shall be done, Louisa, on our wedding-day. I need not tell Louisa Charlton that whatever she may choose to do with any part of her fortune before our marriage, it will be well pleasing to the man she has chosen."

"I wish my poor father could have heard you, Edmond; it would have removed many of his anxieties on my account," was Louisa's reply; and she leaned her head upon her lover's shoulder, while the tears again filled her eyes.

"Of one thing I have always been satisfied," said Morton, "that wealth ought ever to be looked upon, not as a benefit conferred upon ourselves for our own gratification, but a precious trust confided to us for its due administration to others. In whatever hands it accumulates, to whomsoever it descends, it is but as a stream collected into a great reservoir to fertilise and refresh all that is around it. If, by what I propose, you can reclaim this young man, the employment of your fortune will be noble and good; and even should the experiment altogether fail, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your part. Then, as to Mrs. Charlton, the income she possesses is not sufficient, and of course will be less when you are no longer with her."

"It is very strange," said Louisa, thoughtfully, "I mean my father's will. There are some parts of it I do not at all understand. He seemed to love her very much, and yet he leaves her with an insufficient income. I do not think he altogether relied upon her judgment, or her—her—her affection for me; and yet he——"

She paused, and Morton added, "He leaves you dependent in some degree upon her caprice, you would say, my Louisa. We shall see how she attempts to exercise the authority she has received. Of one thing, however, I am sure, that the law would read that part of the will somewhat differently from what she supposes; perhaps set it aside altogether. At all events, dear Louisa, I have your promise, rich or poor, you are mine. Is it not so, my beloved?"

"Oh, Edmond!" said Louisa, "you know that I could only wish to possess wealth to place it in the hands of one who would use it as you would. But could you really—nay, I will not ask the question, Edmond—I know you would take her you love, rich or poor; but what ought she to do; ought she to consent?"

"I will give her no choice," answered Morton, pressing her to his heart. "She has given her promise—she has made no condition. She is fast bound, and cannot escape."

"I do not wish it, Edmond, I do not wish it," repeated Louisa, earnestly. "I should hardly have fortitude to cast away such happiness, even for your sake."

CHAPTER XXVII.

After Morton and Mr. Nethersole had left Mother Brown's cottage, Alfred Latimer lay for several minutes gazing up towards the ceiling of the back room in which he had been placed, where a good deal more lath was apparent than plaster, and that portion of the latter which remained was principally supported by long filaments of horse-hair, which not unfrequently suffered a large mass of mortar to hang waving about in the wind. A small deal table, notched at the edges like a school-boy's desk, and with "Tom Brown" cut in large capitals in two or three places, stood in the middle of the chamber, and on it, in a battered tin candlestick, was a solitary tallow candle, with the top of the wick spreading out into sooty fungi, and the grease weltering down the sides. A tattered old chintz curtain half concealed the window; but where the sash appeared it showed many a piece of glass wanting, in one spot pasted up with brown paper, while in others the gaping aperture was stuffed up with dirty rags. To these interesting objects the young gentleman turned his eyes, after he had studied the canopy over his head for a considerable time, and then he exclaimed, "D—n it! This is very strange. Why I feel all knocked about; and where the devil I am, I can't tell. Surely that is Wilkinson. Why, what is all this? Where am I? How came I here?"

It was very evident that, as not uncommonly happens in such cases, the blow he had received on the head had obliterated all memory of the events immediately preceding. It is generally judged expedient to touch upon the subject of his state as little as possible with a patient so circumstanced; but Wilkinson had not studied the matter very deeply, and he consequently set to work, and told him all that had happened. The tale seemed to awaken Alfred Latimer's remembrance; and when he heard that he was in Mother Brown's cottage, he instantly showed that his recollection was quite unimpaired, by saying in a low voice, "Where are my clothes, Wilkinson? Put them here on the bed, and do not let the people get at them, for there is a good sum of money in one of the pockets. Don't lose sight of them for a minute, Wilkinson; for it would be a devil of an affair if they were to take that."

"Don't you think it would be better to send it to mistress to keep for you, sir?" asked the servant.

"No, curse it! she would keep it with a vengeance," answered her dutiful and respectful son. "I should get it back as soon from them as I should from her."

"Then, why not give it to Mr. Nethersole, to take care of for you till you are well," replied the man.

"Well, perhaps I may," rejoined Latimer; "that's no bad thought—but the doctor is gone, isn't he?"

Wilkinson made him understand that Mr. Nethersole would soon be back, and then warned Mr. Latimer that he ought not to speak, but to

remain quiet. Alfred Latimer, however, was not a man to restrain himself in anything; and he continued to ask questions, and to swear at his companion if he answered briefly or remonstrated, till the servant's patience becoming near its end, he replied, "Indeed, Mr. Latimer, I must obey the doctor's orders, and as you will not keep silent, I will go into the other room, but I will take care no one comes in without me."

"Go to the devil, if you like," replied Alfred Latimer; "but snuff the candle first."

The man did as he was directed, and left the room. About half an hour after this Mr. Nethersole returned, and having heard from the servant in the outer room, that Mr. Latimer was very unmanageable, he replied, "I will keep him quiet. I shall stay here till morning; so you can either remain or go home for an hour or two, as you like; only be back by five o'clock, for I have a case I must see."

With this warning the surgeon walked into the other room, and then, shutting the door, he held up his finger again to Mr. Latimer not to speak, sat down by his bed-side, and felt his pulse. "A little fever," he said, as if speaking to himself. "I am afraid there has been some excitement here. In your case, Mr. Latimer, Harpocrates is as good as Hippocrates, and better; but we must make them go hand in hand—Silence, my dear sir! silence! if you please. I am going to sit by your bed-side all night; and if you want anything, just hold up your finger. I shall divine what you want, and give it to you."

"You'll be devilish clever, then," said Alfred Latimer aloud, "for I want something now——"

"Not a word!" said Mr. Nethersole, stopping both his ears: "I will not listen to a word," and, approaching the table, he pulled a phial out of his pocket, poured about a third of it out into a little cup, and presented it to the patient, saying, "Drink that. Then turn round on your right side and try to get to sleep. That will compose you wonderfully."

"Why I'm quite composed already," answered the other.

"You won't be soon, if you go on so," answered Mr. Nethersole, drily, "for in two hours you'll be in a burning fever if you talk at all; in two days you will be lying composed enough; and in less than two weeks you will go out of that door with your feet foremost."

This speech had the desired effect. Alfred Latimer did not at all like the prospect so unceremoniously presented to him, and he lay down as he was bid, and kept silence, while Mr. Nethersole seated himself in the chair by his side, and taking a medical book out of his pocket began to read. Nine times did Mr. Nethersole snuff the candle; and then, as there was no use of snuffing it any longer, he went into the next room and got another. Mother Brown had gone to bed; her son was snoring in a chair; and when he returned the worthy surgeon found that Alfred Latimer was breathing hard too. The example he judged a good one, and bending down his head upon his arms he was soon in that strange mysterious state, wherein the distinction between the life of the body and the life of the soul is more plain than in any of the other phenomena of our marvellous existence.

He had gone on for some hours, and Alfred Latimer was still in a

sound and comfortable sleep, when the worthy surgeon was suddenly awakened by the opening of the door. He looked up, and saw the widow's son beckoning to him.

"Here's your boy, doctor, wants you quick," said the man, in a low tone.

"The deuce he does," murmured the surgeon; "that Mrs. Tilson come before her time!—she always does—I never saw anything like it."

It was, indeed, as he supposed; and after a brief conference with the boy at the door, he returned and looked at his patient, and then at his watch. The former was still enjoying tranquil repose, and the latter pointed to a quarter past four.

"Wilkinson must be back in three-quarters of an hour at the farthest," said Mr. Nethersole, "and Mrs. Tilson can't wait, that's certain. No great harm can happen; for he's doing quite well. Here, Tom," he continued, putting his head into the next room, and speaking in a low voice to Mother Brown's son; "When Wilkinson returns tell him to give his young master one half of that draught; and to send to me at Mrs. Tilson's, at Shedbury, if anything goes wrong;" and going out he mounted the horse the boy had brought, and rode away.

The moment he had gone, Tom Brown set the bottle down upon the table, and put his forefinger to his forehead. He was a dull-looking man; but yet there was a keen cunning light stole out of his somewhat oblique eyes when he thus set himself to consider, which had something dangerous and sinister in it.

"Three-quarters of an hour," he said, meditating, "that's well nigh an hour, may like. Howsomdever, I won't do nothing alone. I'll take advice and have help; for he might get upright by chance, and one would have to put him out of pain. Nobody would know it—One knock 's as good as another, and he's in such a smash 't wouldn't be seen. He said he'd a lot o' money—I heard un; but he didn't say how much, so who can tell. We might take a bit, and leave some upon account. Mother could hold the candle while I took the money, and Jack stood by wi' the poker ready to stop noise."

It was a perilous moment for Alfred Latimer; and the man walking to the foot of the stairs called his mother; but in so low a voice that she did not hear.

"What's the matter?" said some one in deep masculine tones. "He's not dying, is he?"

"Pooh, no!" cried [illegible] Brown. "Nothing like it at present. I want you, Jack Williams, and mother, too. Go and give her a shake in t'other room."

Jack Williams, without reply, went and woke Mother Brown, who hurried on some rags of clothes, and descended to the room where Williams and her son were already in conference. As she went down she stumbled over an iron pot which had been carelessly put at the foot of the stairs; and the pot, on being disturbed at that hour of the night, uttered a loud complaint. Alfred Latimer started, turned round, and gazed about him. The door between his room and the next had been left partly ajar, and he heard the sound of voices speaking. They were subdued; but yet many, nay, most of the words, were distinct to an ear quickened by a slight degree of feverish excitement, and he

heard the tongue of Mother Brown, as she was called, going pret sharply.

"It's no use taking the flimsies," she said; "they'd be knowed ai traced directly, and we should all get nabbed. But I don't see the can be any harm in seeing what yellow boys may be in his pockets. would be spoony enough to let them go, when he'd know nothi about it. He was always a careless hand, I've heard; and he mig ha' dropped 'em while they were lugging him out of the chay, or arte wards, or any how."

"I'd take the flimsies, too," said her well-educated son. "If wo couldn't flash them ourselves, we could get some one to do it. So I' take all—make a sweep out, and I know what——"

"Well, what do you know?" said a voice which Alfred Latimer instantly recognised as that of Jack Williams.

"Why, I should not like to do anything to him sleeping," answered Tom Brown; "but it would not be a bad job if he woke, and got a quiet knock o' the head—a little would do it now, and no one the wiser."

"And I know what, too," resumed Jack Williams aloud—"that none of you shall take a penny of his, or lay a finger on him. Why, confound you all, he's one of our own friends, and we should act like gentlemen to one another. He'll make as fine a fellow as ever lived one of these days, if a set of puling fools do not get hold of him, and preach the spirit out of him. But I don't think there is much chance of that. The lad's young, and has not had much experience, yet he is sharp enough, and I have seen signs of a bold strong heart in him, and a determined spirit. I'll have no tricks, Tom Brown; so look you, Mr. Latimer is under my protection, and let people take a penny from him if they dare."

The conversation did not only fall upon Alfred Latimer's ear, but sunk into his heart. The boldness with which Williams stood forward in his defence touched one of the few better points about him: and the language that he used was immediately put in strong opposition to that which Quatterly had employed. The latter had shown that in the higher ranks of life, a reputation once even stained could never be rendered wholly pure; the former proved that good feeling of a particular kind can be mingled with crimes and faults of a very deep dic. He fancied that the door was closed upon him in one course, and that it was open in another; and that low-toned conversation was more injurious to every good principle than the most potent arguments could have proved, if addressed to himself directly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

On the evening after the accident which, with its consequences, has occupied so much of our attention, about half an hour before nightfall, the graceful figure of Lucy Edmonds was observed walking near Mallington Park with a basket on her arm; her fair face was sad, and her eyes bent down upon the ground.

There was one watching her; and when she came into the part of the wood where the trees closed thickest, Jack Williams walked out

from amongst the nearest group of poplars, and advanced to meet her. Lucy started; but it was the suddenness of his appearance alone that surprised her, and her manner clearly showed that she had held communication of some kind with him before.

"Ah! Mr. Williams," she said, "I did not expect to see you here."

"No, Miss Lucy," replied the man; "but I came to meet you, for I watched you out; and I thought you would like to hear the truth of how he is going on, poor fellow."

Lucy turned towards him with a look of apprehension. "Going on!" she cried—"Poor fellow! What do you mean, Mr. Williams? Oh! tell me, what is the matter now?"

"What! have you not heard?" asked Williams; "why, he has met with a bad accident; but don't frighten yourself—he is better and will do well—that is, if his spirits are kept up; but don't frighten yourself; he will do very well, I tell you. But the matter is this, as I was saying —I wrote him a note, you know, telling him that your father wished you to marry young Garland; and off he set from London directly. Mr. Morton, a gentleman who has been staying down here——"

"Oh! I know him very well," replied Lucy Edmonds; "he has been several times to see my father."

"Well, he was in the chaise with Mr. Latimer," continued Williams; "and they came on at a great rate till they reached Mallington Common, about eight o'clock last night. There the horses ran away with them, and went over the bank into Mother Brown's Pit. Mr. Morton was very little hurt, but poor Alfred was taken out speechless."

The man paused, and Lucy wrung her hands in bitter grief. "But you say he is better?" she cried, after a moment's silence. "Oh! tell me true, Mr. Williams."

"Yes, he is better," answered her companion—"a good deal better; but I know what would make him quite well."

"And what is that?" demanded Lucy Edmonds.

"If you would come and see him, Miss Lucy," said Williams, "or promise to do so to-morrow; it would do him more good than all the stuff out of Dr. Nethersole's shop."

"That is impossible," answered Lucy Edmonds, firmly; "how could I go up to Mallington House?—and besides——"

"He is not at Mallington House," replied Williams, interrupting her; "he is at Mother Brown's cottage, on the common. You could come quite well, and nobody know anything of it."

"No," answered Lucy, "I promised my father that I would not see him, and I cannot."

"Then you are a very silly girl," answered Williams, sternly; "or else you are going to do what your father wishes, and marry young Garland. Ay, ay! Count upon a woman's love! It is no more to be leaned upon than one of those sedges. But I'll go away and tell him to break his heart for you no more; for that you have got a new lover, and care no more for him."

"Oh! do not, do not be so cruel," said Lucy, weeping bitterly; "you know that what you say is not true. Tell him, if you will, not to think of me any more; for my father says he will never let him have me. But do not tell him I have or can forget him, for that is false."

"Well, I will tell him," replied Williams; "but he won't easily believe you love him much, if you will not come to see him even when he is lying sick. He will think that you do not wish to know how he is."

"Oh! he knows better," replied Lucy; "he knows I would give anything in the world to hear every day how he is."

"Well, I can let you know that," said Williams. "If you can come out about this place of an evening—say at this time—I will be down and tell you how he is going on, for I am lodging at Widow Brown's, and I see him very often."

"Oh! do, do," cried Lucy, eagerly. "I will come whenever I can: but do not wait long for me, for my father might send me somewhere else. But I will come whenever I can, indeed I will."

"Well, you are a good girl after all, and do love him, I believe," replied Williams.

"Oh, you know I do, too well!" answered Lucy Edmonds.

"Then you are very silly for not following your love," answered the man; "fathers have always such crotchets; and if a girl did not take her own way, no girl would ever marry the man she loves. If Mr. Latimer did not mean fair by you, it would be another thing; but he has offered to marry you at once—ay, and he will marry you too, whatever your father may say, for love will have its way."

"But my promise," said Lucy, with a deep sigh.

"Nonsense about promises," answered Williams; "they never hold good long against love, Lucy Edmonds. However, I will bring you word how Alfred is going on every evening about this time; and you can come and hear it if you like: so now, good night."

Lucy bade him adieu, and, wiping the traces of tears from her eyes, walked on towards her home. Williams remained gazing after her; and his feelings were of so strange and mixed a nature, that we may well pause to look into them more closely. He gazed after Lucy Edmonds, I have said, and certainly with some admiration of her beauty; but it was with no thought of robbing Alfred Latimer of the heart he had won, even if it had been possible; and the only observation he made to himself was—"She's very pretty; it is a pity he should not have her."

After Lucy was gone, he sat down upon the stump of a willow, and began to ponder on the future and the present. "She will make him a sweet wife," he thought; "and though she's very different from Margaritta, yet she will suit him. If we can get together money enough to buy a schooner out there, and set ourselves up in one of those beautiful little islands, we may carry on gloriously. I can sail the ship, and he can do many things that I can't. It's just the life to suit him. I wonder if he'll consent. If we carry off pretty Lucy by force he'll be obliged; for he must be off as fast as possible. I have him there; and then it will be the best thing he can do. I long to see Black Jack flying over us; but I must not let him squander away his money with Bill Maltby and such fellows. We'll have no Bill Maltby amongst us either. He's a pitiful knave—cheats at cards and dice. We'll have bold fellows, that can fight only; and then we'll make fine work with the turbans. But he has no notion of my plan yet, and I had better sound him. I'll tell him some stories of what happened last year at

Zante, and see how he likes it. But once we've carried her off, he must go; and then what better could he do?"

Such were some of the thoughts of him who deserved the name of ruffian more than villain; but there were many other ideas crossed his mind, fleeting, transitory, and strange—sensations rather than thoughts, making a strange mixed mass of good and of evil, of coarse fierceness, and many softer emotions. When he returned to the common, a carriage was standing at the nearest point of the road to the cottage of Widow Brown, and Williams at once recognised the liveries of Mrs. Charlton. He saw, likewise, the horse of Mr. Nethersole; and he walked on with a leisurely, sauntering pace, still keeping within sight, but affecting to amuse himself with looking at the shrubs and bushes. He then descended into the pit, in which he saw some people gathered about the spot where the chaise had fallen; and he found that the little crowd was occupied with the removal of the two dead horses in a cart for Mr. Markham's kennel. In one of the persons there assembled, however, he instantly recognised a gentleman whom he had no great inclination to meet, namely, Mr. Gibbs, the traveller with whom he had made a somewhat unpleasant acquaintance in Wenlock Wood. But Williams was not one to suffer even conscience to cow him; and he gazed upon the other's face with a stern and stedfast look, more like that of an injured person than of one who had committed an injury. He was very much surprised, however, when Gibbs advanced to meet him with a pleasant smirk upon his face, saying, "Ah, Mr. Williams! I am very glad to see you."

"Indeed!" said Williams, without relaxing a feature of his face; "that is more than I can say to you.—What makes you glad to see me, pray?"

"Because, Mr. Williams," replied the traveller, "I always like to do justice; and though, when I last beheld you, I thought you very like the man who knocked me down and robbed me on the other side of the water, I am now convinced that I was quite mistaken."

Williams replied, drily, "Oh! you are, are you? Well, better late than never. But let it teach you not to suspect innocent people again. I should like to hear, however, what it is has convinced you at last."

"I will tell you in a moment," said Mr. Gibbs. "In the first place, the man must have been taller than you: in the next place, he wore different shoes; and, in the third place, I find you changed a five-pound note that very day at the inn, and another yesterday at the linendraper's. Now, no notes were taken from me; and a man is not likely to take another man's money when his own pockets are full."

"He may want to fill them fuller," answered Williams, "so that's no reason, Mr. What's-your-name; but as for me, I got my pay and prize-money when my ship was paid off; so I had enough of my own for the time being; but when it is all spent, if you will tell me which way you are going with a good lot of gold about you, I'll see what I can do with yours."

He spoke laughing, and Mr. Gibbs laughed, too—quite heartily. Nay, he even added, "Well, I did you injustice, Mr. Williams; I beg your pardon for it frankly, and as it's growing dark, if you will come down to the Bagpipes we will have a bowl of punch together, and forget all grievances."

"I can't just now," answered Williams; "but I will to-morrow night if you like."

Mr. Gibbs agreed to this change of his proposed plan, and Williams, seeing the top of Mrs. Charlton's carriage, the sight of which he just caught over the bank moving rapidly away, turned upon his heel and entered the cottage.

Several of the persons who had overheard this conversation stared at Mr. Gibbs; and one of them, a surly carter, who knew Jack Williams well, uttered in a murmur between his teeth—what was probably the internal opinion of all—"Well, you're a fool, if ever there was one." But in this instance, at least, Mr. Gibbs was not such a fool as people thought. The cart moved off with the two dead horses; and the people, who had been gathered round, followed it. Mr. Gibbs remained for a moment or two behind, then stooping down, as if to tie his shoe, he pulled something out from beneath a bramble bush, scratching himself a good deal as he did so; and then climbing the bank, he paused as soon as he got into the clearer light which the higher ground afforded, examined something which he held in his hand attentively, and walked straight away to Mallington House.

Mr. Morton was dressing for dinner, when a servant entered his room, saying, "There is a person below, sir, who wishes to speak with you directly upon business of importance."

"Indeed!" said Morton, "did he give his name?"

"He said his name is Gibbs, sir," answered the footman, "and that he would not detain you a minute."

"I know no such person," replied the young gentleman, looking at his watch; "however, as there is time, tell him that I am dressing; but if his business be of real importance, he can see me here. If not, let him call to-morrow."

The man retired, and in two or three minutes returned, ushering in Mr. Gibbs.

Mr. Gibbs bowed low, very low indeed; and then hemmed and bowed again, while the servant shut the door and retired.

"Well, sir," said Morton, waxing somewhat impatient. "What may be your business?"

"My name is Gibbs, sir," rejoined the other, with a most agreeable smile, "and yours is Morton?"

The young gentleman bowed his head.

"This pocket-book, then, I suppose, belongs to you," said Mr. Gibbs, in reply to this mute assent.

Morton started and turned round. "Yes, sir, it does," he said; "I must have dropped it in getting out of the chaise last night—it is very strange I did not miss it."

It would, indeed, have been strange, if he had not been so near Louisa Charlton; but that altered the case. Mr. Gibbs placed the wetted and soiled book in its owner's hands, with another low bow, adding, in a marked and peculiar tone, "I was obliged, sir, to open it and examine the contents, to ascertain to whom it belonged."

This intimation, from some cause or other, seemed to give Morton cause for thought, but at length with a light and half-laughing look, he replied, "I understand what you mean, Mr. Gibbs; and all I can

say is, that I must trust to your discretion, which, if it prove stable, shall not go unrewarded.

"Pray, do not mention such a thing, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs: "my discretion you may fully trust to without any reward; and, indeed, there is a subject on which I have wished to speak to you for two or three days, which will show you how discreet I can be."

"I think I must ask you to choose another time, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, looking again at his watch. "I must go down as soon as I am dressed."

"When you please, sir," answered the traveller, "but, before you are dressed, I can give you an inkling of the matter. I think you take a good deal of interest in the family of a park-keeper over the river, named Edmonds?"

"I do certainly," said Morton; "he is a very good, respectable man."

"And in his daughter, I believe, sir?" rejoined Mr. Gibbs.

Morton drew up his head, and looked at his companion in some surprise. "I do not understand your meaning, sir," he answered. "I have once, or perhaps twice, seen his daughter, but I take no other interest in her than in the rest of his family. Pray explain yourself."

"Why, I thought, sir—I thought," replied Mr. Gibbs, hesitating; "I thought I saw you—I am sure it was a gentleman—speaking with her, for nearly an hour, about a fortnight ago in the park; and he came from this house, and went back to this house. And now I thought —that is to say, I suspected—I mean, I imagined—it might be interesting to him to know, that she is in the custom of meeting—that is to say, I am sure, she has met four days ago, and to-night, too—a man, named Williams, who was supposed—that is to say, accused—of knocking me down and robbing me in Wenlock Wood, when I was here last."

Now all this information was interesting to Mr. Morton; for it gave him a clue to part of Alfred Latimer's conduct, at least he thought so. The facts of his having seen Williams (whose name had been mentioned in his hearing) at the cottage of Widow Brown, of the man's meeting that night with Lucy, and of their preceding interview four days before, connected themselves with the letter Alfred Latimer had received, and with his eagerness to return to Mallington immediately after having read it. With Morton all was at present fancy; it was a conjectural collocation of circumstances, and the proof was yet to be obtained. But how? was the difficult question. To act as a spy, or to employ a spy upon any other man's actions, was not to be thought of; and he resolved to let matters take their course; evolve themselves as they would, and at the same time to employ the information he had received as occasion might require.

"In the first place, Mr. Gibbs," he replied, when his cogitations came to an end, "let me inform you that you are mistaken in supposing that I am the person whom you saw talking with Lucy Edmonds. I never spoke to her out of her father's house in my life, and at the time you mention was not a visitor here. May I ask how near you were to the person you supposed to be me?"

"Oh dear, sir, I was a long way off," replied Mr. Gibbs. "I was at the top of the house amusing myself, as I usually do, with this little instrument," and he pulled out a small telescope from his pocket.

"From the window of my room," he continued, "I command the park on one side, and the hill up to the common on the other, and I see all that goes on in the place."

"I should not think it a very profitable or very worthy inquiry, sir," replied Morton, "but every man has his tastes; and, as meddling with other people's business is not one of mine, I can have nothing further to do with the matter you have mentioned, except, indeed, to say it would be, I think, but an act of Christian charity to warn poor Edmonds, that his daughter is placing herself in dangerous circumstances. That would be drawing some good from perquisitions which I cannot advise you to pursue further."

"You mistake, sir; allow me very respectfully to say, you mistake," said Mr. Gibbs, with some warmth. "You must allow me, sir, to clear myself. I do not use my telescope for the purpose of prying into other people's affairs, though I can't help seeing them if they come in my way. Sir, the truth is this: I have been knocked down and robbed near here. We could not identify the man; but I am quite sure of who he is, and I am resolved to bring him to justice. I have fixed my eye upon a particular man, sir, and he shall find that he can't escape that eye. I watch him and his doings every moment I have to spare, and ere long I shall get hold of the end of the clue."

"That alters the case very materially, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, "and I trust that you will succeed; but, in regard to this poor girl, it would, I think, be but right to speak with her father upon the subject, and leave it to him to take such steps as he may think fit."

"May I ask, sir," said Mr. Gibbs, in a low tone, "whether he is acquainted or not with certain circumstances. I wish to act discreetly, sir; and would not, for the world, betray a secret which had accidentally fallen into my possession."

"You are quite right, Mr. Gibbs," said Morton. "But, to answer your question, he is not aware of anything; no one, indeed, is. The matter is of no great consequence, indeed; but every man has his whim."

"Oh! certainly, sir, certainly," said Mr. Gibbs. "But I won't detain you longer, sir; and if you have any further commands for me you will find me at the inn, sir; for I have determined not to quit this place till I have got the right sow by the ear."

Morton then hastened down to the drawing-room, but was disappointed in his hope of finding Louisa alone. Mrs. Charlton was, indeed, not yet down; but Dr. Western was seated on the sofa by the side of his fair ward.

"Ay, my young friend," said the clergyman, with a laughing look towards Louisa: "I am very much in the way here, but I wanted to speak to you, so I came early, even at the risk of being the unfortunate third.—Nay, Louisa," he continued, seeing her rising as if she received what he said as a hint to leave them, "you know I am the friend of both, and give my hearty consent—so if you run away, I shall think that you wish to hide your arrangements from me. I have nothing to say to him that you may not hear, though, perhaps, the confidence is not quite reciprocal. Morton, have you done what you said you would?"

"No, my dear sir," replied Morton, "I have had no time." All to-

day we have been in the strait-waistcoat of society, and yesterday, while we were five minutes alone together, we somehow talked of other things."

"Oh! I know how quite well," answered Dr. Western; "but what need of time?—one minute will do it. My dear Louisa, let me introduce a friend of mine to you;" and leading Morton up to her, with a gay look, he whispered a word in her ear.

Louisa Charlton gazed in Morton's face with an expression of surprise almost amounting to alarm. But Morton, notwithstanding the good doctor's presence, threw his arms round her, saying, "What, my beloved! can a name make any difference to you?"

"No," murmured Louisa—"oh! no; but this takes me very much by surprise."

"Our good friend here is wrong," said Morton, "in telling you thus, dear Louisa. Nay, he is wrong in telling you at all as yet; for all is not settled, and I wished it to be so fully before I spoke."

"It is you who are wrong, Morton," replied Dr. Western; "the parson of the parish is always right. There should be no secrets between two people circumstanced as you are. Nay, more, I have to tell you, sir, that all is settled, as I will prove to you, if you will come and partake of a plain dinner with me to-morrow, at five, and then take a long walk. Louisa shall share the dinner if she will, but not the ramble; and in the meantime, ma'am, remember that though I have taken the liberty of telling you other people's secrets, you are not to follow my bad example."

As he spoke, Mrs. Charlton entered the room, and found Morton, Louisa, and Dr. Western standing close together, with somewhat too evident symptoms of having been engaged in secret conclave. She made no observation, indeed; but a slight smile, somewhat sarcastic and triumphant, crossed her lip, as if she would have said, had she thought fit to speak what was passing within, "Ah! you think that I am blind; but you are playing my game while you imagine you are playing your own."

Dr. Western at once entered into conversation with the lady, telling her that "he had asked Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton to dine with him on the following day, and trusted she would be of the party."

"I suppose, in propriety, I ought to be," replied Mrs. Charlton; "but really, my dear sir, I have so many different things to do, that Louisa must go without a chaperon for once, especially when she is going to her guardian's house. Alfred tells me that you have been to see him, doctor, for which I am very much obliged."

"I thought it a duty, my dear lady," replied Dr. Western; "the accounts that reached me were so alarming that I feared I should find him very ill. There seems little the matter, however, but a few bruises; and I should think you could bring him home quite safely to-morrow."

Before Mrs. Charlton could reply, the door was thrown open to announce dinner, and the rector, advancing, gave her his arm, while Morton followed with Louisa.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MOTHER BROWN'S cottage was certainly by no means a pleasant place, and yet thither must I once more lead the gentle reader.

In the outer chamber of the cottage, which was divided into four rooms, two above and two below, and by the side of the large ill-constructed chimney, sat Tom Brown, the widow's son, with an old yellow greasy tobacco-pipe in his mouth, puffing away clouds of no very fragrant smoke. Sometimes a momentary smile would change the expression of his dull face, yet in general a heavy frown still further contracted that meaningless and animal forehead. It is not necessary to inquire what emotions produced either the frown or the smile; but their course was soon after interrupted by the entrance of Williams, who spoke with him for a moment or two by the fire, and then turned towards the door which led into the inner chamber.

"Ah!" said Tom Brown, "there he lies on his back, like a dead crow, when he's just as well as you or I, Jack. Well, I shall go and take a walk—I wonder what the devil he keeps lying there for?"

"He knows what he's about," answered Williams; "but don't you go far, Tom, for we may want you. Where's your mother?"

"Oh! she's gone down to Mallington to buy some pork," replied her son; and, thus saying, he walked out of the door, and closed it behind him.

Jack Williams in the meantime entered the room where Alfred Latimer lay; and the moment that he appeared the young gentleman started up in his bed, without any sign of pain or sickness, exclaiming, "Well, I'm devilish glad you're come at last; I thought you'd never be here."

"Why, I had a good deal to do," said Williams, "and one can't manage obstinate people in a minute, Mr. Latimer."

"Ay, that's what my mother said of me this morning," rejoined the young gentleman. "She was over here, and wanted me to go back to the house; for she and that old fool Western have been laying their heads together, and settling that this was a very bad place for me to stay in, so that, fever or no fever, I ought to be brought over to Mallington. I wouldn't go, however, and then, just to drive me, she said she couldn't spare Wilkinson any longer."

"What did you say to that?" demanded Jack Williams.

"Why, I said I could spare him very well," answered Alfred Latimer, "and so sent him about his business, glad enough to get rid of him. I promised to come over to-morrow, however; so whatever is to be done must be done to-night."

"Oh! I've got all ready," replied Jack Williams, "if you are strong enough."

"I'm quite well," replied Alfred Latimer. "There's nothing the matter with me; but I've been thinking, Jack, how the deuce we shall get her across the water and through the village without people seeing. She will never be able to walk to the other bridge."

"To be sure not," answered Williams; "that's what has kept me such a time, for I couldn't hire a punt, all I could do. One fellow said he was sure I was going to poach the river, and he might have his boat seized. However, at last I got hold of young Blackmore, who promised to draw his father's punt up and amongst the reeds there; then we can get across in the dusk, without being seen, and have her up to the cottage at Illington in no time. But mind, Mr. Latimer, you're to marry her, you know."

"Oh—ah! I'll marry her," replied Alfred Latimer; "I'll marry her—don't you be afraid."

"No, I'm not afraid," replied Williams; "for I wouldn't help you if I thought you'd cheat her; and having given me your promise, I look to you to keep it. So, as that's settled, I've got a pack of things for you here in the bundle that will make you look as much like a gamekeeper as possible, leather leggings and all; and if you start over the back way just before dusk you'll find me down by the water. We must get Tom Brown, however, to stay in the boat while we are in the park. It will be awkward, however, if she doesn't come, since you have promised to go home to-morrow."

"If she doesn't I won't go," replied Alfred Latimer. "It will do well enough, and nobody suspect anything, while I am lying here and supposed to be ill; but if I were up at Mallington House, and going about, they'd say directly I had taken her—but she'll come, I think."

In about ten minutes, the step of Tom Brown was heard crossing the floor of the next room in haste, and the moment after he opened the door and put his head in, saying, "I say, Mr. Williams, have you been talking loud with that window open, for there's been a d——d fellow hanging about on the outside listening, or I am mistaken."

Williams started up with a heavy brow, without any reply, and, running to the window, looked forth.

"He's gone, he's gone," said Tom Brown; "as soon as he saw me come down the hill he was off like a shot."

"Do you know him?" asked Williams.

"I'm not quite sure," answered Brown, "but I think, by the look of him, that it was that dancing-master looking cove who got his head broke and lost his money one day."

"He may get his head broken to better purpose if he comes listening here," said Williams; and then fell into a train of thought, from which he was roused after a moment or two by Alfred Latimer exclaiming—"Why, if he has heard all, our scheme will be blown over the whole place."

"No, no," answered his companion, "he did not hear enough for that. No names were mentioned, you know; and he couldn't make out much of it. However, run down to the bridge, and see whether he crosses or not. If we can make sure of him till five o'clock I'll take care of him after that. He shan't blab till the thing is done, at all events."

"Stay there till Williams comes down to you," said Alfred Latimer, "and I'll give you five shillings for your pains, Brown."

People's estimation of their conscience is very different in different individuals; but, unlike the appreciation of any other thing, the less

a man has of it the less value does he place upon it. What is there on earth that Tom Brown would not have done for five shillings? On his present errand, he set off at once with so rapid a step that he overtook Mr. Gibbs half way down the hill, and saw him enter the inn before he took his station on the bridge. The guard he kept was uninterrupted; for whether it was that the worthy traveller was conscious of being watched, or whether some other occupation kept him within, he did not issue forth again till the figure of Jack Williams was seen walking with a slow pace, and the usual swinging gait of a sailor, down towards the side of the river. No verbal communication took place between the two confederates, but the thumb pointed back over the right shoulder indicated to Tom Brown that he was to go back to the cottage, and Williams, walking into the inn, asked if Mr. Gibbs was at home.

Mr. Williams was introduced into the chamber of Mr. Gibbs, and a bowl of punch had been ordered, which speedily appeared. Mr. Gibbs, who paid with a degree of regularity for everything he bought, which he often wished that others would imitate, drew forth a ten-pound note, and asked the maid who brought the punch to change it; and on her returning with the note unchanged, he applied to his new companion, but without success. Williams, for some reason, declared that he had no change, though his pocket was very heavy, and the girl civilly insisting that there was no hurry, Mr. Gibbs was obliged to desist. He was courtesy itself to his guest—he plied him with punch, he talked to him incessantly, he mingled soft allusions to the fragrant Balm of Trinidad with expressions of regret at having ever been betrayed into the folly of thinking that a seafaring gentleman like Mr. John Williams could have committed a highway robbery.

Williams listened to him with grim gravity; nothing that Mr. Gibbs could say could move him to more than a sardonic smile. In short, Jack Williams was an old bird, and was not to be caught with chaff such as Mr. Gibbs threw down before him. On the Balm of Trinidad, however, he was somewhat more discursive; and when they had well nigh got to the bottom of the bowl of punch, he began to twist upon his finger the long ringlets that hung over his whiskers, and inquired particularly into the merits of that fragrant essence. It was a subject upon which Mr. Gibbs was eloquent, and he enumerated some nineteen or twenty of its admirable qualities, till at length Mr. Williams felt in his pocket and asked the price, producing at the same time a crown piece. The ruling passion strong in death showed Mr. Gibbs the opportunity of doing a little business, and unable to resist, he said, "The retail price was in truth seven-and-sixpence, but he would pass it to his friend Mr. Williams at the wholesale rate of five shillings."

"Well, then, let us have a bottle!" exclaimed Jack Williams, giving another coxcomb twist to the corkscrew curl.

Immediately Mr. Gibbs started up from the table; and approaching a large leather-covered case, which stood in the window, he dived into the interior thereof to bring up a bottle of the Balm of Trinidad. As he was doing so he heard the ladle rattle in the bowl, and turned his head round, when he saw Mr. Williams helping himself to some more punch.

"I've taken the liberty, Mr. Gibbs," said Jack Williams, in a slow

tone, "to drink your health during your absence. Shall I fill your glass to return thanks?"

"Thank you, I'm coming back directly," said Mr. Gibbs; and, returning to the table, he presented his companion with a bottle of the fragrant balm, received his crown piece, and, filling himself a glass of punch—it was well nigh the last that the bowl contained—he drank it off.

Jack Williams in the meanwhile went on sipping his own, opening the bottle of fragrant balm, pulling out the cork, and smelling the odour with the air of a connoisseur. Mr. Gibbs then proposed another bowl, and Mr. Williams readily consented. The maid was summoned, the empty vessel carried away, and another replete with fragrant liquor speedily placed upon the table. By this time, however, the eyes of Mr. Gibbs had acquired a somewhat glassy and lackadaisical expression, and in a few minutes he began to nod; upon which Jack Williams gave him a meaning smile, and taking up the bowl, half emptied it at a draught. He then sat for about half an hour longer to watch the progress of his entertainer's sleep.

The Caliph Haroun Alraschid had a certain powder—we are informed by one of the most veracious of all possible histories—of which, when he wished to send any of his friends to sleep, he used to take a pinch and drop it into their wine or sherbet. Now, whether Jack Williams, in his travels in the East, had possessed himself or not of the Caliph's secret, certain it is that he intended Mr. Gibbs to go to sleep, and that Mr. Gibbs dutifully complied with his desire. At length, as the sky was beginning to get a little grey, Williams rose, and taking up the worthy traveller in his arms, laid him quietly on his bed; then descending the stairs, he stopped a minute at the bar, saying to Mrs. Pluckrose, "You've made that punch devilish strong, marm, and Gibbs has got as drunk as an owl."

"Good gracious me!" cried the worthy landlady, "I hope he's not noisy."

"Oh, no," answered Williams; "he's fallen sound asleep, and left me to drink out the bowl; but I find my head queerish too, and so I'll have no more of it. Good night, marm," and away he went.

Mrs. Pluckrose and the maid immediately proceeded to ascertain the facts of the case; and finding the worthy traveller stretched upon his bed, apparently in a state of drunken sleep, they left him there, only taking the precaution of putting some towels under his boots that they might not dirt the counterpane.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was a very pleasant little drive from Mallington House to the rectory, both for Edmond Morton and Louisa Charlton, and yet it would be very difficult to say in what its pleasantness consisted. They spoke very little, so that it could not be in conversation. They were aware that the eyes of the villagers were upon them, and therefore it was not in what is commonly called making love. Louisa felt a little awkwardness in thus first appearing with her lover alone, and therefore it was not in that ease and freedom from restraint which in itself is an

enjoyment. It could only be, then, in being together, but that was something, and something very pleasant too. It connected itself by the fine links of thought with a future, when they should be always together—when, heart and hand united, and yet separate, they should go along the varied paths of life, mutually enjoying the sunshine, and cheering each other in the shade.

When they reached the rectory, strange to say, both were more at ease in their demeanour to each other than they had been when alone; and the quiet simple dinner at the rectory passed over in calm and pleasant conversation, natural, straightforward, true.

As soon as dinner was done, Dr. Western proposed to his young friend that they should set out upon their walk; and having taken their hats and sticks, they issued forth from the rectory, and bent their steps towards the bridge. At length, when within about five hundred yards of the house, they turned from their course, and bent their steps towards the park-keeper's cottage. Opening the door without ceremony, Dr. Western led the way in, and looked around; but the only person the little room contained was Mrs. Edmonds. She smiled and courtesied on seeing the rector; and, in reply to his question, said that Edmonds was up at the Hall, having gone to speak with Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, in regard to some men who had been seen prowling about. Dr. Western sat down for a minute or two, and inquired in a careless tone for his young friends, Lucy and John.

"Oh! John is tending the fowls," replied the mother; "and Lucy has gone down with a few eggs to poor Janet Hazlewood: she is late this evening. I wish she would come back."

"She should be in before dark, Mrs. Edmonds," said Dr. Western, in a grave tone; "and as you say there are strange men about the place, if you would take my advice, you would send her brother with her for a day or two, whenever she goes out."

"I will, sir," replied the park-keeper's wife.

She looked earnestly in the rector's face, as if there were questions she would fain have asked; but either from timidity, or some vague apprehension, she did not put them; and soon after Dr. Western and his young companion bade her good evening, and walked towards the Hall. It was now nearly dark, and a twinkling star was here and there appearing in the sky, when suddenly Morton stopped, and said, "I thought I heard a scream."

"I heard a jay in the wood," replied Dr. Western; but nevertheless they waited and listened. No other sound, however, broke the silence of the air; and, after pausing for a few moments, they followed the path to the house. The great door of the Hall was opened for them by Edmonds himself; but, although they had been down to his house to seek him, neither of the two gentlemen seemed to have any particular matter to communicate, for they merely told him to bring them a light into the library, and turned their steps thither themselves.

"I will see him to-morrow," said Dr. Western, "and tell him privately, when I can admonish him a little; for though an excellent man, there is a certain degree of sternness about him which might drive the poor child to further imprudence, if not to evil."

A minute after Edmonds entered with a light, and merely saying to Morton, in a respectful tone, that he would wait till that gentleman

was at leisure, for he wished to speak with him for a moment, the park-keeper retired and shut the door. The dim light of the tallow-candle penetrated with difficulty the obscurity of the large old-fashioned room; but Dr. Western walked direct to one corner of the library, and took down a thick quarto, on which was inscribed the words "History of ——shire."

"Oh! I have seen that, my dear sir," said Morton, with a smile. "I looked all through it before I left London, but it throws no light upon that part of the subject."

"What an impatient thing is youth!" replied the worthy clergyman: and, laying down the book upon the long table, he opened it and turned over several pages. Besides the printed matter which it contained, there was now displayed upon the broad margin numerous annotations, written in a small clear hand, and each signed by a single name. Between the leaves, too, were several scraps of written paper, some of which Morton barely looked at and passed over; but at one he paused, and read the whole contents with great attention; and then, turning to Dr. Western, he shook him by the hand, saying, "This is all that could be desired, indeed! How, in the name of good fortune, did you discover it, my dear sir?"

"By a very simple process," replied Dr. Western. "My predecessor at Mallington was a great antiquarian and genealogist. At his death I bought his books; and, amongst the rest, there fell into my hands a manuscript account of this part of the country. On looking in that, to see if I could find a clue to what you wanted, I met with numerous references to this book, and especially to the notes and memoranda of Lord Mallington, after this fashion:—'In History of ——shire, Mallington Park Library—the Earl's MS. illustrations.' I came up yesterday morning, and very soon satisfied myself that here was the information required."

"I must have a copy of this!" said Morton. "I suppose that it would be hardly justifiable to take the original."

"I do not see why," replied Dr. Western; "but, as a copy will do as well, you had better keep on the right side. We will get a pen and ink, and then half an hour will suffice to transcribe it."

Dr. Western moved towards the door as he spoke; but ere he reached it, Edmonds, the park-keeper, entered with a face a little pale, and an expression of intense anxiety in his eyes. "I am afraid, sir, I must go away," he said, addressing Morton; "for my boy has just come up to tell me that Lucy is not yet at home. I don't understand it, sir; I must go and see."

He evidently strove to speak calmly, but the father's apprehensions would have way, and his voice trembled, and his lip quivered. Dr. Western and Morton looked at each other with a grave and meaning glance; and Morton, closing the book before them, said in a low tone of voice to the rector, "We can do this to-morrow; let us go with him. He may need support and assistance."

Dr. Western nodded his head, and said, in as easy a tone as he could assume, "We will go with you, Edmonds. But don't make yourself uneasy, my good man. Your wife told us that Lucy had gone down to poor old Janet Hazlewood's. Something may have occurred to detain her."

The man looked earnestly in Dr. Western's face, but he made no reply; for there was suspicion in his heart which he did not dare utter to any one else till it grew into certainty. The good old housekeeper, who had followed him into the hall, took the candle and closed the door after they had gone out; and directing their course across the park towards a spot where the tr es came nearly down to the river's side, about two hundred yards' distance from the gates, they turned towards the marshy piece of ground where Williams and Lucy Edmonds had met the day before.

"Is there no other path she could have taken in coming home?" asked Morton, speaking to Edmonds, who, with his eyes bent forward to see if he could catch a glimpse of her coming form through the darkness of the night, had gone on in silence a few steps before the two gentlemen.

"She might take the gravel-walk, there, that runs through the trees above," said Edmonds; "but I don't think it likely, sir."

"Then I will go that way," said Morton.—"Where does it join the other path?"

"Close by the osiers, sir," answered the park-keeper; and Morton, turning away, hurried on to the spot where the gravel-walk, which Edmonds had mentioned, entered the thicker wood, and then pursued it, as fast as he could go, till it came to the side of the swamp. During the last thirty or forty yards, he could hear the voices of Dr. Western and the park-keeper speaking earnestly together, but they ceased as soon as he joined them; and, examining the ground to the right and the left as they proceeded, the whole party walked on till they came to the park wall. There was no gate nor door at that spot; but a little flight of wooden steps, up one side of the wall and down the other, soon brought them to the sandy lane, beyond which two or three cottages were seen by the side of the road; and, advancing to a door that stood exactly opposite, Edmonds opened it and went in, followed close by Dr. Western and Mr. Morton. The park-keeper cast a quick and eager glance around into every corner of the room. There was an old and sickly woman sitting in a large wicker-chair by the side of the little fire-place, and another woman of the same class, about forty years of age, busily making her some tea; but the form he looked for did not meet the poor man's eye, and his heart sank.

"So Lucy is not here, good dame?" he said, speaking to the sick woman.

"Oh! no, Mr. Edmonds," replied Dame Hazlewood, "she's gone home."

"She's been gone well nigh an hour," said the other woman.

Edmonds pressed his two hands tight together, but uttered not a word. Yet the expression of anguish and alarm in his face instantly struck the woman who had last spoke, and she exclaimed, "Has the poor dear not come home?"

"No," answered Edmonds; "no, nor is she on the way."

"Perhaps you did not take the same path, Mr. Edmonds," replied the younger woman; "you might pass very close to each other without knowing it. I'm sure as I came down an hour or so ago, I should have never known that any one was along the other walk, if young Mr. Latimer had not come through the trees, and said, 'Is that you, Jack?'"

"Mr. Latimer is sick in bed at Brown's cottage, my good lady," said Morton, advancing. "You must be mistaken."

"Oh! no, sir," answered Dame Hazlewood's friend. "I saw him with my own eyes. He was oddly dressed, to be sure, as if he did not wish to be known; but I'd swear to him anywhere."

"I think there must be an error," said Dr. Western; but before he concluded the sentence, Edmonds, with a flashing eye and a burning cheek, broke in upon his speech, exclaiming, "No, no, no! It was he, sure enough. The villain has robbed me of my child—I know all about it. He has corrupted her heart, and condemned her soul; and God's curse and her father's be upon both their heads!"

Dr. Western laid his hand upon his arm, saying, with a grave brow and solemn tone, "Forbear, forbear!"

"I cannot, sir,—I cannot!" cried Edmonds, furiously. "He has made her a lie to me; he has perverted as pure and good a girl as ever lived. She has had warning—she has had counsel—she has had her father's commands; but she has neither honoured his nor God's. All the persuasion of this black villain! Curses upon him—ay, and upon her too; and may they light upon my head if ever I see her again!—I will go home—I will go home, and break my poor wife's heart with this news;" and, without waiting for remonstrance or reproof, he flung out of the cottage, crossed the road, mounted the stile, and entered the park.

"This young man is incorrigible, I fear," said Morton, after a pause. "Such conduct shows a spirit too corrupt and perverted to admit even the hope of reformation."

"We must always hope," replied Dr. Western, "but this indeed is very bad. I know not well what is to be done; for in order to rescue this unhappy girl from his hands, if she be inclined to stay with him, we ought to have her father's sanction."

"Had we not better follow him to his house?" asked Morton. "Perhaps, by reason and admonition, my dear sir, you might induce the poor man to think better of this affair, and take the only means that can be devised for saving his child. They cannot have taken her far."

"It is vain to talk to him to-night," said Dr. Western. "His mind is in a state that will not bear it; and, whether the law will justify me or not, I must take his consent for granted, and on my own responsibility issue a warrant against those who are supposed to have carried off this unhappy girl."

"I am sure it was the young gentleman from Mallington House," joined in the woman who was in attendance upon Dame Hazlewood; "that I can swear to anywhere."

"Then come up to the rectory early to-morrow, Mrs. Wilson," said Dr. Western. "I will issue the warrant to-night at all risks, but in the meantime inquire amongst your neighbours as to which way Lucy and her seducer went, and if you gain any information let me know. They could not have gone out by the great gates, or we must have met them."

"And they did not come over the stile, I am sure," said Mrs. Wilson, "for the door hadn't been shut two minutes before you came in, sir."

"Do you remember having seen a boat cross the river?" asked Morton.

Dr. Western bowed his head with a meaning look, but merely replied, "We had better get home as soon as possible. Remember to send me any information you may obtain, Mrs. Wilson, without a moment's delay."

The good woman promised to obey, and the two gentlemen, quitting the cottage, returned through the park, conversing over what had taken place.

"This is sad, very sad, indeed," said Dr. Western; "and this, my dear young friend, is that which forms the most painful part of a clergyman's existence, to see every admonition and every effort to check the wild course of passion and folly by the restraints of religion, vain and empty! Here this poor girl, Lucy, has been a regular attendant upon my church. I have spoken with her and her family often in private. I have endeavoured to give them on all occasions such counsel and admonition as I thought would lead them right; and yet, I cannot but fear that I have not done enough, and that a share of this fault may rest with me for negligence."

"Nay, my dear friend," replied Morton; "such, I am sure, is not the case. You must remember that prophets and preachers from the beginning of time have striven in vain to restrain the force of human passion. All that we can do is to labour as far as we have strength; and very often that labour will be unsuccessful. But perhaps," he continued, willing to lead the conversation away from the points that were most painful to his companion, "we may be judging harshly of this poor girl—we may be even doing wrong to Alfred Latimer himself. That good woman may be mistaken; or, if not, some violence may have been used. Do you not remember I thought I heard a scream as we were walking from the park-keeper's cottage up to the Hall?"

Morton left the worthy rector at the inn to summon the constables of the place, and take such other measures as were necessary for the restoration of Lucy Edmonds to her home, while he himself walked on up the hill, and with a rapid pace bent his steps to the cottage of the Widow Brown.

At the door of Widow Brown's house, Morton knocked before he entered, and at first no answer was returned; but upon repeating the summons, the voice of the old woman herself was heard, in a harsh tone, exclaiming, "Come in! Why the devil do you stand knocking there?"

On Morton's entrance she seemed both surprised and annoyed, but changed her tone to a more civil one as she asked what was his pleasure.

"I wish to see Mr. Latimer, my good dame," replied Morton; "shall I find him in the next room?"

Mother Brown hesitated, and, probably, if she had possessed any means of preventing her visitor from satisfying himself, she would have said that the young gentleman was asleep. Certain it is that the lie first rose to her lips; but remembering that she was alone, and could not stop Mr. Morton from going on into the adjoining room if he thought fit, she replied, "He has gone out upon the common, sir, to

take a little walk in the moonlight. He thought it would do him good, poor gentleman."

With this confirmation of the suspicions which had been entertained against Mrs. Charlton's son, Morton did not think fit to ask any more questions, but merely answering, "Well, tell him I called to see him," he turned and left the cottage.

There had been a light within, and a cloud was just coming over the moon, the silvery edge resting half over her disc affording a gleam, which lasted but a moment, however, till the dark vapour swept across and cast its shadows upon the earth. During that moment Morton thought that he caught sight of a man's head and shoulders just rising above the edge of the neighbouring pit; but he was not one easily to apprehend any danger, and he walked quietly on, merely noticing that the figure disappeared more suddenly than could be accounted for by the increased darkness produced by the cloud; for the brightness of the sky around afforded sufficient light to see, though indistinctly. Scarcely had he passed the spot, however, where the man's head and shoulders had appeared, when he heard a sound like gravel falling from the bank into the pit below, under the tread of some one springing up, and he was instinctively turning round towards the side whence the noise proceeded when he received a violent blow on the head which laid him stunned and bleeding on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXI.

We must look back for an hour or two, to the period when, about sun set, a boat crossed the river from the Mallington side to the sedgy piece of ground which we have more than once alluded to.

The boat reached the shore, and was drawn into a little sort of muddy creek, where several large old willows hid it from observation. There, one of the two men which it contained jumped on shore: and the other laid his head upon the raised part of the stern, and seemed to dispose himself to sleep. The other—in whom it required an eye well acquainted with his person to recognise Alfred Latimer—walked on, till he reached the path. Thence, after looking round him for a minute or two, he crossed through the shrubs and underwood to the other footway. There he paused for some minutes, looking up the path with an impatient glance, and muttering to himself with an oath, "Jack Williams is devilish late—I wonder what is keeping him Hark! there's a step;" and hurrying through the trees again, he exclaimed, incautiously, "Is that you, Jack?"

The moment he beheld Dame Wilson, however, he withdrew before he thought she could notice him, and then listened for her retreating footfalls. He then turned along the path in the direction of the Hall, retrod his steps again, and was once more wheeling round, when, without having heard any one approach, he found Jack Williams by his side.

"Why, this isn't the place, Mr. Latimer," said Williams, in a low voice; "if you don't mind what you're about she will pass without

your seeing her; quick, get through the trees, and look out on that other road."

"Come along, then," said Alfred Latimer, "I did not know which path it was upon."

"No, go yourself first," replied Williams, in the same quick manner; "try to persuade her, first, gently; I will be close at hand."

The young gentleman, following this counsel, crossed once more through the trees, while Williams hid himself in the brushwood and listened. Several minutes elapsed, however, before Lucy herself appeared, and Alfred Latimer was beginning to think that she must have passed, when he suddenly caught sight of her, coming with faint and agitated steps along the side of the marsh. He instantly sprang forward to meet her; but, though joy at seeing him was upon poor Lucy's countenance, her first words were—"Oh! Mr. Latimer, I promised never to meet you again."

"You have done so by accident, Lucy," said Alfred Latimer, taking her hand, and pressing it in his; "they cannot blame you; and, indeed, if you had been wise, and loved me as I once thought you did, no one would have any right to blame you—for you would now be my wife."

"Oh, Alfred!" replied Lucy, looking up in his face with a reproachful glance, "you know too well"—but she did not finish the sentence, and he went on.

"You would have me believe that you do love me, Lucy," he said; "but how can I think so when, for a mere rash whim of your father's—a hatred of me without a cause—you not only make me miserable, but drive me to all sorts of rash things. See what your unkindness has already brought about. Have I not quarrelled with my mother, gone to London, half ruined myself, and then, in coming down like a madman to seek you, because I was informed that your father was going to marry you to another, have I not been dashed almost to pieces?"

Poor Lucy wept, but through her tears she answered, "No, no, Alfred; I will never marry another."

"Then be mine now, dearest Lucy," replied Alfred Latimer, pressing her closer to him. "We have now the opportunity. Do not let us lose it. And then my heart will be at rest, and no one can tease you any more to be another's wife. I have a boat here which will carry us across the river in two minutes. Then I have got the pretty cottage for you that stands away at the back of the commom, where you can be quiet and peaceable all night, and to-morrow we can go away to a distance and be married immediately—come, dear Lucy, come!"

"Oh, no, no!" murmured Lucy Edmonds, striving to free herself from his arms as he would have drawn her towards the river side, "I must not—I dare not, Alfred."

"What, when I have risen from a sick-bed to come and ask you at the risk of life!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, impetuously. "Is this love, Lucy? Is this affection?"

"You know I love you," she answered; "but my father—my mother—I cannot, I ought not—oh! I do love you truly, but——"

At the moment Williams appeared suddenly from amongst the trees,

and though his touch was not rough as he took her by the arm, the surprise and terror of the moment called a scream from her lips.

"Come, come, Miss Edmonds," he said, "there is no use of resisting --one can see well enough how your heart leads you, and it is too late to fight with it now. Mr. Latimer has promised to marry you, in my hearing, and he will keep his word. Do not keep us here till people come, and we get into a row, where some of us may lose our lives. Do kindly what you must do, and think what would befall if your father were to come up just now."

As he spoke he aided Latimer in drawing her along towards the boat, but his last words seemed to have more effect on Lucy Edmonds than anything else. Before, she had resisted, though but feebly; but at the thought of her father's appearance at that moment, and all the consequences that might ensue, she murmured, "Oh, Heaven forbid!" and looking wildly round, suffered them to lead her on without further opposition. In another minute she was seated in the punt, which was immediately pushed off by the man Brown, and was soon in the midst of the river. Supported by Alfred Latimer, she sat with her hands covering her eyes, and the tears streaming through her fingers as the boat glided over the chequered surface of the waters, now rippling in the moonlight, now shadowed by the clouds. It took but a minute or two to cross, and as soon as the punt touched the ground, and the man Brown had jumped out and moored it by the chain, Alfred Latimer carried rather than led the poor girl to the shore, and then endeavoured to support her trembling form upon his arm. But Lucy could hardly stand, and was still less able to walk, so that they were obliged to pause for a minute or two, nearly at the spot where Louisa Charlton had plunged in to save the unhappy girl's brother. They had not been long there when they heard the sound of voices from the other side. Lucy recognised her father's tones; but it was too late now, she thought, to hesitate or to resist. The die was cast; her fate for weal or woe was sealed, and the voice which had once been so pleasant to her ear, now brought nothing but terror: yet it was the terror which gives strength, and not which overpowers, and with a great effort she said, "I can go! I can go! Oh. Heaven! do not let them find us."

With her lover supporting her on one side, and Williams on the other, while the man Brown followed lest his aid should be needed, Lucy advanced along the road which led towards the back of the common, with her heart beating fearfully and her breath coming short. At length she paused for a while, saying, "A moment, Alfred!—a moment! I will go on again in a moment!"

They all stopped in silence; and, as they waited, the gay sound of village mirth reached them from Mallington.

Oh, how sad it came upon poor Lucy's ear!—It seemed to tell her, with a prophetic voice, that the light laugh, the joyous merriment, was no more to be her portion upon earth; that she was given over to heart-sinking despondency, to self-reproach and sadness; that the peace and the pleasure, the calm night, the contented day, the spirit at rest, and the bosom without care, were all gone for ever! But there is something even in such dark and powerful convictions which gives a vigour, though it be the vigour of despair. She was anxious to fly from all sounds that she had loved, for they seemed to ring the knell

of departed days; and saying in a low tone, "Now, Alfred, I can go," she resumed her way up the hill.

The walk was a long one, for the cottage which Williams had hired for Alfred Latimer was at least two miles distant from Mallington; but Lucy Edmonds stopped no more.

At length the cottage door was reached, but the windows were all dark and cheerless. There was no light within any more than in her own heart; and though the leaves of the woodbine and the rose climbed over the little trellised porch, and reached their fibres up to the thatch, they seemed like nightshade to poor Lucy Edmonds, as she waited while Williams drew the key from his pocket and opened the door. He had caused everything to be prepared, however, with some care and neatness. Candles stood upon the table, which were soon lighted, showing a neatly-furnished room, and various provisions upon the shelves and tables around. But Lucy marked none of these things. It was of leaving her father's house she thought; of disobeying his command; of never seeing his face again; of being no longer pressed to her mother's bosom; of the breaking of all the fond ties of youth; of the loss of all the dear affections of early days: and when she looked around all seemed desolation.

Alfred Latimer led her to a chair, and seated her with her hand in his; but Williams, approaching one of the shelves, took down a bottle of wine, and pouring some out into a glass gave it to her, saying, in the kindly tone which sailors generally use to the weak and young, "Come, take that, Miss Edmonds; you are tired and faint. It will be all well in a day or two; and then, when you are his wife, your father will forget and forgive, and see things very differently. Come, don't vex yourself; for you may be very happy if you like."

Lucy took the wine and drank it. She would have done anything that they bade her; but the moment after, though the hopes that Williams presented to her mind cheered her for an instant, the voice of the man Brown, who had just entered, made her start, and turn round with terror.

"I shouldn't mind a glass, too," he said; "for it's a long walk. Come, pour us out some, Jack;" and his words and his appearance brought a new source of apprehension into Lucy's mind. What were these comrades of the man she loved? Who were these familiar friends with whom he consorted? Were these the companions of the son of a high race? Were these the persons he trusted and esteemed?

Williams, however, answered nothing to the ruffian's speech, but spoke eagerly for a few minutes in a low voice to Alfred Latimer, urging him apparently to some course which he did not think fit to pursue. "Well," he said at length, "you are not right—but we had better go. Only remember your promise, Mr. Latimer. Come, Brown;" and Lucy Edmonds was left alone with Alfred Latimer.

Williams and his companion, Brown, then mounted the little bank under which the cottage lay, and came upon the common above. There was a small public-house at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, at the door of which Brown stopped, declaring that, as he had been bilked of his wine, the other should treat him to a glass of spirits; and, going in, he tossed off more than half a pint of the liquid fire, which is but too readily to be found in such places. He was in-

clined to stop and gossip with some loose characters whom they found in the parlour; but the superior ruffian with whom he was associated for the time, forced him out, and took the way with him towards his mother's hut. The man had been drinking before, and the spirits he had taken had some effect, not in inebriating, but in raising his dull nature into something approaching a brutal sort of energy.

"Hang me!" he said, as they walked along, "if I should not like to have a spree of some kind to-night. I wish it was the pheasant season, I would clear out Master Edmonds' covers for him while he's piping after his daughter."

"Go home, and go to bed, you fool," said Williams in a surly tone. "When you do anything of that kind, have your head clear, and don't go drinking and then talking as loud as a babbling old woman in a passion."

The other man felt his own inferiority sufficiently to be silent, though he was not very well pleased with his companion's words; and thus they proceeded till they came to the clump of old fir-trees, about a couple of hundred yards distant from Mother Brown's dwelling, where her son caught hold of Williams' arm, saying in a lower tone than he had used before, "D—n me, if there isn't somebody walking up to the house! If it's some one come after young Latimer, this job will all be blown."

"Some of the servants, I dare say," replied Williams, looking towards the house. "I hope your mother won't be fool enough to say he's out."

"Why, what would you have her say?" asked her son.

"Can't she say he's asleep?" rejoined Williams; but just then a gleam of moonlight passing over the figure they had seen, he added, "It doesn't look like a servant either."

"I know who it is," said Tom Brown; "d—n him, he is always meddling, and I'll break his head some day."

"If you mean Gibbs, you are mistaken, Tom," replied Williams.

"I know what I mean," rejoined the other, in a mysterious tone; "and, if that fellow finds that the young cove is out, you'll have the whole story ferreted out. But come into the gravel-pit, Jack; and wait till he is gone."

They then approached the house, and descended into a pit which lay at the side of the road from Mother Brown's cottage to Mallington. There Williams seated himself at the bottom of the bank; but Brown climbed up till he could see over, and his companion remarked that he sought out a large stone, which he held tight in his right hand, holding by the turf above with his left.

"Come, no nonsense, Tom," said Williams, "let us hear what you are going to be after."

"Nothing, but look out," replied Tom Brown; and immediately added, "he's gone in."

A pause of about half a minute ensued, and then the ruffian above said, in a low voice to him below, "He has come out again. He has found it all out, or I'm ——;" and, at the same moment, he drew himself back as if about to descend.

"Come down, Tom," said Williams; "no more work to-night. We have enough upon our hands for once." But almost at the same

moment Brown scrambled up without reply, and his companion heard a blow and a fall. All was silent, however; and, springing up the bank like a squirrel, Williams stood upon the common just as the moon was coming out again from behind the quick passing cloud. Tom Brown was standing at three or four paces distance; and Morton, with his hat knocked off, was stretched upon the ground, with his face upon the grass.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Nothing had been seen of Mr. Latimer, by any of the people of the inn, since the accident; and, just as the good doctor's inquiries were drawing to a close, the constable made his appearance; a keen stout man, with hawk's nose, and a pair of sharp bright eyes, not altogether parallel in their direction. His own interests, of which he had a very tolerable notion, generally kept his conduct, indeed, more straightforward than his look; and, trusting to this tie, Dr. Western and the other magistrates in the neighbourhood generally relied upon him with confidence; nor had they ever hitherto had occasion to repent of so doing.

In the present instance Dr. Western communicated to him what had occurred; directed him to take two or three stout fellows from the village, and, without the loss of a moment, to use his best endeavours for discovering where poor Lucy Edmonds had been taken. He further ordered him, if successful in his search, to bring her to the Rectory whatever the hour might be; and, moreover, to apprehend any one whom he had reason to believe was a participant in her abduction from her father's protection, and to lodge them in the cage for the night.

Harry Soames scratched his head at the idea of these vigorous measures. "Well, your reverence knows best," he said, "what's law and what's not; but if every young man was apprehended for playing the fool with a pretty girl, the cage would be desperate full, I've a notion. I can't help thinking that Miss Lucy's gone willingly enough, though your reverence seems to think not. I've seen young Master Latimer more nor once a-hanging about after her: she was precious fond of him, too; as well she might be of such a young gentleman. Am I to take him up if I find him with her?"

"You are to make no distinction of persons whatsoever," replied Dr. Western, not very well satisfied with his constable's notions of morality. "I suspect, as you do, that Mr. Latimer may have had something to do with this affair; and, although I have not sufficient proof of the fact to give you a warrant against him, yet I will furnish you with full authority to act in the manner I have directed, and the responsibility will rest upon me, not upon you. Bring me a pen and ink."

It had been arranged that Dr. Western was to walk up with Louisa and Mr. Morton to Mallington House about ten o'clock, but that hour had not yet arrived when the sound of a vehicle driving up was heard, and in a minute or two after, the rector's servant announced that the chariot had come for Miss Charlton.

"Why, we told them that we would walk," replied Dr. Western; "and Mr. Morton is not yet returned."

"Mr. Morton is up at the house, sir," answered the man, "and not quite well—so Jones says."

Louisa's cheek turned very pale; and the good clergyman, feeling for her anxiety, and knowing that few evils are equal to suspense, inquired at once, "What is the matter? Did the coachman say?"

"Why, sir, he told me," replied the servant, "that Mr. Morton had been knocked down upon the common, and had been helped home by a man of the name of Williams. Mr. Nethersole had bled him, and he was better; and begged Jones to say he was not much hurt."

Louisa Charlton's heart sank, and her spirit seemed to ask itself if this were the beginning of a fresh course of sorrows—if the new path which she had opened for herself was already presenting the thorns that are destined to obstruct all human enjoyment. She did not give way, indeed: the paleness of her cheek, and a certain apprehensive look in her beautiful eyes, were the only indications which showed, to the two kind friends who watched her, how deeply she felt. But Dr. Western understood it all; and, laying his hand gently upon her arm, he said, "I will go with you, my dear child. I must see into this affair myself. Outrages are becoming somewhat too frequent here; though, I doubt not, our young friend is not much hurt."

Louisa replied by assuring him that she strove as far as possible to keep her mind easy, and the moment after the carriage drove through the gates, and stopped at the door of the house. We will not pause to analyse poor Louisa's feelings, nor to tell how they varied at every step which that pretty little foot set upon the stairs, till at the drawing-room door she had nearly dropped fainting on the carpet. By a strong effort of the mind, however, she contrived to regain some command over herself; and opening the door, went in. There sat Mrs. Charlton at a table, quietly writing a note, with an air of the most complete composure possible—very pretty, very well dressed, and very placid, she was the complete antithesis to all poor Louisa's feelings; and it must be confessed that, though our sweet friend was the least splenetic person in the world, she felt almost provoked, as well as a little ashamed, at the contrast between her own agitation and her step-mother's profound tranquillity.

However, Mrs. Charlton was a perfect Achilles in her way; she was quite invulnerable upon all points but self; and, although it would not have suited her purposes at this time to have had Mr. Morton killed outright, yet a little bodily suffering, which might render him more interesting in Louisa's eyes, was far from giving her the slightest concern. She would have gone on writing her note with the fortitude of a martyr, if Mr. Nethersole had been actually trepanning the skull of her guest in the next room, provided she had been quite sure he would not die under the operation. It was her part, however, to affect a benevolent interest in Mr. Morton's situation; and as soon as she beheld Louisa, she laid down the pen with a look of concern, saying, "I did not like to shock you, my love, with the news; but our poor friend, Mr. Morton, has met with a sad accident; but do not agitate yourself, he is doing quite well. Oh! kind Dr. Western, I am glad you have come; Morton will be delighted to see you. Pray go

up to him—he is in his dressing-room, and while you are gone I will tell Louisa all about it."

Dr. Western thought more than he chose to say; but, following Mrs. Charlton's suggestion, he went up to his young friend; while the worthy mistress of the house proceeded to relate to her step-daughter all the particulars of which she was aware regarding Morton's adventure.

Hearing voices speaking within, Dr. Western knocked at the dressing-room door before he entered, and on going in found Morton seated in an arm-chair in his dressing-gown, with Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, beside him. The young gentleman's face was pale, and his head had a bandage round it, but he received the worthy clergyman with a smile, saying, "Hard blows seem somewhat rife in your neighbourhood, my dear doctor, but this will prove of no consequence, I am sure, and I hope that Miss Charlton has not been alarmed."

"A good deal," replied Dr. Western, who thought fit to speak guardedly in the presence of the surgeon. "I dare say, however," he continued, "that the report of our good friend here will remove her apprehension, if he can, as I trust, conscientiously tell her there is no danger."

"I see none," replied Mr. Nethersole, rising at the doctor's hint; "and I trust in Mr. Morton to find a more tractable patient than Mr. Latimer has proved."

"Stay a moment, Mr. Nethersole," said Morton, "I think that your knowledge of the country, and of what is taking place amongst the people round, may give Dr. Western and myself some insight into the matter which took me up to the common where I received this blow."

"I cannot have you enter into any business to-night, sir," replied Mr. Nethersole, struggling between a certain degree of curiosity and a sense of professional duty. "Perhaps Dr. Western can explain the affair to me."

Morton whispered a few words to Dr. Western, who exclaimed, "Yes, yes, he will be able to tell us more than any one. So he was out? Then it is clearly as we thought:" and turning to the surgeon, he informed him of all that had taken place in regard to poor Lucy Edmonds, and inquired whether anything had come to his knowledge which might direct them in their search for her. So well, however, had Williams laid his plans, that even to the ears of Mr. Nethersole not a hint had arrived which could give them any insight into the events of that night; but, relying upon all the various petty sources of information which were at his command, the worthy surgeon promised boldly to bring them tidings of the whole affair by the next morning. He then added a warning, that quiet was absolutely necessary for Mr. Morton, and descended to the drawing-room to make his report to Mrs. Charlton and Louisa.

The conversation between Morton and Dr. Western, after the surgeon had left them, took a sort of zig-zag course between the two principal events of the night, sometimes turning to Mallington Park, sometimes resting upon Mallington Common. Into the assault which had been committed upon the person of his young friend, Dr. Western inquired as a magistrate, hinting plainly that he strongly suspected that the act had been perpetrated by Williams, who had by no means cleared

himself to the doctor's full satisfaction from the charge of having knocked down and plundered worthy Mr. Gibbs.

Morton, however, rejected the idea at once, exclaiming, "Oh! no, my dear sir, that is quite out of the question. For several minutes I remained quite stunned; and when I recovered my recollection, I found this very man bathing my head with water, which he had brought up in his leathern hat. He told me he had found me there as he was walking home, and had seen a man go away from the spot as he came up. Now, I saw the man too, who did it—at least I can have no doubt of the fact—and he was much taller than this Williams, though not so stout and broadly built."

Dr. Western shook his head, still unconvinced, and proceeded to inquire into all the particulars, asking, amongst other questions, whether in this case, as in that of Mr. Gibbs, the act of violence had been accompanied by robbery.

"I suppose so," replied Morton; "but I really have not had time to ascertain the fact. The sum I had upon me, however, was very small, and, by looking in my pockets, the fact will soon be ascertained."

He rose as he spoke to examine as he proposed, but sat down again immediately, feeling himself giddy; and Dr. Western brought him his coat and waistcoat, which had been cast down upon a chair. His watch had not been taken, but his purse was gone, and when he came to put his hand into the pocket of his coat, his brow contracted. "My pocket-book is gone," he said, looking at Dr. Western, "and with it the papers I took, thinking they might be necessary in the inquiry we were making this evening."

"That is unfortunate, indeed!" exclaimed the clergyman, "but they were copies, were they not?"

"In most cases, the originals," replied Morton. "They must be recovered by some means."

"They can be of no use to any one else," said Dr. Western; "so that, doubtless, if we offer a reward they will be restored."

"We must couple that offer," answered Morton, "with an engagement to ask no questions. Perhaps, it might be as well to have an officer down from London. They are as much accustomed to negotiate with thieves as to apprehend them."

Knowing the great importance of the papers which had been taken, and feeling what must be the effect of the loss upon his young friend's mind, Dr. Western did his best to persuade him that they would be easily regained; and having succeeded in some degree, the worthy clergyman left Morton to repose, and proceeded to say a word or two of comfort to Louisa before he returned to the Rectory.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

We left Alfred Latimer alone in the cottage with Lucy Edmonds, little more than an hour after sunset. It was near midnight when he came forth again, and he took his way, with a hurried and irregular step, over the moor. He watched not the clouds rushing across the sky; he marked not the light of the declining moon while it played as if in living sport with the shadows that swept by over bush and tree, and

green grass and yellow road, and deep pit and glistening pool, bu with his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his hand thrust into hi bosom, on he went, without pause, till he came within sight of th cottage where he had been carried after the accident which had befallen the chaise. There for an instant he stopped, put his hand to his head and thought. He then went on again quickly, and entered.

There was but one person in the little room; and that was the man Williams, who was seated gloomily at the table, smoking a short pipe.

"Ah! you've come back at last," he said abruptly; "this is all very wrong, Mr. Latimer. I know what you will say; but it's all nonsense. If she is to stay there the night alone, it is no matter whether it be an hour or two longer or not. However, there are other things to think of. The matter's blown all over the place; and there have been people up here seeking you. They have been up at my house, too, but I was not fool enough to be out of the way; and Soames, the constable, and half a dozen others, have been beating about for you as if you were a cock pheasant under a hollybush."

"Who came up here?" demanded Alfred Latimer, not a little alarmed at what he heard. "What the devil has the constable to do with it? Who can stop me from taking the girl if she is willing to go with me?"

"The magistrates say they can," answered Williams, "and they have issued a warrant against you, but Soames is in no great hurry in executing it; for he is not particularly fond of Master Edmonds. So you've got till to-morrow morning to get poor Lucy away into another county till you can be married, and that matter set all right."

Alfred Latimer made no reply, but looked down upon the table, and twisted some white ashes which had fallen from his companion's pipe into a heap between his finger and thumb.

"As to who was seeking you up here," continued Williams, after a moment's pause, "it was the gentleman who is staying at your mother's; and that old idiot, Mother Brown, told him you were out. Then her son, a greater fool still, chose to make the matter worse by knocking him down on the common. I found him stunned, and took him home, so there will be a fine work about it, you may be sure, and I'd advise you to get out of the county for a time as soon as you can."

"I will—I will," answered Alfred Latimer, who saw all the danger of his situation. "I can't go to-night, for Lucy must have some rest, and I must get a chaise or something to take us."

"That is soon got," replied Williams, "but you can stop till day-break and then be off. Turn in for a few hours and take some sleep: and about four I'll walk over to Long Sutton and bring a chaise for you, while you go and tell poor Lucy Edmonds to get ready."

"But are you sure to wake by that time?" asked Alfred Latimer. "I know if my head is once laid down I shall not open an eye for many an hour."

"You have never been at sea," answered Williams; "if you show a bold heart, and carry out what we were talking of, you'll soon be like me. I could not, for my life, go on a minute beyond the hour of my watch; so do not be afraid, I'll wake you."

Sleep at length came, and when it did it was profound. He fancied that he had not closed his eyes more than a minute when Williams

shook him by the shoulder, and told him to rise, for it was four o'clock. It was as dark as the grave—the moon had gone down, the sky was cloudy, and not the least glimmering of dawn was yet to be discerned. It is wonderful how external things give a colour to the feelings of the heart. Alfred Latimer felt the bold wild schemes which he had been indulging, chilled and dimmed by the gloomy aspect of all around him; but after a few moments' conversation with Williams, he set off for the cottage where he had left Lucy, while his companion walked away in the direction of a neighbouring village in which was an inn that let post-horses.

As he walked on, the darkness somewhat diminished: there was a sort of grey light began to steal through the blackness of night; and when he reached the bank which sheltered the cottage, he could see a golden gleam coming on some of the clouds at the horizon's edge. He paused and looked at it as it extended, like the first glimmering of heavenly light upon a long-darkened mind. He looked up at the cottage, too, as the dawn began to display its closed shutters and rustic porch, covered with climbing plants. It all looked peaceful and calm. There is no heart without some softer point; and as he stood and gazed while the light spread rosy over head, he thought of her within, and her young gentleness, with feelings of tenderness—almost of compassion. Some sensations of compunction came over him, and he murmured, "Well, I will marry her as I promised."

Then he gazed at the cottage again, and paused awhile, saying, "I dare say she is asleep!"

He little knew Lucy Edmonds, to think that she could sleep.

At length he knocked with his hand, having told her to lock the door, when he left her. But there was no answer, and turning the handle to shake it, so as to rouse her, he found the door open, and went in. Lucy was kneeling beside her bed, exactly in the same guise as the night before, with her head and arms resting on the bed-clothes, and her face buried in them. The heaving of her frame showed that she was still weeping; and Alfred Latimer raised her up, and strove to comfort her. The first words he spoke were the best that he could have chosen for that purpose, though they were simply suggested by the circumstances of the moment. "Come, Lucy, come!" he said, "do not go on crying; but prepare to come away with me immediately, for the people have found out all, and we must be off into another county directly, or they will take you away, and stop our marriage. Once we are married, you know, they have no power over you."

"Oh, that we were!" cried Lucy Edmonds, drying her tears; "but how can we go?"

"I have sent for a chaise, dear girl," replied her lover. "Hark! I think I hear it coming. Get ready—there's a love."

"I will be ready in a moment," answered Lucy; "I will but wash my eyes."

"I will go out, and see if that be it," said Alfred Latimer; and walking into the road he took a step or two up the little declivity, where, as soon as his head was above the slope, he saw the chaise coming down at great speed, with some one inside.

"Williams has come with it," said the young gentleman; "I am glad

of that." And thus thinking, he turned back, and entered the little passage of the house.

The chaise drove up at the same time, but the voice of Williams, saying to some one, "Well, sir, we don't go any further: now, you must walk straight on; and then, the first turning on the left brings you to Mallington," caused Alfred Latimer to look round, when to his surprise he beheld the face of Captain Tankerville.

The sight of Captain Tankerville's face was by no means agreeable to Alfred Latimer. He remembered instantaneously a promise which he had made and not fulfilled, regarding a certain sum of fifty pounds which it was not very pleasant for him to part with; and he would willingly have retreated into the house, but he was not quick enough to escape the shrewd eyes of his former fellow-prisoner, who at once replied to the directions given to him by Jack Williams, saying, "I have no need to go to Mallington, for the person I came to seek is here."

There was a sneer in his tone which irritated the already excited feelings of Alfred Latimer; and, giving up the plan which the first impulse led him to pursue, he advanced at once, saying, boldly, "I presume you mean me, Captain Tankerville; but I am too busy at present to hold much conversation with you."

"Our conversation need be very short, Mr. Latimer," replied Tankerville, walking up to him: "I come to ask if you remember having promised me a loan of fifty pounds, and if you are ready and willing to perform it now?"

"And what if I say no?" asked Alfred Latimer, put upon his metal by the presence of Williams, as well as by the tone which the other assumed. "I am not a man to be bullied, Captain Tankerville. What if I say no?"

"Why, then all I can say for you is, that you are a pitiful scoundrel, and that you are scarcely worth the horsewhipping which I shall give you," replied the captain.

"Hush, hush!" cried Williams; "if the matter's to take such a course as that, we had better move further off. It doesn't do to talk of such things with a lady near."

Alfred Latimer nodded his head, and pointed to Tankerville to go on up to the path, which, after a moment's consideration, he did. The young gentleman followed, with a look towards the house, and Jack Williams strode on by his side, saying, in a whisper, "You should keep your promise at all events, Mr. Latimer."

"I would if he had spoken civilly," replied the other, "but I won't be bullied by him or any man."

"That's all right," replied Williams; "but yet you should find some way of keeping your promise, too."

Alfred Latimer did not answer for a moment or two; but then he put his hand in his pocket and drew out his pocket-book, saying, "I'll tell you what, Williams, I'll give you the fifty pounds, and then you can let him have it, whatever comes of it, for hang me, if he talks in this way, if I don't have a shot at him."

"That's the way you gentlemen settle these things," replied Williams, with a grim smile, "and perhaps it's as good as any other.

But here we are out of sight of the cottage, and so you can have it out with him. I'll see to this," he continued, taking three notes which the young gentleman handed to him; "and now you can talk to him with a cool face."

By this time Captain Tankerville had halted at about fifty paces before them, and the other two joined him without delay, Alfred Latimer walking up to him with a firm and decided air, which is not without its effect upon bullies of all kinds.

"You talked of horsewhipping me, Captain Tankerville," he said—"that is all nonsense; for, in the first place, you have not got a horsewhip with you; and, in the next, that is a game that two can play at; but if you think I have done you any wrong, I am quite ready to settle the affair with you as gentlemen usually do."

"When and where?" asked the captain, with a sneer upon his lip. "You are what our good bailiffs call a slippery customer."

"Here, this minute," replied Latimer, stung to the quick; "here I say."

"Ah! that's only because you think I have not the means of taking you at your word; but I'll show you that you are mistaken," was Tankerville's reply; and, putting his hands into his pockets, he drew forth his pistols, and laid them down upon the turf, together with a powder-flask and some balls. "You thought to get rid of me in that way, did you? You know well enough I never miss my mark."

"I've heard you say so," replied the young gentleman, glaring upon him with eyes in which there was much anger indeed but no terror, for he was now roused to a pitch of daring which even the thought of death could not affect; and, as he spoke, he drew forth his pocket handkerchief, and twisted it round like a rope. "There's one way, Captain Tankerville," he continued, "of making all shots equal, and ensuring fair play. So, you load one of the pistols, and I will load the other, after which you shall take one end of this handkerchief and I the other; for if you kill me, I'll be hanged if you shall kill any one else. Jack Williams, here, shall give the word; and if either of us fires before the time, he will both bear witness and secure him."

"That's the right sort, sir," cried Williams, with a laugh. But Captain Tankerville did not seem to relish the proposal; and, crossing his arms upon his breast, he stood gazing, with a frowning brow, at his opponent, as if considering what he should reply.

"I did not come here to commit murder," he at length said, "nor to be murdered."

"What!" cried Williams. "A man who never misses his mark does not come down to commit murder! Pooh, nonsense! Will you fight him over the handkerchief or not?"

"What's that to you?" exclaimed Tankerville. "No, I will not but still I say he's played me a very shabby trick."

"You shan't say that any longer," replied Williams, doubling up the notes and holding them out towards him.

"There's the money, it is not for that he stands, but of course he would not be brow-beat by a bully, and you are no better, and mayhap a bit of coward too. There, there's no use of saying any more. We have had your answer, and can't wait palavering; but remember, if you

don't pay him within two months I'll find you out, and break every bone in your skin, if he doesn't."

Captain Tankerville was a man of very nice calculations, and, having summed up all the pros and cons in his head, he took the money proffered; but in order to get rid as far as possible of the appearance of sneaking, as schoolboys would call it, he exclaimed, "Why the devil, Latimer, did you not let me have the money at first? I am sure I alway wished to behave very friendly towards you; and if you had but said a civil word we should have had no quarrel at all."

Alfred Latimer turned upon his heel, replying, with a somewhat contemptuous look, "You came down here to bully, but you mistook your man; and you will now recollect that what I will do because I have promised it, I won't do for big words or angry looks;" and without waiting for any further reply, he walked away with Jack Williams, leaving Tankerville to pick up the pistols and powder-flask, and stomach the disagreeable points of his situation as best he might.

He remained gazing after them for a minute or two with an angry face; and then placed the implements of destruction in his pocket, muttering, "Well, perhaps I may pay you all I owe you some of these days."

They were soon at the door of the cottage, and there Alfred Latimer paused for an instant in thought, which did not seem the most pleasant. The fifty pounds was too great a diminution of his small store to be parted with willingly; and he did not feel at all obliged to his companion for having handed over the money to his adversary so readily.

When he entered the little parlour he found Lucy seated at the table ready to set out; and taking her by the hand he led her to the chaise, spoke a few words to Williams in regard to their future proceedings, and then directed the post-boy where to drive.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NOTHING could be kinder than Mrs. Charlton was during the whole period of Mr. Morton's convalescence; nothing could be more tender or considerate for all his feelings. The house was kept as quiet as possible; no parties took place; she assigned him as his own particular abode the small back drawing-room, which looked down the hill; she was with him for several hours every day; and when she was not, she invariably sent Louisa "to amuse him and keep him from being dull." She was, in fact, wonderfully considerate, both as a step-mother and as a friend.

It must be confessed that Morton and Louisa availed themselves of her kindness to the utmost, and they were very, very happy together, though Mrs. Charlton's conduct somewhat puzzled them both.

During the three days which Morton spent in the house by Mr. Nethersole's orders, two events occurred affecting himself which must be noticed, as neither the one nor the other were altogether without their effect, insignificant as one of them might seem.

A large packet arrived at the inn from London bearing his address: and being sent to the house, it remained for some time upon the

drawing-room table, under the eyes of Mrs. Charlton. She gazed at it with much curiosity; she would have given a great deal to have seen the contents. Who knows how far the irritating passion would have carried her, if it had not been for all the obstacles that lay in the way. But the packet was guarded with double and triple folds of thick brown paper and sealed string, equal in the eye of law and decency to triple gates of steel. Brown paper, string, and seals, are dangerous things to meddle with. Unlike the worthy independent electors of towns and boroughs in our purest of all pure representative systems, they almost uniformly bear witness of the fact whenever they are tampered with; and Mrs. Charlton judiciously refrained.

Virtue had its reward, for no sooner did Mr. Morton enter the room, than he took out a pen-knife, begged Mrs. Charlton's pardon for investigating the contents of the packet, and cut the string in a most wasteful and extravagant manner, displaying to her eyes what seemed nearly a ream of large-sized drawing-paper, a vast number of Brookman and Langdon's black-lead pencils, and sundry small cakes of water colours. It seemed, in short, as if he had made up his mind to teach all Mallington to draw; but, strange to say, nothing could be more satisfactory to Mrs. Charlton than the sight. She had been staggered in her opinion of Mr. Morton of late; but this exhibition confirmed her belief that Mr. Morton was exactly the sort of gentleman she wanted.

The other incident to which we have alluded was the arrival of a visitor to Mr. Morton from the great city of London. Exactly two days after his misadventure on the common, and about half an hour after the arrival of the coach at Mallington, some one rang at the bell of Mallington House.

The butler announced him to Mr. Morton in the little drawing-room, and the latter naturally inquired what sort of a person it was; to which the man replied, "A queer-looking sort of gentleman, sir, with knee breeches and white stockings."

"Pray, let him come up," said Morton; "or, perhaps, not to disturb you, Mrs. Charlton, it will be better to send him to my dressing-room."

But the lady would not hear of such a thing, saying that she and Louisa would go into the other drawing-room, that Mr. Morton might speak with the visitor.

On the visitor's entrance Mr. Morton gazed on him as a stranger, and he, on his part, began the conversation by inquiring, in very good language, whether he had the honour of addressing Mr. Morton. The young gentleman replied in the affirmative; and the other immediately went on to say, "Well, sir, my name is Prior; and I was sent down by Sir Richard to speak with you concerning your pocket-book, according to your desire."

"Oh! from Bow-street?" exclaimed Morton; "I did not expect you so soon. Pray take a seat, and I will explain the whole matter to you."

Prior, the officer, according to this invitation, seated himself on one of the drawing-room chairs, and he then received from Mr. Morton a clear and distinct account of the attack made upon him on the common, and the loss of his pocket-book. He uttered not a word while the particulars were related; but, like a skilful physician, suffered the

patient to state his own case before he commenced his interrogatory. In the present instance, indeed, the mind of the narrator was of that peculiar cast which brings easily, and, as it were, naturally into one focus all the principal points of any question it has to deal with, and, therefore, at the end of the tale the officer had very few inquiries to make.

"He was a taller man, I think you say, sir," was his first question, "than the man who brought you home?"

"Decidedly," replied Morton; "if the person who struck me with the stone was the same whom I saw by the edge of the pit."

"Can you give a guess how long you might lie there?" asked Prior.

"It could not have been many minutes," answered the young gentleman, "for as I reached the top of the hill in going I heard Mallington clock strike nine; the distance from that spot to the cottage is about a mile, and when I came into the hall of this house with Williams, the hall clock was marking a quarter to ten."

"He must have been very near, then, sir," rejoined Prior, "when the blow was given."

"That is true, certainly," replied Morton; "but yet that does not prove that he had anything to do with it."

"No, sir; but it is a suspicious circumstance in the case of a man of bad character," was Prior's reply; and, after a moment's thought, he went on to say, "Well! there is no telling as yet, but I will go and make inquiries. I know one young fellow down here of the name of Maltby; and though he is not likely to tell anything, yet one sometimes gets a hint by finding out what it is that folks wish to conceal. However, I must have you tell me, in the first place, sir, what it is you want—the man or the pocket-book. I think I shall have no difficulty in nabbing the one or getting back the other; but I doubt that I shall be able to manage both."

"Oh! the pocket-book, by all means, if it can be obtained with all its contents," answered Morton. "Indeed! I have already ordered bills to be struck offering a reward for the recovery, and promising to ask no questions; but the lazy fellow of a printer has not done them yet."

"So much the better, sir," replied Prior; "don't you think of sticking them up. Leave the matter to me. If you will give a reward and ask no questions, we'll soon get the pocket-book back, never fear."

"The reward I proposed to offer was fifty pounds," rejoined Morton: "and I shall be well inclined to bestow on you, Mr. Prior, the like sum, if you recover the papers for me."

"Thank you, sir; quite sufficient," replied the officer; "you may look upon the matter as done, if they have not tindered the stuff—I mean burned the papers. First, we must find out who has got the book, and then we must tame him a little. It may be Williams himself—it may be some other; and now I think of it, as I got off the coach I saw Captain Tankerville walking along with a slickery doll from London."

"With a what?" exclaimed Morton, in much surprise.

"Oh! what I call a slickery doll, sir," replied Prior, laughing; "that means an over-dressed bad woman; and I should not wonder if there

was a whole gang of 'em down doing business in different ways—cracksmen, and smashers, and prigs, and all. However, the pocket-book's the first thing. I'll just go and 'stablish myself at the Bagpipes, to see what's going forward, and I'll bring you up a report."

"Do, Mr. Prior," answered Morton; "I should like to hear the steps you take as you go on."

"In the name of fortune, Mr. Morton," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, "who is that odd-looking man?"

"Only a Bow-street officer, my dear madam," replied Morton; "you know I lost my purse and my pocket-book when I was knocked down on the common; and I thought it expedient to send to London to see what could be done for their recovery."

Mr. Prior had set about his work very quietly. After having seen Mr. Morton, and returned to the inn, he sat himself down in the commercial room, as it was called, and quietly considered his ground, and looked about him. He courted no conversation—he looked dull and reserved—he gave himself none of the airs of inquiry, or of Bow-street-officerism; but while he ate his mutton chop, and drank his pint of ale, seemingly not looking at anybody or anything in the room—he overheard everything that was said around him, and judged, with the utmost professional skill, the characters of those who sat at the different tables round the room.

There was a pale man with a blue beard, at one of these tables, dressed in a black coat and grey breeches, who sighed frequently over a plate of boiled beef and a glass of gin and water.

"A walker of the Tract Society," said Mr. Prior to himself, as he eyed him.

At another were seated two men—one in a blue coat and bright yellow buttons, with well-worn, but not well-cleaned leather breeches, and top-boots sadly in want of oxalic acid; the other, with a green Newmarket coat, a fancy button, brown cloth trousers, and boots with spurs over them: a fresh-coloured blue-eyed youth, with large lips, and curly light hair.

"Sound! Lord bless 'ee, you've only to look at her," said leather breeches, with a screw in his eye. "Why, I trotted her up that blessed hill this morning as hard as I could go. She's none of mine, she's the genuine property of a gentleman who wants a little hard cash. So take her or leave her just as you like. I've no interest in the matter."

"A horse-couper and his cully," said Mr. Prior, internally. "He'll do him."

At a third table appeared Mr. Gibbs, with his long ringlets flowing, and dropping odours, though not wine. He looked about him, sadly at a loss for somebody on whom to bestow a description of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad. The horse couper was hopeless, for it was evident that his hair was never trimmed but with the same shears that cut his horses' manes and tails—never oiled but with the sweat of his brow. To the dispenser of tracts, the Balm of Trinidad would have been an abomination. But the young country cully gave him some hope; for his fair curls were so crisp and dry as to excite Mr. Gibbs's compassion. He was only waiting for an opportunity of fairly introducing the subject to his notice, when Mr. Prior entered the room. Mr. Gibbs's eye instantly followed him, and rested upon the close-cut black hair, which

seemed as if intended to have a wig over it, with a look of great despondency.

Nevertheless, the brief glance of Mr. Prior was sufficient to make that gentleman expect something more from Mr. Gibbs; and when the girl of the house entered, and Mr. Gibbs called her "Betsy," and moreover bade her tell "Mrs. Pluckrose" so-and-so, Mr. Prior was confirmed in his previous opinion. "For," said he to himself, "he has been here some time, that's clear, and knows the place and the people." At length Mr. Gibbs, joining in the conversation between the cully and the horse-couper, ventured to recommend to the former the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, much to the indignation of the latter, who did not like his dealings to be interrupted.

"He's a perfumer," said Mr. Prior mentally; and a minute or two after Mr. Gibbs sat down, rebuffed by the brutality of the horse-couper and the indifference of his chapman. After having finished his mutton chop, and drank his ale, the Bow-street officer called for a glass of brandy-and-water, and then, as if the icy shackles of reserve had been thawed, he put on a brisker look, gazed about him, and entered into conversation with his companions of the commercial room, first speaking a word to the tract distributor, then saying something to the dealer in horse-flesh in a jeering tone, which called forth a pretty sharp reply.

"Ah! yes," answered Prior; "I've seen you before, I think. Ar'n't you the man that was pulled up one day for selling two glandered horses in Smithfield?" and he looked him full in the face, as if he had known all about it, though, to say truth, he spoke but from a random suspicion that such an event might very well have formed part of his good friend's history. The horse-dealer repelled the insinuation with indignation; to which Mr. Prior merely replied, "Well, don't put yourself in a passion, I only asked you a question, my good friend;" and then, turning to Mr. Gibbs, he added, "Such a thing isn't unlikely to any man in his way of life, is it, sir?"

Mr. Gibbs did not venture an opinion upon the subject, but a conversation immediately began between him and the officer, while the two personages at the other table arose and quitted the room.

"I thought it best to give that young fellow a hint," said Prior, in a confidential tone, "for I'm quite sure that jockey will do him. I'll bet you a glass of brandy-and-water that the horse he's going to sell him is spavined, or broken-kneed, or has some screw loose or another, and yet he'll go and buy him."

"There's nothing so good on earth for broken knees," said Mr. Gibbs, as the fragrant Balm of Trinidad."

"I dare say," replied Prior; "but suppose, sir, we take a glass together. What shall it be? Hot with sugar, or cold without?"

Mr. Gibbs would take anything that his companion thought proper; and they were soon in full talk, during the flow of which the officer ascertained that Mr. Gibbs had been now for several weeks in that identical little town of Mallington, and that he was not exactly a perfumer, but the traveller for a London house, and he asked himself, what could have induced such a person to pitch his tent for such a length of time in a spot that offered so few inducements to one of his calling. He found, likewise, that Mr. Gibbs knew something of al-

most everybody in Mallington; and, therefore, that his own sagacity had not deceived him. There were certain subjects, however, upon which the worthy patron of the Balm of Trinidad was rather shy; for having his own views, and not knowing the character of his collocutor, he could not divine that there, upon the chair opposite to him, sat the man of all others who was most likely to help him. Thus, when Mr. Prior propounded to him the following sage observation, "There's been a good deal of ugly work going on here lately, I hear," he merely replied, "So it seems."

"A gentleman has been knocked down upon the common and robbed a night or two ago," continued Prior.

"Yes, so I find," replied Mr. Gibbs.

The blue-bearded vendor of tracts, overhearing this awful notification, looked at the large clock over the mantelpiece, and having to walk five or six miles that night, speedily quitted the premises. Prior, however, sat immovably fixed opposite Mr. Gibbs, calculating what made his companion so reserved upon the particular subject before them. He resolved to pursue his point, nevertheless, and added, "I should like to know somewhat more of that affair."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Gibbs. "Why so? How does it concern you?"

"Oh! it concerns me a little," said Prior: "I may tell you how by-and-by. Pray do you know anything of a man named Williams here?"

"Oh! yes," replied Gibbs, in an indifferent tone; "I know something of him, but not much."

"What sort of character does he bear?" demanded the officer.

"Why, the people about give him a very indifferent character," answered the traveller: "but I say nothing, for I don't like to speak what I can't prove."

"Quite right, Mr. Thompson—quite right," replied Prior; "that's the best way in every court. Nevertheless, I should like to hear something more of this Jack Williams. He helped the gentleman home, it seems, that was knocked down."

"He didn't help me home, though I was knocked down, too," said Mr. Gibbs, in an incautious moment.

"Ah!—so you were knocked down too, were you?" was the officer's rejoinder. "Well, I should like to hear about that too;" and he proceeded to cross-question Mr. Gibbs in a way that gentleman found it impossible to escape from. By this means he wormed out of Mr. Gibbs the whole story of his adventure in Wenlock Wood, and all that had followed; and, as one confession begat another, Mr. Gibbs ended by avowing that he was determined not to quit Mallington till he had discovered the robber.

"Whom you still suspect to be Jack Williams?" said Prior.

"No, no," replied Mr. Gibbs, "I didn't say that; I suspect nobody."

"However, I'm different," said Prior, "for I suspect everybody. That's a part of my trade;" and leaning his two arms upon the table, he bent his head over them, saying, in a low tone, "I am an officer from Bow-street, Mr. Gibbs, and have come down to look after this affair; but that's between you and me. However, we can chat the matter over, and I'll tell you one thing to begin with. Williams was the man who

knocked you down, you may be sure of that; and if he did not do this other business, he had a finger in the pie."

Mr. Gibbs no longer affected to deny the suspicions that he really entertained, but, delighted with the prospect of the aid and assistance he was likely to receive, poured forth the long dammed-up stream of his communicativeness, told all that he had done and suffered, and gave Mr. Prior a full insight, as far as he could give it, into everything that had taken place in Mallington during the last month.

Prior bestowed great commendations upon Mr. Gibbs's skill and perseverance, exclaiming, "Why, with a little teaching and practice you would do for the office, Mr. Gibbs; but now I must find out this fellow Jack Williams, and have a talk with him."

"Oh! that will be easy enough," replied the traveller; "he's a great friend of mine is Jack Williams. I invited him here to drink a bowl of punch with me, and tried to get him to change a ten-pound note, because amongst the guineas I had about me when I was robbed, there was one of Queen Anne, with the least little bit filed out of the edge, so that I could have sworn to it; but he wouldn't change the note; and I don't know how it was, but either the punch must have been very strong, or something; for by the time we got to the end of the first bowl I felt as drowsy as if I had drank a whole bottle of the American Soothing Syrup, and in a minute or two after I was sound asleep."

"Ay, he hocussed your liquor," replied the officer; "he must have been up to something that day, and didn't want to be watched."

Mr. Gibbs mused for a minute or two, and then said, "I dare say you're right, for that was the very day when that wild young blade, Mr. Latimer, carried off the park-keeper's pretty daughter, and Williams had a hand in that affair I know;" and then came the whole story of Lucy and her abduction by Mrs. Charlton's son.

Prior listened attentively, picking out from the long-winded statement of Mr. Gibbs whatever suited his own purpose, as throwing light upon the character of Jack Williams, just as an industrious sempstress, from a great bundle of thread, chooses out those skeins and colours that are necessary for the work she has in hand. When the whole story was brought to a conclusion, however, he returned to the charge about seeing the person in question. Mr. Gibbs professed his readiness to lead him that moment to the house where Williams lodged; and out they both sallied into the streets of Mallington. Near the door they suddenly encountered Captain Tankerville, with an extravagantly smart but somewhat brazen-looking lady on his arm, and the meeting did not seem particularly satisfactory to that respectable gentleman. For a single moment he appeared to hesitate whether he should recognise Prior or not; but the devil of habitual impudence had possession of him, and he gave the officer a cool condescending nod, such as the fashionable gentleman might bestow upon a person in Prior's situation.

Prior understood the matter perfectly, perceived all the minute springs and wheels that were moving in Captain Tankerville's mind, but did not choose that they should produce the result intended, and, therefore, pausing with a familiar shake of the head, he said, "Ah, captain, you down here! What's the go now? I should think

that this was no lay for you. There can't be much business doing in your way here."

"I wanted a little country air, Prior," replied Captain Tankerville, moving on.

"Why, I heard you had been taking country air over in Surrey," answered the officer with a laugh; and he too pursued his way with Mr. Gibbs, asking his companion "whether that chap had been long down in those parts?"

"Oh dear! no," answered Mr. Gibbs; "the first time I ever saw him was yesterday."

"I was thinking," said Prior, "whether he could have anything to do with these jobs. He's just a likely fellow to put other men up to a bad piece of business, and then turn stag. It won't be long before he weighs his weight now; and so if he's had any hand in this, we could soon get at it from him."

"I don't think it," answered Gibbs. "He's never been here before since I've been in the place, and this has been going on a long while."

"Well, we shall see," answered Prior; "but I'll talk to Williams first. You show me where he lives, and I'll go in and have a chat with him."

The two worthy gentlemen, however, were disappointed in their expectations. They soon reached the house where he was said to lodge; a small red brick dwelling, with some cakes, parliament, gingerbread, and apples in the window; while over the door was inscribed, "Pickett, dealer in tea, sugar, coffee, snuff, and tobacco." But on inquiring in the shop, while Gibbs walked slowly up the lane again, the officer was informed by a woman that her lodger had not been home for two days, and that she did not know when he would return.

"Are you sure he'll return at all?" asked the officer in a cynical tone.

"Oh dear! yes," replied the woman; "he is sure to come back, for he's left all his things."

Prior paused for a moment with an unusual degree of hesitation. His habitual propensities impelled him strongly to walk up stairs, and to examine what things Mr. Williams had left behind him; but recollecting that, in order to obtain what Mr. Morton wanted, he must "do his spiriting gently," he forbore, and merely requested the worthy lady to inform Mr. Williams that a gentleman had been to see him; that he was lodging at the Bagpipes, and would be glad of a call as soon as her lodger came back.

He then retrod his steps, hurrying his pace a little to overtake Gibbs, and soon perceived him walking slowly along in conversation with another person. With his keen quick eye Prior scanned the figure of the good traveller's companion, and then walking up to the personage who was still busily talking with Gibbs, he laid his broad hand heavily upon his shoulder. Bill Maltby, for he it was, turned round with a start, and, the moment he saw Prior, turned as pale as death.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Ah, Master Maltby, you down here!" said Prior, fixing his keen eye upon the other's countenance, and marking the waning colour in his cheek with a slight smile. "Still upon the small go, I suppose--nothing heavy yet, or I should have heard of you, Master Maltby."

Although the speech of the excellent Mr. Prior was not altogether pleasant to the ears of Bill Maltby, especially being delivered in the presence of Mr. Gibbs, yet it was so far satisfactory that it showed him that the especial errand of the worthy officer in Mallington did not refer to himself. He therefore replied, with a re-assured countenance, and in a civil tone,—"Oh! no, Mr. Prior; I am down here in my native place, living a very quiet life now."

"I dare say," answered the officer, in that peculiar tone which implied that he dared to say nothing of the kind. "Well, we shall see, Bill; but there's one little thing I should like to speak to you about—as a friend you know, quite as a friend, for I am only taking the country air, travelling incog. for my amusement, like other great men—no business in life, Bill—so if you could just make it convenient to give me a call at the Bagpipes some time this evening, I should like to have a little talk with you about one or two things."

"Oh! I'll come, certainly, sir," replied Bill Maltby, who was quite sure that if Prior wanted him for any unpleasant purpose, he would have had the handcuffs on him by that time.

"Come in about an hour," said Prior; "then we can have a glass of wine together. In the meantime I want to talk a little with this gentleman." Maltby taking the hint, walked away reiterating his promise to come at the appointed time.

No sooner was he gone than Mr. Gibbs proceeded to inquire into the personal character of Mr. Maltby; and when he heard the circumstances of the officer's acquaintance with him, he in return related the fact of his having been wheedled over to Sturton.

"Ah!" said Prior, in a meditative tone; "then he is a confederate of Jack Williams, is he? I thought it must be so; but we'll try if we can't make the decoy duck quack as far as is needful. A pretty gang of them there seems to be hereabouts just now; but our London gents do love, every now and then, to see a bit of country life. He must be a shrewd hand, this Jack Williams, not to take your flimsies, Mr. Gibbs. You won't be able to do anything with him; for, take my word for it, he's got as sharp an eye for a Queen Anne guinea as you have."

"He'll not stop there, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs. "When once a man begins he's sure to go on."

"Ah! there you're right," replied Mr. Prior. "That shows you know something of life, Mr. Gibbs; and as soon as he weighs his weight, we shall have him."

In conversation of this kind they pursued their way back to the Bagpipes; and the officer retired to his own chamber, and ordered a bottle of wine. Shortly afterwards, Bill Maltby appeared at the inn door; but had very nearly been sent away again, as Prior had not

thought fit to communicate his name, and it was only by description that the barmaid was at length brought to understand who was the person asked for. When at length Mr. Maltby was ushered up to the officer's room, which was tolerably high in the building, he was received by Prior with a sort of condescending courtesy, and requested to seat himself. He looked a little anxiously for the commencement of the discourse; but Prior filled the two glasses, nodded, and gave "The King." When this toast was drunk the officer filled again, and then, scratching a certain spot a little behind the temple, which was accustomed to be scratched upon important occasions, he entered upon business.

"Well, Mr. Maltby," he said "so you are down here taking your native air. That's quite right. Here's your health. You are a young man who knows how to take care of yourself, and I dare say may go on a long way if you don't go fast. But what I wanted to say is this, you are acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Williams, I think?"

Maltby nodded his head.

"And do a little business with him in a quiet way, I dare say," continued the officer.

"Oh dear! no," answered Maltby; "I've given up that sort of thing; and besides, Mr. Williams is quite a different sort of person. He's only here for a while till he gets another ship, and spends his prize-money."

"Come, come, now," answered Prior, in a tone of jocular reproach; "as if I didn't know, Bill. What's the use coming that lay with me? Besides, I am not looking after the young man to do him any harm; I've got no warrant against him, bless you; I've a little bit of business to do with him which may turn to his good. So, if you know where he is to be found, speak out like a man."

"No, I don't," replied Maltby; "I haven't set eyes on him these three days. But what is it about, Mr. Prior? Perhaps I can help you notwithstanding."

"Ah! that's another affair," answered Prior, meditating; and Bill Maltby ventured to add, "If it's about the job of that fellow Gibbs, you are mistaken, I can tell you. Jack Williams wasn't in Mallington at the time."

"You were," answered Prior, turning his eyes suddenly upon him.

"That's neither here nor there," answered Maltby, with a perceptible change of countenance. "He wasn't, that's sure."

"He might not be very far off, though," answered the officer, with a grim smile: "but, however, it's not about that at all. I know what I know, and if it were needful could take you all over the ground, and show you how he came, and how he went, and where he stood, just as if I had seen it all. But, as I said, that's no affair of mine. I've no warrant. What I'm after now is this business of Mr. Morton's; and look you, Bill, I'm determined—and you know I'm the man to do it—either to have the papers or to have the men. The money they may keep, and perhaps may have a trifle more, of twenty pounds or so, if they give up the pocket-book quietly and quick."

"I didn't know any pocket-book had been taken," answered Maltby;

"and if it has, most likely they've burnt it. They're not likely to keep a sticky thing like that."

"Then I'll have the men," said Prior, in a determined tone.

"Well, I can't help you there," replied Maltby, drinking down his wine with a gulp; "but one thing, I'm very sure of, Williams was not the man to knock the gentleman down. Of that I give you my honour."

Small rogues are men of honour, as well as great ones—in their own particular way.

"I'll have him, and the other fellow too," answered Prior, "and then you know this business of Gibbs's must be gone into; so you can judge whether that will be pleasant. It will be much better for them to give up the papers and the pocket-book quietly, and then they can go on till another time; but if they don't, they're done; and some others may find themselves in a mess, who, if they don't cut capers, would find themselves lagged to Botany for life; and that's not pleasant."

"No," said Bill Maltby, in what we romance-writers call a tone of deep feeling.

"Does the gentleman suspect Jack Williams?" he inquired at length.

"Lord bless you! no," replied Prior, laughing, "he thinks him a very honest fellow, as I dare say he is in his way. I don't mean to say he knocked him down; but there's weight enough upon him, I can tell you, to pull the rope tight, if things were looked into; and it's much better a young man should be quiet, and give up a trifle like this pocket-book, than to hang about shilly-shally for the chance of a better reward. Twenty pounds is very handsome, I think, and I dare say the gentleman wouldn't stand for five pounds more or less."

"Well, I tell you, Mr. Prior, upon my soul! that Williams had nothing to do with it," answered Maltby; "but I think I know where I can find out whether the papers are burnt or not, and if not, I dare say they'll be given up."

"If they are given up, all may be kept as still as an empty trunk," replied Prior; "if not I must have the men, and then there will be some precious work. You must be quick, however, Bill, for you see I can't dawdle away my time and let matters slip; we must go to work at once either one way or the other."

Bill Maltby fell into a new fit of thought, but at length he brought forth, as if by a jerk, the following question, "Would you mind taking a long walk with me to-night, Mr. Prior?"

"Not particular," replied Prior, "I want a little exercise."

"Well, I think," said Maltby, "I could get you to speak with a young man who knows something of this job; but mind it's only upon condition that you do nothing against him."

"Not to-night, not to-night, of course!" replied the officer. "Honour, Bill!—honour! Before I begin active operations of course I shall declare war; but it's to be the same on both sides, remember. We must have no traps, Bill."

"Oh dear, no, Mr. Prior!" replied Bill Maltby. "That would be devilish little good."

"Well, I'm your man," said Prior; "only I must just go and tell that Mr. Gibbs that I can't drink tea with him to-night. We had better set out at once, I think, for it's beginning to grow duskish."

"Let it get a little darker first," replied Maltby, "for I don't well know how these fellows may like it."

"That's just as you please," replied Prior; "and we've got the bottle to finish, too; so you take another glass, while I go and tell Gibbs."

Thus saying, the officer left the room; and Bill Maltby helped himself to another glass of wine; but that was the only movement that he made.

In the meanwhile that worthy gentleman had visited Mr. Gibbs, and though he entertained no positive fear or hesitation in regard to accompanying Bill Maltby, whithersoever he might lead him, yet he thought it might be just as well to take some precautionary measures, and consequently asked his new-found friend to watch which way he and his companion went, without actually dogging their steps, and to sit up for him till he returned.

"If I'm not back by twelve," he said, "it may be as well to seek for me. Not that I think anything is likely to happen; but still you know men's blood will get up, and they may take a drop or two of spirits more than needful. So I shall leave you, Mr. Gibbs, to look out for me."

This being settled, the officer returned to the room where he had left his companion, eyed him well to ascertain what he had been about during his own absence, finished the bottle according to their previous determination, and then proceeding to the goods and chattels which lay in the window, he drew forth a tolerably large pair of pistols.

"It's always as well," he said, examining the powder in the pans and pressing down the ramrod tight in each, "it's always as well, Mr. Maltby, to be provided with the barkers, though I am quite sure you would not behave ungentlemanly towards me. However, I never go far without them; and so there's no offence in putting them in my pocket."

"Oh, no, none at all!—none at all!" answered Bill Maltby; "but you'll not have to use them, sir, I can tell you."

"Likely," answered the officer; "but now let's go."

Maltby assented, merely murmuring something about its being damp; and then, after a short interval of silence, observed, "You seem to know this part of the country, Mr. Prior?"

"Oh! I know something of most parts," replied the officer: and on they went.

At length, Bill Maltby stopped, and after some humming and hawing, communicated to the officer that he thought he had better go on and inform the good folks of the business they had in hand. "I may tell them, of course, Mr. Prior," he said, "that they're all safe if they let you come?"

"As safe as a babe in the cradle," replied Prior. "You know me well enough, Bill, and what sort of man I am. I'm never afraid of doing anything I have to do straightforward, so I've never any occasion to tell lies about it."

"That's true," answered Maltby; "so, if you'll just wait here for five minutes, I'll go and tell them, and come back again."

At length, after waiting about a quarter of an hour, he heard a quick step, and, advancing, was met by Maltby, who said in a low voice, "Come, sir, come; they will speak with you; though they don't like it at all."

"They must be fools," said Prior, "not to like to get a matter of twenty or five and twenty pounds for some scraps of paper that they can do nothing with."

"That's what I told them," said Bill Maltby.

"Have they got them still?" asked Prior, as they walked along.

"I can't tell," answered his companion; "they didn't say; but you'll soon find out. However, Mr. Prior, it will be all in the dark, for they won't let you see them."

Prior made no reply. He did not much like the idea of going into a place with which he himself was unacquainted, tenanted apparently by a body of men of a daring and violent character, well acquainted with every turning and winding that it contained; but yet it did not make him pause or hesitate. He only bestowed a little meditation upon the means of insuring himself as far as possible; and consequently, when they came to the door of the desolate-looking building to which they went, he quietly slipped his hand into his pocket, drew out the two pistols, and, with the one in his right hand and the other in his left, followed Bill Maltby into the dark and narrow passage.

"This way," said his companion, turning through a door on the left; and, immediately the officer had entered, a harsh voice, apparently proceeding from a room beyond, communicating with the first by an open door, demanded "Who's there?"

"It's I and Mr. Prior," replied Maltby.

"Well, you can stay where you are," rejoined the voice; "we can talk as we are without his coming further. What does he want?"

"Why I want Mr. Morton's pocket-book, and the papers that are in it," answered Prior.

"And why the devil should we give them to you?" rejoined the voice.

"I'll tell you as soon as you let me know whether the papers are safe," answered the officer.

"Oh! yes, safe enough," replied the voice. "Now for it, speak out."

"Well, then," said the officer, "I have been sent for from London in order to get them. The gentleman's content, if they are restored, to let all other matters sleep, and to give a reward of twenty pounds for them. So, if you've a mind to hand them out, you can either let me have them now, or send them to me by Mr. Maltby here."

There was a low murmuring at the other side of the partition, as if two people spoke together, and then the voice answered, "They are worth more than that."

"Well, I dare say the gentleman won't stand for five pounds," answered the officer; "but you know, if you ask too much, you may chance to get yourself into trouble; and it's much better to take a fair offer, than risk your neck in the hope of getting more."

"Oh! my neck's in no risk," answered the man. "I've not got the papers—I'm only speaking for another."

"I hear that," replied the officer, drily; "and I'm speaking for another, too."

There was a short pause; and at length a new voice said, "It's better that principals should deal together; so you may tell Mr. Morton that he shall hear from the person who has got the papers in a day or two, and then he can have them or not at the price put upon them, as he likes."

Since his entrance into that room, Prior had used his best endeavours to gain some knowledge of the interior, but without much success. He had marked, however, with strong attention, the tones of the two speakers, so that he thought he could swear to the voices whenever he heard them again. The proposal of the person who had last spoken was not agreeable to him, as he foresaw a possibility of its depriving him of a part, at least, of the sum promised for negotiating the restoration of the papers. Not that in proposing the sum of twenty, or five and twenty pounds, instead of fifty, which Mr. Morton had offered, he was influenced by any corrupt desire of transferring the rest to his own pocket. On the contrary, he had only begun with the small sum, to leave himself room to increase it, according to circumstances; and he therefore answered, "Come, say in a word what you will take, and let us see whether we can't make a deal of it at once. It's better than hanging fire about the thing, because you see I must do my duty, and if I don't get the papers I must do the other thing."

"You've got your answer," said the second voice in a stern tone, "and that's all the answer you'll get."

"It's an answer that doesn't quite suit me," replied Prior quietly; "but I'll let you hear more what I think of it to-morrow."

"What! I suppose you are afraid of losing the reward," said the second voice; "but as you have opened the way for him, the gentleman will have no right to refuse you whatever he promised."

"You say you'll let him hear from you in a day or two," said Prior. "Well, I'll tell him, and talk with him about the matter. All I can say further is, that you'll be great fools if you suffer yourselves to be lagged up to the office by sticking out for too high a price. Many a man has put his neck in a noose by such a go as that; so you look sharp about it."

While he had been thus speaking he had gradually approached the door as silently as possible, and in a minute after stood on the outside of the house.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Mrs. Charlton was putting in the tea, and Morton was bending slightly over the table to speak some light and casual words to Louisa, when the butler came in, and put down three letters to the lady of the house, and two to Mr. Morton. Those received by Mrs. Charlton certainly did not seem to be of a very pleasant nature from the effect they produced on her countenance. The two which came to her guest were of very different shapes and qualities. One was a large and voluminous packet, costing an immense sum of postage, for Rowland Hill was not then in operation. The second was a smaller epistle, and by no means displaying the neat and tidy exactness which characterised the other, either in folding, sealing, or address. It was a shabby-looking

parallelogram, with the name of the gentleman for whom it was intended written in the right-hand corner, Mallington House in the left, and Mallington underneath, in a most unsymmetrical and anomalous position.

As Morton, however, had received a similar letter three days before, and divined whence it came, he opened it first, when his eye was greeted with the following communication:—

"Sir—You behaved like a gentleman and a man of honour this morning, for I saw all that went on, though nobody saw me. So, if you like to come up into Mallington Park about eight o'clock to-night, we'll talk about the papers, which are quite safe, and I think I can get them for you. I don't ask you to come to the same place, because I think you might not like it at that hour of the night; but I'll be down in the park at that time, somewhere near the rabbit warren at the back of the house. If you'll stand out from the trees I shall see you, and I know you are too much of a gentleman to take advantage. You'll be quite safe yourself, for that I pledge my honour."

No name was signed, and after having read the letter Morton put it in his pocket and opened the other epistle. The cover contained various papers, apparently from the hands of a lawyer, and as Mrs. Charlton quietly glanced her eye across, she saw sufficient to make her divine that one was a power of attorney. Within the whole was a note upon neat paper, written in a nice clean business-like hand, to the following effect:—

"My dear young Friend,

"Allow me to call you so, and to thank you for your invitation. The partridges must wait if they will, and fly away if they won't, for I am tied to London till October. Then, by your good leave, I'll see if I cannot bring down some of the pheasants, with their long tails behind them. If ifs and ands were pots and pans we could do without the paper, as you say; but the law knows no such thing as an if. It is a positive science, my dear sir, and very positive indeed in its way. It will have all the proofs it can lay hold of; and, though too much pudding may choke a dog, the gullet of the law is much more capacious; and, though occasionally it strains at a gnat, is more frequently inclined to swallow a camel. Get the paper if you can, but don't give too much for it, as, though it forms a link, it is but a small one; and we can prove the death by other means, though expensive ones, I fear. However, it is just as well to bring over an Italian priest and an English consul as to bribe a British thief too high. Don't walk upon commons too late any more; for your head, I think, must show you by this time that a pitcher never goes so often to the well but it comes home broken at last. I will send you down a clerk in the course of to-morrow to take your signatures to the papers enclosed when you have looked over them, and, in the meantime, you will believe me,

"Your faithful servant,

"T. Quatterly."

"P. S. The clerk I send is a great scamp, so do not trust him with money. I keep him to look after insolvents and fraudulent bankrupts. Set a thief to catch a thief.

"T. Q."

Mr. Morton made no comment upon his letters, but Mrs. Charlton was evidently disturbed with the contents of hers for the rest of the day, and passed a part of the afternoon writing. The same evening's post carried away from Mallington three neatly-written, beautifully-folded, and exactly-sealed notes, addressed to "Messrs. —— and ——, jewellers, New Bond-street;" "Mrs. ——, dealer in British and Foreign lace, Conduit-street;" "Messrs. ——, silk mercers, &c., Piccadilly."

Mrs. Windsor looked at them all with careful attention, and observed in a murmuring tone to herself, "It won't do much longer, ma'am, I can tell you. You'll have to play your trump, or you'll lose the odd trick. I wonder what she can be waiting for, I should think the pear was quite ripe."

After dinner, however, Morton announced that he had a little business to transact, but would be back shortly; and, going to his room, he furnished his pockets with a brace of pistols, and proceeded towards the rendezvous which had been given him by letter, as we have seen. Taking little heed of whom he met, the young gentleman walked down the hill, crossed the bridge, and at once obtained admission into Mallington Park. Then leaving the keeper's house and the Hall to the left, he followed nearly the same course which he had pursued on his shooting excursion two days before, and was soon at the spot appointed. He there paused and gazed around him, but it was now quite dark, no moon up, and the sky somewhat cloudy. The tall trees falling into thick masses, indeed, could be seen sweeping round through the dim night air, but there was no more light left than to show the grander objects at a distance, and to transform the smaller ones into strange shapes as fancy lent them form and members. Under one of the hawthorns Morton at first fancied that he saw a man seated, but presently he perceived that it was the withered stump of an old tree, and going a little further forward into the open space, after having waited about three minutes, he asked aloud if any one was there.

The moment after he heard a slight rustle amongst the thicker trees, and then clearly distinguished a human form advancing with a quick step towards him. Morton kept his position, however, examining the stranger as he approached, and gaining every instant a stronger and stronger conviction that it was no other than Jack Williams, who had given him such serviceable assistance on the common. In a few minutes the man was by his side, and, without any attempt at concealment, addressed him at once with "Good evening, Mr. Morton; you walk late, sir."

"So do you, it seems," replied Morton; "but business brings me here, as it brought me to the common when first I saw you." He paused, and as Williams made no immediate reply, added, "When I found you here, Mr. Williams, I imagined that your coming had some reference to the business I allude to."

"Perhaps it has," answered the sailor, and then he stopped and seemed to hesitate.

Morton was not altogether pleased with this conduct, and although, from the manner in which the man had aided him when injured and bleeding on Mallington Common, he had believed the suspicions of

the Bow-street officer to be totally unfounded, he now could not help supposing that Williams had had some share in the outrage, if he had not actually committed it. "Well," he said, "I am here to communicate with any person regarding the recovery of my property—property which is valuable to me, though of no use to the persons who have taken it, and if you can give me such information as will enable me to regain it, I am willing to reward you handsomely for the service rendered."

"We will see about that, sir," answered Williams; "but there are first one or two things to be settled. Now, if I tell you who took your pocket-book, will you give me your word of honour, as a gentleman, that you will never proceed against him by the law for taking it?"

"No," replied Morton at once; "I will not give you any such pledge, as it is undoubtedly my intention, if he refuses to give it up, to proceed against him. However, I will give you my word of honour that if he does give it up I will take no steps against him of any kind, either for taking it, or any other part of the affair."

"That won't do, sir," answered Williams, in a determined but not uncivil tone; "and I'll show you why. You and he might not be able to agree about terms; then the information I gave you might put his neck in a halter, so that you would have all the advantage in driving the bargain."

"I understand what you mean," replied Morton; "but it is not at all my object, believe me, to gain the advantage you mention; and I am quite willing to pledge my honour that I will use the information you give me in no way whatever against him. The case shall stand exactly upon the same ground on which it stood before our meeting. If that will suit you, well and good; if not, we had better converse no more upon the subject, for my mind is made up, and I can promise nothing further."

"That is all I meant," replied Williams; "I meant that we should start fair, and that if I told who the man is that took your pocket-book, and gave you the means of communicating with him directly, you shouldn't be able to turn round upon him and say, 'Now I know who you are, if you don't do just as I like I'll hang you.'—But now for it. You want first to hear who has got your papers—I have, sir."

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Morton in a serious tone.

"Ay! and why should you be sorry?" asked Williams, very much struck with the young gentleman's manner.

"Because," replied Morton; "I thought better of you—because I have deceived myself in regard to your character, and, from your whole demeanour and conduct, assured Prior, the officer, that you had nothing to do with the assault upon me, or the robbery which was afterwards committed."

"You were quite right, sir; and, for once in this world, a gentleman has done me justice," replied Williams. "If every one had judged so from the beginning I should not have done half the bad things I have done. Nevertheless, knocking you down, and taking your money or your pocket-book, is not against me on the ship's books; and I would have stopped it all if I had come up in time. The pocket-book came into my hands by accident, but having got it, I think I've a right to drive a bargain about giving it back again."

"I should have imagined," replied Morton, "that a man who shows so much good feeling upon some points as you do would have been rather inclined to restore it to its owner, and to trust to his gratitude for recompense."

"Pooh, trust to any one's gratitude!" said Williams, with a scoff; "that will never do. However, I did mean to have given it back to you, but for circumstances. The truth is, sir, I've got things to do which will make or mar me, and I must have five hundred pounds.

"Then am I to consider," asked Morton, "that such is the price you put upon the papers in your possession?"

"Yes, sir," replied Williams. "I know their value to you as well as you do, and they are worth that."

"You must know their value better than I do," answered the young gentleman, laughing, "if you put such a price upon them, for certainly I will not give it."

"Then, d—n me if I do not burn them!" cried Williams, more irritated by the tone in which Mr. Morton spoke than by his mere refusal to grant such an exorbitant demand.

"In that you'll act as you think fit," replied Morton; "but of this be assured, that the papers are not of the value to me you suppose. I have means of proving the facts to which they refer, which may, indeed, cost a certain sum, but not near so much as you require; and I am not at all disposed to pay largely for the recovery of papers taken from me by a gross act of violence, when I can do without them."

The man muttered a curse of angry disappointment, but made no direct reply, and, after having waited for a minute or two in expectation of some answer, Morton proceeded to say, "You will probably think better of this, but I give you warning that the expense likely to be created by the loss of these papers, as calculated by my solicitor, is about two hundred pounds, and, consequently, that your modified demand, whatever it may be, must be within that sum. You can let me hear your determination before to-morrow night, after which it will be too late to make any change."

"D—n me, if I don't burn them," was Williams's only reply, and Morton turned and walked away.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Williams stood where Morton had left him. He muttered curses, he framed a thousand fierce and rash plans, and he thought alone of avenging himself upon others for a disappointment, which nothing but fancy had taught him to entertain. In the pocket-book which had fallen into his possession, he had discovered papers which he had immediately perceived must be very important to the owner. He had fixed an imaginary value upon them, and had not entertained the slightest doubt of obtaining the sum that he desired.

"By ——! I will have the money one way or another! I will not be baulked and kept here for months, or perhaps shut up in prison, for fear of striking a good stroke. I did not wish to stir up these people here, or to fish in troubled waters among these dull, plodding,

shop-keeping people of England; but now they shall find what I can do;" and, with his eyes bent down in meditation, he turned away and walked towards the further corner of the park. His rapid footfalls caught the ear of some persons actually within the wall of the park, for a voice exclaimed, as he came near, "It must be he, though he's devilish quick back;" and at the same moment the speaker advanced to meet him, adding, "Is that you, Mr. Williams?—have you got it?"

"No, not a farthing, Bill," answered Williams; "and hang me if I don't go home and burn them all;" and he added a bitter oath.

"That's unlucky, upon my life!" added Bill Maltby: "and you wanted to go as soon as possible, too. Couldn't you and he make a deal of it?"

"No," replied Williams; "he thinks to get them for nothing; but he'll find himself devilish much mistaken—Go! to be sure I want to go!" he continued, pursuing in a rambling manner the subject suggested by his companion; "but I'll make a sweep before I go, however; and once I'm at Portsmouth or Plymouth they may hunt long enough before they find me."

"Don't you think," inquired Bill Maltby, in a suggestive kind of manner, "that if you keep about this place long you may have Prior, or some more unpleasant customers still, down here looking after you? I think if I were you I'd be off to-morrow morning."

"Not unless there's something to be done to-night," answered Williams, doggedly; "I will not go without the money I want—besides," he added, after a moment's consideration, "there's no such hurry. He said he would give me till to-morrow night to consider of it; and I can keep him in play about the papers for two or three days more. But I'm resolved to have what I want, any way. Hark ye, Bill, was that Brown you were speaking to?"

"Yes," answered Bill Maltby; "he's a little in the wind, and wouldn't budge, though I told him it was you."

"All the better," answered Williams. "You were talking to me the other day about a lot of things up at the Hall. I've a great mind to try it to-night."

"We had better wait till it's daylight," said Bill Maltby, in a low tone; "then we could contrive to get the two women out of the way, and slip in without any breaking. I know quite well the room where it is all kept. We could hand it out of the window one to the other, and if we were caught it would make a difference, you know."

"I see no difference at all," replied Williams, sharply.

"Oh! but it would at a trial," answered Bill Maltby. "It makes all the difference in life. If you break through a door and only take a silver spoon you're pretty sure to tighten your cravat; but if you slip in and take a thousand pounds you get off for a taste of Botany."

Bill Maltby had not yet reached the point of burglary, and he feared to put his foot upon that round of the ladder. But Williams had no such hesitation, and he replied, "I think you're turning coward, Bill. Ay, and fool too. Are you not quite sure if we tried it in the daylight we should be stopped in the middle of the work, and only get grabbed for our pains? If we get in to-night the matter's quite sure. We can lock up the women, and be off at once, so that we can be out of harm's way before any one knows anything about it."

"But suppose we shouldn't find a ship ready to sail?" said Maltby.

"Why, you don't suppose I'm going to freight a ship?" said Williams. "A boat is the thing, and that can always be hired when one has money. Now, you say there's plenty of stuff here."

"Oh! ay," answered Bill Maltby, "to the tune of two or three thousand pounds, and a great deal of it in gold cups and such like; which could be easily packed."

"We'll beat it up altogether for that matter," answered Williams: "that's soon done. Two or three thousand pounds! That's worth fetching, Bill. Have you got a tool with you?"

"Nothing but a screw-driver," answered Bill Maltby, in a low and faltering voice; for though a share in the plunder tempted him strongly, and though a man ever ready for a scuffle, yet the idea of a new crime which would render the whole of the rest of life insecure, filled him with apprehensions that he could not banish.

"Give it to me," was Williams's only reply; and having received a large turnscrew, which Maltby drew out of his pocket, he ran his hand over it, feeling its thickness and its length, and murmuring to himself, "I would rather it had been a crowbar; but this will do. Now, Bill," he said, "we had better set to work at once; but let us see how we must arrange."

"We shall all go snacks, of course?" said Bill Maltby, who did not like the idea of a smaller share of the plunder.

But Williams turned sharply upon him, replying, "Of course! Do you fancy I'm not a man of honour?"

Bill Maltby was very well satisfied with Williams's arrangement, for the part therein assigned to himself was decidedly the least perilous and the most profitable; and under this view of the case he made no further objection to proceeding immediately to business. Accordingly, Williams and he walked up to the corner where Tom Brown had been left, and where he was found sound asleep with his back against the park wall. He was speedily roused, however, and a short conversation, in a low tone, ensued; in the course of which Brown showed that, with all his apparent dulness, he had occasionally a shrewd conception of the dangers and the probabilities of anything that was to be undertaken.

"No, no, Master Williams," he said; "wait a bit—wait a bit. It isn't nine o'clock yet, and Edmonds and the keepers are always on the look-out about the park till half-past nine or ten. You'll be sure to have some of them upon you; but if you wait till after ten they'll be all snug and snoring. The women, too, will then have gone to bed, so you'll have no piping; and we can sit here under the wall for an hour quite well."

This argument was unanswerable.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was a warm September night, but Maltby felt it cold; a shivering sensation crept down his back, and over his limbs; he felt his arms tremble as he rested them, with his hands upon his knees; he could

scarce keep his teeth from chattering in his head. A terrible thing—a very terrible thing is the expectation of crime!

The wind set from the side of Mallington, and though it was so low as scarcely to stir the trees, it at length brought, sweetly sweeping over the stream, the soft and musical tones of the village clock as it struck ten. Williams instantly started up and shook Brown by the shoulder, saying, in a low voice, "Now, there's ten, and that d—d moon's getting up, I can see by the light aloft there. Let us get to work. You, Tom, go round by the path up over the hill, and meet us just behind the house. I'll go with Bill, and plant him where he can see all round. Come along, Bill."

Maltby recovered in some degree from the effects of his imaginary terrors, as soon as he was once more in activity, but still his nerve was shaken, and ever and anon, as they hurried on through the dark close walks of the wood, he started and looked round as if he fancied that some hand was stretched out to seize him. His demeanour had not passed without observation by his companion, who, though incapable of dread himself, had seen what it produced in other men too often not to recognise the indications thereof; and if Maltby had looked to Williams's face, and had been able, by the faint light of that hour, to distinguish its expression, he would have seen a scornful smile curling the corner of his stern lip at what he internally called his pitiful chicken-heartedness. The sailor made no observation, however; but, keeping as far as possible under the shadow of the trees till they were within about fifty yards of the house, he crossed over suddenly to a wide-spreading elm that stood out clear from the rest near the eastern angle of the building, and then stopping, pointed down to a spot beneath the branches, saying, "There! stand there; you can see pretty well all round but on the west. Keep your eyes busy and your ears too." He spoke slowly and low; and then added, fixing his eyes firmly upon his companion's face, "If a man quits his post, fails to give warning, or betrays his comrades, we shoot him through the head; and if I should not be here to do it, there are friends of mine who will."

"On my life and soul! Williams," said Maltby, "I will be as steady as a rock. Did I not first put you up to the thing?"

"Yes," answered Williams; "and then got poltroonish when it was to be done. Look to it—that's all. You shall have your full share: but if you flinch you shall have lead instead of silver, by G—!"

Thus saying he left him; and Maltby, with mingled shame and indignation, remained gazing for a moment sullenly upon the ground. He then raised his eyes, and with them followed his companion towards the house, saw him joined by another man, and then marked the shadowy forms of both glide all along that side of the building, seeming to examine every window and door attentively. He himself carried his glance over the whole of that façade; but all was dark and sombre. No light from any casement told that there was waking life within; and except on the eastern side, where the moonlight showed the windows, and even the joints of the rough stone, the whole edifice was buried in deep shadow.

After having neglected for some time the task assigned to him, in watching his companions movements, the sentinel began to gaze forth

over the park. Suddenly, with a start, he heard a loud sound, as of some strong plank riven asunder; and, turning his eyes quickly towards the house, he could distinguish, though by no means clearly, the two men standing apparently close together before one of the windows on the ground floor, near the north-eastern angle. The window-shutters of that story were all external; and Maltby well understood that the operation of breaking in had begun; but the noise terrified and shook him; and he instantly cast a hasty glance over the park, as if that sound could have already wakened up servants and keepers. He looked first to the westward, where all was still, and nothing to be seen—not even a deer; and then he gazed to the south, in the direction of Edmonds's house. It was not to be descried, however, being hidden by the trees and undulations of the ground. Running his eye along towards the east, his heart began to beat and his limbs to shake, for he thought he saw two or three figures, a long way off, but advancing towards the Hall; and raising his hand to his eyes he endeavoured to clear them of all mist, fearful lest the terror that he felt might deceive him. He then beheld the same objects more distinctly; they were clearly men; and they were coming forward rapidly. At the same moment a shivering crash met his ear, as if one of the panes of the window had been broken; and after an instant's hesitation as to whether he should at once provide for his own safety, or warn his companions, shame prevailed. He saw that the men who were advancing were yet far from the spot. There was time to save all: and, darting across, he seized Williams's arm just as it was throwing up the sash of the window which had been opened by thrusting a hand through the broken glass.

"There are people coming!" cried Maltby. "Run, quick—there are people coming, I tell you!"

But Williams was in the fierceness of active exertion, and he replied, casting up the window, "I don't believe it—it's a lie—you are afraid, and fancy it. Run round, Tom, and look out."

But, ere the words were well uttered, the alarum-bell of the Hall began to ring; and, snatching up the turnscrew which had fallen down, Williams hurried to the angle and looked round. Tom Brown and Maltby were already many yards towards the wood; but the bolder ruffian stood and gazed forth for an instant ere he also took flight. Then muttering "It is true!" he passed again into the shadow of the house, rushed across the open space towards the trees, and was soon among the wood walks. The alarum-bell still rang out its angry peal as hard as the hands of the two frightened women in Mallington Hall could pull it, and the sounds were borne to the ear of Williams as he doubled and turned amidst the tortuous paths. Instead of flying in the same direction as his two comrades, who ran towards the common at the back of the park and Wenlock Wood, he made the best of his way to the river, and, as silently as possible, waded in, and then swam over. Passing quickly through the back lanes, he entered Mallington-street by a narrow alley, just above the surgeon's house, and then at a slow pace descended the hill towards the inn. Several persons were still moving about in the village, and one of the first whom Williams met was Mr. Soames, the constable. Nor did he fail to stop and talk with him for a moment or two in a calm and easy tone, saying that he

was just going to get a dram before he went to bed. While they were still conversing they were joined by Mr. Crump, who, in a voice of some trepidation, informed the constable that he thought he heard the alarum-bell of the Hall ringing. He had been just undressing, with his high window open, and was startled by the sound; but he could not quite swear that it was the alarum-bell, as the wind set the other way.

"D—n it! let us go and see," said Williams; and the three hurried down to the bridge and listened. All was now still, however; the bell had ceased its warning notes long before, for Mr. Crump had been somewhat long in getting on his clothes; and, concluding that he had made a mistake, the constable and Williams returned, after waiting near the gates of the park for about five minutes. As they trod their way back, the clock struck eleven, and punctual Mrs. Pluckrose had closed her house for the night. Williams was not sorry that such was the case; for he had foreseen that if he entered the inn, to get the draught he had pretended to be seeking, his wet clothes might be more apparent than was agreeable; but he affected some disappointment, and, with an oath at the good landlady for her punctuality, he bade Soames good-night, and walked up the hill.

While such had been the proceedings of Williams, the three keepers, who, with Edmonds at their head, had been out later than usual, hurried up to the Hall, attracted by the sound of the alarum-bell. As they advanced they clearly caught sight of a man's figure crossing towards the wood, and two of the men set off in pursuit as hard as they could run; but the course which Williams had followed deceived them, and it is only necessary to say that their hunt was vain. Edmonds went straight up to the Hall, and rang the door-bell; but it was long ere the two terrified women would give him admission. When he was permitted to enter, they both at once informed him, with all the loquacity of terror, that they had been roused by a loud noise from the lower story, and, on looking out, had seen two men busily engaged in breaking into the house.

With few questions Edmonds proceeded to the spot, the women following at a respectful distance; and there he found the window broken and thrown up, the fastenings of the shutters forced off, and part even of the woodwork shivered. The park-keeper gazed at it in silence for a moment or two, and then returned, locking the door of that room.

"They are gone for to-night, Mrs. Chalke," he said; "but I will leave one of the men with you when they come back; and, for the future, I will sleep up at the Hall myself, at least till the house is full of people again, which I hope will not be long."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

In the parish of Stephen the Martyr, in a town near Mallington, it so happened that Edmonds, the park-keeper, had been born and married, and there, too, the year before he entered the service of the Earl of Mallington, had his daughter Lucy first seen the light. Her name, consequently, appeared in the parish register, which is a matter of some importance to this tale. Alfred Latimer had neither been born in Mallington nor in the aforesaid parish of St. Stephen, but in the

City of London; and it so happened that he knew his parish, which is what every man cannot say.

However that may be, as the parish of St. Stephen the Martyr, in the country town of which we have been speaking, extended a little way into the country, it contained in its outskirts many a pleasant little cottage; and one of these—the name of which, "Prospect Cottage," appeared in embossed letters on the front—was situated in a garden, and was the property of a gardener, who let his first-floor, furnished, to any ladies or gentlemen in want of a lodging. Why it was called Prospect Cottage is in some degree a mystery. It was indeed in a very retired and unobtrusive situation, little to be seen itself, and seeing little of anything or anybody.

In the front room, on the first floor, which was neatly furnished as a sitting room, sat Alfred Latimer with Lucy Edmonds. Poor Lucy was a good deal changed since the fatal period of quitting her father's house; she was thinner, paler, sadder; but perhaps the character of her beauty was that which is increased by changes that effect, detrimentally, the loveliness that depends chiefly upon youth; and certainly it would have been difficult to find anything more interesting, more fair, more graceful than she looked as she sat before him to whom she had become a slave, and who had already too sadly shown her that he could become a tyrant.

She wept not—she had, indeed, given over weeping, for she found that it irritated and annoyed him, and though it was often a terrible and bitter struggle to restrain the tears that were ever ready to burst forth, yet she had gained the mastery of them, and with meek and patient endurance strove to temper the bitterness of her fate. Sad she could not help being; but even her sadness provoked her betrayer, though he could find no excuse for anger, as she complied with his lightest word. Yet, with the perversity of his character, he was not pleased even with this placid obedience; he would fain have had matter for complaint, cause for quarrel. Not that he was already sated, and wished to cast off the unhappy girl whom he had so basely betrayed. He loved Lucy, after his fashion, as much as he could love anything, and if he wished for cause of offence, it was not that he might have an excuse for parting with her, but solely that he might have an opportunity of tyrannising. She gave him no occasion, however, and his only resource was to torment her with hopes and fears about their marriage. It is true he wavered, and had wavered from the first, as to whether he would wed her or not. He had at first feared that by giving her such a tie upon him he might lose his slave, but as he saw more of her disposition he lost that apprehension; and the very bitterness and obstinacy of his character, inclined him more and more to keep his word. He had not forgotten the stern and severe language which poor Edmonds himself had used in speaking of his marriage with Lucy, and it seemed to him some sort of revenge to marry her in her parents' despite. He thought that he would make a great lady of her, that he would take her to Mallington in finery and splendour; but that, as her father had said he would rather see her dead than his wife, she should hold no communication with her parents, but treat them as aliens for ever. Thus at his heart he had really determined to keep his word; but yet he could not refrain from leaving her in doubt upon

the subject—from alarming her with affected hesitations—from reminding her that, up to the last moment, it was in his power to do as he pleased.

Though the banns had been published twice, and but a few days were to elapse ere they were to be published a third time, he had that very morning put her in mind that the publication was nothing, adding, "You know, Lucy, we need not be married, after all, unless we like it."

Lucy's eyes were ready to run over, and her heart beat like that of a prisoner bird in the hand of one of the young tormentors of a school, but she conquered her emotion, and only replied, "Oh, Alfred, do not break my heart!"

"Why should it break your heart, silly girl?" asked Alfred Latimer. "What the better will you be for having a ring on your finger?"

Lucy shook her head sadly, but would not utter her thoughts aloud: and their further conference was interrupted by the landlady's daughter coming to say there was a gentleman below who desired admission.

Alfred Latimer asked several questions of the girl in regard to the appearance of the person who desired to see him, and then exclaimed, "Well, d—n him! show him up, whoever he is;" and then, bidding Lucy go into the inner room, he threw himself back in an arm-chair, watching the door.

What was his surprise, however, when he beheld Captain Tankerville enter with a gay familiar air, as if they had parted the best friends upon the face of the earth.

"Ah, my dear Latimer, glad to see you! I found you out, you see. 'Pon my life a very pretty-looking place! What a nice garden you've got — better than the Surrey side of the bridges — and where's madame?"

Cool impudence is certainly a very wonderful thing, for although it cannot do everything, yet it can do a great deal more, and does do a great deal more, in all the affairs of life than any one suspects. Many a man of very moderate abilities rises to the first offices in church and state by its influence alone. Every class of successful men, but one, owes it a good deal in the progress towards power, wealth, or honour. It may be asked, which is the one class we have excepted? It is the very small, narrow, circumscribed class of truly great men—the colossal statues of which the world has not room for many.

Though almost all men are more or less impressible by cool impudence, yet some are peculiarly so, and such was the case with Alfred Latimer. We have already hinted that a foolish sort of shyness had been one of the early causes of many another fault in his career; and shy men, except under very great and trying circumstances, which bring out the energies that are sometimes latent in their nature, are almost always very much overawed by impudence in others. Captain Tankerville, in the character of bully and bravo, Alfred Latimer had shown himself ready to meet, and competent to deal with; and had he appeared in the same humour on the present occasion, the young gentleman would have kicked him down stairs without the least ceremony. But his cool, easy, pleasant impudence, Mr. Latimer did not know how to manage. At first he looked grave and even stern; but it was irresistible. Captain Tankerville saw no coldness, noticed no

frown, seemed to have forgotten all that had passed upon the common, all talk of horsewhips and production of pistols. It seemed as if every scene had been obliterated between the spunging-house and that cottage drawing-room, and as if he were still Mr. Latimer's very good friend and boon companion. Such sort of forgetfulness of things that we don't want to remember has undoubtedly an infectious operation upon those who may not be quite so much inclined to forget, yet, as in the case of inoculation for small-pox, the disease is generally produced in a milder form, and people do remember a little. Even Alfred Latimer did not become altogether placable at once, and inquired, in a cold tone, what was Captain Tankerville's business with him.

"Come, come, Latimer," cried Captain Tankerville, "don't let's think of what is past. I behaved like a fool, and am quite ready to admit it; but the truth is I was half mad for want of money, and when a man is in that state, you know, he will quarrel with his best friend."

Against such frankness what could Alfred Latimer do? From inexperience of the world he was somewhat gullible, and slightly so also by natural character. Nevertheless, at the present moment, his own finances were beginning to get somewhat lower than he liked to see them, and he therefore answered, "I can understand that, for to say the truth, Tankerville, I am somewhat short of cash myself, and sha'n't be sorry to hear that you have come to pay me the fifty pounds again."

This was a way of putting the matter, which Captain Tankerville was not altogether unprepared for, for he was a grand calculator of contingencies, and he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with every discoverable fact concerning Mr. Latimer's family, circumstances, and situation.

"Why, not exactly that, Latimer," he replied. "I've come to pay you back part, and part is better than none, you know. I can let you have twenty pounds, for I have just made a grand coup, and as soon as I got any of the dust I thought of you. Here's the money; but I can do better than that for you—if you'll just listen to a little advice of mine I think I can put you in the way of setting yourself up completely; but then, you know, you must let me have a share of the advantage."

"Let us hear what the business is," said Alfred Latimer. "You shall have your share if it can be carried through, and I'd give a devil of a deal just now to be able to command a thousand pounds."

"You can get more than that if you manage right—ay, five times as much," was Captain Tankerville's answer; "the matter will be easily done, for it wants but one bold stroke, which in your case would be attended with no danger, to make your fortune completely."

"Well, out with it," said Alfred Latimer; "I'm ready for anything that may do that. What is to be done?"

"Something I wonder you have not done long ago," answered Tankerville. "You know we had a talk some time ago about your sort of half sister, Miss Charlton—that is to say, your mother's second husband's daughter."

"That is not my half sister, you know!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer. "We are no more relatives than you and I are; but what next?"

"At all events she has a large fortune," said Captain Tankerville "You can drive your own bargain with any man who wants to marry her. If one won't pay down another will."

"That won't do," replied Alfred Latimer. "I have no power over her."

"But you may readily get it," said Tankerville, in a low voice.

"I might have got it at one time, if I had thought of it before," answered his companion; "but that chance is gone too, now. She is engaged, I am sure, to Morton, and with my mother's consent, too, or she would never have told him all her affairs."

"Do you know what this Morton is?" asked Captain Tankerville; "the people of Mallington do not seem to know anything about him."

"My mother thinks he is a poor painter," answered Latimer; "but I am sure he is not that."

"Are you sure he is not worse?" demanded Captain Tankerville; "there are strange suspicions about him in the village. I was talking only last night to a good lady of the name of Martin, who told me many doubts she had, and very reasonable doubts, too. Now listen to me, Latimer—you've a great regard for Louisa, and you've every right in the world to interfere, in order to prevent her marrying a man whom you have reason to think a swindler."

"But I've no reason to think any such thing!" exclaimed Latimer; "quite the contrary. I'm sure he's a man of fortune. Ah! I see what you mean," he continued, observing a peculiar grin upon Captain Tankerville's countenance,—"you would say I can pretend to think he's a swindler; but he could prove the contrary in five minutes, and then I must hold my tongue."

"Not if you will do as I would have you," said his companion. "You don't suppose I wish you to go to Mallington and tell your mother and the old guardian—I forget what is his name—that you think Mr. Morton not a proper marriage for Miss Charlton, and all that. No, no; that would never do. You must first get her into your power—into your own hands—then drive your bargain with him; and if there be any row about the matter, you've always got a good reason to give for what you have done. You can say that you had reason to believe he was an impostor; that your mother and the old guardian were, for their own ends, furthering the trick; and that you had taken her away only to make her a ward in Chancery. But there will be no row. He will come down with the dust fast enough when he finds you have got her in your own hands, and that there may be a great deal of difficulty in getting her out again."

"I don't think it," answered Alfred Latimer; "when I talked to him about my mother's making him pay for her consent, and showed him that it was well worth his while to do so, he replied, as proud as a peer, that he would never have any share in making Louisa's hand 'a matter of merchandise.'"

"Ay! that's another affair," replied the Captain; "he'll be all the more likely to give five or six thousand pounds to get her away from you, especially if you keep it close where she is. He'll not call that a matter of merchandise. That will be merely setting her free."

"There's something in that," said Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but I don't know how it is, I don't like to vex Louisa. She's a good kind girl as ever lived."

"But you must tell her and everybody else the same story," rejoined Captain Tankerville, who internally laughed at the few remaining

scruples in Alfred Latimer's heart. "You must make them all think that you wish her nothing but good, and you can easily do so, for there are plenty of causes for believing this Mr. Morton to be a very doubtful sort of person."

Alfred Latimer shook his head, and laughed, answering,—"You can't make me credit that."

"What will you think," said Captain Tankerville, after a momentary pause for consideration, "when I tell you that there are bills posted upon all the walls round London, offering a reward of fifty pounds for the apprehension of a certain clerk, lately in the employment of Mr. Quatterly, solicitor, who has absconded with a large sum of money, and is supposed to be concealed in the country under a false name? Now you may very well choose to believe that this Mr. Morton is that very clerk. You know that Morton and Quatterly had money matters with each other, and there are many suspicious circumstances about this fellow's stay at Mallington. All this can be proved, and no one can say that you didn't believe the whole of it, so you are perfectly safe, if you choose to take Louisa from Mallington House to-morrow."

"It's not a bad scheme," answered Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but how am I to get her away?"

"That's easily done," answered Captain Tankerville. "I'll manage that for you."

Just at that moment a slight noise was heard in the next room; and Alfred Latimer suddenly held up his hand to Captain Tankerville, and then, opening the door between the two chambers, looked in. Lucy was seated near the window, employing herself with some woman's work, and her scissors lay upon the floor beside her, as if they had fallen from her lap. Alfred Latimer closed the door again, but did not resume the conversation there, beckoning his companion to follow him to the garden.

CHAPTER XL.

The first house in the town where Alfred Lutimer had taken up his abode as one come from London had a tall wooden post before the door, with a square iron frame at the top, in which had formerly swung a sign; but that sign had long given way to wind and weather, and the present occupant had contented himself with painting up in large letters over the door, "The King's Arms." In this house there was a small parlour, which had not known the beautifying touch of either painter's or whitewasher's brush for several generations. The brownish yellow colour, too, which is acquired by age, had been deepened and heightened by the fumes of many thousand tobacco-pipes; and the odour of the narcotic weed, rendered somewhat flat and strong by its antiquity, still exhaled from the pannelling and from every article of furniture which the place contained.

The room had but one tenant, a man of about thirty-five or thirty-six years of age, who, in spite of being respectably dressed, had a look of misery about him difficult to describe. It was not alone that his well-cut and not very old coat had evidently not been brushed for

several days, nor that the legs of his trousers displayed spots of mud up the back; but it was the attitude in which he sat, and the expression of his countenance which gave one the idea of utter wretchedness—deep, internal, consuming.

There was a handful of fire in the grate, and he had drawn his chair to the side of it, resting his right foot upon the fender. His fore-arm lay negligently on his thigh, his head dropped till it was within a foot of his knee, his shoulders were drawn forward till they almost touched his ears, the form of the bladebones being apparent through the coat behind; and he gazed upon the small glimmering fire, as it wavered and flickered before him, with a dull and leaden eye, in which there was no comfort. Never was there a picture of more complete dejection; and if it wanted aught to render it more striking, the finishing touch was given by the glass half full of gin-and-water, which stood upon the table beside him. He had drunk a part in the vain endeavour to raise his spirits, but even in the midst had plunged into the reverie of his sorrow, and forgotten to finish the draught. What was that sorrow? The worst that can afflict humanity—crime.

The door opened with a pulley and weight; and the moment he heard the clatter that it made, he started with a look of terror and turned round. It was Captain Tankerville who entered, and in him the poor man recognised a tormentor, but not what he most dreaded—an officer; and, with an impatient jerk of the shoulder, he betook him to gaze into the fire again, at the same time raising the glass with a nervous shaking of the hand, and drinking off the contents.

"Ah, Mr. Wilkins," said the worthy captain, as he entered, "still poring and pondering, and making yourself miserable. If you go on this way you will get caught to a dead certainty."

"Do not call me Wilkins," answered the man in a piteous tone, "I told you that my name is Jones. What do you want now? You promised to go away, and not to come near me again."

"Ay, I intended to do so," replied Captain Tankerville; "but I am compelled to trouble you, as the tradesmen say, Mr. Wilkins—I mean Jones. A little occurrence has just taken place which makes it absolutely necessary that I should have two hundred pounds more."

"Two hundred pounds!" exclaimed the unhappy man, "where am I to get it?"

"That won't do, my good sir!" replied the captain, "I'm up to all that. The sum you took off old Quatterly's desk was eleven hundred pounds, and——"

"Hush, hush!" cried the culprit, for Tankerville had purposely raised his voice; "do not speak so loud. You know I gave you all the gold I had—one hundred and ninety pounds—and you said you would not take notes for fear they should be stopped."

"Well, they must do now, for want of better," answered the captain; "but I must have two hundred somehow, that's clear."

"And then you will come back and want more," rejoined the clerk, almost fiercely, "till you get the whole, and I shall be punished for your profit."

"Oh, no!" cried his tormentor, "that's a mistake. This is the last, positively; but it must be had, Mr. Wilkins, alias Jones. No, I am sorry for you, and don't wish to trouble you; nay, more, I'll put you

upon a plan of getting safe out of the country as soon as you bring the money."

"Will you?" cried the unhappy man, eagerly. "How is it—what's to be done?"

"Get the money first, and then I'll tell you," replied Captain Tankerville.

"But won't you cheat me," replied the man, "after you've got the money?"

"See what it is to be a cheat," said the worthy captain, in the true Richard the Third style. "He fancies every one as great a rogue as himself."

The fraudulent clerk did not certainly look quite satisfied, but went out of the room, muttering something to himself. Captain Tankerville was not inclined to put more confidence in the clerk than the clerk was in Captain Tankerville, and recollecting that it was quite possible for Mr. Wilkins to quit the house, he walked out into the passage, and planted himself at the foot of the stairs. He received no interruption in his watch but from the landlord, who inquired, "Are you pleased to want anything, sir?"

"A glass of brandy-and-water," replied the captain, who was always ready,—"Cold without;" and leaning his arm upon the bar, he chatted for a moment till Mr. Wilkins appeared coming down the stairs. The unfortunate man had never entertained the slightest idea of escaping from his persecutor; and giving Tankerville a sign to follow, he walked into the little parlour again. As soon as they had entered he produced a bundle of notes, which he handed over to Captain Tankerville, exclaiming, "Now tell me, tell me what is to be done?"

But Captain Tankerville had his particular taste as well as other men. He enjoyed the unhappy culprit's anxiety; it was a pleasant amusement to him. He therefore counted over the notes slowly, and then, looking up with a dry cold countenance as he put them into his pocket, he said, "Suppose I have nothing to tell?"

"You're not such a villain," said the clerk.

"Why, you see, Mr. Wilkins, alias Jones," said Captain Tankerville, "it was not very fortunate for you, certainly, that you should stumble upon one who knew you so well; but, if you ask my advice, now—the best thing you can do is to make your way to a sea-port, and take your berth in a ship. That's the only way to get out of an island."

The poor man gazed upon him for a moment, with a look almost bewildered; but then a glance of rage came into his eyes, he lifted his head, threw back his shoulders, and rising from his seat strode towards the door.

"Hallo! what are you going to do?" exclaimed Captain Tankerville, somewhat disconcerted by these signs of an intention which he did not rightly comprehend.

"I'll tell you," said Wilkins—"I see what you're about. You intend to wring the last shilling out of me, and then inform against me for the reward; but I'll be beforehand with you; and, what I am going to do, is to call the landlord, give myself up to him, and accuse you as an accessory with the money upon you—I won't be tortured this way any longer;" and he stretched out his hand towards the lock.

"Pooh, nonsense! I was only joking," cried Captain Tankerville, a

good deal alarmed in his turn. "Come back—come back, and I'll tell you what to do."

He rose as he spoke; but Wilkins had by this time gained the courage and decision of despair; and he replied, "Sit where you are, and I'll stay here till you tell me, for I'll have no more joking, when you've got my neck in the halter, and I've got your feet in Botany Bay."

Now, it is probable that Captain Tankerville, if he had not given twenty pounds of the stolen money to Alfred Latimer, might have ventured to call loudly for the landlord, to have given Wilkins in charge, and to have pretended that he had only taken the sum which he had about him in order to prove the man's guilt. But that was out of the question, and after a moment's consideration, he said, "What a fool you are not to see when a man is joking with you. Here have I not only been laying out a scheme for you, but have actually got the means of carrying it into execution. Look here," and he pulled out of his coat-pocket a bundle of handbills, each of which contained a full, true, and particular account of Mr. Wilkins's personal appearance, and offered a reward for his apprehension.

"What has that to do with my escape?" said Wilkins fiercely, when he saw them.

"Everything," replied Captain Tankerville: "I bought these of a man who was sticking them up, expressly for your sake. Now, what you have got to do is this—go to a slopseller's, and buy yourself a flannel jacket and an apron, get yourself a tin-pot full of paste and a paste brush, and walk away towards the nearest port you can find, sticking up a bill upon the wall wherever you may think there are people looking after you. They are never likely to suspect a man who is seen placarding a reward for his own apprehension. It's a new go that, my good fellow, and I think a devilish clever one;" and he laughed at his own cunning. "I'll tell you what I'd do besides," he continued, getting into the spirit of the thing—"I'd cut off that dark hair and those whiskers, buy myself a second-hand flaxen wig, and a low-crowned glazed hat. Then the devil himself wouldn't know you."

A ray of the bright light of hope shone in the culprit's eyes, and he said, "That will do—I do believe that would do. Well, this is kind of you after all; but I don't know rightly which road to take."

"Oh! I'll tell you," answered Captain Tankerville; "you've only to walk along the London-road for a mile, and just beyond the milestone you'll find it branch off to the right; that will lead you over the hills to Mallington."

"I can't go there," cried Wilkins: "that's where I was ordered to go the very morning I took the money."

"That's just the reason why you should go," answered Tankerville: "they'll never think to find you there. You might lodge there for a year without ever being found. It really makes me sick to see a fellow like you in such a fright. But do as I tell you, and all will go right. The first thing you do when you go into Mallington, stick up a bill against the wall of the great house at the top of the hill. Then plant another on the garden wall of the Bagpipes Inn, down by the bridge; then you can take the coach that comes down at night, and get on to Winchester, and so to Southampton."

"I'll set about it directly," said Wilkins, raising his hand to the lock of the door; but then he paused, while his face became a shade paler, and he added, "You won't inform against me, after all?"

"Why, you fool, I should be cutting my own throat," replied Captain Tankerville. "Should not I have to give up all I've got? Besides, I've another object in getting you safe out of the country. What it is, is no business of yours; but it will serve my purpose, and that is enough. So go along and buy the things, pack them up in a bundle, and change your clothes at the first common or wood you come to. I'll keep the landlord chatting here till you've done it all."

"I must get a five pound note changed," said Wilkins, remembering his assertion that he had given Captain Tankerville all the gold he had taken, though such was not absolutely the fact; and after remaining at the inn till Wilkins returned from making his purchases, Captain Tankerville saw him pay his bill, and went with him a short distance on his road to Mallington.

CHAPTER XLI.

On the day the inhabitants of Mallington, on rising from their beds, found the placard describing the absconded clerk, which had been posted up the day before, Louisa Charlton entered the garden about a quarter before eight, with an air less calm and tranquil than usual. She came down the steps, with her light foot treading the ground eagerly, and her face turned alternately to every different part of the garden, evidently looking for some one in haste. At length some object, beyond the second row of evergreens, attracted her up the middle walk, and in less than a minute her hand was clasped in Morton's as he advanced to meet her.

"Oh, Edmond!" she exclaimed, "I am glad I have found you. The butler said you had gone out; and, as you mentioned last night that you had some engagement to-day respecting the pocket-book, I feared that you might be already away."

"What is the matter, dear girl?" asked Morton, with some feelings of apprehension. "You seem agitated. Has anything alarmed you?"

"No, I am not exactly alarmed," replied Louisa, "but a little annoyed by a note I have received this morning from Alfred. He says," she continued, holding an open letter for her lover to read—"he says I am not to tell any one, and especially neither Mrs. Charlton nor you; but I think that, as we are circumstanced"—and the blood rose slightly in her cheek—"I have no right to keep anything back from you, whoever may ask it. In this case especially, I cannot do so, for, how I shall act will depend entirely upon what you say."

Morton took the note gravely, for there was something in the very name of Alfred Latimer that conjured up thoughts of no very pleasant character: and read it through before he replied. The words he saw were to the following effect:—

"Dear Louisa,

"I am very awkwardly situated, and much want your advice and as-

sistance. I cannot come into Mallington to see you, for reasons; but if you would just, like a kind good girl, as you always are, walk out through the garden upon the common, and take your way towards the windmill, about half-past eight to-morrow, I will meet you there, and you can be back time enough for breakfast. It will be doing me a great favour, indeed, if you come; but mind, don't say a word to my mother, and although Morton's a very good fellow, you must not say anything to him.

"Your affectionate brother,

"ALFRED LATIMER.

"P.S. Mind, not a word to Morton, for the world."

Morton gave the letter back to Louisa, and then drew her arm through his, saying in a decided but kindly tone, "You must not go, dear girl, on any consideration."

"I thought such would be your opinion," answered Miss Charlton: "and, indeed, after what I have vaguely heard of Alfred's late conduct I felt no inclination to go."

"Were Latimer a mere wild careless youth," replied Morton, "who got himself into difficulties by thoughtlessness or folly, I might have hesitated what to advise you; but as, on the contrary, he is habitually depraved—as he has shown no regard for honesty, honour, or even common decency,—I must be harsh, Louisa, for the occasion requires it,—I cannot but say it would be both improper and dangerous for you to meet him in the way he suggests. What may be his design or object I know not, but I doubt much that it is one at all honourable to himself; and if he retained any sense of what is right, he would not make such a request as this."

"I do not think he meant ill there," answered Louisa, somewhat sadly; "you know that we have been brought up together as brother and sister, and he might not see any impropriety in asking me to meet him on the common, if he wished, as I doubt not he does, to obtain some assistance from me, or through my means. It is his conduct to others that has made me hesitate."

"And it is that conduct, dearest Louisa," replied Morton, "which renders it wrong in him to ask you to come, conscious as he must be of acts committed in this very neighbourhood of the most shameless description."

"And yet, Morton," said his fair companion, "I would give much to be enabled to make one more effort to recall him to better things—to give him some assistance, to extricate him from his present situation, and to—to press him——"

Louisa paused and coloured, for she was now approaching a subject that, to a mind like hers, was painful and agitating. After a moment's hesitation, however, she went on. "I would give much," she said, "to have an opportunity of pressing him to marry that poor girl Lucy. I have often seen her, Edmond, often spoke to her, and I am sure she is at least modest, good, and virtuous. I cannot but think that some base means must have been employed towards her; and I would fain urge Mr. Latimer to remove that stain at least from his character."

Morton laid his hand upon the soft and fair one that rested on his arm. "Ever kind and noble!" he said: "I fear that it will be vain,

Louisa: but yet such feelings and such wishes must not be thwarted. For you to meet him is impossible; but as this letter shows that he can be at no great distance, I will endeavour to find him out and——"

"Oh! do not risk a quarrel with him," cried Louisa; "you know not how violent and impetuous he can be; and I much fear if you were to speak with him on the subject I have mentioned, he would become furious."

"I do not propose to do so, dear one," replied Morton; "my voice would have no effect. I have abandoned all hope of reclaiming him; but yet—and I do not think that it is love which makes me fancy so—I cannot but believe that your voice might have some effect. There is something in the pleading of a woman for a woman, in the virtuous and the high, for the sinful and the fallen, which is very powerful. What I will then do, my Louisa, is to seek him out, to avoid all matter of discussion between him and myself, and to make some arrangement by which he may come here in safety—perhaps to-morrow morning, before Mrs. Charlton is up, and speak to you in private. You can then hear what he has to say, and shape your arguments accordingly."

Louisa hesitated ere she replied, for she could not banish all apprehension from her mind of some painful collision between her lover and Mrs. Charlton's son; and before she suffered Morton to leave her upon the errand on which he was about to set out, she sought to take securities from him in the shape of many promises, that nothing should induce him to suffer Alfred Latimer to irritate or make him angry. Morton tranquillised her upon that point, assuring her that her fears were without cause, and then left her to proceed upon his way, having received the day before an intimation, that if he would come to a spot named, some communication would be made to him in regard to the lost pocket-book, which might prove more satisfactory than the last.

Issuing out of the gate farthest from the house, Morton directed his steps towards the point assigned, which was marked by a red-painted finger-post upon the common, about two miles and a half from Mallington House. He had no very distinct notion of the locality, for he had never hitherto had occasion to visit that side of the common. The attentive reader, indeed, would probably be able to find his way to it blindfold, were he told that the post stood about three hundred yards to the south of the lone house, to which Prior, the Bow-street officer, had been conducted some time before by Bill Maltby. As Mr. Morton, however, had not heard anything but the result of Prior's expedition, it is not to be wondered at that he wandered somewhat out of the way. Thus bearing to the eastward of the direct line, at the distance of about a mile from Mallington House, he came in sight of the mill which had been mentioned in Alfred Latimer's letter, and he naturally turned his eyes in that direction. At a little distance from the mill he perceived a man pacing up and down the road; and though he could not be nearer than half a mile, he had no difficulty in recognising the person of Mrs. Charlton's son. As it was not his intention to encounter him at that moment, and he did not like to have the appearance of spying upon him, Morton turned off to the right, and, passing over the brow of one of the numerous waves of ground, de-

scended into a hollow filled with gorse and heath, through the midst of which wound the little narrow path he was following. That path soon led him over another slope, from which he caught sight once more of the top of the windmill, and in a minute or two after he descended into a still more profound hollow, which, like a great furrow formed by some gigantic plough, extended straight across the moor for nearly a mile. On the left, in the direction of the mill, which was now no longer visible to Morton's eyes, and at the distance of about three quarters of a mile from the path which he was pursuing, the highway crossed the dell, and, looking along the hollow vista in that direction, the top and body of a post-chaise as far down as the axles of the wheels, with the heads and shoulders of three or four men gathered together in a group, were apparent. The chaise was motionless; the men did not stir; and Morton thought the whole circumstance somewhat odd and suspicious. He calculated that the spot where the vehicle was placed must be about a quarter of a mile from the mill, and upon considering the undulations of the ground, he became convinced that neither the chaise itself, nor the people who accompanied it, could be visible from the spot where Alfred Latimer was waiting for Louisa Charlton.

A quick suspicion passed through his mind; but Morton was not fond of suspicion, and although he knew that it was difficult to do Alfred Latimer injustice in such circumstances, he mentally said, "No; he could never be such a scoundrel!"

Twice or thrice, as he passed over the opposite slope, he turned his eyes towards the chaise, and still saw the same group at the same spot. Just when he reached the top, he perceived the figure he had seen waiting near the mill, coming along the road above, towards the party below, and apparently beckoning to one or more of them. Satisfied, however, that Louisa was in safety, Morton walked on, and the minute after they were hidden from his sight.

As he advanced he got a better and more general view of the country round, and perceiving that he must have gone too far to the eastward, he took the first path to the right, which soon led him to a small sandy carriage road; and at the end of about half a mile further he perceived the red post to which he had been directed, standing before him, with part of the lone house which Prior had visited, appearing above some trees beyond. No person was seen upon the road, however, and Morton, thinking that he might have been delayed beyond the appointed time, took out his watch to ascertain the hour. He had yet ten minutes to spare, and walking on to the finger-post, he sauntered up and down before it; but still no one appeared. Nor; indeed, had it ever been the intention of the person who called him there to come or send, the appointment being made, as the reader may have divined, merely for the purpose of keeping Mr. Morton in play. That gentleman at length began to suspect that such was the case, and was about to turn upon his way homeward, when the sound of carriage-wheels suddenly met his ear, coming on apparently at a rapid rate.

CHAPTER XLII.

The plan was all laid out, the preparations made, half a dozen lies were ready to be told as soon as any circumstance might require them, the post-chaise was concealed in the hollow, and, besides two or three of Alfred Latimer's usual companions, Captain Tankerville, dressed in a suit of black, to look as like a physician as possible, stood by the vehicle, to give authority to the tale which had been devised. The post-boy had been brought from a house at which Alfred Latimer was not known, and he had been told that the object of all this care and plotting was to catch a poor maniac who was in the habit of wandering upon the common and who was to be confined in an asylum under a medical certificate. The same tale was to be spread wherever any questions were asked; and the document, authorising restraint to be used, had been manufactured by Captain Tankerville, who was an adept in concocting false papers to suit his purposes. Everything, also, had been prepared at the cottage inhabited by Alfred Latimer; a room had been furnished with nailed windows and iron bars; and the landlord had received intimation that it was the intention of his tenant to bring thither, for a short time, a near relation of his own, who was, unhappily, insane. The good gardener took the story upon trust; and Latimer, never doubting that Louisa would come at his invitation, thought Tankerville a very clever fellow for devising such a plan.

"I do not see," he said, "why I should not get a part of the money as well as my mother, if Louisa is to be set up to auction;" and he proceeded to calculate how many pleasant things he could do with five or six thousand pounds.

He was early to the spot appointed, and, when Morton passed, had been waiting nearly an hour, though the time he himself had fixed had not long gone by. As he was watching for Louisa coming, he caught sight of Morton, though that gentleman was not exactly upon the road by which he expected her to appear. At first he did not recognise him; but in a moment or two there was something in the air and figure which showed him who it was: the firm and vigorous step, the upright and commanding carriage, left not a doubt; and, on the first impulse, Alfred Latimer would have hurried behind the mill to hide himself. The next instant, however, he thought, "She has told him, I'll bet a guinea; and he's coming here to spy. He had better mind his own business, or he'll get his bones broken. Perhaps she has sent him to palaver me about virtue and propriety, and all that, and to offer me money if I'll be a good boy;" and he laughed scornfully, adding, "Hang me if I get out of his way."

Thus saying, he commenced his walk again; but he very soon perceived that, whatever was Morton's object in coming to the common at all, he had no intention of approaching the spot where he had stationed himself. He concluded that Louisa's lover had come to watch and to find out his designs, and the consciousness of his own villanous purpose made him fancy it already in part discovered. "Curse it!" he exclaimed; "if he goes on in that direction he will

see the chaise and all the people. Perhaps he may have other fellows to help him, sent round behind by the lanes and the bank. I had better go and talk to Tankerville about it;" and off he set as hard as he could go, beckoning to his companions as soon as he got upon the brow of the hill, and calling them to come to him, in order that the post-boy might not overhear their consultations.

The first who approached was Captain Tankerville, and Alfred Latimer was in full career communicating to him his doubts and suspicions in regard to Morton, when Bill Maltby joined them. The latter caught enough of what was said to perceive the fears which the young gentleman entertained of being surprised, and he hastened to relieve him, saying, "Pooh! nonsense, sir. I knew quite well he was going across the common at this time."

"What is he after, then?" asked Alfred Latimer, turning quickly towards him. "What business has he up here at this time?"

The question somewhat puzzled Bill Maltby, for though he had willingly enough agreed to take part in Alfred Latimer's present enterprise, and had himself found a boy to carry the note to Miss Charlton, he was not at all disposed to trust that gentleman with any knowledge of the adventures in which he and Williams had been engaged.

"What he's about is no great matter," replied Maltby, at length. "He's gone upon a fool's errand, and will have to cool his heels for an hour at the red post, by Gandy's old house, waiting for 'the man that never comes.' The truth is, he's been making a fuss about this pocket-book of his, and had down Prior from London: so a party of us young fellows determined that we'd have some fun out of it, and make the gentleman walk the country."

"If that's the case," said Captain Tankerville, "you had better go back, Latimer. But it must be past the hour. I shouldn't wonder if she didn't come."

"If she doesn't," replied Latimer, "that fellow has stopped her."

"Why I can't help saying he's very right," replied Tankerville, laughing; "and yet we might make him pay for it, too."

"I wish we could," replied Alfred Latimer. "I am sure he has stopped her, if she is stopped, for she would only show the letter to him; and I'd give a guinea to see his head broke for his pains."

"Perhaps we can do better than that," replied Captain Tankerville: "but do you run up again, Latimer, and see if the girl's coming. I'll think of another plan in the meantime."

His companion returned to watch by the mill, and Tankerville held a brief conversation with Bill Maltby, in which they spoke quick, and eked out their words with nods and signs. We must, however, content ourself with such scraps and bits of sentences as met the ear of an inferior companion, young Blackmore, the gardener's son, who had been engaged by Maltby to assist that morning, but was not admitted to the full confidence of the superior vagabonds with whom he was confederated.

"Oh, no," answered Maltby, to a question from Captain Tankerville, "he knows nothing of me, though I know him."

"Well, then, if we can't have the doe, we must take the buck," replied Tankerville. Then followed some murmuring, at the end of which the captain observed aloud, "Oh, no; I heard all. He did not

say whether it was a man or a woman—not a word of it. He only said a maniac."

"But I do not see the use of it," said Maltby. "What can you do with him?"

"I've not settled all," replied Captain Tankerville, in a tone of philosophic meditation. "One can never quite foresee all the results of anything; but one must be a great fool if one cannot find some way of turning them to advantage. At all events, if this young lady is so much in love as Latimer says, we shall find means of driving a bargain with her when we have got her lover safe in our hands."

"Well, you had better be quick," rejoined Maltby, "for he will not wait very long, and, besides, he'll show fight, you may be sure, and then, if there should be any one near, we may get into a mess."

"Run up and call back Latimer," replied Tankerville, "and in the meanwhile I will instruct this young fellow—what is his name?"

"John Blackmore," answered the other, in a whisper; "he's a determined little devil, though he looks spooney and lackadaisical," and having given this excellent character to his friend, he set off to recall Alfred Latimer.

On his return a brief but earnest conference was held by the four respectable persons engaged in this very praiseworthy enterprise, and though Latimer, when he rejoined his companions, bore a dark fierce look upon his countenance, he soon was seen to smile with a bitter sort of satisfaction at what Tankerville proposed regarding Morton; for your thorough scoundrel is incapable of gratitude, and, transmuted by the dark alchemy of his own heart, benefits conferred upon him become injuries. There was something in the whole scheme that he liked—it had its portion of imagination and enterprise, and, as to scruples, Alfred Latimer had done with them.

"You must drive us round by this road, and then take the second to the right till I tell you to stop," said Latimer to the postboy. The man touched his hat, and the young gentleman added, "The poor man we are looking for has gone across the common."

"Aye, sir, I see him go just over there five minutes ago," answered the other. "I should not wonder if he were to dodge you un common."

Latimer, Tankerville, and Maltby then got into the chaise, John Blackmore mounted the splinter bar, and round they drove till they came within about a couple of hundred yards of the spot where Morton was waiting. There, leaving the chaise in the hollow, while John Blackmore, instructed what he was to say, advanced along the road to engage the object of their scheme in conversation, the other three crept through the shrubs and tall furze towards the same spot.

The gardener's son came up with Mr. Morton just as he was about to turn towards Mallington, and, addressing him with an easy air, he said, "I beg pardon for keeping you so long, sir; but there were people with a chaise dodging about, and I did not know what they might be after."

"Then you have come to speak about the return of my pocket-book?" replied Morton. "I hope, to accept the offer I made, for this will be the last opportunity you will have of doing so."

"Cannot we split the difference, sir?" said young Blackmore, ad-

vancing closer to Morton, as if to whisper. "I think, now, you ought to consider—and if you do not you must."

Thus saying he threw himself upon him; but Morton, stepping back, with one straightforward blow levelled him with the ground. The youth, however, cast his arms round his opponent's feet and legs as he fell, and in an instant the three other men were upon him. The struggle that ensued was firm but brief, for Morton's chief effort was to draw a pistol from his coat-pocket, having taken the precaution of arming himself before he set out upon an expedition which might not be without its peril, but the attack was so sudden that his arms were speedily pinioned; and as soon as he found the attempt to reach the weapon vain, he ceased to resist, merely saying, as his eye rested upon Mrs. Charlton's son, "I know not what are your designs, sir, but you had better consider well what you are about, before you plunge into crimes as well as vices."

Alfred Latimer made no reply but by a triumphant laugh, and they hurried their captive on towards the chaise. As soon as the post-boy was within hearing, however, Morton exclaimed, "Are you, my man, too, an accessory to this act of violence?"

"Ah, poor gentleman, I know all about it!" answered the man; and before Captain Tankerville could stop him, he added, "You're not the first madman I've druv."

"Ha! is that the story?" exclaimed Morton; "then let me tell you, you are cheated; and if you do not inform the nearest magistrate of all you have seen, you will certainly suffer for your part in this affair. I shall know you and your master;" and he read aloud the name upon the door of the chaise.

Morton resisted the efforts made to force him on till he had said what he thought necessary, and then quietly entered the vehicle. Captain Tankerville and Alfred Latimer took their seats on either side of him, Maltby got upon the splinter-bar, and young Blackmore, having received a whispered message from the latter, and some money from Mr. Latimer, hurried away across the common.

CHAPTER XLIII.

It took about three hours and a half for the chaise to carry Morton and his captors from Mallington Common to the house in the garden. After quitting the common, the road traversed several little hamlets, but no large village, and then gradually ascending, it ran along the ridge of a bare hilly spine, used principally as a sheep-walk by the neighbouring farmers. At the other end, again, it entered into a more fully inhabited tract. A gentleman's house was to be seen here and there rising on the side of a hill; and one or two small villages echoed to the sound of the wheels, as the chaise whirled through them, but as the road was now almost all the way down-hill, the post-boy kept his horses at a good pace, and it was not till they were within about a mile and a half of the town that any pause took place. It was by this time half-past twelve—an unpleasant hour for any one to bring a cargo of contraband merchandise through the market-place of a large town—and, consequently, Alfred Latimer put his head out of

the front window, and directed the post-boy to drive round by the lanes, adding something about "the poor gentleman making a row."

Morton merely smiled; and though he saw a man coming along the road he made no movement of any kind, being one of those calm people who only take advantage of the proper opportunity more resolutely, because they have waited for it with patience. His perfect tranquillity, indeed, was not altogether pleasant, either to Alfred Latimer or to Captain Tankerville. They could not account for it themselves upon any other reason than that he had a perfect certainty in his own mind of speedy deliverance, by some process which they could not divine; and they began to entertain those vague apprehensions of dangers, against which there is no guarding, but which are very unpleasant to men engaged in a criminal pursuit. The post-boy having received his orders, drove round the town, through the lanes, and reached the cottage in the garden, the wall of which had in it, besides the ordinary door, a gate for the gardeners' carts to enter and go forth. At this gate Maltby jumped down, and drew back the bolt, giving admission to the vehicle, which instantly rolled on close up to the door of the house. He then planted himself on one of the steps, and Alfred Latimer sprang to the other, to prevent the captive of their bow and spear from holding any communication with the master of the house, who was seen at a little distance working in his garden. Morton, however, alighted quite quietly, as if going straight into the house, but he turned suddenly to the post-boy, who was looking round, and exclaimed, "Remember what I told you! You will be well rewarded if you do—punished if you do not," and then walked on, followed by Tankerville and Latimer, while Maltby remained at the door to watch the proceedings of the driver.

As soon as Mr. Morton was safely deposited in the room which had been prepared for Louisa Charlton, and the door locked and bolted upon him, the two principal scoundrels who had brought him thither held a whispered consultation in regard to what was to be done with the post-boy.

"By G—! he's devilish like to go and tell a magistrate," said Alfred Latimer; "the fellow will say to himself there can be no harm in that, whether the man is mad or not."

"Ay, that's what our friend up stairs calculated upon," rejoined the worthy captain; "and there's but one way of mending it."

"And what's that?" demanded Mr. Latimer. "I don't see how we can stop it."

"Why give the boy a five-pound note for his trouble," answered Tankerville; "then if he keeps the money he's art and part in the business, and won't dare to say a word; and if he says a word he'll be obliged to give up the money, which, depend upon it, he won't like to do."

Alfred Latimer did not at all approve of lessening his little stock by the sum of five pounds; but, nevertheless, he saw no help for it; and after some grumbling, he advanced to the door of the house, paid for the horses, and gave the post-boy the sum determined upon, saying, "That's for your own trouble. You need not mind anything that fellow said about telling magistrates. He's as mad as a March hare, and we've got a doctor's order. Here it is."

The man only thanked him, and drove out of the gate again; but as he went he exchanged a glance with the gardener; and raising his right thumb towards the left ear of the off horse, seemed to indicate a desire that the man should follow whither he was about to go. The gardener, advancing to shut the gates, looked out, and nodded his head, as if to signify that he understood and would follow.

In the meantime the three gentlemen who had been engaged in this pleasant affair proceeded to the drawing-room of the cottage, whence poor Lucy Edmonds was speedily dislodged to give freedom to their consultation. As soon as she was gone, Tankerville exclaimed, slapping Latimer on the shoulder, "Now, my boy! at him at once. You have got the game in your own hands, if you play it well."

"But let us consider what I'm to say," rejoined Alfred Latimer.

"Oh! don't stand any nonsense," answered Tankerville. "Treat it as a matter of business, Latimer. Tell him you know quite well he prevented Miss Charlton from coming, and so he must stand in her place. Just say to him that if he has a mind to give you a promise in writing to lay down five thousand pounds to you on his marriage with Louisa, and to pledge his word of honour that he will not mention anything about this affair to any one, you'll let him out at once: but if he doesn't, you'll keep him in till you settle the matter with Louisa herself."

"He'll refuse to a certainty," replied Alfred Latimer: "I know him better than you do."

"Well, it can't be helped, if he does," answered Tankerville. "We'll settle the matter with the young lady. It's always a devil of a deal easier to plough with the heifer. We must get her promise for the five thousand—I'll manage all that. The devil of it is, we must be quick, otherwise you see inquiries will be made, and the whole business may get blown, which would be awkward. However, we are sure of three or four days, and I'll answer for bringing the young lady round in that time. You go and speak to him, Latimer; and Mr. Maltby and I will wait at the door, to make sure he doesn't break your head and get out, for he's devilish strong when he likes it."

Alfred Latimer, according to this suggestion, moved up stairs, followed by his two worthy comrades, to the room in which Morton had been placed. At the door, however, he paused for an instant; for when his blood was not up, there was a sufficient degree of shame left to make him feel unwilling to go in and display to an honourable man the whole meanness and baseness of his character. He did not choose, however, to shrink or hesitate before his two more impudent companions; and, after this momentary pause, he threw open the door sharply and went in, with his brow knit into a frown.

Morton was standing at the window, looking out; but he turned round instantly, catching sight before the door was closed, not only of Alfred Latimer himself, but of his two companions. His visitor, however, determined to take the first word; and, without giving Morton time to speak, he said, with a swagger, "I can tell you what, sir, people who think they can thwart me when I've determined on a thing, will find that they may get into the wrong box. You may say what you like, but I know quite well Louisa was fool enough to show you my

letter, and that you told her not to come; you now taste the consequences."

Morton gazed at him with a look of pity, not unmingled with contempt; "I do not understand," he replied, "what you mean by telling me that I may say what I like. I am not accustomed, sir, to say anything but that which is true."

"Well, did you, or did you not, tell her not to come?" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, eager to find grounds of quarrel.

"I undoubtedly did," replied Morton, "and I am exceedingly glad that my opinion of your character was so strongly formed, that I advised her not to trust herself with you at a distance from home, even before I knew you would venture to such a length as to gather together three or four ruffians and swindlers, with a post-chaise, in order to carry her away to a room freshly prepared, with iron bars to the windows, for her imprisonment under some pretence or another."

Latimer had twice opened his lips to interrupt Morton while he spoke; but, to say truth, he was puzzled for a reply, and rage did not facilitate his utterance.

"I have every right!" he exclaimed, at length, "to take any means I may think fit to prevent my sister from marrying a fortune-hunter and a swindler."

Morton smiled, but answered calmly, "You have no right, sir, to interfere even in the slightest degree. Fortunately for herself, and for all who have any regard for her, you are not any relation whatever to the lady whom you presume to call your sister. Her guardians and her step-mother will, doubtless, take good care that she does not, as you say, marry either a fortune-hunter or a swindler; and if it is to me you apply those terms, there is nobody who should know better than yourself that you are falsifying the truth, and attempting to cover a piece of knavery by a lie."

Had Tankerville or any other of his companions ventured to use such expressions, Alfred Latimer's first act would have been to knock him down, but there was something in Morton which cowed him; and, after hesitating for an instant, he replied, "I did not say you were a fortune-hunter or a swindler; but I do say I've a right to know who you are, before you marry Louisa Charlton, who, if she is not my sister, is just as good."

"You have no right at all," replied Morton. "To those who have a right to inquire, I have explained already."

"The devil you have!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer. "Then, I suppose, you mean to say you've made your bargain with my mother?"

"I've made no bargain with any one," answered Morton; "nor shall I make one—of that you may be quite sure; and I cannot but hope and believe that you mistake your mother's character in attributing such objects to her."

"Pooh, nonsense!" replied Alfred Latimer. "My mother would be a fool if, when old Charlton put such power in her hands, she did not make the most of it. What did the old man do it for, if he did not intend her to gain something by it?"

"It was very strange, certainly," answered Morton, thoughtfully; "but there is no accounting for old men's caprices; and it is my belief that the law will not sustain that part of the will."

"The deuce it is!" exclaimed Latimer; "then the more need I should take care of myself: and I've only one word to say, Mr. Morton, which is this—if you or Louisa do not agree to pay me down five thousand pounds upon your marriage-day, and if you do not give me your word of honour that no notice shall be taken of this affair, you will have to kick your heels here for a month or two."

"In regard to my taking notice of your present conduct," replied Morton, "probably I shall not punish you as you deserve; not on your account, but on Miss Charlton's. In regard to her conduct to you, or to what she may think fit to promise you, I have no control; but for my own part, as I said before, I enter into no bargain with you or any one else; and allow me to say that, by attempting to make such, you only degrade yourself, without in the slightest degree forwarding your own object."

Alfred Latimer set his teeth hard, and then replied, "I'll tell you what, sir—I've got the whip hand of you, for a time at least—and I'll make you forward my object, whether you like it or not;" and thus saying, he flung out of the room, and joined his two companions on the outside.

"Well done, Latimer!" said the gallant captain, grasping him by the arm. "We heard it all, and nobody could do it better. But come, let us consult on the next step;" and, going down to the room below, Captain Tankerville continued, for he had already laid out the whole plan in his own head. "You must make me your ambassador to this fair queen of beauty and wealth," he said. "I will go over early to-morrow and represent the case to her; and I doubt not, before dinner time I shall bring you over her promise under hand and seal. Those dear creatures, the women, they are so easily humbugged, especially where a lover is in the case! Then, they are always inclined to do things with an air; and but set them riding upon the hobby of generosity, and there's no knowing how far they will go."

"It's not so with all women," answered Alfred Latimer, thinking of his mother.

"Wouldn't it be better for you, captain, to go over at once?" asked Bill Maltby. "It's better to strike while the iron's hot."

"No, no," replied Captain Tankerville; "give her a day to fret. They'll not be able to trace him—don't be afraid; and what between trying to find him out all this morning, and fancying he's murdered all night, she'll be brought down so low by to-morrow that she'll be ready to do anything that one wants, merely for the assurance that he's alive and well."

"That's Louisa all over," answered Alfred Latimer. "I don't doubt that she'll promise; but I'll tell you how you can make it quite sure, Tankerville. If you just make her think that Morton wishes it, she'll do it in a minute."

"Not a bad idea," answered Captain Tankerville; "we might write a letter for him, asking her to do it."

"It will be better not to put anything on paper," said Maltby, who had a fear of forgery. "Captain Tankerville can just quietly hint that Mr. Morton wishes it; but wouldn't for the world ask her. But you see, the mischief of it is, that while we are all over here, we can none of us tell what may be going on at Mallington, and a thousand things

may happen to make it devilish awkward when we come to operations to-morrow."

This very sage observation produced a discussion as to the steps to be taken, which ended in Maltby setting out for the purpose of hiring a horse and gig to proceed to Mallington, to watch all that took place in that village, and give due intimation of any occurrence that might be important to his two companions.

After he was gone, Captain Tankerville coolly invited himself to dine and spend the evening with his dear acquaintance of the spunging-house; and poor Lucy Edmonds was forced to endure during the rest of the day the presence and society of a man whose countenance and manners filled her with instinctive dread. After dinner, Latimer and his companion both drank deep, and Lucy was glad to quit them, and retire nominally to rest, though but little rest indeed could the unhappy girl find. The drinking still went on in the room that she left, and then cards were produced to pass away the time, for Captain Tankerville could not resist the temptation to pigeon even a confederate in crime; and Alfred Latimer, who really did play well—it was his only talent—fancied that he played better than any one else. For several games success was pretty equal on both sides; and though Latimer did not wish to risk money, as the whole of the twenty pounds he had received from Captain Tankerville had been well nigh dissipated in the operations of that morning, the stakes were gradually increased till they mounted high, when fortune's balance began immediately to incline in favour of Captain Tankerville. With a heated brow and a glittering eye Latimer went on; but he still lost, and began to fancy he was cheated. The pile of money grew up on Tankerville's side of the table, and diminished upon his, till he saw immediate need stare him in the face. Yet he could not stop, but went on watching the game with fierce eagerness, and thinking that he saw a card kept back, or slipped beneath when the pack was cut. He was in hopes at the very next deal of detecting the fraud, when the bell of the house was heard to ring. The door was not opened, however, and with scarcely a minute's interval the bell rang again.

"The old fellow below is asleep," said Tankerville. "I should not wonder if it is some one from Mallington. I'll go and see;" but before he did so he swept up his winnings, and put them in his pocket. Then, taking the candle, he walked down stairs.

Alfred Latimer listened, and heard the voice of John Blackmore, the gardener's son; then looked with a haggard eye at the small sum that remained upon the table—less than ten pounds; but that was all that he now possessed on earth; and the next moment Tankerville and the messenger entered the room, with an expression of a good deal of anxiety in the countenance of the former.

CHAPTER XLIV.

There are many varieties of the post-boy genus: the loquacious, the taciturn, the observing, the stolid, the drunken, the grave, the smart, the slow, the impassable, the picturesque, and the poetical; but we will not be led into a disquisition upon post-boys, and merely say that, of

all these varieties, the post-boy in question belonged to the observing class. A mind naturally astute, rendered quicker by a considerable quantity of drubbing in infancy and boyhood; the habit of lounging about inn-doors and examining all sorts of things that passed: the necessity of driving multitudes of people whom he did not know, and of gathering from various little traits whether they would give threepence, fourpence, or fivepence a mile; and the custom of riding and tending every devil of a horse that his master chose to purchase; all these rendered him of an observing disposition, and enabled him to judge rapidly of everything he saw.

Having stopped his horses, which were somewhat hot and very tired, he got out of the saddle, and turning round looked behind him, to see if Alfred Latimer's landlord was coming. He had to wait several minutes before the worthy gardener made his appearance, plodding up the lane, and, after a significant glance between him and the post-boy, the conversation began as follows:—

"This is a rum go, Master Wilson," said the man of horses.

"Ay! I don't half know what to make of it," rejoined the man of flowers.

"Do you know much about that young chap as is lodging with you?" asked the post-boy.

"No; I know nothing at all," replied the gardener, "except that he pays his rent. That's my business, and I never mind anything else."

"That's a hint," said the post-boy, "that I had better mind my business too;—but I can't help thinking, Master Wilson, that 'ere young gentleman they've got hold on is no more mad nor you or I."

"Can't say," replied the gardener, drily; "never see him before."

"Did you hear what he said to me?" inquired the other.

"No; I heard him say something, but not what it was," answered the gardener. "The truth is, I don't want to meddle with what doesn't concern me, and so——"

"As you get your rent, and I dare say it's a good one," rejoined he of the post-chaise, with a grin, "you'd rather that your lodger wasn't disturbed in his doings. Well, it's no concern of mine either; so I'll jog on;" and thereupon he put his foot in the stirrup, and trotted away to the inn.

The post-boy was now left to his own resources, cut off from the expected counsel of the gardener, and much doubting what he ought to do. The five-pound note which he had in his breeches pocket had a snug and comfortable feeling about it, which it would have been unpleasant to part with; and yet, strange to say, the very fact of his having received that five-pound note caused the greatest doubt as to whether he should keep it. He knew that it had not been given him for nothing: and he had to consider that, if any disagreeable consequences arose from the detention of the gentleman reported to be insane, he was sure to be looked upon as art and part in the transaction, in consequence of his having received so large a sum without a rightful claim. Besides all this, he was at heart not at all an ill-disposed or dishonest person. He had, also, that which almost every Englishman naturally possesses, from the highest-minded man of honour to the lowest scamp—a great dislike to injustice in the abstract; and, more-

over, that which all Englishmen habitually receive—an abhorrence of any infringement of civil liberty.

But then the five-pound note in his pocket felt so comfortable; and the devil, who is always at every man's elbow, ready to take advantage of any little circumstance in his fate to lead him away from the straight path by the most persuasive arguments, kept pointing out to him how many nice things he could buy, and how many pleasant things he could do, with the sum of one hundred shillings. Honesty and prudence required him to resign it: the devil and convenience said, keep it snug; and, between them, poor human nature was in a sad puzzle.

The internal emotions of the man will have in some way their external impression. Our poor post-boy displayed the embarrassment in which he was by various visible signs. He rubbed down his horses ten times more than was needful—he broke out into an agitated whistle in the midst of his brushing. The ostler asked him where he had been so long, and he answered, "Yes—very;" and when he came to give the landlord the money for the horses he had well nigh given him the five-pound note into the bargain. Still he could settle the matter in no degree to his satisfaction. He wished the devil would not tempt him, but the devil would; and the bundles of hay were so equally divided, that, like the ass in the fable, he could move on neither the one side nor the other, so completely was his mind on the balance.

At length something occurred to relieve him. A gentleman's chariot drove up to the door of the inn, and a loud voice shouted up the yard, "Horses on!"

The inn possessed three pair of posters, and at that particular time but two post-boys. The ostler called aloud, "Tom! Tom!—horses on!"

"Where's Bill?" cried Tom, which was our friend's Christian name.

"Gone to Winkington," answered the ostler. "Quick, Tom; the gemman's in a hurry, and you must go."

Now Tom, as the reader knows, had ridden forty-two miles that day, and he might be well pleased with a little repose; but there was no remedy for his case, and, carrying his great-coat over his arm, he issued forth to the inn door, where the ostler was already busy in putting-to the horses. The first thing he saw, on giving a glance in at the carriage-window, was an immense head, which had apparently seen many summers; but the expression of the countenance thereunto appertaining he could not well discover, for, in addition to the impediment of a pair of spectacles, the eyes were cast down, busily reading what seemed to be a law-paper. The landlord was making out the ticket, but Tom, with a view to further discoveries, thought fit to approach the window, and inquire, "Where to, sir?"

The gentleman looked up, and replied, "To Mallington. How far is it?"

"One and twenty miles good, sir," replied Tom, in a desponding tone, as if he thought he should never get there that night.

His dolorous expression seemed to strike the gentleman, and he replied, "I hope the man in the moon has not come down too soon to find his way to Norwich, for I should like very much to be in Mallington before eight."

Tom promised to do his best, received the ticket, got into the saddle, and drove away, still cogitating upon what he was to do. The journey, however, passed over quietly enough. The horses were fresh —a great deal fresher than Tom—but he himself was moved by that sort of irritating doubt which is a great incentive to locomotion; and so he kept his beasts going at a good rate till a little after nightfall they entered Mallington, and drove up to the door of the Bagpipes. Mrs. Pluckrose was out in a minute, the ostler made his appearance, the chambermaid was seen in the back-ground, and two or three heads raised themselves over the blinds of the tap and the commercial-room. In the meantime, Mr. Quatterly entered the inn, and was ushered up stairs; the horses were taken off, and Tom, the post-boy, thinking he had earned a right to a little repose, went into the tap, seated himself with his whip in his hand, and called for a pint of beer to begin with. While the barmaid was drawing it for him, he suddenly heard the voice of Mrs. Pluckrose replying to her new guest on the first landing, "I'll send the note immediately, sir; but I'm afraid it's no use, for Mr. Morton, as I hear, went out early this morning from Mallington House, and hasn't yet returned, and they are all in a great fuss about him. There have been people out all over the country looking for him; but when last I heard he had not been found."

This speech of the landlady made a deep impression upon Tom, and on the impulse of the moment he exclaimed aloud, without noticing the presence of a slang-looking young man, who was flirting with the barmaid through the window, "Hang me! if that isn't the gentleman they are talking of as I druv over this morning. I'll go and tell them all about it;" and up he got, with his whip still in his hand, and approached the foot of the stairs.

"No," said Mr. Quatterly, speaking to Mrs. Pluckrose, still at the first landing, "I'll go myself, ma'am, and inquire into this business. Let me have somebody to show me the way." But just at that moment Tom appeared, touching his hat, and saying,—

"I think I can tell you more about it nor any one, sir, for I knows more nor any one."

"Come up, then—come up," said Mr. Quatterly, quickly. "Though this business seems as dark as mutton-pie, we'll soon have some light in it."

The moment after, Tom, Mrs. Pluckrose, and Mr. Quatterly were all shut in together, in consultation, and, in about five minutes, the voice of the landlady was heard calling from above,—"Betsy!—Betsy! Send the boy down to Dr. Western to say we've heard where Mr. Morton is gone to, and beg him to step up directly. Tell the ostler to get out a chaise directly—make the boy run all the way."

The slang-looking gentleman, of whom we have spoken, had paused in his conversation with the barmaid to listen to what was taking place above; and when the voice of Mrs. Pluckrose was heard giving the above orders, he walked hastily out of the inn, and hurried down a lane at the back of the street to a small public-house, which we may say, by the way, bore not the very best reputation in Mallington. He there found seated, our respectable friends Bill Maltby and Mr. Williams, to whom he communicated all that had just taken place at the inn.

"Get out the horse, like the devil!" was Maltby's first exclamation; and as soon as the lad had run to perform this errand, he and Williams held a short whispered consultation, at the end of which a piece of paper was procured, on which the latter gentleman wrote a few hasty lines. In a minute after the youth returned, saying the horse was out. The note was entrusted to him; and he received directions to "ride like hell!" which we may naturally conclude meant as quick as he could go.

CHAPTER XLV.

As may well be supposed, the news which reached Captain Tankerville and Alfred Latimer, to the effect that their whole proceedings were made known, and that magistrates and lawyers were in pursuit of them, proved by no means palatable to those worthy gentlemen. After about five minutes' conference, however, Captain Tankerville made up his mind as to his own course.

"Well, Latimer," he said, "I don't know what you intend to do; but I'm off; so good-night."

Latimer looked at him with a stern and haggard eye, but, for a moment, made no answer. At length, however, a smile of scorn, somewhat strained and unnatural, came upon his face: and he said, "You are easily frightened, Tankerville, and, I dare say, will be afraid to come back and give me my revenge when these fellows are gone. You have left me but a hundred pounds in the house; and you ought to give me my revenge at least—if your heart does not fail you."

He spoke an untruth when he pretended to possess the sum he stated; but it was not without an object, as he well knew the only sure bait he could hold out to the swindler before him was money.

Captain Tankerville rose at it like a hungry trout. "Oh dear, no!" he said—"I'll not baulk you. I'll come back as soon as I find the coast clear; but I doubt, my friend, that if you stay, you'll get nabbed, for what we have done is no joke."

"I can get bail, if I want it," replied his companion, in a cool tone; "but as you cannot, I fancy, you had better go. I shall expect you to breakfast at ten; and I'll bet you five pounds that I keep my man in spite of them."

"Done!" answered Captain Tankerville; and, with a renewed promise to return and give him his revenge, as men term the process by which they propose to plunder a dupe still further, he took his departure, and left Latimer and young Blackmore together.

As soon as he was gone the note was examined once more with keen attention, and then Mr. Latimer inquired, "How will Williams get over, John?"

"In the gig, sir," replied the gardener's son. "He has been showing himself a good deal in Mallington lately, just to prove to the folks that he had nothing to do with cracking the window at the Hall, but he always keeps a gig ready, nevertheless; and if he tells you in the note that he's coming, he'll be over quick enough, for Jack Williams does not lose time. He did not say anything to me about it, however."

"Then you had better go where you were told," answered the young gentleman. "I cannot spare much, but there's five shillings to bait the horse, and you shall have more by-and-by."

He spoke in a calm, ordinary tone; but when he was once more alone that apparent tranquillity deserted him, and he walked up and down the room for half an hour in a state of agitation approaching despair. Again and again he looked at the small sum upon the table, and murmured, "What shall I do?" and then recommenced his walk with a quick and irregular step. There was an ear that heard it all, and a heart that more than shared his anguish, though without being able to conceive the circumstances, vague hints of which showed her that he was suffering and in peril. Lucy Edmonds would have given worlds to have gone in and consoled him; but she had learned to fear him, too, and dared not venture; and while she was still listening to the hurried footfall, she heard the sound of wheels. Then a window was thrown open, and Latimer's voice, speaking to some one over the garden-wall, inquired, "Is that you, Williams?"

Another voice answered in the affirmative, and then she caught the sound of Latimer's foot descending the stairs. The door below was opened, and then there was a pause of some minutes, after which two persons ascended to the adjoining room, and voices were heard again.

Lucy listened eagerly—not from curiosity, but from deep interest. She only heard part, however; but that part was sufficient to cause very mingled emotions. Once the light of joy rose up in her heart, and more than once terror, and anxiety, and grief, took possession of her. Her lip now bore a smile—faint, indeed, although it was the smile of hope; but then again she trembled as she lay, and, turning her face to the pillow, wept. To explain the cause of such emotions, we must relate the conversation that took place in the other room; but, at the same time, it must be remembered that it was but a part, and that a small part, which Lucy Edmonds overheard, otherwise the slight gleam of hope and happiness that came upon her would have been drowned out at once in the flood of anguish.

Williams entered the room with a slow step, and, without seating himself, stood on one side of the table, where Captain Tankerville had been placed, while Latimer remained upon the other. "I looked for you all along the road," he said, "thinking that the news might have scared you."

"If you had not come soon, I should have gone after John Blackmore, and waited for you there," replied Latimer.

"I called as I came by," said Williams. "I must have got the start of them in setting out, by full half an hour; and those two spavined carcasses that Mrs. Pluckrose calls post-horses will be a pretty time upon the road, I'll answer for it. So we shall have time to talk a bit before there is any danger; and I want to say a word to you."

"Well, say away," answered Alfred Latimer, "only remember Lucy is in there;" and he pointed with his thumb to the door of the bed-room.

"Are you married yet?" asked Williams, aloud.

"No," answered Alfred Latimer; "not yet."

"Then I sha'n't say anything at all," answered Williams; "for you promised her, and you promised me, and how can I trust the man who breaks his word so?"

"How the devil could I keep it sooner?" replied Latimer. "The banns have been published twice, and to-morrow's the third time—I intend to marry her the next day."

"Will you really?" asked Williams. "You seem devilish lukewarm about it."

Alfred Latimer called down vengeance on his head, with a fearful imprecation, if he did not fulfil his word on the day after the next; and then added, "I'm not lukewarm at all about it—I'm more determined than ever; for I've devilish little to share with her but my name, and that she may as well have as soon as possible. But what has all this to do with what you were going to say?"

"Why, a good deal," answered Jack Williams; "for I intend to be off for Zante on Monday, and you may come too, if you like. But you sha'n't come unless Lucy goes as your wife. There's a ship lying ready to sail in the Downs, which will take us all for a trifle; and when we are there, we can follow out what we are talking of, you know."

Alfred Latimer was silent; and he gazed upon the table with bitter mortification, as he thought that the state of poverty to which he had reduced himself would prevent him from executing the wild and criminal but exciting scheme upon which he had been meditating for the last month. Williams looked at him with a thoughtful face, seeing clearly that there was some impediment which made Alfred Latimer hesitate.

"Come," he said at length, "if you are thinking of this other scheme you have in hand, it's all no use. Maltby told me all about it; and as soon as I heard of it I wondered how you could be such a fool as to be taken in by a pitiful, cowardly vermin, like that Tankerville, to try anything of the sort. He's not brave enough to do anything bold and manly; and you'll soon have all the magistrates upon you for your pains."

"As to the magistrates," replied Latimer, "I don't care a pin, for they can but say that I got hold of this fellow Morton to prevent Louisa Charlton from marrying a swindler."

"Swindler!" said Williams, with a low laugh; "you know better than that; but, however, you must keep out of the way, for if they get hold of you, it may prevent you from lending a hand to one scheme or the other. If you would take my advice, you'd just open the door, and let him out, and then come along with me."

"I should like to keep him in as long as I can," replied Alfred Latimer; "for as sure as he gets out he will have the constables after me, and very likely take away Lucy, too, before we are married. A thousand things may prevent the people from Mallington coming as soon as we fancy."

"There's some truth in that," replied his companion; "but, at all events, you had better go with me; keep yourself out of the way till it's blown over; come back, and marry Lucy on Monday morning; and then let us be off over the wild sea to a country where there's plenty to be done, and where we may lead a life of pleasure and activity, instead of hanging on here, where man is always flogged back into a particular path by laws and customs that he hates, like one out of a pack of hounds."

Alfred Latimer shook his head sadly. "I can't, Williams," he said; "I can't. That fellow Tankerville has cheated me out of almost everything I had. That's all he's left me;" and he pointed to the seven or eight guineas that lay upon the table.

"That's bad," said Williams, looking at the money with a grim smile. "I knew what would come of it, as soon as I heard you had anything to do with that fellow again. But come, sir, there's nothing without its remedy; and what I've got to talk to you about will be a remedy for this, if you've got the courage and determination I think you have. Though I am pretty well off in pocket for a single adventure, yet I haven't got enough for what I want. We must strike a good stroke before we go, that may set us off well; and I know where such a blow is to be struck."

Alfred Latimer raised his fingers, and pointed to the next room; and Williams proceeded in a lower tone. "I was disappointed," he said, "when I first tried this job; but I sha'n't be disappointed a second time, for I have got a key made to the little door that goes into the stable-yard, and there are no bolts upon it. We should only have to get over the wall, and walk quietly in, shut up the women, quietly to pack up what we want, and be off. Maltby had such a fright last time that we won't have him, though we must give him something to be quiet; but I only intend to have two with me, and, if you like, you may be one."

"Where is it?" demanded Latimer, in a whisper. "Is it Mallington Hall?"

Williams nodded his head, and both remained silent, while Latimer first gazed down upon the ground, and then turned his eyes with a look of bitter inquiry to the small sum of money upon the table. At length his brow contracted; he set his teeth fast, and muttered between them, with a nod of the head, "I will go."

"That's right," said Williams. "There is certainly to the worth of five or six thousand pounds, and perhaps more."

"When is it to be?" asked his young companion, eagerly.

"To-morrow night," replied Williams; "but you had better come with me to-night. All this job about Mr. Morton will make a good blind for your being absent. Then you can come back early on Monday, marry Lucy, and be off for the sea."

Alfred Latimer agreed to all that he proposed, for his fortunes seemed desperate, and, like many another man, without waiting to see if, out of the clouds and darkness that surrounded him, some light would not break to guide patience and endurance unto brighter things, he hurried on upon the path before him, heedless of the abyss that yawned beneath his feet.

"I will come," he said, "I will come. But I must take some things with me, and speak to Lucy for a minute, to tell her that I will be back on Monday."

"She had better have everything arranged for your marriage by nine o'clock," said Williams, "for the sooner you are away the better. Write a note to the parson before you go, and bid Lucy meet you at the church with all the traps. Then you can start at once."

"I will," replied Alfred Latimer; "and I'll give the note to Lucy to take."

"You had better a great deal tell her to keep herself out of the way all to-morrow morning," answered Williams, "for you can't tell what may happen. We'll bid John Blackmore watch about, and let her know when the people have been here, so that she may come back afterwards."

The note was accordingly written with all despatch, and, taking it up to carry it to Lucy, Alfred Latimer was putting his little store of money in his pocket, when Williams whispered, "Give her half of it, man—never leave a woman without money;" and, agreeing to the suggestion, the young man entered the chamber beyond, and closed the door. What was said Williams could not distinguish, but he heard a low, murmured conversation, mingled, he thought, with bitter sobs: and when Alfred Latimer returned, his face was flushed and his manner agitated.

"What's the matter?" asked Williams.

"She fancies something," answered Latimer, "and wanted to stop me; but it doesn't signify. Now I am ready to go. But stay, I may as well put these in my pocket;" and taking out a brace of pistols from a cupboard, he disposed of them as he had mentioned, and followed his companion down stairs.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE summons of Mr. Quatterly was not long unattended to by Dr. Western, and in less than twenty minutes he walked into the inn and inquired for the gentleman who wished to see him. The meeting between him and the respectable solicitor was not as that of two strangers, although they had never seen each other before; for as soon as Mr. Quatterly announced his name, the rector shook him warmly by the hand, saying, "Very happy indeed to see you, my dear sir. But what of our young friend? Called away, doubtless, on this business suddenly; but indeed he should have given some intimation of his going, for we have all been in vast alarm about him. One little heart in our village is well nigh breaking with terror; and let me tell you that heart is a treasure not to be trifled with."

"What can't be cured must be endured, my dear doctor," replied the solicitor; "Samson was a strong man, but he could not drink out of an empty pitcher. Our friend could not give any intimation of his departure, because he did not know he was going. You have heard of the man who set out to catch a Tartar. Now, my dear doctor, our friend caught a Tartar who would not let him do anything he thought fit to do. He was not exactly in bodily fear; for I suppose he would call me out if I were to insinuate that such a thing was possible; but he was not 'liber homo.'"

"Indeed!" exclaimed the rector, mistaking Mr. Quatterly's meaning, and thinking that for some cause, just or unjust, Morton had been arrested; "how did this happen?—I hope no foolish quarrel—no duel? He went out early, Louisa said, and——"

"Wrong, all wrong," replied the old solicitor. "He was neither in the hands of sheriffs' officers nor of Bow-street officers—neither of the

'constabularius vulgaris,' nor of the 'serviens ad clavam, or 'ad arma;' but in the hands of a set of Macegrarii, as I may call them, or buyers and sellers of stolen flesh; they have kidnapped him, carried him off in a post-chaise, upon the pretence that he is insane, and taken him to the town of ——, which I passed through about four hours ago—would I had known it then!"

"But who can have done this?" said Dr. Western; "any of the parties, think you, to this suit that is pending?"

"Not at all, not at all," replied Mr. Quatterly; "but this young dog who, quitting his rank and station in society, chooses to associate with scamps and swindlers. Was not she a dirty slut to sell her bed and lie upon dirt?—The rhyme is not correct, but that does not matter—it is no other than young Alfred Latimer, to whom he was so kind. I told him, I told him! What's bred in the bone will never come out of the flesh. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. But there is the roll of wheels, and it must be the chaise I ordered, so that the best thing you and I can do is to step in, go over to ——, and ensure his liberation as fast as possible. You are a magistrate, I think?"

"But not for that county," replied Dr. Western. "Besides, my dear sir, I am not prepared for this journey: to-morrow is Sunday, and duty must, of course, be done in my church."

"Very unfortunate, very unfortunate," said Mr. Quatterly; "but surely you could get back in time for that, and I shall require some person to identify me as Timothy Quatterly, Esquire. At all events, you'll come over as soon as possible to-morrow, for we may have difficulties, especially if they have taken care to get or manufacture a certificate of insanity, which seems probable, from the account of the post-boy, and who says that they showed him some sort of paper about somebody being mad."

Dr. Western was somewhat puzzled how to act. He saw, indeed, that his presence might be absolutely necessary to Morton's immediate liberation, and yet he knew not where to find any one on the spur of the occasion to do duty for him in his church. At length, however, the worthy solicitor broke in upon his reverie, saying, "Well, you must come to-morrow, at all events, and I will go on to-night to have all ready. I will go on with the bottle and bag, and you can come after on little 'ack nag. I must not forget, however, to take this post-boy with me, for I must have evidence on oath of our friend having been carried off, of the parties to the crime, and of the place to which he has been carried."

"He can be sworn before me," said Dr. Western; "it does not matter in what county he makes his deposition, provided it be properly attested."

"True, true," replied Mr. Quatterly. "We'll have him up. You shall swear him, and I'll be the clerk."

Thus saying, Mr. Quatterly rose, rolled his great body on his small legs to the door, and going out, descended at once to the ground-floor of Mrs. Pluckrose's dwelling, where he advanced to the door of the tap-room and threw it open.

"Hie! you sir," cried Mr. Quatterly, as his eye instantly rested on the post-boy. "Be so good as to come up stairs;" and he went on to mutter to himself, not venturing to say it aloud, for fear of confound-

ing the man's comprehension, "Up-stairs, down-stairs, in my lady's chamber."

As he did so, however, he swept over with his eye the rest of the persons assembled in the room, turning himself half round at the same time, as if to depart. Suddenly he came to a full stop, and then marched straight up to a man dressed in a jacket and apron, who sat on the other side of the room, with a pot of beer before him. If any body had taken the trouble to look at that man's countenance when Mr. Quatterly's large and remarkable head first presented itself in the tap, he would have seen a hue like that of death spread itself over his cheeks and lips. Yet, though evidently terrified at something, he seemed fascinated like the bird by the serpent, and continued gazing in the solicitor's face with a vacant and stone-like stare till Mr. Quatterly stood directly before him, saying, "Oh, ho!" with a very remarkable emphasis. Then his teeth began to chatter in his head, and though he gasped twice, as if in the attempt to speak, no sounds issued forth from his unclosed jaws.

Mr. Quatterly remained the space of about a minute silent, but at length he spoke in an authoritative tone, saying, "Be so good as to get up, sir, and walk through that door, then take the turning to the left, and up stairs to the first landing. Post-boy, follow him close, and be ready to chevy in case he runs."

But the poor wretch had no such design. He rose as he was directed, moved like an automaton to the door, which the post-boy opened for him, walked up the stairs, and there, at the top of the first landing, stood with his head bent down, his hands clasped together before him, and the same death-like hue upon his face.

"Walk in," said Mr. Quatterly, who followed close, and, at the same time, opened the door of the sitting-room. The man obeyed; and as he entered, with Mr. Quatterly behind, Dr. Western inquired, with a glance at his habiliments, which were certainly very un-post-boyish, "Is this the man?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Quatterly. "This is the man who robbed me of upwards of a thousand pounds the other day;" and, turning quick upon the unfortunate Mr. Wilkins, he inquired, "Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?"

The man found a voice this time, but it was only to murmur in the hollow tone of despair, "Nothing;" and while he uttered that single but expressive word of self-condemnation, he still remained with his head bowed down, and his hands hanging powerless before him.

"Nothing!" said Mr. Quatterly, who was evidently a good deal excited: "that's a poor excuse, sir—yet, after all, it is perhaps the best you could make. Tell me, sir, was not I a kind master to you? Did I not pay you well? Were you ever kept out late at nights if I could help it? Did I ever make you sit up till morning copying old papers and investigating titles, if I could do the work myself? Did I ever refuse you a holiday when it was possible to grant it? Did I show myself unjust,—harsh—unfeeling?"

"Never, never!" replied the man, warmly. "You were all that was kind and good, and I am a fool and a scoundrel."

"There's some grace left," said Mr. Quatterly, in a loud aside spoken

over his shoulder to Dr. Western, and then demanded, "And pray what do you deserve, and what do you expect?"

"Punishment," replied the man Wilkins; "though, God knows! I've been punished enough since."

"Ay, the heart has been at work, has it?" said Mr. Quatterly; "but tell me, sir, was it fear or remorse that smote you?"

"Both," replied the culprit earnestly; "fear breeding remorse. In the first place I have been tormented by that fiend Captain Tankerville. He found me out, and preyed upon me, threatening continually to give me up to justice, till he had obtained all he thought he could get. Then he sent me off in this guise on the road to the sea-coast. But here remorse came upon me, and I determined to send you back all that he had left me, except what was just enough to carry me to another land."

"What's that you say?" cried Mr. Quatterly; "you determined to send it back? I much fear you would have gone on nibbling, my good friend, till the cheese was all eaten up."

"No, indeed, sir," answered the wretched man; "I've got the letter and the notes here in my pocket, all folded up and sealed ready to send off, and with them are the papers which I took at the same time—here they are."

"Let's see, let's see," cried Mr. Quatterly, and he took from his former clerk's hand a large lawyer-like packet, which he broke into at once, and took out a bundle of notes and papers which he looked over carefully. Then turning to the delinquent, he said, "Here are all the documents, and six hundred and eighty-five pounds. There is somewhere above four hundred pounds wanting. What have you kept for yourself? and what did you give to that fellow Tankerville?"

"I gave him three hundred and ninety pounds," replied the man; "I spent nine pounds on my way hither, and I've got five-and-twenty pounds in my bundle up stairs."

"You've only kept five-and-twenty pounds, then?" said Mr. Quatterly. "You'll swear you gave him all the rest?"

"I will," replied the clerk; "I have no more, and I spent no more."

"And positively you intended to send this letter?" continued the solicitor.

The man bowed his head, saying, "It would have gone to-night."

"What do you think of all this, eh?" demanded Mr. Quatterly, looking over his shoulder to Dr. Western; but the post-boy seemed to consider that the question was addressed to himself, for he advanced a step or two from the door, and pulling a long lock of hair which hung down from the front of his head over his forehead, he brought his chin thereby down upon his cravat, saying, "I think, sir, as how the young man intends to make reparation; and as for that Captain Tankerville, why, Lord bless 'ee! he was one of them fellows as carried off the gentleman from the common."

"The deuce he was!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly; "then the murder's out, for that fellow's up to any mischief. But are you quite sure he was one?"

"That I am, your honour," replied the post-boy, "for one of them

called him captain, and t' other called him Tankerville, and them two put together makes Captain Tankerville, I think."

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Quatterly; "but that brings us back to the point. You, boy, come hither to this table, and make a true and particular statement before this gentleman, who is a magistrate, of all that took place regarding the abduction of Mr. Morton. You, sir," he continued, turning to Mr. Wilkins, and pointing to the side of the room furthest from the window, "sit down in that corner, and don't budge a step till I tell you. I'll transport that fellow Tankerville, if there's law in the land; and shall be transported myself to do so."

"I don't know, sir, whether you know the chaise is at the door," said Mrs. Pluckrose, putting her head into the room; "but I should think, surely, you would want some supper before you go."

"I want a Bible, in the first place, madam," replied Mr. Quatterly; "and then supper, for I do begin to feel hungry; but do not let us be interrupted till I ring;" and all the arrangements being made, the deposition of the post-boy was taken in proper form. Dr. Western, then rising, proposed to walk up to Mallington House to relieve the apprehensions of Miss Charlton.

"Take my advice, my dear sir," said Mr. Quatterly, "talk as little about this business as possible—give no further explanations than needful. Just put the young lady's mind at rest, and say no more. You see," he continued, advancing to Dr. Western, and laying the forefinger of his right hand upon the lappel of that gentleman's coat, "you see, my dear sir, there are various motives for caution in this matter. In the first place, it does not do to let our proceedings be known, lest the persons implicated should hop the twig, as schoolboys term it. In the next place we are not certain what course our friend may think fit to pursue in regard to the gentry concerned in this outrage. One of them is, it appears, a very near connection of a certain fair lady; and besides, his own peculiar idiosyncrasy—which, of all the idiosyncrasies that I ever knew, is most opposed to a fuss, as I term it—would probably lead him to pass over the matter rather than to make any noise about it."

"I don't see how secrecy can be observed," said Dr. Western gravely, "as so many persons are aware of the particulars: here are these two men now in the room, besides Mrs. Pluckrose, who has, like other ladies, a tongue not always to be restrained."

"Mrs. Pluckrose knows nothing about it," said Mr. Quatterly; "for as soon as ever I was sure the information was really coming, and I had told her to send for you, I turned her out of the room. Then, as to that man," and he pointed to his clerk, "I shall take him over with me. The other fellow in the corduroys has been already well cautioned, knows he may get into a scrape, and upon the whole seems to be a very well-disposed person, who understands that it is better to keep his breath to cool his porridge than waste it in vain gossiping. You haven't said anything to anybody yet, post-boy, have you?"

"Not a word, sir," replied the man.

"Well, then, if you take my advice," said Mr. Quatterly, "as soon as your horses are fed and rested, you'll bring them over after me, for it's as well to keep yourself out of temptation."

The post-boy promised to observe these injunctions faithfully, Dr.

Western went to execute his comfortable mission to Louisa, and Mr. Quatterly called for his supper, preparatory to setting out. He seated himself, cut off a slice of the cold beef, and put a piece in his mouth—then turned his eyes to the corner, where the culprit sat as still as marble, like a statue of despair. Mr. Quatterly looked embarrassed, and felt it unpleasant to eat in the presence of so much misery. He took a glass of wine, but that did not do any better, and he looked at the culprit again with a hesitating expression of countenance. The man had not moved an inch, and Mr. Quatterly laid down the knife and fork which he had just resumed, saying, "Come, Wilkins, draw forward your chair and take some supper."

"I cannot, sir," replied Wilkins; "I have no appetite."

"The devil you haven't!" said Mr. Quatterly; "I'm glad to hear it—it's a good sign;" and bolting a few hasty mouthfuls, he drank another glass of wine, descended the stairs, made Wilkins get into the post-chaise first, and was soon rolling away towards the town which he had quitted a few hours before.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Mallington had rung all the morning with the disappearance of Mr. Morton, and the Misses Martin had derived so much comfort from the fact, that they could not help endeavouring to extract a little more from it during the evening. They whispered together with the young surgeon, shrugged their shoulders, professed that they had been perfectly sure how it would turn out, and called upon one or two of their neighbours to bear witness to the fact of their prophecies having been antecedent to the event.

"Poor Mrs. Charlton!" said Miss Martin, "I'm very sorry for her; but I wonder that she made such a fuss about it. It would have been better to have kept it quiet, I can't help thinking. But how does she bear it, Mrs. Windsor? for really I am sorry for her, more sorry a great deal than for Miss Louisa, for she's a girl of sense, and must be glad that before matters went too far he has been found out."

"Found out!" said Mrs. Windsor. "Gone out, I suppose, you mean, Miss Martin."

"Oh dear, no!" replied Mathilda, "my sister means found out. I don't know what you can call it, Mrs. Windsor, when there are bills posted up all over the place for a gentleman, and as soon as he sees them he takes himself off, but being found out for what he really is."

"And what may that be?" asked Mrs. Windsor. "I really don't know what you mean?"

"Why, I suppose there can be no doubt in the mind of anybody who has eyes, ears, and understanding; that this Mr. Morton, who has been down here, is the felonious clerk that has been advertised for."

"Really I think not," replied the housekeeper of Mallington House; "and I don't at all doubt that we shall soon hear of Mr. Morton again—I hope in safety, though I have some apprehensions on that score after what happened before."

"Oh! I dare say he's skulking about in some of the woods or places,"

replied Miss Mathilda Martin: "very likely over at Wenlock, where he was so fond of going; but I dare say the officers will find him out."

Mrs. Windsor did not condescend to answer, but played out her rubber in silence; and about nine o'clock, or a little before, took her leave, and left the Misses Martin in possession of the field. They triumphed wonderfully—they were eloquent—they were pathetic—they were sublime; they left nothing unsaid that could be said upon the subject of Mr. Morton, Mrs. Charlton, and Louisa; and they even touched episodically upon Dr. Western. In the meanwhile Mrs. Windsor walked up the hill towards Mallington House, not very slow, because she thought her mistress might want her; not very quick, because she was in a meditative mood. Mrs. Windsor was endowed with a quality usually ascribed to a certain small animal with a long tail accustomed to frequent the drains and minor passages of not the newest mansions in the world, which quality is a certain inherent prescience of the approaching fall of the house. By aid of this gift the housekeeper had arrived at the conclusion that Mrs. Charlton was in a somewhat tottering condition. At the same time it appeared to her that Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton were likely to build up a dwelling of a much more stable construction, and she was strongly disposed to detach herself from the dilapidated, and attach herself to the perfect house. The only consideration, indeed, was whether she was likely to succeed in the latter part of her object, but Mrs. Windsor had all her life been a very shrewd woman. She had been peculiarly kind and civil to Louisa Charlton at all times, with a degree of foresight which Mrs. Charlton herself had not possessed. She had never exactly taken the young lady's part against her mistress; for not only would that have been dangerous as affecting Mrs. Charlton, but Mrs. Windsor had a strong notion that the appearance of ingratitude towards a person whom she had so long served, would be no passport to the favour of Louisa. She had, therefore, never blamed anything that Mrs. Charlton did—she had never opposed any of her unjust or unwise acts towards Louisa—but by a thousand little marked and kindly attentions, especially apparent at those times when the young lady was suffering under any of the mortifications inflicted on her by her step-mother, she had not only endeavoured to soothe and comfort her, but cast an implied censure upon the conduct which required such counteraction. Thus Mrs. Windsor imagined that her chance was a fair one, even as matters stood at that moment; and as she foresaw that a time was coming when a breach was likely to take place between Mrs. Charlton and her step-daughter in regard to the marriage of the latter with Mr. Morton, she thought several little pieces of information which she possessed, and which might be most serviceable to the two young people, might form a link between her and them, which would render her station in their regard quite secure. Something was necessary, however, as an excuse for deserting the interests of her mistress, and she could think of nothing better than a personal quarrel, which would put Mrs. Charlton in the wrong towards herself. She saw every probability, indeed, of such a result being easily brought about, for Mrs. Charlton had been very irritable of late, and had vented a good deal of that irritability upon Mrs. Windsor. Mrs. Windsor had submitted hitherto in silence, because she thought it would be politic so

to do, but as she calculated that a crisis was very near at hand, she now determined to submit no longer, but to retaliate in such a manner as to call forth the whole of Mrs. Charlton's spleen, without, however, putting herself in the wrong. One thing, too, she especially determined to refrain from, and that was from all allusion to her knowledge of Mrs. Charlton's secret plans for the future, or acts in the past, till the moment when it might be necessary to proclaim them aloud, for she was well aware that that excellent lady had sufficient art to govern her passions completely if she found it dangerous to display them, and to avoid anything like a quarrel with her housekeeper, if she believed it to be more for her interest to be friends with her.

With these resolutions, Mrs. Windsor rang the servants' bell at Mallington House.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Oh, doubt and uncertainty, what terrible states they are amongst the perilous things and anxious circumstances of this mortal life! How the news of the battle fought, how the howling of the angry storm, will fix the fangs of those two demons upon the heart of the mother or the wife!—how they tear the breast of the absent for the loved afar—how they aggravate all pangs—how they mingle the bitter drop with many a cup of joy!

They were the companions of Lucy Edmonds through the livelong night after Alfred Latimer left her; and many a dark and terrible form they took, as, with sleepless eyes, she lay and revolved the past, the present, and the future,—all sad, all cloudy, all full of frowning menace. Whither was he gone? she asked herself. What to do?—what new folly, what new sin, what new crime to commit? Would he indeed return as he had said? or was she abandoned as well as betrayed—cast off upon the hard world—homeless, defenceless, powerless, fatherless? Her heart sunk low—low, till it hardly beat. Was it not in his character to do so?—was it not man's accustomed dealings with the weak?—were not all his actions, since she had seen them closely, evidences that he could so act? The very doubt was worse than death; yet she strove not to believe it, for she loved him still. She tried to shut out conviction of his faults and of his nature; but still she doubted, and doubt was agony.

Then came the fears for him. What would be the end of such a course as he was pursuing?—what the consequences that must sooner or later fall upon his head? All was wild uncertainty; but, like the clouds of a thunder-storm, the phantoms of the future, though vague and changing, still took a thousand dark and terrible forms. Minute after minute passed away, hour after hour went by, but every minute brought some fresh pang, every hour was consumed in bitterness and dread.

At length the day began to dawn, and the faint grey light of the autumnal morning streamed in through the half-closed curtains; but it woke no joy. Faint and sick at heart, weary, desponding, and filled with dark remorse, daylight brought no day to Lucy Edmonds's heart. Within it all was night. Still she lay and pondered for some time

longer; but at length hearing sounds in the house, and remembering the injunctions laid upon her to go out early and remain absent long, she rose and dressed herself, and walked languidly into the other room. The maid of the house was clearing the table, and the sight of the bottles and glasses and scattered cards made poor Lucy feel sick at heart. She turned away to the window, bidding the girl bring breakfast quickly.

The sight of some people in their Sunday clothes, recalled to her mind the note which had been left with her for the clergyman of the parish, and the words of assurance that Latimer had then spoken, and she seized upon them eagerly as food for half-famished hope. "Oh, yes!" she thought, "he will come back—he will keep his word:" and hurrying into the other room again she brought forth the letter, and gazed upon it with one faint ray of light breaking in upon her darkened heart.

The maid brought in the breakfast, and Lucy began to say something to her, but hesitated and then stopped. The girl was slow in laying the table, and at length, as she was just quitting the room, Lucy said, "I wish to speak with your master—presently."

The last word was added with a view to further delay, but the maid had not been gone five minutes when the landlord of the house appeared, inquiring, "Did you want me, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir," said Lucy, hesitating and embarrassed. "Mr. Latimer will be out all to-day, but will be back to-morrow morning early, and he wished me to give this letter to the clergyman of the parish—Where does he live?"

The man gave her the information which she required; and then, seeing that she was embarrassed, he good-humouredly added, "I suppose it's about your marriage, ma'am. I heard the banns published for the second time last Sunday."

It was a great relief to Lucy, but yet her face turned crimson, and her heart beat terribly. "Yes," she said, when she recovered breath; "it is to take place a little after nine to-morrow, and Mr. Latimer told me to ask if you would be kind enough to—to—to go with me to the church, as I have no friends here;" and overpowered at the thought that she had no friends who would own her anywhere, poor Lucy covered her eyes with her handkerchief and wept.

"I will, madam, with pleasure," replied the gardener. "Come, come, don't take on so. Most people have to be married once, and it's not such a terrible affair, after all. I was married once myself. Shall I take the note for you?"

"No, I thank you, sir," replied Lucy, wiping her eyes; "I promised to deliver it myself."

Though she said no more, the man still remained; and Lucy, misunderstanding his object, inquired, "Did Mr. Latimer pay the rent last week?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am," replied the gardener; "we always have a week in advance. He paid everything yesterday morning up to Saturday next, but I hope, I'm sure, that I shall have you for a lodger a long while after you are Mrs. Latimer."

"I trust so," replied Lucy, merely for something to say, "for it is a very pretty place, and the lodging is very comfortable."

"One thing I wanted to ask, ma'am," continued the landlord, after another pause; "what's to be done with the gentleman whom they say is insane—with him, I mean, whom Mr. Latimer and the rest brought in yesterday and shut up in the room where he had the bars put? He must have some breakfast and dinner, I suppose."

"I don't know anything about him," replied Lucy, with surprise: "I heard a good many people coming and going yesterday, but I was in the other room, and am not aware of what happened."

"Well, ma'am, he can't starve," replied the landlord.

"Oh! certainly not," exclaimed Lucy; "he must have all that is necessary, of course. Can you not take it to him?"

"Why, you see, ma'am, I don't like to have anything to do with the matter," answered the gardener, "besides, the door is locked, and I haven't got the key."

"I suppose this is it," said Lucy, taking a large key from the mantelpiece."

But the landlord still shook his head, saying, "I don't like to have anything to do with it. But the man must have victuals, that's clear;" and he took a step back, as if to quit the room.

Poor Lucy was sadly embarrassed; she knew not what to say, or how to act, and the whole story confounded and perplexed her. "Mad!" she thought—"what can Alfred have to do with a madman?" After a long pause for consideration, however, she inquired—"Is he dangerous?"

"Oh dear, no!" replied the landlord. "He seemed quite quiet. For my part, I should not have thought him mad at all."

"Then I will go to him myself," said Lucy, "if you will send up the maid to go with me, and see that he does not hurt me."

The worthy host did as she required; and though he had very little doubt that the gentleman up stairs was just as sane as he was himself, yet he remained with the door open in the little parlour below, to insure that they should have assistance in case of need. In the mean while, Lucy, having put on her bonnet and shawl to go out, followed by the girl, approached the door above—in some trepidation, it must be confessed. But there seemed no other means of insuring that the person within, whoever he was, should have that attention which humanity required; and without pausing to give time for fear to overpower her, she put the key in the lock and opened the door. The first object that met her eye was Mr. Morton seated at the table, and looking straight towards her. She stood for an instant motionless and speechless. Her countenance was pale, too, for fear was the first impression; but the next instant the blood rushed up into her face, and exclaiming, "Oh, Heaven!" she ran down the stairs before Morton could rise to speak with her, and in another minute was out of the house. Hurrying on with a quick pace, she walked into the town with all her thoughts in confusion and disarray. Gradually, however, she became more tranquil, though it was a sad and dark tranquillity; an oppressive leaden weight, from the sad conviction that her worst suspicions of him who had so wronged herself were all too true.

Yet there was no choice before her what to do; she was the creature of his will, entirely dependent upon him. She had no means of escape from the situation in which she was placed—her fate was sealed and

irrevocable. The only thing that could bring the slightest amelioration was to become his wife, and link herself to him for ever—to him whom she knew to be a villain, not only to woman, but to man. Despair has its own calmness, and after a time she thought clearly of what she should do, and determined to execute all that he had enjoined. Still she had some dread of again meeting Morton; and, looking anxiously up each street as she went, she made her way round by the least-frequented parts of the town to the dwelling of the clergyman. Thence, after leaving Latimer's note, she directed her steps into the country, which was smiling in all the beauty of a fresh autumnal day. The atmosphere was peculiarly clear, the leaves of the trees were just tinged with the first yellow hues of advancing decay, the distant country looked purple in the early light, and a small stream danced along by the road side in sparkling eddies and miniature cataracts. But the face of nature had lost its loveliness for Lucy Edmonds, and every object which once would have seemed bright and beautiful to her eyes, was now only full of sad remembrances.

At the distance of about a mile and a half from the town there was a small village, and a neat church, evidently of very ancient structure; for the yews in the churchyard, and the ivy upon the walls, showed the growth of many centuries, and the old Norman arch of the porch, with its deep and manifold mouldings, softened and pared away by the hand of time, spoke the reign of some early king, before the house of Anjou obtained possession of the crown. As Lucy approached, the bell began to ring with a cheerful and yet solemn sound, calling the villagers to supplicate and glorify God on the appointed day of rest. But, oh! how sadly did that chime sound in the ear of poor Lucy Edmonds—what memories did it not wake of the days of youth, when she, with the rest, went forth in her Sunday attire, beneath the protection of parental love, to prayer, to praise, and to instruction. She looked up wistfully towards the church—she longed to go in with others who were bending their steps towards the gate; but her heart sank, and she felt a fear and a dread.

She lingered, however, for a time in the churchyard, watching the passers by, and her eye from time to time rested upon the tombstones, where, amongst homely phrases of commendation on the gone, she found many a text of Scripture full of hope and consolation.

"Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you," said the inscription on one tomb; and another bore, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins." She took heart as she read, and with bent-down eyes and a slow step she entered the church with the rest. She had not known comfort before since she left her father's house, but as she prayed and listened she gained both consolation and strength. She resolved thenceforward to have but one rule for her life.

"If he keeps his word," she thought, "to-morrow he will be my husband, and I am bound to believe him in all that is right; but, whatever be his own course, he shall not induce me to take any part in what is wrong."

With this resolution she bent her way back to the town again, took the path to the house she had inhabited, and rang the bell. The door

was opened by the gardener himself. "Well, ma'am, he's gone," he said, as soon as he saw her; "I couldn't stop him, you know, when you left the door open, so I thought it best to be civil."

"You did quite right," said Lucy, in a calmer tone than she could have used in the morning. "I foolishly went away as quickly as I could, for fear of hearing that gentleman's reproaches, though I had no share in the injury that has been done him."

"Why, he did not seem at all inclined to reproach any one, ma'am," said the gardener; "he seemed a very civil sort of gentleman, indeed, and not mad in the least, I'm sure. He asked a great many questions about you, and stayed half an hour, I dare say, talking."

Lucy did not venture to inquire what Mr. Morton's questions had been, and, for fear she should hear what might be painful to her, she answered quickly, "Oh! no, he is not mad at all. However, I should not wish to see any one to-day, and should there be gentlemen here inquiring after him, you can assure them that he is gone."

"I hope, ma'am," said the landlord, with his habitual view to his own interest, "that if Mr. Latimer should make any row about his being let out, you will acknowledge you did it?"

Lucy bowed her head, replying, "I will do so, certainly."

Several hours passed by, and evening was approaching; when the maid took up a note, saying that a man had brought it from the inn. He was waiting to see if there was any answer, the girl added. Lucy opened it with trembling hands, but glancing her eye at once to the bottom of the paper, she saw the word Western, and turning again to the beginning, read the following lines:—

"I grieve much for you, Lucy, and believe, my poor child, that you are more sinned against than sinning. I have good reason to suppose that you have been very badly used; but if this young man is really willing to make you his wife, I will say nothing to dissuade you from consenting to a step which is the only reparation he can offer. I do trust, however, Lucy, that the instructions you have received, the religious principles which were early implanted in your mind, and the example of your excellent parents, have not been so cast away as to admit the possibility of your continuing with him if this unhappy young man should neglect or delay to fulfil his promises. My eye is upon you, and it will become my duty to exhort you most earnestly to quit him at once in case of any delay taking place. Should you follow my counsel, and thereby show true repentance for any error you may have committed, which I believe to be less than many might suppose, come at once to me, and no effort shall be wanting on my part to place you in a situation of comfort, and to screen you from those reproaches and that hard treatment which never yet awoke an impenitent heart, and can only add to the pangs of one that is truly penitent. You have known me from your infancy, and can trust me both as a counsellor and as your sincere friend.

"R. WESTERN."

Long after she had read the letter and dismissed the maid, Lucy gazed at the lines with emotions very mixed, but yet hope predominated; for that very word "friend" at the end had something balmy and comforting to her breast. The rest of the evening passed over

tranquilly, and Lucy was glad to be alone. For many days before solitude had been burdensome, terrible, to her; but now it was a relief, for the only light that she could receive, the only hope that could find place in her bosom, had been given from the high, pure source that offers peace to all who will accept it.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE butler opened the door of Mallington House, in answer to Mrs. Windsor's bell, and looked at her with a meaning smile as she entered, saying, "You'll get it ma'am, to-night, I've a notion; for Mrs. Charlton's in a queer way. She has scolded Miss Louisa till she cried, and at dinner she rowed me for the best part of an hour.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Windsor, drily, without the slightest appearance of intimidation. "I do not think she will scold me, for I have not done anything to deserve it;" and she pulled off her clogs deliberately in the little vestibule.

"Perhaps that is the very reason why she will," replied the butler, watching Mrs. Windsor in the delicate operation she was performing. "At all events, she has gone to her dressing-room, and rang for you three times, and she told Smith, who went up, that your conduct was too bad, and that she would put up with it no longer. So, if I were you, I would just keep away till to-morrow."

"Oh dear, no!" replied Mrs. Windsor. "I shall go up directly. I could not tell she would go to bed before nine o'clock. She has a head-ache, I suppose, poor thing; and that always makes people cross."

"Why, I believe all this fuss about Mr. Morton disappearing has put her out," replied the butler; "but for my part, if I were you, I would let her cool; but you know best."

Mrs. Windsor, however, who did know best, and found all things exactly in the state she could have wished, signified once more her intention of presenting herself before her mistress, in so cool and satisfied a tone that the butler was disappointed.

In the meanwhile the housekeeper knocked at the dressing-room door, and on hearing a sharp "Come in," she entered, saying, "The butler tells me you wanted me, ma'am."

"Wanted you!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "I have been waiting for you this hour. I have rang three times for you, and the answer has always been that you were out. You are always gadding about, and I shall not put up with this any longer. You presume, because you are an old servant; but my patience is come to an end, and I will have different conduct."

"I am very sorry, ma'am, you had to wait," replied the housekeeper, in a tone of perfect civility, "but I don't see how I could help it, or what change I can make to please you."

"Do not answer me, Windsor," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, "I will not put up with any insolence."

"I am not going to be insolent in the least, ma'am," replied the housekeeper; "but when I am accused of neglecting my duty, I must say something for myself. I could not tell that you would

go to bed so early. I am home two hours before your usual time, and——"

"I will not have you answer me in this way," exclaimed the lady again with increasing vehemence. "I will be obeyed by my servants at least, though Miss Charlton may think fit to be as insolent and self-willed as she likes."

It was too fair an opportunity for planting a hit, to be neglected by Mrs. Windsor; and she instantly replied, "Ah! poor dear young lady; I am sure she is too gentle and tractable to be insolent or self-willed, whatever she may suffer."

"You impudent minx!" cried Mrs. Charlton, her eyes flashing fire; "do you mean to say I make Miss Charlton suffer? Well, upon my life, this is too bad—Oh! I can see it all. There's no use of more words. I dare say the housekeeper's room is ringing all day long with my unkindness to Miss Charlton. I'm a true step-mother, and everything Miss Charlton does is right, and everything I do wrong! All the neighbourhood hears of it, and not a lady's maid for ten miles round does not pity the poor thing! But I've seen your cogging and your flattery of her. I understand it all; but you may find yourself mistaken, all of you, for I'll put up with it no more, and make a clear house of you."

Mrs. Windsor had endeavoured in vain to interpose a word or two, not for the purpose of allaying her mistress's anger, but of adding fuel to the fire. The torrent of Mrs. Charlton's indignation, however, gave no opportunity, for she went on with a volubility which left no space between her words. Mrs. Windsor was well aware that the good lady was not that gentle composed person, at all times, that she appeared in public; for more than once, even in her earlier and brighter days, she had seen little bursts of passion not at all dignified or pleasant. The present indulgence, however, was somewhat more than ordinary; but as things were taking the exact course that she could have desired, she determined to clench the affair by a slight touch of civil contempt; and, consequently, when Mrs. Charlton paused to take breath, after threatening to clear the house of her attendants, she replied, in a calm and deferential tone, "I think, ma'am, you had better consider of that first, for the servants might take you at your word. There are a good many of them, and their wages have not been paid for nine months!"

Mrs. Charlton's face grew redder than before. There was so much truth, however, in Mrs. Windsor's hint, and her finances for the time were at so low an ebb, that during several minutes she could only reply, "Well, I'm sure!" Mrs. Windsor, in the meantime, remained looking in her mistress's face, with a very provoking degree of placidity, till at length Mrs. Charlton recovering her composure, nodded her head significantly, saying, "You shall go at least, my good lady. Make up your mind to that. I did not mean the other servants, but I mean you—and you understand me."

"Oh! yes, ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor, "you mean to give me warning, and I take it, though I don't deserve such treatment. But that being settled, I will only tell you what I've been about this afternoon, which you would not hear before. I saw Mr. Spraggs this morning, and he had with him a gentleman who came down from the jewellers in London. I told him that I was sure in a week or ten days

you would be able to pay everything, but he said they were not inclined to wait any longer. I persuaded him to go and talk to the other tradesmen, however, and as I didn't get any answer, I went down myself."

"And what did they say, Windsor?" asked Mrs. Charlton in a very much altered tone, for the housekeeper's intelligence, though partly fictitious and partly true, had instantly brought her to her senses.

"Why, ma'am, I did my best," replied Mrs. Windsor, "and they consented to wait till Saturday next."

"Well, then, it must be done before then," said Mrs. Charlton, speaking to herself.

"Have you any other commands, ma'am?" asked the housekeeper.

"No, Windsor, no," replied her mistress; and then added, in a coaxing tone, "you should not reply when you see me angry, Windsor. There, go away now, and let us forget all that's past."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Windsor, dropping a low courtesy: "but I can't quite forget. You have called me an impudent minx, and you have given me warning. No mistress shall ever do so twice;" and bringing, by a natural process which some women can command, a good deal of water into her eyes, Mrs. Windsor dropped another low courtesy and quitted the room.

Straight from Mrs. Charlton's dressing-room the housekeeper, with her candle in her hand, and her eyes still comfortably red, took her way to the door of the drawing-room, opened it and went two steps in; then suddenly stopped, as if in great surprise at seeing Miss Charlton and Dr. Western, who were seated on the sofa at a little distance. "I beg pardon, ma'am," she said, "I thought you were gone to bed, and came to see that all was right; but I'm really so flurried that I don't know what I'm doing."

"What is the matter, Windsor?" said Louisa. "You look as if you had been crying."

"Oh! nothing, ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor. "It is only that my mistress has given me warning."

"You, Windsor!" exclaimed Louisa, in a tone of great surprise. "What could that be for?"

"Oh! ma'am, it is not for me to say," replied the housekeeper in a humble tone: "I dare say I was wrong, but I could not bear to hear those I respect spoken ill of, and I answered my mistress when I ought to have held my tongue. So she called me an impudent minx, and gave me warning."

"Oh! I dare say she'll think better of it to-morrow," replied Louisa, in a kindly tone. "She's angry about something to-night; she would be sorry to part with you, I'm sure."

"I beg pardon, ma'am," answered Mrs. Windsor; "but I cannot stay with her. I may be wrong in that too; but, after what she said of me and others, it's quite impossible;" and, putting her handkerchief to her eye, Mrs. Windsor, with another low courtesy, withdrew from the room. And so all that was settled quite to her satisfaction.

CHAPTER L.

It must not be denied that Mr. Morton had passed a very unpleasant day and night before Lucy Edmonds opened the door of the room in which he was confined; but I will not dilate upon many of the discomforts of mind and body which he underwent, confining myself to two only.

He had various important pieces of business to transact; he knew that his presence, his signature, or his directions might be needed at any time, in regard to matters that would bear no delay; he expected every day and every hour to receive news from London which might require instant decision; and he did not at all like being deprived of his liberty at such a moment. But there was another circumstance still more unpleasant to him: he thought of the feelings of Louisa Charlton, of her anxiety, of her apprehensions regarding him; he summed up in imagination all that he himself would have felt if she had so suddenly disappeared; he added one-half more for the difference between the acuteness of a woman's feelings and those of a man; and thus he made himself as uncomfortable as might be during the whole of the day on which he was seized and the night that followed.

To see his door opened at all, then, was a relief to him, and when he beheld a woman's face, instead of that of Alfred Latimer and his accomplices, it was very satisfactory. But when he perceived who it was, other feelings arose, and all the interest which he had taken in the poor girl's fate instantly revived. "Lucy!" he exclaimed, "Lucy Edmonds!"

But Lucy stayed not to hear, and the sudden glance of surprise she gave him, the look of fear, and the burning glow of shame that followed, showed him at once that whatever was the cause of her coming, she had been utterly ignorant of his being there, and that she was both terrified and distressed to see him. He paused for a moment to consider rather what was the state of the poor girl's mind than what his own conduct should be.

The deep blush with which she had seen him answered him at least on one point; and, walking out through the door she had left open, he descended uninterrupted to the passage below, and, after pausing for a moment to see if any one would appear, he entered the parlour, where he heard somebody move. "Are you the master of this house?" he demanded, as the gardener stood before him, not knowing very well what to say or do.

"Yes, sir," replied the gardener; "that is to say, I am the landlord —not exactly the master, for I let part of it."

"You must be aware, sir," said Morton, in a calm, grave tone, "that a very shameful and criminal act has been committed in bringing me hither. But I do not wish to speak upon that subject at present, as I shall take what measures I think fit hereafter."

"Lord, sir, I had nothing to do with it," replied the gardener; "I let my lodgings, and know little or nothing about what takes place in them. I'm sure it's no fault of mine."

"Perhaps not," replied Morton; "but, as I said before, on that sub-

ject I do not intend to speak just now. Is Mr. Latimer within at present?"

"No, sir," replied the gardener, in a respectful manner; "he has gone out for the whole day."

"And pray," demanded Morton, "in what relation does that young person who has just left the house stand towards him?"

"Dear me, sir, that is an awkward question," said the landlord; "I never asked them, not I."

"I should be obliged to you," said Morton, fully convinced that the man knew more, "to give me an explicit reply to my questions. You will not injure yourself by so doing, but the contrary. I take some interest in that young person. Her father is a very faithful servant of mine, and an excellent man. I believe she is well-disposed herself, and I am afraid she has been ill-used by Mr. Latimer. Now, my only object is to know her real situation, in order to make him do what is right by her, if possible."

"Oh! if that's all," exclaimed the landlord, "I can make you quite easy about that. They are to be married to-morrow, at a quarter past nine. The banns will be published to-day for the third time, and I am to go with her to the church to-morrow to give her away."

Morton mused for a moment or two, and then inquired, "Do you really think that Mr. Latimer intends to fulfil this engagement?"

"What, marry her? Oh dear, yes, sir; I am quite sure of that," was the gardener's reply. "Why, he need not have had the banns called if he didn't; and why should he make her ask me to go with her? Besides, bless you, sir! he's very fond of her, though he does worry her now and then."

"I trust it is as you say," replied Morton; "but nevertheless I shall take means to ascertain the facts, that, if he do not fulfil his promise, measures may be taken both to punish him and to protect her. It may be as well," he continued, "when she returns, not to tell her that we have had any conversation upon this subject. My hat, I think, is in the room up stairs: be so good as to bring it to me."

The gardener obeyed with great alacrity, brushing the fine new beaver with his arm as he brought it down, and taking care to look into the hat to see if he could find the owner's name. He discovered nothing, however, for Mr. Morton was not one of that class of men who write their names in their hats.

"You will remember what I have told you," said Morton, when the landlord came down, "and not repeat our conversation to any one. I shall probably remain till after the hour appointed for the marriage, and you shall hear from me again according to your conduct."

Thus saying, he walked out, passed through the garden, and entered the lane. There he paused for an instant, not very well knowing which way to turn, for the walls on each side of the lane were high, and it was not till he had taken some twenty or thirty steps rather away from the town than towards it, that, on looking round, he perceived part of the steeple of a church in the opposite direction, and, turning back, he walked at a quick pace up the lane again, when suddenly he perceived a body of four or five men advancing towards him. At the head of the party was a gentleman with a low-crowned hat, a pigtail, and a pair of spectacles, with the capacious stomach, carried on by a

pair of diminutive legs, enveloped in drab breeches and grey worsted stockings. There was no mistaking Mr. Quatterly: once seen he was known for ever. Morton's face became certainly very joyful at the sight, and he walked straight up to his old friend, who did not recognise him till he was within twenty yards. But as soon as he did, Mr. Quatterly, on the impulse of the moment, took off his hat, and waved it over his head, exclaiming aloud — "Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Here's little bo-peep who went to sleep. My dear sir, how do you do? I declare that though, in regard to the poor man of Tobago, you may—

> 'Imagine his bliss
> When the doctor said this:
> To a roast leg of mutton you may go,'

you cannot imagine my bliss at seeing you a free man. Why, we heard that you had been arrested—detained in prison without bail, and treated with all the rigour of the law—without a fi. fa., a capias, or any other writ, injunction, or prescript whatsoever; and here am I with this worthy magistrate, two constables, and an assistant, ready to deliver you, should it be necessary, by habeas corpus."

"A thousand thanks, my dear sir," replied Morton; "but luckily no such measures will be necessary now. I am at liberty, as you see; and, although a most gross and scandalous outrage has been committed, yet some consideration may be necessary before we proceed to punish the offenders."

"One of them I will certainly punish," said Mr. Quatterly, "though not for this offence, my dear sir. I mean a certain Captain Tankerville, for I am determined that wild beast shall not go about the world any longer. I've got a string round his leg that he does not know of, and he sha'n't go far. As to the rest of the gentry, you can do as you think fit. I meddle with no man's charities, however absurd they may be. But let me make you acquaint with this worshipful J. P."—and he introduced Morton in form to the magistrate who accompanied him, and who, finding that the prisoner was at liberty, took his leave with his satellites, leaving Mr. Morton and Mr. Quatterly to go on to the inn.

Morton's first anxiety was in regard to Louisa, but it was not till the worthy solicitor had rung for breakfast, and ordered it, and made sundry observations upon the unshaved state of his young friend's chin, and begun and broken off his story half a dozen times, that Morton discovered that he, Mr. Quatterly, had visited Mallington. As soon as he was aware of the fact, however, he himself broke through the thread of the worthy solicitor's narrative to inquire whether he had been to Mrs. Charlton's and seen Louisa.

"No, my dear sir, no," replied Mr. Quatterly; "but I did better than present the fair lady with the person of an old lawyer. I sent her an old doctor of divinity. Set your mind at rest. Dr. Western went up to her immediately, to tell her you were quite safe, and I came over here to ensure that the tale was true. The worthy doctor will be over here himself in an hour or two;—and now, to other things."

Mr. Quatterly then proceeded to entertain Mr. Morton with a variety

of details, regarding the affairs of that gentleman himself, those of his unfortunate clerk, Mr. Wilkins, and those of Captain Tankerville; and he ended, as breakfast was brought in, by expressing a hope that Morton had not been put to inconvenience by want of the sum which Wilkins had carried off, and which had, in fact, been destined for his use. "As soon as I could make arrangements for trapping the fellow," he continued, "I set off post myself, with the money in my pocket-book, deviating a little from my way to visit this town, information having reached me that my scamp had been seen at a village about five miles off on the London road. He was gone before I arrived, and I went on to Mallington at once; not, indeed, that it was absolutely necessary I should in person carry you the money; but I had other news to tell you, and good news too—I have every reason to believe, my dear sir, that the whole of our important affair is settled. I have done it, I think, by a coup de maître."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Morton. "How might it be, my dear sir? I know that you are very skilful in diplomacy, and learned in the law; but I did not expect that we should terminate this affair for three or four months to come, especially as we are in the long vacation."

"It was by no stroke of diplomacy," replied Mr. Quatterly, "nor by any legal process. On the contrary, it was by a proceeding quite out of all rule, and contrary to every etiquette. I begged a conference with our opponents, but seemed particularly unwilling that your worthy cousin should be present, he being a principal, and you not being on the spot. In this I calculated on the natural obstinacy of the human beast, and I was successful, for he insisted upon being at the meeting himself, saying, that you might come up if you liked it. Well, I submitted with an ill grace. I, upon your part, sole and alone; he, accompanied by his solicitors, Messrs. Clearwink and Writham, and by their junior, Mr. Dasherbald.—Had a clerk at my back, it is true, and an enormous blue bag.—When there I immediately addressed my legal brethren, pointing out my objection to principals being present; that was to throw the breach of all etiquette upon them, but they stoutly maintained your cousin's right to hear all that was said; so then I immediately proceeded to business. I told them that my sole object was to save him needless litigation and expense, as I knew that his fortune would ill bear it; while yours, though too ample to be affected by any costs, would be quite as well without them. Our case was so clear, I said, that I had come to make what the French lawyers call a communication des pièces, which would satisfy them, that they had no case to carry into court. When they heard this, my fraternity would have given two or three fingers to get their principal out of the way; but that was not to be done, and, without giving them more time than enough, I produced an abstract of your title, comprising a list of all documents and proofs in our possession; and I could see our friend's countenance fall most sadly, as he heard me make out my case, step by step, leaving him not a leg to stand upon. Mr. Dasherbald was in a high state of irritation, protested against the irregularity of the whole proceeding, and appealed to my sense of professional etiquette; for he had an unpleasant foresight of losing the fees on sundry briefs, if the suit was nipped in the bud. I

would neither be stopped nor squabble, but went on to the end, and then cited to my gentlemen two or three instances of their own irregularity—pointing out, moreover, that having consented to the conference, and insisted upon a principal being present, their demurrer came too late. My effect was produced. Though very unwilling to admit it, even to himself, your opponent saw that his case was yours; and the only question in his mind was, whether, out of spite, he should fight out a lost battle, and die in the field—if not in person, at least in fortune—or whether he should beat a retreat with what he had got left. Even the lawyers were a little staggered, for I had taken care to let them know that the sinews of war, on the part of the adversary, were less than they even themselves supposed; so that, if their bill went beyond a couple of thousand pounds, they were very likely to be minus the balance of account. I then said that, having shown them how the gentleman stood, it was for them to give him their best advice as to proceeding with a hopeless case. Mr. Dasherbald declared that he did not see the case was hopeless at all; and was proceeding in the same strain, when Clearwink pulled him by the sleeve, and said it might be better for them to confer apart. He then, having first whispered a word to Writham, retired with Dasherbald and Mr. Wilmot into another room; and Writham, setting his head on one side, told me, in the gentlest tone possible, that he feared the greatest difficulty would be about their costs. I said, in reply, that there would be great difficulty, I did not doubt, in getting them from Mr. Wilmot. He shrugged his shoulders—asked who they could look to, if not to him; and added that, under circumstances, he thought they must plead, to give a chance for the said costs. Thereupon, in the good plain vernacular, I asked him if he would have them now, or wait till he could get them. He winked his eye, and said he did not know whether he rightly comprehended me. I replied, that you were a man who did not like trouble—hated lawsuits and lawyers, with a few brilliant exceptions—could easily calculate what the expenses of the case would be, if carried into court—knew perfectly well that no person in England can either get his rights, or keep them, without paying for them; and therefore would, in all probability, be ready to make a sacrifice. After this the matter was all plain sailing: their bill was to be discharged by you, if satisfactory to me; and, if not, referred to arbitration, for Writham would not consent to have it taxed. To save their credit, some time for consideration was demanded. I handed them over the list of documents, and they are to let me have a definite answer as speedily as possible. It had not arrived when I set out after Wilkins, and I ordered it to follow me to Mallington without delay."

"And pray what has become of this clerk of yours?" asked Mr. Morton. "You say you caught him at Mallington, and that he seemed very penitent. What have you done with him?"

"Set him free upon parole," replied Mr. Quatterly. "Ah! I see you think it very extraordinary; but recollect, my dear friend, I never do anything like any other man, and such a course has this great advantage, that nobody ever knows where to have me. But this fellow has promised to ferret out for me our worthy friend Captain

Tankerville, who has squeezed him like a sponge under his own fears. And now let us sit down to breakfast, after which you shall shave yourself, and we will go to church."

Morton very willingly agreed to the proposal in all its terms, though, undoubtedly, had he done what inclination prompted, he would have set off for Mallington at once; but, now that he knew Louisa's mind had been relieved in regard to his fate, he thought it in some sort a duty to wait for Dr. Western's arrival, in order to consult with him as to Lucy Edmonds. This he accordingly resolved to do; but time passed, and Dr. Western did not appear. The young gentleman and his solicitor breakfasted, went to church, returned, and waited till past five o'clock before the worthy clergyman reached the town. . .

The time of Mr. Morton and his solicitor, indeed, was not wholly unoccupied; for, when they came back from the morning service, they found Mr. Wilkins waiting for them, with the information that our highly respected friend, Captain Tankerville, was at an inn somewhat further down the street, and that he had received one or two communications from a young man, who came and went frequently between him and a cottage just out of the town, which Morton and Mr. Quatterly instantly concluded must be that inhabited by Alfred Latimer. Mr. Quatterly's measures were immediately taken. A magistrate was visited—information on oath filed against the worthy captain,—not as an accessory after the fact to Mr. Wilkins's robbery—not as an accessory before the fact to Mr. Morton's abduction—but as a principal, in having affixed other people's names to certain documents, greatly to his benefit and their loss. A warrant was at once made out, and Captain Tankerville was conveyed, from a pint of sherry and a mutton-chop, to the town gaol.

At length, towards evening, Dr. Western appeared, and great was his satisfaction to find his young friend at liberty. After having satisfied him in regard to Louisa, he listened with deep interest to all that Morton had to say regarding Lucy Edmonds, and agreed to wait and be present himself in church next morning, in order to ascertain whether the marriage between her and Alfred Latimer did or did not take place. Mr. Quatterly determined to remain also, to look after his sheepfold, as he termed the prison where Captain Tankerville was confined; but Morton resolved to see her he loved as early as possible on the following morning, and consequently, after having partaken of dinner with his two friends, he set out once more in a post-chaise for Mallington, towards half-past seven o'clock, calculating upon reaching that place by ten. But human calculations are all in vain. The chaise, having had more travelling than it approved of, broke down about seven miles from Mallington, and Morton had to sleep at a small public-house, in the first village he could meet with, after walking some miles on foot. He did not even reach this shelter till it was past eleven o'clock, and, consequently, judged it much too late to go on and present himself at Mallington House.

CHAPTER LI.

The night was dark, the moon had gone down, the sky showed not a star, when Alfred Latimer, jumping into the gig with Williams, on the night of the preceding Saturday, drove away with him on the road towards Mallington. At first they went very slow, for the lanes at the back of the town were somewhat intricate, and the obscurity which pervaded the whole air rendered it somewhat difficult to make their way on in safety without lights. Neither of them spoke a word, for Williams was naturally taciturn, except when possessed by the wild and eager spirit of adventure, which, in the intervals between conception and execution, would sometimes break forth in descriptions full of a rude but powerful eloquence. Alfred Latimer, too, had plenty of matter for thought, and, to say the truth, his heart was as dark and cheerless as the night air through which he passed. Bankrupt in purse and reputation, contemned by those who might have loved and esteemed him, alienated from those classes of society in which he was born to move, cut off from all chance of raising himself above that rank from which he had chosen his companions, hopeless of improving his means but by adding crime to vice, with nothing to look back upon in the past but wasted advantages and evil passions pampered, with nought to hope for in the future but a wild life of feverish pleasure, mingled with daily peril, and intervals of sickly lassitude, he was going to take the first profound plunge into the dark ocean of crime, and to render the whole of the rest of life full of remorse and apprehension. Thoughtless, rash, unprincipled as he was, he could not but feel such things, and that feeling kept him silent.

Still, however, he brooded; and still dark regret and sorrow would make themselves felt; and the consciousness of having been a fool and a scoundrel hung vaguely over him, keeping him in gloomy silence while they rolled along, till the horse began to slacken his pace as the road wound slowly up the hill; and at length his companion spoke, remarking, "You are devilish silent, Mr. Latimer."

"So are you, Williams," replied Alfred Latimer.

"Ay, it's my nature, but not yours," answered Jack Williams; "and I was thinking that perhaps, after all, you may not like this job. Now, I'm not fond of having to do with waverers."

"I'll tell you what, Williams," replied the young man, in a low, stern, determined tone, "I'm in that sort of way just now, that I'd shoot my own father for a thousand pounds."

"No need of that," replied Jack Williams, carelessly; "nor your mother either. You can get more than that without shooting any one. However, I see you are up to the thing; that's something. It's no very difficult affair, after all; and, once it's done, and the white coast of England left far behind us, we may lead a life such as men lived in old days, and put the wide blue sea under contribution. I know a place—where I've left one that's very dear to me—in a deep cove of which, all surrounded by high blue hills, one could hide away a man-of-war as easily as I could cover a hazel-nut with my hand. All that we shall want, however, is a good schooner and a gallant crew. There

are some twenty or thirty fellows thereabout—some doing one thing, some another—who would be glad enough to come to my whistle, and many more will join us. Then we'll make our own laws, Mr. Latimer; and better a great deal will they be than all the long rigmaroles that a set of gabbling fools pass in what they call parliament. We've no need of all such long stories. Half a dozen simple rules will be quite enough for us; and we'll be at peace amongst ourselves, and at war with all the rest of the world. I don't know a finer thing than, on the clear, starlight nights of that part of the world, to stand either upon the deck, or upon one of the high rocks, and look out over the glistening sea for a white sail, with a rich freight aboard. Then after her, like a swallow after a fly, and haul her colours down and bring her into port."

The vision that he called up was just what was wanted to rouse Alfred Latimer from the doubts which had begun to take possession of him. He rejoiced at the thought of the booty that was to be obtained; and only asked how they were to dispose of the plate when they had got it.

"Oh! turn it into money, to be sure," replied his companion.

"Ay, but how is that to be done?" asked Alfred Latimer.

"Oh! there are ways and means," answered Williams; "and I sent word to a fellow in London who, a good many years ago, used to take game and venison, and such things, off my hands, and who's now as rich as a Jew, to come down, and bring plenty of money with him. I gave him a hint of the sum that would be needed, too; so he'll come prepared, and I think we had better stop to-night at the place where he's likely to be found, if he's arrived yet."

"Where's that?" answered Alfred Latimer.

"At Mr. Gatton's, to be sure," replied Williams.

"Why, not the great inn, the Bell, at Sturton!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer.

"Ay, ay," said Williams; "there are more things done at that inn than you know of. Besides, he travels quite like a gentleman, and has got his own little goods-cart marked on the back, 'Moses Levi, draper, Burton-on-Trent.'"

It was about two o'clock when they drove into the yard of the Bell, but they still found the people of the house up, for there had been a club dinner there that day, and some of the party, half muddled with wine, were still engaged in playing at cards in a room up stairs. The landlord himself was in the bar, a stout, well-made, hawked-faced man; and when Williams and his companion entered, the host nodded to the sailor, as to an old acquaintance, displaying no sign of coolness.

"Pray, Mr. Gatton," said Williams, "has Mr. Levi come here to-day?"

The landlord nodded again, and the other went on to inquire, "Is he in bed yet?"

"No," answered Mr. Gatton; "he's up stairs, number twenty-three."

Williams thanked him for the information, and was turning away to seek the room indicated, when the landlord exclaimed, "Williams! Williams! I want to speak with you;" and then added, in a low tone, when the other approached nearer, "I wish you could get me a dozen more of those handkerchiefs."

"You shall have them," said Williams, with a significant look; and once more resuming his course, he led Alfred Latimer up two pair of stairs, and then along the corridor, examining the numbers over the doors as they passed. At number twenty-three he knocked, and a voice from within said, in a sort of abstracted tone, "Come in;" upon which the two gentlemen entered. The name of Moses Levi had suggested to the imagination of Alfred Latimer the figure of a little fat, dirty, blear-eyed Jew. What was his surprise, then, to behold a tall, well-proportioned, and good-looking man of about forty-eight or fifty, dressed with scrupulous neatness. He was seated at a table, with a small bowl beside him, from which probably issued the strong odour of punch with which the air of the room was impregnated. An inkstand was nearer to him than the bowl, and a neat-looking, apparently well-kept note-book was open before him, over which he bent, pen in hand, seemingly calculating his well-gotten gains. So busily was he employed that he did not look up till Williams and his companion were far in the room, but he then raised his face towards them, displaying very handsome features, though not without a peculiar, keen, and cunning look generally displayed by the race from which he sprung.

"Ah, Jack!" he cried, starting up and shaking Williams heartily by the hand, "I am glad to see you. Why we hav'n't met I don't know how long. This is a friend of yours, I suppose."

"Mr. Latimer," said Williams, introducing the two to each other; and Mr. Levi bowed and scraped as ceremoniously as an ambassador.

"Come, sit down, gentlemen," said Mr. Moses Levi. "We'll have some more glasses and some punch, and then we'll talk of business."

The glasses and punch were brought, and Alfred Latimer took a liberal supply, while Williams helped himself more carefully, and, after a few words upon ordinary subjects, Mr. Levi proceeded as follows:—"Well, Mr. Williams, I got your message, and, though it was rather inconvenient for me, I came down at once, because I know you never disappoint one—I suppose this gentleman is one of us, though I don't know him."

"All right," said Williams. "Have you got the money with you?"

"Why, not the whole sum," replied the Jew. "I hadn't got as much in the house. Why, five or six thousand pounds is a great amount, you know—what a job it must be!"

"How much have you brought?" asked Williams.

"Somewhere near upon three thousand pounds," answered his London friend.

"That won't do," replied Williams, who knew his man. "If you av'n't got the whole you may as well go back again."

"Ay! but that will do to pay part," rejoined Levi; "and you can touch the rest in London, you know."

"It won't do, Moses," reiterated the other, with a shake of the head. "We must make a finish of it all at once. So if you are not ready, I must send to Solomons."

"No! no! no!" cried Mr. Levi. "Don't be so hasty, Jack; if I hav'n't got the money with me I can get it in five minutes. I never need to send to London for money when there's a banker in the town."

"Yes, but Sunday is coming on," said Williams, "and we must have it paid all in gold."

"Well, well, that can be done," said his respectable friend. "Leave all that to me. The money shall be ready in the twinkling of an eye."

"In short, you've got it with you, Moses, that's the fact," was Williams's very just rejoinder.

Other points were then discussed, the value of gold and silver plate—at least, the value that Mr. Levi chose to put upon them,—the price of guineas, which in a time of proper currency were very dear, and several other particulars. Mr. Levi sought to drive a hard bargain, but Jack Williams knew him, and would not let him. The latter talked of sending for another receiver of stolen goods, and the former represented the difficulty of getting rid of articles so purchased. He admitted, however, that he had brought crucibles, and fluxes, and scales and weights with him, so that any wrought vessels that might be presented to him for purchase would be made into what he called soup, or melted before he left the house, thus losing every mark by which they could be identified. The whole affair was barely adjusted when some one knocked at the door, and Mr. Levi, putting by his pocket-book, bade them come in. The figure that appeared was that of the landlord, who closed the door, and, walking slowly up to the table, said, addressing Williams, "I thought it just as well to tell you, Jack, that Harry Soames, the constable from Mallington, has been over here this afternoon, asking a number of questions about you, and whether you had lately been seen in Sturton, and when—it's no harm knowing, you know."

"Oh! no," replied Jack Williams, in a careless tone; "if he asks again, give him my compliments, and tell him I shall be very happy to see him when he calls. Perhaps I shall call upon him some day."

The landlord laughed with a meaning chuckle, and Alfred Latimer gave an intimation that it was his intention to go to bed.

"Why, I'm going to bed, too," said Mr. Gatton, "for I'm tired; but I'll send the chambermaid, sir;" and he went away.

"We must be off before daylight to-morrow, Mr. Latimer," said Williams, "for it wouldn't do for Soames to find you and me together. I'll wake you in time, however;" and so they parted for the night.

CHAPTER LII.

To explain the cause of Harry Soames's visit to Sturton, and his inquiries for Jack Williams, we must now treat of a very uninteresting person, and his uninteresting history. On the Saturday, an hour after noon, the constable of Mallington received a summons to the house of Mr. Middleton, the magistrate, which, as the reader knows, is situate at the distance of about a mile and a half from the village. As he had a liking for the active exercise of his profession, Mr. Soames trudged over willingly enough, and on presenting himself was kept for about a quarter of an hour in the hall, while voices were heard talking in the little room at the side. At the end of that period the door of that room opened, and Miss Mathilda Martin issued forth, while the voice of Mr. Middleton was heard to say, "Thank you, Miss

Martin, thank you: I always was sure he was an impostor. I will look to it."

Miss Martin passed Mr. Soames without deigning to speak to him; and immediately after the constable was called to the presence of the magistrate, who, as he entered, inquired of the servant who ushered the man in, whether Sir Simon Upplestone had arrived.

The servant answered in the negative, and Mr. Middleton, seating himself again with an important air, remarked, "I fear, Soames, we may be accused of neglect of our duty in suffering this young man to remain so long in Mallington under such suspicious circumstances."

"Is it Mr. Morton your worship was talking of?" asked Soames.

"To be sure," answered Mr. Middleton: "he is the only person to whom the terms I have used could apply. From various circumstances, I have not the slightest doubt that he is neither more nor less than a swindler, and will ultimately be identified with the clerk who has absconded from London."

Harry Soames scratched his head, and as Mr. Middleton was well aware that he was not a man dull of comprehension, he could not conceive what made the constable hesitate in this unwonted manner. He accordingly asked, "What is the matter, Soames?"

"Why, I was thinking, your worship," said the constable, "that Gibbs could tell us more of the matter, if he liked."

"And who the devil is Gibbs?" asked Mr. Middleton solemnly.

"Why, the travelling perfumer man, your worship," answered the constable. "He who has been down here so long hanging about with his Fragrant Balm of Trinidad. He has let out to me more than once that he knows summut of Mr. Morton. But the difficulty will be to make him speak."

"We'll grant a warrant against him," said Mr. Middleton. "He may be art and part in the offence for aught we know."

"Better summons him as a witness, your honour," said Soames. "A warrant would be a stopper, I should think."

"Perhaps it might," replied the magistrate, sagaciously. "We will summons him as a witness. Get me down 'Burn's Justice,' Soames. There it stands. I expect Sir Simon Upplestone every moment," he continued, after having looked into the magistrate's text-book for some minutes. "In the meantime you go down, and bring up this man Gibbs. Tell Skinner to send some one to act as our clerk; and take measures to prevent this young vagabond from making his escape."

"Lord bless your worship!" replied Mr. Soames, "he has been off from Mallington House ever since early this morning."

Mr. Middleton looked aghast; but Soames consoled him the moment after by informing him that he had good reason to believe Mr. Morton was only over at Sturton, and then proceeded to execute his mission, which occupied rather more than an hour.

He returned with Mr. Gibbs, who came very unwillingly, trying hard by the way to gather from the constable what the magistrates wanted. But Mr. Soames would not say a word, and Mr. Gibbs was ushered into the presence of the two magistrates, perfectly ignorant of their object in sending for him.

"Now, Mr. Gibbs," said Sir Simon Upplestone, "tell us what you know of this matter?"

"I don't know what the matter is, sir," answered Mr. Gibbs. "I only know that the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad is incomparable in its qualities, nourishing and strengthening the hair, encouraging the growth of eyebrows and whiskers, restoring the supreme ornament of the human person to a glossy black or brown hue, when it has become grey with time or care, and invigorating and restoring the graceful natural curl, when, either by the effects of tropical climates, or——"

"Pooh, pooh!" said Mr. Middleton. "Sir Simon, we must put the question in another form, and carry on the examination regularly. Now answer, Mr. Gibbs—you know a person who calls himself Morton?"

"I have that honour, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"Not a great one, I fancy," rejoined the magistrate, who piqued himself upon saying smart things. "Now, answer me truly, for we shall swear you to your deposition. Have you any reason for believing that this Mr. Morton, as he calls himself, is ever known by any other name?"

Mr. Gibbs was confounded, and knew not what to answer. He would have fain plunged into the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad, which, in difficult circumstances, had often proved to him an invaluable resource. But in the present instance he did not know how to bring it in, and in the confusion of the moment replied, "Perhaps I have."

"Take that down," said Mr. Middleton, addressing one of Mr. Skinner's young men, who had come up to act as clerk.

"Now, Mr. Gibbs, what is the other name he goes by?" demanded Sir Simon Upplestone, bluntly.

"That I can't exactly say," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"'Tis quite sufficient, Sir Simon," said Mr. Middleton. "He may have half a dozen more aliases. His going by another name is a proof that he's a swindler. He may call himself colonel this, or lord that, or captain the other, but what is that to us? Now, Mr. Gibbs, I say again, answer truly. Did you ever see this young man in any situation which would induce you to doubt his respectability, or know of his frequenting bad characters, or,—or anything of the kind? Remember, we have good information, Mr. Gibbs."

After some hesitation Mr. Gibbs replied, "Why, you see, sir, I came down here to sell the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad, which, if you will allow me to say, is one of the most sovereign——"

"Pooh! no more of such nonsense," cried Sir Simon Upplestone. "The question is very plain, Mr. Gibbs. Will you answer it or will you not? There is such a thing as contempt of court, sir, and compounding of felony."

"In one word, Mr. Gibbs," added the other magistrate, "if you do not deal candidly with us, instead of allowing you to be a witness, we may treat you as an accessory."

All Mr. Gibbs's firmness melted away at the threat, and, finding that the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad had failed him, he replied in a humble tone, "Why, gentlemen, I was only going to tell you how all the matter began: when first I came here I was knocked down and robbed, and I am quite sure that I know the man who did it—a fellow well known in these parts, called Jack Williams."

"The greatest rascal and poacher that ever lived," cried Sir Simon.

"Well, gentlemen, I have watched him ever since as close as possible," continued Mr. Gibbs, "and as I heard a great deal of his hanging about Mallington Park, I used to go there of a night to see what he was about. I always took a brace of bosom friends with me, but still I thought it best to keep out of his way, and so I used now and then to get up into a tree. Well, one night, when I was in a beech, with low branches, I saw him meet another man there, and have a long conference with him, though I could not hear what it was about; but I saw that they often looked towards the place where I was, and I began to be in a leetle bit of a fright. At length they parted, and when Williams took round to the other side of the wood, as if to cut me off that way, the other came straight up towards the tree where I had perched myself. Thinking that I should fare ill between both, I determined to give them leg bail, and, dropping down at once, I took to my heels across the park, only having just time to see that the one who was coming up was Mr. Morton."

"Ho, ho!" cried Sir Simon Upplestone.

"Ah, ha!" cried Mr. Middleton; "and pray what night was that, Mr. Gibbs?"

"Wa'n't that the night that they tried to break into Mallington Hall?" demanded Harry Soames, who had remained in the room.

"Precisely," answered Mr. Gibbs.

"Well, I think, Mr. Simon, that we have perfectly enough information, with that which I communicated to you before, to justify us in having this young man apprehended. Fill up a warrant, Mr. Masters," he continued, turning to the clerk; and then, addressing Soames, he proceeded as follows:—"You will get a horse at the Bagpipes, Soames, and ride over immediately to Sturton, where you will endeavour to find out this Mr. Morton, who you think is there. You can make strict inquiries after Jack Williams too."

"I should not wonder if this Morton were to come back here," said the constable.

"We must think of some means of catching him, if he does come," said Mr. Middleton; "but leave that to us, Soames, and be off to Sturton as fast as possible. You, Mr. Gibbs, hold yourself in readiness to attend and give evidence, whenever you may be called upon."

CHAPTER LIII.

Towards six o'clock on Sunday morning, a gig, containing two individuals, Jack Williams and Latimer, rolled out of the yard at the Bell Inn, at Sturton, and took the way towards Mallington. It was still dark, for though a light line of grey was to be seen in the sky, the sun had not risen high enough to give much light to the world, and the streets of the town, though it was generally a gay-looking, bustling place, looked dreary and deserted in the misty dawn.

At length they came to the spot near which they knew the cave must be, and easily found their way to it. It seemed as if no step had passed its entrance since Latimer was last there. There was the blackened place where the fire had been, the broken bottles, the well-

polished bones. Nothing had been touched; and a rabbit running out and making its way to its sandy burrow opposite, at the sound of his footstep, showed him that, at the present moment, at least, the cave was tenantless.

Then he plunged into a wide abyss of wild and troublous thoughts. We will not attempt to trace them, for it was a labyrinth without a clue, one branching into another, as if interminably; but their nature, and that to which they tended, may be judged by the words with which they closed, and which he actually uttered in a murmur. "It's no use," he said, "it's no use, I'm too far in now to go back, so why should I think of it?" and once more approaching the mouth of the cave, he looked out and listened.

At length a step sounded upon the path, and he drew back, for he felt sure that it was not that of Williams. It was lighter, quicker, more youthful; but the instant after, as he stood in the shadow, and looked out upon the trees, which concealed the entrance from the neighbouring path, he saw Maltby come round and approach his retreat. Not knowing how far Williams had confided in him, he retired to the back of the hollow; but when the man came near the mouth, it became apparent to Alfred Latimer that the other was seeking him, for Maltby set down a basket with which he was burdened, and looked in, saying, "D—n it! he is not here. Williams said he must be here long ago."

"Ah! Maltby, is that you?" said the young man, advancing. "Is Williams coming?"

"Presently," replied Maltby. "He's gone to see Tom Brown; but he sent me up with this basket for you, as he thought you might want your breakfast, having had none when you left Sturton."

"I could have waited," replied Alfred Latimer, making his way into the basket: "but I'm devilish hungry, it is true."

"Take care, take care," cried Maltby; "there's a powder-flask underneath; for he says that you did not bring any with your pistols."

"They are loaded," answered Alfred Latimer, with a nod of the head; "and I don't think any man who stands two shots from them will ever have to stand another."

"Ay; but it's always as well to be ready and prepared," answered Maltby. "A man's hand shakes sometimes, you know."

"I don't think mine will," answered Alfred Latimer; "but what the mischief is this?"

"Some black crape for your faces, that's all," replied the other.

"Ay, upon my soul! that's well thought of," said the young gentleman. "Under this they won't easily know one. Oh, here's the brandy! Bill, will you take a glass?"

"No, I thank you," answered Maltby. "I'll be off to Mallington again. I've got the horse and gig to see after, and I'm to bring them up to the back of the wood at eleven. Good-day, Mr. Latimer;" and he turned back through the wood, leaving the young gentleman once more alone.

There had been something dry and bitter in his manner, which Alfred Latimer did not altogether like, and vague apprehensions began to take possession of him. "Williams has trusted him too far," he

thought. "I should not wonder if he were to peach, and get us all into a trap. He was always a pitiful scamp, though a devilish good boxer. At all events, I'm sure, if he were hard up he would turn king's evidence, and hang us all."

In these pleasant reveries he passed another hour, till at length Williams himself appeared, and Alfred Latimer at once communicated to him the suspicions which Maltby's manner had inspired. His companion, however, easily quieted him on that score, saying that the youth was a little sulky on account of the quarrel they had had some days before; but that he would not peach for his own sake, as then he would lose all the money he was to have; and as to his turning king's evidence, he might do what he liked, for they would be out of the country before that could do them any harm.

These assurances satisfied Alfred Latimer; but, nevertheless, the passing of that day was long and tedious. They sometimes talked, but more frequently remained plunged in deep fits of silence, meditating the coming hour; but Williams was well pleased to see that, though his young companion had become unnaturally grave and stern, there was no sign of wavering, no apparent hesitation, not even a thought of shrinking from the enterprise before them.

Thus they saw noon and evening pass, and gradually the sun went down, leaving the sky all red and glowing for full half an hour after he had sunk. All then became darkness; the stars, indeed, appearing first faint and then brighter, but the air below in the valley by the river becoming somewhat dull and misty as the sun disappeared.

"Tom Brown can't be long now," said Williams at length. "I'll go out and see if he be coming;" and accordingly he walked away into the wood, while Latimer remained with his head resting on his hand, and his eyes half closed. It would have been a sad dark spectacle, if one could have looked into his bosom at that moment. Suddenly he rose, went up to the basket, and drawing forth the bottle of brandy, set it to his lips. He took a long draught, and had scarcely done when Williams and the ruffian from the common came into the cave.

"We must wait an hour or two yet," said the former. "Tom here tells me, sir, that there are a number of the good folks about, and that Edmonds is out with his men, scouring all the place round; so we must be still. When does the moon rise, Tom?"

"She's up now, only you can't see her for the hill," replied the ruffian.

"Ay! but at what hour does she come up?" asked Williams. "I see she has risen plain enough, by the light, but I want to know what o'clock it is?"

"Oh! about ten," answered Alfred Latimer; "but if you wait a little you'll hear Mallington clock strike."

A few minutes after the clock was heard to strike ten, and it was then agreed to wait another hour, in order that all might be still, and the sober folks of the neighbourhood retired to rest.

Eleven struck, and then, taking some keys, the powder-flask, and an iron bar out of the basket, with hardly a word spoken, they issued out into the wood, threaded the narrow paths, approached the scene of their destined crime from the side of Wenlock Common, and paused

for an instant close to the Park. A few words of final arrangement then passed, one by one they leaped the wall, and Alfred Latimer stood within Mallington Park.

CHAPTER LIII.

On the night of the Sunday which we have been lately speaking of, good old Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper at Mallington Hall, as she sat before the fire, was in anything but a merry or even a tranquil mood. There was some wind stirring, and occasionally the panelling cracked, or the tall window rattled; and whenever such was the case, the good old lady started and looked round, expecting to see neither ghost nor hobgoblin, but some more terrible apparition still, of flesh and blood, armed with cold steel and leaden bullets against the scanty remains of life which yet were hers. Once, when the gust was more vehement than ordinary, and, like an importunate beggar, clamoured loudly for admittance, she suddenly stretched out her hand, and seized the bell, forgetting that the girl, who was her only companion in the house, could render her but little effectual assistance; or, perhaps, thinking that if she was to be murdered, she had better be so in the presence of respectable witnesses.

Though the gust died away, good Mrs. Chalke still held the bell-rope in her hand; and, at length, after some consideration, she gave it a gentle pull. In a minute or two after, a quick pair of feet were heard coming along the passage, and the housemaid appeared, with a face of agitation and alarm, as if she expected to behold some horrible spectacle. In fact, the nerves of both the poor women had been sadly shattered by the late attempt upon the house.

"What o'clock is it, Sally?" asked Mrs. Chalke, turning to the housemaid.

"Lord ha' mercy, ma'am!" exclaimed the latter, "I thought something was the matter; and, though I must be about the place, I feel quite in a twitter as soon as ever I am left alone. Then those long passáges frighten me out of my life, every time I go through them."

Sally had not answered the housekeeper's inquiry, however, and Mrs. Chalke repeated it, obtaining for a reply the information, that it was a quarter past ten by the clock in the kitchen.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the housekeeper, "what can make Mr. Edmonds so late? I hope nothing has happened to him."

"Oh! I dare say not, ma'am," rejoined Sally. "You know he's always out long on Sunday nights; for he says that bad characters are always more about then than on any other day."

"That's what I am afraid of," replied Mrs. Chalke; "and, while he's looking after the game, we might all have our throats cut."

"Dear me, ma'am! don't talk so," said Sally; "I declare you make my blood quite cruddle. I haven't slept a wink one blessed night since those fellows tried to break in; and I dare say they would murder me first, all along of my having been the one to ring the alarum-bell, which spoiled their sport."

"No; they would murder me first, for the keys," said Mrs. Chalke, jealous of the dignity of her office; "and, besides, I dare say they

know nothing about who rung the bell. It must be a terrible thing to have one's throat cut."

Just at that moment the bell rang sharply, and both the good women started, and both screamed; after which, it suddenly struck Sally that it must be Edmonds himself, who had slept at the house constantly since the night of the attack. Communicating this supposition to Mrs. Chalke, she hurried to the door, while the housekeeper followed, with a flat candlestick in her hand, laying strong injunctions on her companion not to turn key, or draw bolt, till they had ascertained who was the visitor.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Sally, putting her mouth down to the lock.

"Who's there?" cried Mrs. Chalke; adding, as a caution to the maid, "don't put your head there, girl; he might shoot you through the key-hole."

Almost at the same moment, however, the well-known voice of Edmonds answered, "It's I, Sally; let us in,"—and joyfully the door was opened, and poor Edmonds, with a face haggard and worn, both with bitter care and fatigue, entered the hall.

"Dear me, Mr. Edmonds," said Mrs. Chalke, "I'm so glad to see you. I began to think you wouldn't come to-night, and we were in such a trepidation."

"Oh! you need not have been afraid," replied the park-keeper; "you might be sure I would come, Mrs. Chalke. It's a duty to my employer; and I won't fail in my duty, whoever does. But I thought it best to take a longer round to-night with my men than usual; for I heard about six o'clock, from Blackmore, the gardener, that he had seen some fellows, of whom I have strong suspicions, driving this way from Sturton, this morning. I could find nobody, however. I am very tired, for I've gone good twelve miles, besides my walk in the morning. I wonder what tires me so soon; but one breaks down like an old tree. First goes one branch, and then another; and each leaves a gap, where the weather pours in, and rots the whole core."

While he thus spoke, he paused in the hall, addressing the beginning of his speech to the housekeeper, and ending it apparently to himself, with his eyes fixed upon the stone pavement, and his head bent forward, in an attitude of melancholy thought. He looked sad, and somewhat wild; and Mrs. Chalke, remarking the expression of his countenance, and thinking that the weight of his sorrows must have been greatly aggravated by corporeal fatigue, begged him to come into her sitting-room, and take a glass of ale, and something to eat.

"Thank you, ma'am, thank you," said Edmonds, "I will come and sit down a bit, and perhaps take a jug of beer, for I am weary and thirsty; but I can't eat anything, for I have no stomach now. I shall go to bed soon, for I hope to sleep to-night. It's a long time since I slept."

The good lady, however, when once he was seated by her fire, and the jug of strong ale, with which she intended to strengthen both the inner and the outer man, placed beside him at the table, attempted to while away the time by asking questions, although, to say sooth, Edmonds was very little inclined for conversation. It is a mistake, however, that many people make, who think that they can wean us

from our sorrows by calling our mere words to indifferent topics. As well might they think to relieve a mother's mind by taking her on some trifling errand from the cradle of her sick babe. The heart and the thoughts are still with our sorrows, whatever subject may employ our tongues.

She was still going on in the same strain, when suddenly, with a great start, she exclaimed, "Goodness gracious! what's that? Didn't you hear a step?"

The next instant the cause of the phenomenon she had remarked became evident by Sally putting in her head, and inquiring, "Wouldn't you like a toast with your beer, sir?"

"How can you frighten one so, girl?" cried Mrs. Chalke, in a petulant tone; "I declare I thought it was the robbers broke in."

"No, I thank you, Sally," replied Edmonds; "but haven't you any common beer. This ale is too strong."

"There is not a drop in the house, sir," replied the housemaid; "but as to its being too strong, it will do you no harm. It's every drop of it pure malt and hops. Home made, I can assure you, just before my lord died."

These last words threw Edmonds into a new fit of meditation. "Ay," he said thoughtfully, "it was a bad day for Mallington Hall when he died; things have gone wrong ever since, and we never know, you see, Mrs. Chalke, what it is to have a good thing till we lose it. A good master is a good thing, and he was a good master, for he was always very reasonable, and inclined to do what was right and proper, when people told him how."

"Well, I hope this young gentleman will be as good as he," said Mrs. Chalke. "When do you think he'll take possession, Mr. Edmonds?"

"I don't know, I don't know," answered Edmonds; "I tell you, my good dame, you are mistaken. I am just as ignorant about all these things as you are;" and Mrs. Chalke, finding that she could make nothing of him, rose, saying, "Well, now you are come I shall go to bed and sleep in peace. I shouldn't have winked an eye all night if you hadn't been here. You had better have your gun with you in your room—there it stands in the corner. Don't forget it, there's a good man, for if they were to get hold of it they might blow all our brains out."

"No fear, no fear," answered Edmonds, turning his back to the fire. "There is nobody to be afraid of within five miles, unless they be in Mallington, and there are sharp eyes looking out for them there too. You may rest quietly enough—nobody will disturb your sleep."

"She has no daughter!" continued the poor park-keeper, murmuring to himself, as soon as Mrs. Chalke was gone. "I wish I were dead, though it is a sin to say so, with all the blessings that God has still given me. I wish I could think of other things;" and after pressing his hand upon his brow for a moment, he took up the jug of beer again and emptied it at a draught.

CHAPTER LIV.

Alfred Latimer, as we have seen, sprang over the paling, and stood within the enclosure of Mallington Park. When he had done so he gazed around him for an instant, and a sudden change came over his countenance. It seemed to him as if he had awakened in a moment from a dream, as if all that had passed during the last week had been a troublous vision, and that now for the first time he unclosed his eyes to the reality.

It was an awful moment, but it was quickly over, for Williams almost instantly touched his arm, saying, "Come along, what are you stopping for? You are not going to show the white feather now?"

The young man merely replied, "Oh, no!" and followed him instinctively through the nearer trees, across the warren, and towards the back of Mallington Hall. Often had he trod those paths, often had he traversed those woods in happier days. Sometimes he had watched for Lucy there, occasionally with angry feelings at her delay, occasionally with the natural impatience of an eager and impetuous spirit; [illegible]
thought to be such a burden as it seemed during the next five minutes. His only resource was to fly from thought. "Show the white feather!" he repeated to himself more than once. "No! that's out of the question; but I wish I had not got into this business. There's no use thinking of it, however. Here I am, and it must be done;" and, advancing to Williams's side, he asked him something in a whisper.

"Hush!" said the robber; "I thought I heard a whistle;" and creeping slowly on for about a quarter of a mile further, he looked out into the more open part of the park. At some two or three hundred yards distance was a large clump of old elms, in advance of another portion of the wood, and Williams thought he saw something underneath them. After waiting for a minute he whispered to his companions, "Be ready to be off like a shot!" and then ventured a low whistle. It was answered the next minute, and the form of a man came out into the moonlight, then retreated again, and was lost to the eye.

"That was like Maltby, wasn't it?" inquired Williams; and the gruff voice of the man Brown replied, "Ay, that's he."

After a short pause the whistle was repeated, and Williams observed, "He is coming round. We must show him where we are." Thus saying he uttered another whistle, to which there was a reply somewhat nearer than before.

"Did you expect him here?" asked Alfred Latimer. "I thought he was to bring up the gig to the corner of the park."

"Ay, but he was to let me know if he heard anything fresh," was the answer; and, a few moments after, they plainly heard a rustle in the wood, and the fall of a footstep. Williams quietly drew forth a pistol; but the next instant Maltby's voice was heard inquiring, "Where are you, Williams?"

"Here, here!" answered the other. "Is there any danger ahead?"

"No!" answered Maltby, coming up. "They are all gone quietly to bed; for I've been watching for this last half hour, and saw the lights

put out in the different rooms; but I thought you'd like to know that Edmonds sleeps at the house every night; so that unless you get hold of him first you may have a devil of a work."

"Ah!" said Williams, "how did you hear that, Bill?"

"Why, it was old Blackmore told me," answered the young man. "I went down this evening to ask where his son was, for he's never come back, and the old man took it kind, and was more civil than ordinary."

"Perhaps it isn't true," said Williams.

"Oh! yes it is," rejoined the other, "for I went up afterwards to Mother Witherton at the lodge, and I found out from her that Edmonds sleeps in the little room near the library, where he can hear both ways what's going on at each side of the house."

"He shan't hear me till he sees me," answered Jack Williams, with a laugh; "but we must make him fast first, that's clear. Have you got the flint and steel, Brown? We may as well light the dark lantern, as there's likely to be more work than we thought."

A flint and steel were soon produced, and the dark lantern was opened, lighted, and closed again.

"Now, Bill, run and get the gig; quick, for I am determined this shall go through to-night," continued Williams.

"Hadn't you better cross the water with the punt, and start from the other side?" asked Maltby: "I left it there on purpose. There are some people still about at Mallington, and if I go rattling over the bridge in the gig I shall be sure to have folks looking at me."

"That's true," answered Williams; "and you're right, Master Bill. You can bring it down at the end of the lane, and then nobody shall see it come or go."

This being agreed upon, Maltby slunk away through the woods again, and his three companions crept silently and stealthily on towards Mallington Hall. When they had reached the point of the wood nearest to the mansion they paused once more, and gazed over the whole building. All was dark, no window showed a light, and, proceeding from one detached tree to another, they approached nearer and more near, till they were close to the outbuildings and enclosed courts at the back of the house.

A large old walnut-tree grew near the wall, and stretched its long and rugged arms over into the stable-yard, and, once under its branches, their proceedings were quick and easy. Williams swarmed up the tree in a minute, walked along one of the thick overhanging boughs, and reached the top of the wall. He then aided his two companions to mount, and jumped lightly down upon a pile of straw and rubbish below. The other two descended as rapidly and noiselessly, and then, taking their way across the court, they approached a small door in the main building. Jack Williams had laid his schemes well. Applying the false key to the lock, he turned it with little or no sound, and then, feeling for the latch, he raised it, pushed the door open, and listened. Every one held their breath; but all was as silent as the grave, and turning the shade of the lantern Williams and his companion looked in. Nothing was seen, however, that could alarm them. A long narrow stone passage, with one or two empty tubs lying against the wall, was all that they saw, and Alfred Latimer

having now plunged fully in, and knowing that all chance of retreat was out of the question, whispered to Williams. "I will show you the way; I know it well, and can find it in the dark, so you had better shade the lantern again."

"Not yet," said Williams, in the same tone; "we may stumble over some of these d—d things in the passages. There is no one here to see, and in the great hall we shall get the moonlight through the windows."

Without reply, Alfred Latimer passed him and went on, drawing one of the pistols from his pockets, however, and cocking it.

"He's a bold young devil!" murmured Jack Williams to himself as he followed, while Tom Brown came behind in silence. Thus proceeding they reached the end of that passage, turned into another at the left, and mounted three or four steps, for the house was built upon an irregular foundation. They then passed between the kitchen and servants' hall, the butler's pantry, and what was called the still-room, beyond which came a pair of folding-doors covered with baize, and having a stone staircase on the left hand. Here, however, they were brought to a sudden stop, for the folding-doors were bolted on the other side; and Alfred Latimer proposed to lead them by the stone stairs, and the corridor above, down the great staircase, to the room where poor Edmonds slept.

"Let us put the crape over our faces first," said Williams, "for there's no need of his knowing who we are."

This was soon done; and Alfred Latimer, when he gazed, through the dull veil which was spread over his eyes and fastened behind his head, at the countenances of his two companions, similarly disguised, fancied that it was impossible any one should recognise them. Then, after having taken off their shoes, the whole party mounted the stairs quietly, and, passing along the corridor, descended by the great staircase to the hall. All was still, silent, and tranquil; but when, passing through a passage at the back of the library, they approached a door at the end, they thought they heard a noise, and stopped.

As they listened, the hard regular breathing of some one in a profound sleep was heard, and Williams whispered, "He's as sound as a hedgehog; but if he should wake, is there any other door to the room?"

"None that I know of," answered Latimer, without raising his voice.

"Then I'll soon send this one in if it should be fastened," rejoined Williams. "Here, Tom, hold the lantern while we try."

Poor Edmonds, however, had not taken the trouble to lock his door, and it opened easily at the first touch. The light of the lantern spread faintly round the chamber, showing Edmonds as he lay on the half-tester bed at the other side of the room, partly but not wholly undressed, with his head pillowed on his arm, and still asleep. The slight sound of the opening door did not fully awaken him; but either that or the light of the lantern caused him to turn somewhat on the bed. At this movement Williams suddenly drew a rope from his pocket, and sprang forward. Alfred Latimer followed, and both threw themselves upon the poor fellow, as he was starting up. He was, as we have said, a powerful man, and he struggled for an instant

vehemently with his assailants; but it was in vain; and before he could put forth his strength, he was overpowered, and his arms pinioned tightly behind. Not a word was spoken on either part; for Edmonds well knew that it was useless to call for help, and the other two were not anxious that their voices should be heard. When the struggle was over, the park-keeper stood before his two opponents, gazing upon them sternly, while Alfred Latimer pushed the crape farther up over his forehead, from which it had been partly removed, and Williams laughed low, though his triumph was more that he had succeeded without unnecessary violence, than that he had overcome in a contest where the odds were so greatly on his side. The man Brown, remained dully at the door, with the lantern in one hand and a pistol in the other, quite ready to use the latter, if by any chance Edmonds had obtained even a temporary advantage.

"Well, my men, well!" exclaimed the park-keeper at length; but then suddenly he stopped, and, after a brief pause, added—"But it's of no use—the game's up. It signifies not saying a word. I'm helpless now."

Neither Williams nor Alfred Latimer replied, but the former drew the latter aside, and whispered—"Stay you here and keep guard over him, sir. I can trust you, and you can trust me. But we cannot be sure of Brown, if our eyes are off him; and he is not unlikely to kick at our going over the house alone. "Will you stay?"

He spoke eagerly and anxiously, and though the young man would rather have had a share in anything more active, he replied,—"Well, I will stay; but do not be long. I should not wonder if all this noise had awakened the women."

"No fear!" answered Williams; "but I will light you the candle first;" and taking up Edmonds's candlestick, he carried it to the lantern, saying to Brown, "Come, my lad, we will go, while he remains on guard."

"Come along," answered Brown, in a louder tone than needful; and leaving the captive and his guard together, the two hurried up the stairs to the top of the house. Williams had already made himself aware of the room in which the old housekeeper slept, and he was not long in finding it; but as he went he looked round for the rope of the alarum-bell, which he at length found passing down the wall of the corridor through the flooring to the story below.

"Stand fast by that, Tom," he said; "and if the other woman comes, seize her tight."

He then advanced to the door, and turned the handle; but it was locked, and a voice immediately demanded, in the accents of terror, "Who's there?"

"It's I—Edmonds," said the man, counterfeiting the park-keeper's voice; but, without waiting for reply, he set his broad shoulder against the slight door, stretched his foot out to the other side of the narrow passage, and with this purchase pushed will all his strength. There came immediately a crushing sound, as of breaking wood, and then a shrill scream, evidently from two voices."

"Here, Tom!" exclaimed Williams, "they are both in here, bring the light;" and he applied his strength again, with another effort, and the door was burst violently into the room.

Another shriek instantly succeeded; but Williams exclaimed fiercely, "Silence! or you shall pay for it with your lives. No one is going to hurt you, if you keep still; but, if either of you say a word, I will blow your brains out. Have you got any cord?" he continued, turning to his companion. "Tie that one, while I do the same for this;" and, calmly and deliberately, he fastened the housemaid's arms behind her, while Brown did the same office for the terrified old housekeeper.

"Now, bring them along into another room," said Williams. "This door won't keep them in; and, if they get out they'll be at the bell somehow."

"I won't, indeed, Mr. Robber," sobbed poor Mrs. Chalke; "take all I have, and spare my life. I'll do nothing at all, but be as quiet as a mouse."

"Silence!" said Williams, sternly; "bring them along—we'll make sure of them;" and, dragged through the passage, the two trembling women were taken to a room looking to the park side of the house, where they were thrust in, and the door locked.

This done, they both hurried down the first flight of stairs, to the large corridors and spacious rooms of the best sleeping-floor.

"The room at the end!" said Williams, thoughtfully,—"it must be that one just over where the man slept;" and, walking straight forward to the end of the long passage, which ran between a long range of bed-chambers on either side, with occasional intervals to admit the light from the west, he paused opposite to a strong plated door, at the further extremity.

"Here it is!" he said, holding the lantern to the heavy lock. "It will be no easy job to get in, I fancy—I'll try the picklocks first, however."

Thus saying, he took out the bunch of keys from his pocket; and, after several efforts, the bolt of the lock was forced back. To the surprise of both the men, however, the door remained fast; and, on further examination, they discovered another key-hole higher up. On that the picklocks proved ineffectual, and the small bar of steel which Williams had brought with him was next employed. Pressed between the door and the post, it soon wrenched back a part of the iron plating and tore off a portion of the wood. A large splinter was then forced away, showing the lock firmly shot into the plate opposite; but, with the swallow-tailed end of the crow, Williams contrived to push it back and then pulled the door open with ease. A number of large chests, banded with iron, stood before them; but these offered no serious impediment. Some were opened with the skeleton keys, others broken into with the crow-bar; and a far greater quantity of gold and silver was exposed to their eyes, than even their greedy hopes had ventured to expect.

"There, give me the bags," cried Williams; "he has got some more below, run and fetch them. We will only take what is most worth while, for there is more here than we can carry."

"Let us take all we can," said Brown; "I can carry a good deal, and we may as well fill our pockets and the bags too;" and thus saying, he thrust his hand into a box, where a number of guineas appeared piled up in regular rows.

"Hark !" cried Williams, suddenly; and, at the same moment, the report of a pistol rang through the house. Williams snatched up the lantern, and, hurrying out, both ran down stairs as fast as they could.

CHAPTER LV.

We must now return to the room below, where we left Alfred Latimer and Edmonds, the park-keeper, in order to explain the cause of that unexpected sound, which disturbed Williams and his companion in their course of pillage. No task, perhaps, could have been inflicted upon the unhappy young man, more painful than that which he had undertaken to perform. Activity was, at that moment, a need—it was the only veil which could hide from his own eyes the sight of what he had become. He felt that he was a felon—that the barrier had fallen behind him, which for ever excluded him from a return to society—that all he had done before was light and venial, compared with the deed of that night. But he would fain have hurried on in any course, to avoid reflection; he would even have willingly plunged into new crimes, to escape from the dark impression of the one he had committed. It may seem strange that such should be the effect of remorse; but such is always the case, when remorse is without repentance. Remorse, without repentance, is despair. Such was that which Alfred Latimer felt. He never thought of his offence to God. He was conscious of guilt; but he looked to no repentance—to no atonement—to no reformation. It was in relation to its effects upon himself, that he considered the crime he had committed; and, in the spirit of Cain, he was ready to insult the Almighty by any new crime, from the very sense of the depth to which he had fallen. The hardening of the heart, which so frequently follows wickedness, is surely a natural part of its punishment.

"Ay," he thought, "curse him ! If it had not been for him, I should not have been what I now am ; I should never have done this thing. If he had not refused to let me marry Lucy, when I offered honourably, all would have been right. My mother might have made a piece of work at first, but that would have soon blown by, and Louisa would have helped us. And now, what has come of his cursed obstinacy ? Here, I shall very likely get hanged, and I dare say he would help to convict me. I wonder if he suspects anything ? He looks at me devilish hard.

He longed to question the poor fellow, but did not dare ; though he thought, once or twice, that he could disguise his voice, so as not to sound familiar to Edmonds's ears. He hesitated, however, standing half-way between the bed and the door, with the cocked pistol in his hand.

After waiting thus for a few minutes, while Edmonds remained sitting on the edge of the bed, there came a crash, as of breaking wood, and then a scream. Voices were next heard speaking, and then some shrieks, louder and more distinct than before. Edmonds started up, and advanced a step, exclaiming, "The bloody villains are hurting the poor women—a set of scoundrels !"

Alfred Latimer pointed the pistol at him, saying, in a feigned voice "Keep back, or I'll blow your brains out!" and Edmonds paused, with his eyes fixed upon him, longing to spring forward and wrench the weapon from his hands; but feeling how vain would be the attempt, with his pinioned arms. The shrieks ceased, and all that could be heard was the sound of several voices speaking—some in the tones of supplication; some in those of menace or command. A woman's tongue, however, could be distinguished; and, as if relieved, the park-keeper sat down again, and bent his head thoughtfully.

Shortly after, steps were heard above, and then, after a pause, came again a grating crash just over their heads, and then a dull creaking sound, as of a door moving on hinges long disused. Edmonds seemed uneasy, and moved once or twice upon the side of the bed.

"They have broken into the plate-room," he said at length, looking at Alfred Latimer again; "that's what they came for; but they'll all be hanged, that's one comfort."

The young man gazed at him fiercely, but remained silent; and after a minute or two had elapsed, during which time the various sounds of moving and breaking into the chests were heard, the park-keeper spoke again—"They'll all be hanged," he repeated, "for they are all known, and will be caught before to-morrow's over."

"Do you mean to say you know them, fool?" demanded Latimer, in a feigned voice.

"To be sure I do," replied Edmonds, rising, and confronting him boldly. "It is you who are the fools, to think that a trumpery piece of crape would hide you."

Alfred Latimer trembled, but it was not with fear. "Who are they then?" he demanded, grasping the pistol tighter in his hand.

"Why, Williams and the ruffian Brown," replied Edmonds at once.

"And I," said Alfred Latimer, in a very low tone, "who am I?"

"I know you well enough," answered the park-keeper, in a voice of deep sadness, "I wish to Heaven I didn't."

"Speak!" said the young man, "who am I?"

"Why, one, bad as I believed him, whom I never thought to see at work like this," replied Edmonds; "the destroyer of my child."

The young man instantly raised the pistol as if to shoot him; but the sturdy park-keeper's eyes did not even wink, and he continued to gaze upon him sternly. Suddenly the youth dropped the muzzle again, saying, with an ill-feigned laugh, "You are mistaken. You have seen me often, I know, but I am not the man you think. I am—I could tell you who; but I won't."

"It's no use, Mr. Latimer," answered Edmonds; "it's no use at all. I know you just as well as if your face were uncovered. I wish to Heaven, I say, that I did not. You looked just now as if you were going to shoot me. I don't care a straw if you do. You have broken my heart, and made life a load; so finish all by taking it if you will."

The young man stared at him for an instant; then strode up to his side, and grasped him with his left hand by the shoulder, saying, in his natural voice, but low and stern, "Will you swear, so help you God, not to betray me?—will you, for Lucy's sake, if not for mine?"

"No!" replied Edmonds, in a resolute tone. "I think you as great

a villain as ever lived, and far worse than the other two. Why should I punish them and not you?"

"Will you swear to give no information till this time to-morrow night?" asked Alfred Latimer, with a shaking voice. "Will you swear, man—will you swear? for if not you must die, and my hand must stop your tongue."

Edmonds paused a single instant; but the next, his own stout heart called him coward even for that brief hesitation. "No," he said, "I will not. I will do my duty at once, and directly. I will neither tell a lie, nor consent to robbery, for any man on earth."

"But till to-morrow night," repeated Alfred Latimer, raising the pistol to the man's head. "Will you swear, till to-morrow night?"

"No, I won't," replied the park-keeper, setting his teeth close. "Make yourself a murderer if you will, as well as a robber and a deceiver."

The finger was pressed hard upon the trigger—the cock of the pistol fell; there was a flash and a report, and poor Edmonds staggered forward. "Oh, God!—Lucy!" he cried, and then fell forward upon the floor, with his feet beating the ground convulsively for a moment, after which all was still.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE moment Williams entered he stopped short, gazing at the dead man; and Alfred Latimer instantly stepped up to him, saying, in a low tone, "I could not help it. He drove me to do it."

"Speak out, speak out!" cried Williams. "There's no use of whispering now. He can't hear you, man, that's clear enough. I'd have given a great deal, though, that this had not happened. What did he do?"

"He told me that he knew us all, and that he would inform."

"That might be all stuff," replied Williams, with a stern brow. "I don't think he could know us."

"Ay, but he named every one of us," answered Alfred Latimer, eager to palliate the deed even to his ruffian companions. "I could scarcely get him to name me, though he mentioned you and Brown outright at first. But he told me who I was plainly enough in the end."

"It could not be helped, then," said Williams. "It was his own fault; but I think I'd have tried to swear him to secrecy. He'd have kept his oath if he had taken it."

"I did try!" replied the young man, "but he refused—ay, even when the pistol was at his head he swore he would tell all the moment he was free. So I thought there was no use of waiting for you to do what I could do without you, and I fired."

"Served him devilish right!" murmured Brown; but Williams was silent for several minutes, and he evidently regretted what had taken place, although he said, in the end, "Well, there was no help for it. If a man will be such a fool, he must take the consequences; and when a man's to be hanged for a robbery, they can't do worse to him for a murder. Yet I like the fellow's pluck too; but the worst of pistols is,

they make such a devil of a noise. Run to the round window, Tom, there's no shutter, and you can see well enough by the moonlight, over towards the keeper's cottage. Look out, and let us know if there's anybody coming."

"Don't go up to the plate-room till I'm back," answered Brown, always fearful of losing part of the money.

"No nonsense!" cried Williams sternly. "Do as you are bid, and do not give me any of your insolence, or he sha'n't long lie there singly;" and he pointed to the body of Edmonds.

The other ruffian was cowed and walked away, and Williams turning towards Alfred Latimer, gazed at him for a moment as he stood with his arms folded, his brows knit, and a look of deep bitter gloom upon his face. The impression of his crime was spreading over him more and more darkly every moment. The heart of Cain was in his bosom, the curse of Cain upon his head. Some of the words of his companion, too, even in justifying the deed he had committed, had presented it in its blackest colours to his mind. He had heard it called murder. He had heard the courage and stern resolution, even to death, of the man he had slain, applauded. At length Williams, who divined in some degree what was passing in his breast, interrupted his reverie by saying, "Come, Mr. Latimer, it can't be helped. It was his own fault. It was very easy for him to say he wouldn't tell, and your life is as good to you as his, so you had no choice. Your only way now is to make poor Lucy all the better husband."

Alfred Latimer suddenly put his hand to his head, as if some terrible pang shot through his brain; but the moment after he answered, "So I will, so I will. But will she ever see me again after this?"

"Pooh! nonsense," cried Williams; "she will know nothing about it: if we are not fools ourselves there's no chance of how it happened ever reaching her ears. Come, let us be off, and get what we can. There's more money than I thought for. So perhaps it will be better to leave the plate behind. I like your resolution, sir, in settling the affair with this poor fellow yourself. Many a man, and a brave man, too, would have waited for us to come down. We won't leave him there, however. Let us put him on the bed."

He took the corpse by the shoulders, and, though unwillingly, Alfred Latimer did not like to refuse to bear a part; lifting the body of poor Edmonds between them, they laid him on the bed where he had been sleeping, and then turned towards the door.

"Why, you have got yourself all over blood, Mr. Latimer," said Williams. "But never mind, come along, you can have Brown's smock-frock till you can change your things."

He then led the way out of the room and up the stairs again towards the plate-room, where the lantern had been left burning on the floor. They found Brown at the door, and, though some sharp words passed between him and Williams, they did not discover whether he had been in the room or not. They entered, however, and the sight of all the wealth that the late Earl of Mallington had there accumulated soon drove from the thoughts of Williams at least all memory of the deed that had been done below. Alfred Latimer, less accustomed to scenes of blood, was longer in recovering himself; but when a change did take place it ran into a greater extreme, and became the sort of wild

intoxication of despair. He talked, he even laughed, when loading himself with the money and the trinkets they found; but his words were wild and whirling, like those of a man half inebriated.

It was speedily decided that all the heavier articles of plate should be left, and in about a quarter of an hour they had possessed themselves of even a larger booty than they expected. When this was done they descended to the hall again, and Williams said, "I will go and put out that light."

"A devil of a deal better just pop it to the curtains of the bed," said Brown; "then there would be one grand blaze, and the whole job would be over, and no one know anything about it."

"No," said Williams, sternly, "that's needless. The women don't know us, and there's no use of hurting them."

He then entered the room where poor Edmonds lay, and blew out the candle; and threading the various passages of the house by the light they carried, they reached the door by which they had entered. There the lantern was also extinguished, and issuing out into the yard, they easily got over the wall into the open ground of the park; and thence took their course towards the river.

All was still and silent; the clear moon shining calm and peacefully over the glades and dells; not a sound but the whispering of the light breeze among the trees and the fern; no sight of a living thing but when they startled a herd of deer or roused a hare to scamper away in the moonlight. Nothing could form a stronger contrast than the scene without, in its clear, cool, lustrous tranquillity, with the fierce and agitating passions within the bosoms of those unhappy men. At length, when they came amongst the trees by the river side, Williams stopped and proposed to Brown that he should give his smock-frock to Alfred Latimer. The inferior ruffian, however, did not choose to part with it without compensation, and exacted a guinea as the price of the garment. Paying the money with a curse, Latimer took the smock-frock and drew it over his other dress, which had before been altered to make him look as much like a countryman as possible. Approaching the little creek where poor Lucy had been carried not long before, they found the punt lying quietly at the bank. As they got in, however, what between agitation and the load he carried, Alfred Latimer stumbled, and his hat fell into the river. Brown, who was already in the boat, strove to catch it with the pole; but in so doing he pressed it down, and it filled and sank.

"That's devilish unlucky!" cried Williams; "what's to be done now?"

"Why, I must go home," said Alfred Latimer, "and change my dress altogether. I can put these things away where nobody will find them. I can get up one of the windows, I dare say."

"You must be quick, then," said Williams, as they pushed away into the stream, "for we must be far off before daylight, and its past twelve now. There's Maltby, I fancy, standing on the shore. We'll wait for you at the cottage, by the common, where you took Lucy, if you will run up the back lanes to the house. Only don't be long, and mind you stow away the things where they can't be found."

"No fear," replied Latimer; and the boat pushed on to the bank, where the form of Bill Maltby became more and more distinct, as they

approached. The horse and gig, however, were not to be seen; and Williams's first salutation to his accomplice was an inquiry as to the cause of this deficiency.

"Hush!" said Maltby: "don't speak loud. Harry Soames has got a warrant against you, Jack; and, hearing that you were at the Hog-in-Armour, further down, he's gone to see if he can nab you. He doesn't want, that's the fact, but he was obliged to go down, and so he told me all about it. I took the horse up to the back of the common, and there left him and the gig, because Harry must come back this way. He'll be half an hour first; but still we had better be off as quick as possible."

"We're a match for him if he does come," answered Williams, stepping out of the boat; "but there's no use risking anything, or breaking a man's head if one can help it. So you start off quick, Mr. Latimer. We will wait for you three quarters of an hour."

CHAPTER LVII.

Louisa Charlton—sweet Louisa Charlton—I return to her with pleasure, and could pause long, without unwillingness, to paint her on that eventful Saturday, when her lover was carried away. I could dwell upon all the painful emotions of her heart—all the dreadful images that terror suggested—all the dull and heavy vacancy that the very thought of losing him whom only she loved, produced in her bosom. I could willingly tell, too, how she strove for calmness—how she succeeded in suppressing any vehement expression of alarm—and how she suggested various means, that others had not thought of, for discovering Morton's fate.

Louisa turned her thoughts to the painful subject of contemplation afforded by Morton's continued absence. In solitude and silence—with no one to comfort, with nothing to re-assure, with no object to divert her attention—the feelings of her heart had nearly overpowered her. The tears did rise into her eyes; and she was struggling to keep the flood from pouring down, when the servant announced Dr. Western, and Louisa started up with hope and terror, which always walk hand in hand through the dim vale of uncertainty. The expression of the good rector's face, however, at once relieved her. There was a joyful smile upon it, such as she knew his kind heart could not give unless the tidings he bore were happy. She saw that he was the messenger of peace, and his first words proved it likewise.

"I have got good news, my love," he said; "and I am glad to find you alone, for they are for your ear only. Morton is quite well, and safe;" and he went on to tell her all that he thought necessary,—remembering, however, the good solicitor's caution, and not saying more than was required to set her heart at rest.

The next day passed. Louisa was cheerful, from renewed hope; Mrs. Charlton was in a languid and somewhat dolorous mood. She lay upon her sofa, in her dressing-room, the whole morning, in the patience-on-a-monument style, and Louisa went to church by herself. Her step-mother called her a selfish, unfeeling girl; but the words were no[t] addressed to Louisa's ear, and would not have pained her much if [they]

had heard them. At dinner Mrs. Charlton treated her coldly, and somewhat repulsively; but yet she could not help fancying, from her step-daughter's calmness, that she must have some assurance of Morton's safety, which was a comfort to herself also. A little after tea she retired to rest, giving a hint, both to Louisa and the servants, that she wished to have the house kept quite silent.

Though by no means disposed to sleep—for Dr. Western had given her some hope of Morton's return that night, or on the following morning—Louisa willingly enough went to her own room, which her father had taken care should be fitted up with every comfort and convenience. She there sat, reading and listening alternately, till all hope of Morton coming that night was over; and even afterwards, as the book she had taken up interested her, she went on with its perusal, leaning her fair head upon her hand, and mingling the thoughts of the author with her own. The clock struck twelve—all was silent around; and it seemed the hour, of all others, to sit and read, by the solitary lamp, the pouring forth of a high spirit long passed away from earth. She continued some time longer, then; but, as she felt it growing late, she rose to seek her pillow, and only paused to look out from the window, the curtains of which were withdrawn, and gaze for a moment at the starlight sky. As she did so, some sound from below, as of a person leaping the garden wall, made her look down, and she saw the figure of a man moving on the gravel walk. The next instant he stooped, rose again, and threw some small pebbles against her window, and the moment after, as she was drawing back in some alarm, she heard a voice pronounce her name.

There was something about the figure which reminded her of Mrs. Charlton's son; and yet it seemed very different too, but the voice was undoubtedly his; and she came nearer to the window again, and once more looked out. She had no longer any doubt. It was certainly Alfred Latimer, though, it seemed, in very strange attire; and as soon as, by the light in the room, he perceived that she was again at the window, he made signs to her to open it, which, after a momentary hesitation, she did.

"Louisa," he said in a low voice—"Louisa, come down and open the door, there's a dear sister; I want to get in."

His tone and whole manner was agitated and wild; and Louisa replied, "I will call one of the servants, Alfred, and bid them let you in in a minute."

"On no account!" he exclaimed; "if you won't take the trouble to come down, and let me in yourself, say so at once, and I will go away again; but I wish no one to know that I am here to-night. Will you open it, or will you not?"

His tone was so sharp and menacing that Louisa felt some alarm, though she knew not well what injury he could do her if she did as he desired; but reflecting that the butler slept on the ground floor, at no great distance from the door, and that the bell-rope of a large bell, which would speedily alarm the whole house, hung close by, she replied at length, "Well, wait a moment, and I will come down, Alfred."

"And you will wake no one?" he said, in a tone which seemed to her mingled with apprehension.

"No," she replied; "if you do not wish it, I will not."

"There's a good girl," was the answer; "be quick, be quick, Louisa;" and, taking a candle from the table, she descended to the garden door, withdrew the chain, and unlocked it, still keeping near the bell; and then, turning the handle of the lock, drew it back.

The instant the door was opened Alfred Latimer came in, snatched the candle from her hand, and saying in a low tone, "That will do, that will do. Thank you, Louisa;" he walked straight up stairs.

Louisa stood confounded.

His face, usually florid, was as pale as death; his eyes were wild and haggard; his hand shook so that it could scarcely hold the candlestick; and his dress was no less strange than his manner. He had no hat on, and over his other clothing was drawn a smock-frock, stained and dirty, and as Louisa watched him up stairs she saw that the singular costume was completed by a pair of common leather leggings. She had no time to observe more; but with a suspicion that he had become deranged in intellect—an event which she had often dreaded, from his wild and irregular course of life—she returned to her room, and instantly locked the door. Not above two or three minutes passed ere some one turned the handle of the lock. Then came a knock; and, approaching the door, she inquired, "What is it? I cannot open the door now. I am going to bed."

"Put down your ear to the keyhole, then," said the voice of Alfred Latimer; and when she had done so, he added, in a stern tone, "Not a word to any one of my having been here, upon your life." Thus saying he turned away, and she could hear him go down stairs, open and close the door, and go out.

The means that he employed to procure entrance have been already detailed; but between the time of his seeing Louisa at the window and of her coming down to give him admission, a dark and shameful scheme suggested itself to his mind, which he proceeded to put in execution. The fiend called Fear drives man but too frequently to darker crimes than any other passion, and as Alfred Latimer stood there by the door, he thought, "I will put these things in Morton's room. If they do suspect him, he will soon be able to prove himself innocent. It can be but a day or two in prison to him, and it might be death and destruction to me."

At that moment the door was opened, and he went in, hurrying past Louisa, as we have said, and seeking his own room in the first place, when he stripped off the attire in which he had come thither, and clothed himself in a fresh and unstained dress. Then, after disposing of the money somewhat better about his person than he had done before, he gathered up the bloody clothes, tied them together, and, carrying them into Morton's room, put them cunningly away under the drawers.

Williams had grown impatient, and was upon the very eve of setting off, when Alfred Latimer made his appearance. "Here, jump in," he cried. "There is room enough for us three, and it doesn't much signify if we break the horse's wind, for we must kill him, and break the gig to pieces, to prevent them telling tales of how we went."

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning when they came within three miles of the place to which their steps tended.

Williams then pulled up, saying, "There should be a chalk-pit here, Mr. Latimer, I think."

"It's further on," answered the young man. "I've seen it once or twice as we have passed, coming close to the side of the road."

"What the devil do you want a chalk-pit for?" asked Tom Brown.

"To put the horse and gig in, to be sure," replied Williams. "We can't send them back without showing which way we came; and if we were to leave them at the inn while we go on to the sea, it would soon set all the people talking."

"But how are we to get on to the town?" asked Brown.

"Walk, to be sure," answered Williams. "Ay, and we must go all the way round, too, and come in by the other side. That will just fill up the time, for I don't want to come to the inn before daylight. Then we are to be a wedding party, you know. The marriage won't take above ten minutes; and then Mr. Latimer can set off in a chaise with his lady, and we can follow immediately after. It will be the best blind that we could have."

Alfred Latimer had remained as silent as the grave while his marriage was named; but after a pause, during which Williams whipped the horse on, he asked, in a low voice, almost a whisper, "Won't all this marriage delay us too long? It can't take place till nine o'clock."

"Oh dear! no," answered Williams carelessly. "They'll not find out anything of the job at the Hall till seven or eight, then they'll have to carry the news to the magistrates, and then there will be all the fuss of taking evidence and examining the premises; so that they will not start upon any track till eleven or twelve. They know of your being here, sir; but as they have no reason to believe you have anything to do with it, and the only people left living to tell—I mean the old women—saw no one but Brown and me, there's every chance in life that they will take any road but the right one, especially if the horse and gig are not heard of for some time—Ay, there's the pit; I see the railing."

CHAPTER LVIII.

It was in the pretty little church of St. Stephen the Martyr, in the town of ——, at nine o'clock in the morning precisely, that the clergyman of the place waited calmly in his surplice near the door of the vestry.

As he stood within the vestry door, he heard a few words pass between the clerk and the strangers, and then the creaking of a pew. The rector was somewhat puzzled, but the minute after the clerk appeared and nodded his head with a solemn inclination, to announce that some, at least, of the wedding party had arrived. The rector then came forth and perceived, nearest to the communion table, a young man somewhat pale, dressed in fashionable attire, with an elder man by his side, stout, dark, and apparently somewhat inferior in station to himself, while through the door of the church were seen coming a fair young girl, leaning on the arm of a respectable-looking old man, dressed in his best, in whom the rector instantly recognised one of his own parishioners. He was, as we have shown, in no humour for asking

many questions; but still, as he was a conscientious person, before he proceeded to perform his functions he drew the good gardener aside, and addressed some inquiries to him. What the other answered matters not much; but the rector was satisfied, and advanced again, saying, "Oh! very well." The clerk arranged the parties in order, and the ceremony proceeded. To those who looked on, and knew not what was passing in the breast of any there present, it presented few incidents at all remarkable. The rector, indeed, observed that the bridegroom sometimes made the responses aloud, sometimes murmured something, which might be assent or not, for no one could hear what it was—that his eye looked wild, and that once or twice he turned and gazed over his shoulder. But as forced marriages, by parochial or other authority, were very common in those days, the clergyman concluded that in this case the young gentleman had been compelled by the friends of the bride to do her justice. The only objection he could see to this supposition was a momentary indication of affection, which the bridegroom had displayed towards the fair trembling being who was so soon to be united to him by a holy tie, as they came near the communion table, when he suddenly grasped her hand, and murmured, "Dear Lucy," in a tone full of melancholy but of deep feeling. The rector also remarked that when he was reading the warning to confess if there were any impediment to their marriage, the bridegroom, at the words, "As ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed," turned deadly pale, and seemed to stagger where he stood. The concluding words, therefore, were pronounced in a more solemn and urgent tone; but they produced no further effect. The banns had been regularly published, and the ceremony went on to its close.

But had the eye of man been able to penetrate the human heart, and see all the dark things that it contains, what a terrible scene would have been disclosed by the bosom of Alfred Latimer. There he stood before the altar with the only woman he had ever loved, with the only woman towards whom, perhaps, he had ever entertained one purer or higher feeling. He had loved her notwithstanding all the wrong he had done her, notwithstanding all the evil he had inflicted, notwithstanding the misery and wretchedness which he was ready, either from caprice or passion, to inflict upon her afterwards; nay, more, he loved her still, and the very desolation of his heart, the feelings of despair that had seized upon him, made him cling to her affection—made him feel that it was the only thing left to him in existence—made him look upon it as a ray of comfort in the midst of the utter darkness that surrounded him. He stood with her before the altar, but under what circumstances? With her father's murder upon his head—with the blood of him who gave her being still hot and reeking upon his hand—with the image still present to his eyes of her parent lying before him struggling in the agonies of death. When her hand clasped his it seemed as if it scorched him with the touch; as if the fire of hell spread along every nerve, and flowed through every vein. And when the awful adjuration of the priest was pronounced, calling up the vague images of death, and judgment, and eternal condemnation, and the opening of the book in which all the dire secrets of humanity stand recorded, it seemed as if the everlasting doom was already ring-

ing in his ears—as if the Almighty fiat had gone forth of unchanging torture and despair.

When the ceremony came to an end, Alfred Latimer seemed scarcely to know that it had concluded. The monosyllable "Come!" from Williams's lips, however, roused him, and paying the fees, he led his bride to the church-door. A chaise was there in waiting, packed with all the little articles which had been accumulated at the gardener's cottage, and the man Brown was standing by its side. Lucy got in, her husband followed, the door was closed, and the postboy, according to his previous orders, drove off at a rapid rate towards the nearest sea-port. Poor Lucy had not seen her lover since the Saturday before. She had received a hurried note from him that morning, dated at the inn, telling her to pack up everything, and have all prepared, and he would join her at the church. The words were somewhat wild, and the handwriting irregular, but yet the note had made Lucy very happy. When she saw him in the church, however, his pale and haggard look alarmed her much; but still he had kept his promise; he had made her his wife; he had even testified his strong affection for her in so doing; and as they drove out of the town she laid her hand on his, and said, "Thank you, Alfred—thank you!"

Alfred Latimer cast his arms round her, drew her vehemently to his bosom, and pressed his lips on hers.

But we must return to the church.

Williams and Brown and the gardener walked away together. The latter seemed inclined to stay and gossip with them; but Williams thrust a couple of guineas into his hand, saying, "There, my good friend. The gentleman left that for you. Good-day," and without further ceremony he turned in another direction, and hurried off.

The rector hastened home to his breakfast; and the clerk, walking up to the door of a pew, opened it, to give exit to Mr. Quatterly and Dr. Western.

"Well, my dear sir, that's all over," said the worthy solicitor, "and so you are now satisfied on that score. She's bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh; so we have nothing to detain us here for more than an hour, I should think; and, with your good leave, we will order a chaise, and be off for Mallington."

"Most willingly," replied Dr. Western, "for I am anxious to be back;" and the two crossed the little burying-ground, and entered the street.

"Ha! who have we got here?" cried Mr. Quatterly; "our sagacious Dogberry, posting away as if for life. Good-morning, Mr. Higginthorp; what news stirring? Anything from our young friend in quod? 'Pon my life! you had better let him out, or you'll get into a scrape."

"Let him out?" cried Mr. Higginthorp, tapping the side of his nose sagaciously with his forefinger. "No, no; whatsomever any one says I shall keep him safe. Why, sir, he's confessed quite woluntary to being a cessuary before the fack to an inhuman robbery as was to be committed by the notorious Jack Williams this here last night as was at Mallington Hall."

"Jack Williams!" exclaimed Dr. Western; "why that's the very man who was here not a minute ago. He turned the corner with the other fellow just as we came out."

"Thems the men!" cried Mr. Higginthorp. "Which way did they go, your worship?"

"Towards the High-street, I think," said Dr. Western.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE morning shone bright over Mallington Park and Mallington village. The river glistened in the early sunshine, the trees waved their leaves, touched with autumnal yellow, in the light air, as if seeking for refreshment; a cloud or two, thin, small, and high up, drifted away over head on the quick breeze. All was gay and peaceful; but the windows of the Hall remained closed, the chimneys gave forth no smoke, and the great door, which usually was flung back soon after daybreak, stood firm as it had been fastened the night before. These were unusual things, yet, strange to say, they remained without notice till near eight o'clock. It had been the common custom of poor Edmonds, since he had made a practice of sleeping at the Hall, to go upon his round straight from the house before he went home; the gamekeepers and workmen who had been lately taken into employment went their several ways, sure to meet him or be visited by him in the course of the morning; and old Blackmore, the gardener, with the man who assisted him, proceeded at once to the garden, which lay at a little distance from the mansion.

Mrs. Edmonds, who had charge of the cows, usually milked them at an early hour of the morning, and sent up what was wanted at the Hall by her son; but for more than a fortnight she had been later than before, for hers was a heavy heart lately. It was eight o'clock, when the boy, carrying a small can of milk and a basket of butter, walked leisurely up to the terrace, and went round to the back door. He looked up to the windows, and marvelled to see them all shut; his was not the age of fears; but when he found the back door fastened, his surprise became mingled with alarm; and, after trying another entrance on that side, he knocked hard with his hand, and rang the bell sharply, his heart beginning to beat with doubt and terror. Immediately there was a noise above, and looking up he saw the face of the housemaid at a window, pale, haggard, and wild. For a moment she did not seem disposed to open it, for fright had nearly deprived her of her senses; but when the boy moved a little way back so that she could see him fully, and shouted to her, "What's the matter?—what's the matter?" she threw up the sash, having contrived to get her hands free, and exclaimed, "They have broken into the house, and locked us all in!"

"Where's my father?" demanded the boy, in terror. "I can't get in; where's my father?"

At the same moment the old housekeeper, Mrs. Chalke, appeared at the window, somewhat re-assured by the sound of the boy's voice. "Run, and call somebody," she said, "there's a good boy, and try and get in and let us out."

"I will go and call old Blackmore and Wilkins from the garden," he said; and setting down the milk and the basket, he ran off at full speed.

His news carried consternation and alarm to the gardeners; but old Blackmore recovered himself in a minute, and exclaimed, "Come along, Ned! Take a pickaxe; we'll soon get in."

The door, however, resisted all his efforts; and he was as far from his object as ever, when Mrs. Chalke called from above, "Try one of the windows, John Blackmore. You'll get in easier so."

The gardener was just about to follow her suggestion, when two of the gamekeepers came running up, with young Edmonds following as fast as his lesser limbs would let him. It then struck him that the boy's account of all the doors being fast might not be quite accurate, and several were tried anew, till at length one of the gamekeepers exclaimed, "They must have got in somehow. Perhaps the door in the stable-yard is open. Here, hold my gun; I'll run and see."

He first pushed the great gates, but they were shut, and then following exactly the course which Williams and his companions had pursued, he got into the yard, and almost immediately after his voice was heard exclaiming, "Here, here! this is the way;" and the whole party scrambling over, found him at the entrance of the passage, with the door wide open.

"Come along," cried Blackmore; "open some of the windows as we go, Ned. One of you fellows run and let the women out."

But, notwithstanding this desire, there were busy feelings amongst them that kept them altogether. The silence, the darkness of the house, had something terrible in it; but still they went on, opening the windows as they passed, till they reached the hall, where Blackmore paused; but the boy, becoming more and more terrified in regard to his father every moment, exclaimed, "This way, this way, Blackmore. He used to sleep in the room up here."

"Stay a minute, my dear," said the gardener, laying his hand upon young Edmonds's head. "Tom, you come on with me; better let the men go on first, my dear," and walking forward with sad misgivings in his heart, he opened the door of poor Edmonds's room. The passage was obscure the windows were closed, and the interior was quite dark; but there was no sound, and the old gardener, advancing cautiously, opened the shutters. "My God!" cried one of the men who was behind him; and, turning quickly round, the old gardener saw the floor covered with blood, and the dead body of his good friend lying on the bed. The four men gathered round, and it was long before any one ventured to speak; but in the midst of the deep silence a loud and wailing cry burst from behind them, and Blackmore, turning, threw his arms round the poor boy, while the tears dropped heavily from his own eyes.

"Better go away, my dear, better go away," he said. "Here, Ned, take him down to my cottage. Don't let him go home just yet. I'll go to your mother, and comfort her as well as I can. Go away, there's a good boy, this is no sight for you."

The boy was quite passive in their hands, and taking him by the arm, the under gardener led him away, while Blackmore whispered, "As soon as you have taken him to my wife, run over and fetch Dr. Western. You had better get the constable, too, and send word to the other magistrates."

"Shall I bring the surgeon?" asked the man, as he was going out of

the door. But Blackmore took up poor Edmonds's hand, let it drop again stiff and cold upon the bed, and shook his head mournfully.

"You may as well, however," he said; "the poor widow may want him."

They then proceeded to examine the house, and to release the two women who were shut up above. The object and proceedings of the robbers, as far as any traces of them remained, were soon discovered. Edmonds's gun was found in the housekeeper's room; and as the door leading into the yard had been locked the night before, it was clear that the lock had been picked, and entrance effected by that means. The whole party immediately applied themselves to look for footsteps, and, though they were somewhat puzzled by their own, which crossed the yard in a direct line, they found a number of others both going and coming.

CHAPTER LX.

"Come, Louisa, my love," said Mrs. Charlton, "do not be melancholy and anxious; I'm sure Mr. Morton is quite safe. Indeed, I had an intimation last night that such is the case, from good Mr. Nethersole, who heard it at Dr. Western's from Mrs. Evelyn—nay, there's no use of colouring, you naughty girl. You did not suppose my eyes were blind all this time, did you?"

Had there been esteem, respect, or affection, Louisa would have cast herself upon Mrs. Charlton's breast, and given way to grateful tears; but as there was neither she repressed them.

"Ma'am, the housemaid wants to speak to you," said a footman at the door; and Mrs. Charlton, wondering what a housemaid could wish to say to her, quitted the room.

After reflecting for a few minutes, not without both doubt and wonder, upon her step-mother's conduct on the present occasion, Louisa took up a book to divert her thoughts, and a minute or two after the great bell of the door rang. A step then sounded upon the stairs, which made Louisa's heart palpitate; Mrs. Charlton's voice was heard welcoming somebody; and in another moment that lady and Mr. Morton entered the room together. Mrs. Charlton's face was all radiant with the brightest and best-arranged smiles possible; and Morton advancing towards Louisa at once, with very little restraint upon the feelings of his heart, took her hand in his, and pressed his lips upon it.

"Come, no explanations now," said Mrs. Charlton, "we'll have breakfast first, for I am very hungry; and then, my love, our young friend and myself will have a conference upon matters of importance."

With an easy grace, which bespoke the utmost composure, Mrs. Charlton led the way to the breakfast-room, leaving a sufficient space between herself on the one part, and Mr. Morton and Louisa on the other, to afford the lovers a few moments of private conversation as they descended the stairs. The whole evolution was performed very neatly, Mrs. Charlton speaking near the door, and then immediately taking her departure, so that it was impossible for Morton to be civil enough to attend at her side. Not the most discreet chaperon could

have done it better. When, however, tea was made and coffee brought in, conversation became general, and naturally turned to the causes of the visitor's unexplained absence.

It was a somewhat difficult subject to deal with; but Morton generalised as much as possible, stating, indeed, the facts of his strange abduction, but withholding the names of the parties concerned in it. Mrs. Charlton, however, was not to be so satisfied, and inquired at once, first, whether Mr. Morton knew the persons implicated in so gross an outrage? and, next, what were their names?

"My dear madam," replied her guest, "my worthy solicitor, who was the first to come to my rescue, advises a prosecution, and says that some of the parties might be transported; but as I am very much disinclined to such harsh measures, I think it will be better perhaps not to mention any names till, after due deliberation, I have made up my mind to my course."

Mrs. Charlton merely replied, "Oh! very well;" and breakfast proceeded.

When that important avocation was at an end, a slight and only momentary tremor seemed to affect the lady of the house; but immediately after she rose, saying, in a clear sweet voice, "Now, my dear sir, I wish to speak with you for a few minutes; and, if you please, we will go into the library."

Mr. Morton, of course, acceded; and Mrs. Charlton and her visitor proceeded through the doors on the left, and were soon seated in the library. A short pause ensued; but Morton, perversely, would not break silence first, and at length Mrs. Charlton commenced with a gay, short, merry laugh.

"Well, Mr. Morton," she said, "this is, perhaps, almost ridiculous to speak about; but yet I feel myself called upon to say something about our dear Louisa. You must feel that this cannot go on further without some definite understanding between us upon the subject. Not, indeed, that I imagine you to be a man to trifle with any woman's affections; but people will make observations. In a word, then, you love Louisa—is it not so?"

"Most sincerely and devotedly, my dear madam," replied Morton. "I say at once I seek her hand, and am ready immediately to enter into explanations with both her guardians upon the subject."

This was not quite the reply that Mrs. Charlton desired. She had expected to hear of difficulties—to receive some excuses for presuming to address a young lady of considerable wealth without equal advantages. She had thought it would be so; several things that she had seen, as well as the report of others, had made her imagine it, but yet her confidence in that result had been somewhat shaken by other circumstances. Nevertheless, she had a reserve which she fancied quite secure. If Morton was not seeking Louisa for her wealth, he was evidently deeply attached to her; and she argued, if it be her money that is his object, she has enough to make part a bait sufficiently tempting; if it be herself, the loss of a portion will be nothing in his estimation.

After a moment's pause, then, she answered, "Nay, my dear sir, I too must claim some say in the matter. In the first place as a mother —and I am sure I regard Louisa with the affection of one—and, in the

next place, as one especially appointed by her dear father, the best and kindest man that ever lived"—and Mrs. Charlton took out a fine cambric handkerchief, embroidered in the corners—"appointed by her father, I say, to watch over her settlement in life. Perhaps you are not aware, Mr. Morton, that, by her father's will, my consent is absolutely necessary to her marriage, and, therefore, I am her guardian as far as that great step in a woman's life is concerned."

"My dear madam," replied Morton, "I have been fully made aware of the terms of Mr. Charlton's will——"

"Good!" thought Mrs. Charlton, "he has inquired into the matter. It is her fortune he seeks, and he is prepared to act like a man of sense."

But Mr. Morton proceeded, "I am quite ready to give every explanation to yourself, if you think fit, but first——"

"Oh! yes," said Mrs. Charlton, interrupting him, "it may first be necessary, as you say, to explain all the circumstances of the case; for, of course, they do not exactly appear upon the face of the will; and, indeed, I have always felt that, in consequence of Mr. Charlton not stating his intentions clearly in that document, I am placed in a very delicate and unpleasant position. It luckily happens now, however, that I have to deal with a man of high feeling and honour, who will understand my situation at once, and thus the task will be less difficult. It had better be undertaken at once, therefore, and thus the case stands: Mr. Charlton and I had often talked over dear Louisa's prospects; and though he was at one time somewhat inclined—out of regard for me I believe—that a marriage should take place between her and my son Alfred, I represented to him that the poor boy was in no degree fitted to make her happy, and induced him to put such a bar against it, that it could never be thought of. He then, as you know, made his will, leaving all his property to Louisa, with my full consent and approbation; but, at the same time, he said to me, 'My dearest Emily, while Louisa remains with you, united as you are by the strongest ties of affection, there will be quite enough to maintain your household in the style in which you are accustomed to live; but it is my intention to render your consent to her marriage indispensable, both for her own sake and yours, in order that if she chooses to marry, which, perhaps, may not be the case, you may be secured such a share in what I leave as will compensate to you for her seeking another home.'"

Mrs. Charlton paused, and looked at Mr. Morton; but that gentleman sat with his fine eyes bent upon the ground, without any movement of lip, nostril or eyebrow indicating what was passing in his mind; and she then went on in an easy natural tone, saying, "I argued against this arrangement; but he still adhered to it, though it was shaken before he died; but that lamentable event was so sudden that he had not time to make the better arrangements which I believe he proposed, and, therefore, of course, we must abide by those that exist."

"Certainly, my dear madam," replied Morton; "and may I now ask what it is that you think those arrangements imply?"

Now was the tug of war. It was the most important event of all those campaigns which Mrs. Charlton had carried on against the

poverty in which she was originally born. She had hitherto been a very successful general, but this was her Waterloo, and she felt all the weight of the occasion. Nevertheless she would not, by the pause of one moment, suffer Mr. Morton to see that she was calculating. It was her wish to impress him with the idea that all had been settled long before, between her and Mr. Charlton, and she replied in an instant,—"My dear husband's wish was, that, if Louisa married, such an arrangement should be made to secure to me one-half of the property, for which reason he placed the whole at my disposal if she married without my consent."

Morton had well-nigh laughed. The murder was out, the whole scheme developed; but he restrained himself, and demanded, "Pray, my dear madam, is there any memorandum of this intention of Mr. Charlton's, any document by which the matter may be defined?"

"No, sir, no!" answered the lady, beginning to grow angry at his coolness, and her cheek becoming somewhat flushed with a vague perception that he saw through her; "there is no memorandum—there is no document. But, surely, Mr. Morton," she added, in a less sharp tone, "you can trust to my word?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Morton; "but it would be much more satisfactory to me, my dear lady, to have something tangible to satisfy certain principles which I have within the last three days announced so distinctly, that I fear I could not retreat from them without such written proofs of Mr. Charlton's intentions."

The lady was in a state of high consternation and anger. She had expected no such opposition; but what could she do? Her own case was urgent; money she must have; she had always calculated upon having it; and even delay would be ruinous. In these circumstances she lost her usual caution, exposing her game more and more. "Such as I have stated were Mr. Charlton's intentions," she replied: "but I do not say, Mr. Morton, that I am by any means disposed to exact the complete fulfilment of his wishes. A third of the property, fairly estimated, is all that I expect; but that I think I have a right to demand."

"My dear madam," replied Morton, in the same quiet tone, "according to your own showing you have a right to demand half; and all I require is, that the fact of Mr. Charlton's intentions should be so clearly shown as to justify me in acceding—having, as I said, within these three days, distinctly expressed an opinion on the subject which I cannot retract."

"Within these three days!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, her cheek growing very red, "to whom, sir—who has a right to meddle with these matters but myself?"

"To your own son, my dear madam," answered her companion. "It is now necessary to inform you that Mr. Alfred Latimer, with a gang of not very respectable gentlemen whom he employed, was the person to carry me off from Mallington, and that his object was to drive a bargain with me to pay him certain thousand pounds on my marriage with Miss Charlton. He also hinted that you would have something of this kind to propose; but I told him distinctly, and at once, that I would never make a matter of merchandise of Miss Charlton's hand,

nor be a party to any such transaction; that I would wed her with all that her father left her, or with none, and therefore——"

"Then, then"—cried Mrs. Charlton, with fury flashing from her eyes; but before she could finish the sentence, Wilkinson, the footman, entered the room with a note upon a salver, saying, "Soames, the constable, brought this, ma'am, and he is waiting to see you."

Mrs. Charlton took the note, and was twisting it round her fingers; but the man added, "He says it's very immediate, ma'am, and very important."

His mistress tore it open, and read. At the first words a malicious and triumphant smile crossed her angry countenance, and at the end she rose and hurried out of the room; while Morton, supposing their conference ended, passed through the side door into the breakfast-room in search of Louisa.

CHAPTER LXI.

"CAN you tell me where I shall find Miss Charlton?" demanded Morton, as he entered the dining-room, and saw Mrs. Windsor's head looking in at the opposite door.

"She is in the little drawing-room, sir," answered the housekeeper; "but I was looking for you, sir—I beg pardon for the liberty. I have something very particular to say to you, if you would be good enough to allow me five minutes' conversation."

"Very willingly, Mrs. Windsor," answered Morton, moving towards the door, "but I fear if you desire any conversation with me, you must come down to the inn, as, in consequence of something that has just passed, I do not propose to trespass upon Mrs. Charlton's hospitality any longer. At present I must speak with Miss Charlton immediately."

"I guess what has passed, sir," answered Mrs. Windsor, with a grave face, "and wish I could have spoken to you before, as it was just about that I desired to say a word or two, for Mrs. Charlton has in reality no more power over Miss Louisa, or her fortune either, than I have; and I do not like to see my poor young lady made unhappy."

Morton, on his part, hurried on, and at once entered the little drawing-room, where he found his fair Louisa gazing out of the window, with a look of deep and anxious thought. She sprang to meet him, however, as soon as she saw him, and we must forgive Morton if he took one embrace, ay, and one kiss.

"Listen, dearest," he said, "for we may be interrupted in a moment—I shall have to leave this house very soon. She wishes to make a matter of merchandise of your hand. I will consent to no such thing. It shall never be said I bought my Louisa. She has, she says, and so says your poor father's will, the power of depriving you of all he left, if you marry without her consent, and for that consent she demands half your property. So be it—Louisa is to me a treasure which makes all other wealth valueless. I can settle upon you enough to compensate for what you lose. Will you, dear one—will you make this

sacrifice for me, and be mine even at the risk of forfeiting all that is now your own?"

"Oh, Morton!" cried Louisa, sadly, "it is you that will lose what you had a right to expect."

"I win all that I desire if I win you, Louisa," answered Morton. "Do you consent?—Will you be mine at any risk?"

"At any, at every risk, I will," replied Louisa, "and try to compensate, by my love and gratitude, for such noble conduct. But what must I do, Morton, if——"

"Go down as soon as possible to Dr. Western's," answered Morton, before she could finish her question. "Take up your abode with him and Mrs. Evelyn till you can be mine. He is your guardian, and his house is your proper place of refuge, dearest—some one is coming. Will you promise me to do so?"

"I will, Edmond," she said, "I will; nothing shall stop me."

Almost as she spoke Mrs. Charlton entered the room; but the expression of that lady's countenance was so peculiar that it deserves a word or two for itself. There was still a touch of anger about it, but subdued and quieted, while a slight smile mingled an air of triumph with the bitterness of expression, as if she had suddenly gained some advantage over an enemy. Her tone, too, when she spoke was cold and decided, though with an affectation of perfect ease, which showed the effect a little too plainly.

"So," she said somewhat sarcastically, "you are consulting about it. Have you made up your minds yet?"

"You are mistaken, my dear madam," answered Morton: "we are not consulting upon it at all; and as to my mind, it is perfectly made up."

"Well, I have been thinking of other things," said Mrs. Charlton, "and we can talk of that afterwards, should it be necessary. Pray be seated, Mr. Morton. You have heard, I suppose, what has happened in our neighbourhood?"

"No, indeed," answered her guest; "I have heard of nothing extraordinary, except what has happened to myself, within this last two or three days."

The words would bear two interpretations, and consequently Mrs. Charlton immediately contrived to think that Morton referred to her own conduct towards him. "Oh! yes," she answered, "there has been something both very extraordinary and very horrible happened last night. I thought you must have known it—Mallington Hall was broken into, the door of the plate-room forced open, and everything it contained carried off."

Morton was considerably moved. His brow contracted, his cheek got a little heated, and his eyes flashed. "This is too bad," he cried, "this is really too bad."

"It is indeed," answered Mrs. Charlton, coolly; "but that is not all. The worst yet remains to be told. However, the villains are not likely to escape. They are pretty well known, I am told, and means have been taken for their immediate apprehension."

"I am very glad to hear it," answered Morton; "for the various outrages that have lately taken place in this neighbourhood show that there are some desperate characters down here."

"Quite right, my dear sir," replied Mrs. Charlton, keeping her eye fixed upon his face. "The principal person suspected is a certain lawyer's clerk, who robbed his employer some time ago and absconded. There have been bills stuck up all about the place regarding him. Have you seen them, Mr. Morton?"

"Oh!—about that unfortunate fellow, Wilkins," replied the gentleman to whom she spoke. "But if he be suspected of a robbery last night an error has been committed, as I happen to know that he was not in this neighbourhood."

"Are you acquainted with him, then, Mr. Morton?" demanded the lady, in the quietest possible tone.

"I have seen him several times at Mr. Quatterly's," answered Morton. carelessly; "but I know that he could not have done this that is attributed to him, as he was not here."

"Oh! then, you know Mr. Quatterly?" rejoined the lady, with a smile.

"Extremely well," was Morton's reply; though he began to be a little surprised at Mrs. Charlton's tone. "Mr. Quatterly is my own solicitor, and the money stolen happened to be my own."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "Then it has not reached you?"

"Oh! yes, it has," answered Morton. "Mr. Quatterly, of course. made it good to me."

"Ahem!" said the lady; but Louisa—who by long and sad experience knew more of her step-dame than Morton did—saw very well that there was something kept back, which she expected to produce at last with great effect, and she demanded, "What is there more? You said that the worst remained to be told."

"Yes, indeed!" answered Mrs. Charlton; "the worst does remain to be told, and a horrible story it is. It seems that an attempt was made upon the house some time ago; and that ever since poor Edmonds, the park-keeper—as good a creature as ever lived—you know him, Mr. Morton, I think, for you've often been seen talking with him, they tell me?"

"I know him very well, madam," answered Morton; "a highly respectable and honest man. What of him?"

Mrs. Charlton paused for a moment, with a somewhat puzzled look; but then she answered, "Ever since that last attempt, it seems poor Edmonds has slept in the house to protect it. The villains, whoever they were, must have known all the rooms and passages—and it is a difficult house, too—so they could have been no common burglars. However, they made their way in by picking the lock of a back door; and what were all their proceedings within, we, of course, cannot tell; but the result is now clear enough."

She paused again; and it was evident, both to Morton and to Louisa, that for some purpose of her own she was drawing her story out to as great a length as possible. Morton, however, anxious to get at the facts, inquired eagerly, "But what was that result, my dear madam? It is that we principally desire to hear."

"Why, that poor Edmonds was murdered," answered Mrs. Charlton. "He was found lying on his bed, shot through the head."

Both Louisa and her lover turned as pale as death. "Good God!"

exclaimed Morton, starting up, "I must go down and see about it. This is horrible, indeed!"

"Stay a moment, Mr. Morton," said Mrs. Charlton; "we have, you know, some business to settle, and as I hate talking frequently upon disagreeable subjects, we had better settle it at once."

"As far as I am concerned," answered Morton, abruptly, "the whole business is settled already. I think you could not mistake my meaning, my dear lady."

"Yet a moment," said the mistress of the house, beckoning him towards a window. "Louisa, you need not go; this business concerns you, too. Mr. Morton, you are in a dangerous situation, which will become more or less so according to your conduct to me."

"My dear madam, you are pleased to be enigmatical," answered Morton, indignation beginning to master him. "Will you have the goodness to explain yourself clearly, for, standing here comfortably in the drawing-room of Mallington House, I do not see how I can be in a dangerous situation at all."

Mrs. Charlton's fair round cheek flushed, and she answered, "I will explain myself clearly. It is supposed, my dear sir, that the name you have been pleased to assume in this place is not your real one." A slight smile came over Morton's face, and the lady went on, "I see I am right; but it is moreover suspected—mind, I don't say that it is so—that your name is more like Wilkins than Morton. Do you deny it?"

Morton paused for an instant, and then answered coolly, giving a gay glance of his eye to Louisa as he did so, "Perhaps it is, my dear madam."

Louisa, sad and distressed as she was, could not refrain from a smile: and Mrs. Charlton thought, as she observed the whole, "Then she has known it all the time. 'Pon my word, this is too bad! What creatures girls are in these days!"

She then went on aloud, however, to say, "This is not all, Mr. Morton, or Mr. Wilkins—you are strongly suspected of having some share in this dark deed at Mallington Hall.—Mind, I don't say that it is so, but I tell you that I have the power of confirming those suspicions in a very strange manner." She spoke sternly and resolutely, fixing her eye upon him as if she would have searched his soul.

"Pooh, pooh!" exclaimed Morton, with his lip curling. "This is carrying the matter too far."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Charlton, pointing with her finger through the window down the hill, up which was seen coming at considerable speed a gentleman on horseback, followed by a servant. "You have two minutes to decide upon what I propose to you, and not more. What do you say?"

"Exactly what I said before," answered Morton, coolly; "and allow me to add, madam, that Mrs. Charlton does not raise herself in my opinion by being ready, for a sum of money, to give the hand of her husband's daughter to a man whom she believes to be a swindler, and suspects of being a murderer."

"I will have revenge, at least," muttered Mrs. Charlton; and then, raising her voice, she exclaimed, "Soames, Soames! come in."

Louisa had been gazing down upon the carpet as if she had been studying the gay flowers with which it was covered; but suddenly a look of horror and consternation, deep and intense, overspread her countenance, as if some startling and dreadful fact had suddenly presented itself to her mind, and starting forward, she caught Mrs. Charlton's arm, exclaiming, "Stay, stay—for Heaven's sake stay! you do not know what you are doing. You are destroying yourself."

But as she spoke the constable entered the room, and Mrs. Charlton cried at once, "Take him in charge, Soames."

"What is the matter, dearest Louisa?" asked Morton in a tone of surprise. "You cannot suppose for a moment——"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Louisa wringing her hands; "but I fear she will bring down destruction on her own head."

"I am the best judge of my own acts, Miss Charlton," said the lady. "Take him in charge, Soames. He owns that his name is Wilkins, and not Morton."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Morton, laughing. "Not exactly that, as Miss Charlton can bear witness. I said, more like it. This is a very serious business; and yet, pushed to this extremity, I cannot but feel that it becomes in some degree a jest."

"You will find it no jest, I suspect," replied Mrs. Charlton, not a little puzzled by Mr. Morton's demeanour, and only the more angry from a vague apprehension that she had suffered rage to carry her beyond the bounds of prudence; "however, the matter is not in my hands now. Louisa, you may as well retire, for Mr. Middleton must be already at the door, and the examination of this person will probably be proceeded with here. Such scenes are not fit for young ladies."

"You will excuse me, madam," replied Louisa. "I shall certainly remain here. No place can be more fit for me than by the side of my future husband, when a false, I might call it a ridiculous, accusation is brought against him."

"Oh, ho! so bold!" said Mrs. Charlton; "but I have understood you long, young lady. Nevertheless, it is as well, perhaps, that you should stay to witness what takes place regarding the man of your choice."

"There can be nothing to witness, madam, that I am afraid of," replied Louisa; but even while she was speaking, the door opened and Mr. Middleton was announced. The constable had been talking for a moment to Mr. Morton, and as soon as the magistrate had entered the room, he spoke a few words to the servant in a low tone, to which the man replied, "I'll send down directly." Harry Soames nodded his head, and then returned quickly to the side of Mr. Morton, towards whom he seemed inclined to testify every sort of respect.

The air of Mr. Middleton was very grand and important indeed. He felt that he was a man of consequence—that his bosom was the temple of justice, and that J. P. was written on his forehead, or ought to be. With a self-satisfied smile, he crossed the room to shake hands with Mrs. Charlton, and conversed with her for a few minutes in a low voice, and then observing that Miss Charlton and her lover were speaking together, he exclaimed, "No conversing with the prisoner. Constable, see that nothing of this kind takes place."

"Then I am to consider myself a prisoner, sir?" demanded Morton, addressing the magistrate.

"Most assuredly!" answered Mr. Middleton, with a look of cold scorn.

"On what charge, and on whose authority?" asked the young gentleman.

"On the charge of fraud, robbery, and murder!" replied Mr. Middleton, "and on my authority."

His tone was intended to be very laconic and decided, but Morton persevered. "May I beg to know who it is brings the charge?" he next inquired. "Of course you do not act without information?"

"Oh, no!" answered the magistrate; "I act upon very good information. You are in custody on suspicion, young man. You will hear more by-and-by."

"At all events," answered Morton, "let me bring to your remembrance that a person should always be looked upon as innocent till he is proved guilty, and that it is sometimes inconvenient to forget that you are a gentleman or that another is so, as you may have occasion afterwards to repent it."

"What, sir! do you venture to threaten me, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Middleton in fury; "to threaten a magistrate in the execution of his duty!"

"No!" replied Morton, calmly; "I do not threaten you at all, Mr. Middleton. I only wish to call you back to a sense of propriety."

"This is foolish nonsense," replied the worthy gentleman; "but we shall soon have Sir Simon Upplestone here, and we can proceed to business on the spot. If you will have the kindness to let us use one of your drawing-rooms, Mrs. Charlton, I do not see why we should adjourn. Or we can go to the library, which, perhaps, will be more out of your way."

"Let it be here, by all means," answered Mrs. Charlton; "there stands a young lady who declares she will be present the whole time; and I rather imagine that I shall be forced to submit to examination as a witness."

Mr. Middleton raised his eyebrows at the announcement of Louisa's intention, and looked surprised at Mrs. Charlton's hint of her own testimony being important; but after a few moments' private conversation with that lady, he seemed still more surprised, and turning round, exclaimed aloud, "Is it possible! The whole seems so clear that we might, I think, commit him for trial at once—but here is Sir Simon, I suppose. Who has he got with him, I wonder?"

The last observations of Mr. Middleton were produced by the sound of steps and voices coming up the stairs; but, when the door opened, he beheld not only his friend Sir Simon Upplestone, but Dr. Western and another gentleman, with two or three persons of an inferior class, standing at the top of the staircase. The first who entered was the baronet, who, without noticing any one else in the room, advanced straight towards his brother magistrate, and then said in a loud whisper, "I am afraid there has been a great mistake here, Middleton. You've been in too great a hurry."

"Not a bit, Sir Simon," replied Mr. Middleton, in a determined

tone. "You are not acquainted with all the circumstances, my good friend."

"Nor you either, Middleton," answered the other.

While he was speaking, Dr. Western entered the room, with an expression both of pain and indignation on his countenance, and advancing at once to Morton, by whose side Louisa was still standing, he shook hands with them both, and then turning to the other magistrates, demanded aloud, "What is all this folly, Mr. Middleton?"

"Hush, hush," said Morton in a low tone. "Let the whole thing proceed, my dear friend. I wish particularly to see that worthy lady play her game out."

In the meantime Mr. Middleton was answering Dr. Western's question in a somewhat sarcastic tone, saying, "The folly, my reverend friend, happens to be no folly at all. An exceedingly strong case of suspicion has been made out against that gentleman, standing there, as accessory, if not principal, in the robbery of Mallington Hall, and the murder of poor Edmonds; and since I have come here this morning additional evidence has been tendered, which must, I think, place his guilt beyond all manner of doubt, and require his immediate committal. I am glad of the assistance of my two brother justices, but if they had not been present I should have taken the responsibility upon myself."

A clear merry laugh rang through the room, and a good round voice exclaimed, "Ay, if ifs and ands were pots and pans, there would be no work for the tinkers.—How do you do, my dear sir? how do you do? You seem to have had a pleasant time of it since we parted yesterday evening; but when the cat's away the mice will play. As it seems clear we are to have larks for supper, I may as well get ready my knife and fork;" and Mr. Quatterly, after having shaken hands with Morton, and given a gay sparkling glance from his face to that of Louisa Charlton, murmuring to himself, "Devilish pretty! devilish pretty!" pulled out of his pocket a note-book, a pencil and some papers, folded up and tied together with red tape.

At the same time Dr. Western was advancing to speak with the other magistrates and Mrs. Charlton, who were gathered together in a group on the opposite side of the room; but Morton at this moment took a step forward, and said aloud, "My dear Dr. Western, you must hear me for a moment. This business cannot, and must not, be stopped. A very horrible charge, perfectly unfounded, as you well know, has been brought against me this morning, together with half a dozen other minor insinuations, partly proceeding from malice, and partly from stupidity, originating, I have no doubt, amongst the gossips of this little town, and fostered under the kind care of that lady and that gentleman," and he pointed to Mrs. Charlton and Mr. Middleton. "These charges and insinuations must at once be thoroughly and accurately investigated, and I have to beg you, my dear sir, and also my friend here on the left, not to bring forward any one particular to show the persons concerned the absurdity of the accusation, till all the charges themselves are fairly stated, and the evidence upon which they are grounded adduced. I would rather, if it were necessary, sleep a night in prison than that the whole of the business should not be made quite clear."

he saw. His eyes fell first, however, upon the group consisting of Louisa, Mr. Morton, and the constable, with Mr. Quatterly a step before them, as an outpost in advance of their camp; and he bowed low to the young lady, and still more low and reverently to the young gentleman. Mr. Quatterly, however, shook hands with him, saying, "Ah, Skinner! how do you do? These gentlemen are in a mess, I think;" and then, as he saw his fellow solicitor raise his eyes to the group on the opposite side of the room, he added, "There, Skinner, go across Tom Tickler's ground, and tell their worships what they're to do, for they don't know."

Mr. Skinner accordingly crossed over; and, after a brief consultation with the magistrates, decided that it was better all the witnesses should be admitted. It was their usual custom in that part of the county, he said, as it was merely a preparatory investigation, and truth might be better obtained by giving general publicity in this stage of the proceedings. Mr. Quatterly did not object, though he shook his head, as if he had some doubts of the soundness of the doctrine; and the door having been opened, a mixed multitude entered, consisting of gamekeepers, gardeners, housekeepers, housemaids, Mr. Gibbs, and Miss Mathilda Martin. Mrs. Charlton, however, was somewhat surprised to see her friend Mrs. Windsor come in with the rest.

"What do you want here, Windsor?" said Mrs. Charlton, in a sharp key.

"To give my evidence, ma'am," said Mrs. Windsor, respectfully.

"Your evidence!" exclaimed the mistress. "You can know nothing about it."

"I think I do, ma'am," rejoined the housekeeper, drily.

In the meantime the chairs and tables were arranged, under the direction of Mr. Skinner, very much in the way that Mr. Quatterly had proposed. The magistrate's clerk, however, contented himself with an ordinary chair, and, greatly to Mrs. Charlton's surprise and disgust, placed the fourth arm-chair for Mr. Morton with his own hands close to the table, and opposite to the one which he himself was about to occupy, while the magistrates were arranged on either side. Pens, ink, and paper having been procured—Dr. Western, as the senior magistrate, placed in the chair—the witnesses arranged, some seated, some standing towards the sides of the room,—the investigation commenced.

Dr. Western looked around the circle; and then, with a glance at Mr. Quatterly, though his heart was very sad—for he was one of those true Christians who mourn over the crimes of their fellow-creatures—he could not forbear a faint smile at what he regarded as one of the most absurd scenes he had ever beheld. Mr. Quatterly caught his eye and laughed merrily, rubbing his small fat white hands as if it were the best joke in the world, for he was more accustomed to such scenes, and had so long given up the hope of mending human beings, that he thought he had a right to be amused at their follies, whether solemn or gay.

"Let them go on!" said the worthy solicitor, with a nod to the clergyman; "even in a farce, truths will come out unexpectedly."

Mr. Middleton and Mrs. Charlton were both nettled at Dr. Western's smile and Mr. Quatterly's laugh—surprised, indeed, and somewhat pa-

prehensive that they were not quite right, but more angry than either, and resolved to go on in their course only the more vehemently, in order to prove that they had had good cause for suspicion. Mrs. Charlton, it is true, was actuated by very different feelings from the worthy justice; for, as she found that she could not gain her original purpose with Mr. Morton, she was resolved to have revenge; and being, as we have shown, subject to much more severe internal commotions than her calm and sweet exterior usually suffered to appear, she would have given one of her own pretty white hands to have seen her lately-cherished guest hanging by the neck from any piece of timber that was convenient.

"I think I had better read," said Mr. Middleton, beginning the investigation, "the notes I took of the state of Mallington Hall, and the adjacent premises, when I examined them this morning, on receiving information of the crime that was committed there last night."

"By all means," answered Dr. Western; "I am as yet nearly ignorant of the whole circumstances."

"That is clear," said Mr. Middleton; and he then proceeded to read from a little note-book the memoranda which he had taken on the spot, commenting, as he went, with that sort of routine of commonplaces, which is a wonderful engine for obtaining a reputation for sagacity—with the vulgar. Dr. Western listened with horror and grief, covering his eyes with his hands, as if unwilling that all he felt should appear; and the whole court, if it could be so called, heard the facts in deep silence.

When he had done this, Mr. Middleton paused, and looked round with the consciousness of having made a very neat and compact statement, deserving some credit.

Mr. Quatterly, however, stepped in to prevent him enjoying his self-satisfaction too long. "Well, sir," he said, "and how does that affect the gentleman before you?"

"You shall hear in a few minutes, sir," answered Mr. Middleton, solemnly raising himself from his chair, and looking over the table at Morton's feet; "you must have remarked that the footsteps which were traced in the yard were of three distinct sizes. One very large and long, one somewhat smaller, and one very small and neat, precisely what is usually called a gentleman's footstep."

"Well, sir," said Mr. Quatterly, "what of that?" But Mr. Middleton did not choose to take any notice of the solicitor, and went on to say, addressing Dr. Western, "You will see here, my dear sir, the deposition of one Gibbs, taken by myself and Sir Simon Upplestone on the seventeenth of this month, by which it appears that on the very night when Mallington Hall was before attempted, the notorious Jack Williams was seen in the park in earnest conversation with this very Mr. Morton—in Mallington Park, I say, where neither of them had any right to be at that hour, except for illegal purposes."

Morton smiled, and Mr. Quatterly, as usual, rubbed his hands, saying, "A new dictum in law, I think—that men have a right to be in another man's park for illegal purposes. However, my dear sir, I deny the whole position, and beg that, before you assume that Mr. Morton had no right to be there, you will prove it. Whether you do or not, I'll prove the contrary."

"How so, sir?" demanded Mr. Middleton, growing furious.

"By and by—by and by," said Mr. Quatterly, nodding his head let us have the whole case first. Pray read the deposition, Dr. Western, for, as the warrant I see is dated on that day, it may be of consequence."

Dr. Western put on his spectacles, and read, smiling when he came to the assertion that his young friend was known by another name than that of Morton, and saying, as a commentary, "I am well aware of that fact; and am afraid I must plead guilty to being an accessory."

When he had gone on to the end, Mr. Middleton proceeded, in the tone of a public accuser, rather than that of a justice of the peace: "It is proved by numerous witnesses," he continued, "that this gentleman, whoever he may be, was constantly seen hanging about Mallington Park and Mallington Hall—that he obtained admission more than once into the house, and examined it most curiously—that he made himself acquainted with the habits of the people upon the estate, and learned at what time they were least upon their guard. It was also proved, or can be proved, that he absented himself from Mallington without any apparent cause, or giving any notice of his departure, from the morning of Saturday till the morning of Monday, in which interval the robbery and murder were committed. We have seen that the criminals who committed the act must have been well acquainted with the house, and must have gained information of the usual proceedings of the servants: that one set of footmarks was small and neat, very like those which would be left by the prisoner's feet; and that he has been seen consorting by night, and when he thought himself unobserved, with some of the most desperate characters in the county. Now, I must say, and must contend," and he thumped the table with his fist, "that there is perfectly sufficient before us to send the case to a jury, even if there were no other evidence to be produced, which I am informed there is, and evidence of a very important character too."

"I've seen an innocent man hanged upon less," said Mr. Quatterly, drily; and Louisa Charlton started and looked at him for a moment with fear and surprise.

The lady of the house had sat while all this was going on, with her arm thrown over the back of her chair, her two pretty little feet extended, and her head drooping forward with an air of studied but graceful attention. Slight, very slight indications of what was passing in her mind floated over her countenance from time to time; but now, when Mr. Middleton turned towards her, saying, "Mrs. Charlton, I think"—she rose and advanced towards the table with a melancholy and reluctant air.

"I have very little evidence to give, sir," she said, "myself; and as you all know what kindness and attention I have shown to Mr. Morton, and what esteem, and I may say regard, I once entertained for him, you will easily conceive how painful that evidence must be, especially as it is confirmatory of the worst suspicions that are entertained. Mr. Morton has been, as Mr. Middleton says, absent from my house, where he was on a visit, from Saturday morning till this morning, at about a quarter to ten—at least, that was the first time I saw him,

though I am afraid there is clear proof of his having been in the house previously, without my knowledge. Just before I met him coming up the stairs, and apparently freshly arrived, I was called out of the drawing-room by the upper housemaid, who informed me that she had found in Mr. Morton's room, wrapped up in a bundle, and thrust under the drawers, a sort of carman's frock, stained with blood, and a jacket in the same condition, with a good deal of mud and dirt upon it, but having the whole sleeve still wet with gore. Not having heard, at the time, of the barbarous murder of poor Edmonds, and never dreaming that there was any one in my house who would commit such an act, I took no particular notice, but said that it must be some accident, and ordered her to leave the things where she found them. She is here present, and can give her own testimony. These blood-stained clothes are, I suppose, where they were first discovered?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the housemaid, dropping a courtsey.

"A pretty little concatenation," said Mr. Quatterly. "Pray, sir, let us have the things down. You can take the evidence of the housemaid while they are being brought."

Mrs. Charlton immediately ordered one of the men-servants to go up and fetch the bundle, describing where it was to be found, and laying particular stress upon the words, "In Mr. Morton's room."

The housemaid was then called upon for her testimony, and fully confirmed Mrs. Charlton's account; adding, that she had found the marks of some dirty footsteps up the stairs that morning. She was just concluding when the servant returned with the bundle, which was speedily spread out upon the table.

"Look to Miss Charlton," cried Dr. Western, "she is going to faint!"

"No," said Louisa, rising; "but I wish to give my evidence, terrible as it is."

"Stop a little, my dear," said Mr. Quatterly, patting her gently on the hand. "Do not alarm yourself; this will all be made clear."

"Not without dreadful consequences," said Louisa, taking her seat again, and covering her eyes with her hand.

Each of the magistrates examined the frock and jacket carefully; and then Mr. Middleton, rising, said in a solemn and pompous tone, "Sir Simon, I think this is quite sufficient; and that we are not only justified, but called upon by our duty, to commit the prisoner for trial. Is it not so, Dr. Western?"

"We can do no such thing," answered the clergyman; for I happen to know, that it is utterly impossible that Mr. Morton can have had any share in this transaction."

Mrs. Charlton fixed her beautiful blue eyes upon him with not the sweetest expression in the world, and Mr. Quatterly, advancing a step, remarked, "You are in a mighty hurry, worshipful sir; I should have thought it was to-day that the fox-hounds were to meet. One story is very good till another is told; and, by your good leave, you must now hear that other. You have made a very good story of it, and I must say that a capital special pleader was spoiled when nature turned you into a country squire; but now we will proceed in order, if you please; for you have made various assumptions, and thrown out various insinuations, of which I must clear the case."

"I beg, sir, that you would treat the court with respect," exclaimed Mr. Middleton, half rising.

"With the most profound," said Mr. Quatterly; "as deep as a draw-well, though not perhaps quite so clear. We will admit almost all your premises; but strip them, if you please, of your deductions. In the first place, the prisoner, for reasons of his own, did choose, in coming down here, to assume a name different from that by which he usually goes, though still one that he has a right to, for his name is Edmond Morton, as I can testify. In the next place, he was seen—at least, I have no doubt that such was the case—in Mallington Park, speaking with that very notorious person Jack Williams, who is, I am happy to tell you, now in custody. I have no doubt either that their conversation was earnest, nay, perhaps, very vehement; but as to your assumption, that neither of them had any right there, that I have before denied, and do still deny."

"Upon what grounds, sir?" demanded Mr. Middleton, beginning to find his ideas getting a little confused.

"Upon the best of all possible grounds," answered Mr. Quatterly; "as you shall hear. Jack Williams, perhaps, had no right there—I am not aware that he had. It is not in evidence—and yet it might be so; for if Mr. Morton invited him he had a right, and therefore your assumption in his case is as unwarranted as in the other. But, in regard to Mr. Morton, I not only contend that he had a right, but that nobody on earth—let his condition, state, rank, or calling be what they may—had so good a right to be in Mallington Park, at any hour of the day or night which unto him might seem expedient; for who can have so good a title to walk in a park, Mallington Park or any other, as the owner thereof?"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Middleton. Has Mr. Morton purchased the park? I did not know it could be sold."

"You have got a capital case of circumstantial evidence," continued Mr. Quatterly, enjoying the evident consternation and surprise of the profound magistrate, "and now I will tell you what you were going to commit a man for. For breaking into his own house, robbing his own plate-room, and shooting his own park-keeper. All these circumstances are very probable! Reason and likelihood goes with them. But stay a minute—don't be in a hurry, either on one side or the other. We will have the whole matter clear before we have done with it, if you please. You shall have full evidence that the gentleman now before you is the proprietor of Mallington Park, of Mallington Hall, and of everything that it contains, and that the poor man who lost his life there was his servant, and had been receiving wages from him for some time."

"I told you you were going too fast, Middleton," whispered Sir Simon Upplestone, across Dr. Western.

"Pish!" cried Mr. Middleton, in a high state of excitement; and Mr. Quatterly went on, saying, "As to Mr. Morton's absence from this place from Saturday morning till Monday morning, that can be easily accounted for. But it may be sufficient for our present purpose to show where that gentleman was at the time the murder was committed. Now, up to the hour of half-past seven o'clock on Sunday evening, he was, with myself and Dr. Western, at the distance of two-

and-twenty miles from Mallington; he then set off in a hack p'id chaise, and a dark night, intending, I believe, to sleep here; but t chaise unfortunately broke down some seven miles from this pl about ten o'clock. He reached a public-house, called the Hand- Hand, about four miles off, towards eleven, and remained there t this morning, at about half-past eight, when he left it to walk hithe without ever quitting the house in the interval. It may seem to th sagacity of your worships somewhat extraordinary that I should com here so well prepared to meet this case; and as Justice is a very suspicious person, apt to peep out under her bandage, just to see that nobody is playing her a trick, this fact must be explained also. The truth, then, is, that as Dr. Western and myself were driving over hither from the town of ——, we came upon Mr. Morton's post-chaise, with the axle broken, and one of the wheels off, and with a man doing his best to pull it further to pieces for the purpose of mending it. The post-boy who drove it was in the act of giving instructions to that effect, and by him we were informed that the late tenant of his vehicle had the night before gone on to the Hand-in-Hand, two or three miles further, and, stopping there to water the horses, we had a full, true, and particular account from the landlady of the arrival and departure of her guest, for whom we inquired. There sits Dr. Western, who can corroborate my evidence."

Dr. Western bowed his head and said, "Entirely."

"And now," continued Mr. Quatterly; but Mr. Middleton interrupted him, beginning to find that he was in what is usually termed the wrong box. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "if all these circumstances can be so clearly explained, the great weight of suspicion is removed; but still it would be satisfactory to all parties if the whole were cleared up, and perhaps Mr. Morton will assign the cause of his meeting with Williams, who is certainly not fit society for a gentleman of property."

"That is very easily explained, sir," replied Morton. "It may be in your recollection, and certainly is in Dr. Western's, that I was knocked down upon the common here, and on that occasion I lost a pocket-book containing the certificate of my grandfather's marriage, and various other papers of considerable importance. I sent for a Bow-street officer from London, and offered a reward for the recovery of the papers. We found that the parties who possessed them comprehended their value, and thought that I might be induced to give a much larger sum for them than I had offered. They opened a communication with me to that effect, and a place of meeting was appointed, first in Wenlock Wood, and subsequently in Mallington Park. I went to the rendezvous, as agreed upon, alone, and not having been able to come to satisfactory terms with the man Williams, the person who met me there, I was walking back again when I saw somebody scampering off, who, it now seems, was the worthy gentleman with his Fragrant Balm of Trinidad. Such is the plain state of the case, as there are several persons here who know; and if there be anything else that requires explanation, it must be given, as the whole of this matter had better be cleared up at once, especially the placing of those bloody clothes in the room which I lately occupied, for I should wish to be quite sure that malice had no part in such a proceeding."

"Oh! hush, hush!" said a faint voice behind him.

t Mr. Middleton replied, without attending to those sounds, at is just what I was going to observe, sir," he said; "it is very ssary that the fact should be explained. It seems clear to me these clothes on which the blood is not yet dry, as you perceive, st have belonged to the person who committed the crime. Now, v came they in this house? How came they in that room? That he question. Soames, you had better call all the servants up, and my man and Sir Simon's aid you, with any persons you can collect ar, to ensure that nobody quits the house without permission."

Mrs. Charlton displayed at this moment a considerable degree of agitation. She moved about with a certain sort of nervous uneasiness in her chair, and seemed twice as if she was about to speak. She did not do so, however, and it was Mr. Quatterly who proceeded as soon as the magistrate had done. "There are one or two other questions, in the first place, I should like to establish," he said; "as the charge has been made against Mr. Morton, it is necessary to trace his whole course, and therefore I wish to question some of the servants, if you have no objection."

"None whatever," said Sir Simon Upplestone.

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Middleton, courteously.

"I would fain know, then," continued Mr. Quatterly, "who it was that let this gentleman in this morning?"

"I did, sir," answered the man Wilkinson, stepping forward.

"At what hour was that?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"It might be half-past nine, or a quarter to ten," was the servant's reply.

"What did Mr. Morton then do?" inquired Mr. Quatterly.

"He walked straight up stairs towards the drawing-room," answered Wilkinson, "and met my mistress at the drawing-room door."

"You are quite sure that he did not go up to his room?" said Mr. Quatterly.

"Quite sure," replied the servant, "for I heard him speak to my mistress immediately, and saw them go into the drawing-room together."

"I will only remark," proceeded the solicitor, "that, from the lady's evidence, these articles were found before she met Mr. Morton. I will now ask, however, whether any one saw that gentleman in the house, or about the house, before he was admitted by the footman?"

There was a complete silence; and he went on, "Then, now, Mr. What's-your-name, which door did Mr. Morton come in by? There are more doors than one to the house, I suppose?"

"He came in by the great gates, sir," answered the man. "The bell rang, and I opened the door of the house, and went out to let him in."

"Then he was actually without the garden-wall when you first saw him?" said Mr. Quatterly.

Wilkinson assented, and the lawyer went on, "Was the house-door locked, or open?"

"It was locked when I got up, sir," said the housemaid; "but I opened it to sweep out the hall."

"Well, then, my pretty girl," continued the solicitor, "since you

are upon your legs, I'll ask you a question or two, with their wor 'd leave. You said just now that you had found dirty footmarks u' stairs. When did you make that discovery?"

"When first I got up, sir," said the girl; "as soon as I had t' down the shutters off the glass-door in the garden I saw them dir —first upon the mat, and then upon the stairs, and upon the oil-cl too, for that matter."

"Then they began at the glass-door going into the garden," s Mr. Quatterly, "and went up stairs. How far could you tra them?"

"Why, as far as Mr. Alfred's room," replied the girl.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly; and Dr. Western suddenly raise his head with a look of horror and consternation.

"Were the marks plain there?" demanded the solicitor, still ad dressing the housemaid.

"There was a piece of mud and some gravel stones," replied th girl; "but they were not so plain as below."

"Could you track them any further?" was the solicitor's nex question.

"I didn't remark them," she said.

"Did you go into that room?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"No, sir," replied the girl; "I had all the lower part of the hous to do first; and when I went up after our breakfast, I first went to Mr. Morton's room, to open the windows there. It lies at the other end of the passage, you know."

"No, I don't know," answered Mr. Quatterly. "What may be the distance?"

"Oh! not ten steps," answered the girl. Mr. Alfred's is just over Miss Louisa's room, and the other is down two doors beyond."

"Was the glass-door open or shut?" inquired Mr. Quatterly.

"It was locked, but not bolted," said the housemaid.

"I bolted it last night with my own hands," observed the butler. who had entered the room, with the cook and several other servants, a minute or two before; but Mr Quatterly went on, still addressing the housemaid, "Were you up first in the house?" he demanded.

"No, sir," replied the girl, beginning to get a little bewildered. "I think Mrs. Windsor and the still-room maid were down before me."

"We were," said Mrs. Windsor; "and I found the door unlocked and locked it till the men got up. I have got more to say when it is wanted; but I think my young lady can tell more than any of us."

Mr. Quatterly looked from the housekeeper to Louisa; but Mis Charlton's eyes were fixed upon her step-mother, who sat opposite fixed, and immovable as a statue, with her face pale and her hea bent down. There was a pause for a moment, and then Louisa rose and with somewhat trembling steps advancing to the table, spok across the table to Dr. Western in a low tone, "You had better tak her away," she said; "you had better take her away."

The worthy rector instantly rose, and going round to Mrs. Charlton he said, "I think it would be best for you to retire, my dear lady You are not well. This is too much for you.

But Mrs. Charlton instantly raised her head quickly, and sharpl

claiming, "No! it's all false; but I'll hear it all; I'll hear all!"

"Be advised," said Dr. Western, in a tender tone.

"No, I will not!" she cried; "I understand it all—Go on, go on!"

And Dr. Western retiring from her side, resumed his seat. Louisa had by this time retired to the chair where she had been sitting, and stood trembling beside it with a face very pale, and her lips almost bloodless.

"You said you had evidence to give, my dear," said Mr. Quatterly; "will you give it now, or shall I examine this good lady first?"

Louisa hesitated, but Mrs. Charlton exclaimed vehemently, "I demand that one should be sent out of the room, while the other speaks. They will frame their stories one upon the other, I dare say, if they have not done it already."

Louisa said nothing, but moved towards the door. Mrs. Windsor, however, replied, "I haven't spoken to Miss Charlton to-day, ma'am—not a word—and have only to tell the truth, though I am afraid what I am going to say may offend her."

"Tell the truth, Mrs. Windsor," said Louisa, turning at the door, "whatever it may be—your so doing will give me no offence, be assured."

"A pretty scene!" cried Mrs. Charlton, with a look of contempt.

"Now ma'am, what have you to depose?" said Sir Simon Upplestone, who was getting heartily tired of the affair, and wished it over.

"Why, merely this, sir," said Mrs. Windsor. "Last night as I was lying awake in bed I heard somebody walking in the garden. My room is at the far corner just over Mr. Morton's. I can't tell what o'clock it was, for I had gone to sleep for a short time when I first laid down; but it could not be very late, for the moon was still far up. However, thinking it might be somebody that wanted to rob the house, I got up and went to the window, and there I saw a man below on the gravel walk, who seemed to throw some stones up towards Miss Charlton's room. He then called out, but not very loud, 'Louisa. Louisa!' which is her name. He then seemed to make signs to open the window, and presently I could plainly hear it thrown up. After that, he asked her to come down and open the door, for he wished to come in. After that, I could hear Miss Charlton say she would call one of the servants; but he answered not to do so on any account; but to come down herself, and he spoke sharply and angrily to her; after which she told him to wait a minute and she would. He seemed very careful to tell her not to wake any one, saying that he did not wish it to be known that he was there. After waiting a minute or two, I could plainly hear the door below unchained and unlocked; and the minute after a foot coming quickly up the stairs, stopped at Mr. Latimer's door, and went in. It did not come as far as Mr. Morton's room then, but after about two minutes I heard it come along the passage, and some one opened the door of Mr. Morton's room, which is just below mine—the bed-room, not the dressing-room, I mean."

"Ay, it was in the bed-room, under the drawers, I found the things," said the housemaid.

"Whoever it was did not stay there a minute," continued Mrs. Windsor, "and then went back and down stairs. He seemed to stop a

minute at Miss Louisa's door, and then went down and out into the garden. As soon as I heard the door shut I went back to the window again, and I saw the same man go along the gravel walk, and take the first turning to the left towards the wall. I could see him quite plainly, for the night was clear."

She paused, and Mr. Quatterly inquired, "Did you ever see him before?"

"Yes, often," replied Mrs. Windsor, in a firm but solemn tone.

"Do you see him now?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"No," replied Mrs. Windsor, fixing her eyes full upon Morton.

"Was he the man before you?" asked Mr. Quatterly again.

"Certainly not," answered the housekeeper.

"Then that is all I have to do with the affair," rejoined the solicitor, taking a step back.

"Then who do you really think it was?" demanded Mr. Middleton.

"I think and fully believe," replied Mrs. Windsor, "that it was Mr. Alfred Latimer. His person, perhaps, I could not swear to, for when first he came he seemed strangely disguised; and though, when he went away, he was differently dressed, his back was towards me; but his voice I could swear to anywhere, and he called Miss Charlton, sister, too, which he sometimes did when——"

"Liar and hussy!" cried Mrs. Charlton, starting up and stamping her foot; but Mr. Middleton, whose views were now altogether changed, exclaimed, "We must not have anything of this kind, madam. The case must be investigated fully. Shall we call in Miss Charlton?"

"I think you had better first inquire how the person was dressed," said Mr. Quatterly, "and also call in the gardener, for footsteps must have been remarked."

All the magistrates assented to this course; and in regard to the apparel of the person she had seen, Mrs. Windsor replied, "That when first she saw him, he was dressed in a carman's frock, such as that which lay on the table; but that, when he went away, he had on a dark coat such as Mr. Latimer usually wore."

Louisa entered more calm than she had departed. She was still very pale, and her steps still wavered. Her heart, too, sank, and she felt afraid that her voice would fail her when she came to speak; but she had had time for thought, she had had time to ask herself what was her duty, and the voice within at once answered, "To tell the plain truth." It was a terrible thing indeed to bear any part in destroying one whose young years had been spent under the same roof with herself, who had been accustomed to call her sister, whom she had often aided and befriended, for whose wilfulness and vices she had often mourned,—but still she felt that she must not let such feelings take from her her truth; and though she resolved not to offer aught in evidence against him that was not drawn from her by questions, she was determined to answer each question truly, without a shadow of turning.

If, however, she expected to escape close questioning she was mistaken: for as soon as she entered, Dr. Western having first requested her to take a seat, Mr. Middleton proceeded to interrogate her in a way that left no opportunity of passing aught over in silence, taking

as a text-book Mrs. Windsor's account; and having gained the admission that some one had come under the window a little after twelve, had thrown up some pebbles against it, and called her by name, he in plain terms directed her to state all that had occurred between that period and her retiring to rest. Louisa told all truly, but as succinctly as possible; often stopped and questioned as she went, and still giving true and straightforward answers, till at length, just as she was replying that Alfred Latimer was dressed when he came in a carman's frock—the very one, she believed, upon the table—Mrs. Charlton, seeing that the proofs against her unhappy son were all too clear, and that, in her own malignity and covetousness, she had been the person to bring them all to light, exclaimed almost with a shriek, "Oh, treacherous girl!" and in a vain effort to reach the door fell fainting almost at Mr. Morton's feet. She was immediately carried to the adjoining drawing-room.

"Now, Mr. Nethersole, we will take your evidence, if you please," said Mr. Middleton after a pause.

Mr. Nethersole advanced, and Mr. Middleton proceeded to inquire whether he had visited the Hall and examined the body of poor Edmonds, the park-keeper. Having replied that he had, he was directed to state what remarks he had made, and what he supposed to be the cause of his death, though Mr. Quatterly justly observed that this was evidence rather for the coroner's inquest than the magistrates.

"I found a wound," he said, "in both sides of the head, which, from the appearance it presented, must have been caused by a pistol-ball fired from the right side, where it cut the temporal artery and passed through the anterior lobe of the brain, finding exit on the right side, about two inches above the eyebrow."

Sir Simon Upplestone had said nothing for some time, and he owned to himself that Mr. Middleton was the dominant spirit; but still he thought he ought to have his share of importance, and might as well ask a solemn question too, to throw light or darkness on the matter, as the case might be. "Pray, Mr. Nethersole," he said, "did you use any means of resuscitation?"

There are some questions so utterly confounding that the wit of the most ingenious man upon earth cannot find a ready answer to them, and Mr. Nethersole, with the most profound respect for the worthy baronet, and every desire to answer as fast as possible, could only stare in silence for a full minute, at being asked whether he had attempted to restore a man to life who had been shot through and through the head nearly twelve hours before.

"We have an authentic record," said Mr. Quatterly, in a low voice, "of a man having burnt his mouth by eating cold plum porridge, and of another having bitten his own nose off, so that it is clear nothing is impossible; and therefore, whatever others may think, I hold the question to be a very sensible one."

"My dear sir, I can't jest upon the subject," said Morton, to whom the words were addressed. But, as Sir Simon Upplestone evidently waited for an answer, Mr. Nethersole at last made shift to say, "Why, no, Sir Simon, I did not think it would be of any avail, for I never knew a man recover with his brains blown out; and, besides, the poor

fellow had been dead many hours, the limbs were quite rigid, so it could have answered no purpose."

"I think I would have tried something," said Sir Simon, sagely.

Mr. Middleton contrived to occupy about five minutes more with questions of somewhat greater sagacity, but not much more pertinence; and at the end of that time the constable and the housemaid re-appeared.

"Well, Soames, well!" cried Mr. Middleton, "what have you discovered?"

"Why I found this here candlestick, your worship," answered the constable, putting one down on the table. It's burnt out in the socket, you see, sir, and scattered all the wax about. It was a-top of the drawers in Mr. Latimer's room. It might have set the house a-fire. Then, as to the footsteps, we traced two or three of them in straight from the door up to the drawers, and one of the drawers had been pulled open, for we saw the mark of a hand upon it, somewhat dirty, and not quite dry, and the same is on the candlestick, if you'll look, and then on the floor, tumbled down, with the top off, was a hat-box, which the girl says had a new hat in it yesterday; but the hat is gone now, howsoever; and there were two finger-marks on the top."

"Did you find any steps towards Mr. Morton's room?" asked Mr. Middleton.

"Why, no, sir," said the constable; "but the girl says she swept the passage and the room. We found nothing particular there, though I went over it, just to see underneath the drawers, where the bundle had been stowed away; the carpet was somewhat bloody—not much, just a scratch of blood, like; but that shows that the job couldn't have been long done, or the things would have been dry."

"Very true, very true," said Mr. Middleton; and, turning to Morton, he said, "I think, sir, the evidence given clears you of all suspicion."

"Then you'll have the goodness to dismiss the warrant," said Mr. Quatterly.

"I think we ought to have evidence," said Sir Simon Upplestone, "that the gentleman is really the proprietor of Mallington Hall, for on that rests a great deal of the matter."

"Not a whit," replied Mr. Quatterly. "If he had no other property than a mortgage on the moon there is not one suspicious circumstance against him. But the evidence you shall have. There is your own clerk, a very respectable solicitor, whom you all know. He can testify to the fact."

"I beg leave to depose," said Mr. Skinner, rising and speaking with due deliberation, "that this gentleman, commonly called and known by, in these parts, the name of Mr. Morton, is the undoubted proprietor of Mallington Hall, and the Mallington Park estate, together with all the goods, chattels, household furniture, books, pictures, plate, and appurtenances therein contained, or belonging thereto;" and down he sat, having said exactly what he thought sufficient, and not one word more.

Sir Simon Upplestone was frustrated; for, if truth must be told, a certain very ticklish propensity, easily excited in human beings, and called curiosity, was the true motive of the question he had put. He

wanted to know, in short, who Mr. Morton was, and what, and all about him; and Mr. Quatterly saw through and through him as if he had been a piece of rock crystal.

"And now, Dr. Western," said Mr. Quatterly, "I think, my very reverend friend, that it will be expedient for you to inform your worshipful brethren of the facts which came to our knowledge this morning regarding two worthy gentlemen named Thomas Brown and John Williams, and also in regard to another personage called Mr. Alfred Latimer, against whom a slight case of suspicion has been made out this morning. Your worships will remark that I say slight; because it is very slight indeed, and though, from the temper of the court, it is evident that the young gentleman does not appear in a very favourable light, yet it must be recollected that nothing has been proved against him whatsoever as yet; but that he entered his own mother's house clandestinely and in disguise on the same night that this unhappy event occurred. The disguise, however, might have been assumed from a thousand different causes; the clandestine mode of his coming might be accounted for in various ways: and the blood which was found upon the clothes supposed to be cast off by him may be that of a hare, of a rabbit, or a barn-door fowl, for aught we know to the contrary."

"There, my dear," he continued, turning to Louisa, "go and tell that to your step-mother, it may be some comfort to her; and as for yourself, your white face and trembling hand shows that you have had quite enough of this business already."

Louisa felt that it was indeed as he said, and rose to depart, and Morton very naturally accompanied her for a short time from the room—not, indeed, that he had the slightest intention of visiting Mrs. Charlton, as he was well aware that in the existing state of that lady's mind his presence was not likely to be peculiarly agreeable to her.

CHAPTER LXII.

"WELL, madam," said Mr. Quatterly, tapping the landlady familiarly on the shoulder; "well, Mrs. Pluckrose"—and immediately deviating, as was sometimes customary with him, into an abominable pun, he added, "though, indeed, my dear lady, I think your name ought to be put into the plural, for you must have plucked two roses to blush so brightly on either cheek. But to return. Has anybody been here this morning inquiring for me? If so, I hope you have kept him."

"Oh! yes, sir," replied Mrs. Pluckrose, dropping a courtesy, "there are two gentlemen waiting for you. I took the liberty of putting them into Mr. Morton's sitting-room, because the house is so full."

"Not so full as to prevent my having a bed in it, Mrs. Pluckrose?" said the worthy solicitor; but the landlady reassured him on that point, and Mr. Morton and his friend walked up stairs, where they found waiting a middle-aged gentleman, who looked very much like a solicitor, and a younger man, bearing a strong resemblance to a clerk. There was a great blue bag upon the table before them, and the solicitor looked out of the window, while the clerk sat with his hands on his knees.

"Ah, Mr. Writham!" said Mr. Quatterly, rolling into the room as fast as his small legs would carry him, "I hope I have not kept you waiting, for we had a little magisterial business to go through here. Indeed, I did not expect to see you yourself; a clerk would have done."

"Oh! nothing like one's own presence, my dear sir," answered Mr. Writham, who had a peculiarly clear, sharp, ferret-like expression of countenance, with a long, pointed nose, the very look of which would have made a flaw in a piece of parchment. "I came down to say, that the whole may be considered as definitively settled and agreed, upon the basis laid down between us at our last conference; always provided, nevertheless——"

"Anything hereinbefore contained to the contrary, notwithstanding," said Mr. Quatterly, laughing, "I thought there was an exceptional clause, friend Writham. Well, what is it? Out with it, man! We'll soon deal with it."

"It is simply this, my dear sir," answered Mr. Writham, "and you will own that it's quite reasonable; namely, that your client—I presume that I have the honour of being in his presence—do produce lawful and sufficient proof of the marriage of Henry Morton Wilmot and Maria dei Pazzi, and also of the death without issue of Charles Francis Wilmot."

"Oh! the latter is easily proved," replied Mr. Quatterly; "and, besides, with that you have nothing to do; for if he did leave legitimate issue, it would bar your client as well as mine. Besides, I never heard of a boy seven years old having a son and heir. The law does not contemplate such a case, Mr. Writham; and we can prove his birth and his death, with an interval of seven years between them. As to the other matter, it is quite right that you should have the proof you require, and you shall have it. There may be a little delay, from an awkward event which has removed the certificate to some distance."

Mr. Writham pricked up his ears, for there seemed to him a chance of pleading still; and he observed in a solemn tone, "Of course, Mr. Quatterly, proof is necessary. Full, legal, indubitable proof."

"And proof you shall have, my dear Writham," answered Mr. Quatterly, "full, legal, indubitable proof, as you say; for where we got the one certificate we can easily get another, even if the first should be lost. But by your good leave, my friend, we will draw up a little memorandum of the grounds on which we stand, stating the proofs and particulars that you require, and guarding against any future demands." Mr. Writham seemed to pause and hesitate; but Mr. Quatterly went on in a decided tone, saying, "It is absolutely necessary, Writham; it must be done, my friend; either sign and get your costs, or don't sign and go without them. I'm a solicitor, too, you know, Writham; and one time I had a window broken in my house. A glazier was sent for, who put in the pane. Just when he had done I unfortunately walked into the room, and saw him neatly starring the next pane with his diamond, then placing his finger dexterously against it till it gave a crack. I thought to myself 'What an image of a solicitor!' We are all fond of making little holes, that we may mend them afterwards. It's the very nature and essence

of our profession, Writham;" and he took his fellow practitioner by the arm and gave him a friendly shake.

Mr. Writham did not attempt to resist his eloquence. The paper was drawn up by Mr. Quatterly's own hands. Mr. Writham suggested some alterations; they were discussed, and some were rejected, while others were admitted; after which the paper was signed. When the whole business was concluded, Mr. Quatterly began to feel the inconvenience of his brother solicitor having been shown into that room. He was naturally of a hospitable and jovial disposition; and he would have liked very well to ask Mr. Writham to dine with him at Mallington; but then he wanted a little private conversation with Morton. Mr. Writham, however, relieved him from his difficulty, by declaring that he must be off to London as fast as possible, as he had at least a hundred and fifty pieces of business to transact on the following day; and accordingly, as soon as a postchaise could be procured, away he went, taking his clerk and his blue bag along with him.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Quatterly entered upon business with his friend. "This certificate must be procured somehow, my dear sir," he said. "It may be difficult and unpleasant to wait for journeys to and from Italy; and yet how we are to get it without sending, I do not perceive. You look mighty cool and indifferent; but I can tell you if the exhibition of this document be long delayed, it may encourage these people to plead; and then Lord have mercy on your purse!—for it will be a fight with them for life or death—or for costs or no costs, which comes to the same thing."

"I am not at all indifferent, my good friend, I assure you," answered Morton; "but, nevertheless, I feel very sure that we shall obtain the paper speedily. I know it to be in the hands of the fellow Williams. Most likely he has not destroyed it before he was apprehended, as you have stated, for the only thing he could gain by it would be by keeping it; and, therefore, doubtless, it will be found amongst the rest of the things which he may have thought fit to leave behind. I suppose we shall soon have over some intelligence from Mr. Soames, the constable, and you can send over directions to stop all that belongs to me."

"That shall be done," answered Mr. Quatterly; "but still I can't help regretting that the paper is not forthcoming at once. I see risk and inconvenience, and a great deal of law; and no one who knows much of the fresh eggs of Mrs. Themis, can doubt that the sooner they are hatched the better; for if they are left alone for a night, a thousand to one they are found addled the next morning. But tell me what you are going to do, noble sir, and I'll be no clog to you."

"I am going over to Mallington Hall, my dear sir," replied Morton, "in order to see something of the scene of such sad events, and to visit the poor widow of the murdered man; then I am going to return here, by your leave, to dine with you upon such fare as Mrs. Pluckrose can furnish; and then I shall go and drink tea with good Dr. Western and his sister."

"Where you expect to meet somebody else," said Mr. Quatterly. "Well, then, my young friend, my afternoon is laid out also. First, I will walk over with you to Mallington Hall, if you have no objection: then I will return here with you and dine; then I will amuse myself

by writing a few letters, and making a few notes, till it is time to go to what the young people call Bedfordshire. Thus will you and I both consult our convenience; I shall not be in your way, and you will not be in mine. But pray order the dinner before you go, or else we shall have to wait for a full hour after we come back. Now there is nothing so unpleasant on earth as waiting for an inn dinner."

Morton praised the punctuality of Mrs. Pluckrose, the greatest virtue of an innkeeper, but took his friend's advice, and after the dinner was ordered they both set out upon their expedition, although the day had become cloudy as the sun crossed the sky. Mr. Quatterly admired the whole scene very much. With the park he was peculiarly pleased, and noticed all those little beauties which well-directed art had added to nature, in a manner that would have delighted poor Edmonds, could he have heard his words.

"All that you so much praise, my dear sir," said Morton. "is owing to the exertions of one man, poor Edmonds, who lies murdered up at the house there. He was a fine specimen of that very fine creature the English peasant of the best class. Not without his peculiarities; he was perhaps, rather elevated by them than otherwise, for they were all of a fine and generous kind. He was blunt and straightforward, but never rude or insolent, and resolute to do his duty to his master, whether his master liked it or not; he was sometimes a little pertinacious, especially where the object required labour and exertion on his own part. There was a certain degree of sternness about him, but yet he was not without kindly and gentle feelings: and, indeed, from all I have heard, I fear that his taking part with, and making excuses for, that wretched young man, Mrs. Charlton's son, when every one else avoided and condemned him, has been the means of bringing wretchedness to his home, and even death upon himself."

"A fine character, but a rare one in his class," said Mr. Quatterly.

"Nay, I do not think so," answered Morton: "I believe that there are more of such characters in England than we imagine, and that there would be more still if various circumstances in our state of society did not tend in different ways to brutalise them. Here, in this very case before us, a man in the rank and station of a gentleman is treated both respectfully and kindly by a person greatly superior to him in mind; and what does he inflict in return, first upon the daughter, and then upon the father?"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, with surprise, "you do not mean to say that the poor girl I saw married this day to that young vagabond Alfred Latimer is the daughter of the murdered man."

"Yes, indeed," answered Morton; "and I know not whether to be sorry or to rejoice that the marriage has really taken place."

"Oh! rejoice, rejoice at all events," answered Mr. Quatterly; "but, to say truth, this offers me the first reasonable cause for doubting the young man's guilt. Notwithstanding all my knowledge of human crime—and it is tolerably extensive, as I need not tell you—I can hardly believe it possible that a man, however depraved, should go and wed at the altar a woman with whose father's blood his hand was still wet. Truth, that most extraordinary thing, is the most difficult of all ores to extract from the immense mass of dross with which it is

mingled, and in this case we may have got upon a wrong scent. Certainly the circumstances are very suspicious; but yet nothing is clearly proved.

Morton was silent, for he knew more of Alfred Latimer's character than good Mr. Quatterly did, and he did not entertain the same hopes as his friend. In a few minutes after they approached the great door of the house by the gravel walk in front; but I will not pause to recount all that took place on Morton's visit to the Hall, or during that which he afterwards made to the park-keeper's cottage.

After spending two hours on the scene of such sad events, he and Mr. Quatterly returned to the village of Mallington and the inn, where the good landlady proved herself worthy of the commendations Morton had bestowed.

We will not stop to discuss the dinner which Mrs. Pluckrose set before her revered guests, nor descant upon the excellence of the roast chickens, nor the insufferable hardness of the bacon, by which they were accompanied. After the moderate meal was over, Morton left his companion for the evening, and once more took his way along the bank of the river from the inn to the rectory, a faint hope of seeing fair Louisa Charlton at the rector's made him hurry his steps. Nor was he deceived, for the first person he saw on entering was herself.

"I thought, dear Louisa," he said, "that you would be driven to this kind place of refuge. I hope you had not much to endure before you sought it."

"A great deal more than ought to have been inflicted upon her," replied Dr. Western, speaking for his fair ward. "But now, my dear sir, my sister and I will do our best to make her happy whilst she remains with us. Yet I fear there are still a good many difficulties and discomforts to be encountered before her fate is more happily fixed."

"Discomforts, perhaps, many," replied Morton; "but difficulties, I trust, none, my dear doctor. Mrs. Charlton's opposition, I know, we must expect; but, if Louisa feels as I hope she does, that opposition need cause no delay whatever in our arrangements. The law must afterwards take its course, and pronounce how far we may be affected by the lady's decision. But, after a scene which took place this morning before you arrived, I think you will see that it is unnecessary for us to pay any attention to Mrs. Charlton's proceedings, as her opinion of me or any other person depends entirely upon our pliability in regard to certain views which seem to me not of the most honest character. However, of that hereafter."

The conversation now turned to other subjects, but still the events of the day formed, of course, the principal topic, and as all those events were sad—as they all showed, in different points of view, the depravity or folly of human nature, the general tenor of that evening's conference was somewhat gloomy. Yet Morton did not love Louisa less, and Louisa loved Morton, if possible, more, as that conversation came towards a close. The lighter things of life have their effect perhaps in first attracting, but it is when the deeper and the sterner draw forth the more profound and precious qualities that the heart becomes knit to heart by ties that can never be broken: for the small traits and in-

dications which are visible in ordinary society much more frequently afford a view into the faults and failings than into the virtues and excellences of our companions.

As the hour of ten was approaching, Morton related to Dr. Western his visit to the widow of poor Edmonds, and the short conversation which had taken place between them. "I must ask you, my dear sir," he said, "who know so much more of her habits and feelings than I do, to turn in your mind what sort of position will be best suited for her. I will secure to her an independence; but I know that it will please her best, and I am sure that, under existing circumstances, it will be best for her, to have some employment for her leisure time. There are occasions, as we all know, when labour is a blessing; and such, I believe, it will be in her case. The boy we will easily provide for; and as to poor Lucy, I fear we must wait to see the course of events before we can devise anything for her benefit."

"I dread to think," said Dr. Western, feelingly, "what must be the effect on Lucy's mind when she knows the whole of this sad history."

"Oh, keep it from her!" cried Louisa. "If it be possible, never let her know the worst of all that has occurred."

Dr. Western shook his head. "It is the saddest part of sin and crime, my love," he said, "that they bring misery to others who have no participation in them. You, yourself, my dear child, will have to bear your share of suffering from Alfred Latimer's errors, and this poor girl, who is now his wife, must endure her part of the same hard consequences. I see no possibility of preventing it. She must know of his apprehension, which will doubtless be speedily effected; and all the circumstances will, sooner or later, be heard, whatever be the result."

"I think it might be prevented," said Morton, after a moment's thought. "His apprehension, indeed, she must learn; but it seems to me possible that by some one stepping forward to protect her in her unprotected state the darkest fact of all—if it be a fact—that her husband was an actual participator in her father's murder, may be concealed from her."

"You say, if it be a fact, my dear sir," replied Dr. Western, "and you speak in a tone of doubt. Has anything occurred to make you hope that the opinions we formed this morning are groundless?"

"Little," answered Morton. "Mr. Quatterly, indeed, has doubts; but it seems to me——"

While he was speaking there was a good deal of bustle in the rector's hall; much more, indeed, than that usually quiet and well-regulated place was at all accustomed to. Voices sounded, speaking low and eagerly, and the tones of Dr. Western's old butler, usually so grave and calm, were at length heard rising powerfully.

"But I must and will see him this instant," cried one voice, which Morton thought he recognised.

"But I tell you you cannot see him till I let him know, and ask him whether he chooses or not."

"But I know he will choose, and see him I will this moment," rejoined the first speaker. "I tell you it's matter of life and death; and there's not a moment to be lost!"

There seemed to come then a little scuffle in the hall, in which the rector's butler, being the weakest, as usual went to the wall, and the moment after the door was thrown open. All eyes were turned towards it—on the part of Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn with some degree of fear—and instantly in rushed Mr. Gibbs in his own proper person, his usually neat and somewhat extravagant attire being a good deal deranged, his black and silken ringlets all confused and tumbled over each other like a mob of corkscrews; but importance and vigour in his countenance.

"Oh! sir," he said, addressing Morton, as soon as he perceived him; "I have such news for you, though it has well nigh cost me my life—come along—there is not a moment to be lost—we've got them safe if you like to have them."

Mr. Gibbs's mind was evidently over-excited, and Morton, fearing that he might come harshly on some subject that would be painful to Louisa, beckoned him to come out of the room, saying, "I will speak to you in the library, Mr. Gibbs, by Dr. Western's permission."

"Let him come too," cried Mr. Gibbs. "We shall want all the assistance we can get, I can tell you, sir; but there's not a moment to be lost if you intend to do anything effectual"—thus saying he followed Mr. Morton out of the room. Dr. Western accompanied them into the library.

The first sentence, after their entrance, spoken, was by Morton. "Well, Mr. Gibbs," he said, "what is all this? What have you discovered?"

"Why, I've got them, sir—I've got them!" cried Gibbs; "but there's no time to be lost if you want to have them."

"What do you mean, my good friend?" exclaimed Dr. Western. "Do you mean Mr. Latimer?"

"No, no, no!" cried the traveller, eagerly. "I mean the villains, the scoundrels, the chiefs of the whole gang, and I'm afraid every moment that they should get away."

"But give us some connected account of who they are, and what you mean," said Mr. Morton, judging from the visitor's excited manner, soiled and deranged dress, and whirling words, that he had drank too much. "We have already seen to-day, Mr. Gibbs, how unjustly suspicions may be entertained, and of course can do nothing without proper information."

"Well, then, if I must waste time," exclaimed the other, "all that I have to say is that it is entirely owing to the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad. If it hadn't been for that I should never have known anything at all. As soon as ever I could get away this morning, I went over to Sturton, sir, where I made a very convenient deal, and as I was coming back through the wood, just at the top of the hill on this side of Sturton, where I could look down over all the country, I saw two men creeping up by one of the narrow paths, and, not liking their looks at all—for I thought I knew the villains—I went off as fast as I could. They came nearly as fast, and, as the mischief would have it, it grew quite dark in the wood, and down I fell, breaking my shin most desperately. Running was out of the question; if I lay there I was sure to be murdered; so I took to my old trick and got up the tree. I had not been there two minutes when the blood-thirsty villains passed underneath, and I

dications which are visible in ordinary society much more frequently afford a view into the faults and failings than into the virtues and excellences of our companions.

As the hour of ten was approaching, Morton related to Dr. Western his visit to the widow of poor Edmonds, and the short conversation which had taken place between them. "I must ask you, my dear sir," he said, "who know so much more of her habits and feelings than I do, to turn in your mind what sort of position will be best suited for her. I will secure to her an independence; but I know that it will please her best, and I am sure that, under existing circumstances, it will be best for her, to have some employment for her leisure time. There are occasions, as we all know, when labour is a blessing; and such, I believe, it will be in her case. The boy we will easily provide for; and as to poor Lucy, I fear we must wait to see the course of events before we can devise anything for her benefit."

"I dread to think," said Dr. Western, feelingly, "what must be the effect on Lucy's mind when she knows the whole of this sad history."

"Oh, keep it from her!" cried Louisa. "If it be possible, never let her know the worst of all that has occurred."

Dr. Western shook his head. "It is the saddest part of sin and crime, my love," he said, "that they bring misery to others who have no participation in them. You, yourself, my dear child, will have to bear your share of suffering from Alfred Latimer's errors, and this poor girl, who is now his wife, must endure her part of the same hard consequences. I see no possibility of preventing it. She must know of his apprehension, which will doubtless be speedily effected; and all the circumstances will, sooner or later, be heard, whatever be the result."

"I think it might be prevented," said Morton, after a moment's thought. "His apprehension, indeed, she must learn; but it seems to me possible that by some one stepping forward to protect her in her unprotected state the darkest fact of all—if it be a fact—that her husband was an actual participator in her father's murder, may be concealed from her."

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held my breath, and listened with all my ears. Well, I heard one say to the other, 'I could have sworn I heard something running and the bushes shake;' and then the other answered, 'It's very likely a deer got out of the park; the pailing is very bad in some places.' You may fancy how I trembled; but then t'other one said, 'It was more like a man's foot than a deer's,' so that made me tremble more, till I thought they would hear me shaking. But then one said to the other, 'It's all quiet enough now, however;' and the other answered, 'Ay, if it was any one, he's off by this time, and he couldn't be looking for us, at all events.' That was Jack Williams that spoke."

"Jack Williams!" exclaimed Dr. Western; "why, I thought he was in custody."

"Ay! he's out, however it happened," answered Mr. Gibbs, "and Brown with him, too, doctor; I'll take my oath of it, by the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad, and all I hold sacred! I knew who they were pretty well when first I saw them, and then when I heard their tongues I was quite sure. Besides, they called each other by their names; that is to say, Brown called him 'Williams,' and he called Brown 'Tom.'"

"But where are they, then?" demanded Morton. "It would take a whole regiment to search that wood properly, even if they are there still."

"They are there still," answered Gibbs; "but they won't be there very long. As to searching the wood, that's needless; for I can tell you exactly where they are, and where they intend to remain till two o'clock, for I heard all their arrangements just as plain as a sermon. They stopped a minute close under the tree, after they had said what I have told you, as if they were listening; and then Brown said to Williams, 'I don't hear anything, Williams, do you?' upon which Williams answered, 'No, Tom, I don't; and at all events we had better get into the cave, for we must have some rest before we go on, and we are in less danger there than anywhere else.' 'So I think,' answered Brown; 'but if I once fall asleep I'm not likely to wake in a hurry, for it's a tolerable long walk I can tell you, Williams, with all the round we have made, and this bundle is devilish heavy. One of us had better keep awake whilst the other sleeps, and so take it in turns.' But Williams replied, 'Never you fear, I shall wake at two o'clock. I always do; for that's the time I used to go up on watch. I must have some sleep, too, recollect: for I've had none these three nights. And we musn't be much after two in starting again, that we may get on ten or twelve miles on the other side before daylight.' 'Well, come along then,' answered Brown, 'and let us have something to eat and drink first. It's devilish little use having got the money, if we are forced to starve ourselves notwithstanding.' After that they walked on a little, and I began to think how I should like to follow them, and see where the cave is they talked about; but I very soon found that it was nearer than I thought; for I could hear that they did not go along the path, but pushed through the trees and bushes near towards the high bank, and then they seemed to come to a dead stop, for I could hear their voices talking again without seeming to move. They were far enough off to prevent me from knowing what they said, except when they spoke very loud; but near enough to make me quite sure of where-

abouts they were. Presently, too, there came a sort of crackling sound, and I could see a red light shining through the branches, which showed me that they had lighted a fire. The dogs did not know there was anybody so near, or I dare say they would not have made themselves so comfortable."

"This opportunity must not be lost," said Dr. Western, rising and ringing the bell. "We must secure these men if possible."

"It would do me a great deal of good, your reverence," said Mr. Gibbs, "if you would just let me have a glass of wine; for, to tell the truth, I am somewhat tired, and a good deal exhausted, not having touched a bit of anything for a good many hours; but still I am ready to go the minute the others are."

"You deserve high praise for your courage and activity, Mr. Gibbs," replied the worthy clergyman; "and you shall have anything that you desire which the house can afford. Bring in some wine and some cold meat," he continued, as the servant appeared; "but, first, tell the coachman to come here directly. Now pray, Mr. Gibbs, let us hear how you escaped from your very unpleasant situation in the tree."

"It was all owing to the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad," replied his visitor; "for, having a specimen bottle in my pocket, as soon as I found that the murderers were safely lodged at such a distance as not to hear a little rustle, I took it out, and pushing down my stocking, rubbed my shin till the pain quite went off, otherwise I couldn't have walked a step, I'm sure. I kept a sharp ear upon my friends in the cave, however, and rubbed and listened, and listened and rubbed, for full half an hour.

"When I was quite sure they must be asleep, I got slowly down the tree from knot to knot, making no noise at all; and then crept quietly through the grass towards the chestnut-trees and bushes under the bank, making as near as I could for the spot where I had seen the light glimmering when I was up-stairs in the tree, for I could not see it now for the brushwood, but I smelt it strong enough notwithstanding. I picked my steps like a cat over the wet ground; and presently, as I moved about, I spied a gap amongst the leaves and branches, not bigger than my hand, through which I saw something red shining, and, getting as near as I could, I peeped through."

"And what did you see?" asked Morton, as the coachman entered, followed by the footman with a tray of cold meat and wine in his hands, and Mr. Gibbs paused in his narrative.

"Why, I saw the fire of sticks beginning to die out," replied Mr. Gibbs, "and that great big hulking fellow, Brown, lying upon his back with a bundle under his head, and Williams sitting with his back against the bank, and his head leaning forward, sound asleep. Creeping away again without making the least noise, I marked one or two of the large trees near with my knife, and then came down back again as fast as I could to old Blackmore, the gardener's cottage. I had to knock the old man up out of his bed, for his boat was chained and padlocked; but when he saw me, and heard what I wanted it for—though I didn't tell him all—he let me have it willingly enough, and I punted myself across here without more ado. The boat is just down by the bank there, and I'm ready to go as soon as I have had something to refresh me a little."

While Mr. Gibbs proceeded with great self-possession and satisfaction to comfort himself with the good things set before him, a consultation took place between Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and the coachman, as to what would be the best plan to pursue for the purpose of capturing the two malefactors, whose place of concealment had been discovered by the worthy traveller. Dr. Western was a man of peace; but, nevertheless, his sense of duty as a magistrate led him at first to resolve upon going in person, and it was with the greatest difficulty that Morton dissuaded him.

"I shall go, certainly, my dear sir," said the young gentleman himself, "you know that I have a personal stake in this matter; for, besides forwarding the ends of justice, I would fain secure the papers which one or the other of these men undoubtedly possess. But both your age and your profession, my dear sir, should prevent you from going; and, doubtless, we shall be able to get enough men by the way to render our proceedings secure."

"I don't know, sir," said the coachman, scratching his head; "but if you cross over in the boat you'll find nobody but old Blackmore, and he's too lame to be of any good. You and I and the gentleman there might be enough it's true: but, depend upon it, the fellows will fight like mad, for I suppose they've got a rope round their necks any how."

"Doesn't Miles, one of the keepers, live up at the corner of the park by Mrs. Hazlewood's cottage?" asked Morton; "we can easily take that in our way."

"Yes, sir," answered the coachman; "and a strapping chap he is too. I didn't think of him."

"Then we shall be enough, my dear sir," rejoined Mr. Morton, turning to the rector with a cheerful smile. "Four stout men will certainly be sufficient against two. Though any odds are justifiable in such a case, I should be almost ashamed of taking more. We had better have some arms, however, if you have any in the house. If not, I must send for my pistols to the inn."

"Oh! the footman has a couple of brace in his pantry, and I have a long-unused gun up stairs," replied Dr. Western.

"I've got a pistol, too," said the coachman; and Mr. Gibbs chimed in, announcing that he had his two little barkers in his pocket, never having gone unprovided since his head had suffered in the very wood to which he was now destined. He started up at the same time, declaring himself quite ready; and, indeed, he showed a degree of alacrity and resolution which raised him high in the opinion of Mr. Morton. The gun and pistols were procured, and then a sufficient quantity of cord was sought for and cut to convenient lengths, with a portion of which each of the party furnished themselves.

"Now, go out with the coachman and down to the boat, Mr. Gibbs," said Mr. Morton, as soon as all was ready; "I will join you in a minute;" and then turning to Dr. Western, he added, "I will merely go and bid Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn good evening. It will be much better, however, that they should know nothing of this affair till it is over, as it would only render them uneasy during the night, and poor Louisa has enough to grieve her without any further anxiety."

Dr. Western agreed cordially in this view, but at the same time he

added, "You must return and let me know, my dear sir, for I shall certainly sit up till it is all over."

Morton promised to do as he requested, and then entering the drawing-room, laughed with Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn for a moment over Mr. Gibbs's strange interruption, and merely added that he thought it would end in the capture of two notorious malefactors, took his leave with as light an air as if he were going to a party of pleasure.

CHAPTER LXIII.

MORTON led the way at once towards the cottage of the man Miles; but by this time it was past twelve o'clock, and the good countryman and all his family were sound asleep in their beds, whence it was very difficult to rouse them. At length after long knocking at the door, and tapping at the window, Miles himself awoke, and, as apprehension was the order of the day, and he did not choose to give such nocturnal visitors an opportunity of forcing their way in, he brought his face as near as possible to the casement, and opening it, inquired, "Who the devil are you?"

"Get on some clothes and come out, Miles," replied Mr. Morton. "Bring your gun with you, too, with a ball or two fit for it, if you've got any."

"Lord bless me, sir! I didn't know you," answered the man in a respectful tone; but, rubbing his eyes heartily at the same time, "What's it all about?"

"I'll tell you presently," answered Morton; "but make haste, my good friend, for we have no time to lose."

The man retired, promptly threw on some clothes, and calling one of his little girls to shut the door after him, speedily appeared, with gun and powder-flask in one hand, and some bullets in the other.

"You had better charge," said Morton; and the man obeyed without hesitation. Mr. Gibbs he stared at heartily, but recognised Dr. Western's coachman, and asked him how he did in a semi-somnambulous manner, while he went on cramming his gun.

"The French haven't landed, have they?" he asked at length, as he followed Morton up the sandy lane under the park-wall.

"Oh! no," answered Morton. "We have not such serious enemies to deal with as that, my good fellow. We have discovered where two of the men are lying hid, who are suspected of having broken into Mallington Hall, and murdered poor Edmonds."

"Oh," cried the gamekeeper, "if I catch them I'll knock their brains out."

"No, no," answered Morton. "You must be so good as to follow your orders exactly. I'll tell you what to do, when we get near the spot, and you must do neither more nor less."

"Where be they?" asked Miles, in an eager tone, which showed that sleep was now quite thrown off. "In the chestnut wood, I'll bet any money."

"No," answered Morton; "in a cave or hollow piece of ground in Wenlock Wood, I understand."

"What! Gammer Mudge's Hole?" exclaimed Miles, stopping suddenly. "Well, that's the very place for them to hide, to be sure. I haven't been there this many a year, and I didn't think of it. But stop a bit, stop a bit. If they are in there you'll want some light, for at the back part it's as black as the coal-hole, even in the day-time, and we may all get our throats cut before we know it."

This was a point which had neither struck Morton, Mr. Gibbs, nor the coachman, and for a moment or two it puzzled them all very much.

Miles soon came to their relief. "I've got a dark lantern at home," he said. "You three go up to the common, at the back of the park, and I'll run and fetch it, and be up with you in a minute."

They reached the top of the hill, however, some time before they were overtaken by the gamekeeper; and Morton took advantage of the opportunity to arrange his plan of operations.

"Two of us had better go in first," he said, "and two stay at the entrance, in case the others should miss them, and they should run out. As soon, however, as we have got hold of them the others can rush in to help."

"They were both close at the mouth," said Mr. Gibbs. "But who's to go in first?"

Morton mistook him, and thought that one of the qualms of apprehension which he acknowledged having felt in the tree, had now got possession of him again, and he accordingly replied, "You and the coachman had better stay at the entrance, Mr. Gibbs; you can hold the lantern, so as to give us as much light as possible, and knock any of them down that attempt to pass."

But the safety that is in numbers had inspired Mr. Gibbs with the spirit of a hero. "No, no, sir!" he exclaimed, "on my life that's not fair. I found the fellows out, and I ought to be allowed my part in taking them."

"So you shall, my good friend," replied Morton; "but only, as I think that Miles is a stronger man——"

"Oh! I'm stronger than I look," answered Mr. Gibbs, interrupting him, "and devilish active. Let me once get my fingers on one of their throats, and the fellow sha'n't throw me off."

"Well, so be it," answered Morton, who, recollecting that Miles was a married man, with a large family dependent upon him, thought it as well that the more dangerous part of the undertaking should fall upon the dapper traveller.

When the gamekeeper joined them, though he did not venture to express his dissent so boldly as Mr. Gibbs had done, yet he grumbled a little at the prospect of not being allowed, as he termed it, "to have a lick at the fellows who murdered poor Edmonds."

Morton replied, "You must remember that they are only suspected my good friend, and, therefore, there must be no more violence than is necessary to secure them. Probably, however, we shall all have as much of it as we desire. So now that we understand the whole, let us go on in perfect silence; and remember, Miles, not to unshade the lantern till we are close to the entrance of the cave. Step as quietly as possible also; and you, Miles, lead the way, as I suppose you know the place best."

"Know Gammer Mudge's Hole? Ay, that I do," answered the gamekeeper; "but what am I to do if I am not to go in when I get there?"

"You keep close to the right of the mouth. The coachman, who must come last, will keep close to the left, and Mr. Gibbs and I will go in between you as soon as you unshade the lantern."

"Very well, sir," answered Miles, "just as you like, though I think you had better leave it to us, in case harm should come of it."

"No, no," answered Morton. "I never put other men upon tasks that I am afraid to undertake myself. Now, go on, Miles."

The man led the way across the common till he reached the edge of Wenlock Wood; but then, instead of taking the path which Mr. Gibbs had followed once before, he struck away to the left, skirting the wood till he came nearly to the spot where the high bank, in which the cave was dug, fell away into the broken ground of the common.

There the gamekeeper turned into the wood, where a somewhat broader and less entangled path was found, under the shelter of the sandy banks.

When they had gone about a quarter of a mile a bird of the raven species—whether their steps had caught his watchful ear, or whether he was already on the wing—flew over their heads with a hoarse croak, and they could hear the strong feathers of his wings flap amongst the branches. These were the only sounds they heard: all the rest was still and solemn, and silent; not a breath of air was felt; the thin branches of the birch waved not, and the light leaves of the aspen remained at rest. Their own step was all that moved, and each took especial care to tread as lightly as possible, and to hold the cautious breath. At length a faint odour of burnt wood was perceptible, hanging about amongst the trees; and Miles, turning partly round, touched Mr. Morton on the shoulder, as an intimation that they were approaching the place.

Morton instantly drew one of the pistols from his pocket and held it in his left hand, giving a sign to those behind him; and, after taking about twenty steps further, the gamekeeper stood still. Though completely dark, and though the fire which Mr. Gibbs had seen had now gone out, Morton could perceive distinctly enough the dark outline of the mouth of the cave, and when Miles paused and faced round on the right-hand side, the young gentleman did the same within about a yard of him. Mr. Gibbs also approached, and then Morton touched the gamekeeper as a signal to unshade the lantern. Just at the same moment there was a slight noise in the cave, as if some one moved; but the covering over the lantern was instantly drawn back, and the figures of the two sleeping men were straight before them. The feeble rays penetrated faintly into the cave, showing near the entrance the rough smoke-begrimed sides, but suffering the further parts to rest in obscurity. They flashed full upon the faces of Williams and his companion, however, and while Brown rolled over uneasily on his side, but without waking, the former started at once upon his feet, exclaiming, "Ay, ay, sir!" as if suddenly called by some one in command over him.

Without giving him a moment's pause, Morton rushed in upon him

and grasped him by the collar; but even in the short interval, roused completely by the sound of feet, the miscreant was upon his guard, and grappling tight with his antagonist, a fearful struggle commenced between them. At the same moment Mr. Gibbs sprang upon Brown and held him down, meeting at first but little resistance, for the man's senses were completely buried in sleep. But, as the grasp of his as sailant began to oppress his throat he too roused himself and struck the traveller a tremendous blow on the head as he started up, but with out inducing Gibbs to let go his hold. Then seizing him by the wais he endeavoured with his great strength to dash his head against th side of the cavern; but with active dexterity Gibbs contrived to avoi the blow, keeping fast to his throat, to use his own simile, like a bull dog, while Brown raged and swore with every blasphemy that th vocabulary of crime could supply.

The contest, in the meantime, between Morton and Williams wa more silent, and apparently less violent, but more deadly. They wer better matched in all respects; the gentleman was taller, as active, a much inured to exercise and danger; but not so muscular as his oppo nent. He had his pistol cocked in his hand, too, but that only embar rassed him, for he was determined not to use it but in case of the las necessity, and as he was presenting it at his head with a low threat t fire, a well-aimed blow knocked it out of his hand, and it went off a it struck the ground. They then grappled with each other mor closely, and wrestling with all their power, each strove to throw th other, till Williams finding that he had to contend with one as power ful and as skilful as himself, relaxed his hold for a moment, and thrus his hand into the pocket of his jacket. It was for life or death; for h knew that the withdrawal of his hand from Morton's shoulder woul give his antagonist one fearful advantage, but he saw the two men a the mouth of the cave, and beheld Miles set down the lantern to star forward. His only chance was in despatching his adversary at once and the next instant a pistol was in his hand. Morton perceived i turned towards him, and put forth all his strength. Williams stag gered, wavered, lost his balance: but still, with the pertinacity of th wolf, that bites even in dying, he strove to aim the weapon aright as h fell, still clinging to his enemy with his left hand. Miles beheld th whole, as he rushed on; and he grasped at the felon's wrist, turning i somewhat from its course; but at the same moment that Williams fel headlong, the pistol went off; and Morton cast himself upon him holding his chest down with his knee.

"Are you hurt, sir—are you hurt?" cried the gamekeeper.

"Never mind! never mind!" answered Morton. "Tie him! ti him!" and at the same time he pressed heavily upon his antagonist' chest.

With rapidity and skill Miles slipped a noose over Williams's arm (while Morton held him down), drew it tight, and tied it fast. "Now help them there! help them!" said the young gentleman, rising; an as Miles sprang away to aid Gibbs and the coachman, who were bot struggling with Brown, Morton drew a second pistol from his pocket turned to the mouth of the cave, and sat down, keeping a wary ey upon Williams. The man stood for an instant with his eyes bent upo

the ground, without turning even a glance to the strife which went on for a moment near, ere his comrade was finally overcome; but at length with a slow step, he advanced towards Morton.

"Stand back!" said the young gentleman, as he saw him approach, raising his pistol at the same time; "I have not strength to struggle with you now, so I must fire, however unwillingly, if you attempt to escape."

"I was only coming to say I am afraid you are hurt, sir," answered Williams, in a mild tone; "I am sorry for it; but my blood was up, and I could not help it."

At the same moment Miles seized him by the collar, and dragged him back; but Morton exclaimed, "Do not ill-use him—do not ill-use him, on any account!" and the other three gathering round the young gentleman, whose face had turned somewhat pale, saw the blood streaming rapidly over the breast of his shirt from the right side, as he leaned upon his left arm.

CHAPTER LXIV.

The postchaise which contained Alfred Latimer and his poor bride rolled along as fast as two horses could draw it; but yet not fast enough for his impatience, for remorse and fear were upon him.

Remorse, was doing its part bitterly and terribly; and the struggling feelings within his bosom strangely affected his demeanour. Sometimes he would fall into deep and gloomy fits of thought; sometimes he would answer Lucy sharply and angrily, sometimes be prodigal of tenderness and caresses. He loved her certainly better than he had ever loved any human being. He had always done so; and now he clung to her as the only solace left, and the only fragment that he had saved out of the wreck of better things; and yet the impatience and irritation of his mind would not suffer him to be wholly kind. But she bore all with gentleness and affection, as she had been lately taught to bear; and she now saw that something, she knew not what, weighed heavily upon his mind. For a moment at one time she thought, with deep grief, that it might be his marriage with her that irritated him; that he might regret it; that he might feel that it had degraded him; but then came one of those fits of tenderness which showed her that such could not be the case.

She little dreamed, poor girl! that she was sitting side by side with the murderer of her father; and that the hand, the burning hand, which clasped hers, was stained with her parent's blood!

Onward, however, they went, and had gone near fifty miles of their way before Harry Soames, the constable, set out from Mallington in pursuit of them. But though poor Lucy was tired, and Alfred Latimer himself became drowsy with the exertions and the watchfulness of the preceding night, still he went on, till towards eleven they reached the town of Southampton. As soon as the chaise drove up at the door of the inn, Alfred Latimer inquired when the packet would sail for Havre; and, to his great relief, heard that it got under weigh at four o'clock on the following morning. He immediately sent to secure berths for himself and his wife; and, after a light meal, bade Lucy

retire to rest for an hour or two. But he himself did not lie down, fearful lest the people of the inn, notwithstanding all his injunctions, should not call him in time; and he remained dozing by the fire of the sitting-room in a half-delirious sleep. The horrors that he underwent during the three hours that he thus remained are indescribable. Scarcely had he closed his eyes for five minutes, when the figure of poor Edmonds, as he lay bleeding on the floor the moment after he had shot him, presented itself to his sight, and he woke with a start of agony. Then, when he slept again, he seemed to hear loud voices shouting, and people screaming out his name, and calling "Stop the murderer!" and again sleep was banished. Thus it went on all the time till, at the hour appointed, the punctual porter of the inn came with a candle in his hand to call the gentleman and lady that were going by the packet.

Lucy was soon roused, and ready to depart. The trunks and boxes they had brought were put upon a wheelbarrow; the bills paid; the servants fee'd; and, with the daughter of his victim hanging on his arm, Alfred Latimer took his way down through the dark streets to the port.

It was a fine clear night, the wind was light and favourable, and no obstacle or impediment presented itself. The careless examination to which goods going abroad at that time were subjected at the Custom House was soon got over; one trunk was opened, and then all were marked with chalk, and carried to the vessel. Alfred Latimer and Lucy went on board at the same time, and both went down below to wait for the ship sailing.

In about twenty minutes after there was a good deal of noise and swearing upon deck, and Alfred Latimer looked anxiously towards the cabin-door; but presently a sort of swaying motion was felt, the ship began to bend considerably to one side, and the noise of rushing water showed him that they had got under weigh. It was a blessed relief, but still he could not rest; and as he and Lucy were the only cabin passengers, he laid down for a short time on the sofa by the side of her berth, and then started up again, saying he would go upon deck to see how they got on.

He found everything now calm and quiet, the ship going easily through the water, and the different lights that marked the shoals and headlands in that part of the channel distinctly visible. He wished that they were all passed; but still it was some satisfaction to be at sea, and he gazed over for a few minutes into the water as the ship sent it in foam from her sides. Presently, however, the captain gave some orders, the speed of the packet was slackened, and then apparently she stopped, without however letting down the anchor, and in reality driving on slowly with the tide.

"What is the matter?" asked Alfred Latimer of one of the sailors, who came up the gangway with a coil of rope on his arm.

"Nothing but a boat from Portsmouth, sir," answered the man, unfastening the bolt where what is called the accommodation-ladder is placed.

Alfred Latimer asked no more questions, but instantly went below, and there remained listening with the cabin-door ajar in his hand. Presently the sound of oars, a grating noise against the ship's side, and

voices speaking, were heard. A good deal of hallooing followed, and then some conversation upon deck; but the unhappy young man could not distinguish anything that was said. In another instant, however, steps were heard coming down, and he closed the door hastily, and laid down upon the sofa again.

The persons who had descended went into what was called the gentlemen's cabin first; but then almost immediately returned, and the door of that in which Alfred Latimer and his poor wife were, was thrown unceremoniously open. The first who came in was the captain of the ship, but two other faces appeared behind him, and in one of them the wretched young man instantly recognised a countenance which he knew too well—that of Harry Soames, the constable of Mallington.

His fate was no longer doubtful; a chill like that of death spread over his whole frame, and though he shook not, nor uttered a word, it seemed as if all his limbs were changed into stone.

"Ah, Master Alfred!" cried the constable, in a familiar tone, "I've caught you at last, have I? 'T was devilish clever of you that doubling upon me at Andover, and taking to Southampton instead of Portsmouth, where young John Blackmore said you were a going. But you must come along now, and I am sorry to say I must put the darbies upon you, for you see the offence is a big'un."

Alfred Latimer stood before him without word or motion, with his eyes gazing upon him, his lips quivering, and his cheeks as pale as death.

"What is the matter?" cried Lucy, rising in terror. "What is all this, in Heaven's name?"

"Why, it's a bad job, Miss Lucy," replied Harry Seames. "I must take your lover here—that's to say your husband, for I hear you are married outright—away with me. I've got nothing to do with you. The warrant's against him, and you can go where you like—to France, if it suits you."

"I will go wherever he goes," answered Lucy, clinging to the arms of her husband.

"Can't allow that," said Mr. Soames, in a decided tone; "and, besides, you see it is impossible. I and the other constable have got to take him back, and the shay will but hold three anyhow. Howsoever, you can come after us if you like, though I'd advise you not."

"Where are you going to take him?" cried Lucy. "What are you putting those things on him for?" and she gazed with terror upon the handcuffs that they were fastening upon his unresisting arms.

"Why, we are going back to Mallington," answered Harry Soames, "and that as fast as we can go; and as for why we are putting these things on him, you see it's for murder"—he had very nearly added "of your own father," but he paused, thinking, "I will not say that."

"For murder!" exclaimed Lucy, "for murder! Well, he is my husband, and I will go with him, whatever he has done."

"But I tell you you can't, marm," answered Harry Soames. "It's no use argutying, it can't be done."

"Then I'll follow," said Lucy, mournfully—"I'll follow, wherever he goes."

"Come," said the captain of the vessel, "you had better get him out

of the ship as fast as you can. I can't lay-to here all night. I thought there was something wrong about him when first I saw him. Come, take him away to the boat."

"Oh, take me with him—take me with him in the boat!" cried Lucy; "at least take me on shore with him!"

But Mr. Soames thought fit to assume a harshness which, notwithstanding his various faults, was not natural to him. "It's a great deal better she should be out of the way," he thought, "she'll only break her heart if she comes in the midst of it, and finds how it all is. Better the young dog should be safe lodged in the stone pitcher, and her father's burial over, before she gets home, anyhow;" and, therefore, upon these considerations he replied, "No, that can't be permitted, marm. You may just speak a word to him, if you like, before he goes. There can be no harm in that. Stay a minute, captain, there's a good soul. They are new-married people, and this is a hard parting;" and he walked towards the door.

"And what am I to do with the girl?" asked the captain, in a low voice, following the constable.

"Oh! you must take her over to Havre, and bring her back again if she wants to come," answered Soames. "I'm not going to take her ashore, I can tell you, for many reasons; but be kind to her, there's a good man, for she comes of very good people, and he's a gentleman of high family, although he has played this here trick."

"Are they really married?" asked the captain.

"Yes they were, yesterday morning," answered Soames; "I see the gentleman that married them."

In the meantime Lucy had cast her arms round her husband's neck, and given way to the tears she had long repressed. But Alfred Latimer recovered himself sufficiently to whisper, in a quick tone, "Put your hand in my waistcoat pocket, and take out the key of the large trunk—all the money is in it. Go on to Havre, and then come back again if you like, Lucy. But on no account bring that trunk back with you, or anything that it contains, but what money you want. Quick—quick!—don't let them see you."

Lucy did as he bade her; and the moment after Harry Soames said, "Come, I can't give any more time, Mr. Latimer; you must come along."

"Well, I am ready," answered the young man. "Farewell, Lucy!—farewell!" and he kissed her tenderly.

They were obliged to take poor Lucy's arms from his neck before they could lead him to the deck. Alfred Latimer went calmly, though slowly; but, as he approached the ship's side, the overwhelming impression of the dreadful situation in which he was placed, rushed upon his mind more forcibly than it had done before. The horror of being branded and tried as a murderer—the sight of all those he had known from his youth gazing upon him with horror, and the agony of a public execution—all seemed to flash upon his mind at once, and he thought anything would be preferable. He was near the ship's side—one of the men had him by the arm to help him down into the boat, and his hands were manacled; but he contrived to dart away, and at one spring cleared the bulwark. A dull splash was heard in the water, and a loud shriek from Lucy, who had followed close behind; but the

instant after one of the boatmen exclaimed, "I have got him—I have got him! Here he is!" and as they held the lantern over the ship's side, they saw two of the men below pulling the wretched culprit into the boat.

"Oh! let me go with him—in pity, in mercy, let me go with him!" cried poor Lucy; but Harry Soames and his companion scrambled down the ship's side without heeding her, and the next moment the boat pushed off, leaving her upon the deck.

"There, go down, go down, my poor young lady," said the captain, in a kindly tone—"go down and sleep. Perhaps they won't be able to prove anything against him after all."

Those were the first words of comfort that Lucy had heard, and, after gazing for a minute in the direction that the boat took, she did go down into the cabin, but not to sleep. Still the captain's words returned to her mind.

"They may not be able to prove anything against him," she repeated to herself. "Oh! no—no—no, I am sure they cannot. Murder! Alfred would never commit murder! Perhaps he has killed somebody in a duel; they call that murder sometimes, but then they are always pardoned, and I am sure he will be."

She gave up her mind, however, to bitterer thoughts, when she remembered many of the circumstances that had taken place—the companionship of Williams, the long absence of her husband for a day and two nights, the terrible agitation he had displayed, his haste and eagerness to reach a foreign country, and the sort of dull despair that had fallen upon him when Soames and his companion came on board. "I will return directly," she thought. "I will get back as fast as I can. But where shall I go when I reach Mallington? My father would be angry and not see me, and my mother will not venture to have me there. I will go to Dr. Western; he [illegible] kind, though he may be angry, and he will pity me and help me, I am sure. But I must go back directly. I wonder if they could not land me somewhere as they go."

As soon as this thought struck her she looked forth from the cabin, and called the steward, inquiring whether the captain could not put her ashore on the Isle of Wight? The reply, however, was in the negative; and a few minutes after the captain himself came down, saying, "I sha'n't touch anywhere till I get to Havre, ma'am, but I can bring you back the day after to-morrow, if that will do. But I think you had a great deal better lie down, for we shall soon get into rough water."

"The day after to-morrow!" said Lucy. "That is a long time;" but the poor girl had no other resource. Steam-packets in those days did not span the seas as with a flying bridge, and Lucy, after brief deliberation, agreed to the captain's proposal to carry her back again. Then, lying down in her berth once more, she turned her face so that no one entering could see her, and gave way to her grief without restraint.

CHAPTER LXV.

GREAT was the bustle and confusion in Mallington, even at a late hour of the night on which the notorious Jack Williams and the little less notorious Tom Brown were secured.

Mr. Morton was assisted up stairs to his room in the Bagpipes, for by this time he was greatly weakened by loss of blood; and having undressed himself with difficulty, he stretched himself on the bed, to wait for Mr. Nethersole. But a very few minutes elapsed before that gentleman appeared, half dressed indeed, but having a large case of instruments under his arm, and his assistant at his back. Without asking any questions, and with a very quiet, deferential manner, he proceeded to examine the young gentleman's wound, and probed it to the bottom.

"There's the ball," he said, "there's the ball. That's lucky—we shall easily get at it. I fear, sir, I must put you to a good deal of pain; but it must be extracted immediately, and then we shall easily take up the vessels that have been cut."

"I do not mind the pain," said Mr. Morton; "but you had better get me a glass of wine, for I feel faint."

Mr. Nethersole, as we have said, was a skilful man, very dexterous in the manipulation of his tools; and while Mr. Morton had been speaking, he had continued apparently probing the wound with a curious-looking instrument, somewhat like a pair of curling-irons.

"Get a glass of wine, William," he said; and at the same moment Morton felt a sort of tug, by no means of a pleasant description, but it was followed by instant relief from a sort of burning sensation, which he had felt just between the right shoulder and the chest, somewhat below the clavicle.

"Here it is," said Mr. Nethersole, with a slight degree of triumph in his tone, although it was low and mild; and he held up before Morton's eyes a pistol bullet, which he had drawn from the wound. "All safe, my dear sir," he continued, "no bones injured; and now we will attend to the hæmorrhage." Before ten minutes were over, the bleeding had ceased; and Morton felt himself comparatively comfortable when Dr. Western arrived, with terrible consternation in his face. Good Mrs. Pluckrose, who had been holding the light with Spartan fortitude, now hastened to relieve the mind of the worthy rector, exclaiming "It's all right now, sir: the bleeding is stopped, and the bullet's out. There it lies upon the table."

But Dr. Western, without examining the implement of evil, advanced to his young friend's bedside, and took his hand quietly in his. "Oh! it's nothing, my dear sir," said Morton; "the loss of blood made me somewhat faint, but that is all the mischief that has been done. I took the liberty of sending for you, because I knew that you were sitting up, and wished you to communicate the fact to Louisa in such a way as would not alarm her. But I dare say I shall be able to get out to-morrow."

Mr. Nethersole shook his head. "Perfect quiet, my dear sir," he said, "is absolutely necessary. For three days, at least, I shall not let

you quit your bed. The wound certainly is not dangerous, but we never can tell the result of inflammation, and, as you are well aware, some inflammation must come on, even in order to effect the healing process. At present I would forbid all conversation. It is my invariable rule. Upon quiet depends your recovery in ten days or a fortnight, or you remain ill for six weeks or two months. You may, therefore, take your choice. We surgeons don't object to a long case, you know; but still conscience, conscience makes us give the patient his option.

"Oh! the shorter time by all means," answered Morton; "and, therefore, I will merely speak a few words to Dr. Western, and bid him good-night."

Mr. Nethersole, taking the hint, retired to the other side of the room, wiped his instruments, washed his hands, and conversed a few moments with Mrs. Pluckrose, while Morton requested the clergyman to take every measure for securing the comfort of poor Mrs. Edmonds, and arranging the funeral of her husband after the coroner's inquest had taken place. Many were the messages, also, which he sent Louisa, beseeching her not to make herself uneasy; but Dr. Western well knew that it would be in vain to attempt to relieve Louisa's anxiety till she herself could see him.

With the earliest light of day Louisa was up; and in less than half an hour afterwards was down in Dr. Western's study. As always happens in such cases, the very tidings which he wished to communicate as gently as possible, were told by the housemaid in the most abrupt and exaggerated form. Louisa might, indeed, guess that something had been added to the tale over and above the truth, but still the fact was clear—Morton was wounded; and fear can be as great a magician as hope, although in a sadder way. For a full hour Louisa continued giving way to all the darkest fancies that apprehension could call up; and then, unable to bear the suspense any longer, she hastened to the room of Mrs. Evelyn, and knocking at the door craved admission. The tale was soon told, and the old lady endeavoured to soothe her as much as possible, but as the best means of satisfying both, she went away, half-dressed as she was, to her brother's room.

Dr. Western did not make them wait, for he was already up and dressed; and, hurrying out, he informed Louisa, kindly and tenderly, but with perfect truth, of the state of the case.

"Morton is certainly hurt, my dear," he said, "but not dangerously. I assure you there is not the slightest cause for apprehension, and you know that I would not say so unless I had good grounds."

"I am perfectly certain of that," replied Louisa; "and your assurance is a great comfort to me; but yet I should be more happy if—do you think there would be any harm or impropriety in my going with you to see him?"

"No, my dear," answered Dr. Western; "circumstanced as you are, and with your guardian at your side, I think there would be none; but there is an objection of another kind. Mr. Nethersole recommends perfect quiet for the next three days. Now, I need not tell you, Louisa, that Morton could not see you without very different emotions from those with which he would receive the surgeon, or the surgeon's assistant. Therefore, I think you had better forbear."

Louisa was reasonable. "Whatever I may feel," she said, "I will do nothing to protract his illness; but at all events, as I suppose you will go to see him yourself, I may accompany you to the door. That will be some satisfaction."

To this there was no objection; and it was arranged that about the middle of the day Louisa, Mrs. Evelyn, and the good doctor, should go together to the inn, and thence cross over to Mallington Park, on a visit of consolation to poor Mrs. Edmonds. Before they set out, a message from Mr. Nethersole brought the welcome intelligence that Morton was proceeding perfectly well, and that he wished to see Dr. Western, to which the surgeon assented; and when, after having waited in the carriage for about a quarter of an hour, while the clergyman visited the wounded man, Louisa was again joined by her guardian, she received the still better tidings, that her lover was apparently better than the night before; and Dr. Western added, with a smile, "The only danger is that he seems so well, it will be difficult to keep him quiet."

The carriage drove slowly over the bridge; and, at the spot where the roads crossed, was turning to the left towards the rectory, when, suddenly, dashing down the hill as fast as four horses could bring it, appeared a postchaise approaching the inn. Louisa's eyes were turned in that direction, when she naturally gazed at so unusual a sight in the little town of Mallington; but the first object she beheld in the vehicle was Alfred Latimer, seated between the constable, Harry Soames, and another man, to whom she was a stranger. The face of her step-mother's son, once florid and healthy, was now as pale as death; and there was something in the position in which he sat, in the straitened and forward posture of the arms, which showed her that his wrists were manacled. His eyes were bent down, so that, though seen, he did not see anything that was passing around; and Louisa drew back in the carriage, and pressed her hand upon her brow. Dr. Western's chariot rolled on without pause; and the fearful sight of one who had called her sister brought past his own door as a captured felon was soon removed from her eyes.

CHAPTER LXVI.

Just one week passed after the discovery of the murder at the Hall and, at the usual hour in the evening, the London coach stopped at the inn in Mallington with a heavier load than it ordinarily brought. The burden, indeed, was not destined to swell even for a time the population of the little town; for only one passenger got out of the inside and gave any indication of an inclination to remain. That one was a lady, simply, though nicely dressed; and one box, or rather trunk, which contained her worldly goods, was taken from the boot by the coachman, and set down at the door of the Bagpipes. Mrs. Pluckrose was waiting, as she not uncommonly did, to see what fortune fate would send her by the coach, and, after eyeing the lady for a moment, for her features were not clearly discernible through a thick veil, she approached with a courtesy, asking if she intended to stay in Mallington.

"I will leave the trunk here, Mrs. Pluckrose," said a voice the good landlady knew right well; "but I must go down to Dr. Western's immediately."

"Dear me, Miss Lucy!" exclaimed Mrs. Pluckrose. "Dear me! is that you? You have come at a sad time, Miss Lucy—Mrs. Latimer, I mean to say—I wish you had come at any other time."

"I know it is a sad time," answered Lucy, "I know it too well, Mrs. Pluckrose; but, nevertheless, I must go down to Dr. Western's directly."

"Oh, don't go there just now, ma'am!" rejoined the worthy landlady. "Don't go there just now, my dear child—or, at all events, stop a little here. Come into my parlour, there you can be quite quiet and private."

"No, no!" answered Lucy Edmonds: "I must not stop for anything. Only just take care of my trunk till I know where I can lie, Mrs. Pluckrose; I am determined to do just what Dr. Western tells me; and wherever he tells me I ought to go, there I will go."

"Well, that's right—that's very right!" answered Mrs. Pluckrose; "but yet, my dear, I wish you would wait here for a little."

Before Lucy could answer, the coachman came up, with his bill in his hand, saying, "Four-and-twenty shillings, if you please, ma'am;" and the landlady was called away to reckon with one of the travellers, who was about to proceed.

Lucy paid the money, received the admonition to "remember the coachman" with due attention, and then crossing over the way, fol-

lowed the road by the river bank towards the rectory. Her steps were wavering and uncertain—her eyes bent upon the ground, and, to tell the truth, they were filled with tears, for every painful memory of the past, and every dark anticipation of the future, rose up before her, as she proceeded through the scenes of her early days, with none to welcome her, with none to offer one kindly word, or greet the wanderer's return with an embrace. From time to time she looked around, as if fearful that some one should see her whom she had formerly known. She dreaded to meet her father's eyes, little dreaming that those eyes were covered with the shroud. Even the mother who had so loved her—who had always been so tender and so kind—she would fain have shunned, little knowing that that mother was standing by a husband's grave on the road directly before.

When she had advanced about a quarter of a mile, she saw a lady and a gentleman coming slowly towards her, the latter very pale, and apparently languid and ill; the former with her eyes anxiously turned towards his countenance, and her hand resting very lightly on his arm. Lucy instantly recognised Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton, but she could not make up her mind to speak to them; and anxious to avoid their notice—though she might have passed safely under the thick veil which she wore—she crossed the little bit of green sward which lay between the road and the river, and gazed upon the passing waters, as if some secret treasure lay hidden beneath their course.

When they had passed by, she resumed her walk, and was approaching the rectory, when she caught a sight of Dr. Western's figure coming by a private gate from the churchyard into his own grounds. But upon the open road, before the rectory, there was another sight—two undertakers, in black, were leading the way from the churchyard before a long string of other persons, with all the signs of deep mourning in their apparel and demeanour, who seemed to have been attending a funeral. Lucy hurried forward, in the hope of avoiding them, by the gates which led into the garden of the rectory; but, just as she did so, her eye fell upon the form of a young boy, walking beside a woman, whose face was buried in her handkerchief. They were the two first of the sad procession, the principal mourners, and in the one Lucy recognised her brother. Who was the other? The poor girl eyed her with a sinking dread at her heart, which made her whole frame tremble. The woman withdrew her handkerchief for a moment from her streaming eyes to speak a word or two with the boy, and Lucy beheld her mother.

A part of the truth—happily, only a part—flashed instantly upon her mind. Her father was dead! She accused herself of killing him; and, giving way to the sudden impulse of grief and love, she darted forward towards her mother; but ere she reached her, all the exhaustion that a week of agonising suspense had produced, the weariness of travelling, the lassitude of long-endured grief, overpowered her corporeal energies; she felt an indescribable sick faintness spread over her whole frame, the objects swam before her eyes, her brain seemed to turn round, and she sank senseless at her mother's feet.

It needed not the sight of her face to show her mother who she was; and Mrs. Edmonds stooped tenderly over her while one of the

men who had followed the body of the poor park-keeper to the tomb, lifted the unhappy girl in his arms. There was no look of reproach upon the widow's countenance—there was no reproachful feeling in her heart. She knew well that the grief and agony of her child, when she came to learn the whole, would be far more than sufficient punishment for any fault she had committed, although Mrs. Edmonds was not aware of how much there was to palliate Lucy's conduct, or that she was rather the victim than the offender. While she was thus hanging over her, with all a mother's feelings strong in her heart, and while Lucy's brother was rubbing her hand, and gazing at the same time at the wedding-ring upon her finger, the voice of Dr. Western (who had been drawn to the spot by the sudden halt of the funeral party, and the little bustle that succeeded) was heard from within the garden-fence, desiring that Lucy might be brought into his house.

This was soon done; and under Mrs. Evelyn's kind management the poor girl was speedily restored to consciousness; but as soon as Dr. Western saw the returning colour appear in her cheek he took her mother into the adjoining room, and urged upon her the necessity of concealing from her daughter as long as possible, the awful facts of which she herself had become by this time aware. Mrs. Edmonds would willingly enough have yielded to the good rector's advice, but she started a difficulty which he had not foreseen, for she knew her daughter better than he did.

"I will do anything you tell me, sir," answered the widow, in her humble manner; "but I can't help thinking my poor girl is suffering worse than she would do if she knew the whole truth. She fancies, sir, that it has been her going away killed her father. I could see it in a minute; and if you will ask her you will find it so."

"Such may be the case, indeed," answered Dr. Western; "but we will ascertain the fact, and act accordingly. Let me speak with her first, Mrs. Edmonds;" and returning to the library, where Lucy still lay upon the sofa, though now much recovered, he sat down by her, hile her mother held her hand and kissed it.

"You are all very kind to me," said poor Lucy, "much kinder than I have deserved; and yet, indeed, indeed, if you knew all, you would see I am not so much to blame as you think. Oh, my poor father! if he could but have known——" and she burst into tears.

"Lucy, my dear child," said Dr. Western, "we have no cause to think that he believed you so much to blame as you suppose he did—at least after his first anger was over. Doubtless, he would have been easily brought to forgive you, especially when he heard of your marriage, had not this fatal accident deprived us of him."

"A fatal accident!" exclaimed Lucy; "then it was not my doing! —A fatal accident!"

"Yes, my dear child," replied the rector: "he met his death by violence, it would seem; but as yet we know not the full particulars."

"By violence!" cried Lucy, raising herself, deadly pale, and gazing in the clergyman's face. "By violence!—and my husband—Oh, Heaven! my husband!—violence!—murder!" and she fell back again, as if life had utterly departed.

CHAPTER LXVII.

In the prison at Sturton, in which Alfred Latimer, with his two companions in crime, Williams and Brown, were now confined, a good deal of laxity existed. The prisoners were allowed to purchase anything they liked, if the governor of the prison did not judge it dangerous. They were suffered to walk out in the yard, to converse together, to arrange any plans they might think fit, and to see any one who might come to visit them, favoured by a magistrate's order, or the governor's caprice. The three persons I have named, all charged with the same crime, and committed very nearly upon the same evidence, were, nevertheless, very differently dealt with. Alfred Latimer, undoubtedly the most criminal of the three, knew little of the rigours of imprisonment but the name. He was a young gentleman, and was treated in a very gentlemanly manner indeed. He had a comfortable room in the governor's own lodging, a well-furnished table, wine at will, books to read, paper to write, and occasionally a game at piquet with another favoured culprit committed to the same gaol. When he walked out in the yard, no clanking irons announced the felon; and had it not been for the downcast look and gloomy brow, the quivering lip and the abstracted air, one might have supposed him a visitor, brought by curiosity to examine the interior of the gaol.

Neither was Williams manacled, though the desperate resistance he had made when he was taken, and the wound he had inflicted upon Mr. Morton, might have well justified such a precaution. But since his confinement he had shown himself perfectly calm, tranquil, and obedient. His resistance, in the first instance, he shrewdly explained away, saying, that, suddenly startled out of his sleep, after a long and fatiguing walk, he did not know what his captors wanted, and expressing great and apparently sincere regret that he had hurt the young gentleman, who, he added, had always been very civil to him. He frequently asked after his health, and seemed well pleased to hear that he was recovering rapidly, displaying a great wish to see him, and ask his pardon for having wounded him.

Tom Brown, on the contrary, never appeared without being accoutred with what he himself called the "darbies;" but, to say truth, he had given cause for severity, having knocked down and nearly murdered one of the turnkeys two days after his committal. He thought him-

self very ill-used, indeed, when, walking out in the yard, he found Williams left to the free use of his limbs; and a feeling of rancour was generated in his bosom by the distinction.

For several days after their committal, Alfred Latimer did not appear in the yard at the same time with themselves, and at first Williams concluded that he had effected his escape, expressing to Brown some satisfaction that such was the case. Brown gave no answer but by a savage laugh; and, as secrets will find their way out even in a prison, they soon found that their comrade in crime was within the same walls.

Williams accounted for his non-appearance by the supposition that he was purposely kept apart from them by the authorities of the prison, which, as the management of unconvicted prisoners greatly depended on caprice, was not improbable. But the facts of the case were very different. Alfred Latimer, on his committal, had affected to desire no communication with the persons under the same charge with himself, and had requested, as a favour, to be allowed to walk in the yard at a different hour from that assigned to them. He said, and said truly, though not for the purpose of truth, that his acquaintance with Williams, and having suffered himself to be led into several wild adventures by that man, had been the cause of all the evil that had befallen him, and he added that he wished for no more of his society. But very speedily a change came over his views, after speaking in private with a shrewd solicitor who had been brought from London to prepare his defence. He then saw that the evidence of Maltby, which clearly established the fact of his having been in company with Williams and Brown, would require a combination of measures with them, and he thenceforward became as anxious to speak with them as he had before been desirous of disclaiming any connection with them at the period when the offence took place. He so contrived it the next day that at the hour assigned for his own walk he was apparently busy in drawing up notes and memoranda for his lawyer; and afterwards, at the hour when he knew they would be in the yard, he pretended to be suffering from headache, and requested to be permitted to take some exercise. The governor informed him in reply, that the two men, Williams and Brown, were then out; but Alfred Latimer affected a tone of indifference, answering, "Oh! I don't care for meeting them—I am not afraid to meet anybody;" and having obtained leave, he went forth.

There were several people in the yard, besides the turnkey who was watching them at the door; and the young gentleman, on first entering, had to abide all the insults and annoyances which usually await a new prisoner on first mingling with his fellow-captives. As soon as he could free himself he crossed over direct towards Williams, who was pacing up and down the yard with Brown, as if keeping watch on the deck of a ship; and, after a slight hesitation, he shook hands with him, and entered into conversation with him as they walked. They could pursue no topic long and uninterruptedly, for many of their fellow-prisoners either crossed them, or came up for the express purpose of teasing the new comer, but from time to time they spoke of the subject that was naturally uppermost in the thoughts of each, though in low tones, and with anxious looks around.

"I don't think it will do, Mr. Latimer," said Williams, in reply to

some observation of the other; "I think they have got us tight, whichever way we turn, unless they break down at the indictment. You see that cowardly blackguard Maltby has sworn that he saw us all together on the very night that we came over the river, just after the time when the thing was done. Then, there's that unfortunate job of your bloody clothes being found, and a dozen other things will come out besides, if they haven't come out already. No, there's nothing for it," he added, "but to get out of this place, if we can. I've a scheme on hand, which would be easy enough done, if it weren't for these irons on Brown: but we'll talk about it to-morrow, for it will soon be shutting-up time."

Alfred Latimer returned to the room in which he was confined more gloomy than he had been since he had entered those walls.

I will not recapitulate all the dark images that fancy called up before him, but only say that there he sat for more than one hour, with the thought of a dreadful death before him. The chance of escape from the walls of the prison seemed so faint that it gave him no relief. He looked upon it merely as a thing to be justified by despair, and he gazed trembling on into the future, tasting all the bitter fruits of crime.

At length, however, he heard the bolts undrawn, and the door unlocked, and the next instant the governor himself entered with the turnkey, who bore the candles.

"Your mother, sir," said the officer, "is in my room, wishing to see you. I don't know any reason why she should not; the magistrates have given me no directions. So if you like to see her, you can."

To the governor's surprise, and it must be added to his horror, Alfred Latimer's first exclamation was, "Curse her! she has done me more mischief than any one else. I don't want to see her. I should like to see my wife, indeed, but I don't care about this woman."

The governor was turning away in some disgust, and without reply; but then the hardened villain seemed to think better of it, and exclaimed, "Well, never mind, let her come in; she may as well see what a terrible state she has brought me to." And in a minute or two after Mrs. Charlton entered, supported by the governor.

I will not pause upon the first part of the scene that ensued, for it was too horrible to be dwelt upon. Bitter, horrible, and impious invective, was all that the mother heard from the lips of her son; and strong as was the spirit of Mrs. Charlton herself, it was completely cowed under his wild and outrageous violence. She strove to pacify him; and, with her usual skill, she soon divined that the only means of doing so was by holding out hopes. That quieted him a little; and when she went on to speak of the means to be taken for his defence, he listened sullenly, and answered from time to time in few words and in a bitter tone. His mind was led on, however, by several things she said, to think over some cunning scheme for evading the grasp of the law. Neither mother nor son for one instant took into consideration the truth or falsehood, the justice or the iniquity, the right or the wrong, of anything they proposed to say or do. To save him from an ignominious death by any means was all that they considered. Mrs. Charlton never inquired whether he was innocent or guilty; but, after several schemes had been rejected, she said, in a low tone, "Don't you

think I could bribe some of the jury? Three or four thousand pounds would tempt any common man to do more than that."

"How the devil will you know who the jury are till the very day?" exclaimed Alfred Latimer. But then, a moment after, he said, "Stay, stay! I have thought of something. Perhaps you could bribe the fellow who draws up the indictment—the Clerk of the Arraigns, I believe, he is called—to put in a flaw, and that would be sure work. But it will take a great sum, depend upon it. You must not offer less than five or ten thousand pounds."

"But where am I to get it?" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "If I were to sell all my jewels and plate, they would not produce more than four thousand."

"You must get it from Morton," said her son; "he will give treble that, I am sure, to marry Louisa."

"He won't, he won't!" cried Mrs. Charlton. "I tried that before all this happened. He is as proud and haughty as Lucifer, and will not enter into any bargain whatever. If he would not do it then, I am sure he will not now."

"You must try," replied Alfred Latimer, doggedly; "or see me hanged—that's all. I don't suppose you care much about that. Still, you won't like to have it said that your son died on a gibbet, for that would not suit your own purpose. So you must try; and if you can't get him to do it any other way, set Louisa to ask him. He will do it for her, if not for you, for I suppose you have quarrelled with him by this time."

"Quarrelled with him!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "I hate him, I abhor him. Oh! if I have to permit that saucy girl to marry this conceited, mercenary upstart, it will break my heart—it is well nigh broken already."

"No fear of that," answered her worthy son, "it's tough enough, or else you wouldn't hesitate when your son's life is at stake. I dare say you think that under your new name of Charlton it will never be known that the accused person is your son; but I'll take care of that, for I'll call you as a witness at the trial, and have the whole story in my last dying speech and confession, that you may have it hawked about under your windows for a penny—ha, ha, ha!" and he laughed bitterly.

"Do not, do not—for Heaven's sake, do not, Alfred!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, wringing her hands; "you know I would do anything for you—I will do even this, let it cost what it may. The girl will surely never refuse me; but I will try him first. If I could but drive them," she continued, in a lower tone, after pausing, and thinking for a moment—"if I could but drive them to a sudden marriage, without my consent, then the whole property would be mine."

"That's all nonsense," answered Alfred Latimer, "there's no time for such manœuvres. You talk as if you and I were to live for ever. Better take what you can get at once, and drive a bargain with Morton. He's a very good fellow, in spite of all you may say, and gave me help once before, when you wouldn't."

"I could not, Alfred, I could not," answered his mother. "You know very well I had not the means."

"I know nothing of the kind," said her son, harshly; "and all I

now know is, that your son will be hanged if you don't do as I tell you. So you can finish the work you have begun, if you like. And after having contrived to bring me here, you can go on, and take me to the gallows; but I shall say there, and tell everybody, that it is all your doing."

"My doing!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; "what had I to do with it?"

"A great many things," answered her son; "education and example, too. I know a good deal that there is no use talking about now; but it shall come out, by-and-by, if my mind is not made easy."

He spoke in a threatening tone, and his mother was profoundly silent.

After an instant she replied, however, "I do not know what you mean, Alfred, and I certainly do think you very ungrateful. But that does not matter; I will do all that you wish, all that I can, to deliver you. I will sacrifice even my just resentment, and condescend to see this man. I will even sue to an ungrateful girl who, forgetful of all the benefits I have conferred upon her youth, now turns upon one who has been more than a mother to her, I am sure; and if I fail there, I will contrive, notwithstanding, to raise the money in some way to save my son, I will sell everything—I will even pledge my income, and live in penury, if he too will not show himself ungrateful."

"Ay, come now, that is something like!" answered Alfred Latimer; and, after some further conversation in regard to the means and the agent to be employed in this scheme for frustrating the ends of justice, the mother and her son parted apparently better friends than they had met. Alfred Latimer remained revolving a new plan which had occurred to his mind for making all doubly sure, and preparing such a defence as would meet all the evidence against him; but Mrs. Charlton, entering her carriage, rolled away towards Mallington with thoughts which would not have been very pleasing to him if he could have seen into her heart. Self, self, was ever uppermost in her thoughts, whatever were the circumstances in which she was placed, and not even maternal affection could act pure and unmingled.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

The gloom which had spread over the little party at the rectory, in consequence of the dark and terrible events which we have lately recorded, had passed in a degree away. Cheerfulness had, to a certain extent, returned; and the feelings of all were at that point, where amusement of any quiet and tranquil kind is sought by the mind, to relieve it from the painful consciousness not only of the sad things gone, but of others that are to come. Gaiety, indeed, was yet far away, and with Louisa Charlton, perhaps, would never wholly return. But still there was light beyond the cloud; and hope, having good ground to rest upon, waved her on into the sunshine of coming years, when the storm should have passed by.

The worthy rector had dined somewhat later than usual; and he and his sister, and their fair guest, were still sitting round the table, evidently waiting for some one who was expected, but who did not come. Louisa seemed somewhat uneasy, and her kind old friend jested with her on her apprehensions without a cause.

"Well, perhaps it is foolish, and perhaps it is wrong," answered Louisa, "but I am afraid it is natural too, when we have seen such terrible and unexpected things take place, to lose, as it were, our confidence in the future, and never see a friend depart from us without asking ourselves, 'Shall we ever behold him again? Will he be safe, well, uninjured, where he is going?'"

"Is not that something very like our losing our confidence in God?" asked Dr. Western, in a graver tone. "If, my dear child, it is our duty to bear any griefs or adversities that He may send us with tranquil submission to his will, depend upon it that it is no less a duty to look forward to all his dealings towards us with trust and hope, in the full knowledge of his goodness and mercy. One of the best and most beautiful exemplifications of faith in ordinary life is, the serenity with which a good man waits for the future developments of God's will. We have no right to anticipate one evil, except as a consequence of our own bad acts; and he who has a conscience clear of offence, may well feel sure, that if adversity befall him, it will prove ultimately a benefit rather than an infliction."

"Well," said Mrs. Evelyn, who perhaps did not take quite so high a view as her brother, and was anxious to cheer Louisa by more human

means, "there can be no danger to Mr. Morton in this case; and here I think he comes, to show that no evil has happened."

The sound of wheels grating through the gravel was heard as she spoke; and in another minute Morton himself appeared. He was still pale, and somewhat languid from his wound, but his face was bright and cheerful.

"Here is a fair lady who has been frightening herself about you, my young friend," said the clergyman. "Indeed, you must take care to get no more wounds and bruises, or her courage will all go—and she had once a good deal."

"There was no danger in this instance, at least," replied Morton, "for I had a phalanx of jailers and turnkeys about me sufficient to have protected a monarch. My journey has been successful, too, my dear sir," he continued, putting a small pocket-book into Dr. Western's hands, and seating himself by Louisa.

While the worthy rector opened the pocket-book, took out one paper after another, put on his spectacles, and examined them carefully, Louisa Charlton inquired somewhat timidly of Morton, whether he had seen Alfred Latimer.

"No," he replied. "On asking for him, I found that his mother was with him; and, of course, I could not break in upon their conference. But I will go and see him some other day, dearest girl, and offer him every means of defence; for it is but right that he should have the full opportunity of proving his innocence, if possible."

"They are all here, then," said Dr. Western abruptly, raising his head from the small scraps of paper he had been studying—"There is no link wanting?"

"The only one that was missing is there supplied," replied Morton, "so that every difficulty is removed."

"Well, then, you have no objection now," said the worthy rector, rising from his chair. "Sister, allow me to introduce you to a new acquaintance. Mrs. Evelyn, the Earl of Mallington—My Lord, my sister, Mrs Evelyn."

Morton took the old lady's hand, laughing at her brother's formal introduction, and saying, "You must forgive me for my concealment, my dear madam; but as long as there was any doubt whatever remaining of my being able to prove my title, I did not choose to assume a name that might be taken from me; and having, when I first came down here in search of different documents, judged it best to drop my final name of Wilmot, retaining only the two first as Edmond Morton, I could not well resume the other without betraying the whole secret."

"And do you think you deceived me?" asked Mrs. Evelyn, with a quiet smile. "I can assure you, my dear lord, I have been well aware of the fact for the last fortnight. From the time when you were declared the owner of Mallington Park, I settled the matter quite quietly in my own head that you were the heir of the peerage."

"Nay," answered Morton. "I might have been the owner of the Park, my dear lady, without being the heir of the peerage. But you have certainly concealed your knowledge very well, for I never imagined that you even suspected how the case stood."

"Oh! a woman can keep a secret notwithstanding all man's libels

upon her," replied Mrs. Evelyn. "There is Louisa,—who sits smiling here as if it were a great relief to her to be freed from the burden—she has borne it most heroically, I can assure you, and never hinted it even to me, her oldest friend."

"From her I felt bound to have no concealments," answred Mortone "and never will. Though I won her as a simple gentleman, yet when, once won, she had a right to share all my thoughts."

Louisa gazed at him with dewy eyes, brilliant, yet moist, like a landscape in the early morning. But before she could reply, Dr. Western's old servant opened the door, saying, "Mrs. Windsor, sir, wishes to speak with you."

The words were addressed to Morton; and Dr. Western added, "She has been here twice before this afternoon, and seems burdened with her secret also, for she seemed very anxious indeed to bestow one upon you, asking particularly when you would return. You will find a fire in the library, and we shall be in the drawing-room, when you have done with the good lady."

"She mentioned once before she had something to tell me," answered Morton, going out. "Oh! come into this room, Mrs. Windsor," he continued, finding Mrs. Charlton's housekeeper in the passage.

Mrs. Windsor followed him into the library, and closed the door behind her, looking, as usual, perfectly prim and quiet, as if she had come about the most ordinary business in the world. "I remember you told me, when last I was at Mallington House," said Morton, leaning on the table, "that you had something to communicate to me. Is it upon the same subject you wish to speak with me to-day, or another Mrs. Windsor?"

"The same, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, in her usual quick, brief manner. "I heard you had been wounded, sir, and did not like to intrude; but now you are well again, and things must come to a conclusion, I thought it best to come down, because there is no reason why Miss Charlton,—who has always been good and kind to everybody—should be made a bit more unhappy than necessary."

"Certainly not, Mrs. Windsor," answered Morton. "But may I enquire what you allude to, or why you think your young lady is likely to be made unhappy at all?"

"Why, sir," replied the housekeeper, "I know my mistress very well—I have known her for a great many years. One can't do that without seeing and understanding what she means just as well as she [illegible]. With regard to you, sir, and Miss Louisa, I have understood everything from the beginning, though I don't think you did."

"Certainly not from the beginning," replied Morton; "but I very soon found that there was something to be discovered, Mrs. Windsor."

"Oh yes, sir," answered the abigail, with one of her axioms, which were rarely without a certain portion of good sense. "It's a very easy thing to conceal a great deal, but a very difficult thing to conceal that we are concealing something. However, as Mrs. Charlton never thought that I saw anything but what she wished me to see, I saw a great deal, as you may suppose, and I very quickly made up my mind as to what was her game with you."

"And pray what might it be, Mrs. Windsor?" asked Morton, desirous that the good lady should develope her own views.

"Why, sir, she took it into her head when first you came down, that you were a painter," replied the housekeeper; "and she held to that opinion because she was fond of it—long after she should have known better. She thought, because you did not bring down servants and horses, and a carriage of your own, that you must be a poor gentleman, at all events, who would be glad to marry a young lady with a good fortune, at any price. She had been laying it out in her head for a long time, I know, and you were just the sort of person that suited her, for you were introduced by Dr. Western, and had the sort of air with you that would give her a good excuse for letting you be always with Miss Charlton, without pledging her to anything in case you did not come up to her price. So you were quite a godsend in her way."

Morton smiled to find how accurately Mrs. Windsor had calculated all her mistress's steps, and he inquired, "What might be the original cause of all this, Mrs. Windsor?—for taking it for granted that your view is quite correct, it seems to me that she has somewhat hurried all her proceedings."

"Aye, sir, that's because she's hard pressed just now," replied Mrs Windsor. "She owes a great deal in different quarters, and people are getting impatient. She intended, some months ago, to have gone to London, and played the same game there, but there was a difficulty about money then, and you came down just at the time, and saved her the trouble. So she did everything in her power to promote matters, and when she found out that it all went on as she wished, she was quite delighted. She got in a little fright, indeed, when she found out that you had more money than she fancied. But as she had sat down to the game, there was nothing for it but to play it out—which she did I suppose, the last time you saw her?"

Morton was not satisfied with such vague explanations, and determining to bring Mrs. Windsor to the point, he said, "Why, what do you suppose she did, my good lady?"

"I suppose, sir," said Mrs. Windsor, with a smile at the question, as if it were quite superfluous to put it, "that she told you she would be very happy to see you Miss Charlton's husband provided you gave up one-half of her fortune; that if you didn't she would not give her consent; and if you married without it, it would all come to herself. I am sure that was her plan, whether she put it in execution or not."

Morton meditated, but the subject of his reverie was not exactly what the reader may suppose. He was considering with himself the exact topography of Mallington House, and calling to mind the relative positions of the drawing-room, the library, the dining-room, and the hall, with a view to ascertain whether Mrs. Windsor could have overheard what passed between him and Mrs. Charlton. He settled it at length, however, that such a thing was impossible. "You are not very far wrong, Mrs. Windsor," he said. "But before we speak further on these rather delicate subjects, it will be as well for you to tell me what the intelligence you have to give me is, and how it bears upon these matters."

"Certainly, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, "I am sure I ought to beg pardon for speaking upon them at all. But you see, I came into the house when Miss Charlton was very young, and I have seen her grow up as nice a young lady as any in the world, and I cannot bear that

she should be wronged. All I have therefore to say is, that Mrs. Charlton has no more to do with Miss Louisa's marriage than I have, whatever she may say."

"But," said Morton, "there is a codicil to Mr. Charlton's will, by which it is provided that if Louisa marries without her step-mother's consent, the whole property falls absolutely to Mrs. Charlton."

"Pooh! sir," exclaimed Mrs. Windsor, "that codicil is not worth a piece of packing paper."

Morton smiled at the boldness with which she spoke, though far from being convinced that she was right in her assertions. "Women, I am afraid, are not the best judges of the law. The codicil is all written in Mr. Charlton's own hand, signed with his name, and though not witnessed, is as good as any other part of the will. However, set your mind at ease about your young lady; it luckily happens that I am not so poor as Mrs. Charlton supposed; and to one thing I have perfectly made up my mind—not to drive any bargain whatsoever as to her fortune. She shall have all or none. Her hand is too precious a thing to be bought or sold."

"I was quite sure you would think so, sir," replied the housekeeper, "otherwise I should not have said a word. But with regard to the will—I am certain you are mistaken; and as I fancy things standing as they do, Mrs. Charlton will not be long before she begins the matter with you again, I think you might as well ask her one or two questions, and see what she answers. First, sir, I would ask," replied the housekeeper, "whether she was in the library for an hour and a half, when everybody else was in bed, on the night that Mr. Charlton died? and whether she didn't write a great number of papers there, and burn several of them that were not quite done to her mind? Then, I would have you ask her where Mr. Charlton was on the 25th of July, 18—?"

"Why, that was the day that the codicil was signed," rejoined Morton, with the light beginning to glimmer in upon him.

"That is the day it is dated," answered Mrs. Windsor. "But what I want to know is, where he was on that day, for it is dated Mallington too, I think, and there must be a mistake somewhere."

Morton gazed at her steadily for a moment; but the woman's face was all calm and quiet, adding nothing whatever to her words. "I think, Mrs. Windsor," he said at length, "I had better call in Dr. Western to hear our consultation, as he is one of Louisa's guardians, and an executor under the will."

"I don't know, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, in the same quiet but quick tone. "You are the best judge; but perhaps, till you have considered the matter, it would be as well to keep it quiet. Dr. Western is a magistrate you know, and may think himself bound to take strong measures; which, when once they are begun, must be gone on with. I don't wish to do my mistress any harm; and I think if you were to talk quietly with her, and just ask her the questions I have told you, all would go right. It would be a sad thing, sir, to have mother and son in jail both at once; especially for Miss Louisa, when it is her own father's wife that she has to do with."

"You are right Mrs. Windsor, and I thank you," answered Morton. "It will, indeed, be as well to say no more upon the subject than is

absolutely necessary. Is there anybody else besides yourself who knows any of the facts?"

"A fellow-servant, sir," answered Mrs. Windsor, "knows that my mistress was in the library a long time that night, and that she burnt several papers; but no one ever thought of the date of the codicil, as it is called, but myself. Whenever it was read I thought, 'Why, master and mistress were both away at that time, or I am much mistaken;' and when I went and looked at my books I found it was just so. They went away four days before, and did not come back till the week after."

Morton mused. The first question he put to himself was, "Might it not be better to do anything this unhappy woman demands, rather than expose so disgraceful an affair?" But the moment after, he replied to himself, "No; I see not why she should be suffered to triumph in her knavery. If she escapes prosecution, she is perhaps too leniently treated."—"Well, Mrs. Windsor," he continued aloud, "I am very much obliged to you for the information you have given me. I will soon bring the question to issue with Mrs. Charlton, even if she does not do so herself; and, should need be, I will send for you to speak with me further. At all events your services shall not be forgotten, you may depend upon it."

"I thank you very much, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, with a low courtesy, "but I wish for nothing but to see right done; and I am quite sure that neither you nor Miss Charlton will see me suffer for speaking the truth." And thus saying, she courtesied again, and quitted the room.

CHAPTER LXIX.

When Morton entered the drawing-room, after his conference with Mrs. Windsor, he found Dr. Western with a note in his hand, which the rector handed to him without comment. Morton took it, and instantly recognised Mrs. Charlton's handwriting. The contents of the present epistle, however, were of a very different character from any note of hers he had yet seen; and as he read, a smile came over his countenance, the internal causes of which I will leave the reader to divine, when he sees the substance of the lady's note, which was as follows:—

"My dear Sir,

"I must really remonstrate upon the conduct which Miss Charlton pursues, and is suffered to pursue. You must be well aware that I have no false or affected prudery about me; and I trust that though my own conduct has always been governed by propriety, I have ever shown full consideration for the foolishness of young people. I learn, however, that Louisa, since you thought fit, as her guardian, to remove her from my house, has been permitted to walk about the whole neighbourhood with Mr. Morton, alone; when that gentleman has not even yet obtained my consent to his engagement—as I suppose it must be called—to Miss Charlton; whom you must know I have always looked upon and treated as if she were my own daughter. I should have thought that gentleman's own good sense and good feeling—of which he is by no means destitute—would have shown him the impropriety of such conduct. But I cannot sit by and neglect my duty, by suffering it to proceed any longer without some explanation between himself and me. If, therefore, he is now at your house,—where I understand he is usually to be found,—I beg you will communicate to him what I say, and hint that it will be expedient that we should have some conversation without delay.

"Believe me to be, my dear sir, yours, &c."

Such was the well-concocted epistle which met Morton's eyes; and

returning it to Dr. Western, still smiling, he said, "Well, my dear sir, what do you think of it?"

"Very bad, very bad," said Dr. Western, shaking his head. "You must act as you think fit, my young friend."

"Perhaps the best way will be to see the lady at once," observed Morton, after some consideration; "for though I must speak with Louisa fully upon the subject, before I can finally determine upon anything, it may be as well to hear what Mrs. Charlton can say, in the first place."

"I will abide by anything you determine," replied Louisa, "for I am sure, Morton, you will remember that she was my father's wife, and will not do anything that is unkind."

"Undoubtedly I will not, Louisa," answered Morton. "But yet, my love, you do not know the whole. I wish much that my good friend Quatterly was down here still, for I want a little of his legal help in judging of these matters. I am afraid there is a certain perversity in my nature which induces me to resist desperately one part of the fate of all human beings."

"What part is that, Morton?" asked Louisa.

"Being cheated, dear girl," answered Morton, laughing. "But now I will run away, lest I be tempted to use any more of such hard words."

Taking his hat, Morton walked slowly up the hill to Mallington House. He had twice to ring at the bell before he was admitted; and there was something in the whole appearance and state of the house, a negligence in the air of the servants, and a number of little circumstances very nearly indescribable, which showed Morton that a great change had taken place since Louisa had left her own dwelling, and that the respect as well as affection of the inferior persons it contained, was gone from those above them. The butler, who opened the door, replied in answer to his questions, that Mrs. Charlton was at home, and disengaged; and Morton, as he followed the man, said, deliberately, "Have the goodness to tell her that the Earl of Mallington wishes to see her." The butler instantly put on a deferential air, and while Morton remained for a moment or two without, he could hear his name announced, and Mrs. Charlton exclaim in a sharp tone, "The Earl of Mallington! What Earl of Mallington?"

"Mr. Morton as was, ma'am, if you please," answered the butler.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Charlton, with a dry and somewhat snappish prolongation of the sound; "show his lordship in."

Morton was accordingly introduced; and the fair lady, rising, made him a profound and too ceremonious courtesy, saying, "I am informed that I have the honour of seeing the Earl of Mallington—pray, be seated, my lord."

"The same, my dear madam," replied Morton, calmly; for he easily understood that it was not particularly agreeable for Mrs. Charlton to find his rank and station such as would afford no reasonable ground of objection to his marriage with Louisa. As she remained silent, however, he continued, "My friend, Dr. Western, informs me, that you wished for some conversation with me, and I thought it better to come up at once, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour."

"And thinking, perhaps," added Mrs. Charlton, who had rapidly

arranged her plan, "that the Earl of Mallington might find my views different from those expressed to Mr. Morton. In that, my lord, at least, you are mistaken; for, taking it for granted that your present rank is not, like your former name, assumed, that fact will only strengthen the opinions I before expressed."

"Let me correct one error," said Morton, as she paused for an instant; "neither my present rank nor my former name was assumed, my dear madam. My name is simply Edmond Morton Wilmot, or Wilmot Morton; and, as I never assume anything that is not clearly my own, I did not take the title of Earl of Mallington, so long as any one could entertain a doubt of my right to it. As all doubts and difficulties, however, are now removed, I should be deceiving you were I to give myself any other name."

"I am glad to find, sir, that you did not deceive me before," replied Mrs. Charlton, somewhat sharply; "and I only wish you had carried your candour further, and informed me of your pretensions, as I should certainly, under those circumstances, have neglected the honour of your acquaintance. I have, I may almost say, an insuperable objection to young women of an inferior rank marrying persons of family. I have myself experienced all the evils which result from such unequal connections, and am most indisposed to sanction them in any case."

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Morton; "but I fear, my dear madam, there is no help for it in this instance, as I have no power to give up my rank, and no inclination to give up Louisa."

"You speak with prodigious coolness, my lord," answered Mrs. Charlton, with her eyes gleaming; "and I doubt not in the least that your fortune is so enormous as to make six or seven thousand a year with your wife a matter of no consequence to you at all. But one thing I must say, that Miss Charlton's guardians will not do their duty, unless they see, when such a sacrifice is made, that a settlement quite equal to the loss is secured to their ward."

"That will all be easily arranged," answered Morton, in a tone of the most provoking indifference. "I have the consent of both her guardians, which is, I believe, all that is necessary."

"To her marriage with you, sir, perhaps it is," answered Mrs. Charlton; "but to your obtaining a penny of her fortune something more is required—my consent. You take her a beggar, if you take her at all without my approbation: pray remember that."

Morton [illegible] provoked more than he had fancied his contempt would suffer him to be. "If what you say, my dear madam, is true," he replied, "I think, taking the whole matter in a mercantile point of view, you would be very foolish to give your consent at all. You seem to forget that it would be a great loss to you; and I cannot conceive how a lady of such correct calculations can even consider the matter at all—unless, indeed, you entertain the opinion, which some people have, that the grounds of your pretensions are not quite so sure as they seem at first sight."

'Not sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, vehemently. "What says

have see[illegible]

registered—acted upon. How will you get over that, I should like to know!"

"There are two or three ways in which I might answer that question," replied Morton. "In the first place, my dear madam, a Court of Chancery gives the means of putting a right and lawful construction upon wills; and it would be for that court to consider whether the refusal of consent, which would entitle you to the whole of Mr. Charlton's property, must not absolutely be made upon reasonable grounds."

"There is nothing to that effect in the codicil!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "The word is simply—consent."

"True," replied Morton; "but the codicil premises that it is made on the consideration that heiressess are too often the dupes of sharpers, and that the power given to you is to prevent that result in this instance. Such being the case, and I not being a sharper, the construction of the will may perhaps afford a curious and intricate question to the bar."

Mrs. Charlton remained silent, and very pale, for a minute or two; but at length she answered, "I see, my lord, that you wish to frighten me with the idea of a long lawsuit; but I am not easily frightened."

"I should think not," replied Morton; "and, therefore, what I am going to say will probably produce no alarm. The law proceedings, Mrs. Charlton, may perhaps be reduced within a very narrow compass; for there are other questions, connected with this will, which may be much more easily decided than its construction. The first will be—is the codicil genuine?"

"Genuine!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, grasping the arm of the sofa—"genuine!"

"Yes, my dear madam, genuine!" replied Morton. "There are two minor questions affecting that greater one, which it will be well for you to consider before you proceed further in the course you have thought fit to adopt. The first question is, 'Whether, on the night after Mr. Charlton's death, and in the possession of all his keys, you did or did not pass a considerable time, when the whole household were in bed, in examining different papers, and writing others, in the library?' The next question will be, 'Whether the codicil to Mr. Charlton's will is not dated Mallington, on a day when Mr. Charlton himself was many miles distant from the spot?' I would recommend these subjects to your attention; and, until you have considered them, I think we had better delay any further conversation; for there are acts which place people in very great danger, and which none of those connected with them can wish to be inspected too closely."

Thus saying, Morton rose, and walked towards the door. She sat, however, on the sofa, still and silent as a statue, with her horrified eyes fixed upon the table, and the agony of detected guilt at her heart. Notwithstanding the contempt he felt for her, Morton was moved with compassion when he beheld the intense sufferings which his words produced; and, after pausing for an instant at the door, he turned back, and, approaching close to Louisa's step-mother, he said, "Mrs. Charlton, listen to me for a moment."

She remained perfectly silent and motionless, however, as if she were deprived of all thought and sensation. "Listen to me, I beg of you," he continued. "Louisa and myself are disposed to do anything that is kind towards you. We cannot recognise a claim that we do not believe rightly exists; and, therefore, anything you desire must

not be put in such a shape. We have no inclination to stir this question of the will, unless it be forced upon us; and farther, allow me to say, that, out of affection for her, I am ready now, or at any time, to do all I can to assist or befriend her father's widow. Pray think of this, and let me hear from you."

A ray of consciousness came into Mrs. Charlton's eyes, and she held out her hand to him. Morton took it for a moment, then released it, and left the room.

CHAPTER LXX.

There are times and seasons when intense corporeal suffering is a relief; for mental agony is far more terrible to bear; and it fortunately happens, in the strange, mysterious union between soul and body, that in general the powers of the human frame give way when the pangs of the spirit reach a certain point, affording either a diversion or a cessation of thought. At her mother's earnest request, Lucy Edmonds was conveyed to the park-keeper's house at Mallington Park, under a strict promise on the widow's part, not to say a word that would give her any certainty upon the terrible subject of her suspicions. Caution, however, was not very long necessary; for though Lucy was kept perfectly tranquil, yet before nightfall she began to show symptoms of fever. Her thoughts wandered, her cheek grew flushed, her breathing quick, and about midnight delirium came on, in which she seemed to lose all consciousness of her actual situation. Sometimes, indeed, she would rave of Alfred Latimer, but then it was as connected with the past—not with the present. For nine days this state continued; and then, carefully and tenderly nursed, youth and a good constitution began to triumph over disease and grief. The delirium ceased, she became quiet and more at ease, but it would seem that, for a time, memory of more recent events was altogether obliterated. She spoke little, and only uttered a word or two at a time, but those words showed that she had forgotten her marriage, and all the terrible events connected with it—her husband's situation; her father's fate; her hopeless journey with Alfred Latimer, and her own sad return to the scenes of her youth. There was a blank in memory, a cloud over a part of the past. Dr. Western visited her often, watching with the most kindly care every change that took place, anxious to seize the right moment for administering the only sort of consolation she could receive. One day it seemed to him that the time was fast approaching, for Lucy was much better. She was up; she could hold a conversation; she listened with attention, and apparently with deep thought, to all he said; and he ventured to dilate in general terms upon the duty and necessity of submitting patiently to the will of God under all afflictions. He made no personal application of his words, and left her, as he thought, calmer and better prepared. But when he was gone,

Lucy fell into a fit of deep meditation, and then gave way to bitter tears. Her mother, who slept beside her, perceived that she wept through a great part of the night; and though her health did not suffer, as might have been expected; though she rose the next day, and dressed herself with apparently greater strength than she had yet displayed since her illness; though she took food and everything that was recommended to her, yet a deep gloom hung upon her, and in the evening she spoke with her mother for the first time, of her husband and of her father.

Mrs. Edmonds endeavoured to turn the conversation; but Lucy—though, from the agitation she perceived in her mother, she would not press the subject of her father's death—could not be brought to refrain from asking further questions in regard to Alfred Latimer.

"Where is he, my dear mother?" she said. "Do not be afraid to tell me, for I now recollect all. They took him away from me—they put him in prison, I know. You must tell me where he is confined, for I must write to him—when I am able."

The widow, seeing that she would not be satisfied without information, thought it best to tell her the truth, that her husband was in Sturton jail. But about ten on the following morning she set out to inform Dr. Western of what had occurred, leaving her son to sit with Lucy during her absence. When she went the poor girl was up and dressed, and apparently trying to amuse herself by reading; but as soon as Mrs. Edmonds had quitted the cottage, she called her brother to her, saying, "John, I want you to tell me one thing, and then I won't ask you any more—Who killed our father?"

Her voice was perfectly calm, though low; and her manner displayed little or no agitation. But the boy, who had been warned beforehand, replied, with glistening eyes, "Indeed I don't know, Lucy. People say that tall man, Brown; or the other, Jack Williams; but nobody can tell rightly yet."

Lucy was silent, and looked at the book again, but her eye did not move along the line; and had the boy been very watchful, he must have seen that her thoughts were busy with objects beyond her sight. About five minutes afterwards his sister looked up, and said, "I wish you would run up to the Hall, John, and ask Mrs. Chalke to lend me the great book full of pictures that she once showed me. Bring it down carefully."

Perhaps her brother might have hesitated to obey before his mother returned, if it had not been for the thought of the pictures in the book, which he was well inclined to look at himself. He paused an instant, indeed, but Lucy repeated her request: and taking his hat he set off as fast as he could for the Hall.

As soon as he was gone, his sister rose suddenly, went into the other room for her bonnet and shawl, and having found them, hastened to the door and looked out; then darting away with a quick step, she made a circuit round the house, gained the shelter of the wood, and hurried along one of the paths which led along towards the stile near Dame Hazlewood's cottage. As she approached, however, she heard voices in the road, and turned away to the left to another stile further up the hill, and then issued from the park, and bent her steps on the

high road to Sturton. She walked on for some way with much greater strength than might have been expected—but when she had gone about half the distance, however, her strength failed her, and she sat down to rest for some time by the way-side. In about twenty minutes she rose again, and with tottering steps hurried on till she came opposite to a little public-house, on the other side of the road, where she paused and looked up with a hesitating and uncertain air. But she felt that she could not proceed further on foot without refreshment, and knowing the people to be good and honest country folks, well acquainted with her family, she crossed over and went in. At first the landlord and his wife did not recollect her, for she was much changed, both in dress and in appearance—but when they did call her person to mind, they showed her such kindness as their somewhat unpolished nature permitted, and seeming to divine whither she was going, set before her some refreshments without asking any questions. The good man and his wife talked together, indeed, for some time, in a low voice; and Lucy, terrified lest any one should stop her, remarked, that their eyes were directed towards her as they spoke, and rose sooner than she would otherwise have done, to depart, asking what she had to pay.

"You are not fit to go, my dear," said the landlord, coming forward to her. "I suppose you are walking to Sturton—but it's a long way for a poor sick girl like you on foot. I wonder your mother let you come, and alone too!"

"I must see my husband, you know," answered Lucy, judging from the man's words that her whole history was known.

"Well, I don't say but you must," replied the landlord, "I suppose that's but right, whatever may have happened. But I'll tell you what, my dear, you had better have our chaise-cart. Bill will soon drive you over."

It may easily be conceived that this offer was a great relief to the poor girl's mind. The little tax-cart was soon brought out, and in about three quarters of an hour poor Lucy was at the gates of Sturton gaol. Her heart sunk when she approached them, and gazed up at the awful and gloomy masses of stone, which seemed to harmonise but too sadly and darkly with all the crime and sorrow which from time to time they contained. She rang the bell, however, and on the wicket being opened, asked to see her husband, Mr. Latimer. The man gazed at her with a cold look, but a piece of money slipped into his hand soon softened him; and bidding her wait a minute in the lodge, while he asked the governor, he hurried away, leaving Lucy with one of the turnkeys, who was smoking a pipe at the table. Both remained silent, and the porter returned in a minute or two with the tidings that the governor had no objection. With eyes bent down, and wavering steps, and a heart beating wildly at every door they passed, poor Lucy followed the jailor along the passages of the prison to the room where her husband was confined. By the time the two large bolts were drawn back, and the door unlocked, she could hardly stand, but the moment after, the sight of Alfred, sitting at the table, revived her, and running forward, while the jailor, said, "Here's your lady, sir, come to see you," she cast her arms round his neck and wept.

Alfred Latimer's eye was haggard, and his whole look anxious and

despairing, but nevertheless he was truly rejoiced to see poor Lucy again. In the moment of his affliction and his danger, her coming was a true consolation and comfort to him, reviving for the time the faint light of better feelings in his dark and obdurate heart. He pressed her warmly to his breast; he soothed, he caressed her, and even so far forgot himself, as to remark her altered appearance, and say, "You look very ill, love, You must have suffered a great deal, I am sure, my poor Lucy!"

"I have been very ill," answered Lucy. "They thought me dying, I believe, for I quite lost my senses after I came back; and they would not have let me come now, I am sure, if they had known it."

"They have no right to stop you!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, sharply; "are not you my wife? They can't stop a wife coming to see her husband!"

"No: it was because I have been so ill, and am so weak," replied the poor girl. "I feel as if I should faint now."

"Here, take some wine," said Alfred Latimer, placing her in a chair, and reaching a bottle from the mantel-piece. You must keep up, Lucy, for I may want you to help me - I am sure you will, Lucy, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, I will!" answered Lucy. "I will help you whatever be the case, Alfred, for that is my duty now: yet, I would fain ask you one question, Alfred," she continued, in a sad and hesitating tone, "only one question."

A dark and fiend-like scowl came upon his face, and he replied, "Ask me no questions at all, for I shall answer none—that's to say at present—for small words often do great mischief. Your only business is, if you really love me, to do the best you can to get me out of this scrape."

Lucy was silent for a moment, with her eyes bent down in bitter thought; but looking up the instant after, she said gravely, "I will do all I can."

"That's a dear girl," answered her husband, "and I'll tell you what you must do. In the first place, you must know nothing about this business at all; and if any one asks you, say so."

"I do know nothing," answered Lucy, "they have told me nothing yet."

"Well, that's all right," answered her husband, sitting down beside her, and putting his arm round her waist. "Take some more wine, my love. That has done you good already. I'll tell you how it all is, Lucy. My mother, somehow or another, got together ten thousand pounds, and tried to bribe one of the clerks to put a flaw in the indictment against me. It was the lawyer Hazzard who managed it all; but the fool of a clerk would not take the money, and threatened to peach besides. My mother told her lawyer not to tell me that it had failed—some of her own cunning schemes made her want to keep it from me—but he was here this morning, and let it all out; so the only chance is——But you do not listen, Lucy.—Would you, too, help to ruin me?"

Lucy had remained with her eyes bent down; but she instantly raised her head, saying, "I do listen, Alfred; I hear every word, and

you know I would give my life to save you. Only tell me what I have to do, and I will do it, if I have strength, but I have very little, Alfred, and I fear what little I have will fail me very soon."

"Pooh, nonsense!" answered Alfred Latimer, all whose selfishness had returned upon him in full force again; "you must get a chaise, dear Lucy, and that will save you; then bid the post-boy drive you over by the bridge here, round to the common behind Mallington House. Make him stop near the gravel-pits; and then seek out Mother Brown, who has a cottage there—you know Mother Brown?"

Lucy shook her head. "Why, hers is the cottage close by the pits," continued Alfred Latimer; "where I was taken when I got such a fall. But you must find her out at all events, and tell her, if she would save her son's life, she must get some pheasants or hares, or game of any kind, and hide them away in the very back part of the cave in Wenlock Wood—she'll know the place quite well. You must give her some money to pay for the game—for I don't think the old wretch would spend a penny, if her own life depended on it—and tell her you will give her more when you know that it is done,—I don't care what the game is like, and the longer it has been killed the better, especially if there be a good deal of blood about it."

A sharp shudder passed all over poor Lucy's frame, but her husband did not remark it, and went on to say, "Simpkin, the poacher, will get her as much as she wants, and the more she gets the better—do you hear?"

"Yes," answered Lucy, "I hear, and I will go and do it directly. Can I do anything else, Alfred?"

"No, my love," he replied; "but bring me some money the next time you come. What have you got with you now?"

"Seven or eight guineas," answered Lucy. "I brought two hundred over with me from France, thinking you might want some, and I have spent four or five."

"Well, bring me a hundred next time you come, and take care that no one sees you with it, for most likely they would stop it."

He paused and thought for a moment, and then added, thoughtfully, "I wish to Heaven I could see Tankerville—he would soon help me to get out of this place. Couldn't you write to him, Lucy, and tell him my mother will give him a thousand pounds if he can get me over safely to France?"

"But where is he to be found?" asked Lucy, leaning her head upon her hand.

"Aye, that's the question," answered her husband. "Well, there's no help for it—if you can find out where he is, tell him what I say, but at all events do the other, and come back and see me as soon as you can—there's a dear girl. I'll tell them to get you a chaise here, and you can bid the boy drive towards Mallington House, then they'll think you are going to my mother."

Lucy made no answer, and her husband rang the bell, which was one of the conveniences granted in those days to a prisoner who could afford to pay for good accommodation. A turnkey speedily appeared; a chaise was ordered, and quickly brought to the gates, for it was not allowed to enter the court; and Alfred Latimer took leave

of Lucy, embracing her and kissing her tenderly. She suffered him to do so, for it cannot be said that she returned his caresses; a great change having come over her demeanour towards him since she first entered the prison. It is needless to enter into any long explanation of the cause, for a few words which she murmured to herself, as the vehicle drove rapidly away towards the bridge over the river, will be sufficient. The unhappy girl sank back in the seat, clasping her hands together, and saying, "Oh, my father! I am helping your murderer—but he is my husband, he is my husband!"

CHAPTER LXXI.

On the evening of the same day, the woman called Mother Brown might be seen returning from the common to her own cottage, laden with a large bundle of broken sticks and dry gorse. As soon as she had entered the hovel, she deposited her load upon the floor, bolted the door, and then, taking a quantity of the thorns and wood, laid them upon the nearly extinct embers which glowed faintly upon the hearth. The dry faggots speedily caught fire, and blazed up; and then, hanging her pot upon the hook, she filled it with water, and returning to the bundle spread the furze and sticks abroad, drawing out, from the very heart of the whole, a fine barn-door hen, stripped of the feathers. The neck hung down limp and pliant as if it had not been long killed, and the old woman, with a low chuckling laugh, muttered, as she raised it, "Ah! thou'lt lay no more eggs for Dame Johnson."

After certain preliminaries, such as cutting off the head, the fowl was consigned to the pot, and the old woman continued to hover about, moving now this thing and now that to very little purpose, and talking to herself the while in a rambling incoherent sort of way.

As she was thus speaking, some one from without lifted the latch, and pushed the door sharply. Up started Mother Brown, giving an apprehensive look towards the door; while the personage without shook it again and again, exclaiming, "Come, open it, or I'll burst it in. I see you quite plain, you old jade!"

Finding her castle likely to be stormed, Mother Brown thought it best to surrender at discretion; and, opening the door, exclaimed in a tone of surprise, as Captain Tankerville walked in, "Lord! sir, is that you? I could not think who it was, and I was afraid; for I am quite a lone woman now, since they nabbed my Tommy."

"Well, you may shut the door if you like now," answered Captain Tankerville, "for I have come for a night's lodging, and I want to hear about your Tommy, as you call him, and my friend, Alfred Latimer."

"Lauk, sir! I can't take you in," answered Mrs. Brown.

"No, that you can't, granny," answered Tankerville, playing on the words, "though you have taken many a one in, in your day, I dare say. But I'm not easily done; and I intend to stay here all night, I can

tell you. You shall have half a crown for your pains, so don't say another word about it. Now tell me about your son Tommy, and where they've put him, and Jack Williams, and young Latimer. I shouldn't wonder if there's a penny to be made out of that blade yet."

"You've just got out yourself, I dare say, captain," said Mrs. Brown. "My son told me, when he brought you here, that you are a famous one for diddling the beakies. And so you want to lodge here, not to be seen?"

"No; you're out, old woman," answered Captain Tankerville, who, whether her surmise was true or false, was not willing to make her his confidant. "The old gentleman who had me in couldn't make out his case."

"Hush!" cried Mother Brown; "there's some one a-coming."

"Is there, by Jove?" cried the worthy captain, "then I'll make myself scarce;" and away he went into the other room, closing the door carefully behind him.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when a gentle knock was heard at the door, and Mother Brown exclaimed, in a gruff and indifferent tone, "Come in, whoever ye be."

The person who appeared, as the reader may suppose, was no othe than poor Lucy; who inquired, as she entered, "Is your name Brown ma'am?"

"Yes, my pretty lady," answered the old hag; "and I'm not a ghost either, though you look as pale as if you seed one."

"I am very tired," answered Lucy, "and have been ill. But I want you to do me a service, Mrs. Brown; and you shall be well paid for it."

The idea of money always had an immense effect upon the person to whom these words were addressed; and she became extremely civil, eyeing Lucy's shawl with a certain sort of glance which was in itself an evident breach of the tenth commandment. Lucy's business was soon entered upon; and she was going on to tell all that Alfred Latimer wanted the old woman to do, when Mother Brown raised her finger, with a monitory gesture and elevated eyebrows, saying, in a whisper, "Hush! there is some one in there. We had better go out before the door and talk." But before her suggestion could be followed, Captain Tankerville walked in, with his usual swaggering air, wishing Lucy good evening as an old acquaintance.

"Oh, this is fortunate, Captain Tankerville!" said the poor girl; "for I was told to write to you on the part of my poor husband."

"Husband!" repeated Captain Tankerville. "Oh, ay!—Very well; but we had better shut and bolt the door, and then we can talk without being interrupted."

Luc[illegible] cheek had flushed at his first words; but she replied at once, "No, there is no need of that; I have very little to say;" and she drew nearer to the door, in order to get out if he attempted to close it, for there was something she dreaded exceedingly in that man; and then, going on, she gave both to him and the old woman the [illegible] with which she had been charged by her husband.

not ob[illegible] [illegible]nkerville, for his part, mused in silence for a moment or

two; but the old woman at once exclaimed, "But the money! One can't buy swish tails, or lions' either, without money."

"Here is enough for that purpose," answered Lucy, drawing forth her purse, and giving the old woman all that it contained, except what was just sufficient to pay the expenses of the chaise. "When you have done what I tell you, and I am sure that the game is there, you will receive five guineas more."

"Five guineas!" said Mother Brown; "that's very little, considering I have to walk so far."

"Why, you old besom!" said Captain Tankerville, "you wouldn't hang your own son for the sake of a walk, would you?"

"I don't care whether he's hanged or not," answered the hag. "Howsomever, I'll do it; but where am I to get the five guineas, my pretty lady?"

"Come down to me, at Mallington Park," answered Lucy, "and you shall have it. Come to Mrs. Edmonds's, but remember you do not speak a word of this to any one but myself. Ask for Mrs. Latimer."

The old woman answered only by a low unpleasant chuckle, and Lucy took a step towards the door, but turning again to Captain Tankerville, ere she went out, she added, in a trembling voice, "I hope, sir, you will be able to do what I asked. You had better see Mrs. Charlton soon, for no time is to be lost."

"I suppose not," answered Tankerville, dryly. "I will do my best: for, to be frank, a thousand pounds is something worth having; and I like Latimer too. He's a devilish good fellow."

"He's quite sure you can do what he wishes, if you please," replied Lucy. "I trust—I hope, he is not guilty."

"Oh! as to guilty or not I have nothing to do with that," said Captain Tankerville, with a laugh that made the poor girl shudder. "But as to getting him out, that may be a different affair. Stone walls are stone walls. If I were in myself, I could manage it, I dare say; for then I would direct the whole, but now it can only be done by a good lot of money."

"That will not be wanting, I am sure," replied Lucy. "Mrs. Charlton will supply all that is needed."

"Well, well, I dare say we shall manage it," said Tankerville, whose imagination warmed at the idea of the thousand pounds, and who saw the prospect of extracting considerable sums from Mrs. Charlton at all events. "I'll do my best, Lucy, and I'll come down and tell you how it all goes on; for we may want your help to tell him news, and let him know what we are about."

There was a familiarity in his tone that pained Lucy, and with a brief word or two of reply, she hurried away, got into the chaise, and drove back sadly to her mother's house. She had gone through the fatigue and the exertion of the day with resolution that conquered even bodily weakness; but the moment that she had crossed the threshold, and was clasped in her mother's arms, she fainted away, and lay for some time as if she were dead. When she recovered, Mrs. Edmonds asked no questions; and Lucy herself was the first to speak of her going. "My mother," she said, "I have been to see my

band, you must forgive me, for whatever he has done, I am his wife, and must do my duty to him. I must go again, too, and you must not try to stop me, for if you do, I shall die."

"It's only for your own sake, I would try to stop you, Lucy," replied her mother, "you have almost killed yourself now."

"It would do much more harm to stay away," replied Lucy; "but I will not go to-morrow, I will take that day to rest and recover." Much indeed did she need it; and till the following evening she remained in bed.

In the meanwhile Captain Tankerville sat for more than an hour in Mother Brown's cottage, spending part of the time in cogitations, and part in devouring his full share of the old woman's stolen fowl. As soon as it was quite dark, the worthy captain set out for Mallington House, and ringing at the bell, desired to see Mrs. Charlton. His appearance, just having come out of prison, was, to use a very expressive, though somewhat vulgar term, rather seedy; and the servant, after eyeing him for a moment, told him that Mrs. Charlton was engaged, and could not see him. Captain Tankerville, however, was not a man to take a refusal easily; and assuming an authoritative air, he replied: "Go in and tell her, that I must see her on business of importance. I have not a card with me, but my name is Captain Tankerville, of the royal navy, a friend of her son's, from whom I have a message."

The servant obeyed; but took care to inform his mistress that the applicant was "rather an odd-looking fellow." Nevertheless, there was something aristocratic in the name, which proved a passport to Mrs. Charlton's presence. Captain Tankerville was accordingly admitted, and, though very different people, perhaps no two persons were ever better qualified to deal with each other, than that worthy gentleman and that fair lady. The captain opened his business with the utmost coolness, informing Mrs. Charlton that he had received a message from her son, with a promise of a thousand pounds from her, if he succeeded in effecting his liberation. "Now, my dear madam," he continued, "I think I can manage the matter; but the first thing to be ascertained is, whether you are disposed to ratify the engagement. A thousand pounds! You know promises from a man in prison are worth nothing, and you may view the matter very differently from my friend Latimer."

"I shall not grudge the thousand pounds, sir," replied Mrs. Charlton, "if my son is actually liberated, but I certainly shall not pay it before."

"That's very prudent," replied Captain Tankerville, who seemed to have an instinctive appreciation of the lady's character. "It would not be pleasant to give a thousand pounds and have him hanged too."

"Good Heavens! sir, you need not use such shocking expressions," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; "I trust there is no chance whatever of such a dreadful event!"

"I don't know, my dear madam," replied Tankerville, dryly, "he seems to think there is, and he's the best judge, I fancy. But business is business. Although, of course, I do not expect you to be such a goose as to buy a pig in a poke, and pay before your son's out, you will not object to sign a little memorandum that I am to have the thousand

pounds if I get him out? Then we shall both be pinned fast, you see If you don't pay me, you might chance to be required to visit New South Wales for your share in the transaction; and then again you have got a hold upon me, for I can't peach of you without subjecting myself to the same voyage, which, though a naval man, would not be agreeable to me."

Mrs. Charlton considered the matter with due deliberation, but at length she made up her mind to consent; and before showing his game any further, Captain Tankerville thought it best to have the paper drawn up and signed, which was accordingly done.

"And now, my dear madam," he continued, as soon as he had got the document in his pocket, "the next thing to be considered is the means."

"The means," repeated Mrs. Charlton, "I thought you had arranged all that already. You told me you thought it could be done."

"True, true," replied the worthy captain. "But when I say means, I would imply the sinews of war, my dear madam. I am a poor captain on half-pay, and I cannot be supposed to supply all the finances. The sum required won't be a trifle, I can tell you; and you can judge yourself what your son's life is worth, as well as if you kept an insurance office. There are jailors to be bribed, and turnkeys to be feed."

"Then I am very sorry that it can't be done," said Mrs. Charlton, in a low but decided tone. "The thousand pounds I can command, but I cannot go much further, for the truth is, I have not the money; and besides," she added, with a slight smile, "how could I tell in what way the money was applied? I could not be sure it was used at all for the purpose intended."

Mrs. Charlton's mind rose highly in her guest's estimation, and he mentally observed, "A very different lady from her daughter in-law! We must try to give her some security."

"Quite right, my dear madam," continued Captain Tankerville aloud. "You had better come over to the place yourself; I can prepare the way for you, and when the turnkeys are off duty, can have the honour of introducing them to you quietly when you can pay them with your own hands; for they must be trusted, even if you don't trust me."

"Ay! but I must have some hold upon them, Captain Tankerville," replied Mrs. Charlton. "If I can prove that they have taken money from me and they don't do what they promise, they can be punished you know."

"Well, so be it," answered the captain. "You may be quite sure I shall do my best to get the thousand pounds; but some money must be had in hand, even to begin with. They will never risk coming to see you, nor talking much with me either, without having something to make it worth their while."

"How much will be required, do you think?" asked Mrs. Charlton.

"Why, there will be the porter, and the principal turnkey, and one of his fellows," replied Tankerville thoughtfully. "I should think three hundred pounds would do."

"Three hundred pounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "What! to begin with?"

"You can't expect men to risk transportation for nothing," replied the captain.

"There is no risk of transportation for coming to speak with a lady at an inn," rejoined his fair companion. "In one word, Captain Tankerville, I must see my way clearly in the business. I am not a person easily deceived; and, besides, I have not got more than a hundred pounds in the house."

"Well, we must make that go as far as it will," he answered, perfectly unconcernedly. "We will meet at this place, Sturton, as soon as you like, Mrs. Charlton; and I trust with the hundred pounds, if you will have the goodness to fetch it, I shall be able to get two of them at least to come and see you."

Mrs. Charlton went away, and returned in a minute or two with the money.

"Oh! very well; this is the money," he said, holding out his hand as soon as Mrs. Charlton appeared. But the lady, instead of giving him the notes, took up the pen, dipped it in the ink, and proceeded to write a regular receipt for one hundred pounds, specifying, in good set terms, that it was to be applied to the purpose of bribing the jailors and turnkeys of Sturton gaol to facilitate the escape of Alfred Latimer, Esq. To this she requested Captain Tankerville's signature, but that gentleman hesitated; and Mrs. Charlton then added, grasping the notes tight in her hand, "Our hold must be mutual upon each other, Captain Tankerville. I shall not pay a single penny without a similar receipt."

The captain laughed, and signed the paper; saying, in a complimentary tone, "Well, you are the cleverest woman I ever had to deal with." And after some further conversation, in the course of which it was agreed that Mrs. Charlton should go over to Sturton on the following day and sleep at the inn there, the worthy captain took his leave, assuring her that he would lose no time in commencing the preliminary negotiations.

CHAPTER LXXII.

The yard of the prison was not so full as ordinary, and the greater part of the prisoners who tenanted it at the time were busily amusing themselves in one corner, with different games, which were in those days permitted to the unconvicted. While one part of the prison-yard was thus engaged, the other displayed Jack Williams and Alfred Latimer—the former taking his short walk up and down, the latter keeping by his side, and talking with him eagerly.

"It won't answer, Mr. Latimer; it won't answer," said Williams, in reply to something that his companion had just communicated. "They have proofs enough against us all, that's the truth; and we had better look at it straightforwardly. I had a hint yesterday afternoon that they have got hold of everything in the place where we hid them away."

"They haven't got what I had," answered Latimer, eagerly; "that's all safe in France, and they found nothing upon me that they could swear to."

Williams looked at him steadfastly for a moment, and then said, "You are thinking of getting yourself out of the scrape, and leaving us in; but it won't do, Mr. Latimer."

"I am thinking of no such thing," answered Alfred Latimer, sharply, with the colour mounting in his cheek; "such a thing never crossed my thoughts—but I was thinking it was a pity you hadn't been as careful as I was. Even now I don't see, if they cannot prove that you put the things there, how it can tell against you or Brown either. Any one who took the things might have hidden them as well as you."

"There's some truth in that," answered Williams thoughtfully. "Well, let us hear what's your plan with this business of the game."

"Why, the object is," answered Alfred Latimer, whose wit had been sharpened by his danger, "to account for two or three of the strong points against us. In the first place, if we are all in the same story, that we were just out bagging a few pheasants—which is very likely, seeing that we have all been in the same scrape before—it will show how we all came to go across the water together, and will knock down

that cowardly rascal's, Maltby's, evidence. Then again," he said, "it will show a cause for the blood on my clothes; and almost everything else will be affected by it one way or another. So you see I was not thinking of getting out of the scrape and leaving you in it, though I cannot fancy what good it would do you to have me hanged as well as yourself."

"Perhaps not," answered Williams, with a grim smile; "but we are all in the same boat, Mr. Latimer, and must sink or swim together—not that I mean to say, if judge or jury were inclined to let you off for any want of proof, that I would speak a single word to stop them. That's all fair. But if you were to contrive any plan for saving yourself without giving us a chance, I would spoil that for you, I can tell you.—Now let's think of this scheme a little more. It's not a bad one, and we may as well let it go on, for it may make the folks doubt, and that's something; but the hope is so very faint a one, that we must leave nothing else untried."

"But why is it so faint?" asked Alfred Latimer. "Maltby did not see us go into the house—nobody saw you and Brown hide the rings and things; and on me they have found nothing but ten guineas in my own purse."

"Well, the game had better be left there," said Williams, after some meditation, "and we can keep to that story, if the worst comes to the worst. But the first thing to be done is, to try to get out of this place."

"Ay, but how is that to be done?" asked Alfred Latimer. "I should be glad enough to get out, if I saw any chance of it."

Williams gave his under jaw a twist as if there had been something in his mouth, and then answered, "It's to be done, Mr. Latimer; and as you must have some share in the thing, and must give us some help, I may as well tell you part of the plan now, especially as we are never sure how long we may have an opportunity of talking over it, for if these fellows in the gaol knew what they were about, they would not let you and I be walking up and down here, laying our heads together in this way; and if the visiting justices hear of it, they'll have a finger in the pie—that's clear. Now look, sir. That wall's a good height, you see; but yet a ladder could soon be made that would reach to the top, if we could only get some thin but very strong cord."

"I could easily get that," answered Alfred Latimer; "my wife would bring that in—what sort of cord do you want—how thick?"

"It does not much matter," answered the man, "how thick, so that she can carry it without being seen, and it be strongly twisted. I shall have to work it up myself. That would be soon done, if I could sit to it long enough at a time, but the people are always coming into my cell, and as I have got no light to work at night, I shall be obliged to do it by the feel."

"Oh! I'll get her to bring me in a phosphorus box and some candles," said Alfred Latimer. "But when you have made the ladder, I don't see how you could use it. You are locked up at night, I suppose, as well as myself; and if you were to try it in the day, you'd be stopped in five minutes."

"There's such a thing as mortar between stones," answered Williams, dryly, "and such a thing as working the mortar out.—Brown's at it now, and I shall take my turn by-and-by; we are half-way through the wall already, as near as I can calculate, and in two days more we shall be within half an inch of the outside."

"Why Brown and you aren't in the same cell, surely," said the young gentleman.

"No! not at night," answered Williams; "but during the airing time, as they call it, as our cells are close by the yard-door, and as there is no means of getting out that way, they don't much watch if we go in for a minute or two, and then nobody notices if he goes into his cell or mine."

"But how will he get into your cell when you want to start?" asked Alfred Latimer.

"We've a plan for that," replied Williams; "that won't be difficult to manage."

"And how am I to manage, Williams?" demanded his companion. "It seems to me that you two have been laying out for yourselves to get out of the scrape and leave me in it."

"I shouldn't be telling you all about it if I had," answered Williams. "But you must do something for yourself, Mr. Latimer. You shall know whenever all is quite ready, and the time fixed; then you must pay one of the turnkeys well to let you come at night and have a little private talk with me. You know a stout, swivel-eyed fellow, with a hooked nose—he's the man you must speak to. Just give him a hint that you want to consult me about our defence. Now, for ten pounds, he won't mind letting you do that, for they think that's all fair; and, to make everything sure, you can tell him he may lock you in, and come for you in a couple of hours again. He did so for Brown two or three nights ago, for the little sum which I could give him, which was but two guineas."

"How did you get that?" asked Alfred Latimer. "They took all I had from me, and now let me have what I want on my mother's account. The blackguards searched me to the skin."

"So they did me," answered Williams, "and if I had had two guineas about me they would have soon found them; but I had what was worth more than two guineas—some bits of paper belonging to a friend of yours, one Mr. Morton—for which, at one time, he offered a reward of fifty pounds. I had slipped them in between my jacket and the lining, where they never thought of looking; and, after I had been in for a while, I sent for Mr. Morton, on pretence of wanting to confess something to him, and then asked him if he was willing to give the same sum for the papers as ever. He was glad enough to do it; so I got the money, and he got the papers. But that's nothing to do with what we were talking about. I wanted to try that turnkey; for I've a strange notion of picking out men by their faces, and I thought I was pretty sure of my mark. You may talk to him, therefore, quite safely, the first time you can get him into your room. Then, when I tell you all's ready, you can get him to bring you to my cell, about one or two in the morning; and, while you are locked in there, as he thinks, we can be walking away towards Portsmouth."

"But won't he see the hole you have made in the wall?" asked Alfred Latimer.

"No!" replied Williams. "In the first place, there is never a stone out of its place when they come in; and, besides, the bed-head is against it."

The scheme seemed feasible to Alfred Latimer, and he had heard of such things being attempted with success; but yet the risk appeared to him so great that he said at length, "Won't it be better, Jack, to keep this shift till the last—I mean till the trial is over?"

"Why, you fool," answered Jack Williams, sharply, "we shall be in irons then. It's a wonder we aren't now; only there are one or two old women amongst the justices, who are trying what they call a new system here, in order to reclaim us, as they say. Devilish little chance of reclaiming me, I think, irons or no irons." He and his companion laughed; and he proceeded, "Brown got his darbies off yesterday by good behaviour, and we must take care to use our arms and legs while they are at liberty; so you get the cord, and the phosphorus-box, and the lights—one of those long rolls of taper will be better than candles. Furnish yourself with all the money you can scrape together, and we shall do the matter easily enough. If I were you, Mr. Latimer, however, I would not neglect the other scheme. That can do no harm, and we might be stopped, you know. Another thing is—I don't see why you should be worse off, if it does come to a trial, than any of us—and, as things stand now, you are so; for that young lady—that Miss Charlton—knows nothing of me or Brown, but her evidence may be devilish unlucky for you. I should think, when you are so nearly related to her, that you could easily get her out of the way."

"Not so easy," answered Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but I'll try—yes, I'll try. She's kind enough; but there's a great deal of determination about her too, when she takes a thing into her head."

"I'd try every way," answered Williams. "But here comes Dick, the other turnkey, as if he were making for us. Don't say a word to him, mind; for though he's devilish civil, yet you'll find him a dogged fellow, who won't take a sixpence."

The turnkey beckoned to Alfred Latimer, as he approached, and told him that his lady was waiting to see him, in very reverential tones. There must be something most extraordinary in gold, that the very name and reputation of wealth, even when joined with crime, should obtain the respect that virtuous poverty cannot command.

Alfred Latimer followed the worthy jailor into the prison, and, in a few minutes, was in his room again with Lucy, who seemed to have gained strength, notwithstanding all she had suffered. Lucy had a long tale to tell; for, since she had last seen him, many things had happened. Mrs. Charlton had opened a communication with her—had been to see her—and, upon the strength of the occasion, had been as gentle, and kind, and sweetly maternal as possible. Not choosing to visit the prison again too soon, the lady had instructed her son's wife to communicate to him secretly the efforts that were making to liberate him, and to warn him to be prepared to take advantage of them at a moment's notice. Lucy had been instructed, too, to convey to him the means of disguising his person; and, over her own ordinary

dress, she now wore a second gown and shawl, which she had been told to leave with him. She had received all these directions, and promised to follow them, with her natural gentleness; but Mrs. Charlton remarked, in their interview, a sort of apathetic coldness, which she attributed, perhaps, to the right cause, and feared that it might interfere with Lucy's exertions on Alfred Latimer's behalf. Mrs. Charlton never scrupled, when she had an object in view, to say what was not; and, therefore, in taking leave of her daughter-in-law—whom she might have treated at any other time as the dirt beneath her feet, or as a politician treats an elector who has served him, and can serve him no more—she kissed her tenderly, adding, "You must be very well aware, my dear Lucy, that nothing could induce me to take all these steps, even for a son, were I not fully convinced that he is perfectly innocent. The truth is," she continued, seeing some surprise in Lucy's face, "poor Alfred had engaged to go out with these men to shoot in the preserves here—it was very wrong and very foolish, certainly, but more a boyish frolic than anything else. However, he had nothing to do with the rest of the sad affair. That they did alone, when he left them; but, as he was seen with them just before and just after, there is no means of proving his innocence, unless they would confess the truth—and, even then, their words would not be believed; besides, these people are always so malicious. But I have heard quite enough to show me the true state of the case, and that poor Alfred was never nearer to the house than the willow-ground, by the water."

Had Lucy been very clear-sighted—had she had a full knowledge of all the evidence that had been given, she would easily have perceived that Mrs. Charlton's story could not be true. But what we wish for, that we believe—at least, in nine cases out of ten—and she gladly caught at the idea that her suspicions had done her husband injustice. She thus returned to her husband with warmer feelings, and a more eager desire to serve and save him than when she left him; and she detailed all the information she possessed as rapidly as possible, stripped off the gown and shawl in haste, and aided to hide them amongst his clothes.

It may easily be conceived that the tidings were joyful to Alfred Latimer, and he loaded poor Lucy with caresses, calling her the best and dearest girl in the world. He did not forget, however, the conversation which had taken place between him and Williams; and directed Lucy to bring him the phosphorus-box and taper, and inquired eagerly for the money which had been spoken of at their last interview. It was instantly produced by Lucy, neatly rolled up into the smallest possible compass. But Alfred Latimer had still directions to give; and, after meditating for a moment, he said to himself, "Even if the scheme of Tankerville's succeeds, I must not let Williams and Brown know what is going on; and, to hide it all, I must seem as busy about their plan as ever. But, in case both fail, I had better try to get the evidence against me out of the way." He then proceeded aloud—"There's one thing, dear Lucy, I wish could be done. If you could give my mother a hint that, at all events, she had better persuade Louisa to marry, and go abroad for a while, I should be very glad. Louisa would do it, I am sure, if she's asked; and my mother can

always coax her to do a thing, if she takes the right way. If young Blackmore, too, were gone, it would be all the better. Maltby, I am afraid, they can't get hold of; for I have heard that they have shut him up."

"But do you think Miss Charlton will consent?" asked Lucy, doubtingly. "She's not with Mrs. Charlton now, you know."

"The devil she isn't!" cried her husband. "I suppose, then, my mother has quarrelled with her, like a fool; but I'm sure, after all, Louisa could be persuaded; for she could never wish me to be condemned, when I am innocent."

He said the words boldly enough, for he had accustomed himself to the assertion. Nevertheless, there was some slight hesitation observable as he spoke; and Lucy asked, in a low and anxious tone, while her heart sank with doubt,—"And are you really innocent, indeed, Alfred?"

Not more than a fortnight before, such a question would have cast him into a fearful state of agitation—for remorse, at that time, had mingled with apprehension; but selfishness had now resumed her full sway, and his only thought was to save himself. He answered, then, vehemently—almost eagerly—"To be sure I am; how could you ever doubt it, girl? I can tell you, Lucy, there's many an innocent man in England hanged upon what they call circumstantial evidence; and here, because two or three things are proved, which could be easily accounted for, I am already treated like a guilty person, and should very likely be found guilty by a jury."

Lucy replied nothing, but murmured to herself, "Thank God! thank God!"

"Thank God that I am likely to be hanged!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer.

"No, no!" she cried, placing her hands upon his arm; "thank God that you are innocent, Alfred."

"You should never have doubted it," he answered, pushing her from him; "but that does not matter. You tell my mother what I say—bid her go on with what she's about with Tankerville; but, in case the worst comes to the worst, let her get Louisa out of the way as soon as possible. She can easily manage it if she tries, and then it will be pretty nearly all sure."

Lucy was pained, for every moment showed her more clearly that he thought of nothing but himself; but still, the increasing assurance that he was innocent was the greatest of comforts to her; and, after having made him repeat all his instructions, she again took leave of him with a lightened heart. A momentary fit of tenderness seized him at the last instant of her stay, and he even so far forgot himself as to ask her to remain a little longer.—Did I say he forgot himself? Perhaps it was wrong to say so; for, after all, it was but a softer kind of selfishness, less hard—less brutish than the other. He felt a comfort—a relief in her society. There was something in the clinging affection of the poor girl—in her devotion to him in that hour of sorrow and of peril, that seemed to cheer and mitigate the dark solitude of crime. He seated himself by her—he threw his arms round her—he leaned his head upon her shoulder, while her hand lay clasped

in his; and, as they were thus placed, one of the jailors suddenly entered—perhaps with some doubt as to what might be the object of Lucy's visit. All seemed natural and easy, however. Both started at the interruption. Alfred Latimer withdrew his arm; and the turnkey, making some excuse for his entrance, returned to the rooms of the governor, from whence he had come. Shortly after Lucy quitted the prison; but this time she went on foot, and took her way towards the best inn of the place.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

ONE night—about the period of which we have just been writing,—towards half-past nine, the great bell—the bell at Sturton—rang vehemently. The roll of wheels had previously called forth the ostler, and now out of sundry chambers rushed two or three waiters, in black silk stockings, like spiders darting along the toils at the first touch of a fly's foot. The glass-doors were thrown open, the landlord himself was summoned, and the housekeeper lighted a bed candle. The first object that presented itself to the eyes of landlord and waiters, when they came out upon the steps, was a travelling chariot, apparently of a green colour. The lamps were lighted, and the post-boy stood beside his horses, already undoing the harness. Ostler was in a hurry to call out "horses on," but the head waiter opened the door of the vehicle, politely saying, "Won't you please to alight, sir?"

"What's o'clock?" said a voice from within.

The waiter took a step back, looked at his watch by the light in the hall, saw the time, added half an hour, to give the inn a better chance, and replied, "Ten o'clock, sir."

"Then I'll stop here for the night," replied the gentleman from within; "though dickery, dickery dock, the mouse must have run up the clock, for it was only eight when we left ——, and that's but ten miles."

"This way, sir, this way, sir," said the waiter, without any reply to the gentleman's last observation. But our good friend, Mr. Quatterly, who stepped out of the carriage as the man spoke, remained for the space of about three minutes, paying the post-boy, and seeing sundry tin cases and small leathern boxes, which he had with him in the interior of the carriage, safely lifted out and carried on before him. He then duly followed where the waiter led, Mr. Gatton's housekeeper exclaiming, "Number 42, Jackson," as the party passed. Mr. Quatterly was introduced into a sitting-room, the neatness of which, together with the sparkling fire in the grate, were very satisfactory to his corporeal feelings. He looked at his watch, nevertheless; and shaking his finger at the waiter, he exclaimed, "You vagabond, you said it was ten o'clock, and it wants twenty minutes."

"Bless my heart, sir!" said the waiter, twitching out his own chronometer, as if horribly shocked at the thought of such an error; and then looking confounded, he added, "Really, I beg pardon, sir, I made a mistake. That light there below is so werry bad. Will you take tea or supper, sir?"

"Ay, I understand," said Mr. Quatterly, good-humouredly, "but you shall have sixpence less for cheating me. I thought we couldn't have taken all that time, or that I must have been dreaming, like David Dribble, who 'dreamed he drove a dragon:' for it seemed as if the horses were going as fast as they could.—Tea or supper? I'll have dinner first, if you please, for I have not put a morsel between my grinders since seven o'clock this morning. Let me have what can be soonest ready—a little soup, no fish—I hate fish in the midland counties—and anything else that the house can afford, together with a bottle

of sherry and an apple-tart—not baked above three days, if you please, Mr. Waiter."

"Baked this morning, sir," said the waiter.

"At ten o'clock?" inquired Mr. Quatterly, slyly. "Now be so good as to put these boxes in order upon that table—regularly, regularly—the big ones behind, the little ones before, the light companies in front and the grenadiers in the rear. And now show me my bed-room. I always like to see the thing I have got to lie upon.

"This way, sir, this way," said the waiter. "Chambermaid, forty-nine." And candle in hand, he lighted Mr. Quatterly about ten steps along the passage, towards the door of a bed-room on the opposite side. In ten steps, however, very wonderful things may happen, and in this instance something did happen which surprised Mr. Quatterly a good deal. A door opened on the same side as his own sitting-room, and a head and face, with part of the body, appeared at the aperture. Mr. Quatterly saw the countenance distinctly, for the waiter held the light in a very illuminating direction, and there were the identical features of his worthy and accomplished friend, Captain Tankerville, which, though withdrawn again as soon as seen, produced from Mr. Quatterly's chest the significant interjection, "Ah, ah!"

"Sir," said the waiter.

"Number forty-five," said Mr. Quatterly, "who's staying in forty-five, waiter?"

"Mrs. Charlton, sir—the Honourable Mrs. Charlton," replied the officer in black silk stockings.

"Oh! when the pie was opened, the birds began to sing," said Mr. Quatterly; and without any more pellucid comment, the worthy solicitor followed the waiter and the chambermaid, by whom they were just then joined, into the bed-room, examined the bed, gave some orders, and then returned to his sitting-room, pausing every second step to think for a moment. When he had reached the door, his cogitation seemed to have arrived at some result, for he turned to the waiter, saying, "Get the dinner and serve it. I shall be back by the time it is on table." And going into the room, he took his hat, and issued forth from the inn on foot.

In the streets of Sturton Mr. Quatterly walked on, looking to the right and left at the different houses he passed, as if he were enjoying a strange town, one of the greatest pleasures to a thoughtful man that can be conceived. However, Mr. Quatterly, it would appear, was differently occupied, and after having gone for a couple of hundred yards, or somewhat more, he crossed over to a chemist's shop, which was one of the few that was open in the place, and walked in with a low bow to the proprietor thereof, who was standing taking leave of his goods and chattels for the night.

"Pray, sir," he said, "can you inform me where the mayor is to be found, and if not, which is the house of the nearest magistrate?" The chemist did both, and the magistrate's dwelling being near at hand, the mayor's far away, Mr. Quatterly proceeded to the door of the former, and was soon after admitted. His visit was not long, for in about five minutes he issued forth again, and in all was about a quarter of an hour absent from the inn. His dinner did not seem to have made much progress during his absence, for the cloth was still unlaid. But

all was bustle as soon as he summoned the waiters by the bell; and in about ten minutes more the soup was before him. That part of the feast was discussed, and Mr. Quatterly was entering upon the wing of a fowl, when one of the host of waiters came in and inquired, "Pray sir, is your name Quatterly?"

"It used to be," replied the worthy solicitor; "and if it has been changed, it was done without my consent."

"Mrs. Charlton, sir," said the waiter, "would be glad to speak with you for a few minutes, with her compliments."

"Well, then," answered Mr. Quatterly, "pray tell Mrs. Charlton, that I am particularly occupied at this moment, but that I will wait upon her in a quarter of an hour, with my compliments;" and Mr. Quatterly applied himself to his meal again with all due devotion. After having thanked Heaven for a good meal, he directed the waiter to inform Mrs. Charlton that he was ready to attend her. The lady sent back word that she was eager to see him, and the moment after Mr. Quatterly entered the sitting-room, No. forty-five.

With one of her sweetest and most engaging smiles the lady received her guest, and declared that she was delighted to see him, besought him to take a seat by her on the sofa, and spared no blandishments to produce a favourable impression. But, as we have shown before, Mr. Quatterly combined, with very great simplicity of manners and a peculiar fondness for many very juvenile things, a shrewd and keen intellect, great knowledge of the world, and a vast experience of rogues and vagabonds of every class and degree; and all Mrs. Charlton's arts were lost upon him.

"Delighted, my dear madam," he replied, "to renew my acquaintance with you under less disagreeable circumstances than those with which it commenced. I trust I see you in good health."

"As well as I can be expected to be," replied the lady. "Ah! that was a terrible day, indeed, Mr. Quatterly; I was quite beside myself. But even the timid pigeon, you know, will peck when its young ones are assailed."

"The hen pigeon, madam," replied Mr. Quatterly, somewhat dryly. "But I did not think you were beside yourself at all; you seemed to me to do it all very well."

Mrs. Charlton did not altogether like his answer; and, after pausing for a moment and nibbling her pretty lips, she said, "I was very glad to hear from a friend that you were here, Mr. Quatterly, for I thought that you might be the means——"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," replied the solicitor; "but the friend, I presume, is Captain Tankerville."

"Yes," said Mrs. Charlton, with some hesitation. "Poor man! he is, he is——" and there she stopped.

"Exactly, ma'am," rejoined Mr. Quatterly, ending the sentence for her, "he is a swindler, ma'am, and a felon."

"Good gracious! I hope not," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, in affected surprise and consternation. "He seemed to take a great deal of interest in my son, and so ——"

"It is exactly as I say, my dear madam," replied Mr. Quatterly. "Your son, I beg leave to say, he pigeoned in the most egregious manner, and was one of those who greatly aided to lead him, or drive

him into acts which have produced his present unpleasant situation. As for your son, he has been but a tool in the hands of others, I am sure."

"I can assure you he is perfectly innocent," said Mrs. Charlton earnestly; "that is to say, of the offences with which he is charged. That he was very culpable in going out at night to shoot the earl's game, I admit, but that was his only offence."

"Then let it be his defence likewise, my dear madam," answered the solicitor. "Prove that, and he's quite safe."

"But how can we prove it?" demanded the lady. "Meeting with these men on his way back, he crossed over in their boat without knowing anything of what they had done. But who could suppose for a moment, my dear Mr. Quatterly, that any one would go and marry in the morning the daughter of a man he had murdered at night?"

"It is not a usual proceeding, indeed," answered the solicitor; "and I trust it may be, as you say, impossible. Nevertheless, his situation is indeed very awkward, and how he is to get out of it I don't see. It will depend upon thirteen contingencies, namely, twelve jurors and the judge. A hanging judge and a hungry jury are hard things to deal with. But we may have something more favourable in this case and I trust such may be the result, not alone for your sake, but for that of Miss Charlton, to whom the whole business must be most painful."

"Ay, that is just what I wanted to speak to you about, Mr. Quatterly," said the lady. "It will be very terrible to poor dear Louisa and still more so to Alfred, who has ever looked upon her as a sister to see her appear as a witness against him, whose testimony will be very likely to turn the scale, and doom him to death. Do you not think, Mr. Quatterly, that it would be much better for her and for all parties, if she were at once to give her hand to Lord Mallington, and take a little tour on the Continent? It would do the health of both good, I am sure."

"May I ask, madam, if you consult me as a friend, a lawyer, or a physician?" inquired Mr. Quatterly.

The natural impulse of Mrs. Charlton's art—if I may use such a contradictory expression—would have led her to reply at once, "Oh! as a friend of course;" but a moment's thought stopped the words on her lips, and she said, "As a solicitor."

"Six-and-eightpence, then, madam," said Mr. Quatterly, dryly; and Mrs. Charlton with a smile took out her purse, and laid seven shillings on the table. The worthy solicitor swept it up, put it in one pocket, and drew forth fourpence from the other, which he duly handed across to the lady.

"Now, madam," he said, "I am your lawyer; and in that capacity I beg leave to reply, that the very best thing for your son, be he guilty or innocent, would be to get some of the witnesses out of the way, especially Miss Charlton. The lad Blackmore is another who may be disposed of with advantage; and those are the only two you can deal with. But you must excuse me if I decline to undertake the [illegible] part of the affair, as it is out of my way of practice. I can't blame you if you do it; but I should blame myself very much if I did."

"...ut surely, my dear Mr. Quatterly, you will not refuse to take a m...ge from me to Louisa and the earl," said Mrs. Charlton, "or to ...them most strongly to hasten their nuptials, for which they have ...est consent; and, and——"

"...and go to the Continent," said Mr. Quatterly. "Well, my dear m...am, I will take the message; and though I do not promise to urge ...most strongly, yet I will say nothing against it."

"...h! pray, do urge them," said Mrs. Charlton, eagerly. "I am ... a word from you would do a great deal."

"My dear madam," rejoined the solicitor, "I never yet saw a man ...it was necessary to urge to take a glass of wine if he was thirsty ...liked wine; or to take a walk, if it was a fine day and he liked walking; no, nor any two young people either, who were in love with each other, to marry at once, if there was not the slightest impediment in nature. I therefore think your proposition has a very good chance, even if it come plain and unadorned from my lips."

...Charlton mused for an instant, and then replied, as Mr. Quat...rose and stood before her about to depart, "I am sure you will d...at you can. But, now, tell me about Captain Tankerville."

"...have nothing to tell you, my dear madam," replied Mr. Quatterly; "...have his character according to my best powers of portraiture: he's a swindler and a felon. He fleeced your son, and he's now fleecing you I suspect—or at least would be if he weren't in gaol; which he is ...time, if the magistrates have done their duty."

"...ood gracious!" cried Mrs. Charlton, "I can hardly believe he is ... character."

"...he powers of credulity required are not very great," replied the ...or. "And now, my dear madam, good-night; for I have a great ma...papers to look over."

"...ll, thank God!" said Mrs. Charlton, as soon as Mr. Quatterly w...ne, "I have seen both the porter and the turnkey myself, and ...ow where to find them, and how to deal with them: so it's no great matter if he is in gaol—it will save money."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE morning was bright and beautiful, though an occasional sh wer more like one of those which chequer the sunshine of an April day, swept over the sky, and passed away again, leaving the whole w rld sparkling. Breakfast was just over at the Rectory—Dr. Westei gone into his library to speak to some of his poor. Mrs. Eve retired from the breakfast-room -whether on business or from tion, I cannot tell - and Morton and Louisa stood together window, gazing toward the Park and the Hall. It was nat Louisa's mind to be led on by the sight she beheld, into th with which it associated itself. There was to be the dwelli after-years, there was the ancestral mansion of him she l deeply, there the spot in which all the bright imaginations all the fond visions of affection, congregated themselves l eye of hope. Was it unnatural, that with so many dark an circumstances as then surrounded her, she should feel a yea the coming time, a longing to hurry forward to the period w cloud should be passed away, and the sunshine all bright again

Morton, on his part, summed up all his feelings towards Lo saying that he had come to Mallington in search of an idle na had found a real treasure by the way. Loved her, he certain from a very early period of their acquaintance. He had soon to think her the most beautiful, and, what is of more importa most interesting being he had ever beheld · but now such se had warmed by intimacy into a passion as ardent as it was deep as he stood there, and gazed with her from the window on the scene I have described, he felt even a more eager longing than she did, to hasten forward to the time when the tie that was to unite them for ever should be theirs, and every cold restraint and worldly barrier done away.

Certainly a more propitious moment could not have been foun for any proposal that might tend to hasten their union, but as they still gazing forth, and speaking of the changes and improvements th were by this time going on at Mallington Park, the green chariot of worthy Mr. Quatterly drove in through the gates, and stopped at the door before their eyes. His voice was then heard in the hall givin various directions for the safe custody of the numerous little boxes which the chariot contained, and the next moment he wa red into the room by Dr. Western's old servant, one of wh heavily laden with the cases by which the worthy sol store. With an air of mock ceremony and reverence, Mr. Qu advanced towards the young nobleman, bowing profoundly.

"My lord," he said, "I have the honour of info ming your ship, that all your lordship's affairs are finally wound up, set