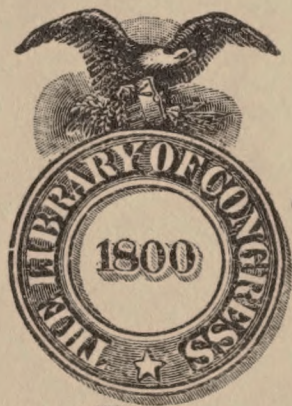


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COUPON
BONDS





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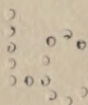
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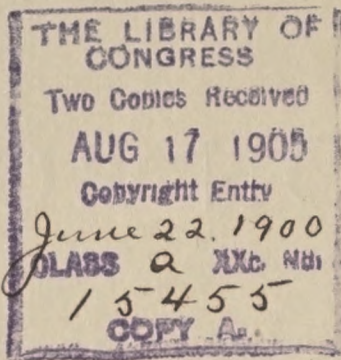
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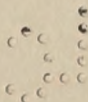
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COUPON BONDS.



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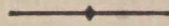
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COUPON BONDS.



I.

WHAT MR. DUCKLOW BROUGHT HOME IN HIS BOOT-LEG.

ON a certain mild March evening, A. D. 1864, the Ducklow kitchen had a general air of waiting for somebody. Mrs. Ducklow sat knitting by the light of a kerosene lamp, but paused ever and anon, neglecting her stocking, and knitting her brows instead, with an aspect of anxious listening. The old gray cat, coiled up on a cushion at her side, purring in her sleep, purred and slept as if she knew perfectly well who was coming soon to occupy that chair, and meant to make the most of it. The old-fashioned clock, perched upon the high mantel-piece of the low-studded room, ticked away lonesomely, as clocks tick only when somebody is waited for who does not come. Even the teakettle on the stove seemed to be in the secret, for it simmered and sang after the manner of a wise old teakettle fully conscious of the importance of its mission. The side-table, which was simply a leaf on hinges fixed in the wall, and looked like an apron when it was down, giving to that side of the kitchen a curious resemblance to Mrs. Ducklow, and rested on one arm when it was up, in which position it reminded you more of Mr. Ducklow leaning his chin on his hand,—the side-table was set with a single plate, knife and fork, and cup and saucer, indicating that the person waited for was expected

to partake of refreshments. Behind the stairway door was a small boy kicking off a very small pair of trousers with a degree of reluctance which showed that he also wished to sit up and wait for somebody.

"Say, ma, *need* I go to bed now!" he exclaimed rather than inquired, starting to pull on the trousers again after he had got one leg free. "He 'll want me to hold the lantern for him to take care of the hoss."

"No, no, Taddy," for that was the boy's name (short for Thaddeus), "you 'll only be in the way, if you set up. Besides, I want to mend your pants."

"You 're always wantin' to mend my pants!" complained the youngster, who seemed to think that it was by no means to do him a favor, but rather to afford herself a gloating pleasure, that Mrs. Ducklow, who had a mania for patching, required the garment to be delivered up to her. "I wish there was n't such a thing as pants in the world!" — utterly regardless of the plight the world would be in without them.

"Don't talk that way, after all the trouble and expense we've been to to clothe ye!" said the good woman, reprovingly. "Where would you be now, if 't was n't for me and yer Pa Ducklow?"

"I should n't be goin' to bed when I don't want to!" he muttered, just loud enough to be heard.

"You ungrateful child!" said Mrs. Ducklow, not without reason, for Taddy knew very well — at least he was reminded of the fact often enough — that he owed to them his home and all its comforts. "Would n't be going to bed when you don't want to! You would n't be going to bed when you do want to, more likely; for ten to one you would n't have a bed to go to. Think of the sitewation you was in when we adopted ye, and then talk that way!"

As this was an unanswerable argument, Taddy contented

himself with thrusting a hand into his trousers and recklessly increasing the area of the forthcoming patch. "If she likes to mend so well, let her!" thought he.

"Taddy, are you tearing them pants?" cried Mrs. Ducklow sharply, hearing a sound alarmingly suggestive of cracking threads.

"I was pullin' 'em off," said Taddy. "I never see such mean cloth! can't touch it but it has to tear. Say, ma, do ye think he'll bring me home a drum?"

"You'll know in the morning."

"I want to know to-night. He said mabby he would. Say, *can't* I set up?"

"I'll let ye know whether you can set up, after you've been told so many times!"

So saying, Mrs. Ducklow rose from her chair, laid down her knitting-work, and started for the stairway door with great energy and a rattan. But Taddy, who perceived retribution approaching, did not see fit to wait for it. He darted up the stairs and crept into his bunk with the lightness and agility of a squirrel.

"I'm abed! Say, ma, I'm abed!" he cried, eager to save the excellent lady the trouble of ascending the stairs. "I'm 'most asleep a'ready!"

"It's a good thing for you you be!" said Mrs. Ducklow, gathering up the garment he had left behind the door. "Why, Taddy, how you did tear it! I've a good notion to give ye a smart trouncing now!"

Taddy began to snore, and Mrs. Ducklow concluded that she would not wake him.

"It *is* mean cloth, as he says!" she exclaimed, examining it by the kerosene lamp. "For my part, I consider it a great misfortin that shoddy was ever invented. Ye can't buy any sort of a ready-made garment for boys now-days but it comes to pieces at the least wear or strain, like so much brown paper."

She was shaping the necessary patch, when the sound of wheels coming into the yard told her that the person so long waited for had arrived.

"That you?" said she, opening the kitchen door and looking out into the darkness.

"Yes," replied a man's voice.

"Ye want the lantern?"

"No : jest set the lamp in the winder, and I guess I can git along. Whoa!" And the man jumped to the ground.

"Had good luck?" the woman inquired in a low voice.

"I'll tell ye when I come in," was the evasive answer.

"Has he bought me a drum?" bawled Taddy from the chamber stairs.

"Do you want me to come up there and 'tend to ye?" demanded Mrs. Ducklow.

The boy was not particularly ambitious of enjoying that honor.

"You be still and go to sleep, then, or you'll git *drummed!*"

And she latched the stairway door, greatly to the dismay of Master Taddy, who felt that some vast and momentous secret was kept from him. Overhearing whispered conferences between his adopted parents in the morning, noticing also the cautious glances they cast at him, and the persistency with which they repeatedly sent him away out of sight on slight and absurd pretences, he had gathered a fact and drawn an inference, namely, that a great purchase was to be made by Mr. Ducklow that day in town, and that, on his return, he (Taddy) was to be surprised by the presentation of what he had long coveted and teased for, — a new drum.

To lie quietly in bed under such circumstances was an act that required more self-control than Master Taddy possessed. Accordingly he stole down stairs and listened,

feeling sure that if the drum should come in, Mrs. Ducklow, and perhaps Mr. Ducklow himself, would be unable to resist the temptation of thumping it softly to try its sound.

Mrs. Ducklow was busy taking her husband's supper out of the oven, where it had been kept warm for him, pouring hot water into the teapot, and giving the last touches to the table. Then came the familiar grating noise of a boot on the scraper. Mrs. Ducklow stepped quickly to open the door for Mr. Ducklow. Taddy, well aware that he was committing an indiscretion, but inspired by the wild hope of seeing a new drum come into the kitchen, ventured to unlatch the stairway door, open it a crack, and peep.

Mr. Ducklow entered, bringing a number of parcels containing purchases from the stores, but no drum visible to Taddy.

"Did you buy?" whispered Mrs. Ducklow, relieving him of his load.

Mr. Ducklow pointed mysteriously at the stairway door, lifting his eyebrows interrogatively.

"Taddy?" said Mrs. Ducklow. "O, he's abed, — though I never in my life had such a time to git him off out of the way; for he'd somehow got possessed with the idee that you was to buy something, and he wanted to set up and see what it was."

"Strange how childern will ketch things sometimes, best ye can do to prevent!" said Mr. Ducklow.

"But did ye buy?"

"You better jest take them matches and put 'em out o' the way, fust thing, 'fore ye forgit it. Matches are dangerous to have layin' around, and I never feel safe till *they're* safe."

And Mr. Ducklow hung up his hat, and laid his over-

coat across a chair in the next room, with a carefulness and deliberation exhausting to the patience of good Mrs. Ducklow, and no less trying to that of Master Taddy, who was waiting to hear the important question answered.

"Come!" said she, after hastily disposing of the matches, "what's the use of keeping me in suspense? *Did* ye buy?"

"Where did ye put 'em?" asked Mr. Ducklow, taking down the bootjack.

"In the little tin pail, where we always keep 'em, of course! Where should I put 'em?"

"You need n't be cross. I asked, 'cause I did n't hear ye put the cover on. I don't believe ye *did* put the cover on, either; and I sha' n't be easy till ye do."

Mrs. Ducklow returned to the pantry; and her husband, pausing a moment, leaning over a chair, heard the cover go on the tin pail with a click and a clatter which betrayed, that, if ever there was an angry and impatient cover, that was.

"Anybody been here to-day?" Mr. Ducklow inquired, pressing the heel of his right boot in the jack, and steady-ing the toe under a round of the chair.

"No," replied Mrs. Ducklow.

"Ye been anywheres?"

"Yes."

"Where?" mildly inquired Mr. Ducklow.

"No matter," said Mrs. Ducklow, with decided ill-temper.

Mr. Ducklow drew a deep sigh, as he turned and looked upon her.

"Wal, you be about the most uncomf'table woman ever I see," he said, with a dark and dissatisfied countenance.

"If you can't answer my question, I don't see why I need take the trouble to answer yours," — and Mrs. Duck-

low returned with compressed lips to her patching. "Yer supper is ready ; ye can eat it when ye please."

"I was answerin' your question as fast as I could," said her husband, in a tone of excessive mildness, full of sorrow and discouragement.

"I have n't seen any signs of your answering it."

And the housewife's fingers stitched away energetically at the patch.

"Wal, wal ! ye don't see everything !"

Mr. Ducklow, having already removed one boot, drew gently at the other. As it came off, something fell out on the floor. He picked it up, and handed it with a triumphant smile to Mrs. Ducklow.

"O, indeed ! is this the —"

She was radiant. Her hands dropped their work, and opened the package, which consisted of a large unsealed envelope and folded papers within. These she unfolded and examined with beaming satisfaction.

"But what made ye carry 'em in yer boot so?"

"To tell the truth," said Mr. Ducklow, in a suppressed voice, "I was afraid o' bein' robbed. I never was so afraid o' bein' robbed in my life ! So, jest as I got clear o' the town, I took it out o' my pocket" (meaning, not the town, but the envelope containing the papers), "an' tucked it down my boot-leg. Then, all the way home, I was scaret when I was ridin' alone, an' still more scaret when I heard anybody comin' after me. You see, it's jest like so much money."

And he arranged the window-curtain in a manner to prevent the sharpest-eyed burglar from peeping in and catching a glimpse of the papers.

He neglected to secure the stairway door, however. There, in his hiding-place behind it, stood Taddy, shivering in his shirt, but peeping and listening in a fever of cu-

riosity which nothing could chill. His position was such that he could not see Mr. Ducklow or the documents, and his mind was left free to revel in the most daring fancies regarding the wonderful purchase. He had not yet fully given up the idea of a new drum, although the image, which vaguely shaped itself in his mind, of Mr. Ducklow "tucking it down his boot-leg," presented difficulties.

"This is the bond, you see," Mr. Ducklow explained; "and all these little things that fill out the sheet are the cowpons. You have only to cut off one o' these, take it to the bank when it is due, and draw the interest on it in gold!"

"But suppose you lose the bonds?" queried Mrs. Ducklow, regarding, not without awe, the destructible paper representatives of so much property.

"That's what I've been thinkin' of; that's what's made me so narvous. I supposed 't would be like so much railroad stock, good for nothin' to nobody but the owner, and somethin' that could be replaced if I lost it. But the man to the bank said no, — 't was like so much currency, and I must look out for it. That's what filled all the bushes with robbers as I come along the road. And I tell ye, 't was a relief to feel I'd got safe home at last; though I don't see now how we're to keep the plaguy things so we sha' n't feel uneasy about 'em."

"Nor I either!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, turning pale. "Suppose the house should take fire! or burglars should break in! I don't wonder you was so particular about the matches! Dear me! I shall be frightened to death! I'd no idee 't was to be such dangerous property! I shall be thinking of fires and burglars! — O-h-h-h!"

The terrified woman uttered a wild scream; for just then a door flew suddenly open, and there burst into the room a frightful object, making a headlong plunge at the pre-

cious papers. Mr. Ducklow sprang back against the table set for his supper with a force that made everything jar. Then he sprang forward again, instinctively reaching to grasp and save from plunder the coupon bonds. But by this time both he and his wife had become aware of the nature of the intrusion.

“Thaddeus!” ejaculated the lady. “How came you here? Get up! Give an account of yourself!”

Taddy, whose abrupt appearance in the room had been altogether involuntary, was quite innocent of any predatory designs. Leaning forward farther and farther, in the ardor of discovery, he had, when too late to save himself, experienced the phenomenon of losing his balance, and pitched from the stairway into the kitchen with a violence that threw the door back against the wall with a bang, and laid him out, a sprawling figure, in scanty, ghostly apparel, on the floor.

“What ye want? What ye here for?” sternly demanded Mr. Ducklow, snatching him up by one arm, and shaking him.

“Don’t know,” faltered the luckless youngster, speaking the truth for once in his life. “Fell.”

“Fell! How did you come to fall? What are you out o’ bed for?”

“Don’t know,” — snivelling and rubbing his eyes. “Did n’t know I was.”

“Got up without knowing it! That’s a likely story! How could that happen you, sir?” said Mrs. Ducklow.

“Don’t know, ’thout ’t was I got up in my sleep,” said Taddy, who had on rare occasions been known to indulge in moderate somnambulism.

“In your sleep!” said Mr. Ducklow, incredulously.

“I guess so. I was dreamin’ you brought me home a new drum, — tucked down yer — boot-leg,” faltered Taddy.

“Strange!” said Mr. Ducklow, with a glance at his wife. “But how could I bring a drum in my boot-leg?”

“Don’t know, ’thout it’s a new kind, one that’ll shet up.”

Taddy looked eagerly round, but saw nothing new or interesting, except some curious-looking papers which Mrs. Ducklow was hastily tucking into an envelope.

“Say, did ye, pa?”

“Did I? Of course I did n’t! What nonsense! But how came ye down here? Speak the truth!”

“I dreamt you was blowin’ it up, and I sprung to ketch it, when, fust I knowed, I was on the floor, like a thousan’ o’ brick! ’Mos’ broke my knee-pans!” whimpered Taddy. “Say, did n’t ye bring me home nothin’?” What’s them things?”

“Nothin’ little boys know anything about. Now run back to bed again. I forgot to buy you a drum to-day, but I’ll git ye somethin’ next time I go to town, — if I think on’t!”

“So ye always say, but ye never think on’t!” complained Taddy.

“There, there! Somebody’s comin’! What a lookin’ object you are, to be seen by visitors!”

There was a knock. Taddy disappeared. Mr. Ducklow turned anxiously to his wife, who was hastily hiding the bonds in her palpitating bosom.

“Who can it be this time o’ night?”

“Sakes alive!” said Mrs. Ducklow, in whose mind burglars were uppermost, “I wish, whoever ’t is, they’d keep away! Go to the door,” she whispered, resuming her work.

Mr. Ducklow complied; and, as the visitor entered, there she sat plying her needle as industriously and demurely as though neither bonds nor burglars had ever been heard of in that remote rural district.

II.

MISS BESWICK.

“Ан, Miss Beswick, walk in!” said Mr. Ducklow.

A tall, spare, somewhat prim-looking female of middle age, with a shawl over her head, entered, nodding a curt and precise good-evening, first to Mr. Ducklow, then to his wife.

“What, that you?” said Mrs. Ducklow, with curiosity and surprise. “Where on ’arth did you come from? Set her a chair, why don’t ye, father?”

Mr. Ducklow, who was busy slipping his feet into a pair of old shoes, hastened to comply with the hospitable suggestion.

“I’ve only jest got home,” said he, apologetically, as if fearful lest the fact of his being caught in his stockings should create suspicions: so absurdly careful of appearances some people become, when they have anything to conceal. “Jest had time to kick my boots off, you see. Take a seat.”

“Thank ye. I s’pose you’ll think I’m wild, makin’ calls at this hour!”

And Miss Beswick seated herself with an angular movement, and held herself prim and erect in the chair.

“Why, no, I don’t,” said Mrs. Ducklow, civilly; while at the same time she did think it very extraordinary and unwarrantable conduct on the part of her neighbor to be walking the streets and entering the dwellings of honest people, alone, after eight o’clock, on a dark night.

“You’re jest in time to set up and take a cup o’ tea with my husband”; an invitation she knew would not be accepted, and which she pressed accordingly. “Ye better,

Miss Beswick, if only to keep him company. Take off yer things, won't ye?"

"No, I don't go a-visitin', to take off my things and drink tea, this time o' night!"

Miss Beswick condescended, however, to throw back the shawl from her head, exposing to view a long, sinewy neck, the strong lines of which ran up into her cheeks, and ramified into wrinkles, giving severity to her features. At the same time emerged from the fold of the garment, as it were, a knob, a high, bare poll, so lofty and narrow, and destitute of the usual ornament, natural or false, that you involuntarily looked twice, to assure yourself that it was really that lovely and adorable object, a female head.

"I've jest run over to tell you the news," said Miss Beswick.

"Nothing bad, I hope?" said Mrs. Ducklow. "No robbers in town? for massy sake!" And Mrs. Ducklow laid her hand on her bosom, to make sure that the bonds were still there.

"No, good news, — good for Sophrony, at any rate!"

"Ah! she has heard from Reuben?"

"No!" The severity of the features was modified by a grim smile. "No!" and the little, high knob of a head was shaken expressively.

"What then?" Ducklow inquired.

"Reuben has come home!" The words were spoken triumphantly, and the keen gray eyes of the elderly maiden twinkled.

"Come home! home!" echoed both Ducklows at once, in great astonishment.

Miss Beswick assured them of the fact.

"My! how you talk!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow. "I never dreamed of such a — When did he come?"

“About an hour 'n' a half ago. I happened to be in to Sophrony's. I had jest gone over to set a little while with her and keep her company, — as I've often done, she seemed so lonely, livin' there with her two children alone in the house, her husband away so. Her friends ha' n't been none too attentive to her in his absence, she thinks, — and so I think.”

“I — I hope you don't mean that as a hint to us, Miss Beswick,” said Mrs. Ducklow.

“You can take it as such, or not, jest as you please! I leave it to your own consciences. You know best whuther you have done your duty to Sophrony and her family, whilst her husband has been off to the war; and I sha' n't set myself up for a judge. You never had any boys of your own, and so you adopted Reuben, jest as you have lately adopted Thaddeus; and I s'pose you think you've done well by him, jest as you think you will do by Thaddeus, if he's a good boy, and stays with you till he's twenty-one.”

“I hope no one thinks or says the contrary, Miss Beswick!” said Mr. Ducklow, gravely, with flushed face.

“There may be two opinions on that subject!” said Miss Beswick, with a slight toss of the head, setting that small and irregular spheroid at a still loftier and more imposing altitude. “Reuben came to you when he was jest old enough to be of use about the house and on the farm; and if I recollect right, you did n't encourage idleness in him long. You did n't give his hands much chance to do 'some mischief still!' No, indeed! nobody can accuse you of that weakness!” And the skin of the wrinkled features tightened with a terrible grin.

“Nobody can say we ever overworked the boy, or ill-used him in any way!” exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, excitedly.

“No! *I* don’t say it! But this I’ll say, for I’ve had it in my mind ever since Sophrony was left alone, — I could n’t help seein’ and feelin’, and now you’ve set me a-talkin’ I may as well speak out. Reuben was always a good boy, and a willin’ boy, as you yourselves must allow; and he paid his way from the first.”

“I don’t know about that!” interposed Mr. Ducklow, taking up his knife and fork, and dropping them again, in no little agitation. “He was a good and willin’ boy, as you say; but the expense of clothin’ him and keepin’ him to school —”

“He paid his way from the first!” repeated Miss Beswick, sternly. “You kept him to school winters, when he did more work ’fore and after school than any other boy in town. He worked all the time summers; and soon he was as good as a hired man to you. He never went to school a day after he was fifteen; and from that time he was better’n any hired man, for he was faithful, and took an interest, and looked after and took care of things as no hired man ever would or could do, as I’ve heard you yourself say, Mr. Ducklow!”

“Reuben was a good, faithful boy: I never denied that! I never denied that!”

“Well, he stayed with you till he was twenty-one, — did ye a man’s service for the last five or six years; then you giv’ him what you called a settin’ out, — a new suit o’ clothes, a yoke of oxen, some farmin’-tools, and a hundred dollars in money! You, with yer thousands, Mr. Ducklow, giv’ him a hundred dollars in money!”

“That was only a beginnin’, only a beginnin’, I’ve always said!” declared the red-flushed farmer.

“I know it; and I s’pose you’ll continner to say so till the day of yer death! Then maybe you’ll remember Reuben in yer will. That’s the way! Keep puttin’ him

off as long as you can possibly hold on to your property yourself, — then, when you see you 've got to go and leave it, give him what you ought to 've gi'n him years before. There a'n't no merit in that kind o' justice, did ye know it, Mr. Ducklow? I tell ye, what belongs to Reuben belongs to him *now*, — not ten or twenty year hence, when you 've done with 't, and he most likely won't need it. A few hundred dollars now 'll be more useful to him than all your thousands will be bime-by. After he left you, he took the Moseley farm; everybody respected him, everybody trusted him; he was doin' well, everybody said; then he married Sophrony, and a good and faithful wife she's been to him; and finally he concluded to buy the farm, which you yourself said was a good idee, and encouraged him in 't."

"So it was; Reuben used judgment in that, and he'd have got along well enough if 't had n't been for the war," said Mr. Ducklow; while his wife sat dumb, not daring to measure tongues with their vigorous-minded and plain-speaking neighbor.

"Jest so!" said Miss Beswick. "If it had n't been for the war! He had made his first payments, and would have met the rest as they came due, no doubt of it. But the war broke out, and he left all to sarve his country. Says he, 'I'm an able-bodied man, and I ought to go,' says he. His business was as important, and his wife and children was as dear to him, as anybody's; but he felt it his duty to go, and he went. They did n't give no such big bounties to volunteers then as they do now, and it was a sacrifice to him every way when he enlisted. But says he, 'I'll jest do my duty,' says he, 'and trust to Providence for the rest.' You did n't *discourage* his goin', — and you did n't *incourage* him, neither, the way you 'd ought to."

"My! what on 'arth, Miss Beswick! — Seems to me

you 're takin' it upon yourself to say things that are un-called for, to say the least! I can't understand what should have sent you here, to tell me what's my business, and what a'n't, this fashion. As if I did n't know my own duty and intentions!" And Mr. Ducklow poured his tea into his plate, and buttered his bread with a teaspoon.

"I s'pose she's been talking with Sophrony, and she has sent her to interfere."

"Mis' Ducklow, you don't s'pose no such thing! You know Sophrony would n't send anybody on such an arrant; and you know I a'n't a person to do such arrants, or be made a cat's-paw of by anybody. I a'n't handsome, not partic'larly; and I a'n't wuth my thousands, like some folks I know; and I never got married, for the best reason in the world,—them that offered themselves I would n't have, and them I would have had did n't offer themselves; and I a'n't so good a Christian as I might be, I'm aware. I know my lacks as well as anybody; but bein' a spy and a cat's-paw a'n't one of 'em. I don't do things sly and underhand. If I've anything to say to anybody, I go right to 'em, and say it to their face,—sometimes perty blunt, I allow. But I don't wait to be *sent* by other folks. I've a mind o' my own, and my own way o' doin' things,—that you know as well as anybody. So, when you say you s'pose Sophrony or anybody else sent me here to interfere, I say you s'pose what a'n't true, and what you know a'n't true, Mis' Ducklow!"

Mrs. Ducklow was annihilated, and the visitor went on.

"As for you, Mr. Ducklow, I haven't said you *don't* know your own duty and intentions. I've no doubt you *think* you do, at any rate."

"Very well! then why can't you leave me to do what I think's my duty? Everybody ought to have that privilege."

“You think so?”

“Sartin, Miss Beswick; don’t you?”

“Why, then, *I* ought to have the same.”

“Of course; nobody in this house’ll prevent your doin’ what you’re satisfied’s your duty.”

“Thank ye! much obleeged!” said Miss Beswick, with gleaming, gristly features. “That’s all I ask. Now I’m satisfied it’s my duty to tell ye what I’ve been tellin’ ye, and what I’m goin’ to tell ye: that’s *my* duty. And then it’ll be *your* duty to do what *you* think’s right. That’s plain, a’n’t it?”

“Wal, wal!” said Mr. Ducklow, discomfited; “I can’t hinder yer talkin’, I s’pose; though it seems a man ought to have a right to peace and quiet in his own house.”

“Yes, and in his own conscience too!” said Miss Beswick. “And if you’ll hearken to me now, I promise you’ll have peace and quiet in your conscience, and in your house too, such as you never have had yit. I s’pose you know your great fault, don’t ye? Graspin’, — that’s your fault, that’s your besettin’ sin, Mr. Ducklow. You used to give it as an excuse for not helpin’ Reuben more, that you had your daughter to provide for. Well, your daughter has got married; she married a rich man, — you looked out for that, — and she’s provided for, fur as property can provide for any one. Now, without a child in the world to feel anxious about, you keep layin’ up and layin’ up, and’ll continner to lay up, I s’pose, till ye die, and leave a great fortin’ to your daughter, that already has enough, and jest a pittance to Reuben and Thaddeus.”

“No, no, Miss Beswick! you’re wrong, you’re wrong, Miss Beswick! I mean to do the handsome thing by both on ’em.”

“Mean to! ye mean to! That’s the way ye flatter yer conscience, and cheat yer own soul. Why don’t ye do

what ye *mean* to do to once, and make sure on 't? That 's the way to git the good of your property. I tell ye, the time 's comin' when the recollection of havin' done a good action will be a greater comfort to ye than all the property in the world. Then you 'll look back and say, 'Why *did n't* I do this and do that with my money, when 't was in my power, 'stead of hoardin' up and hoardin' up for others to spend after me?' Now, as I was goin' to say, ye did n't *discourage* Reuben's enlistin', and ye did n't *incourage* him the way ye might. You ought to 've said to him, 'Go, Reuben, if ye see it to be yer duty ; and, as fur as money goes, ye sha'n't suffer for 't. I've got enough for all on us ; and I'll pay yer debts, if need be, and see 't yer fam'ly 's kep' comf'table while ye 're away.' But that 's jest what ye did n't say, and it 's jest what ye did n't do. All the time Reuben 's been sarvin' his country, he 's had his debts and his family expenses to worry him ; and you know it 's been all Sophrony could do, by puttin' forth all her energies, and strainin' every narve, to keep herself and children from goin' hungry and ragged. You've helped 'em a little now and then, in driblets, it 's true ; but, dear me !" exclaimed Miss Beswick ; and she smote her hands, palms downwards, upon her lap, with a look and gesture which signified that words utterly failed to express her feelings on the subject.

Mrs. Ducklow, who, since her annihilation, had scarcely ventured to look up, sat biting her lips, drawing quick breaths of suppressed anger and impatience, and sewing the patch to the trousers and to her own apron under them. There was an awful silence, broken only by the clock ticking, and Mr. Ducklow lifting his knife and fork and letting them fall again. At last he forced himself to speak.

"Wal, you 've read us a pretty smart lectur', Miss Beswick, I must say. I can't consaive what should make ye

take such an interest in our affairs ; but it 's very kind in ye, — very kind, to be sure !”

“ Take an interest ! Have n't I seen Sophrony's struggles with them children ? And have n't I seen Reuben come home this very night, a sick man, with a broken constitution, and no prospect before him but to give up his farm, lose all he has paid, and be thrown upon the charities of the world with his wife and children ? And if the charities of friends are so cold, what can he expect of the charities of the world ? Take an interest ! I wish you took half as much. Here I 've sot half an hour, and you have n't thought to ask how Reuben appeared, or anything about him.”

“ Maybe there 's a good reason for that, Miss Beswick. 'T was on my lips to ask half a dozen times ; but you talked so fast, you would n't give me a chance.”

“ Well, I 'm glad you 've got some excuse, though a poor one,” said Miss Beswick.

“ How is Reuben ?” Mrs. Ducklow meekly inquired.

“ All broken to pieces, — a mere shadder of what he was. He 's had his old wound troublin' him ag'in ; then he 's had the fever, that come within one of takin' him out o' the world. He was in the hospitals, ye know, for two months or more ; but finally the doctors see't was his only chance to be sent home, weak as he was. A sergeant that was comin' on brought him all the way, and took him straight home ; and that 's the reason he got along so sudden and unexpected, even to Sophrony. O, if you could seen their meetin', as I did ! then you would n't sneer at my takin' an interest.” And Miss Beswick, strong-minded as she was, found it necessary to make use of her handkerchief. “ I did n't stop only to help put him to bed, and fix things a little ; then I left 'em alone, and run over to tell ye. It 's a pity you did n't know he

was in town when you was there to-day, so as to bring him home with ye. But I s'pose you had your investments to look after. Come, now, Mr. Ducklow, how many thousan' dollars have you invested, since Reuben's been off to war, and his folks have been sufferin' to home? You may have been layin' up hundreds, or even thousands, that way, this very day, for aught I know. But let me tell ye, you won't git no good of such property, — it'll only be a cuss to ye, — till you do the right thing by Reuben. Mark my word!"

There was another long silence.

"Ye a'n't going, be ye, Miss Beswick?" said Mrs. Ducklow, — for the visitor had arisen. "What's yer hurry?"

"No hurry at all; but I've done my arrant and said my say, and may as well be goin'. Good night. Good night, Mr. Ducklow."

And Miss Beswick, pulling her shawl over her head, stalked out of the house like some tall, gaunt spectre, leaving the Ducklows to recover as best they could from the consternation into which they had been thrown by her coming.

III.

A COMFORTABLE INVESTMENT.

"DID you ever?" said Mrs. Ducklow, gaining courage to speak after the visitor was out of hearing.

"She's got a tongue!" said Mr. Ducklow.

"Strange she should speak of your investing money to-day! D'ye s'pose she knows?"

"I don't see how she *can* know." And Mr. Ducklow paced the room in deep trouble. "I've been careful not

to give a hint on 't to anybody, for I knew jest what folks would say: 'If Ducklow has got so much money to dispose of, he 'd better give Reuben a lift.' I know how folks talk."

"Coming here to browbeat us!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow. "I wonder ye did n't be a little more plain with *her*, father! I would n't have sot and been dictated to as tamely as you did!"

"You would n't? Then why did ye? She dictated to you as much as she did to me; and you scurce opened your head; you did n't dars' to say yer soul was your own!"

"Yes, I did, I—"

"You ventur'd to speak once, and she shet ye up quicker 'n lightnin'. Now tell about you would n't have sot and been dictated to like a tame noodle, as I did!"

"I did n't say *a tame noodle*."

"Yes, ye did. I might have answered back sharp enough, but I was expectin' *you* to speak. *Men* don't like to dispute with *women*."

"That's your git-off," said Mrs. Ducklow, trembling with vexation. "You was jest as much afraid of her as I was. I never see ye so cowed in all my life."

"Cowed! I was n't cowed, neither. How unreasonable, now, for you to cast all the blame on to me!"

And Mr. Ducklow, his features contracted into a black scowl, took his boots from the corner.

"Ye ha'n't got to go out, have ye?" said Mrs. Ducklow. "I should n't think you 'd put on yer boots jest to step to the barn and see to the hoss."

"I'm goin' over to Reuben's."

"To Reuben's! Not to-night, father!"

"Yes, I think I better. He and Sophrony 'll know we heard of his gittin' home, and they're enough inclined

a'ready to feel we neglect 'em. Have n't ye got somethin' ye can send?"

"I don't know," — curtly. "I've scurce ever been over to Sophrony's but I've carried her a pie or cake or something; and mighty little thanks I got for it, as it turns out."

"Why did n't ye say that to Miss Beswick, when she was runnin' us so hard about our never doin' anything for 'em?"

"'T would n't have done no good; I knew jest what she'd say. 'What's a pie or a cake now and then?' — that's jest the reply she'd have made. Dear me! What have I been doing?"

Mrs. Ducklow, rising, had but just discovered that she had stitched the patch and the trousers to her apron.

"So much for Miss Beswick!" she exclaimed, untying the apron-strings, and flinging the united garments spitefully down upon a chair. "I do wish such folks would mind their own business and stay to home!"

"You've got the bonds safe?" said Mr. Ducklow, putting on his overcoat.

"Yes; but I won't engage to keep 'em safe. They make me as narvous as can be. I'm afraid to be left alone in the house with 'em. Here, you take 'em."

"Don't be foolish. What harm can possibly happen to them or you while I'm away? You don't s'pose I want to lug them around with me wherever I go, do ye?"

"I'm sure it's no great lug. I s'pose you're afraid to go acrost the fields alone with 'em in yer pocket. What in the world we're going to do with 'em I don't see. If we go out we can't take 'em with us, for fear of losing 'em, or of being robbed; and we sha' n't dare to leave 'em to home, fear the house'll burn up or git broke into."

"We can hide 'em where no burglar can find 'em," said Mr. Ducklow.

"Yes, and where nobody else can find 'em, neither, provided the house burns and neighbors come in to save things. I don't know but it'll be about as Miss Beswick said: we sha' n't take no comfort with property we ought to make over to Reuben."

"Do *you* think it ought to be made over to Reuben? If you do, it's new to me."

"No, I don't!" replied Mrs. Ducklow, decidedly. "I guess we better put 'em in the clock-case for to-night, had n't we?"

"Jest where they 'd be discovered, if the house is robbed! No: I've an idee. Slip 'em under the settin'-room carpet. Let me take 'em: I can fix a place right here by the side of the door."

With great care and secrecy the bonds were deposited between the carpet and the floor, and a chair set over them.

"What noise was that?" said the farmer, starting.

"Thaddeus," cried Mrs. Ducklow, "is that you?"

It was Thaddeus, indeed, who, awaking from a real dream of the drum this time, and, hearing conversation in the room below, had once more descended the stairs to listen. What were the old people hiding there under the carpet? It must be those curious things in the envelope. And what *were* those things, about which so much mystery seemed necessary? Taddy was peeping and considering, when he heard his name called. He would have glided back to bed again, but Mrs. Ducklow, who sprang to the stairway door, was too quick for him.

"What do you want now?" she demanded.

"I — I want you to scratch my back," said Taddy.

As he had often come to her with this innocent request, after undressing for bed, he did not see why the excuse would not pass as readily as the previous one of somnam-

bulism. But Mrs. Ducklow was in no mood to be trifled with.

“ I ’ll scratch your back for ye ! ” And seizing her rattan, she laid it smartly on the troublesome part, to the terror and pain of poor Taddy, who concluded that too much of a good thing was decidedly worse than nothing. “ There, you sir, that ’s a scratching that ’ll last ye for one while ! ”

And giving him two or three parting cuts, not confined to the region of the back, but falling upon the lower latitudes, which they marked like so many geographical parallels, she dismissed him with a sharp injunction not to let himself be seen or heard again that night.

Taddy obeyed, and, crying himself to sleep, dreamed that he was himself a drum, and that Mrs. Ducklow beat him.

“ Father ! ” called Mrs. Ducklow to her husband, who was at the barn, “ do you know what time it is ? It ’s nine o ’clock ! I would n ’t think of going over there to-night ; they ’ll be all locked up, and abed and asleep, like as not. ”

“ Wal, I s ’pose I must do as you say, ” replied Mr. Ducklow, glad of an excuse not to go, — Miss Beswick ’s visit having left him in extremely low spirits.

Accordingly, after bedding down the horse and fastening the barn, he returned to the kitchen ; and soon the prosperous couple retired to rest.

“ Why, how res ’less you be ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, in the middle of the night. “ What ’s the reason ye can ’t sleep ? ”

“ I don ’t know, ” groaned Mr. Ducklow. “ I can ’t help thinkin ’ o ’ Miss Beswick. I never was so worked at any little thing. ”

“ Well, well ! forget it, father ; and do go to sleep ! ”

"I feel I ought to have gone over to Reuben's! And I should have gone, if 't had n't been for you."

"Now how unreasonable to blame me!" said Mrs. Ducklow. "Ye might have gone; I only reminded ye how late it was."

Mr. Ducklow groaned, and turned over. He tried to forget Miss Beswick, Reuben, and the bonds, and at last he fell asleep.

"Father!" whispered Mrs. Ducklow, awaking him.

"What's the matter?"

"I think — I'm pretty sure — hark! I heard something sounded like somebody gitting into the kitchen winder!"

"It's your narvousness." Yet Mr. Ducklow listened for further indications of burglary. "Why can't ye be quiet and go to sleep, as you said to me?"

"I'm sure I heard something! Anybody might have looked through the blinds and seen us putting — you know — under the carpet."

"Nonsense! 't a'n't at all likely."

But Mr. Ducklow was more alarmed than he was willing to confess. He succeeded in quieting his wife's apprehensions; but at the same time the burden of solicitude and wakefulness seemed to pass from her mind only to rest upon his own. She soon after fell asleep; but he lay awake, hearing burglars in all parts of the house for an hour longer.

"What now?" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, starting up in bed.

"I thought I might as well git up and satisfy myself," replied her husband, in a low, agitated voice.

He had risen, and was groping his way to the kitchen.

"Is there anything?" she inquired, after listening long

with chilling blood, expecting at each moment to hear him knocked down or throttled.

He made no reply, but presently came gliding softly back again.

“I can’t find nothin’. But I never in all my life heard the floors creak so! I could have sworn there was somebody walkin’ over ’em!”

“I guess you ’re a little excited, a’n’t ye?”

“No, — I got over that; but I *did* hear noises!”

Mr. Ducklow, returning to his pillow, dismissed his fears, and once more composed his mind for slumber. But the burden of which he had temporarily relieved his wife now returned with redoubled force to the bosom of that virtuous lady. It seemed as if there was only a certain amount of available sleep in the house, and that, when one had it, the other must go without; while at the same time a swarm of fears perpetually buzzed in and out of the mind, whose windows wakefulness left open.

“Father!” said Mrs. Ducklow, giving him a violent shake.

“Hey? what?” — arousing from his first sound sleep.

“Don’t you smell something burning?”

Ducklow snuffed; Mrs. Ducklow snuffed; they sat up in bed, and snuffed vivaciously in concert.

“No, I can’t say I do. Did you?”

“Jest as plain as ever I smelt anything in my life! But I don’t so” — snuff, snuff — “not quite so distinct now.”

“Seems to me I *do* smell somethin’,” said Mr. Ducklow, imagination coming to his aid. “It can’t be the matches, can it?”

“I thought of the matches, but I certainly covered ’em up tight.”

They snuffed again, — first one, then the other, — now a series of quick, short snuffs, then one long, deep snuff, then

a snuff by both together, as if by uniting their energies, like two persons pulling at a rope, they might accomplish what neither was equal to singly.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Mr. Ducklow.

“Why, what, father?”

“It’s Thaddeus! He’s been walkin’ in his sleep. That’s what we heard. And now he’s got the matches and set the house afire!”

He bounded out of bed; he went stumbling over the chairs in the kitchen, and clattering among the tins in the pantry, and rushing blindly and wildly up the kitchen stairs, only to find the matches all right, Taddy fast asleep, and no indications anywhere, either to eye or nostril, of anything burning.

“’T was all your imagination, mother.”

“*My* imagination! You was jest as frightened as I was. I’m sure I can’t tell what it was I smelt; I can’t smell it now. Did you feel for the — you know what?”

Mrs. Ducklow seemed to think there were evil ones listening, and it was dangerous to mention by name what was uppermost in the minds of both.

“I wish you *would* jest put your hand and see if they’re all right; for I’ve thought several times I heard somebody taking on ’em out.”

Mr. Ducklow had been troubled by similar fancies; so, getting down on his knees, he felt in the dark for the bonds.

“Good gracious!” he ejaculated.

“What now?” cried Mrs. Ducklow. “They a’n’t gone, be they? You don’t say they’re gone!”

“Sure’s the world! — No, here they be! I did n’t feel in the right place.”

“How you *did* frighten me! My heart almost hopped out of my mouth!” Indeed, the shock was sufficient to keep the good woman awake the rest of the night.

IV.

THE RETURNED SOLDIER.

DAYLIGHT the next morning dissipated their doubts, and made both feel that they had been the victims of unnecessary and foolish alarms.

“I hope ye won’t git so worked up another night,” said Mr. Ducklow. “It’s no use. We might live in the house a hundred years, and never hear of a robber or a fire. Ye only excite yerself, and keep me awake.”

“I should like to know if you did n’t git excited, and rob me of my sleep jest as much as I did you!” retorted the indignant housewife.

“You began it; you fust put it into my head. But never mind; it can’t be helped now. Le’ ’s have breakfast as soon as ye can; then I’ll run over and see Reuben.”

“Why not harness up, and let me ride over with ye?”

“Very well; mabby that’ll be the best way. Come, Taddy, ye must wake up. Fly round. You’ll have lots o’ chores to do this mornin’.”

“What’s the matter ’th my breeches?” snarled Taddy. “Some plaguy thing ’s stuck to ’em!”

It was Mrs. Ducklow’s apron, trailing behind him at half-mast, — at sight of which, and of Taddy turning round and round to look at it, like a kitten in pursuit of her own tail, Ducklow burst into a loud laugh.

“Wal, wal, mother! you’ve done it! You’re dressed for meetin’ now, Taddy!”

“I do declare!” said Mrs. Ducklow, mortified. “I can’t, for the life of me, see what there is so very funny about it!” And she hastened to cut short Taddy’s trail and her husband’s laughter with a pair of scissors.

After breakfast the Ducklows set off in the one-horse wagon, leaving Taddy to take care of the house during their absence. That each felt secretly uneasy about the coupon bonds cannot be denied ; but, after the experiences of the night and the recriminations of the morning, they were unwilling to acknowledge their fears even to themselves, and much less to each other ; so the precious papers were left hidden under the carpet.

“ Safe enough, in all conscience ! ” said Mr. Ducklow.

“ Taddy ! Taddy ! now mind ! ” Mrs. Ducklow repeated for the twentieth time. “ Don’t you leave the house, and don’t you touch the matches nor the fire, and don’t go to ransacking the rooms neither. You won’t, will ye ? ”

“ No ’m,” answered Taddy, also for the twentieth time, — secretly resolved, all the while, to take advantage of their absence, and discover, if possible, what Mr. Ducklow brought home last night in his boot-leg.

The Ducklows had intended to show their zeal and affection by making Reuben an early visit. They were somewhat chagrined, therefore, to find several neighbors already arrived to pay their respects to the returned soldier. The fact that Miss Beswick was among the number did not serve greatly to heighten their spirits.

“ I ’ve as good a notion to turn round and go straight home again as ever I had to eat ! ” muttered Mrs. Ducklow.

“ It ’s too late now,” said her husband, advancing with a show of confidence and cordiality he did not feel. “ Wal, Reuben ! glad to see ye ! glad to see ye ! This is a joyful day I scurce ever expected to see ! Why, ye don’t look so sick as I thought ye would ! Does he, mother ? ”

“ Dear me ! ” said Mrs. Ducklow, her woman’s nature, and perhaps her old motherly feelings for their adopted son, deeply moved by the sight of his changed and wasted

aspect. "I'd no idee he could be so very, so very pale and thin! Had you, Sophrony?"

"I don't know what I thought," said the young wife, standing by, watching her returned volunteer with features surcharged with emotion, — deep suffering and sympathy, suffused and lighted up by love and joy. "I only know I have him now! He has come home! He shall never leave me again, — never!"

"But was n't it terrible to see him brought home so?" whispered Mrs. Ducklow.

"Yes, it was! But, oh, I was so thankful! I felt the worst was over; and I had him again! I can nurse him now. He is no longer hundreds of miles away, among strangers, where I cannot go to him, — though I should have gone long ago, as you know, if I could have raised the means, and if it had n't been for the children."

"I — I — Mr. Ducklow would have tried to help you to the means, and I would have taken the children, if we had thought it best for you to go," said Mrs. Ducklow. "But you see now it was n't best, don't you?"

"Whether it was or not, I don't complain. I am too happy to-day to complain of anything. To see him home again! But I have dreamt so often that he came home, and woke up to find it was only a dream, I'm half afraid now to be as happy as I might be."

"Be as happy as you please, Sophrony!" spoke up Reuben, who had seemed to be listening to Mr. Ducklow's apologies for not coming over the night before, while he was in reality straining his ear to catch every word his wife was saying. He was dressed in his uniform and lying on a lounge, supported by pillows. "I'm just where I want to be, of all places in this world, — or the next world either, I may say; for I can't conceive of any greater heaven than I'm in now. I'm going to get well, too, spite

of the doctors. Coming home is the best medicine for a fellow in my condition. Not bad to take, either! Stand here, Ruby, my boy, and let yer daddy look at ye again! To think that's *my* Ruby, Pa Ducklow! Why, he was a mere baby when I went away!"

"Reuben! Reuben!" entreated the young wife, leaning over him, "you are talking too much. You promised me you would n't, you know."

"Well, well, I won't. But when a fellow's heart is chock-full, it's hard to shut down on it sometimes. Don't look so, friends, as if ye pitied me! I a'n't to be pitied. I'll bet there is n't one of ye half as happy as I am at this minute!"

"Here's Miss Beswick, Mother Ducklow," said Sophronia. "Have n't you noticed her?"

"Oh! how do you do, Miss Beswick?" said Mrs. Ducklow, appearing surprised.

"Tryin' to keep out o' the way, and make myself useful," replied Miss Beswick, stiffly.

"I don't know what I should do without her," said Sophronia, as the tall spinster disappeared. "She took right hold and helped me last night; then she came in again the first thing this morning. 'Go to your husband,' says she to me; 'don't leave him a minute. I know he don't want ye out of his sight, — and you don't want to be out of his sight, either; so you 'tend right to him, and I'll do the work. There'll be enough folks comin' in to hender, but I've come in to help,' says she. And here she's been ever since, hard at work; for when Miss Beswick says a thing, there's no use opposing her, — that *you* know, Mother Ducklow."

"Yes, she likes to have her own way," said Mrs. Ducklow, with a peculiar pucker.

"It seems she called at the door last night to tell you Reuben had come."

“Called at the door! Did n’t she tell you she came in and made us a visit?”

“No, indeed! Did she?”

Mrs. Ducklow concluded, that, if nothing had been said on that subject, she might as well remain silent; so she merely remarked, —

“O yes, a visit, — *for her*. She a’n’t no great hand to make long stops, ye know.”

“Only when she’s needed,” said Sophronia; “then she never thinks of going as long as she sees anything to do. Reuben! you must n’t talk, Reuben!”

“I was saying,” remarked Neighbor Jepworth, “it’ll be too bad now, if you have to give up this place; but he —”

Sophronia, unseen by her husband, made anxious signs to the speaker to avoid so distressing a topic in the invalid’s presence.

“We are not going to worry about that,” she hastened to say. “After we have been favored by Providence so far and in such extraordinary ways, we think we can afford to trust still further. We have all we can think of and attend to to-day; and the future will take care of itself.”

“That’s right; that’s the way to talk!” said Mr. Ducklow. “Providence’ll take care of ye, you may be sure!”

“I should think you might get Ditson to renew the mortgage,” observed Neighbor Ferring. “He can’t be hard on you, under such circumstances. And he can’t be so foolish as to want the money. There’s no security like real estate. If I had money to invest, I would n’t put it into anything else.”

“Nor I,” said Mr. Ducklow; “nothin’ like real estate!” — with an expression of profound conviction.

“What do you think of Gov’t bonds?” asked Neighbor Jepworth.

“I don’t know.” Mr. Ducklow scratched his cheek and

wrinkled his brow with an expression of thoughtfulness and candor. "I have n't given much attention to the subject. It may be a patriotic duty to lend to Gov'ment, if one has the funds to spare."

"Yes," said Jepworth, warming. "When we consider that every dollar we lend to Government goes to carry on the war, and put down this cursed Rebellion —"

"And to pay off the soldiers," put in Reuben, raising himself on his elbow. "Nobody knows the sufferings of soldiers and soldiers' families on account of the Government's inability to pay them off. If that subject was felt and understood as some I know feel and understand it, I'm sure every right-minded man with fifty dollars to spare would make haste to lend it to Uncle Sam. I tell ye, I got a little excited on this subject, coming on in the cars. I heard a gentleman complaining of the Government for not paying off its creditors; he did n't say so much about the soldiers, but he thought contractors ought to have their claims settled at once. At the same time he said he had had twenty thousand dollars lying idle for two months, not knowing what to do with it, but had finally concluded to invest it in railroad stock. 'Have ye any Government stock?' said his friend. 'Not a dollar's worth,' said he; 'I'm afraid of it.' Sick as I was, I could n't lie and hear that. 'And do you know the reason,' said I, 'why Government cannot pay off its creditors? I'll tell ye,' said I. 'It is because it has n't the money. And it has n't the money, because such men as you, who have your thousands lying idle, refuse to lend to your country, because you are afraid. That's the extent of your patriotism: you are afraid! What do you think of us who have gone into the war, and been willing to risk everything, — not only our business and our property, but life and limb? I've ruined myself personally,' said I, 'lost my property and

my health, to be of service to my country. I don't regret it, — though I should never recover, I shall not regret it. I'm a tolerably patient, philosophical sort of fellow ; but I have n't patience nor philosophy enough to hear such men as you abuse the Government for not doing what it's your duty to assist it in doing.' ”

“ Good for you, Reuben ! ” exclaimed Mr. Ducklow, who really felt obliged to the young soldier for placing the previous day's investment in such a strong patriotic light. (“ I've only done *my* duty to Gov'ment, let Miss Beswick say what she will, ” thought he.) “ You wound him up, I guess. Fact, you state the case so well, Reuben, I believe, if I had any funds to spare, I should n't hesitate a minute, but go right off and invest in Gov'ment bonds. ”

“ That might be well enough, if you did it from a sense of duty, ” said Neighbor Ferring, who was something of a croaker, and not much of a patriot. “ But as an investment, 't would be the wust ye could make. ”

“ Ye think so ? ” said Mr. Ducklow, with quick alarm.

“ Certainly, ” said Ferring. “ Gov'ment 'll repudiate. It 'll *have* to repudiate. This enormous debt never can be paid. Your interest in gold is a temptation, jest now ; but that won't be paid much longer, and then yer bonds won't be wuth any more 'n so much brown paper. ”

“ I — I don't think so, ” said Mr. Ducklow, who nevertheless turned pale, — Ferring gave his opinion in such a positive, oracular way. “ I don't believe I should be frightened, even if I *had* Gov'ment securities in my hands. I wish I had ; I really wish I had a good lot o' them bonds ! Don't you, Jepworth ? ”

“ They're mighty resky things to have in the house, that's one objection to 'em, ” replied Jepworth, thus adding breath to Ducklow's already kindled alarm.

“ That's so ! ” said Ferring, emphatically. “ I read in

the papers almost every day about somebody's having his coupon bonds stole."

"I should be more afraid of fires," observed Jepworth.

"But there's this to be considered in favor of fires," said Reuben: "if the bonds burn up, they won't have to be paid. So what is your loss is the country's gain."

"But is n't there any — is n't there any remedy?" inquired Ducklow, scarcely able to sit in his chair.

"There's no risk at all, if a man subscribes for registered bonds," said Reuben. "They're like railroad stock. But if you have the coupons, you must look out for them."

"Why did n't I buy registered bonds?" said Ducklow to himself. His chair was becoming like a keg of gunpowder with a lighted fuse inserted. The familiar style of expression — "*Your* bonds," "*your* loss," "*you* must look out" — used by Ferring and Reuben, was not calculated to relieve his embarrassment. He fancied that he was suspected of owning Government securities, and that these careless phrases were based upon that surmise. He could keep his seat no longer.

"Wal, Reuben! I must be drivin' home, I s'pose. Left everything at loose ends. I was in such a hurry to see ye, and find out if there's anything I can do for ye."

"As for that," said Reuben, "I've got a trunk over in town which could n't be brought last night. If you will have that sent for, I'll be obliged to ye."

"Sartin! sartin!" And Mr. Ducklow drove away, greatly to the relief of Mrs. Ducklow, who, listening to the alarming conversation, and remembering the bonds under the carpet, and the matches in the pantry, and Taddy's propensity to mischief, felt herself (as she afterwards confessed) "jest ready to fly."

V.

MR. DUCKLOW'S ADVENTURES.

MR. DUCKLOW had scarcely turned the corner of the street, when, looking anxiously in the direction of his homestead, he saw a column of smoke. It was directly over the spot where he knew his house to be situated. He guessed at a glance what had happened. The frightful catastrophe he foreboded had befallen. Taddy had set the house afire.

“Them bonds! them bonds!” he exclaimed, distractedly. He did not think so much of the house: house and furniture were insured; if they were burned, the inconvenience would be great indeed, and at any other time the thought of such an event would have been sufficient cause for trepidation, — but now his chief, his only anxiety was the bonds. They were not insured. They would be a dead loss. And what added sharpness to his pangs, they would be a loss which he must keep a secret, as he had kept their existence a secret, — a loss which he could not confess, and of which he could not complain. Had he not just given his neighbors to understand that he held no such property? And his wife, — was she not at that very moment, if not serving up a lie on the subject, at least paring the truth very thin indeed?

“A man would think,” observed Ferring, “that Ducklow had some o’ them bonds on his hands, and got scaret, he took such a sudden start. He has, — has n’t he, Mrs. Ducklow?”

“Has what?” said Mrs. Ducklow, pretending ignorance.

“Some o’ them cowpon bonds. I ruther guess he’s got some.”

“You mean Gov’ment bonds? Ducklow got some?”

'T a'n't at all likely he'd spec'late in them, without saying something to *me* about it! No, he could n't have any without my knowing it, I'm sure!"

How demure, how innocent she looked, plying her knitting-needles, and stopping to take up a stitch! How little at that moment she knew of Ducklow's trouble, and its terrible cause!

Ducklow's first impulse was to drive on, and endeavor at all hazards to snatch the bonds from the flames. His next was, to return and alarm his neighbors, and obtain their assistance. But a minute's delay might be fatal; so he drove on, screaming, "Fire! fire!" at the top of his voice.

But the old mare was a slow-footed animal; and Ducklow had no whip. He reached forward and struck her with the reins.

"Git up! git up!—Fire! fire!" screamed Ducklow. "O, them bonds! them bonds! Why did n't I give the money to Reuben? Fire! fire! fire!"

By dint of screaming and slapping, he urged her from a trot into a gallop, which was scarcely an improvement as to speed, and certainly not as to grace. It was like the gallop of an old cow. "Why don't ye go 'long!" he cried despairingly.

Slap, slap! He knocked his own hat off with the loose ends of the reins. It fell under the wheels. He cast one look behind, to satisfy himself that it had been very thoroughly run over and crushed in the dirt, and left it to its fate.

Slap, slap! "Fire, fire!" Canter, canter, canter! Neighbors looked out of their windows, and, recognizing Ducklow's wagon and old mare in such an astonishing plight, and Ducklow himself, without his hat, rising from his seat, and reaching forward in wild attitudes, brandishing the

reins, at the same time rending the azure with yells, thought he must be insane.

He drove to the top of the hill, and looking beyond, in expectation of seeing his house wrapped in flames, discovered that the smoke proceeded from a brush-heap which his neighbor Atkins was burning in a field near by.

The revulsion of feeling that ensued was almost too much for the excitable Ducklow. His strength went out of him. For a little while there seemed to be nothing left of him but tremor and cold sweat. Difficult as it had been to get the old mare in motion, it was now even more difficult to stop her.

“Why! what has got into Ducklow’s old mare? She’s running away with him! Who ever heard of such a thing!” And Atkins, watching the ludicrous spectacle from his field, became almost as weak from laughter as Ducklow was from the effects of fear.

At length Ducklow succeeded in checking the old mare’s speed, and in turning her about. It was necessary to drive back for his hat. By this time he could hear a chorus of shouts, “Fire! fire! fire!” over the hill. He had aroused the neighbors as he passed, and now they were flocking to extinguish the flames.

“A false alarm! a false alarm!” said Ducklow, looking marvellously sheepish as he met them. “Nothing but Atkins’s brush-heap!”

“Seems to me you ought to have found that out ’fore you raised all creation with your yells!” said one hyperbolic fellow. “You looked like the Flying Dutchman! This your hat? I thought ’t was a dead cat in the road. No fire, no fire!” — turning back to his comrades, — “only one of Ducklow’s jokes.”

Nevertheless, two or three boys there were who would not be convinced, but continued to leap up, swing their

caps, and scream "Fire!" against all remonstrance. Ducklow did not wait to enter into explanations, but, turning the old mare about again, drove home amid the laughter of the bystanders and the screams of the misguided youngsters. As he approached the house, he met Taddy rushing wildly up the street.

"Thaddeus! Thaddeus! where ye goin', Thaddeus?"

"Goin' to the fire!" cried Taddy.

"There a'n't any fire, boy!"

"Yes, there is! Did n't ye hear 'em? They 've been yellin' like fury."

"It 's nothin' but Atkins's brush."

"That all?" And Taddy appeared very much disappointed. "I thought there was goin' to be some fun. I wonder who was such a fool as to yell fire jest for a darned old brush-heap!"

Ducklow did not inform him.

"I 've got to drive over to town and git Reuben's trunk. You stand by the mare while I step in and brush my hat."

Instead of applying himself at once to the restoration of his beaver, he hastened to the sitting-room, to see that the bonds were safe.

"Heavens and 'arth!" said Ducklow.

The chair, which had been carefully planted in the spot where they were concealed, had been removed. Three or four tacks had been taken out, and the carpet pushed from the wall. There was straw scattered about. Evidently Taddy had been interrupted, in the midst of his ransacking, by the alarm of fire. Indeed, he was even now creeping into the house to see what notice Ducklow would take of these evidences of his mischief.

In great trepidation the farmer thrust in his hand here and there, and groped, until he found the envelope precisely where it had been placed the night before, with the tape

tied around it, which his wife had put on to prevent its contents from slipping out and losing themselves. Great was the joy of Ducklow. Great also was the wrath of him when he turned and discovered Taddy.

“Did n’t I tell you to stand by the old mare?”

“She won’t stir,” said Taddy, shrinking away again.

“Come here!” And Ducklow grasped him by the collar. “What have you been doin’? Look at that!”

“T wa’n’t me!” — beginning to whimper, and ram his fists into his eyes.

“Don’t tell me ’t wa’n’t you!” Ducklow shook him till his teeth chattered. “What was you pullin’ up the carpet for?”

“Lost a marble!” snivelled Taddy.

“Lost a marble! Ye did n’t lose it under the carpet, did ye? Look at all that straw pulled out!” — shaking him again.

“Did n’t know but it might ’a’ got under the carpet, marbles roll so,” explained Taddy, as soon as he could get his breath.

“Wal, sir!” Ducklow administered a resounding box on his ear. “Don’t you do such a thing again, if you lose a million marbles!”

“Ha’n’t got a million!” Taddy wept, rubbing his cheek. “Ha’n’t got but four! Won’t ye buy me some to-day?”

“Go to that mare, and don’t you leave her again till I come, or I’ll *marble* ye in a way you won’t like!”

Understanding, by this somewhat equivocal form of expression, that flagellation was threatened, Taddy obeyed, still feeling his smarting and burning ear.

Ducklow was in trouble. What should he do with the bonds? The floor was no place for them, after what had happened, and he remembered too well the experience of yesterday to think for a moment of carrying them about

his person. With unreasonable impatience, his mind reverted to Mrs. Ducklow.

“Why a’n’t she to home? These women are forever a-gaddin’! I wish Reuben’s trunk was in Jericho!”

Thinking of the trunk reminded him of one in the garret, filled with old papers of all sorts, — newspapers, letters, bills of sale, children’s writing-books, — accumulations of the past quarter of a century. Neither fire nor burglar nor ransacking youngster had ever molested those ancient records during all those five-and-twenty years. A bright thought struck him.

“I’ll slip the bonds down into that wuthless heap o’ rubbish, where no one ’u’d ever think o’ lookin’ for ’em, and resk ’em.”

Having assured himself that Taddy was standing by the wagon, he paid a hasty visit to the trunk in the garret, and concealed the envelope, still bound in its band of tape, among the papers. He then drove away, giving Taddy a final charge to beware of setting anything afire.

He had driven about half a mile when he met a pedler. There was nothing unusual or alarming in such a circumstance, surely; but as Ducklow kept on, it troubled him.

“He’ll stop to the house now, most likely, and want to trade. Findin’ nobody but Taddy, there’s no knowin’ what he’ll be tempted to do. But I a’n’t a-goin’ to worry. I’ll defy anybody to find them bonds. Besides, she may be home by this time. I guess she’ll hear of the fire-alarm, and hurry home: it’ll be jest like her. She’ll be there, — and — trade with the pedler?” thought Ducklow, uneasily. Then a frightful fancy possessed him. “She has threatened two or three times to sell that trunkful of old papers. He’ll offer a big price for ’em, and ten to one she’ll let him have ’em. Why *did n’t* I consider on’t? What a stupid blunderbuss I be!”

As Ducklow thought of it he felt almost certain that Mrs. Ducklow had returned home, and that she was bargaining with the pedler at that moment. He fancied her smilingly receiving bright tin-ware for the old papers ; and he could see the tape-tied envelope going into the bag with the rest. The result was that he turned about and whipped the old mare home again in terrific haste, to catch the departing pedler.

Arriving, he found the house as he had left it, and Taddy occupied in making a kite-frame.

“ Did that pedler stop here ? ”

“ I ha’n’t seen no pedler.”

“ And ha’n’t yer Ma Ducklow been home, neither ? ”

“ No.”

And with a guilty look, Taddy put the kite-frame behind him.

Ducklow considered. The pedler had turned up a cross-street : he would probably turn down again and stop at the house after all : Mrs. Ducklow might by that time be at home : then the sale of old papers would very likely take place. Ducklow thought of leaving word that he did not wish any old papers in the house to be sold, but feared the request might excite Taddy’s suspicions.

“ I don’t see no way but for me to take the bonds with me,” thought he, with an inward groan.

He accordingly went to the garret, took the envelope out of the trunk, and placed it in the breast-pocket of his overcoat, to which he pinned it, to prevent it by any chance from getting out. He used six large, strong pins for the purpose, and was afterwards sorry he did not use seven.

“ There’s suthin’ losin’ out of yer pocket ! ” bawled Taddy, as he was once more mounting the wagon.

Quick as lightning, Ducklow clapped his hand to his

breast. In doing so, he loosed his hold of the wagon-box and fell, raking his shin badly on the wheel.

“Yer side-pocket! it’s one o’ yer mittens!” said Taddy.

“You rascal! how you scaret me!”

Seating himself in the wagon, Ducklow gently pulled up his trousers-leg to look at the bruised part.

“Got anything in yer boot-leg to-day, Pa Ducklow?” asked Taddy, innocently.

“Yes, a barked shin!—all on your account, too! Go and put that straw back, and fix the carpet; and don’t ye let me hear ye speak of my boot-leg again, or I’ll *boot-leg* ye!”

So saying, Ducklow departed.

Instead of repairing the mischief he had done in the sitting-room, Taddy devoted his time and talents to the more interesting occupation of constructing his kite-frame. He worked at that, until Mr. Grantley, the minister, driving by, stopped to inquire how the folks were.

“A’n’t to home may I ride?” cried Taddy, all in a breath.

Mr. Grantley was an indulgent old gentleman, fond of children; so he said, “Jump in”; and in a minute Taddy had scrambled to a seat by his side.

VI.

MRS. DUCKLOW’S ADVENTURES.

AND now occurred a circumstance which Ducklow had foreseen. The alarm of fire had reached Reuben’s; and although the report of its falseness followed immediately, Mrs. Ducklow’s inflammable fancy was so kindled by it that she could find no comfort in prolonging her visit.

“Mr. Ducklow ’ll be going for the trunk, and I *must* go home and see to things, Taddy’s *such* a fellow for mischief! I can foot it; I sha’ n’t mind it.”

And off she started, walking herself out of breath in her anxiety.

She reached the brow of the hill just in time to see a chaise drive away from her own door.

“Who *can* that be? I wonder if Taddy’s there to guard the house! If anything should happen to them bonds!”

Out of breath as she was, she quickened her pace, and trudged on, flushed, perspiring, panting, until she reached the house.

“Thaddeus!” she called.

No Taddy answered. She went in. The house was deserted. And lo! the carpet torn up and the bonds abstracted.

Mr. Ducklow never would have made such work, removing the bonds. Then somebody else must have taken them, she reasoned.

“The man in the chaise!” she exclaimed, or rather made an effort to exclaim, succeeding only in bringing forth a hoarse, gasping sound. Fear dried up articulation. *Vox faucibus hæsit.*

And Taddy? He had disappeared; been murdered, perhaps, — or gagged and carried away by the man in the chaise.

Mrs. Ducklow flew hither and thither, (to use a favorite phrase of her own), “like a hen with her head cut off”; then rushed out of the house, and up the street, screaming after the chaise, —

“Murder! murder! Stop thief! stop thief!”

She waved her hands aloft in the air frantically. If she had trudged before, now she trotted, now she cantered: but if the cantering of the old mare was fitly likened to

that of a cow, to what thing, to what manner of motion under the sun, shall we liken the cantering of Mrs. Ducklow? It was original; it was unique; it was prodigious. Now, with her frantically waving hands, and all her undulating and flapping skirts, she seemed a species of huge, unwieldy bird attempting to fly. Then she sank down into a heavy, dragging walk, — breath and strength all gone, — no voice left even to scream murder. Then the awful realization of the loss of the bonds once more rushing over her, she started up again. “Half running, half flying, what progress she made!” Then Atkins’s dog saw her, and, naturally mistaking her for a prodigy, came out at her, bristling up and bounding and barking terrifically.

“Come here!” cried Atkins, following the dog. “What’s the matter? What’s to pay, Mrs. Ducklow?”

Attempting to speak, the good woman could only pant and wheeze.

“Robbed!” she at last managed to whisper, amid the yelpings of the cur that refused to be silenced.

“Robbed? How? Who?”

“The chaise! Ketch it!”

Her gestures expressed more than her words; and Atkins’s horse and wagon, with which he had been drawing out brush, being in the yard near by, he ran to them, leaped to the seat, drove into the road, took Mrs. Ducklow aboard, and set out in vigorous pursuit of the slow two-wheeled vehicle.

“Stop, you, sir! Stop, you, sir!” shrieked Mrs. Ducklow, having recovered her breath by the time they came up with the chaise.

It stopped, and Mr. Grantley the minister put out his good-natured, surprised face.

“You’ve robbed my house! You’ve took —”

Mrs. Ducklow was going on in wild, accusatory accents, when she recognized the benign countenance.

“What do you say? I have robbed you?” he exclaimed, very much astonished.

“No, no! not you! You would n’t do such a thing!” she stammered forth, while Atkins, who had laughed himself weak at Mr. Ducklow’s plight earlier in the morning, now went off into a side-ache at Mrs. Ducklow’s ludicrous mistake. “But did you — did you stop at my house? Have you seen our Thaddeus?”

“Here I be, Ma Ducklow!” piped a small voice; and Taddy, who had till then remained hidden, fearing punishment, peeped out of the chaise from behind the broad back of the minister.

“Taddy! Taddy! how came the carpet —”

“I pulled it up, huntin’ for a marble,” said Taddy, as she paused, overmastered by her emotions.

“And the — the thing tied up in a yaller wrapper?”

“Pa Ducklow took it.”

“Ye sure?”

“Yes, I seen him!”

“O dear!” said Mrs. Ducklow, “I never was so beat! Mr. Grantley, I hope — excuse me — I did n’t know what I was about! Taddy, you notty boy, what did you leave the house for? Be ye quite sure yer Pa Ducklow —”

Taddy repeated that he was quite sure, as he climbed from the chaise into Atkins’s wagon. The minister smilingly remarked that he hoped she would find no robbery had been committed, and went his way. Atkins, driving back, and setting her and Taddy down at the Ducklow gate, answered her embarrassed “Much obleeged to ye,” with a sincere “Not at all,” considering the fun he had had a sufficient compensation for his trouble. And thus ended the morning’s adventures, with the exception of an unimportant episode, in which Taddy, Mrs. Ducklow, and Mrs. Ducklow’s rattan were the principal actors.

VII.

THE JOURNEY.

AT noon Mr. Ducklow returned.

“Did ye take the bonds?” was his wife’s first question.

“Of course I did! Ye don’t suppose I’d go away and leave ’em in the house, not knowin’ when you’d be comin’ home?”

“Wal, I did n’t know. And I did n’t know whuther to believe Taddy or not. O, I’ve had such a fright!”

And she related the story of her pursuit of the minister.

“How could ye make such a fool of yerself? It’ll git all over town, and I shall be mortified to death. Jest like a woman to git frightened!”

“If *you* had n’t got frightened, and made a fool of *yourself*, yellin’ fire, ’t would n’t have happened!” retorted Mrs. Ducklow.

“Wal! wal! say no more about it! The bonds are safe.”

“I was in hopes you’d change ’em for them registered bonds Reuben spoke of.”

“I did try to, but they told me to the bank it could n’t be did. Then I asked ’em if they would keep ’em for me, and they said they would n’t object to lockin’ on ’em up in their safe; but they would n’t give me no receipt, nor hold themselves responsible for ’em. I did n’t know what else to do, so I handed ’em the bonds to keep.”

“I want to know if you did now!” exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, disapprovingly.

“Why not? What else could I do? I did n’t want to lug ’em around with me forever. And as for keepin’ ’em

hid in the house, we've tried that!" and Ducklow unfolded his weekly newspaper.

Mrs. Ducklow was placing the dinner on the table, with a look which seemed to say, "*I would n't have left the bonds in the bank ; my judgment would have been better than all that. If they are lost, I sha' n't be to blame!*" when suddenly Ducklow started and uttered a cry of consternation over his newspaper.

"Why, what have ye found?"

"Bank robbery!"

"Not *your* bank? Not the bank where *your bonds* —"

"Of course not; but in the very next town! The safe blown open with gunpowder! Five thousand dollars in Gov'ment bonds stole!"

"How strange!" said Mrs. Ducklow. "Now what did I tell ye?"

"I believe you're right," cried Ducklow, starting to his feet. "They'll be safer in my own house, or even in my own pocket!"

"If you was going to put 'em in any safe, why not put 'em in Josiah's? He's got a safe, ye know."

"So he has! We might drive over there and make a visit Monday, and ask him to lock up — yes, we might tell him and Laury all about it, and leave 'em in their charge."

"So we might!" said Mrs. Ducklow.

Laura was their daughter and Josiah her husband, in whose honor and sagacity they placed unlimited confidence. The plan was resolved upon at once.

"To-morrow's Sunday," said Ducklow, pacing the floor. "If we leave the bonds in the bank over night, they must stay there till Monday."

"And Sunday is jest the day for burglars to operate!" added Mrs. Ducklow.

I've a good notion — let me see!" said Ducklow, looking at the clock. "Twenty minutes after twelve! Bank closes at two! An hour and a half, — I believe I could git there in an hour and a half. I will. I'll take a bite and drive right back."

Which he accordingly did, and brought the tape-tied envelope home with him again. That night he slept with it under his pillow. The next day was Sunday; and although Mr. Ducklow did not like to have the bonds on his mind during sermon-time, and Mrs. Ducklow "dreaded dreadfully," as she said, "to look the minister in the face," they concluded that it was best, on the whole, to go to meeting, and carry the bonds. With the envelope once more in his breast-pocket (stitched in this time by Mrs. Ducklow's own hand), the farmer sat under the droppings of the sanctuary, and stared up at the good minister, but without hearing a word of the discourse, his mind was so engrossed by worldly cares, until the preacher exclaimed vehemently, looking straight at Ducklow's pew, —

"What said Paul? 'I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, *except these bonds.*' '*Except these bonds!*'" he repeated, striking the Bible. "Can you, my hearers, — can you say with Paul, 'Would that all were as I am, *except these bonds?*'?"

A point which seemed for a moment so personal to himself, that Ducklow was filled with confusion, and would certainly have stammered out some foolish answer, had not the preacher passed on to other themes. As it was, Ducklow contented himself with glancing around to see if the congregation was looking at him, and carelessly passing his hand across his breast-pocket to make sure the bonds were still there.

Early the next morning, the old mare was harnessed,

and Taddy's adopted parents set out to visit their daughter, — Mrs. Ducklow having postponed her washing for the purpose. It was afternoon when they arrived at their journey's end. Laura received them joyfully, but Josiah was not expected home until evening. Mr. Ducklow put the old mare in the barn, and fed her, and then went in to dinner, feeling very comfortable indeed.

“Josiah's got a nice place here. That's about as slick a little barn as ever I see. Always does me good to come over here and see you gittin' along so nicely, Laury.”

“I wish you'd come oftener, then,” said Laura.

“Wal, it's hard leavin' home, ye know. Have to git one of the Atkins boys to come and sleep with Taddy the night we're away.”

“We should n't have come to-day, if 't had n't been for me,” remarked Mrs. Ducklow. “Says I to your father, says I, ‘I feel as if I wanted to go over and see Laury; it seems an age since I've seen her,’ says I. ‘Wal,’ says he, ‘s'pos'n' we go!’ says he. That was only last Saturday; and this morning we started.”

“And it's no fool of a job to make the journey with the old mare!” said Ducklow.

“Why don't you drive a better horse?” said Laura, whose pride was always touched when her parents came to visit her with the old mare and the one-horse wagon.

“O, she answers my purpose. Hoss-flesh is high, Laury. Have to economize, these times.”

“I'm sure there's no need of your economizing!” exclaimed Laura, leading the way to the dining-room.

“Why don't you use your money, and have the good of it?”

“So I tell him,” said Mrs. Ducklow, faintly. — “Why, Laura! I did n't want you to be to so much trouble to git dinner jest for us! A bite would have answered. Do see, father!”

VIII.

WHAT MR. DUCKLOW CARRIED IN THE ENVELOPE.

AT evening Josiah came home ; and it was not until then that Ducklow mentioned the subject which was foremost in his thoughts.

“What do ye think o’ Gov’ment bonds, Josiah?” he incidentally inquired, after supper.

“First-rate!” said Josiah.

“About as safe as anything, a’n’t they?” said Ducklow, encouraged.

“Safe?” cried Josiah. “Just look at the resources of this country! Nobody has begun to appreciate the power and undeveloped wealth of these United States. It’s a big rebellion, I know; but we’re going to put it down. It’ll leave us a big debt, very sure; but we handle it now as easy as that child lifts that stool. It makes him grunt and stagger a little, not because he is n’t strong enough for it, but because he don’t understand his own strength, or how to use it: he’ll have twice the strength, and know just how to apply it, in a little while. Just so with this country. It makes me laugh to hear folks talk about repudiation and bankruptcy.”

“But s’pos’n’ we do put down the rebellion, and the States come back: then what’s to hender the South, and Secesh sympathizers in the North, from j’inin’ hands and votin’ that the debt sha’ n’t be paid?”

“Don’t you worry about that! Do ye suppose we’re going to be such fools as to give the rebels, after we’ve whipped ’em, the same political power they had before the war? Not by a long chalk! Sooner than that we’ll put the ballot into the hands of the freedmen. They’re our

friends. They've fought on the right side, and they'll vote on the right side. I tell ye, spite of all the prejudice there is against black skins, we a'n't such a nation of nin-nies as to give up all we're fighting for, and leave our best friends and allies, not to speak of our own interests, in the hands of our enemies."

"You consider Gov'ments a good investment, then, do ye?" said Ducklow, growing radiant.

"I do, decidedly, — the very best. Besides, you help the Government; and that's no small consideration."

"So I thought. But how is it about the cowpon bonds? A'n't they ruther ticklish property to have in the house?"

"Well, I don't know. Think how many years you'll keep old bills and documents and never dream of such a thing as losing them! There's not a bit more danger with the bonds. I should n't want to carry 'em around with me, to any great amount, — though I did once carry three thousand-dollar bonds in my pocket for a week. I did n't mind it."

"Curi's!" said Ducklow: "I've got three thousan'-dollar bonds in my pocket this minute!"

"Well, it's so much good property," said Josiah, appearing not at all surprised at the circumstance.

"Seems to me, though, if I had a safe, as you have, I should lock 'em up in it."

"I was travelling that week. I locked 'em up pretty soon after I got home, though."

"Suppose," said Ducklow, as if the thought had but just occurred to him, — "suppose you put my bonds into your safe: I shall feel easier."

"Of course," replied Josiah. "I'll keep 'em for you, if you like."

"It will be an accommodation. They'll be safe, will they?"

“Safe as mine are ; safe as anybody’s : I’ll insure ’em for twenty-five cents.”

Ducklow was happy. Mrs. Ducklow was happy. She took her husband’s coat, and with a pair of scissors cut the threads that stitched the envelope to the pocket.

“Have you torn off the May coupons ?” asked Josiah.

“No.”

“Well, you’d better. They’ll be payable now soon ; and if you take them, you won’t have to touch the bonds again till the interest on the November coupons is due.”

“A good idee !” said Ducklow.

He took the envelope, untied the tape, and removed the contents. Suddenly the glow of comfort, the gleam of satisfaction, faded from his countenance.

“Hello ! What ye got there ?” cried Josiah.

“Why, father ! massy sakes !” exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow.

As for Ducklow himself, he could not utter a word ; but, dumb with consternation, he looked again in the envelope, and opened and turned inside out, and shook, with trembling hands, its astonishing contents. The bonds were not there : they had been stolen, and three copies of the “Sunday Visitor” had been inserted in their place.

IX.

FOOD FOR REFLECTION.

VERY early on the following morning a dismal-faced, middle-aged couple might have been seen riding away from Josiah’s house. It was the Ducklows returning home, after their fruitless, their worse than fruitless, journey. No entreaties could prevail upon them to prolong their

visit. It was with difficulty even that they had been prevented from setting off immediately on the discovery of their loss, and travelling all night, in their impatience to get upon the track of the missing bonds.

“There’ll be not the least use in going to-night,” Josiah had said. “If they were stolen at the bank, you can’t do anything about it till to-morrow. And even if they were taken from your own house, I don’t see what’s to be gained now by hurrying back. You may just as well take it easy, — go to bed and sleep on’t, and get a fresh start in the morning.”

So, much against their inclination, the unfortunate owners of the abstracted bonds retired to the luxurious chamber Laura gave them, and lay awake all night, groaning and sighing, wondering and surmising, and (I regret to add) blaming each other. So true it is, that “modern conveniences,” hot and cold water all over the house, a pier-glass, and the most magnificently canopied couch, avail nothing to give tranquillity to the harassed mind. Hitherto the Ducklows had felt great satisfaction in the style their daughter, by her marriage, was enabled to support. To brag of her nice house and furniture and two servants was almost as good as possessing them. Remembering her rich dining-room and silver service and porcelain, they were proud. Such things were enough for the honor of the family; and, asking nothing for themselves, they slept well in their humblest of bedchambers, and sipped their tea contentedly out of clumsy earthen. But that night the boasted style in which their “darter” lived was less appreciated than formerly; fashion and splendor were no longer a consolation.

“If we had only given the three thousan’ dollars to Reuben!” said Ducklow, driving homewards with a countenance as long as his whip-lash. “’T would have jest set

him up, and been some compensation for his sufferin's and losses goin' to the war."

"Wal, I had no objections," replied Mrs. Ducklow. "I always thought he ought to have the money eventooally. And, as Miss Beswick said, no doubt it would 'a' been ten times the comfort to him now it would be a number o' years from now. But you did n't seem willing."

"I don't know! 't was you that was n't willin'!"

And they expatiated on Reuben's merits, and their benevolent intentions towards him, and, in imagination, endowed him with the price of the bonds over and over again: so easy is it to be generous with lost money!

"But it's no use talkin'!" said Ducklow. "I ha'n't the least idee we shall ever see the color o' them bonds again. If they was stole to the bank, I can't prove anything."

"It does seem strange to me," Mrs. Ducklow replied, "that you should have no more gumption than to trust bonds with strangers, when they told you in so many the words they would n't be responsible."

"If you have flung that in my teeth once, you have fifty times!" And Ducklow lashed the old mare, as if she, and not Mrs. Ducklow, had exasperated him.

"Wal," said the lady, "I don't see how we're going to work to find 'em, now they're lost, without making inquiries; and we can't make inquiries without letting it be known we had bought."

"I been thinkin' about that," said her husband. "O dear!" with a groan; "I wish the pesky cowpon bonds had never been invented!"

They drove first to the bank, where they were of course told that the envelope had not been untied there. "Besides, it was sealed, was n't it?" said the cashier. "Indeed!" He expressed great surprise, when informed that it was

not. "It should have been : I supposed any child would know enough to look out for that !"

And this was all the consolation Ducklow could obtain.

"Just as I expected," said Mrs. Ducklow, as they resumed their journey. "I just as much believe that man stole your bonds as that you trusted 'em in his hands in an unsealed wrapper ! Beats all how you could be so careless !"

"Wal, wal ! I s'pose I never shall hear the last on 't !"

And again the poor old mare had to suffer for Mrs. Ducklow's offences.

They had but one hope now, — that perhaps Taddy had tampered with the envelope, and that the bonds might be found somewhere about the house. But this hope was quickly extinguished on their arrival. Taddy, being accused, protested his innocence with a vehemence which convinced even Mr. Ducklow that the cashier was probably the guilty party.

"Unless," said he, brandishing the rattan, "somebody got into the house that morning when the little scamp run off to ride with the minister !"

"O, don't lick me for that ! I've been licked for that once ! ha'n't I, Ma Ducklow ?" shrieked Taddy.

"And besides, you'd took 'em with you, remember," said Mrs. Ducklow.

The house was searched in vain. No clew to the purloined securities could be obtained, — the copies of the "Sunday Visitor," which had been substituted for them, affording not the least ; for that valuable little paper was found in almost every household, except Ducklow's.

"I don't see any way left but to advertise, as Josiah said," remarked the farmer, with a deep sigh of despondency.

"And that'll bring it all out !" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow. "If you only had n't been so imprudent !"

"Wal, wal !" said Ducklow, cutting her short.

X.

REUBEN'S MISFORTUNE.

BEFORE resorting to public measures for the recovery of the stolen property, it was deemed expedient to acquaint their friends with their loss in a private way. The next day, accordingly, they went to pay Reuben a visit. It was a very different meeting from that which took place a few mornings before. The returned soldier had gained in health, but not in spirits. The rapture of reaching home once more, the flush of hope and happiness, had passed away with the visitors who had flocked to offer their congratulations. He had had time to reflect: he had reached home, indeed; but now every moment reminded him how soon that home was to be taken from him. He looked at his wife and children, and clenched his teeth hard to stifle the emotions that arose at the thought of their future. The sweet serenity, the faith and patience and cheerfulness, which never ceased to illumine Sophronia's face as she moved about the house, pursuing her daily tasks, and tenderly waiting upon him, deepened at once his love and his solicitude. He was watching her thus when the Ducklows entered with countenances mournful as the grave.

"How are you gittin' along, Reuben?" said Ducklow, while his wife murmured a solemn "good morning" to Sophronia.

"I am doing well enough. Don't be at all concerned about me! It a'n't pleasant to lie here, and feel it may be months, months, before I'm able to be about my business; but I would n't mind it, — I could stand it first-rate, — I could stand anything, anything, but to see her work-

ing her life out for me and the children ! To no purpose, either ; that 's the worst of it. We shall have to lose this place, spite of fate !”

“ O Reuben !” said Sophronia, hastening to him, and laying her soothing hands upon his hot forehead ; “ why won't you stop thinking about that ? Do try to have more faith ! We shall be taken care of, I'm sure !”

“ If I had three thousand dollars, — yes, or even two, — then I'd have faith !” said Reuben. “ Miss Beswick has proposed to send a subscription-paper around town for us ; but I'd rather die than have it done. Besides, nothing near that amount could be raised, I'm confident. You need n't groan so, Pa Ducklow, for I ain't hinting at you. I don't expect you to help me out of my trouble. If you had felt called upon to do it, you'd have done it before now ; and I don't ask, I don't beg of any man !” added the soldier, proudly.

“ That 's right ; I like yer sperit !” said the miserable Ducklow. “ But I was sighin' to think of something, — something you have n't known anything about, Reuben.”

“ Yes, Reuben, we should have helped you,” said Mrs. Ducklow, “ and did, did take steps towards it —”

“ In fact,” resumed Ducklow, “ you've met with a great misfortin', Reuben. Unbeknown to yourself, you've met with a great misfortin' ! Yer Ma Ducklow knows.”

“ Yes, Reuben, the very day you come home, your Pa Ducklow made an investment for your benefit. We did n't mention it, — you know I would n't own up to it, though I did n't exactly say the contrary, the morning we was over here —”

“ Because,” said Ducklow, as she faltered, “ we wanted to surprise you ; we was keepin' it a secret till the right time, then we was goin' to make it a pleasant surprise to ye.”

“What in the name of common sense are you talking about?” cried Reuben, looking from one to the other of the wretched, prevaricating pair.

“Cowpon bonds!” groaned Ducklow. “Three thousand-dollar cowpon bonds! The money had been lent, but I wanted to make a good investment for you, and I thought there was nothin’ so good as Gov’ments —”

“That’s all right,” said Reuben. “Only, if you had money to invest for my benefit, I should have preferred to pay off the mortgage the first thing.”

“Sartin! sartin!” said Ducklow; “and you could have turned the bonds right in, if you had so chosen, like so much cash. Or you could have drawed your interest on the bonds in gold, and paid the interest on your mortgage in currency, and made so much, as I ruther thought you would.”

“But the bonds?” eagerly demanded Reuben, with trembling hopes, just as Miss Beswick, with her shawl over her head, entered the room.

“We was just telling about our loss, Reuben’s loss,” said Mrs. Ducklow, in a manner which betrayed no little anxiety to conciliate that terrible woman.

“Very well! don’t let me interrupt.” And Miss Beswick, slipping the shawl from her head, sat down.

Her presence, stiff and prim and sarcastic, did not tend in the least to relieve Mr. Ducklow from the natural embarrassment he felt in giving his version of Reuben’s loss. However, assisted occasionally by a judicious remark thrown in by Mrs. Ducklow, he succeeded in telling a sufficiently plausible and candid-seeming story.

XI.

TADDY'S FINANCIAL OPERATIONS.

“I SEE! I see!” said Reuben, who had listened with astonishment and pain to the narrative. “You had kinder intentions towards me than I gave you credit for. Forgive me, if I wronged you!” He pressed the hand of his adopted father, and thanked him from a heart filled with gratitude and trouble. “But don’t feel so bad about it. You did what you thought best. I can only say, the fates are against me.”

“Hem!” coughing, Miss Beswick stretched up her long neck and cleared her throat. “So them bonds you had bought for Reuben was in the house the very night I called!”

“Yes, Miss Beswick,” replied Mrs. Ducklow; “and that’s what made it so uncomfortable to us to have you talk the way you did.”

“Hem!” the neck was stretched up still farther than before, and the redoubtable throat cleared again. “’T was too bad! Ye ought to have told me. You’d actooally bought the bonds, — bought ’em for Reuben, had ye?”

“Sartain! sartain!” said Ducklow.)

“To be sure!” said Mrs. Ducklow.

“We designed ’em for his benefit, a surprise, when the right time come,” said both together.

“Hem! well!” (It was evident that the Beswick was clearing her decks for action.) “When the right time come! yes! That right time was n’t somethin’ indefinite, in the fur futur’, of course! Yer losin’ the bonds did n’t hurry up yer benevolence the least grain, I s’pose! Hem! let in them boys, Sophrony!”

Sophronia opened the door, and in walked Master Dick Atkins (son of the brush-burner), followed, not without reluctance and concern, by Master Taddy.

“Thaddeus! what you here for?” demanded the adopted parents.

“Because I said so,” remarked Miss Beswick, arbitrarily. “Step along, boys, step along. Hold up yer head, Taddy, for ye’ an’t goin’ to be hurt while I’m around. Take yer fists out o’ yer eyes, and stop blubberin’. Mr. Ducklow, that boy knows somethin’ about Reuben’s cowpon bonds.”

“Thaddeus!” ejaculated both Ducklows at once, “did you touch them bonds?”

“Did n’t know what they was!” whimpered Taddy.

“Did you take them?” And the female Ducklow grasped his shoulder.

“Hands off, if you please!” remarked Miss Beswick, with frightfully gleaming courtesy. “I told him, if he’d be a good boy, and come along with Richard, and tell the truth, he should n’t be hurt. *If you please*,” she repeated, with a majestic nod; and Mrs. Ducklow took her hands off.

“Where are they now? where are they?” cried Ducklow, rushing headlong to the main question.

“Don’t know,” said Taddy.

“Don’t know? you villain!” And Ducklow was rising in wrath. But Miss Beswick put up her hand deprecatingly.

“If *you please*!” she said, with grim civility; and Ducklow sank down again.

“What did you do with ’em? what did you want of ’em?” said Mrs. Ducklow, with difficulty restraining an impulse to wring his neck.

“To cover my kite,” confessed the miserable Taddy.

“Cover your kite! your kite!” A chorus of groans from the Ducklows. “Did n’t you know no better?”

“Did n’t think you’d care,” said Taddy. “I had some

newspapers Dick give me to cover it ; but I thought them things 'u'd be pootier. So I took 'em, and put the newspapers in the wrapper."

" Did ye cover yer kite ? "

" No. When I found out you cared so much about 'em, I da's'n't ; I was afraid you 'd see 'em."

" Then what *did* you do with 'em."

" When you was away, Dick come over to sleep with me, and I — I sold 'em to him ! "

" Sold 'em to Dick ! "

" Yes," spoke up Dick, stoutly, " for six marbles, and one was a bull's-eye, and one agate, and two alleys. Then, when you come home and made such a fuss, he wanted 'em ag'in. But he would n't give me back but four, and I wa'n't going to agree to no such nonsense as that."

" I 'd lost the bull's-eye and one common," whined Taddy.

" But the bonds ! did you destroy 'em ? "

" Likely I 'd do that, after I 'd paid six marbles for 'em ! " said Dick. " I wanted 'em to cover *my* kite with."

" Cover *your* — oh ! then *you* 've made a kite of 'em ! " groaned Ducklow.

" Well, I was going to, when Aunt Beswick ketched me at it. She made me tell where I got 'em, and took me over to your house jest now ; and Taddy said you was over here, and so she put ahead, and made us foller her."

Again, in an agony of impatience, Ducklow demanded to know where the bonds were at that moment.

" If Taddy 'll give me back the marbles — " began Master Dick.

" That 'll do ! " said Miss Beswick, silencing him with a gesture. " Reuben will give you twenty marbles ; for I believe you said they was Reuben's bonds, Mr. Ducklow ? "

" Yes, that is — " stammered the adopted father

“Eventooally,” struck in the adopted mother.

“Now look here! What am I to understand? Be they Reuben’s bonds, or be they not? That’s the question!” And there was that in Miss Beswick’s look which said, “If they are not Reuben’s, then they are nobody’s!”

“Of course they are Reuben’s!” “We intended all the while —” “His benefit —” “To do jest what he pleases with ’em,” chorused Pa and Ma Ducklow.

“Wal! now it’s understood! Here, Reuben, are your cowpon bonds!”

And Miss Beswick, drawing them from her bosom, placed the precious documents, with formal politeness, in the glad soldier’s agitated hands.

“Glory!” cried Reuben, assuring himself that they were genuine and real. “Sophrony, you’ve got a home! Ruby, Carrie, you’ve got a home! Miss Beswick! you angel from the skies! order a bushel of marbles for Dick, and have the bill sent to me! O Pa Ducklow! you never did a nobler or more generous thing in your life. These will lift the mortgage, and leave me a nest-egg besides. Then when I get my back pay, and my pension, and my health again, we shall be independent.”

And the soldier, overcome by his feelings, sank back in the arms of his wife.

“We always told you we’d do well by ye, you remember?” said the Ducklows, triumphantly.

The news went abroad. Again congratulations poured in upon the returned volunteer. Everybody rejoiced in his good fortune, — especially certain rich ones, who had been dreading to see Miss Beswick come around with her proposed subscription-paper.

Among the rest, the Ducklows rejoiced not the least; for selfishness was with them, as it is with many, rather a thing of habit than a fault of the heart. The catastrophe

of the bonds broke up that life-long habit, and revealed good hearts underneath. The consciousness of having done an act of justice, although by accident, proved very sweet to them ; it was really a fresh sensation ; and Reuben and his dear little family, saved from ruin and distress, happy, thankful, glad, were a sight to their old eyes such as they had never witnessed before. Not gold itself, in any quantity, at the highest premium, could have given them so much satisfaction ; and as for coupon bonds, they are not to be mentioned in the comparison.

“ Won't you do well by me some time, too ? ” teased little Taddy, who overheard his adopted parents congratulating themselves on having acted so generously by Reuben. “ I don't care for no cowpen bonds, but I do want a new drum ! ”

“ Yes, yes, my son ! ” said Ducklow, patting the boy's shoulder.

And the drum was bought.

Taddy was delighted. But he did not know what made the Ducklows so much happier, so much gentler and kinder, than formerly. Do you ?

MADAM WALDOBOROUGH'S CARRIAGE.

ONE afternoon, in the month of November, 1855, I met on the Avenue des Champs Elysées, in Paris, my young friend Herbert J——.

After many desolate days of wind and rain and falling leaves, the city had thrown off her wet rags, so to speak, and arrayed herself in the gorgeous apparel of one of the most golden and perfect Sundays of the season. "All the world" was out of doors. The Boulevards, the Bois de Boulogne, the bridges over the Seine, all the public promenades and gardens, swarmed with joyous multitudes. The Champs Elysées, and the long avenue leading up to the Barrière de l'Etoile, appeared one mighty river, an Amazon of many-colored human life. The finest July weather had not produced such a superb display; for now the people of fashion, who had passed the summer at their country-seats, or in Switzerland, or among the Pyrenees, reappeared in their showy equipages. The tide, which had been flowing to the Bois de Boulogne ever since two o'clock, had turned, and was pouring back into Paris. For miles, up and down, on either side of the city-wall, extended the glittering train of vehicles. The three broad, open gateways of the Barrière proved insufficient channels; and far as you could see, along the Avenue de l'Impératrice, stood three seemingly endless rows of carriages, closely crowded, unable to advance, waiting for the Barrière de l'Etoile to discharge its surplus living waters. Detach-

ments of the mounted city guard, and long lines of police, regulated the flow ; while at the Barrière an extra force of custom-house officers fulfilled the necessary formality of casting an eye of inspection into each vehicle as it passed, to see that nothing was smuggled.

Just below the Barrière, as I was moving with the stream of pedestrians, I met Herbert. He turned and took my arm. As he did so, I noticed that he lifted his hat towards heaven, saluting with a lofty flourish one of the carriages that passed the gate.

It was a dashy barouche, drawn by a glossy-black span, and occupied by two ladies and a lapdog. A driver on the box and a footman perched behind, both in livery, — long coats, white gloves, and gold bands on their hats, — completed the establishment. The ladies sat facing each other, and their mingled, effervescing skirts and flounces filled the cup of the vehicle quite to over-foaming, like a Rochelle powder, nearly drowning the brave spaniel, whose sturdy little nose was elevated, for air, just above the surge.

Both ladies recognized my friend, and she who sat, or rather reclined (for such a luxurious, languishing attitude can hardly be called a sitting posture), fairy-like, in the hinder part of the shell, bestowed upon him a very gracious, condescending smile. She was a most imposing creature, — in freshness of complexion, in physical development, and, above all, in amplitude and magnificence of attire, a full-blown rose of a woman, — aged, I should say, about forty.

“Don't you know that turn-out?” said Herbert, as the shallop with its lovely freight floated on in the current.

I was not so fortunate.

“Good gracious! miserable man! Where do you live? In what obscure society have you buried yourself? Not to know MADAM WALDOBOROUGH'S CARRIAGE!”

This was spoken in a tone of humorous extravagance which piqued my curiosity. Behind the ostentatious deference with which he had raised his hat to the sky, beneath the respectful awe with which he spoke the lady's name, I detected a spirit of mischief.

“Who is Madam Waldoborough? and what about her carriage?”

“Who is Madam Waldoborough!” echoed Herbert, with mock astonishment; “that a Yankee, six months in Paris, should ask that question! An American woman, and a woman of fortune, sir; and, which is more, of fashion; and, which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any in Messina or elsewhere;—one that occupies a position, go to! and receives on Thursday evenings, go to! and that hath ambassadors at her table, and everything handsome about her! And as for her carriage,” he continued, coming down from his Dogberrian strain of eloquence, “it is the identical carriage which I did n't ride in once!”

“How was that?”

“I'll tell you; for it was a curious adventure, and as it was a very useful lesson to me, so you may take warning by my experience, and, if ever she invites you to ride with her, as she did me, beware! beware! her flashing eyes, her floating hair!—do not accept, or, before accepting, take Iago's advice, and put money in your purse: PUT MONEY IN YOUR PURSE! I'll tell you why.

“But, in the first place, I must explain how I came to be without money in mine, so soon after arriving in Paris, where so much of the article is necessary. My woes all arise from vanity. That is the rock, that is the quicksand, that is the maelstrom. I presume you don't know anybody else who is afflicted with that complaint? If you do, I'll but teach you how to tell my story, and that will cure him; or, at least, it ought to.

“ You see, in crossing over to Liverpool in the steamer, I became acquainted with a charming young lady, who proved to be a second-cousin of my father's. She belongs to the aristocratic branch of our family. Every family tree has an aristocratic branch, or bough, or little twig at least, I believe. She was a Todworth ; and having always heard my other relations mention with immense pride and respect the Todworths, — as if it were one of the solid satisfactions of life to be able to speak of ‘ my uncle Todworth,’ or ‘ my cousins the Todworths,’ — I was prepared to appreciate my extreme good fortune. She was a bride, setting out on her wedding tour. She had married a sallow, bilious, perfumed, very disagreeable fellow, — except that he too was an aristocrat, and a millionaire besides, which made him very agreeable ; at least, I thought so. For that was before I rode in Madam Waldoborough's carriage.

“ Well, the fair bride was most gratifyingly affable, and cousined me to my heart's content. Her husband was no less friendly ; and by the time we reached London I was on as affectionately familiar terms with them as a younger brother could have been. If I had been a Todworth, they could n't have made more of me. They insisted on my going to the same hotel with them, and taking a room adjoining their suite. This was a happiness to which I had but one objection, — my limited pecuniary resources. My family are neither aristocrats nor millionnaires ; and economy required that I should place myself in humble and inexpensive lodgings for the two or three weeks I was to spend in London. But vanity ! vanity ! I was afraid of disgracing my branch of the family in the eyes of the Todworth branch, and of losing the fine friends I had made, by confessing my poverty. They went to Cox's Hotel, in Jermyn Street, and I went with them.

“Cox’s, I fancy, is the crack hotel of London. Lady Byron boarded there then ; the author of ‘Childe Harold’ himself used to stop there ; Tom Moore wrote a few of his last songs and drank a good many of his last bottles of wine there ; my Lords Tom, Dick, and Harry, — the Duke of Dash, Sir Edward Splash, and Viscount Flash, — these and other notables always honor Cox’s when they go to town. So *we* honored Cox’s. And a very quiet, orderly, well-kept tavern we found it. I think Mr. Cox must have a good housekeeper. He has been fortunate in securing a very excellent cook. I should judge that he had engaged some of the finest gentlemen in England to act as waiters. Their manners would do credit to any potentate in Europe : there is that calm self-possession about them, that serious dignity of deportment, sustained by a secure sense of the mighty importance of their mission to the world, which strikes a beholder with awe. I was made to feel very inferior in their presence. We dined at a private table, and these ministers of state waited upon us. They brought us the morning paper on a silver salver ; they presented it as if it had been a mission from a king to a king. Whenever we went out or came in, there stood two of those magnates, in white waistcoats and white gloves, to open the folding-doors for us, with stately mien. You would have said it was the Lord High Chamberlain and his deputy, and that I was at least Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James. I tried to receive these overpowering attentions with an air of easy indifference, like one who had been all his life accustomed to that sort of thing, you know ; but I was oppressed with a terrible sense of being out of my place. I could n’t help feeling that their serene and lofty highnesses knew perfectly well that I was a green Yankee boy, with less than fifty pounds in my pocket ; and I fancied that, behind the mask of gravity

each imperturbable countenance wore, there was always lurking a derisive smile.

“But this was not the worst of it. If noblemen were my attendants, I must expect to maintain noblemen. All that ceremony and deportment must go into the bill. With this view of the case, I could not look at their white kids without feeling sick at heart; white waistcoats became a terror; the sight of an august neckcloth, bowing its solemn attentions to me, depressed my soul. The folding-doors, on golden hinges turning, — figuratively, at least, if not literally, like those of Milton’s heaven, — grated as horrible discords on my secret ear as the gates of Milton’s other place. It was my gold that helped to make those hinges. And this I endured merely for the sake of enjoying the society, not of my dear newly found cousins, but of two phantoms that hovered over their heads, — the phantom of wealth and the still more empty phantom of social position. But all this, understand, was *before* I rode in Madam Waldoborough’s carriage.

“Well, I saw London in company with my aristocratic relatives, and paid a good deal more for the show, and really profited less by it, than if I had gone about the business in my own deliberate and humble way. Everything was, of course, done in the most lordly and costly manner known. Instead of walking to this place or that, or taking an omnibus or a cab, we rolled magnificently in our carriage. I suppose the happy bridegroom would willingly have defrayed all these expenses, if I had wished him to do so; but pride prompted me to pay my share. So it happened that, during nine days in London, I spent as much as would have lasted me as many weeks, if I had been as wise as I was vain, — that is, if I had ridden in Madam Waldoborough’s carriage *before* I went to England.

“When I saw how things were going, bankruptcy staring

me in the face, ruin yawning at my feet, I was suddenly seized with an irresistible desire to go on to Paris. I had a French fever of the most violent character. I declared myself sick of the soot and smoke and uproar of the great Babel, — I even spoke slightingly of Cox's Hotel, as if I had been used to better things, — and called for my bill. Heavens and earth, how I trembled! Did ever a condemned wretch feel as faint at the sight of the priest coming to bid him prepare for the gallows, as I did at the sight of one of those sublime functionaries bringing me my doom on a silver salver? Every pore opened; a clammy perspiration broke out all over me; I reached forth a shaking hand, and thanked his highness with a ghastly smile.

“A few figures told my fate. The convict who hears his death-sentence may still hope for a reprieve; but figures are inexorable, figures cannot lie. My bill at Cox's was in pounds, shillings, and pence, amounting to just eleven dollars a day. Eleven times nine are ninety-nine. It was so near a round hundred, it seemed a bitter mockery not to say a hundred, and have done with it, instead of scrupulously stopping to consider a single paltry dollar. I was reminded of the boy whose father bragged of killing nine hundred and ninety-nine pigeons at one shot. Somebody asked why he didn't say a thousand. ‘Thunder!’ says the boy, ‘do you suppose my father would lie just for one pigeon?’ I told the story, to show my cousins how coolly I received the bill, and paid it.

“This drained my purse so nearly dry that I had only just money enough left to take me to Paris, and pay for a week's lodging or so in advance. They urged me to remain and go to Scotland with them; but I tore myself away, and fled to France. I would not permit them to accompany me to the railroad station, to see me off; for I

was unwilling that they should know I was going to economize my finances by purchasing a second-class ticket. From the life I had been leading at Cox's to a second-class passage to Paris was that step from the sublime to the ridiculous which I did not wish to be seen taking. I think I'd have thrown myself into the Thames before I would thus have exposed myself; for, as I tell you, I had not yet been honored with a seat in Madam Waldoborough's carriage.

“It is certainly a grand thing to keep grand company; but if ever I felt a sense of relief, it was when I found myself free from my cousins, emancipated from the fearful bondage of keeping up such expensive appearances, — seated on the hard, cushionless bench of the second-class car, and nibbling my crackers at my leisure, unoppressed by the awful presence of those grandees in white waistcoats. The crackers tasted sweeter than Cox's best dinners. I nibbled, and contemplated my late experiences; nibbled, and was almost persuaded to be a Christian, — that is, to forswear thenceforth and forever all company which I could not afford to keep, all appearances which were not honest, all foolish pride and silly ambition; — as I did after I had ridden in a certain carriage I have mentioned, and which I am coming to now as fast as possible.

“I had lost nearly all my money and a good share of my self-respect by the course I had taken, and I could think of only one substantial advantage gained. That was a note of introduction from my lovely cousin to Madam Waldoborough. That would be of inestimable value to me in Paris. It would give me access to the best society, and secure to me, a stranger, many privileges which could not otherwise be obtained. ‘Perhaps, after all,’ thought I, as I read over the flattering contents of the unsealed note, — ‘perhaps, after all, I shall find this worth quite as much

as it has cost me.' O, had I foreseen that it was actually destined to procure me an invitation to ride with Madam Waldoborough !

“I reached Paris, took a cheap lodging, and waited for the arrival of my uncle's goods destined for the Great Exhibition, — for to look after them (I could speak French, you know), and to assist in having them properly placed, was the main business that had brought me here. I also waited anxiously for my uncle and a fresh supply of funds. In the mean time I delivered my letters of introduction, and made a few acquaintances. Twice I called at Madam Waldoborough's hotel, but did not see her; she was out. So at least the servants said, but I suspect they lied; for, the second time I was told so, I noticed, O, the most splendid turn-out! — the same you just saw pass — waiting in the carriage-way before her door, with the driver on the box, and the footman holding open the silver-handled and escutchioned panel that served as a door to the barouche, as if expecting some grand personage to get in.

“‘Some distinguished visitor, perhaps,’ thought I; ‘or, it may be Madam Waldoborough herself; instead of being out, she is just going out, and in five minutes the servant's lie will be the truth.’ Sure enough, before I left the street — for I may as well confess that curiosity caused me to linger a little — my lady herself appeared in all her glory, and bounced into the barouche with a vigor that made it rock quite unromantically; for she is not frail, she is not a butterfly, she is not a wasp. I recognized her from a description I had received from my cousin the bride. She was accompanied by that meagre, smart little sprite of a French girl, whom Madam always takes with her, — to talk French with, and to be waited upon by her, she says; but rather, I believe, by way of a contrast to set off her own brilliant complexion and imperial proportions. It is

Juno and Arachne. The divine orbs of the goddess turned haughtily upon me, but did not see me, — looked through and beyond me, as if I had been nothing but gossamer, feathers, air; and the little black, bead-like eyes of the insect pierced me maliciously an instant, as the barouche dashed past, and disappeared in the Rue de Rivoli. I was humiliated; I felt that I was recognized, — known as the rash youth who had just called at the Hôtel de Waldoborough, been told that Madam was out, and had stopped outside to catch the hotel in a lie. It is very singular — how do you explain it? — that the circumstance should have seemed to me something, not for Madam, but for me, to be ashamed of! I don't believe that the color of her peachy cheeks was heightened the shadow of a shade; but as for me, I blushed to the tips of my ears.

“You may believe that I did not go away in such a cheerful frame of mind as might have encouraged me to repeat my call in a hurry. I just coldly enclosed to her my cousin's letter of introduction, along with my address, and said to myself, ‘Now, she'll know what a deuse of a fellow she has slighted; she'll know she has put an affront upon a connection of the Todworths!’ Very silly, you see, for I had not yet — but I am coming to that part of my story.

“Well, returning to my lodgings a few days afterwards, I found a note which had been left for me by a liveried footman, — Madam Waldoborough's footman, O heaven! I was thrown into great trepidation by the stupendous event, and eagerly inquired if Madam herself was in her carriage, and was immensely relieved to learn she was not; for, unspeakably gratifying as such condescension, such an Olympian compliment, would have been under other circumstances, I should have felt it more than offset by the mortification of knowing that she knew, that her own eyes had

beheld, the very humble quarter in which a lack of means had compelled me to put up.

“I turned from that frightful possibility to the note itself. It was everything I could have asked. It was ambrosia, it was nectar. I had done a big thing when I fired the Todworth gun: it had brought the enemy to terms. My cousin was complimented, and I was welcomed to Paris, and — THE HÔTEL WALDOBOROUGH!

“‘Why have you not called to see me?’ the note inquired, with charming innocence. ‘I shall be at home tomorrow morning at two o’clock; cannot you give me the pleasure of greeting so near a relative of my dear, delightful Louise?’

“Of course I could afford her that pleasure! ‘O, what a thing it is,’ I said to myself, ‘to be a third cousin to a Todworth!’ But the two o’clock in the morning, — how should I manage that? I had not supposed that fashionable people in Paris got up so early, much less received visitors at that wonderful hour. But, on reflection, I concluded that two in the morning meant two in the afternoon; for I had heard that the great folks commenced their day at about that time.

“At two o’clock, accordingly, the next afternoon, — excuse me, I mean the next morning, — I sallied forth from my little barren room in the Rue des Vieux Augustins, and proceeded to Madam’s ancient palace in the Rue St. Martin, dressed in my best, and palpitating with a sense of the honor I was doing myself. This time the *concierge* smiled encouragingly, and ascertained for me that Madam *was* at home. I ascended the polished marble staircase to a saloon on the first floor, where I was requested to have the *obligeance d’attendre un petit moment*, until Madam should be informed of my arrival.

“It was a very large, and, I must admit, a very respect-

able saloon, although not exactly what I had expected to see at the very summit of the social Olympus. I dropped into a fauteuil near a centre-table, on which there was a fantastical silver-wrought card-basket. What struck me particularly about the basket was a well-known little Todworth envelope, superscribed in the delicate handwriting of my aristocratic cousin, — my letter of introduction, in fact, — displayed upon the very top of the pile of billets and cards. My own card I did not see ; but in looking for it I discovered some curious specimens of foreign orthography, — particularly one dainty little note on which the name was conscientiously and industriously written out, ‘*Ouâldôbeureau.*’ This, as an instance of spelling an English word *à la Française*, I thought a remarkable success, and very creditable to people who speak of *Lor Be-rong*, meaning Lord Byron, (*Be-wrong* is good!) and talk glibly about *Frongclang*, and *Vashangtong*, meaning the great philosopher, and the Father of his Country.

“I was trying to amuse myself with these orthographical curiosities, yet waiting anxiously all the while for the appearance of that illustrious ornament of her sex, to whom they were addressed ; and the servant’s ‘*petit moment*’ had become a good *quart d’heure*, when the drawing-room door opened, and in glided, not the Goddess, but the Spider.

“She had come to beg Monsieur (that was me) to have the bounty to excuse Madam (that was the Waldoborough), who had caused herself to be waited for, and who, I was assured, would give herself ‘*le plaisir de me voir dans un tout petit moment.*’ So saying, with a smile, she seated herself ; and, discovering that I was an American, began to talk bad English to me. I may say execrable English ; for it is a habit your Frenchwoman often has, to abandon her own facile and fluent vernacular, which she speaks so charmingly, in order to show off a wretched smattering she

may have acquired of your language, — from politeness, possibly, and possibly from vanity. In the mean time Arachne busied her long agile fingers with some very appropriate embroidery ; and busied her mind, too, I could n't help thinking, weaving some intricate web of mischief, — for her eyes sparkled as they looked at me with a certain gleeful, malicious expression, — seeming to say, 'You have walked into my parlor, Mr. Fly, and I am sure to entangle you !' which made me feel uncomfortable.

“The '*tout petit moment*' had become another good quarter of an hour, when the door again opened, and Madam — Madam herself — the Waldoborough — appeared ! Did you ever see flounces ? did you ever witness expansion ? have your eyes ever beheld the — so to speak — new-risen sun trailing clouds of glory over the threshold of the dawn ? You should have seen Madam enter that room ; you should have seen the effulgence of the greeting smile she gave me ; then you would n't wonder that I was dazzled.

“She filled and overflowed with her magnificence the most royal fauteuil in the saloon, and talked to me of my Todworth cousin, and of my Todworth cousin's husband, and of London, and of America, — occasionally turning aside to show off her bad French by speaking to the Spider, until another quarter of an hour had elapsed. Then Paris was mentioned, and one of us happened to speak of the Gobelins, — I cannot now recall which it was first uttered that fatal word to me, the direful spring of woes unnumbered ! Had I visited the Gobelins ? I had not, but I anticipated having that pleasure soon.

“‘Long as I have lived in Paris, I have never yet been to the Gobelins !’ says Madam Waldoborough. '*Mademoiselle*' (that was Arachne) '*m'accuse toujours d'avoir tort, et me dit que je dois y aller, n'est ce pas, Mademoiselle ?*'

“ ‘*Certainement !*’ says Mademoiselle, emphatically ; and in return for Madam’s ill-spoken French, she added in English, of even worse quality, that the Gobelins’ manufacture of tapisserie and carpet, was the place the most curieuse and interressante which one could go see in Paris.

“ ‘*C’est ce qu’elle dit toujours,*’ says the Waldoborough. ‘ But I make great allowances for her opinion, since she is an enthusiast with regard to everything that pertains to weaving.’

“ ‘ Very natural that she should be, being a Spider,’ I thought, but did not say so.

“ ‘ However,’ Madam continued, ‘ I should like extremely well to go there, if I could ever get the time. *Quand aurai-je le tems, Mademoiselle ?*’

“ ‘ I sink zis day is more time zan you have anozer day, Madame,’ says the Spider.

“ ‘ Would you like to go ?’ says Madam ; and as she suggested ordering the carriage for the purpose, of course I jumped at the chance. To ride in that carriage ! with the Waldoborough herself ! with the driver before and the footman behind, in livery ! Oh !

“ I was abandoned to intoxicating dreams of ambition, whilst Madam went to prepare herself, and Mademoiselle to order the carriage. It was not long before I heard a vehicle enter the court-yard, turn, and stop in the carriage-way. I tried to catch a glimpse of it from the window, but saw it only in imagination, — that barouche of barouches, which is Waldoborough’s ! I imagined myself seated luxuriously in that shell, with Madam by my side, rolling through the streets of Paris in even greater state than I had rolled through London with my Todworth cousin. I was impatient to be experiencing the new sensation. The moments dragged : five, ten, fifteen minutes at least elapsed, and all the while the carriage and I were

waiting. Then appeared — who do you suppose? The Spider, dressed for an excursion. ‘So she is going too!’ thought I, not very well pleased. She had in her arms — what do you suppose? A confounded little lapdog, — the spaniel you saw just now with his nose just above the crinoline.

“‘Monsieur,’ says she, ‘I desire make you know ze King François.’ I hate lapdogs; but, in order to be civil, I offered to pat his majesty on the head. That, however, did not seem to be court-etiquette; and I got snapped at by the little despot. ‘Our compagnon of voyage,’ says Mademoiselle, pacifying him with caresses.

“‘So *he* is going too?’ thought I, — so unreasonable as to feel a little dissatisfied; as if I had a right to say who should or who should not ride in Madam Waldoborough’s carriage.

“Mademoiselle sat with her hat on, and held the pup; and I sat with my hat in my hand, and held my peace; and she talked bad English to me, and good French to the dog, for, maybe, ten minutes longer, when the Waldoborough swept in, arrayed for the occasion, and said, ‘*Maintenant nous allons.*’ That was the signal for descending: as we did so, Madam casually remarked, that something was the matter with one of the Waldoborough horses, but that she had not thought it worth the while to give up our visit to the Gobelins on that account, since a *coupé* would answer our purpose; — and the *coupés* in that quarter were really very respectable!

“This considerate remark was as a feather-bed to break the frightful fall before me. You think I tumbled down the Waldoborough stairs? Worse than that: I dropped headlong, precipitately, from the heights of fairy dreams to low actuality; all the way down, down, down, from the Waldoborough barouche to a hired coach, a *voiture de remise*, that stood in its place at the door!

““Mademoiselle suggested that it would be quite as well to go in a *coupé*,” says Madam Waldoborough, as she got in.

““O certainly,” I replied, with preternatural cheerfulness.

“It was a vehicle with two horses and seats for four; one driver in a red face, — the common livery of your Paris hackman; but no footman, no footman, no footman!” Herbert repeated, with a groan. “Not so much as a little tiger clinging to the straps behind! I comforted myself, however, with the reflection that beggars must not be choosers; that, if I rode with Madam, I must accept her style of turn-out; and that if I was a good boy, and went in the *coupé* this time, I might go in the *barouche* the next.

“Madam occupied the back seat — the seat of honor in a coach — with whom, do you suppose? Me? No, sir! With the Spider? Not even with the Spider! With the lapdog, sir! And I was forced to content myself with a seat by Arachne’s side, facing the royal pair.

““*Aux Gobelins*,” says Madam Waldoborough, to the driver; ‘*mais allez par l’Hôtel de Ville, le pont Louis Philippe, et l’Eglise de Notre Dame, — n’est-ce pas?*’ referring the question to me.

“I said, ‘As you please.’ And the red-faced driver said, ‘*Bien, Madame!*’ as he shut us into the coach. And off we went by the Hôtel de Ville, the Pont Louis Philippe, and Notre Dame, accordingly.

“We stopped a few minutes to look at the Cathedral front; then rattled on, up the Quai and across the Pont de l’Archevêché, and through the crooked, countless streets until we reached the Gobelins; and I must confess I did not yet experience any of the sublime emotions I had counted upon in riding with the distinguished Madam Waldoborough.

“You have been to the Gobelins? If you have n't, you must go there, — not with two ladies and a lapdog, as I did, but independently, and you will find the visit well worth the trouble. The establishment derives its name from an obscure wool-dyer of the fifteenth century, Jean Gobelin, whose little workshop has grown to be one of the most extensive and magnificent carpet and tapestry manufactories in the world.

“We found liveried attendants stationed at every door and turning-point, to direct the crowds of visitors and to keep out dogs. No dog could be admitted except in arms. I suggested that King Francis should be left in the coach; upon which Madam Waldoborough asked, reproachfully, ‘Could I be so cruel?’ and the Spider looked at me as if I had been an American savage. To atone for my inhumanity, I offered to carry the cur; he was put into my arms at once; and so it happened that I walked through that wonderful series of rooms, hung with tapestries of the richest description, of the times of Francis I., Louis XIV., and so forth, with a detested lapdog in my hands. However, I showed my heroism by enduring my fate without a murmur, and quoting Tennyson for the gratification of Madam Waldoborough, who was reminded of the corridors of ‘The Palace of Art.’

‘Some were hung with arras green and blue,
 Showing a gaudy summer-morn,
 Where with puffed cheek the belted hunter blew
 His wreathéd bugle-horn.’

And so forth, and so on. I continued my citations in order to keep Madam's mouth shut; for she annoyed me exceedingly by telling everybody she had occasion to speak with who she was.

“‘*Je suis Madame Waldoborough; et je désire savoir*’ this thing, or that, — whatever she wished to inquire

about ; as if all the world knew of her fame, and she had only to state, 'I am that distinguished personage,' in order to command the utmost deference and respect.

"From the show-rooms we passed on to the work-rooms, where we found the patient weavers sitting or standing at the back side of their pieces, with their baskets of many-colored spools at their sides, and the paintings they were copying behind them, slowly building up their imitative fabrics, loop after loop, and stitch after stitch, by hand. Madam told the workmen who she was, and learned that one had been at work six months on his picture ; it was a female figure kneeling to a colossal pair of legs, destined to support a warrior, whose upper proportions waited to be drawn out of the spool-baskets. Another had been a year at work on a headless Virgin with a babe in her arms, finished only to the eyes. Sometimes ten, or even twenty years, are expended by one man upon a single piece of tapestry ; but the patience of the workmen is not more wonderful than the art with which they select and blend their colors, passing from the softest to the most brilliant shades, without fault, as the work they are copying requires.

"From the tapestry-weaving we passed on to the carpet-weaving rooms, where the workmen have the right side of their fabric before them, and the designs to be copied over their heads. Some of the patterns were of the most gorgeous description, — vines, scrolls, flowers, birds, lions, men ; and the way they passed from the reflecting brain through the fingers of the weaver into the woollen texture was marvellous to behold. I could have spent some hours in the establishment pleasantly enough, watching the operatives, but for that terrible annoyance, the dog in my arms. I could not put him down, and I could not ask the ladies to take him. The Spider was in her element ;

she forgot everything but the toil of her fellow-spiders, and it was almost impossible to get her away from any piece she once became interested in. Madam, busy in telling who she was and asking questions, gave me little attention; so that I found myself more in the position of a lackey than a companion. I had regretted that her footman did not accompany us; but what need was there of a footman as long as she had me?

“In half an hour I had become weary of the lapdog and the Gobelins, and wished to get away. But no, — Madam must tell more people who she was, and make further inquiries; and as for Arachne, I believe she would have remained there until this time. Another half-hour, and another, and still the good part of another, exhausted the strength of my arms and the endurance of my soul, until at last the Waldoborough said, ‘*Eh bien, nous avons tout vu, n'est-ce pas? Allons donc!*’ And we allonged.

“We found our *coupé* waiting for us, and I thrust his majesty King Francis into it rather unceremoniously. Now you must know that all this time Madam Waldoborough had not the remotest idea but that she was treating me with all due civility. She is one of your thoroughly egotistical, self-absorbed women, accustomed to receiving homage, who appear to consider that to breathe in their presence and attend upon them is sufficient honor and happiness for anybody.

“‘Never mind,’ thought I, ‘she’ll invite me to dinner, and maybe I shall meet an ambassador!’

“Arrived at the Hotel Waldoborough, accordingly, I stepped out of the *coupé*, and helped out the ladies and the lapdog, and was going in with them, as a matter of course. But the Spider said, ‘Do not give yourself ze pain, Monsieur!’ and relieved me of King Francis. And Madam said, ‘Shall I order the driver to be paid? or will

you retain the *coupé*? You will want it to take you home. Well, good day;’ — offering me two fingers to shake. ‘I am very happy to have met you; and I hope I shall see you at my next reception. Thursday evening, remember; I receive Thursday evenings. *Cocher, vous emporterez Monsieur chez lui, comprenez?*’

“‘*Bien, Madame!*’ says the *cocher*.

“‘*Bon jour, Monsieur!*’ says Arachne, gayly, tripping up the stairs with the king in her arms.

“I was stunned. For a minute I did not know very well what I was about; indeed, I should have done very differently if I had had my wits about me. I stepped back into the *coupé*, — weary, disheartened, hungry; my dinner hour was past long ago; it was now approaching Madam’s dinner hour, and I was sent away fasting. What was worse, the *coupé* was left for me to pay for. It was three hours since it had been ordered; price, two francs an hour; total, six francs. I had given the driver my address, and we were clattering away towards the Rue des Vieux Augustins, when I remembered, with a sinking of the heart I trust you may never experience, that I had not six francs in the world, — at least in this part of the world, — thanks to my Todworth cousin; that I had, in fact, only fifteen paltry sous in my pocket!

“Here was a scrape! I had ridden in Madam Waldoborough’s carriage with a vengeance! Six francs to pay! and how was I ever to pay it? ‘*Cocher! cocher!*’ I cried out, despairingly, ‘*attendez!*’

“The *cocher* stopped promptly. Struck with the appalling thought that every additional rod we travelled involved an increase of expense, my first impulse was to jump out and dismiss him. But then came the more frightful fancy, that it was not possible to dismiss him unless I could pay him! I must keep him with me until

I could devise some means of raising the six francs, which an hour later would be eight francs, and an hour later ten francs, and so forth. Every moment that I delayed payment swelled the debt, like a ruinous rate of interest, and diminished the possibility of ever paying him at all. And of course I could not keep him with me forever, — go about the world henceforth in a hired coach, with a driver and span of horses impossible to get rid of.

“ ‘*Que veut Monsieur ?*’ says the driver, looking over at me with his red face, and waiting for my orders.

“That recalled me from my hideous reverie. I knew I might as well be travelling as standing still, since he was to be paid by the hour; so I said, ‘Drive on, drive faster!’

“I had one hope, — that on reaching my lodgings I might prevail upon the *concierge* to pay for the coach. I stepped out with alacrity, said gayly to my coachman, ‘*Combien est-ce que je vous dois ?*’ and put my hand in among my fifteen sous with an air of confidence.

“The driver looked at his watch, and said, with business-like exactness, ‘*Six francs vingt-cinq centimes, Monsieur.*’ *Vingt-cinq centimes!* My debt had increased five cents whilst I had been thinking about it! ‘*Avec quelque-chose pour la boisson,*’ he added with a persuasive smile. With a trifle besides for drink-money, — for that every French driver expects.

“Then I appeared to discover, to my surprise, that I had not the change; so I cried out to the old woman in the porter’s lodge, ‘Give this man five francs for me, will you?’

“‘Five francs!’ echoed the ogress with astonishment: ‘*Monsieur, je n’ai pas le sou!*’

“I might have known it; of course she would n’t have a sou for a poor devil like me.

"I then proposed to call at the driver's stand and pay him in a day or two, if he would trust me. He smiled and shook his head.

"'Very well,' said I, stepping back into the coach, 'drive to number five, Cité Odiot.' I had an acquaintance there, of whom I thought I might possibly borrow. The coachman drove away cheerfully, seeming to be perfectly well satisfied with the state of things; he was master of the situation, — he was having employment, his pay was going on, and he could hold me in pledge for the money. We reached the Cité Odiot: I ran in at number five, and up stairs to my friend's room. It was locked; he was away from home.

"I had but one other acquaintance in Paris on whom I could venture to call for a loan of a few francs; and he lived far away, across the Seine, in the Rue Racine. There seemed to be no alternative; so away we posted, carrying my ever-increasing debt, dragging at each remove a lengthening chain. We reached the Rue Racine; I found my friend; I wrung his hand. 'For Heaven's sake,' said I, 'help me to get rid of this Old Man of the Sea, — this elephant won in a raffle!'

"I explained. He laughed. 'What a funny adventure!' says he. 'And how curious that at this time, of all others, I have n't ten sous in the world! But I'll tell you what I can do,' says he.

"'For mercy's sake, what?'

"'I can get you out of the building by a private passage, take you through into the Rue de la Harpe, and let you escape. Your coachman will remain waiting for you at the door until you have traversed half Paris. That will be a capital point to the joke, — a splendid *finale* for your little comedy!'

"I confess to you that, perplexed and desperate as I

was, I felt for an instant tempted to accept this infamous suggestion. Not that I would willingly have wronged the coachman; but since there was no hope of doing him justice, why not do the best thing for myself? If I could not save my honor, I might at least save my person. And I own that the picture of him which presented itself to my mind, waiting at the door so complacently, so stolidly, intent only on sticking by me at the rate of two francs an hour until paid off, — without feeling a shadow of sympathy for my distress, but secretly laughing at it, doubtless, — that provoked me; and I was pleased to think of him waiting there still, after I should have escaped, until at last his beaming red face would suddenly grow purple with wrath, and his placidity change to consternation, on discovering that he had been outwitted. But I knew too well what he would do. He would report me to the police! Worse than that, he would report me to Madam Waldoborough!

“Already I fancied him, with his whip under his arm, smilingly taking off his hat, and extending his hand to the amazed and indignant lady, with a polite request that she would pay for that *coupé*! What *coupé*? And he would tell his story, and the Goddess would be thunderstruck; and the eyes of the Spider would sparkle wickedly; and I should be disgraced forever!

“Then I could see the Parisian detectives — the best in the world — going to take down from the lady’s lips a minute description of the adventurer, the swindler, who had imposed upon them, and attempted to cheat a poor hack-driver out of his hard-earned wages! Then would appear the reports in the newspapers, — how a well-dressed young man, an American, Monsieur X., (or perhaps my name would be given,) had been the means of enlivening the fashionable circles of Paris with a choice bit of scandal,

by inviting a very distinguished lady, also an American (whose Thursday-evening receptions are attended by some of the most illustrious French and foreign residents in the metropolis), to accompany him on a tour of inspection to the Gobelins, and had afterwards been guilty of the unexampled baseness of leaving the *coupé* he had employed standing, unpaid, at the door of a certain house in the Rue Racine, whilst he escaped by a private passage into the Rue de la Harpe, and so forth.

“‘No,’ said I; ‘t is impossible! If you can’t help me to the money, I must try — but where, how can I hope to raise eight francs, (for it is four hours by this time, to say nothing of the drink-money!) — how can I ever hope to raise that sum in Paris?’

“‘You can pawn your watch,’ says my false friend, rubbing his hands, and smiling, as if he really enjoyed the comicality of the thing.

“‘But I had already eaten my watch, as the French say: it had been a week at the Mont de Piété.

“‘Your coat then,’ says my counsellor, with good-natured unconcern.

“‘And go in my shirt-sleeves?’ for I had placed my trunk and its contents in the charge of my landlord, as security for the payment of my rent.

“‘In that case, I don’t see what you will do, unless you take my original advice, and dodge the fellow.’

“I left my fair-weather acquaintance in disgust, and went off, literally staggering under the load, the ever-increasing load, the Pelion upon Ossa, of francs, francs, francs, — despair, despair, despair.

“‘*Eh bien?*’ says the driver, interrogatively, as I went out to him.

“I ordered him to drive back to the Cité Odiot.

“‘*Bien!*’ says he, polite as ever, cheery as ever; and

away we went again, back across the Seine, up the Champs Elysées, into the Rue de l'Oratoire, to the Cité, — my stomach faint, my head aching, my thoughts whirling, and the carriage wheels rattling, clattering, chattering all the way, 'Two francs an hour and drink-money! Two francs an hour and drink-money!'

"Once more I tried my luck at number five, and was filled with exasperation and dismay to find that my friend had been home, and gone off again in great haste, with a portmanteau in his hand.

"Where had he gone? Nobody knew: but he had given his key to the house-servant, saying he would be absent several days.

"*'Pensez-vous qu'il est allé à Londres?'* I hurriedly inquired.

"*'Monsieur, je n'en sais rien,'* was the calm, decisive response.

"I knew he often went to London; and now my only hope was to catch him at one of the railway stations. But by which route would he be likely to go? I thought of only one, that by way of Calais, by which I had come, and I ordered my coachman to drive with all speed to the Northern Railway Station. He looked a little glum at this, and his '*Bien!*' sounded a good deal like the 'bang' of the coach-door, as he shut it rather sharply in my face.

"Again we were off, my head hotter than ever, my feet like ice, and the coach-wheels saying vivaciously, as before, 'Two francs an hour and drink-money! Two francs an hour and drink-money!' I was terribly afraid we should be too late; but on arriving at the station, I found there was no train at all. One had left in the afternoon, and another would leave late in the evening. Then I happened to think there were other routes to London, by the way of Dieppe and Havre. My friend might have gone by one

of those! Yes, there was a train at about that time, my driver somewhat sullenly informed me, — for he was fast losing his cheerfulness: perhaps it was his supper-time, or perhaps he was in a hurry for his drink-money. Did he know where the stations were? Know? of course he did! There was but one terminus for both routes; that was in the Rue St. Lazare. Could he reach it before the train started? Possibly; but his horses were jaded; they needed feeding. And why did n't I tell him before that I wished to stop there? for we had come through the Rue St. Lazare, and actually passed the railway station there, on our way from the Cité Odiot! That was vexing to think of, but there was no help for it; so back we flew on our course, to catch, if possible, the train, and my friend, who I was certain was going in it.

“We reached the Lazarus Street Station; and I, all in a frenzy of apprehension, rushed in, to experience one of those fearful trials of temper to which nervous men — especially nervous Americans in Paris — are sometimes subject. The train was about starting; but, owing to the strict regulations which are everywhere enforced on French railways, I could not even force myself into the passenger-room, — much less get through the gate, and past the guard, to the platform where the cars were standing. Nobody could enter there without a ticket. My friend was going, and I could not rush in and catch him, and borrow my — ten francs, I suppose, by that time, because I had not a ticket, nor money to buy a ticket! I laugh now at the image of myself, as I must have appeared then, — frantically explaining what I could of the circumstances to any of the officials who would hear me, — pouring forth torrents of broken and hardly intelligible French, now shrieking to make myself understood, and now groaning with despair, — questioning, cursing, imploring, — and re-

ceiving the invariable, the inexorable reply, always polite, but always firm, —

“‘ON NE PASSE PAS, MONSIEUR.’

“Absolutely no admittance! And while I was convulsing myself in vain, the train started! It was off, — my friend was gone, and I was ruined forever!

“When the worst has happened, and we feel that it is so, and our own efforts are no longer of any avail, then we become calm; the heart accepts the fate it knows to be inevitable. The bankrupt, after all his anxious nights and terrible days of struggle, is almost happy at last, when all is over. Even the convict sleeps soundly on the night preceding his execution. Just so I recovered my self-possession and equanimity after the train had departed.

“I went back to my hackman. His serenity had vanished as mine had arrived; and the fury that possessed me seemed to pass over and take up its abode with him.

“‘Will you pay me?’ he demanded, fiercely.

“‘My friend,’ said I, ‘it is impossible.’ And I repeated my proposition to call and settle with him in a day or two.

“‘And you will not pay me now?’ he vociferated.

“‘My friend, I cannot.’

“‘Then I know what I will do!’ turning away with a gesture of rage.

“‘I have done what I could, now you shall try what you can,’ I answered, mildly.

“‘*Écoutez donc!*’ he hissed, turning once more upon me. ‘I go to Madam. I demand my pay of her. What do you say to that?’

“A few minutes before I should have been overwhelmed by the suggestion. I was not pleased with it now. No man who has enjoyed the society of ladies, and imagined that he appeared well in their presence, fancies the idea of being utterly shamed and humiliated in their eyes. I

ought to have had the courage to say to Madam Waldoborough, when she had the coolness to send me off with the *coupé*, instead of my dinner: 'Excuse me, Madam, I have not the money to pay this man!' It would have been bitter, that confession; but better one pill at the beginning of a malady than a whole boxful later. Better truth, anyhow, though it kill you, than a precarious existence on false appearances. I had, by my own folly, placed myself in an embarrassing and ludicrous position; and I must take the consequences.

"'Very well,' said I, 'if you are absolutely bent on having your money to-night, I suppose that is the best thing you can do. But say to Madam that I expect my uncle by the next steamer; that I wished you to wait till his arrival for your pay; and that you not only refused, but put me to a great deal of trouble. It is nothing extraordinary,' I continued, 'for gay young men, Americans, to be without money for a few days in Paris, expecting remittances from home; and you fellows ought to be more accommodating.'

"'True! true!' says the driver, turning again to go. 'But I must have my pay all the same. I shall tell Madam what you say.'

"He was going. And now happened one of those wonderful things which sometimes occur in real life, but which, in novels, we pronounce improbable. Whilst we were speaking a train arrived; and I noticed a little withered old man, — a little smirking mummy of a man, — with a face all wrinkles and smiles, coming out of the building with his coat on his arm. I noticed him, because he was so ancient and dried up, and yet so happy, whilst I was so young and fresh, and yet so miserable. And I was wondering at his self-satisfaction, when I saw — what think you? — something fall to the ground from the waist-pocket

of the coat he carried on his arm! It was — will you believe it? — a pocket-book! — a fat pocket-book, a respectable, well-worn pocket-book! — the pocket-book of a millionaire, by Jove! I pounced upon it. He was passing on when I ran after him, politely called his attention, and surprised him with a presentation of what he supposed was all the time conveyed safely in his coat.

“‘Is it possible!’ said he in very poor French, which betrayed him to be a foreigner like myself. ‘You are very kind, very obliging, very obliging indeed!’

“‘If thanks and smiles would have answered my purpose, I had them in profusion. He looked to see that the pocket-book had not been opened, and thanked me again and again. He seemed very anxious to do the polite thing, yet still more anxious to be passing on. But I would not let him pass on; I held him with my glittering eye.

“‘Ah!’ said he, ‘perhaps you won’t feel yourself injured by the offer,’ — for he saw that I was well dressed, and probably hesitated on that account to reward me, — ‘perhaps you will take something for your honesty, for your trouble.’ And putting his hand in his pocket, he took it out again, with the palm covered with glittering gold pieces.

“‘Sir,’ said I, ‘I am ashamed to accept anything for so trifling a service; but I owe this man here, — how much is it now?’

“‘Ten francs and a half,’ says the driver, whom I had stopped just in time.

“‘Ten francs and a half,’ I repeated.

“‘*Mais n’oubliez pas la boisson,*’ he added, his persuasive smile returning.

“‘With something for his dram,’ I continued: ‘which if you will have the kindness to pay him, and at the same

time give me your address, I will see that the money is returned to you without fail in a day or two.'

"The smiling little man paid the money on the spot; saying it was of no consequence, and neglecting to give me his address. And he went his way well satisfied, and the driver went his, also well satisfied; and I went mine, infinitely better satisfied, I imagine, than either of them.

"Well, I had got rid of Madam Waldoborough's carriage, and learned a lesson which, I think, will last me the rest of my life. But I must haste and tell you the curious *dénouement* of the affair.

"I was n't so anxious to cultivate Madam's acquaintance *after* riding in her carriage, you may well believe. For months I did n't see her. At last my Todworth cousin and her yellow-complexioned husband came to town, and I went with my uncle to call upon them at Meurice's Hotel. They were delighted to see me, and fondly pressed me to come and take a room adjoining their suite, as I did at Cox's; whereat I smiled.

"A card was brought in, and my cousin directed that the visitor should be admitted. There was a rustle, — a volume of flounces came sweeping in, — a well-remembered voice cried, 'My dear Louise!' — and my Todworth cousin was clasped in the buxom embrace of Madam Waldoborough.

"But what did I behold? Following in Madam's wake, like a skiff towed at the stern of a rushing side-wheel steamer, a dapper little old man, a withered little old man, a gayly smiling little old man, whose countenance was somehow strangely familiar to me. I considered him a moment, and the scene in the Rue St. Lazare, with the *coupé* driver and the man with the pocket-book, flashed across my mind. This was the man! I remembered him well; but he had evidently forgotten me.

“Madam released Louise from her divine large arms, and greeted the yellow-complexioned one. Then she was introduced to my uncle. Then the bride said, ‘You know my cousin Herbert, I believe?’

“‘Ah, yes!’ says the Waldoborough, who had glanced at me curiously, but doubtfully, ‘I recognize him now!’ giving me a smile and two fingers. ‘I thought I had seen him somewhere. You have been to one or two of my receptions, have n’t you?’

“‘I have not yet had that pleasure,’ said I.

“‘Ah, I remember now! You called one morning, did n’t you? And we went somewhere together, — where did we go? — or was it some other gentleman?’

“I said I thought it must have been some other gentleman; for indeed I could hardly believe now that I was that fool.

“‘Very likely,’ said she; ‘for I see so many, — my receptions, you know, Louise, are always so crowded! But, dear me, what am I thinking of? Where are you, my dear?’ and the steamer brought the skiff alongside.

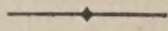
“‘Louise, and gentlemen,’ then said my lady, with a magnificent courtesy, the very wind of which I feared would blow him away, — but he advanced triumphantly, bowing and smiling extravagantly, — ‘allow me the happiness of presenting to you Mr. John Waldoborough, my husband.’

“How I refrained from shrieking and throwing myself on the floor, I never well knew; for I declare to you, I was never so caught by surprise and tickled through and through by any *dénouement* or situation, in or off the stage! To think that pigmy, that wart, that little grimacing monkey of a man, parchment-faced, antique, — a mere money-bag on two sticks, — should be the husband of the great and glorious Madam Waldoborough! His

wondrous self-satisfaction was accounted for. Moreover, I saw that Heaven's justice was done; Madam's husband had paid for Madam's carriage!"

Here Herbert concluded his story. And it was time; for the day had closed, as we walked up and down, and the sudden November night had come on. Gas-light had replaced the light of the sun throughout the streets of the city. The brilliant cressets of the Place de la Concorde flamed like a constellation; and the Avenue des Champs Élysées, with its rows of lamps, and the throngs of carriages, each bearing now its lighted lantern, moving along that far-extending slope, looked like a new Milky Way, fenced with lustrous stars, and swarming with meteoric fire-flies.

FESSENDEN'S.



I.

THE LAST NIGHT OF AUTUMN.

“PLEASE, ma’am, I want to come in out of the rain,” said the dripping figure at the door.

“And who are you, sir?” demanded the lady, astonished; for the bell had been rung familiarly, and, thinking her son had come home, she had hastened to let him in, but had met instead (at the front door of her fine house!) this wretch.

“I’m Fessenden’s fool, please, ma’am,” replied the son — not of this happy mother, thank Heaven! not of this proud, elegant lady, O no! — but of some no less human-hearted mother, I suppose, who had likewise loved her boy, perhaps all the more fondly for his infirmity, — who had hugged him to her bosom so many, many times, with wild and sorrowful love, — and who, be sure, would not have kept him standing there, ragged and shivering, in the rain.

“Fessenden’s fool!” cries the lady. “What’s your name?”

“Please, ma’am, that’s my name.” Meekly spoken, with an earnest, staring face. “Do you want me?”

“No; we don’t want a boy with such a name as that!”

And the lady scowls, and shakes her head, and half

closes the forbidding door, — not thinking of that other mother's heart, — never dreaming that such a gaunt and pallid wight ever had a mother at all. For the idea that those long, lean hands, reaching far out of the short and split coat-sleeves, had been a baby's pure, soft hands once, and had pressed the white maternal breasts, and had played with the kisses of the fond maternal lips, — it was scarcely conceivable ; and a delicate-minded matron, like Mrs. Gingerford, may well be excused for not entertaining any such distressing fancy.

“Wal! I'll go!” And the youth turned away.

She could not shut the door. There was something in the unresentful, sad face, pale cheeks, and large eyes, that fascinated her ; something about the tattered clothes, thin, wet locks of flaxen hair, and ravelled straw hat-brim, fantastic and pitiful. And as he walked wearily away, and she saw the night closing in bleak and dark, and felt the cold dash of the rain blown against her own cheek, she concluded to take pity on him. For she was by no means a hard-hearted woman ; and though her house was altogether too good for poor folks, and she really did n't know what she should do with him, it seemed too bad to send him away shelterless, that stormy November night. Besides, her husband was a rising politician, — the public-spirited Judge Gingerford, you know, — the eloquent philanthropist and reformer ; — and to have it said that his door had been shut against a perishing stranger might tarnish his reputation. So, as I remarked, she concluded to have compassion on the boy, and, after duly weighing the matter, to call him back. And she called, — though, as I suspect, not very loud. Moreover, the wind was whistling through the leafless shrubbery, and his rags were fluttering, and his hat was flapping about his ears, and the rain was pelting him ; and just then the Judge's respectable

dog put his head out of the warm, dry kennel, and barked ; so that he did not hear, — the lady believed.

He had heard very well, nevertheless. Why did n't he go back, then? Maybe, because he was a fool. More likely, because he was, after all, human. Within that husk of rags, under all that dull incumbrance of imperfect physical organs that cramped and stifled it, there dwelt a soul ; and the soul of man knows its own worth, and is proud. The coarsest, most degraded drudge still harbors in his wretched house of clay a divine guest. There is that in the convict and slave which stirs yet at an insult. And even in this lank, half-witted lad, the despised and outcast of years, there abode a sense of inalienable dignity, — an immanent instinct that he, too, was a creature of God, and worthy therefore to be treated with a certain tenderness and respect, and not to be roughly repulsed. This was strong in him as in you. His wisdom was little, but his will was firm. And though the house was cheerful and large, and had room and comfort enough and to spare, rather than enter it, after he had been flatly told he was not wanted, he would lie down in the cold, wet fields and die.

“Certainly he will find shelter somewhere,” thought the Judge's lady, discharging her conscience of the responsibility. “But I am sorry he did n't hear.”

Was she very sorry?

She went back into her cosey, fire-lighted sewing-room, and thought no more of the beggar-boy. And the watchdog, having barked his well-bred, formal bark, without undue heat, — like a dog that knew the world, and had acquired the tone of society, — stood a minute, important, contemplating the drizzle from the door of his kennel, out of which he had not deigned to step, then stretched himself once more on his straw, gave a sigh of repose, and

curled himself up, with his nose to the air, in an attitude of canine enjoyment, in which it was to be hoped no inconsiderate vagabond would again disturb him.

As for Fessenden's — How shall we name him? Somehow, it goes against the grain to call any person a fool. Though we may forget the Scriptural warning, still charity remembers that he is our brother. Suppose, therefore, we stop at the possessive case, and call him simply Fessenden's?

As for Fessenden's, then, he was less fortunate than the Judge's mastiff. He had no dry straw, not even a kennel to crouch in. And the fields were uninviting; and to die was not so pleasant. The veriest wretch alive feels a yearning for life, and few are so foolish as not to prefer a dry skin to a wet one. Even Fessenden's knew enough to go in when it rained, — if he only could. So, with the dimmallest prospect before him, he kept on, in the wind and rain of that bitter November night.

And now the wind was rising to a tempest; and the rain was turning to sleet; and November was fast becoming December. For this was the last day of the month, — the close of the last day of autumn, as we divide the seasons: autumn was flying in battle before the fierce onset of winter. It was the close of the week also, being Saturday.

Saturday night! what a sentiment of thankfulness and repose is in the word! Comfort is in it; and peace exhales from it like an aroma. Your work is ended; it is the hour of rest; the sense of duty done sweetens reflection, and weariness subsides into soothing content. Once more the heart grows tenderly appreciative of the commonest blessings. That you have a roof to shelter you, and a pillow for your head, and love and light and supper, and something in store for Sunday, — that the raving rain is excluded, and the wolfish wind howls in vain, —

that those dearest to you are gathered about your hearth, and all is well, — it is enough ; the full soul asks no more.

But this particular Saturday evening brought no such suffusion of bliss to Fessenden's, — if, indeed, any ever did. He saw, through the streaming, misty air, the happy homes in the village lighted up one by one as it grew dark. He had glimpses, through warm windows, of white supper-tables. The storm made sufficient seclusion ; there was no need to draw the curtains. Servants were bringing in the tea-things. Children were playing about the floors, — laughing, beautiful children. Behold them, shivering beggar-boy ! Lean by the iron rail, wait patiently in the rain, and look in upon them ; it is worth your while. How frolicsome and light-hearted they seem ! They are never cold, and seldom very hungry, and the world is dry to them, and comfortable. And they all have beds, — delicious beds. Mothers' hands tuck them in ; mothers' lips teach them to say their little prayers, and kiss them good night. Foolish fellow ! why did n't you be one of those fortunate children, well fed, rosy, and bright, instead of a starved and stupid tatterdemalion ? A question which shapes itself vaguely in his dull, aching soul, as he stands trembling in the sleet, with only a few transparent squares of glass dividing him and his misery from them and their joy.

Mighty question ! it is vast and dark as the night to him. He cannot answer it ; can you ?

Vast and dark and pitiless is the night. But the morning will surely come ; and after all the wrongs and tumults of life will rise the dawn of the Day of God. And then every question of fate, though it fill the universe for you now, shall dissolve in the brightness like a vapor, and vanish like a little cloud.

Meanwhile a servant comes out and drives Fessenden's

away from the fence. He recommenced his wanderings, — up one street and down another, in search of a place to lay his head. The inferior dwellings he passed by. But when he arrived at a particularly fine one, there he rang. Was it not natural for him to infer that the largest houses had amplest accommodations, and that the rich could best afford to be bounteous? If in all these spacious mansions there was no little nook for him, if out of their luxuries not a blanket or crust could be spared, what could he hope from the poor? You see, he was not altogether witless, if he was a — Fessenden's. Another proof: At whatever house he applied, he never committed the vulgarity of a *détour* to the back entrance, but advanced straight, with bold and confident port, to the front door. The reason of which was equally simple and clear: front doors were the most convenient and inviting; and what were they made for, if not to go in at?

But he grew weary of ringing and of being repulsed. It was dismal standing still, however, and quite as comfortless sitting down. He was so cold! So, to keep his blood in motion, he keeps his limbs in motion, — till, lo! here he is again at the house where the happy children were! They have ceased their play. Two young girls are at the window, gazing out into the darkness, as if expecting some one. Not you, miserable! You need n't stop and make signs for them to admit you. There! don't you see you have frightened them? You are not a fitting spectacle for such sweet-eyed darlings. They do well to drop the shade, to shut out the darkness, and the dim, gesticulating phantom. Flit on! 'T is their father they are looking for, coming home to them with gifts from the city.

But he does not flit. When, presently, they lift a corner of the shade and peep out, they see him still standing there, spectral in the gloom. He is waiting for them to

open the door! He thinks they have quitted the window for that purpose! Ah! here comes the father, and they are glad.

He comes hurrying from the cars under his umbrella, which is braced against the gale and shuts out from his eyes the sight of the unsheltered wretch. And he is hastily entering his door, which is opened to him by the eager children, when they scream alarm; and looking over his shoulder, he perceives, following at his heels, the fright. He is one of your full-blooded, solid men; but he is startled.

“What do you want?” he cries, and lifts the threatening umbrella.

“I'm hungry,” says the intruder, with a ghastly glare, still advancing.

He stands taller in his tattered shoes than the solid gentleman in his boots; and those long, lean, claw-like hands act as if anxious to clutch something. Papa thinks it is his throat.

“By heavens! do you mean to —” And he prepares to charge umbrella.

“You may!” answers the wretch, with perfect sincerity, presenting his ragged bosom to the blow.

The lord of the castle lowers his weapon. The children huddle behind him, hushing their screams.

“Go in, Minnie! In, all of you! Tell Stephen to come here, — quick!”

The children scamper. And the florid, prosperous parent and the gaunt and famishing vagrant are alone, confronting each other by the light of the shining hall-lamp.

“I'm cold,” says the latter, — “and wet,” with an aguish shiver.

“I should think so!” cries the gentleman, recovering

from his alarm, and getting his breath again, as he hears Stephen's step behind him. "Stand back, can't you?" (indignantly.) "Don't you see you are dripping on the carpet?"

"I'm so tired!"

"Well! you need n't rub yourself against the door, if you are! Don't you see you are smearing it? What are you roaming about in this way for, intruding into people's houses?"

"Please, sir, I don't know," is the soft, sad answer; and Fessenden's is meekly taking himself away.

"It's too bad, though!" says the man, relenting. "What can we do with this fellow, Stephen?"

"Send him around to Judge Gingerford's, — I should say that's about the best thing to do with him," says the witty Stephen.

The man knew well what would please. His master's face lighted up. He rubbed his hands, and regarded the vagabond with a humorous twinkle, with malice in it.

"Would you, Stephen? By George, I've a good notion to! Take the umbrella, and go and show him the way."

Stephen did not like that.

"I was only joking, sir," he said.

"A good joke, too! Here, you fellow! go with my man. He'll take you to a house where you'll find friends. Excellent folks! damned philanthropical! red-hot abolitionists! If you only had nigger blood, now, they'd treat you like a prince. I don't know but I'd advise you to tell 'em you're about a quarter nigger, — they'll think ten times as much of you!"

It was sufficiently evident that the gentleman did not love his neighbor the Judge. With his own hands he spread again the soaked umbrella, and, giving it to the reluctant Stephen, sent him away with the vagabond.

Then he shut the door, and went in. By the fire he pulled off his wet boots, and put on the warm slippers, which the children brought him with innocent strife to see which should be foremost. And he gave to each kisses and toys; for he was a kind father. And sitting down to supper, with their beaming faces around him, he thought of the beggar-boy only in connection with the jocular spite he had indulged against his neighbor.

Meanwhile the disgusted Stephen, walking alone under the umbrella, drove Fessenden's before him through the storm. They turned a corner. Stephen stopped.

"There, that's the house, where the lights are. Good by! Luck to you!" And Stephen and umbrella disappeared in the darkness.

Fessenden's kept on, wearily, wearily! He reached the house. And lo! it was the same at the door of which the lady had told him that he, with his name, was not wanted. Tiger slept in his kennel, and dreamed of barking at beggars. The Judge, snugly ensconced in his study, listened to the report of his speech before the Timberville Benevolent Association. His son read it aloud, in the columns of the "Timberville Gazette." Gingerford smiled and nodded; for it sounded well. And Mrs. Gingerford was pleased and proud. And the heart of Gingerford Junior swelled with the fervor of the eloquence, and with exultation in his father's talents and distinction, as he read. The sleet rattled a pleasant accompaniment against the window-shutters; and the organ-pipes of the wind sounded a solemn symphony. This last night of November was genial and bright to these worthy people, in their little family circle. And the future was full of promise. And the rhetoric of the orator settled the duty of man to man so satisfactorily, and painted the pleasures of benevolence in such colors, that all their bosoms glowed.

"It is gratifying to think," said Mrs. Gingerford, wiping her eyes at the pathetic close, "how much good the printing of that address in the 'Gazette' must accomplish. It will reach many so, who had n't the good fortune to hear it at the rooms."

Certainly, madam. The "Gazette" is taken, and perhaps read this very evening, in every one of the houses at which the homeless one has applied in vain for shelter, since you frowned him from your door. Those exalted sentiments, breathed in musical periods, are no doubt a rich legacy to the society of Timberville, and to the world. It was wise to print them; they will "reach many so." But will they reach this outcast beggar-boy, and benefit him? Alas, it is fast growing too late for that!

Utter fatigue and discouragement have overtaken him. The former notion of dying in the fields recurs to him now; and wretched indeed must he be, since even that desperate thought has a sort of comfort in it. But he is too weary to seek out some suitably retired spot to take cold leave of life in. On every side is darkness; on every side, wild storm. Why endeavor to drag farther his benumbed limbs? As well stretch himself here, upon this wet wintry sod, as anywhere. He has the presumption to do it, — never considering how deeply he may injure a fine gentleman's feelings by dying at his door.

Tiger does not bark him away, but only dreams of barking, in his cosey kennel. Close by are the windows of the mansion, glowing with light. There beat the philanthropic hearts; there smiles the pale, pensive lady; there beams the aspiring face of her son; and there sits the Judge, with his feet on the rug, pleasantly contemplating the good his speech will do, and thinking quite as much, perhaps, of the fame it will bring him, — happily unconscious alike of his neighbor's malicious jest, and of the

real victim of that jest, lying out there in the tempest and freezing rain.

So November goes out; and winter, boisterous and triumphant, comes in.

II.

FESSENDEN'S GETS A RIDE.

SUNDAY morning: cold and clear. The December sun shines upon the glassy turf, and upon trees all clad in armor of glittering ice. And the trees creak and rattle in the north wind; and the icy splinters fall tinkling to the ground.

The splendor of the morning gilds the Judge's estate. Everything about the mansion smiles and sparkles. Were last night's horrors a dream?

There was danger, we remember, that the foolish youth might do a very inconsiderate and shocking thing, and perhaps ruin the Judge. What if he had really deposited his mortal remains at the gate of that worthy man, — to be found there, ghastly and stiff, a revolting spectacle, this bright morning? What a commentary on Gingerford philanthropy! For of course some one would at once have stepped forward to testify to having seen him driven from the door, which he came back to lay his bones near. And Stephen would have been on hand to remember directing such a person, inquiring his way a second time to the Judge's house. And here he is dead, — to the secret delight of the Judge's enemies, and to the indignation of all Timberville. At anybody else's door it would n't have seemed so bad. But at Gingerford's! a philanthropist by profession! author of that beautiful speech you cried over!

You will never forgive him those tears. The greatest crime a man can be guilty of in the eyes of his constituents is to have been over-praised by them. Woe to him, when they find out their error! and woe now to the Judge! The fact that a dozen other influential citizens had also refused shelter to the vagabond will not help the matter. Those very men will probably be the first to cry, "Hypocrite! inhuman! a judgment upon him!" — for it is always the person of doubtful virtue who is most eager to assume the appearance of severe integrity; and we often flatter ourselves that our private faults are atoned for, when we have loudly denounced the same in others.

Fortunately, the flower of the Judge's reputation is saved from so terrible a blight. There is no corpse at his gate; and our speculations are idle.

This is what had occurred.

Not long after the lad had lain down, a dream-like spell came over him. His pain was gone. He forgot that he was cold. He was not hungry any more. A sweet sense of rest was diffused through his tired limbs. And smiling and soothed he lay, while the storm beat upon him. Was this death? For we know that in this merciful shape death sometimes comes to the sufferer.

Fessenden's afterwards said that he had "one of his fits." He was subject to such. When men reviled and denied him, then came the angels, — or he imagined they came. They walked by his side, and talked with him; and often, all a summer's afternoon, he could be heard conversing in the fields, as with familiar friends, when only himself was visible, and his voice alone was heard in the silence. This was, in fact, one of those idiosyncrasies which had earned him his shameful name.

In the trance of that night, lying cold upon the ground, he beheld his ghostly visitors. They came and stood

around him, a shining company, and looked upon him with countenances of fair women and good men. Their apparel was not unlike that of mortals. And he heard them questioning among themselves how they should help him. And one of them, as it seemed, brought human assistance; though the boy, who could see plenty of ghosts, could not, for some reason, see the only actually visible and substantial person then on the spot besides himself. He felt, however, sensibly enough, the concussion of a stout pair of mortal legs that presently went stumbling over him in the dark. The shock roused him. The whole shadowy company vanished; and in their place he saw, by the glimmer from the Judge's windows, a dark sprawling figure getting up out of the mud and water.

"Don't be scaret, it's me," said Fessenden's; for he guessed the fellow was frightened.

"Excuse me, sir! I really did n't know it was you, sir!" said the man, with agitated politeness. "And who might you be, sir? if I may be so bold as to inquire." And regaining his balance, his umbrella, and his self-possession, he drew near and squatted cautiously before the prostrate beggar, who, had his eyesight been half as keen for the living as it was for the dead, would have discovered that the face bending over him was black.

"Never mind me," said Fessenden's. "Did it hurt ye?"

"Well, sir, — no, sir, — only my knee went pretty seriously into something wet. And I believe I've turned my umbrella wrong side out. I say, sir, what was you doing, lying here, sir? You don't think of remaining here all night, I trust, sir?"

"I've nowhere else to go," said the boy, trying to rise. The black man helped him up.

"But this never'll do, you know! such an inclement

night as this is! — you 'd die before morning, sure! Just wait till I can get my umbrella into shape, — my gracious! how the wind pulls it! Now, then, suppose you come along with me."

"Please, sir, I can't walk"; for the lad's limbs had stiffened, in spite of his angels.

"Is that so, sir? Let me see; about how much do you weigh, sir? Not much above a hundred, do you? It is n't impossible but I may take you on my back. Suppose you try it."

"O, I can't!" groaned the boy.

"Excuse me for contradicting you, but I think you can, sir. I should n't like to do it myself, in the daytime; but in the night so, who cares? Nobody 'll laugh at us, even if we don't succeed. Really, I wish you was n't quite so wet, sir; for these here is my Sunday clothes. But never mind a little water; we'll find a fire to get dry again. There you are, my friend! A little higher. Put your hands over across my breast. Could n't manage to hold the umbrella over us, could you? So fashion. Now steady, while I rise with you."

And the stalwart young negro, hooking his arms well under the legs of his rider, got up stoopingly, gave a toss and a jolt to get him into the right position, and walked off with him. Away they go, tramp, tramp, in the storm and darkness. Thank Heaven, the Judge's fame is safe! If the pauper dies, it will not be at his door. Little he knows, there in his elegant study, what an inestimable service this black Samaritan is rendering him. And it was just; for, after all the Judge had done for the negro (who, I suppose, was equally unconscious of any substantial benefit received), it was time that the negro should do something for him in return.

Tramp! tramp! a famous beggar's ride! It was a

picturesque scene, with food for laughter and tears in it, had we only been there with a lantern. Fessenden's fantastic astride of the African, staring forward into the darkness from under his ragged hat-brim, endeavoring to hold the wreck of an umbrella over them, — the wind flapping and whirling it. Tramp! tramp! past all those noble mansions, to the negro hut beyond the village. And, O, to think of it! the rich citizens, the enlightened and white-skinned Levites, having left him out, one of their own race, to perish in the storm, this despised black man is found, alone of all the world, to show mercy unto him!

“How do you get on, sir?” says the stout young Ethiop. “Would you ride easier, if I should trot? or would you prefer a canter? Tell 'em to bring on their two-forty nags now, if they want a race.”

Talking in this strain to keep up his rider's spirits, he brought him, not without sweat and toil, to the hut. A kick on the door with the beggar's foot, which he used for the purpose, caused it to be opened by a woolly-headed urchin; and in he staggered.

Little woolly-head clapped his hands and screamed.

“O crackie, pappy! here comes Bill with the Devil on his back!”

Sensation in the hut. There was an old negro woman in the corner, at one side of the stove, knitting; and a very old negro man in the opposite corner, napping; and a middle-aged man with spectacles on his ebony nose, reading slowly aloud from an ancient greasy-covered book opened before him on the old pine table; and a middle-aged woman patching a jacket; and a girl washing dishes which another girl was wiping; representatives of four generations: and they all quitted their occupations at once, to see what sort of a devil Bill had brought home.

“Why, William! who have you got there, William?” said he of the spectacles, with mild wonder, removing those clerkly aids of vision and laying them across the book.

“A chair!” panted Bill. “Now ease him down, if you please, — careful, — and I’ll — recite the circumstances,” — puffing, but polite to the last.

III.

MAKES ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE WILLIAMS FAMILY.

HELPLESS and gasping, Fessenden’s was unfastened, and slipped down the African’s back upon a seat placed to receive him. He still clung to the umbrella, which he endeavored to keep spread over him, while he stared around with stupid amazement at the dim room and the array of black faces.

And now the excited urchin began to caper and sing: —

“ ‘Went down to river, could n’t get across;
Jumped upon a nigger’s back, thought it was a hoss!’

O, crackie, Bill!”

“Father,” said William, with wounded dignity, — for he was something of a gentleman in his way, — “I wish you’d discipline that child, or else give me permission to chuck him.”

“Joseph!” said the father, with a stern shake of his big black head at the boy, “here’s a stranger in the house! Walk straight, Joseph!”

Which solemn injunction Joseph obeyed in a highly offensive manner, by strutting off in imitation of William’s dandified air.

By this time the aged negro in the corner had become fully roused to the consciousness of a guest in the house. He came forward with slow, shuffling step. He was almost blind. He was exceedingly deaf. He was withered and wrinkled in the last degree. His countenance was of the color of rust-eaten bronze. He was more than a hundred years old, — the father of the old woman, the grandfather of the middle-aged man, and the great-grandfather of William, Joseph, and the girls. He was muffled in rags, and wore a little cap on his head. This he removed with his left hand, exposing a little battered tea-kettle of a bald pate, as with smiling politeness he reached out the other trembling hand to shake that of the stranger.

“Welcome, sah! Sarvant, sah!”

He bowed and smiled again, and the hospitable duty was performed; after which he put on his cap and shuffled back into his corner, greatly marvelled at by the gazing beggar-boy.

The girls and their mother now bestirred themselves to get their guest something to eat. The tin teapot was set on the stove, and hash was warmed up in the spider. In the mean time William somewhat ruefully took off his wet Sunday coat, and hung it to dry by the stove, interpolating affectionate regrets for the soiled garment with the narration of his adventure.

“It was the merest chance my coming that way,” he explained; “for I had got started up the other street, when something says to me, ‘Go by Gingerford’s! go by Judge Gingerford’s!’ so I altered my course, and the result was, just as I got against the Judge’s gate I was precipitated over this here person.”

“I know what made ye!” spoke up the boy, with an earnest stare.

"What, sir, if you please?"

"The angels!"

"The — the what, sir?"

"The angels! I seen 'em!" says Fessenden's.

This astounding announcement was followed by a strange hush. Bill forgot to smooth out the creases of his coat, and looked suspiciously at the youth whom it had served as a saddle. He wondered if he had really been ridden by the Devil.

The old woman now interfered. She was at least seventy years of age. The hair of her head was like mixed carded wool. Her coarse, cleanly gown was composed of many-colored, curious patches. The atmosphere of thorough grandmotherly goodness surrounded her. In the twilight sky of her dusky face twinkled shrewdness and good-humor; and her voice was full of authority and kindness.

"Stan' back here now, you troubles!" pushing the children aside. "Did n't none on ye never see nobody afore? This 'ere child's got to be took keer on, and that mighty soon! Gi' me the comf'table off 'm the bed, mammy."

"Mammy" was the mother of the children. The "comf'table" was brought, and she and her husband helped the old negress wrap Fessenden's up in it, from head to foot, wet clothes and all.

"Now your big warm gret-cut, pappy!"

"Pappy" was her own son; and the "gret-cut" was his old, gray, patched and double-patched surtout, which now came down from its peg, and spread its broad flaps, like brooding wings, over the half-drowned human chicken.

"Now put in the wood, boys! Pour some of that 'ere hot tea down his throat. Bless him, we'll sweat the cold out of him! we'll give him a steaming!"

She held with her own hand the cracked teacup to the lad's lips, and made him drink. Then she pulled up the comforter about his face, till nothing of him was visible but his nose and a curl or two of saturated tow. Then she had him moved up close to the glowing stove, like a huge chrysalis to be hatched by the heat.

The dozing centenarian now roused himself again, and, perceiving the little nose in the big bundle on the other side of the chimney, was once more reminded of the sacred duties of hospitality. So he got upon his trembling old legs, pulled off his cap, and bowed and smiled as before, with exquisite politeness, across the stove. "Sarvant, sah! Welcome, sah!" And he sat down and dozed again.

Fessenden's was not in a position to return the courteous salute. The old woman had by this time got his feet packed into the stove-oven, and he was beginning to smoke.

"O Bill! just look a' Joe!" cried one of the girls.

Bill left smoothing his broadcloth, and, turning up the whites of his eyes, uttered a despairing groan. "O, that child! that child! that child!"—his voice running up into a wild falsetto howl.

The child thus passionately alluded to had possessed himself of Bill's genteel silk hat, which had been tenderly put away to dry. It had been sadly soaked by the rain, and bruised by the flopping umbrella which Fessenden's had unhappily attempted to hold over it. And now Joe had knocked in the crown, whilst getting it down from its peg with the broom. He had thought to improve its appearance by stroking the nap the wrong way with his sleeve. Lastly, putting it on his head, he had crushed the sides together to prevent its coming quite down over his eyes and ears and resting on his shoulders. And there

he was, with the broken umbrella spread, hitting the top of the hat with it at every step, as he strutted around the room in emulation of his brother's elegant style.

"My name's Mr. Bill Williams, Asquare!" simpered the little satirist. "Some folks call me Gentleman Bill, 'cause I'm so smart and good-looking, sar!"

Gentleman Bill picked up the jack with which he had pulled off his wet boots, and waited for a good chance to launch it at Joe's head. But Joe kept behind his grandmother, and proceeded with his mimicry.

"Nobody knows I'm smart and good-looking 'cept me, and that's why I tell on't, sar; that's the reason I excite the stircumstances, sar!" He remembered Bill's saying he would "recite the circumstances," and this was as near as he could come to the precise words. "I'm a gentleman tailor; that's my perfession, sar. Work over to the North Village, sar. Come home Sat'day nights to stop over Sunday with the folks, and show my good clo'es. How d'e do, sar? Perty well, thank ye, sar." And Joe, putting down the umbrella, in order to lift the ingulfing hat from his little round, black, curly head with both hands, made a most extravagant bow to the chrysalis.

"Old granny!" hoarsely whispered Bill, "you just stand out of the way once, while I propel this boot-jack!"

"Old granny don't stan' out o' the way oncet, for you to frow no boot-jack in this house! S'pose I want to see that child's head stove in? Which is mos' consequence, I'd like to know, your hat, or his head? Hats enough in the world. But that 'ere head is an oncommon head, and bless the boy, if he should lose that, I do'no' where he'd git another like it! Come, no more fuss now! I got to make some gruel for this 'ere poor, wet, starvin' critter. That hash a'n't the thing for him, mammy, — you'd

ought to know ! He wants somefin' light and comfortin', that'll warm his in'ards, and make him sweat, bless him ! — Joey ! Joey ! give up that 'ere hat now ! ”

“ Take it then ! Mean old thing, — I don't want it ! ”

Joe extended it on the point of the umbrella ; but just as Bill was reaching to receive it, he gave it a little toss, which sent it into the chip-basket.

“ Might know I 'd had on your hat ! ” and the little rogue scratched his head furiously.

“ I shall certainly massacre that child some fine morning ! ” muttered Bill, ruefully extricating the insulted article from the basket. “ O my gracious ! only look at that, now, Creshy ! ” to his sister. “ That 's an interesting object, is n't it ? for a gentleman to think of putting on to his head Sunday morning ! ”

“ O Bill ! ” cried Creshy, “ just look a' Joe ag'in ! ”

Whilst he was sorrowfully restoring his hat to its pristine shape, he had been robbed of his coat. The thief had run with it behind the bed, where he had succeeded in getting into it. The collar enveloped his ears. The skirts dragged upon the floor. He had buttoned it, to make it fit better ; but there was still room in it for two or three boys. He had got on his father's spectacles and the beggar's straw hat. He looked like a frightful little old misshapen dwarf. And now rolling up the sleeves to find his hands, and wrinkling the coat outrageously at every movement, he advanced from his retreat, and began to dance a pigeon-wing, amid the convulsive laughter of the girls.

“ O my soul ! my soul ! ” cried Bill, his voice inclining again to the falsetto. “ Was there ever such an imp of Satan ? Was there ever — ”

Here he made a lunge at the offender. Joe attempted to escape, but getting his feet entangled in the superabun-

dant coat-skirts, fell, screaming as if he were about to be killed.

“Good enough for you!” said his mother. “I wish you would get hurt!”

“What you wish that for?” cried the old grandmother, rushing to the rescue, brandishing a long iron spoon with which she had been stirring the gruel. “Can’t nobody never have no fun in this house? Bless us! what ’ud we do, if ’t wa’n’t for Joey, to make us laugh and keep our sperits up? Jest you stan’ back now, Bill! — ’d ruther you ’d strike me’n see ye hit that ’ere boy oncet!”

“He must let my things be, then,” said Bill, who could n’t see much sport in the disrespectful use made of his wearing apparel. — “Here, you! surrender my property!”

“Laws! you be quiet! You ’ll git yer cut ag’in. Only jest look at him now, he ’s so blessed cunning!”

For Joe, reassured by his grandmother, had stopped screaming, and gone to tailoring. He sat cross-legged on one of the unlucky coat-skirts, and pulled the other up on his lap for his work. Then he got an imaginary thread, and, putting his fingers together, screwed up his mouth, and looked over the spectacles, sharpening his sight, —

“Like an old tailor to his needle’s eye.”

Then he began to stitch, to the infinite disgust of Bill, who was sensitive touching his vocation.

“I do declare, father! how you can smile, seeing that child carrying on in this shape, is beyond my comprehension!”

“Joseph!” said Mr. Williams, good-naturedly, “I guess that ’ll do for to-night. Come, I want my spectacles.”

He had sat down to his book again. He was a slow, thoughtful, easy, cheerful man, whom suffering and much

humiliation had rendered very mild and patient, if not quite broken-spirited. His voice was indulgent and gentle, with that mellow richness of tone peculiar to the negro. After he had spoken, the laughter subsided; and Joe, impressed by the quiet paternal authority, quickly devised means to obey without appearing to do so. For it is not so much obedience, as the manifestation of obedience, that is repugnant to human nature, — not in children only, but in grown folks as well.

Joe disguised his compliance in this way. He got up, took off the beggar's hat, put the spectacles into it, holding his hand on a rip in the crown to keep them from falling through, and passed it around, walking solemnly in his brother's abused coat.

"I'm Deacon Todd," said he, "taking up a collection to buy Gentleman Bill a new cut: gunter make a missionary of him!"

He passed the hat to the women and the girls, all of whom pretended to put in something.

"I ha'n't got nothin'!" said Fessenden's when it came to him; "I'm real sorry! but I'll give my hat!" — earnest as could be.

When the hat came to Mr. Williams, he quietly put in his hand and took out his glasses.

"Here, I've got something for you; I desire to contribute," said Gentleman Bill.

But Joe was shy of his brother.

"O, we don't let the missionary give anything!" he said. "Here's the hat what you're gunter to wear; — give it to him, Creesh!"

Bill disdained the beggar's contribution; but, in his anxiety to seize Joe, he suffered his sister to slip up behind him and clap the wet, ragged straw wreck on his head.

"O Bill! O Bill!" screamed the girls with merriment,

in which mother and grandmother joined, while even their father indulged in a silent, inward laugh.

"Good!" said Fessenden's; "he may have it!"

Bill, watching his opportunity, made a dash at the pretending Deacon Todd. That nimble and quick-witted dwarf escaped as fast as his awkward attire would permit. The bed seemed to be the only place of refuge, and he dodged under it.

"Come out!" shouted Bill, furious.

"Come in and git me!" screamed Joe, defiant.

Bill, if not too large, was far too dignified for such an enterprise. So he got the broom and began to stir Joe with the handle, not observing, in his wrath, that, the more he worried Joe, the more he was damaging his own precious broadcloth.

"I'm the lion to the show!" cried Joe, rolling and tumbling under the bed to avoid the broom. "The keeper's a punchin' on me, to make me roar!"

And the lion roared.

"He's a gunter come into the cage by-'m-by, and put his head into my mouth. Then I'm a gunter swaller him! Ki! hoo! hoo! oo!"

He roared in earnest this time. Bill, grown desperate, had knocked his shins. As long as he hit him only on the head, the king of beasts did n't care; but he could n't stand an attack on the more sensitive part.

"Jest look here, now!" exclaimed the old negress, with unusual spirit; "gi' me that broom!"

She wrenched it from Bill's hand.

"Perty notion, you can't come home a minute without pesterin' that boy's life out of him!"

You see, color makes no difference with grandmothers. Black or white, they are universally unjust, when they come to decide the quarrels of their favorites.

“Great lubberly fellow like you, 'busin' that poor babby all the time! Come, Joey! come to granny, poor child!”

It was a sorry-looking lion that issued whimpering from the cage, limping, and rubbing his eyes. His borrowed hide — namely, Bill's coat — had been twisted into marvellous shapes in the scuffle; and, being wet, it was almost white with the dust and lint that adhered to it. Bill threw up his arms in despair; while Joe threw his, great sleeves and all, around granny's neck, and found comfort on her sympathizing bosom.

IV.

SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY.

“SILENCE, now,” said Mr. Williams, “so 's we can go on with the reading.”

Order was restored. Bill hung up his coat, and sat down. Joe nestled in the old woman's lap. And now the storm was heard beating against the house.

“Say!” spoke up Fessenden's, “can I stop here over night?”

“You don't suppose,” said Mr. Williams, “we'd turn you out in such weather as this, do you?”

“Wal!” said Fessenden's, “nobody else would keep me.”

“Don't you be troubled! While we've a ruf over our heads, no stranger don't git turned away from it that wants shelter, and will put up with our 'commodations. We can keep you to-night, and probably to-morrow night, if you like to stay; but after that I can't promise. Mebby

we sha' n't have a ruf for our own heads then. But we 'll trust the Lord," said Mr. Williams, with a deep serious smile, — while Mrs. Williams sighed.

"How is it about that matter?" Gentleman Bill inquired.

"The house is to be tore down Monday, I suppose," replied his father, mildly.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Bill; "Mr. Frisbie a'n't really going to carry that threat into execution?"

"That's what he says, William. He has got a prejudice ag'inst color, you know. Since he lost the election, through the opposition of the abolitionists, as he thinks, he's been very much excited on the subject," added Mr. Williams, in his subdued way.

"Excited!" echoed his wife, bitterly.

She was a much-suffering woman, inclined to melancholy; but there was a latent fire in her when she seemed most despondent, and she roused up now and spoke with passionate, flashing eyes: —

"Sence he got beat, town-meetin' day, he don't 'pear to take no comfort, 'thout 't is hatin' Judge Gingerford and spitin' niggers, as he calls us. He sent his hired man over ag'in this mornin', to say, if we wa'n't out of the house by Monday, 't would be pulled down on to our heads. Call that Christian, when he knows we can't git another house, there's sich a s'picion ag'in people o' color?"

"'T wa'n't alluz so; 't wa'n't so in my day," said the old woman, pausing, as she was administering the gruel to Fessenden's with a spoon. "Here's gran'pa, he was a slave, and I was born a slave, in this here very State, as long ago as when they used to have slaves here, as I've told ye time and ag'in; though I don't clearly remember it, for I scace ever knowed what bondage was, bless the

Lord! But we alluz foun' somebody to be kind to us, and got along, — for it did seem as though God kind o' looked arter us, and took keer on us, same as he did o' white folks. We've been carried through, somehow or 'nother; and I can't help thinkin' as how we shall be yit, spite o' Mr. Frisbie. S'pose God 'll forgit us 'cause his grand church-folks do? S'pose all they can say 'll pedijice him?"

Having advanced this unanswerable question, she turned once more to her patient, who put up his head, and opened his mouth wide, to receive the great spoon.

"Lucky for them that can trust the Lord!" said Mrs. Williams, over her patching. "But if I was a man, I'm 'fraid I should put my trust in a good knife, and stan' by the ol' house when they come to pull it down! The fust man laid hands on 't 'ud git hurt, I'm dreffle 'fraid! Prayin' won't save it, you see!"

"Mr. Frisbie owns the house," observed Gentleman Bill, "and I would n't resort to violent measures to prevent him; though 't is n't possible for me to believe he'll be so unhuman as to demolish it before you find another."

"I'm inclined to think he will," answered Mr. Williams, calmly. "He's a rather determined man, William. But God won't quite forget us, I'm sartin sure. And we won't worry about the house till the time comes, anyhow. Le' 's see what the Good Book says to comfort us," he added, with a hopeful smile.

Unfortunately, the "Timberville Gazette" had not reached this benighted family; and not having the Judge's Address to read, Mr. Williams read the Sermon on the Mount.

Fessenden's listened with the rest. And a light, not of the understanding, but of the spirit, shone upon him. His intellect was too feeble, I think, to draw any very

keen comparison between those houses where the "Timberville Gazette" was taken and read that evening and this lowly abode, — between the rich there, who had shut their proud, prosperous doors against him, and these poor servants of the Lord, who had taken him in and comforted him, though the hour was nigh, when they, too, were to be driven forth shelterless in the wintry storms. The deep and affecting suggestiveness of that wide contrast his mind was, no doubt, too weak thoroughly to appreciate. Yet something his heart felt, and something his soul perceived; his pale and vacant face was illumined; and at the close of the reading he rose up. The coarse wrappings of his body fell away; and the muffling ignorance, the swaddling dulness, wherein that divine infant, the bright immortal spirit, was confined, seemed also to fall off. He lifted up his hands, spreading them as if dispensing blessings; and his countenance had a vague, smiling wonder in it, almost beautiful, and his voice, when he spoke, thrilled the ear.

"Praise the Lord! praise the Lord! for he will provide!

"Be comforted! for ye are the children of the Lord!

"Be glad! be glad! for the Angel of the Lord is here!

"Don't you see him? don't you see him? There! there!" he cried, pointing, with an earnestness and radiance of look which filled all who saw him with astonishment. They turned to gaze, as if really expecting to behold the vision; then fixed their eyes again on the stranger.

"You'll be taken care of, the Angel says. Even they that hate you shall do you good. The mercy you have shown, Christ will show to you."

Having uttered these sentences at intervals, in a loud voice, the speaker gave a start, turned as if bewildered, and sat down again.

Not a word was spoken. A hush of awe suspended the

breath of the listeners. Then a smile of fervent emotion lighted up like daybreak the negro's dark visage, and his joy broke forth in song. The others joined him, filling the house with the jubilee of their wild and mellow voices.

“A poor wayfaring man of grief
Hath often crossed me on my way,
And sued so humbly for relief
That I could never answer nay.”

And so the fair fame of Gingerford, as we said before, was saved from blight. The beggar-boy awakes this Sunday morning, not in the blaze of Eternity, but in that dim nook of the domain of Time, Nigger Williams's hut. He made his couch, not on the freezing ground, but in a bunk of the low-roofed garret. His steaming clothes had been taken off, a dry shirt had been given him, and he had Joe for a bedfellow.

“Hug him tight, Joey dear!” said the old woman, as she carried away the candle. “Snug up close, and keep him warm!”

“I will!” cried Joe, as affectionate as he was roguish; and Fessenden's never slept better than he did that night, with the tempest singing his lullaby, and the arms of the loving negro boy about him.

In the morning he found his clothes ready to put on. They had been carefully dried; and the old woman had got up early and taken a few needful stitches in them.

“It's Sunday, granny,” Creshy reminded her, to see what she would say.

“A'n't no use lett'n' sich holes as these 'ere go, if 't is Sunday!” replied the old woman. “Hope I never sh'll ketch you a doin' nuffin' wus! A'n't we told to help our neighbor's sheep out o' the ditch on the Lord's day? An' which is mos' consequence, I'd like to know, the neighbor's sheep, or the neighbor hisself?”

"But his clothes a'n't him," said Creshy.

"S'pose I do'no' that? But what's a sheep for, if 't a'n't for its wool to make the clo'es? Then, to look arter the sheep that makes the clo'es, and not look arter the clo'es arter they 're made, that's a mis'ble notion!"

"But you can mend the clothes any day."

"Could I mend 'em yis'day, when I did n't have 'em to mend? or las' night, when they was wringin' wet? Le' me alone, now, with your nonsense!"

"But you can mend them to-morrow," said the mischievous girl, delighted to puzzle her grandmother.

"And let that poor lorn chile go in rags over Sunday, freezin' cold weather like this? Guess I a'n't so onfeelin', — an' you a'n't nuther, for all you like to tease your ole granny so! Bless the boy, seems to me he's jest go'n' to bring us good luck. I feel as though the Angel of the Lord did r'a'ly come into the house with him las' night! Wish I had somefin' r'al good for him for his breakfas' now! He'll be dreffle hungry, that's sartin. Make a rousin' good big Johnnycake, mammy; and, Creshy, you stop botherin', and slice up them 'ere taters for fryin'."

Soon the odor of the cooking stole up into the garret. Fessenden's snuffed it with delighted senses. The feeling of his garments dry and whole pleased him mightily. He heard the call to breakfast; and laughing and rubbing his eyes he followed Joe down the dark, uncertain footing of the stairs.

The family was already huddled about the table. But room was reserved for their guest, and at his appearance the old patriarch rose smilingly from his seat, pulled off his cap, which it seemed he always wore, and shook hands with him, with the usual hospitable greeting.

"Sarvant, sah! Welcome, sah!"

Fessenden's was given a seat by his side. And the old

woman piled his plate with good things. And he ate, and was filled. For he was by no means dainty, and had not, simple soul! the least prejudice against color.

And he was happy. The friendly black faces around him, — the cheerful, sympathetic, rich-toned voices, — the motherly kindness of the old woman, — the exquisite smiling politeness of the old man, who got up and shook hands with him, on an average, every half-hour, — the Bible-reading, — the singing, — the praying, — the elegance and condescension of Gentleman Bill, — the pleasant looks and words of the laughing-eyed girls, — and the irrepressible merriment of Joe, made that a golden Sabbath in the lad's life.

Alas that it should come to this! Associate with black folks! how shocking! What if he was a — Fessenden's? was n't he white? Where were those finer tastes and instincts which make you and me shrink from persons of color? He rolls and tumbles in mad frolic with Joe on the garret floor, and plays horse with him. He suffers his hair to be combed by the girls, and actually experiences pleasure at the touch of their gentle hands, and feels a vague wondering joy when they praise his smooth flaxen locks. In a word, he is so weak as to wish that good Mr. Williams was his father, and this delightful hut his home!

And so he spends his Sunday. The family does not attend public worship. They used to, when the old meeting-house was standing, and the old minister was alive. But they do not feel at ease in the new edifice, and the smart young preacher is too smart for them. His rhetoric is like the cold carving and frescos, — very fine, very admirable, no doubt; but it has no warmth in it for them; it is foreign to their common daily lives; it comes not near the hopes and fears and sufferings of their humble hearts. Here religion, which too long suffered abasement.

is exalted. It is highly respectable. It shows culture ; it has the tone of society. It is worth while coming hither of a Sunday morning, if only to hear the organ and see the fashions. Yet it can hardly be expected that such creatures as the Williamses should appreciate the privilege of hearing and beholding from the enclosure which has been properly set off for their class, — the colored people's pew.

But Fessenden's might have done better, one would say, than to stay at home with them. Why did n't he go to church, and be somebody? *He* would not have been put into the niggers' pew. As for his clothes, which might have been objected to by worldly people, who would have thought of them, or of anything else but his immortal soul, in the house of God? Of course, there were no respecters of persons there, — none to say to a rich Frisbie, or an eloquent Gingerford, "Sit thou, here, in a good place," and to a ragged Fessenden's, "Stand thou there."

But perhaps the less said on the subject the better. Pass over that golden Sunday in the lad's life. Alas, when will he ever have such another? For here it is Monday morning, and the house is to be torn down.

V.

A TREMENDOUS JOKE.

THERE seems to be no mistake about it. Mr. Frisbie has come over early, driven in his light open carriage by his man Stephen, to see that the niggers are out. And yonder come the workmen, to begin the work of demolition.

But the niggers are not out ; not an article of furniture has been removed.

"You see, sir," — Mr. Williams calmly represents the case to his landlord, as he sits in his carriage, — "it has been impossible. We shall certainly go, just as soon as we can get another house anywhere in town —"

"I don't want you to get another house in town," interrupts the full-blooded, red-faced Frisbie. "We have had enough of you. You have had fair warning. Now out with your traps, and off with you!"

"I trust, at least, sir, you will give us another week —"

"Not an hour!"

"One day," remonstrates the mild negro; "I don't think you will refuse us that."

"Not a minute!" exclaims the firm Frisbie. "I've borne with you long enough. Fact is, we have got tired of niggers in this town. I bought the house with you in it, or you never would have got in. Now it is coming down. Call out your folks, and save your stuff, if you're going to. — Good morning, Adsly," to the master carpenter. "Go to work with your fellows. Guess they'll be glad to get out by the time you've ripped the roof off."

Mr. Williams retires, disheartened, his visage surcharged with trouble. For this wretched dwelling was his home, and dear to him. It was the centre of his world. Around it all the humble hopes and pleasures of the man had clustered for years. When weary with the long day's heavy toil, here he had found rest. To this spot his spirit, sorrow-laden, had ever turned with gratitude and yearning. And here he had found shelter, here he had found love and comfort, the lonely, despised man. Even care and grief had contributed to strengthen the hold of his heart upon this soil. Here had died the only child he had ever lost; and in the old burying-ground, over the hill yonder, it was buried. Under this mean roof he had laid his sorrows

before the Lord, he had wrestled with the Lord in prayer, and his burdens had been taken from him, and light and gladness had been poured upon his soul. O ye proud! do you think that happiness dwells only in high places, or that these lowly homes are not dear to the poor?

But now this sole haven of the negro and his family was to be destroyed. Cruel cold blew the December wind, that wintry morning. And the gusts of the landlord's temper were equally pitiless.

Gentleman Bill, full of confidence in his powers of persuasion, advances, to add the weight of his respectability to his parents' remonstrance.

"Good morning, Mr. Frisbie," — politely lifting his hat.

"Hey?" says Frisbie, sarcastic. — "Look at his insolence, Stephen!"

"I sincerely trust, sir," begins Bill, "that you will reconsider your determination, sir —"

"Shall I fetch him a cut with the hosswhip?" whispers Stephen, loud enough for the stalwart young black to hear.

"You can fetch him a cut with the hosswhip, if you like," Bill answers for Mr. Frisbie, with fire blazing up in his polite face. "But, sir, in case you do, sir, I shall take it upon myself to teach you better manners than to insult a gentleman conferring with your master, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Frisbie. "You've got it, Stephen!"

The whip trembled in Stephen's angry hand, but the strapping young negro looked so cool and wicked, standing there, that he wisely forbore to strike.

"I am sure, sir," Bill addresses the landlord, "you are too humane a person —"

"No, I a'n't," says the florid Frisbie. "I know what you're going to say; but it's no use. You can't work

upon my feelings; I a'n't one of your soft kind. Drive up to the door, Stephen."

Stephen is very glad to start the horse suddenly and graze Gentleman Bill's knee with the wheel-hub. Bill steps back a pace, and follows him with the smiting look of one who treasures up wrath. You had better be careful, Stephen, let me tell you!

Joe stands holding the door open, and Mr. Frisbie looks in. There, to his astonishment, he sees the women washing clothes as unconcernedly as if nothing unusual was about to occur. He jumps to the ground, heated with passion.

"Ho, here!" he shouts in at the door; "don't you see the house is coming down?"

Upon which the deaf old grandfather rises in his corner, and pulls off his cap, with the usual salutation, "Sarvant, sah," etc., and, sitting down again, relapses into a doze immediately.

Frisbie is furious. "What you 'bout here?" he cries, in an alarming voice.

"Bless you, sir," answers the old woman over a tub, "don't you see? We're doon' a little washin', sir. Did n't you never see nobody wash afore?" And she proceeds with her rubbing.

"The house will be tumbling on you in ten minutes!"

"You think so? Now I don't, Mr. Frisbie! This 'ere house a'n't go'n' to tumble down this mornin', I know. The Lord'll look out for that, I guess. Look o' these 'ere children! look o' me! look o' my ole father there, more 'n a hundred year ole! What's a go'n' to 'come on us all, if you pull the house down? Can't git another right away; no team to haul our things off with; an' how 'n the world we can do 'thout no house this winter, I can't see. So I've jes' concluded to trust tne Lord, an' git out my washin'." Rub, rub, rub!

Frisbie grows purple. "Are you fools?" he inquires.

"Yes, *I* am! I'm Fessenden's." And the honest staring youth comes forward to see what is wanted.

This unexpected response rather pricks the wind-bag of the man's zeal. He looks curiously at the boy, who follows him out of the house.

"Stephen, did you ever see that fellow before?"

"Yes, sir; he's the one come to our house Saturday night, and I showed round to the Judge's."

"Are you the fellow?"

"Yes," says Fessenden's. "There would n't any of you let me into your houses, neither!"

"Would n't the people I sent you to let you in?"

"No!"

"Hear that, Stephen! your philanthropical Gingerford! And what did you do?"

"I did n't do nothin', — only laid down to die, I did."

"But you did n't die, did you?"

"No! This man he come along, and brought me here."

"Here? to the niggers?"

"Yes! You would n't have me, so they took me, and dried me, and fed me, — good folks, niggers!" Fessenden's bore this simple testimony.

What is it makes the Frisbie color heighten so? Is it Gentleman Bill's quiet smile, as he stands by and hears this conversation?

"And you have been here ever since?" says the man, in a humbler key, and with a milder look, than before.

"Yes! It's a re'l good place!" says the youth.

"But a'n't you ashamed to live with niggers?"

"Ashamed? What for? Nobody else was good to me. But they was good to me. I a'n't ashamed."

The Frisbie color heightens more and more. He looks at that wretched dwelling, — he glances aside at Mr.

Williams, that coal-black Christian, of sad and resigned demeanor, waiting ruefully to see the roof torn off, — the only roof that had afforded shelter to the perishing out-cast. Mr. Frisbie is not one of the “soft kind,” but he feels the prick of conscience in his heart.

“Why did n't you go to the poorhouse? Did n't anybody tell you to?”

“Yes, that's what they said. But nobody showed me the way, and I could n't find it.”

“Where did you come from? Who are you?”

“Fessenden's.”

“Who is Fessenden?”

“The man that owns me. But he whipped me and shet me up, and I would n't stay.”

“Where does he live?”

“Don't know. Away off.”

“You'd better go back to him, had n't you?”

“No! I like these folks. Best folks I ever seen!” avers the earnest youth.

Flush and confusion are in the rich man's face. He turns up an uneasy glance at Adsly's men, already on the roof; then coughs, and says to Stephen, —

“This is interesting!”

“Very,” says Stephen.

“Don't you remember, *I* was going to make some provision for this fellow, — I'd have seen him safe in the almshouse, if nothing more, — but you suggested Gingerford's.”

“I supposed Gingerford would be delighted to take him in,” grins Stephen.

“Instead of that, he turns him out in the storm! Did you ever hear of such sham philanthropy? By George!” cries Frisbie, in his indignation against the Judge, “there's more real philanthropy in these niggers” — checking himself, and glancing again at the workmen on the roof.

"What 's philanthropy?" asked Fessenden's. "Is that what you 're tearin' their house down for? I'm sorry!"

Frisbie is flustered. He is ashamed of appearing "soft." He wishes heartily to be well rid of the niggers. But something in his own heart rebels against the course he has taken to eject them.

"Just hold on there a minute, Adsly!"

"Ay, ay!" says Adsly. And the work stops.

"Now what do I do this for?" exclaims Frisbie, vexed at himself the instant he has spoken. And he frowns, and blows his nose furiously. "It's because I am too good-natured altogether!"

"No, no, sir, — I beg your pardon!" says Mr. Williams, his heart all aglow with gratitude. "To be kind and merciful to the poor, that is n't to be too good-natured, sir!"

"Well, well! I a'n't one of your milk-and-water sort. Look at such a man as Gingerford, for example! But I guess, come case in hand, you'll find as much genuine humanity in me, Adsly, as in them that profess so much. Wait till to-morrow before you knock the old shell to pieces. I'll give 'em another day. And in the mean time, boy," turning to Fessenden's, "you must find you another home. Either go back to your guardian, or I'll send you over to the almshouse. These people can't keep you, for they'll have no house in these parts to keep themselves in."

"So?" says Fessenden's. "They kep' me when they had a house, and I'll stay with them when they have n't got any."

Something in the case of this unfortunate stripling interests Frisbie. His devotion to his new friends is so sincere, and so simply expressed, that the robust, well-fed man is almost touched by it.

"I vow, it's a queer case, Stephen! What do you think of it?"

"I think —" says the joker.

"What do you think? Out with it!"

"You own that vacant lot opposite Gingerford's?"

"Yes; what of that?"

"I think, then, instead of pulling the house down, I'd just move it over there, niggers and all —"

"And set it opposite the Judge's!" exclaims Frisbie, catching gleefully at the idea.

"Exactly," says Stephen; "and give him enough of niggers for one while."

"I'll do it! — Adslly! Adslly! See here, Adslly! Do you suppose this old box can be moved?"

"I guess so. 'T a'n't very large. Ruther think the frame 'll hold together."

"Will you undertake the job?"

"Wal, I never moved a house. There's Cap'en Slade, he moves houses. He's got all the tackle for it, and I ha'n't. I suppose I can git him, if you want me to see to the job."

Agreed! It did not take Frisbie long to decide. It was such a tremendous joke! A nest of niggers under the dainty Gingerford nose! ho, ho! Whip up, Stephen! And the red and puffy face, redder and puffier still with immense fun, rode off.

VI.

THE REMOVAL.

ADSLY and his men disappeared also, to return with Cap'en Slade and his tackle on the morrow. Then Joe began to dance and scream like a little devil.

"Have a ride! have a ride! O mammy! they 're gunter snake th' ole house through the village to-morrer, an' we 're all gunter have a ride! free gratis for nothin'! 'thout payin' for 't neither! A'n't we, Bill?"

Mrs. Williams sits right down, overcome by the surprise.

"Now I want to know if that 'ere 's so?"

"That's what 't looks like now," says Mr. Williams. "We're goin' to be sot opposite Mr. Gingerford's."

"'Ristocratic!" cries Joe, putting on airs. "That 's what 'll tickle Bill!"

"O, laws!" exclaims Mrs. Williams, with humorous sadness, — "what a show th' ole cabin 'll make, stuck down there 'mongst all them fine housen!"

"I don't know 's I quite like the notion," says her husband, with a good-natured expansion of his serious features. "I 'm 'fraid we sha' n't be welcome neighbors down there. 'T a'n't so much out o' kindness to us as it is out o' spite to the Gingerfords, that the house is to be moved instid o' tore down."

"That 's the glory of the Lord! Even the wrath of man shall praise him!" utters the old grandmother, devoutly.

"Won't it be jimmy?" crows Joe. "He 's a jolly ole brick, that Frisbie! I 'm a-gunter set straddle on the ridge-pole an' carry a flag. Hooray!"

"I consider that the situation will be very much preferable to this," observes Gentleman Bill, polishing his hat with his coat-sleeve. "Better quarter of the town; more central; eligible locality for establishing a tailor-shop."

"Legible comicality for stablin' a shailor-top!" stammers Joe, mimicking his brother.

Upon which Bill — as he sometimes did, when excited — relapsed into the vulgar but expressive idiom of the fam-

ily. "Shet yer head, can't ye?" And he lifted a hand with intent to clap it smartly upon the part the occlusion of which was desirable.

Joe shrieked and fled.

"No quarrellin' on a 'casion like this!" interposes the old woman, covering the boy's retreat. "This 'ere 's a time for joy and thanks, an' nuffin' else. Bless the Lord, I knowed he 'd keep an eye on to th' ole house. Did n't I tell ye that boy 'd bring us good luck? It's all on his account the house a'n't tore down, an' I consider it a mighty Providence from fust to last. Was n't I right, when I said I guessed I 'd have faith, an' git the washin' out? Bless the Lord, I could cry!"

And cry she did, with a fulness of heart which, I think, might possibly have convinced even the jocund Frisbie that there was something better than an old, worn-out, spiteful jest in the resolution he had taken to have the house moved, instead of razed.

And now the deaf old patriarch in the corner became suddenly aware that something exciting was going forward; but being unable clearly to comprehend what, and chancing to see Fessenden's coming in, he gave expression to his exuberant emotions by rising, and shaking the lad's passive hand, with the usual highly polite salutation.

"Tell him we 're all a-gunter have a ride," said Joe.

But as Fessenden's could n't tell him loud enough, Joe screamed the news.

"Say?" asked the old man, raising a feeble hand to his ear, and stooping and smiling.

"Put th' ole house on wheels, an' dror it!" shrieked Joe.

"Yes, yes!" chuckled the old man. "I remember! Six hills in a row. Busters!" — looking wonderfully knowing, and with feeble forefinger raised, nodding and

winking at his great-grandchild, — as it were across the dim gulf of a hundred years which divided the gleeful boyhood of Joe from the second childhood of the ancient dreamer.

The next day came Adsly and his men again, with Cap'en Slade and his tackle, and several yokes of oxen with drivers. Levers and screws moved the house from its foundations, and it was launched upon rollers. Then, progress! Then, sensation in Timberville! Some said it was Noah's ark sailing down the street. The household furniture of the patriarch was mostly left on board the antique craft, but Noah and his family followed on foot. They took their live stock with them, — cow and calf, and poultry and pig. Joe and his great-grandfather carried each a pair of pullets in their hands. Gentleman Bill drove the pig, with a rope tied to his (piggy's) leg. Mr. Williams transported more poultry, — turkeys and hens, in two great flopping clusters, slung over his shoulder, with their heads down. The women bore crockery and other frangible articles, and helped Fessenden's drive the cow. A picturesque procession, not noiseless! The bosses shouted to the men, the drivers shouted to the oxen, loud groaned the beams of the ark, the cow lowed, the calf bawled, great was the squawking and squealing!

Gentleman Bill was sick of the business before they had gone half-way. He wished he had stayed in the shop, instead of coming over to help the family, and make himself ridiculous. There was not much pleasure in driving that stout young porker. Many a sharp jerk lamed the hand that held the rope that restrained the leg that piggy wanted to run with. Besides (as I believe swine and some other folks invariably do under the like circumstances), piggy always tried to run in the wrong direction. To add to Gentleman's Bill's annoyance, spectators soon

became numerous, and witty suggestions were not wanting.

“Take him up in your arms,” said somebody.

“Take advantage of his contrariness, and drive him t' other way,” said somebody else.

“Ride him,” proposed a third.

“Make a whistle of his tail, an' blow it, an' he'll foller ye!” screamed a bright school-boy.

“Stick some of yer tailor's needles into him!” “Sew him up in a sack, and shoulder him!” “Take up his hind-legs, and push him like a wheelbarrer!” And so forth, and so forth, till Bill was in a fearful sweat and rage, partly with the pig, but chiefly with the uncivil multitude.

“Ruther carry me on your back, some rainy night, had n't ye?” said Fessenden's, in all simplicity, perceiving his distress.

“You did n't excruciate my wrist so like time!” groaned Bill. And what was more, darkness covered that other memorable journey.

As for Joe, he liked it. Though he was not allowed to ride the ridge-pole and wave a flag through the village, as he proposed, he had plenty of fun on foot. He went swinging his chickens, and frequently pinching them to make them musical. The laughter of the lookers-on did n't trouble him in the least; for he could laugh louder than any. But his sisters were ashamed, and Mr. Williams looked grave; for they were, actually, human! and I suppose they did not like to be jeered at, and called a swarm of niggers, any more than you or I would.

So the journey was accomplished; and the stupendous joke of Frisbie's was achieved. Conceive Mrs. Gingerford's wonder, when she beheld the ark approaching! Fancy her feelings, when she saw it towed up and moored in

front of her own door, — the whole tribe of Noah, lowing cow, bawling calf, squawking poultry, and squealing pig, and so forth, and so forth, accompanying! This, then, was the meaning of the masons at work over there since yesterday. They had been preparing the new foundations on which the old house was to rest. So the stunning truth broke upon her: niggers for neighbors! What had she done to merit such a dispensation?

What done, unhappy lady? Your own act has drawn down upon you this retribution. You yourself have done quite as much towards bringing that queer craft alongside as yonder panting and lolling oxen. They are but the brute instruments, while you have been a moral agent in the matter. One word, uttered by you three nights ago, has had the terrible magic in it to summon forth from the mysterious womb of events this extraordinary procession. Had but a different word been spoken, it would have proved equally magical, though we might never have known it; that breath by your delicate lips would have blown back these horrible shadows, and instead of all this din and confusion of house-hauling, we should have had silence this day in the streets of Timberville. You don't see it? In plain phrase, then, understand: you took not in the stranger at your gate; but he found refuge with these blacks, and because they showed mercy unto him the sword of Frisbie's wrath was turned aside from them, and, edged by Stephen's witty jest, directed against you and yours. Hence this interesting scene which you look down upon from your windows, at the beautiful hour of sunset, which you love. And, O, to think of it! between your chamber and those golden sunsets that negro-hut and those negroes will always be henceforth!

But we will not mock at your calamity. You did precisely what any of us would have been only too apt to do

in your place. You told the simple truth, when you said you did n't want the ragged wretch in your house. And what person of refinement, I should like to know, would have wanted him? For, say what you will, it is a most disagreeable thing to admit downright dirty vagabonds into our elegant dwellings. And dangerous, besides; for they might murder us in the night, or steal something! O, we fastidious and fearful! where is our charity? where is the heart of trust? There was of old a Divine Man, who had not where to lay his head, — whom the wise of those days scoffed at as a crazy fellow, — whom respectable people shunned, — who made himself the companion of the poor, the comforter of the distressed, the helper of those in trouble, and the healer of diseases, — who shrank neither from the man or woman of sin, nor from the loathsome leper, nor from sorrow and death for our sakes, — whose gospel we now profess to live by, and —

But let us not be "soft." We are reasonably Christian, we hope; and it shows low breeding to be ultra. (Was the Carpenter's Son low-bred?)

VII.

GINGERFORD.

AND now the Judge rides home in the dusk of the December day. It is still light enough, however, for him to see that Frisbie's vacant lot has been made an Ararat of; and he could hear the Noachian noises, were it never so dark. The awful jest bursts upon him; he hears the screaming of the bomb-shell, then the explosion. But the mind of this man is (so to speak) casemated. It is a shock, — but he never once loses his self-possession. His

quick perception detects Friend Frisbie behind the gun ; and he smiles with his intelligent, fine-cut face. Shall malice have the pleasure of knowing that the shot has told ? Our orator is too sagacious for that. There is never any use in being angry ; that is one of his maxims. Therefore, if he feels any chagrin, he will smother it. If there is a storm within, the world shall see only the rainbow, that radiant smile of his. Cool is Gingerford ! He has seized the subject instantly, and calculated all its bearings. He is a man to make the best of it ; and even the bitterness which is in it shall, if possible, brew him some wholesome drink. To school his mind to patience, to practise daily the philanthropy he teaches, — this will be much ; and already his heart is humbled and warmed. And who knows, — for with all his sincerity and aspiration he has an eye to temporal uses, — who knows but this stumbling-block an enemy has placed in his way may prove the stepping-stone of his ambition ?

“What is all this, James ?” he inquires of his son, who comes out to the gate to meet him.

“Frisbie’s meanness !” says the young man, almost choking. “And the whole town is laughing at us !”

“Laughing at us ? What have we done ?” mildly answers the parent. “I tell you what, James, they sha’ n’t laugh at us long. We can live so as to compel them to reverence us ; and if there is any ridicule attached to the affair, it will soon rest where it belongs.”

“Such a sty stuck right down under our noses !” mutters the mortified James.

“We will make of it an ornament,” retorts the Judge, with mounting spirits. “Come with me,” — taking the youth’s arm. “My son, call no human habitation a sty. These people are our brothers, and we will show them the kindness of brethren.”

A servant receives the horse, and Gingerford and his son cross the street.

“Good evening, Friend Williams! So you have concluded to come and live neighbor to us, have you?”

Friend Williams was at the end of the house, occupied in improvising a cow-shed under an old apple-tree. Piggy was already tied to the trunk of the tree, and the hens and turkeys were noisily selecting their roosts in the boughs. At sight of the Judge, whose displeasure he feared, the negro was embarrassed, and hardly knew what to say. But the pleasant greeting of the silver-toned voice reassured him, and he stopped his work to frame his candid, respectful answer.

“It was Mr. Frisbie that concluded. All I had to do was to go with the house wherever he chose to move it.”

“Well, he might have done much worse by you. You have a nice landlord, a nice landlord, Mr. Williams. Mr. Frisbie is a very fine man.”

It was Gingerford's practice to speak well of everybody with whom he had any personal relations, and especially well of his enemies; because, as he used to say to his son, evil words commonly do more harm to him who utters them than to those they are designed to injure, while fair and good words are easily spoken, and are the praise of their author, if of nobody else; for, if the subject of them is a bad man, they will not be accepted as literally true by any one that knows him, but, on the contrary, they will be set down to the credit of your good-nature, — or who knows but they may become coals of fire upon the head of your enemy, and convert him into a friend?

James had now an opportunity to test the truth of these observations. Was Mr. Williams convinced that Frisbie was a nice landlord and a fine man? By no means. But that Judge Gingerford was a fine man, and a charitable,

he believed more firmly than ever. Then there was Stephen standing by, — having, no doubt, been sent by his master to observe the chagrin of the Gingerfords, and to bring back the report thereof; who, when he heard the Judge's words, looked surprised and abashed, and presently stole away, himself discomfited.

"I pray the Lord," said Mr. Williams, humbly and heartily, "you won't consider us troublesome neighbors."

"I hope not," replied the Judge; "and why should I? You have a good, honest reputation, Friend Williams; and I hear that you are a peaceable and industrious family. We ought to be able to serve each other in many ways. What can I do for you, to begin with? Would n't you like to turn your cow and calf into my yard?"

"Thank you a thousand times, if I can just as well as not," said the grateful negro. "We had to tear down the shed and pig-pen when we moved the house, and I ha'n't had time to set 'em up again."

"And I imagine you have had enough to do, for one day. Let your children drive the creatures through the gate yonder; my man will show them the shed. Are you a good gardener, Mr. Williams?"

"I've done consid'able at that sort of work, sir."

"I'm glad of that. I have to hire a good deal of gardening done. I see we are going to be very much obliged to your landlord for bringing us so near together. And this is your father?"

"My grandfather, sir," said Mr. Williams.

"Your grandfather? I must shake hands with him."

"Sarvant, sah," said the old man, cap off, bowing and smiling there in the December twilight.

"He's deaf as can be," said Mr. Williams; "you'll have to talk loud, to make him hear. He's more 'n a hundred years old."

"You astonish me!" exclaimed the Judge. "A very remarkable old person! I should delight to converse with him, — to know what his thoughts are in these new times, and what his memories are of the past, which, I suppose, is even now more familiar to his mind than the objects of to-day. God bless you, my venerable friend!" shaking hands a second time with the ancient black, and speaking in a loud voice.

"Tankee, sah, — very kind!" smiled the flattered old man. "Sarvant, sah."

"'T is you who are kind, to take notice of young fellows like me," pleasantly replied the Judge. "Well, good evening, friends. I shall always be glad to know if there is anything I can do for you. Ha! what is this?"

It was the cow and calf coming back again, followed by Joe and Fessenden's.

"Gorry!" cried Joe, "wa'n't that man mad? Thought he'd bite th' ole cow's tail off!"

"What man? My man? Dorson?"

"Yes," said honest Fessenden's; "he said he'd be damned if he'd have a nigger's critters along with hisn?"

"Then we'll afford him an early opportunity to be damned," observed the Judge. "Drive them back again. I'll go with you. By the way, Mr. Williams," — Gingerford saw Dorson approaching, and spoke loud enough for him to hear and understand, — "are you accustomed to taking care of horses? I may find it necessary to employ some one before long."

"Wal, yes, sir; I'm tol'able handy about a stable," replied the negro.

"Hollo, there!" called the man, somewhat sullenly, "drive that cow back here! Why didn't you tell me 't was the boss's orders?"

"Did tell him so ; and he said as how I lied," said Joe, — driving the animals back triumphantly.

The Judge departed with his son, — a thoughtful and aspiring youth, who pondered deeply what he had seen and heard, as he walked by his father's side. And Mr. Williams, greatly relieved and gratified by the interview, hastened to relate to his family the good news. And the praises of Gingerford were on all their tongues, and in their prayers that night he was not forgotten.

Three days after, the Judge's man was dismissed from his place, in consequence of difficulties originating in the affair of the cow. The Judge had sought an early opportunity to converse with him on the subject.

"A negro's cow, Mr. Dorson," said he, "is as good as anybody's cow ; and I consider Mr. Williams as good a man as you are."

The white coachman could not stand that ; and the result was that Gingerford had a black coachman in a few days. The situation was offered to Mr. Williams, and very glad he was to accept it.

VIII.

GINGERFORD'S NEAT REVENGE.

THUS the wrath of man continued to work the welfare of these humble Christians. It is reasonable to doubt whether the Judge was at heart delighted with his new neighbors ; and jolly Mr. Frisbie enjoyed the joke somewhat less, I suspect, than he anticipated. One party enjoyed it nevertheless. It was a serious and solid satisfaction to the Williams family. No member of which, with the exception, perhaps, of Joe, exhibited greater pleasure

at the change in their situation than the old patriarch. It rejuvenated him. His hearing was almost restored. "One move more," he said, "and I shall be young and spry ag'in as the day I got my freedom," — that day, so many, many years ago, which he so well remembered! Well, the "one move more" was near; and the morning of a new freedom, the morning of a more perfect youth and gladness, was not distant.

It was the old man's delight to go out and sit in the sun before the door in the clear December weather, and pull off his cap to the Judge as he passed. To get a bow, and perhaps a kind word, from the illustrious Gingerford, was glory enough for one day, and the old man invariably hurried into the house to tell of it.

But one morning a singular thing occurred. To all appearances — to the eyes of all except one — he remained sitting out there in the sun after the Judge had gone. But Fessenden's looking up suddenly, and, staring at vacancy, cried, —

"Hollo!"

"What, child?" asked Mrs. Williams.

"The old man!" said Fessenden's. "Comin' into the door! Don't ye see him?"

Nobody saw him but the lad; and of course all were astonished by his earnest announcement of the apparition. The old grandmother hastened to look out. There sat her father still, on the bench by the apple-tree, leaning against the trunk. But the sight did not satisfy her. She ran out to him. The smile of salutation was still on his lips, which seemed just saying, "Sârvant, sah," to the Judge. But those lips would never move again. They were the lips of death.

"What is the matter, Williams?" asked the Judge, on his return home that afternoon.

“My gran'ther is dead, sir; and I don't know where to bury him.” This was the negro's quiet and serious answer.

“Dead?” ejaculates the Judge. “Why, I saw him only this morning, and had a smile from him!”

“That was his last smile, sir. You can see it on his face yet. He went to heaven with that smile, we trust.”

The Judge leaves everything and goes home with his coachman. Sure enough! there is the same smile he saw in the morning, frozen on the face of the corpse.

“Gently and late death came to him!” says Gingerford. “Would we could all die as happy! There is no occasion to mourn, my good woman.”

“Bless the Lord, I don't mourn!” replied the old negress. “But I'm so brimful of thanks, I must cry for 't! He died a blessed ole Christian; an' he's gone straight to glory, if there's anything in the promises. He is free now, if he never was afore; — for, though they pretend there a'n't no slaves in this 'ere State, an' the law freed us years ago, seems to me there a'n't no re'l liberty for us, 'cept this!” She pointed at the corpse, then threw up her eyes and hands with an expression of devout and joyful gratitude. “He's gone where there a'n't no predijice agin color, bless the Lord! He's gone where all them that's been washed with the blood of Christ is all of one color in his sight!” Then turning to the Judge, — “And you'll git your reward, sir, be sure o' that!”

“My reward?” And Gingerford, touched with genuine emotion, shook his head sadly.

“Yes, sir, your reward,” repeated the old woman, tenderly arranging the sheet over the still breast and folded hands of the corpse. “For makin' his last days happy, — for makin' his last minutes happy, I may say. That 'ere smile was for you, sir. You was kinder to him 'n folks in gin'ral. He wa'n't used to 't. An' he felt it. An' he's

gone to glory with the news on 't. An' it'll be sot down to your credit there, in the Big Book."

Where was the Judge's eloquence? He could not find words to frame a fitting reply to this ignorant black woman, whose emotion was so much deeper than any fine phrases of his could reach, and whose simple faith and gratitude overwhelmed him with the sudden conviction that he had never yet said anything to the purpose, in all his rhetorical defences of the down-trodden race. From that conviction came humility. Out of humility rose inspiration. Two days later his eloquence found tongue; and this was the occasion of it.

The body of the old negro was to be buried. That he should be simply put into the ground, and nothing said, any more than if he were a brute, did not seem befitting the obsequies of so old a man and so faithful a Christian. The family had natural feelings on that subject. They wanted to have a funeral sermon.

Now it so happened that there was to be another funeral in the village about that time. The old minister, had he been living, might have managed to attend both. But the young minister could not think of such a thing. The loveliest flower of maidenhood in his parish had been cut down. One of the first families had been bereaved. Day and night he must ponder and scribble to prepare a suitable discourse. And then, having exhausted spiritual grace in bedecking the tomb of the lovely, should he — good heavens! *could* he descend from those heights of beauty and purity to the grave of a superannuated negro? Could divine oratory so descend?

“On that fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this *moor*?”

Ought the cup of consolation, which he extended to his best, his worthiest friends and parishioners, to be passed in the same hour to thick African lips?

Which questions were, of course, decided in the negative. There was another minister in the village, but he was sick. What should be done? To go wandering about the world in search of somebody to preach the funeral sermon seemed a hard case, — as Mr. Williams remarked to the Judge.

“Tell you what, Williams,” said the Judge, — “don’t give yourself any more trouble on that account. I’m not a minister, nor half good enough for one,” — he could afford to speak disparagingly of himself, the beautiful, gracious gentleman! — “but if you can’t do any better, I’ll be present and say a few words at the funeral.”

“Thank you a thousand times!” said the grateful negro. “Could n’t be nothin’ better ’n that! We never expected no such honor; an’ if my ole gran’ther could have knowed you would speak to his funeral, he’d have been proud, sir!”

“He was a simple-minded old soul!” replied the Judge, pleasantly. “And you’re another, Williams! However, I’m glad you are satisfied. So this difficulty is settled, too.” For already one very serious difficulty had been arranged through this man’s kindness.

Did I neglect to mention it, — how, when the old negro died, his family had no place to bury him? The rest of his race, dying before him, had been gathered to the mother’s bosom in distant places: long lines of dusky ancestors in Africa; a few descendants in America, — here and there a grave among New England hills. Only one, a child of Mr. Williams’s, had died in Timberville, and been placed in the old burying-ground over yonder. But that was now closed against interments. And as for purchasing a lot in the new cemetery, — how could poor Mr. Williams ever hope to raise money to pay for it?

“Williams,” said the Judge, “I own several lots there, and if you’ll be a good boy, I’ll make you a present of one.”

Ah, Gingerford! Gingerford! was it pure benevolence that prompted the gift? Was the smile with which you afterwards related the circumstance to dear Mrs. Gingerford a smile of sincere satisfaction at having done a good action and witnessed the surprise and gratitude of your black coachman? Tell us, was it altogether an accident, with no tincture whatever of pleasant malice in it, that the lot you selected, out of several, to be the burial-place of negroes, lay side by side with the proud family-vault of your neighbor Frisbie?

The Judge was one of those cool heads, who, when they have received an injury, do not go raving of it up and down, but put it quietly aside, and keep their temper, and rest content to wait patiently, perhaps years, perhaps a lifetime, for the opportunity of a sudden and pat revenge. Indeed, I suppose he would have been well satisfied to answer Frisbie's spite with the nobler revenge of magnanimity and smiling forbearance, had not the said opportunity presented itself. It was a temptation not to be resisted. And he, the most philanthropical of men, proved himself capable of being also the most cruel.

There, in the choicest quarter of the cemetery, shone the white ancestral monuments of the Frisbies. Death, the leveller, had not, somehow, levelled them, — proud and pretentious even in their tombs. You felt, as you read the sculptured record of their names and virtues, that even their ashes were better than the ashes of common mortals. They rendered sacred not only the still enclosure where they lay, but all that beautiful sunny bank; so that nobody else had presumed to be buried near them, but a space of many square rods on either side was left still unappropriated, — until now, when, lo! here comes a black funeral, and the corpse of one who had been a slave in his day, to profane the soil!

IX.

TWO FUNERALS.

NOR is this all, alas ! There comes not one funeral procession only. The first has scarcely entered the cemetery when a second arrives. Side by side the dead of this day are to be laid : our old friend the negro, and the lovely young lady we have mentioned, — even the fairest of Mr. Frisbie's own children.

For it is she. The sweetest of the faces Fessenden's saw that stormy night at the window, and yearned to be with in the bright room where the fire was, — that dear warm face is cold in yonder coffin which the afflicted family are attending to the tomb.

And Frisbie, as we have somewhere said, loved his children. And in the anguish of his bereavement he had not heeded the singular and somewhat humiliating fact that his daughter had issued from the portal of Time in company with one of his most despised tenants, — that, in the same hour, almost at the same moment, Death had summoned them, leading them together, as it were, one with his right hand and one with his left, the way of all the world. So that here was a surprise for the proud and grief-smitten parent.

“What is all that, Stephen ?” he demands, with sudden consternation.

“It seems to be another funeral, sir. They 're buryin' somebody next lot to yours.”

“Who, who, Stephen ?”

“I — I ruther guess it's the old nigger, sir,” says Stephen.

The mighty man is shaken. Wrath and sorrow and

insulted affection convulse him for a moment. His face grows purple, then pale, and he struggles with his neck-cloth, which is choking him. He sees the tall form of Gingerford at the grave, and knows what it is to wish to murder a man. Were those two Christian neighbors quite alone, in this solitude of the dead, I fear one of them would soon be a fit subject for a coroner's inquest and an epitaph. O pride and hatred! with what madness can you inspire a mortal man! O Fessenden's! bless thy stars that thou art not the only fool alive this day, nor the greatest!

Fessenden's walked alone to the funeral, talking by himself, and now and then laughing. Gentleman Bill thought his conduct indecorous, and reproved him for it.

"Gracious!" said the lad, "don't you see who I'm talkin' with?"

"No, sir, — I can't say I see anybody, sir."

"No?" exclaimed the astonished youth. "Why, it's the old man, goin' to his own funeral!"

This, you may say, was foolishness; but, O, it was innocent and beautiful foolishness, compared with that of Frisbie and his sympathizers, when they discovered the negro burial, and felt that their mourning was too respectable to be the near companion of the mourning of those poor blacks, and that their beautiful dead was too precious to be laid in the earth beside their dead.

What could be done? Indignation and sorrow availed nothing. The tomb of the lovely was prepared, and it only remained to pity the affront to her ashes, as she was committed to the chill depths amid silence and choking tears. It is done; and the burial of the old negro is deferentially delayed until the more aristocratic rites are ended.

Gingerford set the example of standing with his hat off in the yellow sunshine and wintry air, with his noble head

bowed low, while the last prayer was said at the maiden's sepulture. Then he lifted up his face, radiant; and the flashing and rainbow-spanned torrent of his eloquence broke forth. He had reserved his forces for this hour. He had not the Williams family and their friends alone for an audience, but many who had come to attend the young lady's funeral remained to hear the Judge. It was worth their while. Finely as he had discoursed at the hut of the negroes, before the corpse was brought out, that was scarcely the time, that was certainly not the place, for a crowning effort of his genius. But here his larger audience, the open air, the blue heavens, the graves around, the burial of the young girl side by side with the old slave, all contributed to inspire him. Human brotherhood, universal love, the stern democracy of death, immortality, — these were his theme. Life, incrustated with conventionalities; Death, that strips them all away. This is the portal (pointing to the grave) at which the soul drops all its false encumbrances, — rank, riches, sorrow, shame. It enters naked into eternity. There worldly pride and arrogance have no place. There false judgment goes out like a sick man's night-lamp, in the morning light of truth. In the courts of God only spiritual distinctions prevail. That you were a lord in this life will be of no account there, where the humblest Christian love is preferred before the most brilliant selfishness, — where the master is degraded, and the servant is exalted. And so forth, and so forth; a brief but eloquent address, of which it is to be regretted that no report exists.

Then came the prayer, — for the Judge had a gift that way too; and the tenderness and true feeling with which he spoke of the old negro and the wrongs of his race drew tears from many eyes. Then a hymn was sung, — those who had stayed to sneer joining their voices seriously with those of the lowly mourners.

X.

REVENGE OF THE FRISBIE FACTION.

“WHAT did I tell you?” says Gingerford, walking familiarly arm in arm with his son James, not long after, — a beautiful sight, to friendly village eyes, as perhaps he is aware. (Does he not hear in fancy the whispers of admiring elderly ladies? — “What a charming picture of father and son! How fond and proud they are of each other!” for the Judge, as we know, is human.) “Who ridicules us now? Our good friend Frisbie could not do us a real injury; we have transmuted his base coin into gold. Look at these people”; and the elegant Gingerford touches his hat, smilingly, to one and another. “They are all on our side, James.”

But the sagacious man is for once mistaken. The Frisbie faction is still strong in town; and, while many have been won over from it by the Judge's admirable behavior towards his colored neighbors, others of its adherents, more violent than ever in their animosity towards him and them since his neat retort upon Frisbie, are even now meditating mischief.

Not directly against Gingerford, — they know too well how the blows of malice recoil from that polished shield of his. Their aim is lower; it is levelled at his black friends over the way. Frisbie himself, sick enough of his own sorry jest, and tired of his tenants, was still too proud to molest them further, — and, let us believe, too humane. The poor, stricken, humbled parent kept his own counsel, and certainly gave no encouragement to the leaders of the plot; perhaps he was not even aware of it. But did not Stephen know his master's secret mind?

“Of course he won't do anything to get the niggers out of his house, since he has moved them in it; but do you think he's such a fool that he won't be glad to have us do the job, while he knows nothing about it?”

Stephen is animated particularly by his hatred of Gentleman Bill; and he has for a confederate one who is moved by a still stronger personal resentment, — the man Dorson, Gingerford's late coachman, whose wrongs are burning to be revenged on his successor; while pure and unadulterated prejudice against color inspires the rest of the whispering, skulking crew that surround the negro's house this wild March night.

It is Saturday evening again, and late. The village lights are out, or going out, all save one, — this which shines through the dingy curtains of the negro's hut; for these dark-skinned children of the Night are sadly inclined to keep late hours. Within you see, seated, in his shirt-sleeves, with his legs crossed and his foot resting upon the wood-box, Gentleman Bill, taking his ease after his week's work in the shop, and occasionally making a quiet observation. At the other side of the stove is Joe, playing at checkers with Fessenden's, who, feeble-minded in many things, showed an aptitude for that game. Again the two girls are putting away the supper dishes, their mother is mending a garment, the old grandmother is nodding over her knitting, and Mr. Williams, with spectacles on nose, is turning the leaves of the old Bible.

“Seems to me the winders in this house rattle more 'n they used to be accustomed to,” remarks the gentleman of the family as the gusts of wind smite the sashes. “Antiquated old shell, rather.”

“What 's ant-acquainted?” grins woolly-headed Joe, looking up from his game of checkers. “Any relation to uncle-acquainted?”

“O father!” says Bill, despairingly, “a’n’t that child ever going to have a suitable bringing up?”

“What about that child?” says the grandmother, jealously, suddenly waking and plying her knitting-needles.

“I was speaking of the old house,” replies Bill. “Loose in the jints, since it was moved; hardly a fit residence for a respectable, growing family.”

“Now don’t you say a word ag’inst the old house!” retorts the grandmother. “I’d as soon you’d go to ’busin’ me. It’s been a home to us ever sence afore you was born, and it’s a good home yit. The Lord has presarved it to us, and I trust he’ll presarve it still, — anyways till I’m ready to move to my long home. Then, if you want a better house, I hope you’ll find it.”

“I did n’t mean no disrespect to the venerable tenement, granny. But you see it’s really gitting too small; very much deficient in room, ’specially since I brought home a permanent boarder on my back,” — with a glance at Fessenden’s.

“That’s a mos’ ongrateful remark, William! We should n’t have the ole house at all, if ’t wa’n’t for him. Ye brought good luck into it, when ye brought him in, an’ it’s stayed with us ever sence, bless the boy! Don’t ye go to pickin’ no flaws in the Lord’s blessin’s; if ye do they’ll be took away from us, sure!”

“You quite misapprehend the drift of my observation,” says Bill, and gives a sudden start. “By George! that wa’n’t no winder rattling!”

“Sounded to me like a stone throwed agin the clabboards,” remarks Mr. Williams, mildly anxious, looking up from his book.

The stalwart young black steps quietly to a window, on the side of the house struck by the missile, and lifts a corner of the curtain. “Jes’ le’ me ketch any feller up to

that sort o' thing, that 's all!" quoth he, with a menacing laugh.

He sees darkness without, and nothing more. But unfortunately his head, defined upon the background of the lamp-lighted room, presents a tempting mark to his enemy, Stephen, at that moment lurking behind a pile of the family stove-wood, a stick of which is in his hand.

The two checker-players give little heed to the disturbance; and now suddenly Joe springs from his chair, overturning it, and shrieking triumphantly, "King-row! king-row! crown him!" performs a sort of wild war-dance about the room, and sits down again, under his brother's severe reproof.

"Keep quiet, can't ye? you young barbarian! Don't you see I'm reconnoitring? Hush!"

An instant of deep silence followed, then came a crash at the window. At the same time fragments of glass struck Gentleman Bill's face and shirt-bosom, and a club, — a stick of green stove-wood, in short, — its force broken by the sash, fell into the room at his feet.

Alarm and consternation entered with it: the checker-board was overturned; the girls dropped a dish or two; Bill, brandishing the club, rushed to the door, his father calling to him and trying to hold him back.

"No, sir!" cries the athletic young fellow. "A head gits cracked for this!"

He flings the door open, and leaps out, to be met by a shower of small stove-wood, hurled by assailants shielded from sight by the outer darkness, while the light streaming from within exposes him to view. Perceiving the odds against him, the young man hurls his club and retreats into the room with blood trickling from a gash in his cheek. One stick enters with him, whizzes past the elder Williams's grizzled locks, and strikes the stove-

pipe with no small clatter, before the door is closed and barred.

"Guess they thought I did n't bring in wood enough!" says Fessenden's, laying the stick in the box. "But they better take care!"

Mrs. Williams and the girls begin to sob and cry. The old grandmother hastens to stanch Bill's wound, saying to Joe by the way, "Under the bed, deary! You'll git hurted!" Bill pushes her off: "Never mind a little blood! More'll flow 'fore this little business is finished!" And he snatches an axe from the corner.

"Be quiet! they're knocking!" says mild Mr. Williams, laying his hand on his son's arm.

"Let Bill fire the old axe at 'em!" gibbers Joe, peeping affrighted from beneath the bed.

"Just open the door sudden for answer!" says Bill, holding the weapon ready, his eyes gleaming wickedly.

"That won't do, William.—What do you want out there?"

The knocking ceases, and a voice replies: "We've come to clean you out. Agree to quit this house and this town within a week, and it's all right; we give you that time."

"I pay Mr. Frisbie rent for this house," humbly suggests Mr. Williams.

"Can't help that. We've got tired of niggers in this town, and we're going to be rid of you."

"But if we agree to stay?" Bill shouts back.

"You'll have to go. If you stick, some of ye'll get hurt, and your house'll come down," roars the voice outside.

"I know that man!" says Fessenden's, recognizing the voice. "He would n't let your cows in Judge's yard."

"Dorson!" remarks Bill. "Jest open, father, and he'll be a head shorter in no time!"

"Do it, pappy!" cries Mrs. Williams, with sudden fire blazing through her tears.

"It is written, 'Thou shalt not kill,'" replies the pious Williams.

"Do you promise?" demands Dorson.

"No, I can't promise that," says the negro. "We have no other house to go to, and we shall try to stay here as long as Mr. Frisbie allows us. We mean to be peaceable, law-abiding people, and to merit no good man's ill-will; and why should you persecute us in this way?"

"We have trusted the Lord so fur, and mean to trust him still," adds the quavering treble of the old woman's earnest voice.

"See, then, if the Lord will keep your door from tumbling in!" And there is a sound of retreating footsteps.

"Why did n't ye fire the axe, Bill? why did n't ye fire the axe?" squeaks Joe, showing the whites of his eyes under a corner of the bed-quilt.

"Trust the Lord! trust the Lord!" the old woman kept saying, with exalted energy.

"Trust the Lord!" echoed Fessenden's, in a loud voice, seized by one of his strange fits of inspiration. "You won't lose your house; they say so!"

"Who says so?" demanded Bill.

"The angels!"

"Go to thunder with your angels!" exclaimed the impatient young black, irreverently. "They're coming again! Now, father!"

As he spoke the door burst in with a great crash, followed by the but-end of a stick of timber which had been used as a battering-ram. As that was precipitately retiring, axe-wielding Gentleman Bill rushed out after it, but came to grief before he could strike a blow; the muffled villains who carried it flung it down at sight of him, and

the heavy end, striking his shin, fell thence upon his foot. The axe dropped from his hand, and he lay howling, when Mr. Williams ran to his rescue.

"They 'll kill you, pappy!" shrieked Mrs. Williams, trying to support the broken door.

"I won't let 'em; but they may kill me!" cried that simple fellow, Fessenden's; and, running out, he placed himself, resolute and erect, between the negroes and their assailants. "Don't hit them, hit me!" he called out, in perfect sincerity and earnest self-devotion.

I do not suppose that even the most depraved of the rioters was bad enough to intend the poor innocent lad a serious harm. But he was in their way; and in the excitement of the moment a billet of hard wood was flung at the negroes. Its pointed end struck his temple, and he staggered back towards the house, following Mr. Williams, who was helping Gentleman Bill across the threshold.

XI.

CONSEQUENCES.

THE rioters seemed aware that a grave accident had occurred, and to be frightened at their own work. The shattered door was closed, and in an instant all was silent about the hut, except the wind. And when, a minute later, the door was boldly opened again, and Mr. Williams appeared, fearless of missiles, calling loudly, "Help! will somebody bring help, for mercy's sake!" the dispersing mob, in still greater alarm, skulked off, and made no sign. As if they, who had committed a deed of darkness, could be expected now to come forward and expose themselves by answering that appeal!

Mr. Williams goes back into the hut, but reappears presently, and is hurrying into the street, when he sees a lantern coming over towards him from the Judge's gate.

"That you, Williams?" cries Gingerford, meeting him. "What's the matter? Where are you going?"

"I was going for you first, then for the doctor." And Williams relates in a few words what has chanced.

"I heard the villains!" says the Judge, striding towards the hut. "They shall rue this night, if there is law in the land!"

He has regained his self-control when he enters and looks upon the pallid face and lifeless form of the simple boy lying upon the bed, with the women bending over him, trying to bring back to that shattered clay sense and breath.

Williams returns with the doctor, and now excited neighbors — for the noise of the riot has got abroad — begin to come in; among them, our friend Frisbie, accompanied by Stephen, looking pale. They find Gingerford, with his coat off, chafing one of the hands of the murdered boy.

"Gentlemen," says the Judge, stepping back to make room for the doctor, "you see what has been done!"

"How did it happen?" falters poor Frisbie, very much disturbed.

"Yes!" exclaims Stephen, with conspicuous innocence, "how did it happen?"

"It was a perfectly murderous attack!" cries Gentleman Bill, nursing his broken shin in the corner. "They had smashed that winder, and the door, — the fiends incarnate, — and disfigured my features with a club; and when I rushed out to defend the domicile, they flung a big beam at my legs, — crippled me, as you see; then as my father went to pick me up, and the clubs kept coming,

that boy sacrificed himself; he rushed between us and the cowardly attackers, and got a stick side the head. That's the history, gentlemen."

"Who were they?" demands the flushed Frisbie.

"Ay, ay! who were they?" echoes the virtuous Stephen.

"I a'n't prepared to give evidence on that p'int, though one or two of 'em is known," says Gentleman Bill, significantly.

Frisbie makes a choking effort to speak, and finally addresses his much-hated neighbor: "Judge Gingerford, you and I have had some political differences, and perhaps personal misunderstandings, but about this thing we feel alike. No man can abominate such proceedings more than I do."

"I am relieved to hear you say it," replies the Judge; "and, believing that you speak sincerely, I offer you my hand."

Frisbie, flustered, could not well refuse this magnanimously proffered token of reconciliation; and the Judge's shining behavior shed something of its lustre even upon him. The spectators were so much affected by this scene, that Stephen immediately turned and offered his hand to Gentleman Bill, who wrung it with a sardonic grin.

"Excuse me, my friends," said Frisbie, looking very apoplectic in the face, "but I left a sick child at home; I was watching with her when Stephen came to tell me there was a disturbance in the village."

"I had heard a noise and gone out to the stable, thinking it was the horses," Stephen makes haste to explain.

"Now, if I can do nothing, I will go back to my sick child," adds Frisbie. "What do you think, doctor?"

"The boy is dead," replies the doctor, quietly, having completed his examination.

"He died for us!" exclaimed the old negress, bending with devoutly clasped hands over the foot of the bed. "He gave up his life for us poor colored folks, when the children of the Evil One surrounded us. He was simple in his mind; but he done all a Christian could do. I bless the Lord for him, for he was a child of God, and he has gone to be an angel with the rest."

Then Mrs. Williams and the girls came and wept over the pale corpse, and Joe, moved by the contagion of grief, sent up a wild wail of woe that filled the hut.

XII.

A STRANGER VISITS THE GRAVE.

OF course there was an inquest, and of course the whole thing was duly reported in the newspapers; in consequence of which a stranger from a neighboring county drove into the village one afternoon, and, after making some inquiries of persons he met, reined up at the negro's hut. As he declined to alight (for good reasons, apparently, being a man of such marvellous ponderosity that, once out of the buggy, which his breadth of beam completely filled, it were a wonder how he could ever get back into it again), Mr. Williams, who had just finished his dinner, went out to speak with him.

He had come to get some particulars concerning the inquest and the subject of it.

"About the boy," said Mr. Williams; "I suppose I can tell you as much as anybody; but about the inquest you'd better see the coroner or Judge Gingerford."

"The inquest did n't seem to be very satisfactory," remarked the stranger, with slow, measured words from broad, unctuous lips.

"They brought in that he come to his death at the hands of some person or persons unknown. Some have been suspected, but the only one we felt pretty sure of has run off, — that was the man Dorson. 'T was better so, I suppose."

"I think justice on the offenders would have been more in the interest of religion and good morals," said the stranger, with grave emphasis. "And have you no personal resentment?"

"What would be the good of that?" replied Williams. "The feeling in town is so strong ag'inst 'em, I don't believe they'll molest us in futur'. And for what they've done, I believe they'll find punishment enough in their own consciences. So we all feel except my son that had his leg hurt; he is pretty hot ag'inst 'em yet, but he'll feel better as his leg gits well."

"Did the boy have suitable burial?"

"Yes, sir, I should say so; I'll go and show you where, if you like."

"It might be a satisfaction to see his grave," remarked the stranger; and, with the negro walking beside the buggy, he drove over to the new cemetery.

"This is my lot, sir," said Williams. "It was given me by the Judge when my old gran'ther died. This new grave is the one, — next to Mr. Frisbie's lot. We had a regular sermon by a minister, and a fine one it was, though he did n't say no such beautiful words as the Judge said over my old gran'ther. But that could n't have been expected; there a'n't another such a man in the world as Judge Gingerford! He has had his enemies, but I believe they're turning about to be his friends.

Mr. Frisbie was very much displeased because he gave us this lot, but he is getting over it. He has had another child very sick, — he buried one here the very day my old gran'ther was laid in the ground ; and the Judge has been to speak friendly words to him ; and my old mother is over there now, nussing the girl, — they found it hard to git a good nuss ; and, sir, even Mr. Frisbie appears very much different towards us now."

"I learn that you behaved in a very Christian manner towards this boy. As I have some interest in him, I shall wish to reward you for your trouble." And the fat man took out a fat pocket-book.

"Excuse me, sir," said Williams, "but I could n't tech no pay for what we done for him, no way in the world. He was a blessing to us from the time he come into our house, and he has left a blessing with us. The angels sent him to us, — he always said they did, and I believe him."

"He had curious notions about the angels," said the stranger, with a peculiar smile. "His friends tried to teach him differently, but he was singularly obstinate about certain things ; I even — perhaps they were too harsh with him, in the way of their duty. Justice is justice, and I must insist upon your taking some compensation ; this is very slight."

He held two or three bills in his hand, and Williams could see that one of them bore the figures "100," — more money than he had ever possessed. Still it would have seemed to him like the price of blood, had he taken it ; and reluctantly at last the man put the notes back into his pocket.

"May I ask, are you a relative of his ?" said Williams, as they parted at the cemetery gate.

"O no ; he has wealthy relatives, though they do not

care to be publicly known as such ; his mental infirmity — you understand.”

“Then may I ask if you —”

“I was only employed to take care of him. My name,” said the stranger, touching up his horse, “is — Fessenden.”

Not long after, Mr. Williams had the remains of his child taken from the old burying-ground, and laid beside the patriarch. Simple tombstones marked the spot, and commemorated the old man's extreme age and early bondage.

Another tablet, of pure white marble, was erected over the grave of the simple boy, bearing the device of a dove, and this inscription, — chosen from the old grandmother's words, —

“A Child of God.”

Need we say that the hand of Judge Gingerford was in all these things ?

After the outrage upon the Williams family, in the full flush of public indignation and sympathy, the sagacious man had caused a subscription paper to circulate for their benefit. That he should lead off the list with a liberal figure was natural, it was characteristic of the superb Gingerford ; but that the very next name on the paper, pledging an equal sum, should have been FRISBIE'S, was astonishing to Timberville, — to everybody, in point of fact, except the Judge, who had warily chosen his moment, and who knew his man.

Such a beginning insured the success of the paper. And yet that success did not account for the fact, that, after funereal and lapidary expenses had been paid, Gingerford, treasurer of the fund, had still five hundred dollars of it

left in his hands! As poor Mr. Williams declared with tearful eyes that his folks had no use for so much money, what did the Judge do with it but build them a new house, — “really a residence, a mansion,” as Gentleman Bill termed it, — upon a lot purchased for the purpose, situated not quite in front of the Judge’s, not exactly under the Gingerford windows, as fastidious readers will be pleased to know. How large a part of all that money had passed through the portly pocket-book of the portly stranger, and was in fact the origin of the fund which had been devised to cover it, Williams, fortunately for his peace of mind, never surmised.

Early in the spring — But no more! Have n’t we already prolonged our sketch to an intolerable length, considering the subject of it? Not a lover in it! and, of course, it is preposterous to think of making a readable story without one. Why did n’t we make young Gingerford in love with — let’s see — Miss Frisbie? and Miss Frisbie’s brother (it would have required but a stroke of the pen to give her one) in love with — Creshy Williams? What melodramatic difficulties might have been built upon this foundation! And as for Fessenden’s, he should have turned out to be the son of either Gingerford or Frisbie! But it is too late now. We acknowledge our fatal mistake. Who cares for the fortunes of a miserable negro family? Who cares for a — Fessenden’s?

ARCHIBALD BLOSSOM, BACHELOR.



I.

MR. BLOSSOM HEARS BAD NEWS.

MR. BENJAMIN BLOSSOM was guilty of three faults which his brother Archy, the bachelor, could not forgive: first, having a family; second, going to California; and, lastly, dying when he got there.

The news of the lamented Blossom's decease was brought to Archy one morning, like Cleopatra's asp, with his breakfast. The surviving brother, unconscious of the sting prepared for him, comfortably seated himself to nibble the bread of single-blessedness, spread his landlady's neat white napkin on his lap, tucking the corners into the armholes of his waistcoat, stirred his coffee, read the morning paper, ate three eggs out of the shell with a little ivory scoop, and finally broke the seal of the feminine-looking envelope beside his plate.

"I knew there was something deused disagreeable in that letter!" said Archy, turning first purple and then pale. "The best I can do, I am always being made a victim!"

The epistle was from the mother of Benjamin's children; and in a cramped chirography, and a style full of grammatical errors, italics, and tears, indicating a good deal of grief and not much education, it informed the bachelor that his sister-in-law was a widdow (with two *d*'s), and his

nephews and nieces "orfens." The news would have been very apt to spoil his breakfast, but for the precaution he had taken to open the eggs before he did the letter.

Archy walked the room with his napkin, and thought of a good many things, — poor Ben dying away off there, among strangers, and, no doubt, in very improper clothes ; how he (the surviving brother) would look in black ; and what was his duty respecting Priscilla and her orphans.

"There is no other way, as I see," he mused, wiping his forehead with the napkin, "but to submit, and be a victim ! Think of me, Archibald Blossom, suddenly called to be the father of four little Blossoms ; and a brother to her whose heart is left destitoot-t, double-o, t, toot !" groaned Archy, holding the letter up to the light. "Poor woman ! poor woman ! no doubt she was too much afflicted to give attention to her spelling. A brother to her ! I wonder she did n't say a husband, while she was about it !" And Archy smiled a grim smile in the glass, mentally contrasting his fastidious habits of life with the disagreeable ties and duties of paternity.

To the bachelor's love of nicety and sleepless solicitude for himself was joined an amiable disposition which was forever getting the other traits into trouble. On the present occasion he was perfectly well aware, as we have seen, that he was to be made a victim ; nevertheless, even while heaping reproaches upon the late Benjamin, calling his children brats, and cursing the man who first invented widows, he resolved to visit his brother's family, — brushed his wig, colored his whiskers, packed a carpet-bag, and made other preparations for the pious pilgrimage. It was the first time he had ever thought of fulfilling the Scriptural injunction, "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" ; although it had long been a personal habit of his to keep himself, literally, "unspotted from the world."

II.

A VISIT TO THE WIDOW AND FATHERLESS.

It was half a day's journey from Archy's residence in town to the rural locality which he had no doubt was all this time resounding with the lamentations of the bereaved family. Arrived at the village hotel, he ordered a room and supper; and, after the necessary ablutions and refreshments, and certain studious moments devoted to his attire, he set out, with his immaculate waistcoat and gold-headed cane, to walk to the Blossom cottage.

It was Archy's first advent in the place; a chronic dislike of scenes rustic and domestic having hitherto deterred him from venturing upon a visit. He was surprised to find the little town so charming. It was the close of a pleasant June day; the sunset was superb, the air cool and sweet, the foliage of the sunlit trees thick and refulgent.

"Really," said Archy to himself, snuffing the odor of roses and pinks that breathed from somewhere about a green-embowered cottage, — "really, and upon my soul, a man might pass an hour or two in this place quite agreeably! Young man," — accosting a village youth, in soiled shirt-sleeves and patched trousers, who approached, pushing a loaded wheelbarrow before him on the sidewalk, — "can you inform me where Mrs. Blossom lives?"

"P'scill Blossom?" said the village youth, setting down the wheelbarrow and tucking up his shirt-sleeves.

"Mrs. Benjamin Blossom," replied Archy, with dignity.

"That 's P'scill," said the village youth, twisting his mouth into a queer expression, and eying Archy with a slant, shrewd leer. "You 've come past. Foller me, and I 'll show ye. Look out for your shins!"

He spat upon his hands, rubbed them together, and once more addressed himself to the wheelbarrow. Archy stepped aside and walked behind. The young man turned up to the fence that enclosed the green-embowered cottage, from about which breathed the delightful odor of pinks and roses.

“Wish you ’d jest open that gate,” said he, holding the wheelbarrow.

Archy, who was unaccustomed to opening gates for people, stood amazed at this audacity. But the young man repeating his request, he concluded to take a benevolent and humorous view of the matter, and, stepping before the wheel, rendered the service.

“Clear the track now!” And the young man began to push.

“Hold! take care!” cried Archy, in peril of his legs. “You scoundrel!” He flourished his cane. But as the wheelbarrow continued to advance, his alternative was either to suffer a collision or retreat. Preferring the latter, he went backward into the yard. Going backward into the yard, he struck his heel against the border of a flower-bed. Striking his heel, he tripped, as was natural, and lost his balance, being unable to recover which, he made a formidable plunge, falling in the most awkward of all positions. His cane flew into the air, his hat into the bushes, and instantly he found himself deeply seated amidst some of the aforesaid odorous pinks and roses.

“Hello! look out! darnation!” ejaculated the youth of the wheelbarrow; “tumblin’ over them beds! P’scill ’ll be in your hair!” Which last allusion prompted the unfortunate Mr. Blossom to catch at his wig, that useful article having found a closer affinity with a rosebush than with the head to which it belonged.

“Young man!” said Archy, regaining his feet and gath-

ering up his hat and stick, "you deserve to be caned within an inch of your life!"

"Do I, though?" and the youth's shrewd leer brightened into an expression of sparkling fun. "I ha'n't done noth'n', only showed you where we live."

"Who cares where you live?" retorted Archy, pale and agitated, hastily brushing his clothes. "You remorseless idiot! I inquired for Mrs. Blossom's house."

"Wal, a'n't I showin' ye? This is our house; I'm her cousin," said the youth. "I a'n't to blame, as I see, for your goin' on to the bed backwards."

"I must always be a victim!" growled Archy, using his handkerchief for a duster. "Young man, I am Benjamin Blossom's brother, and I wish to see Mrs. Blossom."

"Jimmyneddy!" cried the youth, "be ye, though? Darned if I did n't think you was the new minister! I would n't have done it — I mean, I did n't mean to — lemme brush off the dirt!" And he fell to using his unwashed hands about Archy's person with a freedom more alarming than any quantity of unadulterated dirt. The poor bachelor was endeavoring to defend himself when a young woman appeared, coming out of the house, and inquiring eagerly what was the trouble.

A young woman, — she might have been forty; but she was still fresh and good-looking, with a plump figure, hazel eyes, a genuine complexion, teeth that were teeth, beautiful hair of her own, and a pleasing smile. The smile beamed, and at the same time the hazel eyes shone through tears, when the youth of the wheelbarrow announced Mr. Blossom's brother

"O dear, good brother Archy!" she exclaimed, with something between a sob and cry of joy.

"My afflicted sister —" began Archy, who had composed a pathetic little speech, appropriate to the occasion.

He paused, either from forgetfulness or emotion. As she made a movement indicative of falling into his arms, he opened them. Seeing them opened, she could do no less than fall into them. So the afflicted couple embraced, and Mrs. Benjamin Blossom wept upon Mr. Archibald Blossom's shoulder.

"To think we should meet, for the first time since my marriage, on such an occasion!" murmured Mrs. Blossom.

"You have changed very little since that time," said Archy, gallantly, regarding her at arm's-length.

"Brother Archy," faltered Priscilla, wiping her eyes, "this is my cousin, Cyrus Drole." And the bachelor was formally introduced to the youth of the wheelbarrow.

Cyrus offered to shake hands, and Archy, after some hesitation, gave him two fingers.

"And these," said Mrs. Blossom, "are my — his — his children!" — meaning her late husband's, *not* the grinning Cyrus's. She burst into tears, and catching up the youngest of the lamented Benjamin's progeny, as they came running out of the house, almost smothered it with kisses.

Archy took out his handkerchief again, wiped first the two fingers Cyrus had shaken, and then his eyes.

"Poor little dears!" he said, much affected. "How could Benjamin ever leave for a moment so — so interesting a family!"

"Benjie — Phidie — Archy," Mrs. Blossom called the names of the three older children according to their ages, "this is your uncle, — your kind, dear uncle, — your father's only brother, and now all the father you have left!" More sobs, of the choking species. "Kiss your good uncle!"

"Dear little ones — yes!" said Archy, "give your uncle a kiss! (I am going to be a victim, — I know I am!" he added, in a parenthesis, to himself.) "There! there! there!" embracing the three children in succession, but

invariably allowing the kisses to explode before their faces touched his, and then putting them immediately away. He was congratulating himself on having done up this little business so handsomely, when Mrs. Blossom reminded him.

“This is the youngest, — the baby, brother Archy; don’t forget the baby!”

“Bless his little heart, no,” said Archy, gayly fencing with his forefinger; “tut-tut! cock-a-doodle-do! Really, and upon my soul, what a fine boy it is!”

“But it’s a girl,” said Priscilla, hugging the frightened little thing to keep it from crying.

“O, indeed! my mistake! But it’s all the same till they get their baby frocks off,” replied Archy. And the procession moved into the house, Cyrus Drole bringing up the rear. Priscilla, hastily emptying the large rocking-chair of a cat, two kittens, and a doll, offered her brother-in-law a seat.

“That’s my pussy!” said Benjie (young Blossom number one, æt. 7).

“My doll!” screamed Phidie (number two, æt. 5).

“Mamma’s chair!” cried little Blossom number three; and before Archy the uncle could sit down, Archy the nephew had scrambled into it.

“Archy, my dear,” remonstrated the mother, “get down and give his uncle the chair.”

But Archy, laying hold of the arms with both hands, began to rock with all his might, his bright eyes glistening, and his curls shaking merrily about his cheeks. Thereupon the uncle quietly helped himself to another chair, which Priscilla hastened to dust with her apron before she would suffer him to sit down.

“Say, P’scill!” cried Cyrus, who had gone into the kitchen to wash himself; and he appeared at the sitting-room door, rubbing his hands in a profuse foam of soft-

soap and water, -- "say! wa'n't it queer I should take Uncle Archy for a minister?"

"He calls me uncle too!" inwardly groaned the bachelor.

"You have n't been to tea, I suppose?" observed Priscilla, setting out the table, and putting up a leaf. Archy said he had taken tea at the hotel. "Indeed! Are you sure? That was n't very kind in you, brother Archibald!"

The young widow was reluctantly putting down the leaf, with many expressions of regret, when all were startled by a sound of shivered glass, and Phidie (abbreviation of Sophia) uttered a cry of alarm.

"O ma! look at Cilly!" (Blossom number four, æt. 2, named after her mother.) She had got Uncle Archy's cane, and had tested the virtue of the pretty gold head by putting it through a window-pane.

"Why, Cilly! what has she done?" exclaimed her mother.

Cilly began to cry. At that moment young Archy rocked over. Another cry. The benevolent bachelor sprang to lift up his namesake from beneath the overturned chair, and, stooping, struck his head against Phidie's nose. Third cry added to the chorus. Mrs. Blossom, meanwhile, was occupied in running over Benjie, whose fingers she had previously pinched by too suddenly dropping the table-leaf when the alarm was given. At the same time Cyrus, with his soapy hands, ran to the rescue, and took the cane from the affrighted and screaming Cilly.

"What did I tell you, Archibald Blossom?" said the bachelor to himself. "I knew perfectly well you would be a victim!" And stepping back upon a kitten's tail, he elicited a squall of pain from the feline proprietress of the pinched appendage, and a mew of solicitude from the maternal cat.

For a few minutes the domestic confusion in the cottage

surpassed the most dreadful scenes the bachelor's imagination had ever conceived. But the tumult soon passed ; the broken glass was picked up ; the cane (with the streaks of Cyrus's soapy fingers on it) set away ; Phidie's nose washed, which had bled ; and the Blossoms number three and four put to bed, after saying their prayers and kissing, with oozy faces, — or, rather, kissing at, — their Uncle Archy. Benjie and Phidie were suffered to sit up half an hour longer, upon condition that they should behave themselves ; at the expiration of which time they also said their " Now I lay me " and " Our Father " at their mother's knee, greatly to the edification of their uncle, whom they afterward kissed at, with a good-night, on going to bed. Cyrus, in the mean time, had gone to spend his evening at the village stores and bar-rooms ; and now the widow and the surviving brother of the late Benjamin Blossom were left alone together.

III.

MR. ARCHIBALD AND MRS. BENJAMIN.

THE cottage was quiet ; a single lamp was lighted ; the grief-stricken widow took a seat rather near the surviving brother. As they discussed the lamentable news the last steamer had brought, she drew her chair closer still, allowing her head, weighed down by affliction, to droop sympathetically toward his shoulder. Archy was deeply troubled.

" I am more than ever convinced that I shall be a victim," he thought, as he glanced sideways at his companion ; " but, really, and upon my soul, there's something pleasing about her ! "

In the abandonment of grief she let her hand drop upon his knee. She was too much absorbed by her sorrows to think of removing it. Archy experienced a very strange sensation. He had never in his life known anything to produce precisely such an effect as that hand upon his knee; and he wondered if his companion was really aware that it had gone a-visiting. Then Archy suffered his own hand (in the abandonment of grief) to drop near the widow's. There is something magnetic in hands. They attract by laws more subtle than the loadstone's. Two peculiarly charged hands upon the same knee must inevitably touch. Archy's palm lay in the most careless manner upon the back of Priscilla's hand. Gradually his fingers tended to encircle hers; an encouraging movement on her part, then a nestling together of thrilling palms, then an ardent mutual pressure, — and Archy found himself in a position which he would have deemed utterly impossible an hour ago. With that soft, warm, flexible, electric conductor pouring its vital streams into his veins, he comprehended, as never before, how men are entrapped into matrimony. He saw how his brother (the lamented Benjamin) had been entrapped, and forgave him. It was Archy's left hand that clasped Priscilla's left, she sitting upon his right; and now his other arm (all in the abandonment of grief) fell from the top of her chair and lodged near her waist. Her right hand met his, — not to remove it, but to draw it ever so gently about her. At the same time her head, which had been drooping so long, touched his shoulder. Silence, and two deep breaths. Very natural: he had lost a brother, she a husband; and this was consolation.

“My dear sister,” said Archy, “you must not let — ah — circumstances trouble you. I have a little property, — enough to keep me comfortable, — and I have put by a lit-

tle to — to — provide against such a day as this; for I always felt sure Benjamin's projects would turn out in some such way; and, you see, you are not to want for anything, Priscilla —"

"O dear, dear Archy! bless you!" said the widow, with so much emotion that tears were drawn right out of Archy's eyes. "But it is n't money I want! True, I have four children, — they are friendless orphans, — I am poor; but I can work for them with my last breath. It is n't money I want! but sympathy, — a brother's love, — somebody to talk to that knew *him*, — to keep my heart from breaking while my dear children live! O, promise me that!" She clung to Archy. He knew he was a victim, but he also perceived that to be a victim might be sweeter than he had deemed.

IV.

CYRUS.

At this interesting moment the gate clanged, a shuffling of shoes on the stoop-floor followed, and Cyrus Drole walked unceremoniously into the room.

"I am saved!" thought Archy. But it must be confessed he would have preferred not to be saved quite so soon. His chair, as Cyrus entered, was at least a yard and a half from the widow's, and their hands looked perfectly innocent of contact. The hero of the wheelbarrow might have perceived that he was expected to withdraw from the sacred precincts of grief; but he coolly took a chair and sat down, with his hat on.

"Everybody is askin' about Uncle Archy; you'd think the President had come to town!" said Cyrus, tipping

back against the wall, and setting his feet upon the chair-round. "But did n't they all la'f when I told about takin' him for a minister, and runnin' him on to the beds!" And Cyrus chuckled under his hat-brim, hugging his elevated knees.

The two votaries of grief heard these ill-timed words in appropriate solemn silence. Nobody else appearing inclined to talk, Mr. Drole "improved" the occasion. He quoted popular remarks concerning the surviving Mr. Blossom. Elder Spoon's daughter thought he walked "drea'ful stiff"; Miss Brespin, the dressmaker, declared that he winked at her as he passed her window. Archy writhed at this stinging imputation, but contented himself with frowning upon Cyrus.

"Brother Archy don't want to hear all this, Cyrus," interposed the serious-faced Priscilla.

"Jeff Jones said he looked like a horned pout with his white-bellied jacket on!" continued Cyrus. "Cap'in Fling wanted to know if he was an old bach; an' when I said he was, says he, 'I'll bet fifty dollars,' says he, 'he'll marry the widder!' 'If he does,' says Old Cooney, says he, 'he won't look so much as if he'd just walked out of a ban'box time he's been married a month,' says he. I did n't say nothin', but la'ft!"

"Cyrus Drole!" cried the indignant widow, "if you can't behave yourself, you shall go straight to bed. What must Brother Archy think of your impudence?"

"I guess he'll think it's natur'!" laughed Cyrus. "I s'posed you would n't mind, bein' we're all cousins."

Archy had arisen. He inquired, in some agitation, for his hat and cane.

"Why, Brother Archy!" said Priscilla, alarmed, "where are you going?" Archy explained that he had engaged his lodging at the hotel, where his baggage remained. "I

can't bear the thought of your going back there to sleep!" And the widow's tearful eyes looked up pleadingly. "Do stay with us! Cyrus shall go for your carpet-bag!"

Archy said something about "giving trouble." She reproached him tenderly. It would be a comfort, she assured him, to know that he was beneath her roof; and it would soothe her loneliness to remember the pathetic circumstance after he was gone.

"I *am* a victim!" thought Archy; but he could not resist such winning entreaties. Cyrus was despatched for the carpet-bag. He was absent not much more than five minutes; and on his return, placing the article of luggage on the table, he seated himself, tipped against the wall, with his hat on, as before.

"Any time you wish to retire, Brother Archy, —" suggested the widow's softened voice.

Archy cast a scowling glance at Cyrus (who appeared immovable), and replied that he felt the need of rest after his long journey.

"Don't hurry on my account," said Cyrus. "I jest as lives set up and keep ye comp'ny!"

Unseduced by this generous offer, Archy took his carpet-bag and proceeded, under the widow's guidance, to the spare bedroom. It was a neat little chamber, with a rag-carpet on the floor, and cheap lithographs in cheap frames on the wall. The lamp was placed on the white-spread stand, and the carpet-bag on a chair. Archy gave the widow his hand.

"Good night, sister!" Priscilla wept. "Afflicted one!" said Archy, drawing her near him. He put down his lips; she put up hers. At that affecting moment a chuckle was heard. Both started.

"Ye 'fraid of muskeeters, Uncle Archy?" said Cyrus, putting his head in at the door.

Archy had never in his life felt so powerful an impulse to fracture somebody's cervical column. Had there been a weapon at hand, Cyrus would have suffered. As it was, he advanced with impunity into the room.

"'Cause, ef you be, there 's some in this room *that long!*" he added, measuring off a piece of his hand. "Ain't they, P'scill?"

"Cyrus Drole! there is n't a mosquito in the house, and you know it!" exclaimed the widow. "What do you talk so for?"

"They 've got some over to the tavern bigger yit," said Cyrus, seating himself astride a chair, and resting his arms on the back. "They hitched six on 'em to a hand-cart t'other day, and they ripped it all to flinders!"

"Come, Cyrus," expostulated the widow, "you 've no business here; brother wants to go to bed."

"He won't mind me; I'll keep him comp'ny till he wants to go to sleep. *You* need n't stop, if you don't want to!"

Thereupon the widow hastily withdrew, calling upon him to follow. Cyrus rocked to and fro, in his reversed position, appearing perfectly and entirely at home. Archy regarded him sternly.

"What d'ye haf to pay for them kind o' boots?" asked Cyrus. "Pegged or sewed? hey?" No reply. "Psho! what 's the matter? You look as though you 'd forgot suth'n'!"

"Young man," said Archy, loftily, "will you have the kindness to postpone the entertainment of your personal presence and conversation to some remote future period? In other words, will you oblige me by leaving this room?"

"Don't feel like talkin', hey? Wal, I d'n' know but I will, seein' it 's you!" Cyrus, rising deliberately, knocked over his chair, set it up again, and walked slowly to the

door. "I forgot what you said you give for them boots? Oh! you 're in a hurry, be ye?"

Seeing Archy advancing upon him with a somewhat ferocious look, he quickened his step, and with a grin of insolent good-nature dodged out of the room.

V.

A. B. BECOMES A VICTIM.

ARCHY shut the door, and placed two chairs against it, — there being no lock, — pulled off the said boots, hung his wig on the bedpost, and in due time retiring, thought of the widow, and called himself a victim, until he fell asleep; when he dreamed that he was wedded to a spectre, in soiled shirt-sleeves and patched trousers, and had nine children, all of whom were born with little wheelbarrows in their hands.

He was awakened by shouts of childish laughter. He thought of his dream, rubbed his eyes, recognized his wig on the bedpost, and remembered where he was. The laughter proceeded from an adjoining room, where the little Blossoms slept. Archy took his watch from beneath the pillow, and discovered that he had been robbed of his rest three hours earlier than his usual time for rising.

"I'm always being a victim!" he said, with a yawn. "But I suppose it's the custom in the country to get up at five. It will be such a novelty, I'll try it for once."

So Archy arose, dressed, put on his hat, found his gold-headed cane (with the marks of Cyrus's soapy fingers on it), and went out to walk. There was a freshness and beauty in nature which afforded him an agreeable surprise.

“Really, and upon my soul,” he said, “I had quite forgotten that mornings in the country were so fine! One might enjoy an experience of this kind once or twice a year very well indeed.”

Priscilla was occupied in dressing the children when he went out. On his return she was preparing breakfast. He was curious to see how she would look by daylight; and he was conscious of a slight agitation as he entered the room. Her occupation, together with the heat of the kitchen stove, had given her a beautiful color; and the tear and smile with which she greeted him completed the charm. Thus the day began. Archy, who had intended to return on the first train to town, stayed until the afternoon. He then found it impossible to turn a deaf ear to the widow's entreaties, who urged him to remain another night beneath her roof. He delayed his departure another day, and still another night; and ended by spending a week with the widow, Cyrus, and the children, — a week whose history would fill a volume. What we have not space to detail here the reader's imagination — it must be vivid — will supply.

At last the bachelor returned to town. He had long wished to go, and wished not to go. His experiences had been both sweet and terrible; and to depart was as excruciating as to remain. In tearing himself away he left behind a lacerated heart, which Mrs. Priscilla Blossom retained, and in return for which she sent him letters full of affection and bad spelling. It is singular how soon a tender interest in persons invests even their faults with a certain charm. Not a month had elapsed before Archy had learned to love those innocent little errors of orthography and construction as dearly as if the *i*'s she neglected to dot were the very eyes which he had so often seen weep and smile.

“Really, and upon my soul,” said Archy, one morning, after kissing her letter at least twice for every precious error it contained, “she is a delightful creature; and, by Jove, I’d marry her — I would, truly — if — if it was n’t for being a victim!”

A strange unrest — to use a perfectly unhackneyed expression — agitated his once placid bosom. Appetite and flesh forsook him; his landlady observed that her bountiful repasts no longer filled him; his tailor, that he no longer filled his clothes. His friends shook their heads and said, “The Blossom has been nipped by untimely frost!”

At length, yielding to destiny, he again disappeared mysteriously from town. It is supposed that he visited Priscilla. He was absent a week. He returned, bearing a still larger burden of unrest than he had carried away. In short — to sum up the tragical result in one word — Archy was a victim, and he knew it!

How it all happened, poor Archy could never tell; and if he could not, how can his biographer? As early as the middle of October he had written to Priscilla irrevocable words, ordered a wedding suit of his tailor, bought a new wig, and purchased a trunkful of presents for his future wife and children. The 11th of November was fixed for the fatal event. On the night of the 9th he slept not at all, but filled the hours with wakefulness and sighs. “O Benjamin,” he said, “if you had only lived! I wish I had never gone up there! But it is too late to retract! It would break poor dear Priscilla’s heart! I am quite sure she would die of grief! I must go through with it now, — I see no other way!” Mrs. Brown wondered what made her lodger groan so in his sleep.

On the other hand, Archy endeavored to console himself by reasoning thus: “It was n’t in human nature to

resist, — she is such a charming woman! Besides, I was only doing my duty. I should have the family to support any way. I can keep them in the country, and spend as much time in town as I choose. I shall probably spend all my time in town, with the exception of now and then a few days in summer. Though really, and upon my soul, if it was n't for Cyrus and the children I think I could be very happy with Priscilla."

He sank into a half-conscious state, and fancied himself pursuing a wild, sweet, dangerous road, with two figures whirling in a dance before him, one beautiful and bright, but nearly enveloped in the other's black, voluminous robes. One was Happiness, the other Misery; and so they led him on, until the former quite disappeared, and the latter, grim, inexorable, whirled alone. He awoke with a start just as the hideous creature reached forth a skeleton hand to claim him as a partner; and once more Mrs. Brown wondered what made her lodger groan in his sleep.

Archy was expected on the afternoon of the 10th, and Cyrus was at the railroad station to meet him when the train came in. The surviving brother felt not only like a victim, but also very much like a culprit, when he stepped from the cars, a spectacle to the group of loungers.

"Haryunclarchy?" (that is, "How are you, Uncle Archy?") cried Cyrus, familiarly advancing to shake hands. "Got along, have ye? P'scill's been drea'ful 'fraid you would n't come." A broad grin from Mr. Drole. Laughter and significant looks from the crowd. Embarrassment on the part of Mr. Blossom.

"Where's the carriage?" whispered the future bridegroom, who, anticipating this scene, had directed that a decent conveyance should be in waiting for him on his arrival.

“Could n’t git no kind of a one,” said Cyrus, in a loud tone of voice. “Jinkins’s usin’ hisn; Alvord’s hoss’s lame; Hillick, that keeps the tavern, had let hisn; I told ’em you was comin’, and I did n’t know what I should do; but not a darned thing in the shape of a carriage could I scare up. So I concluded you could walk over to the house, — guess you ha’n’t quite forgot the way; and I’ve brought my wheelbarrer for your trunks.”

“Always a victim!” muttered Archy, red and perspiring, perhaps at the recollection of his first adventure with the wheelbarrow. He would have given worlds — as the romance writers say — had he never set foot in the village. But retrogression was now impossible. He hastily pointed out his baggage with his gold-headed cane, and walked up the street. He had not proceeded twenty yards when Cyrus came after him, running his wheelbarrow on the walk, and shouting to the retiring loungers to “clear the track.” He pushed his load of trunks to Archy’s heels, and there he kept it, occasionally grazing his calves with the wheel, until the exasperated bridegroom stepped aside and stopped.

“Go on!” he said, hoarsely.

“Never mind; I a’n’t pa’tic’lar!” replied Cyrus, setting the wheelbarrow down, and spitting on his hands. “I jest as lives you’d go ahead. Whew! makes me blow!”

Archy raised his cane, but forebore exercising it upon the young gentleman’s back (as justice seemed to require) in consequence of the publicity of the scene. He walked on. The wheelbarrow followed, again at his heels. And thus the bridegroom traversed the village, the head of a procession which caused a general expansion of risible muscles and a compression of noses upon window-panes as it passed.

“By the furies!” thought Archy, “I can’t go through with it! I’ll put a stop to the insane proceeding at once! I’ll make some excuse; I’ll say I’ve heard from California and Benjamin is n’t dead. That would n’t do, though; Priscilla’s had a letter from the friend who received his parting breath. I’ll tell her—I’ll tell her I’ve got another wife. Then she’ll reproach me, and what shall I say? Say I thought my wife was dead, but she’s turned up again! That won’t do, though,—I can’t lie.”

“Look out for yer legs!” cried Cyrus. They had passed the gate. Archy was met by Mrs. Blossom and four little Blossoms, soon to be all his own. Priscilla clung to his neck, Benjie to his hand, Phidie to his coat-tails, leaving the lesser Blossoms each a leg.

“I am doomed!” thought Archy. He assumed a gayety, though he felt it not; opened his heart and his trunk; distributed presents; received a good many more thanks and kisses than he wanted; withdrew to the solitude of his chamber; conferred with Priscilla, who followed him thither, and whom he found, after all his doubts and despair, to be the dearest and best of women.

He came out brighter than he had gone in; taking his seat at the tea-table with Blossoms three and four on each side and Priscilla opposite. The children had quarrelled to sit next their uncle, and that rare indulgence had been granted to the youngest two. Little Archy was barefoot, and he persisted in rubbing his toes against big Archy’s trousers. Little Cilly (Blossom number four) sprinkled him with crumbs, buttered his coat-sleeve, and tipped over his teacup. Archy (the uncle) was beginning to have very much the air of a parent.

The presents had so much excited the children that the house that evening was a perfect little Babel. “And this

is the family I am going to marry!" groaned poor Archy. Cyrus was practising upon a new fiddle, in the kitchen, and nothing could silence his horrible discords. The domestic — a recent addition to Mrs. Blossom's establishment — let fall a pile of dishes, deluging the threshold with fragments. Benjie upset the table with a lamp and pitcher, which saturated the carpet with oil and water. Phidie and Archy quarrelled, and cried an hour after they had gone to bed. Number four was sick, in consequence of eating too much of Uncle Archy's candy, and had to be doctored. Priscilla was harassed and — shall we confess it? — cross. Add to the picture the melancholy coloring of the season, — imagine the dreary whistling of the November wind, and the rattling of dry leaves and naked boughs, — and you have some notion of a nice, comfort-loving old bachelor's reasons for homesickness.

Archy retired to his room. "I can't go through with it! It's no use! I'll break it to Priscilla — gradually — but I'm resolved to do it! Suppose I make believe I'm insane, and tear things? Insane! I've been insane! O Benjamin —"

Rap, rap! gently, at the door. "There she is!" said Archy. "Now, Blossom, be a man!" He opened; Priscilla entered. She observed his excited mien with a look of alarm.

"Dear Archy! what is the matter?"

What a wonderful influence there is in woman's eyes, a ripe lip reaching up to you, and an arm about your neck! Archy was afraid he was going to be shaken.

"Priscilla!" he said, with a tragic air, "I've had a horrid thought! Suppose — suppose Benjamin should still be alive! and should come home! and find me — me — a usurper of his happiness!"

"O Archy!" articulated Priscilla, with strong symptoms of fainting, "spare me! spare me!"

“Of course it is n't reasonable to suppose such a thing, — but,” stammered Archy, “is n't our marriage hasty, — premature? Not six months after the news of his death, — though, to be sure, he had then been dead four months, and that makes ten. But would n't it, after all, be wise to postpone our bliss, — say till spring?”

“If you leave me,” said Priscilla, “I shall die!” She closed her eyes, drooping tremulously in his arms; and the scene would have been very romantic indeed but for the plumpness of her figure and the laws of gravitation, which united in compelling him to ease her down upon a chair. “But go!” she added, “go! you do not love me!”

“Really, and upon my soul, I do!” vowed Archy, greatly moved. “Priscilla, I adore you!”

“Then don't — don't break my heart!”

His resolution was melted; he saw that either Priscilla or himself must be a victim. “I'll be one myself,” he thought; “I'm used to it!” And he said no more of postponing their conjugal felicity.

We read of prisoners sleeping soundly on the eve of their execution. So Archy slept that night. The wedding was appointed for the next morning. The bridegroom awoke at half past six. It was cold and rainy. He looked out upon the dimmest scene, — dark and dreary hills, a deserted street, dripping and shivering trees, dead leaves rotting upon the ground.

“I have brought my razor with me,” said Archy; “really, and upon my soul, I think the best thing I can do is to cut off the wretched thread of my existence, just under the chin!”

Already the children were laughing and screaming in the next room, and Cyrus's fiddle squeaked in the kitchen. Archy got up, took his razor, deliberately honed it, uncovered his throat, and — with a firm hand — shaved himself.

VI.

THE WEDDING DAY, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

THE marriage ceremony was to take place at nine o'clock, without display; only the clergyman and two other witnesses were to be present, and the happy pair were to take the cars at ten for a little journey. Two bridesmaids came in the rain, at eight o'clock, to dress the bride. She had already put upon the children their neatest attire, charging them to remain in the house, and keep themselves dry and clean. The arrival of the clergyman was prompt. Nine o'clock struck, — a knell to Archy's heart. At the fatal moment he appeared; he was handsomely dressed; he was pale, but firm. No martyr ever approached the stake with greater fortitude than he displayed on standing up beside Priscilla, in the little parlor, with the clergyman facing them and the witnesses waiting.

At this critical moment, Cyrus, who had gone to secure a conveyance for the wedding party, rushed into the room.

"You, sir," said the clergyman, addressing Archy, "solemnly promise to take this woman —"

"Guess you better wait half a jiffy!" cried Cyrus, flirting his wet cap.

"To be your lawful wife," added the clergyman.

"Somebody else to come," added Cyrus; "he's 'most here; I run ahead to tell ye to stop."

"Hush, Cyrus!" whispered the bride.

"To love, honor, and obey," said the clergyman, growing confused, "until death do you part —"

"He'd jest come in on the cars," interpolated Cyrus.

"Promise," said the clergyman to Archy, who stood staring.

"To obey?" faltered Archy.

"Did I say obey? No matter; it's a mere form —"

"I guess he's from Caleforny!" cried Cyrus; "mebby's he's got news."

"From California!" uttered Archy, with a gleam of hope. "Wait; what does the fellow mean? Who — where is this man?"

"I d'n' know; I never saw him afore; but here he comes!" said Cyrus. The rascal grinned. Priscilla looked wild and distressed. Archy believed it was one of Cyrus's miserable jokes, but resolved to make the most of it.

"Shall I proceed?" inquired the clergyman, who had quite forgotten where he left off. The gate had previously clanged; doors had been opened; and now, to the astonishment of all, a stranger put his head into the room. He wore a Spanish sombrero, a shaggy coat, and an immense red beard. As all turned to look at him, he advanced into the room.

"Stranger!" cried the excited Archy, "who — how — why this interruption?"

"What is going on?" asked the Californian, in a suppressed voice.

"Nothing — only — getting married a little," replied Archy, excited more and more. "You are welcome, sir, welcome! but if you have no business —"

"I have business!" The intruder removed his wet sombrero. "Priscilla! Archibald!"

"Benjamin!" ejaculated Archy, springing forward upon the clergyman's corns.

"My husband!" burst from the lips of the bride; and she threw up her arms, swooning in the traveller's damp embrace. Archy, quite beside himself, ran over the children, and flung his arms frantically about the reunited pair.

"I be darned," said Cyrus, flinging his cap into the corner, "if 't a'n't Ben Blossom come to life agin!"

"Just stand off," cried Benjamin, sternly, "till we have this matter a little better understood."

"I don't object," replied Archy, brushing himself, "for, really, and upon my soul, you are very wet!"

Priscilla was restored to consciousness (which, if the truth must be confessed, she had not lost at all), explanations were made, and the husband's ire appeased. He, on his part, maintained that he had not been dead at all; that the treacherous friend who reported him so had indeed deserted him when he was in an extremely feeble condition at the mines, leaving him to perish alone, of sickness and want, in the dismal rainy season; that he (Mr. Blossom) had lived, so to speak, out of spite, finding shelter in a squatter's hut, digging a little for gold, returning to the seaboard, crossing the Isthmus, and finally reaching home (with less than half the money he had carried away) sooner than any letter, mailed at the earliest opportunity, could have arrived. He seemed rejoiced to get back again; kissed the children; shook hands with the neighbors; and, finally, supporting his wife upon one arm, while he gave Archy a fraternal embrace with the other, frankly forgave them the little matrimonial proceeding we have described.

The truth is, Priscilla had expressed her joy at his return with a spontaneity and emphasis which left no doubt of her sincerity. Archy felt one pang of jealousy at this; but it was evident enough that his satisfaction at seeing Benjamin was unfeigned.

"We are brother and sister again now, Archy?" said Priscilla, offering him her hand.

"We are nothing else, I am happy to say!" replied Archy, overflowing with good humor.

"I must beg your pardon, Archy," said Ben, "for taking away your bride."

"Really, and upon my soul," cried Archy, magnanimously, "I relinquish her — under the circumstances — with joy! Take back your family, Ben! Here are the children, good as new. I give 'em up without a murmur. Heaven forbid that I should wish to rob my brother of his treasures!" Archy's self-denial was beautiful.

"S'pos'n' — s'pos'n'," giggled Cyrus, "he had n't come till to-morrer, an' found there 'd been a weddin'! an' nobody but me an' the children left to hum!"

This ill-timed speech proved very unpopular, and Cyrus was hustled out of the room. The wedding having failed to take place, there was no wedding tour.

Archy remained, and made a visit at his brother's; experiencing unaccountable sensations upon witnessing the unbounded happiness of Priscilla. How she could so easily give up a well-dressed gentleman like himself (after all her professions, too!) and show such preference for a rough, bearded, unkempt, half-savage Californian, puzzled his philosophy. The sight became unendurable. So that afternoon he packed up his luggage and took leave of the happy family, turning a deaf ear to all their entreaties, and setting out, under painful circumstances and a dilapidated umbrella, to walk to the cars. Cyrus accompanied him, transporting his trunks upon the celebrated wheelbarrow. At the station Mr. Drole brought Archy the checks for his baggage, and gave him his good-by, together with a little tribute of sympathy.

"I swanny," said Cyrus, "'t was too bad anyhow you can fix it! But I would n't give up so; mebby you'll have better luck next time."

"Always a victim!" muttered Archy, taking his seat in the cars. Cyrus got upon his wheelbarrow, and whistled

“Try, try again!” playing an imaginary fiddle over his arm. The bachelor (still a bachelor) thanked Heaven when the cars started, and so returned to his elegant single lodgings in town.

But he was no longer the cheerful, contented bachelor of other times. An affectionate letter from Mrs. Blossom, in which she hoped he would find another widdow (with two *d's*), and be hapy (with one *p*), served only to keep alive the fires that had been kindled in his once cool breast. He began to seek female society; grew studious of fair faces; and, to the astonishment of his friends, within a year both Priscilla's wish and Cyrus's prediction touching better luck were realized. Archy had found another widow; who, although perhaps not quite so charming a creature as she who had first aroused him from apathetic celibacy, proved, nevertheless, quite as sincere a woman, as true a wife, and as devoted a mother of her little Blossoms. They occupy a handsome little cottage a few miles out of town; where the late bachelor, now the blessed husband and father, finds wedded life so entirely to his liking, that he often assures Mrs. Blossom that really, and upon his soul, the most fortunate day of his life was when she made him a victim.

IN THE ICE.

I.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A GOLDEN WEDDING.

OLD lady Dracutt, bent with years and trouble, in black cloak and hood, walked home from meeting, with slow steps, leaning on her cane. Old man Dracutt followed her from the porch, took the opposite side of the street, passed her on the way, opened the gate before her, and let it slam back, almost in her face, as she came up.

This little scene, or something like it, happened nearly every Sunday in their lives, and the observant world was getting used to it. Elderly people, watching it now for twenty years or more, had learned to look on and make no other comment than, "Well, it's just like old man Dracutt" (or old lady Dracutt, as the case might be); "they're crotchety, and what's the use of talking?"

Not so the younger portion of the community, represented on this occasion by Miss Emma Welford, who, passing with her little flock of brothers and sisters, — just as the old ploughshare, sagging on its short chain fastened to a stake, jerked the gate violently together again, — said compassionately, "Why could n't he have had the kindness to hold it open till she had gone through?" While even the hard-featured ploughshare seemed, in her pure eyes, to look ashamed of its part in the transaction.

Old man Dracutt, not bent at all by *his* troubles (he ap-

peared to bear the burden of life on his head, and to have been crushed together by it considerably in the jaws and shoulders, getting thereby that stubborn build of body and set expression of face), — old man Dracutt trudged on, and disappeared in the lonely old house, while his wife was still feebly fumbling with the gate. Ah me! how little we know what the effect of a casual kind look or word of ours may be sometimes? Old lady Dracutt took hold of the post instead of the gate, and tried to pull it open that way, — very absurdly, to be sure, but you would hardly have laughed at her if you had seen the cause. The poor old creature was blind with tears. The great sorrow of her life had never given her a moist eye; she was proud, and strong, and obstinate to endure misery and wrong; that tough, dry stock unkindness could bend and wither, but not soften or break; and yet a compassionating glance out of a young girl's eyes, the pitying tones of a sweet voice, could melt her in an instant.

She got the gate open soon, with Emma's help, ("Thank you, dear child," said she,) and entered the house, where she found her husband settling down in his low, square, straight-backed, old oak arm-chair, by the kitchen stove. A newspaper rustled on his trembling knees, while he took from a black leathern case a pair of steel-bowed spectacles, and set them astride his nose, which also appeared to have been crushed a little, and pushed well down over his broad mouth and chin by the aforesaid burden.

She put away her cloak and hood in a dark closet (from which they seldom emerged, except for Sundays and funerals, when they came out saturated with gloom, and almost conscious, it seemed, of the solemn use they served), and presently sat down in her chair (neither had ever, probably, for years, sat in the other's chair), with an ancient, sallow-leaved, well-worn Bible on her lap. Both clad in rusty

black ; he so compressed and grim, and she so crooked and withered ; he with bald crown shining in the light, over shaggy gray ear-locks ; she with iron-gray hair (once black tresses) hidden under her cap of yellow lace, — there they sat, and warmed their bodies, if not their hearts, by the stove between them ; neither ever looking at the other, nor ever speaking more than if each had been alone.

And each was alone ; for what is bodily presence where souls are estranged ? This was the anniversary of their marriage ; did they think of it ? For half a century they had lived together, and to-day they might have celebrated their golden wedding.

Fifty years ago this December evening, full of youth and hope and love, they joined their hands, with trust and solemn vows, and began the journey of life, which looked so beautiful before them. The storm and rainbow of a real little romance had given interest to their courtship and marriage. Jonathan had been off teaching school somewhere, and on his return had found his darling little Jane engaged to be married. They had always been attached to each other from their early childhood, when they played little husband and wife, and kept house together, with clam-shells for dishes, and acorns for cups and saucers, under a board, laid across a corner of the garden fence, for a house. Growing bashful as they grew older, that sweet play ceased ; but at school they dressed and behaved each for the eyes of the other, and were always the best of friends, except that their frequent causeless quarrels showed that there was something warmer, perhaps, than friendship in their attachment. He was stern, exacting, and reticent ; she was pert and wayward and pouting ; and so it happened that they never came to a perfect understanding about the future, until he returned

home, and found her just going to marry her big cousin Jim. Ah! then what a time they had of it! what sleepless nights, what haggard days, what torments of passion and despair! He learned, when about to lose her forever, that he could not possibly live without her; that the sight of the sky and the earth would not be endurable to him for a day, when all hope of her was gone. And being a fellow of tremendous will when aroused, you may be sure he did not sit down and sulk over his sorrow. Becoming suddenly convinced that it was a terrible sin for cousins to intermarry, — though he had seen cousins do so before, and had not thought of the sin at all (a personal interest in such questions sometimes makes a man awfully moral in his feelings all at once), — he determined to save her from its commission, and himself, at the same time, from life-long misery; and set to work, in that matter of life and death, with characteristic energy. And she — why, she had never discovered he cared so much for her; why had n't he told her so before it was too late? or why did he make her wretched by telling her now? In short, the more selfish lover swept everything before him; and the more generous one said, "If you really prefer him to me, Jane, I don't wish to hold you; I give you up." Even having the good grace to be present, a cheerful guest, at that famous wedding.

The old man's newspaper slipped from his hand, the old lady's dim eyes wandered from the broad Bible page to the stove-hearth, and there they sat and mused, while the dull December evening darkened around them. One could almost hope, out of pity for them, that they did not think of those earlier days. How could they bear to think of them? Dear child, whose bright eyes are now following these lines, when the summer of *your* life has burned out, and hope after hope has faded on the cold hearth of old

age, can you bear, think you, to sit, in the long winter twilight, looking at the ashes? O the ashes, the ashes! What a story of bounding sap, and green leaves, and boughs waving in sun and breeze, they might tell, if they had language! This is the tragedy of life, with the slow, black, silent curtain descending upon the scene.

It is all the more a tragedy when the actors feel, as these two must have felt, that they are the authors of their own unhappiness. If Jonathan and Jane had been as humble as they were proud, if they had treated each other tenderly, using love and forbearance toward each other, all their days, this desolation could never have come upon them. Destiny is a tree that grows from seeds in our own hearts.

The first few years of their married life had been happy; but family cares increased, while their patience under them did not increase. What trifles they allowed to vex them! — trifles, surely, when compared with the greatness and glory of love. They could better have afforded to lose everything else than to lose this, if they had only known it! They had the New England vice of excessive industry. Happiness they buried in hard work. They saved the pennies of life, and lost its jewel. The bitter and cruel things they could say to each other, after a while, must have amazed and shamed even themselves when they paused to reflect. I don't know which was most to blame, but it was she who said to him, in the midst of a violent altercation (this was when they had children grown up and married), "Jonathan Dracutt, I wish you would never speak to me again as long as you live!"

He started back, looked at her for a moment in silence, then turned away.

"Tell her I take her at her word," said he to their daughter Elizabeth; "but she must never speak to me!"

“I never will,” said Jane.

That was twelve years ago, and they had not spoken to each other since.

Nobody, not even themselves, though they were quite in earnest at the time, could have expected that their unnatural silence would last so long. Children and friends remonstrated, but in vain.

“She has told me never to speak to her, and, unless she takes back that word, I shall abide by it,” said Jonathan.

“I’ll take it back when he asks my forgiveness for what provoked me to it, — he was so unjust!” said Jane; which, of course, he would never do.

He ask forgiveness! Not even if he knew he was wrong.

“Then it is just as well,” said she.

“Yes,” he replied, through an interpreter, “there is more peace in the house, now her tongue is quiet.”

And this was he who had once believed that life would not be, in any degree, tolerable to him without her.

Pride and resentment kept both from speaking at first, and this reserve became, in the course of time, a settled habit. It gave rise, necessarily, to many inconveniences, and sometimes to a ludicrous situation. If a pedler called and found them alone, he was sure to be amazed and puzzled to hear them communicate with each other through himself: “Ask *him* for some money,” “Tell *her* to git ye some dinner”; and to go away, perhaps, imagining he had been dealing with insane people. Yet the habit grew at length to fit them so easily that visitors were known to stop at the house, converse pleasantly with them, in the presence of their children, and afterward depart without discovering the peculiarity of the old couple. They did not even make direct signs to each

other, like dumb persons ; though, perhaps, if she wanted sugar from the grocery, she would set out the empty bucket where he would see it, and he, if he wished his coat mended, would lay it, rags uppermost, across a chair.

One comprehends more easily how he could continue to live so, than how she could, with her woman's heart. But she knew him to be implacable as fate, and had, I suppose, no notion of humbling herself to plead for a reconciliation which he might not grant. Or, perhaps, when her heart swelled with the memories of happier days, and yearned again for the love it had lost, the recollection of his harshness and injustice rolled back the stone upon it ; for she, too, was one who found it hard to forget a wrong.

The wonder was that they should continue to live together. But children, as children so often do, prevented a separation at first ; and when the last of these married and removed to the far West, they had an idol of a grandchild left, the only son of their only son, who was dead. The boy had lost his mother, too, so that his grandparents now stood to him in the place of parents also. In him all their affections centred, and toward him even the old grandfather, who had always been stern enough with his own children, was sometimes (as is sometimes the way with grandfathers) foolishly weak and indulgent.

II.

THE IDOL OF HIS GRANDPARENTS.

WHILE the two sat there musing in the twilight, the door opened, and a young man, or rather a big boy, burst in, with a loud and abrupt manner, slamming the door

behind him, and tossing his cap at a hat-peg, without much apparent expectation of hitting it.

“Clinton, my dear,” said the old lady, in the tremulous accents of fond but querulous age, “why can’t you hang up your things, when you come in? ’T would be so little trouble to you, and ’t would save me a sight. You’re such a harum-scarum, tearin’ boy! Now, Clinton!”

“O, don’t bother! I’m tired,” said Clinton, flinging his overcoat on one chair, while he jerked another about, and sat down on it, between the old folks, perching his feet on the top of the stove.

“Clinton, you’ll burn yer boots,” said the old man, in a tone of mild warning.

“No, I won’t; there a’n’t heat enough to burn a — Thunder and lightning!” said Clinton, flirting his finger, after indiscreetly touching the stove with it, “what do you keep such a big fire for?”

He pulled off his boots, and hurled them into the corner, and sat in his stockings, with his feet on the stove-hearth, looking hugely dissatisfied, and glowering at his grandparents. For this was he, this was the idol, — being, as a matter of course, like most idols, unworthy of the worship he received.

“Clinton, what’s the matter with ye to-night?” said the old man, with some impatience.

“Nothing, of course! I’ve never anything to complain of! O, of course not!”

“Wal, wal! what have ye to complain of?”

“It’s nothing, of course, that you both begin to scold me, soon as ever I set foot into the house. It’s first my cap, then my boots, then something else. But I’m sick of it; and sometimes I think I never will come into this house again. It’s like coming into a tomb.”

“Wal, I suppose it is,” said the old man; “I can’t

blame ye much ; but don't say I scold ye when I don't. Tell her I'm waiting for my supper."

"Tell him I'm waiting for a pail of water," said the old lady, who had, in fact, been waiting for it during the past half-hour, having no interpreter through whom to ask for it, being too infirm to go herself to the well.

"Why can't you draw a pail of water, Clinton?" said the old man.

"I've just got my boots off," said Clinton, with a snarl and a frown.

The old man got up, and went out for the water. The old lady got up, and, without a word of reproach, took care of the young fellow's cap and coat. He saw her stoop painfully to the floor, bending her poor old back, and then reach painfully to the pegs, which it was no effort at all for him to reach ; he heard the involuntary groans that escaped her ; and there he still sat, not once offering to help her, nor seeming to care. And yet he was not a bad-hearted boy, this Clinton. In the village, he enjoyed the reputation of being a "first-rate fellow." His generous and jovial traits made him a favorite with many, who never suspected what a thunder-cloud he sometimes was at home. There, the agreeable companion became at once a grouty grandson. This was not simply because his home was gloomy, although this circumstance no doubt aggravated his fault. But the dark spirit was within himself ; it had been fostered by indulgence and confirmed by habit, until, though his pride and his ambition to please enabled him to conceal it in society, at home it would have been scarcely possible for him to be anything else than a blusterer and an ingrate.

"Where have you been, to get so tired?" asked the old lady. "You ought to have gone to meetin' this arternoon, Clinton ; you ha'n't been for a month."

“There ! I knew I should get scolded for something else in a minute ! I could n’t go to meeting ; Phil Kermer wanted me. I’m in the ice this year. We’ve been boring. We’ve bored in a dozen different places all over both ponds. Phil said he did n’t know what he should do without me,” said Clinton, brightening, for now he had a chance to brag.

“You and Phil are great friends, a’n’t ye ?” said the old lady ; and that flattered him.

“I bet we are ! He is the smartest fellow and the best fellow there is in this town. He is six years older than I am ; but that don’t make any difference, — we’re just like brothers. He calls me Clint and I call him Phil. He is the Ice Company’s foreman this year ; they trust him with everything ; he’ll have three or four hundred men under him soon as we begin to cut. Won’t it be lively ?”

“What have you been boring for ?”

“To see how much ice has made since yesterday, and to see if it’ll do to put our horses on to-morrow, in case it snows to-night. Phil is dead-sure it’s going to snow. If we get three or four inches, it’ll have to be scraped off. I’m to be Phil’s right-hand man ; did you know it ?”

“Why, are you, Clinton ? What are you going to do ?” said the old lady, proceeding to fill the teakettle, now that the pail of water was brought in.

“I’m to be the marker. When we have so many men and horses at work, somebody must keep count of ’em, you know. I’m to have all their names in a list, and then go round among ’em every day and see who’s at work and who a’n’t, who does his duty and who shirks, and mark ’em. Then I’m to look after things in general,” said Clint, pompously tossing his head and pursing his lips, — “give orders, and report, you know.”

“I hope you won’t git into the pond, my dear!” said the old lady with a shudder.

“O, pshaw, now! don’t be silly! Of course I sha’n’t get into the pond. We do business on scientific principles. We know to a pound just how much weight ice of a certain thickness will bear, — so many inches, so many hundred pounds, you know; it must be so thick for men, and so thick for horses. Phil and I have got the figgers, — we understand.”

“Don’t accidents ever happen?”

“Yes, sometimes. Fellows get careless, and men and horses get in.”

“O Clinton!” said the old lady, in a trembling voice, “what should I do, if you —”

“Bah! you make me sick,” said Clint, with manly disgust, turning his back upon her, to manifest his disapprobation of such womanly weakness, and sitting there in her way, never once offering to move out of it, all the while she was getting supper.

“Clinton,” said the old man, resuming his seat, “I am afraid to have you so intimate with that Phil Kermer.”

Clint gave a scornful snort. “What next, I wonder! You talk to me just as if I was a child!” And the young gentleman took care to show very plainly that his dignity was hurt.

“He’s a man of bad habits, and I’m afraid you’ll fall into ’em,” the old man continued.

“He? Oh!” Clint sneered.

“He’s a capable fellow, but he drinks; and for my part, I wonder the company should ever have put him in the position where he is. I’m sorry you’ve got in with him; he’ll flatter ye to yer ruin.”

The young gentleman was mightily offended at this; and as he could think of no more effective way of resenting the

insult to himself and his friend, he snatched his boots out of the corner, pulled them on, and stalked out of the house ; thus implying that, tired as he was, he could endure anything better than the unreasonableness of these old people, and, to do him justice, really believing himself an abused young man.

He had stayed out in the cold about long enough, and was growing quite angry at the thought that he was, after all, punishing himself more than he was them, when the lamp was lighted, showing that supper was ready ; and he had a good excuse for going in. He was determined, however, not to relax for an instant the awful severity of his wrathful countenance ; but, on the contrary, to convey, by every means in his power, the terrible impression that it was not probable he could ever bring himself to overlook what had passed.

The old lady was wise enough to let him eat his supper in silence. But the old man, laying down his knife and fork, and sitting back in his chair, looked sternly at the youth, and said, "Clinton, it grieves me to the heart to see you act so." (Nothing could have pleased Clinton more.) "But, let me tell you now, that if you don't change for the better in this respect, you and I'll have to part." (He did n't like that quite so well, for the old man seemed to be in earnest.) "I've borne with your surly temper long enough. You can be pleasant in society ; why, then, can't you learn to behave yourself at home ? You know I would do anything in the world for you, that was for your good ; but the more I indulge you, the more ungrateful and insolent and sullen you are. You must reform, if you stay under this roof ; do you hear me ?"

"Yes, sir," said Clinton, lowering, but respectful, for he knew better than to trifle with the old man when his jaws had that expression. He took early occasion, however, to

manifest his sovereign displeasure, and to fill the grand-parental bosoms with remorse, by putting on his cap and coat immediately after supper, and once more departing from the house.

“O dear! O dear! O dear!” sighed the old lady, as she slowly and with shaking hands cleared away the dishes. But the old man sat silent and stern in his corner, thinking how he should do his duty by that young man.

III.

THE LITTLE HOUSEWIFE AND HER FRIENDS.

CLINTON, out of doors, was at the same time thinking how he should wring drops of repentance out of the old man's heart.

It was beginning to snow. He was glad of that, for two reasons: in the first place, he was eager to commence work on the pond, and assume authority under Phil; and, in the next place, he longed for an occasion to show his independence of the old folks.

“I won't be home till long after they're abed to-night,” he muttered to himself; “and I'll be off in the morning before they're up. I'll take a pie in my hand, and go to dinner with Phil, and they sha'n't see me for three days, if I can help it. Glory! how it snows!”

Another thought struck him. He was in business now; why not get married, and have a home of his own? “That would kill the old folks!” he chuckled. “I'll let 'em see whether I'm a boy, to be forever dictated to!” But whom should he marry? Emma Welford, of course; he would not deign to look at anybody else now he was “in

the ice," and had got to be Phil's "right-hand man." He had been in love with her from the day when he helped untangle her fragrant veil from a blissful rosebush, and she gave him a look that had rankled with a sweet pang in his heart ever since. He would have proposed to her before now, if he could have shown that he had any means of supporting a family. "I wonder what salary Phil will give me"; and he proceeded to count a very large brood of chickens, without waiting for the important process of incubation.

He went to see Emma that very evening; shook and stamped off the snow in the entry, and held her dear little hand in his until she withdrew it, saying, for an excuse, "Why, how damp you are, Clinton!"

Then he went in, and sat down, and cracked jokes, and played with the children, and was altogether so kind-hearted and lively, that any one who had seen him an hour before, seeing him again now, would have conjectured there must be two Clintons, — one stamped in the mint of the morning, the other cast in the dark mould of night. Were you ever in your life, my experienced friend, aware of such a phenomenon? And do you, sweet miss (I am looking straight into your eyes at this moment), do you imagine that, when you shall have given your hand to the brave John or Thomas, whose brightness beams upon you now on set evenings of the week, and he shall have taken you to his home, — do you, I say, imagine it possible that he may there introduce you, in some unhappy hour, to his counterpart, the dark John or Thomas, whose existence you have never yet suspected? And you, blithe lover, do you know that you invariably leave one self behind you, and that, perhaps, your real self, when you go to meet your Mary? Well, and perhaps she puts her real self carefully away out of your sight too.

Of course, Emma's folks liked Clinton, and were always delighted to have him come in. And here I must say a word about the family, which consisted of, first, old Uncle Jim, her grandfather, — the same Cousin Jim, by the way, who once came so near marrying Clinton's grandmother. He had not broken his heart over that unhappy affair, but had transferred it, in a tolerably sound and healthy condition, to another young woman, whom he had married, and with whom he had lived happily upwards of forty years. It was the loss greater than all other losses when this aged companion went from them. "But, bless you, sir!" he used to say, "she left the gate open, and I've seen the light through it ever since." A still darker sorrow he had known: a promising young man had won their daughter, their only child. He seemed to have but one fault, yet that one fault had broken her heart, and sent him early to a drunkard's grave. All this and much more (for no life is free from trials) the cheerful spirit of the man survived; and now he lived here with his orphaned grandchildren, their best friend and companion, and still himself a child of threescore years and ten.

Emma was the little housewife and matron, and a charming little matron she was. "Her very mother's self over again," Uncle Jim would sometimes murmur aloud, watching her with eyes brimful of tears and blessings, as she moved about the house. Not that she was the perfect pattern of neatness and order which we sometimes read about in good books; how could she be, with four younger brothers and sisters to look after, besides the housework? She believed that little ones were to be amused and made happy; and how was that possible unless they were sometimes allowed to litter the floor with their playthings?

"I can't be always following them up, and tormenting them about such trifles," she said to Mrs. Jones, a good

friend and neighbor, and the queen of housekeepers, who, looking in to see how the little family of orphans were getting along, had exclaimed, "Why, Emma! how can you stand it?"

"O, I stand it very well!" laughed Emma. "If I believed that immaculate housekeeping was the great end and aim of a woman's life, as some people seem to think, I suppose I should be troubled in my mind. But I tried, and I found I could n't have perfect order and merry children in the house at the same time; and I must say I prefer the merry children."

So it is to be feared we should have found many things out of place in Emma's little domain had we visited it with good Mrs. Jones; but two little things we should always have found in place, namely, a cheerful countenance and a loving heart.

Emma was "so glad" Clinton had come in; he always made such fun for the children; "though you must n't be so funny as you are sometimes, you know," she whispered, "because it's Sunday."

"It's after sundown, and gran'pa always lets us play then; if 't is Sunday; don't you, gran'pa?" young Tommy appealed.

"We keep Saturday nights, or pretend to," said the old man. "Dear me!" he went on, with tender seriousness, "what's more interesting, what is there prettier, than the sight of children at play? I believe Heaven itself is pleased at it."

"There! he said we might," cried Tommy. "Come, Clint, make a wheelbarrow of me, and let Sissy ride, as we did the other night."

So Clint made a wheelbarrow of him, using his legs for handles, and running him on his hands, which worked quite well in place of a wheel; and Lucy and Jimmy set

little Sissy on and held her, while Clint trundled her about the room, crying, "Po-ta-toes! Anybody want to buy a bag of po-ta-toes!" Sissy thought it the funniest thing in the world to be a bag of potatoes, and to have somebody buy her; and, of course, everybody laughed. Tommy himself laughed so that he broke down, and had to be taken to the blacksmith's shop to be mended. Grandfather's knees were the shop, and grandfather's arm was the handle of the bellows; and Clint blew and hammered, and hammered and blew, imitating with his lips the wheeze of the blast, until Tommy declared, amid convulsions of laughter, that he was "tickled to death," and begged not to be mended any more.

"Well, I'll just put your tire on," said Clint; but Tommy said he did n't wear tires, — Jimmy and Sissy did, — he was a big boy, and had outgrown them; which blunder of his created great merriment among the older ones, for Clint meant the tire of the imaginary wheel.

Clint was peddling potatoes again when a second caller came in. This was no other than the Ice Company's foreman, Phil Kermer. The arrival of no other person could have created a livelier interest in the little circle just then. Emma blushed as she had not blushed when Clinton came; and the younger children, with whom Phil also was a great favorite, rushed to meet him.

"The old woman is picking her geese! the old woman is picking her geese!" said Lucy and Jimmy, as he shook the feathery snow from his garments, while the wheelbarrow jumped up and ran away on its handles to the entry, greatly to the disappointment of the bag of potatoes.

"I wanted you to thell me to him," lisped the little commodity, regarding the new-comer as a customer.

“Well, I’ll buy you,” said Phil, entering into the joke when it was explained to him. “What are you, — Irish potatoes?” tossing the bag up lightly on his shoulder.

“No, I’m thweet potatoeth,” said the bag. At which unconsciously apt reply (for *was* n’t she sweet, though?) everybody was delighted.

“Now, I’ll put you in the cellar,” said Phil, setting her up in the corner behind his chair. “Which will you be, — boiled or roasted?”

“Woathted, with thalt on me; but the wathh (rats) will nibble me here!” And out ran sweet potatoes, flying about the room, and keeping up her play till that season so dreaded by fun-loving children arrived, — bedtime.

“Not a word!” said Emma; and the gentle authority she exercised over the little pouters was beautiful to behold. “Come, I have let you sit up a good deal longer than usual to-night, to see the company; and now you must n’t complain. If you do, I shall have to send you off to bed the first thing, the next time they come. Why, Sissy! I need n’t hang your clothes upon the hook to-night, need I? I can hang them on your lip!”

That funny notion set Sissy to laughing, so that she quite forgot the grievance of having to go to bed.

“Come, then,” said Emma, and she led the three younger ones (Lucy was going to sit up a little longer) to their grandpapa’s knee, around which they knelt, and with sweetly composed faces and little hands folded repeated the Lord’s Prayer in unison, very reverently; Sissy’s lisped syllables, “Lead uth not into temptathon,” chiming in so softly and so suggestively (dear child! what did *she* know of temptation?) that Phil Kermer (who did know something of it, and knew, too, that there was need enough of *his* making that prayer) felt his eyes, as he listened, suddenly grow dim with an unaccountable and very extraor-

dinary moisture. Young Clint might also have breathed that prayer to advantage ; but somehow the scene did not touch him in the same way.

Then the old grandfather, in accents affectingly tremulous with the earnestness of his love, gave the little ones his blessing ; then they kissed everybody good night, and Emma went to see them safely tucked up in bed.

Presently a rap was heard on the stove-pipe which went up from the sitting-room into the chamber above. "Mithter Phil ! Mithter Phil !" called Sissy, "when you going to woatht and eat me ?" Then the ringing laugh that followed ! — did ever silver bells equal its music ?

"What should we do without the children ?" said Uncle Jim. "What would the old folks do without you, Clinton ?" he added, thinking immediately of his aged friends in the other house. "It's fortunate you have such a loving disposition. You're their sunbeam, I'm sure."

Clint looked a trifle disconcerted at this. "It's being a sunbeam under difficulties, where they are," he said.

"Well, I suppose it may be. Poor Jane ! she was such a bright girl when — I — I'm sincerely sorry for them," said the old man, with emotion. He had never treasured up resentment against them for the wrong they had done him, and consequently had never felt a thrill of triumph, nor anything else but pity, for the cloud that darkened their lives.

"It would be easy enough to be a sunbeam in *this* house," thought Clint ; and he drew an enchanting picture of himself marrying into the family, having such fun with the young ones every night, and receiving a call from Phil as often as that gentleman would have the condescension to come in. With Emma for a wife and Phil for a friend, he believed he would be the most fortunate and enviable

fellow in the world ; and, indeed, one could hardly blame him for that fancy.

Where was there another man like Phil? Strong, self-reliant, magnetic, kindly, with broad and genial manners, and a smile that broke like sunrise through the cloud of his ruddy-brown beard, you would have set him down at once as a powerful and attractive person with the young of both sexes.

Clint thought they were intimate friends, whereas the relation he bore to Phil was that of a faithful spaniel to an indulgent master. Phil liked him, of course, as good masters like their dogs. The one walked, gravely complacent, his own road, while the other followed and played about him. Clint opened his heart and confided everything to Phil, but Phil kept his own counsel. Clint had even, on one or two occasions, whispered to him his secret hopes with regard to Emma Welford, — a confession which Phil had received with a very curious smile.

While they were waiting for Emma to return to the room, Clint longed to walk up to his friend and give him a hint of his present matrimonial purpose ; but something in Phil's face or manner prevented him. This evening, in fact, the hound happened to be in the master's way, and so received cold looks in place of the expected encouragement.

Emma stayed out of the room as long as she decently could, dreading to return to it for reasons which may as well be told. She was afraid of Phil Kermer, — afraid, because he was at once the dearest man to her in all the world, and the most dangerous. He had won her heart almost before she knew it ; and only when he came to speak to her of marriage had she awakened to the peril of her position.

Her father had died a drunkard, and her mother, on her dying bed, had made her promise that she would never

marry a "drinking man." After the ruin she had seen wrought in her own family by that one fatal habit of self-indulgence, it seemed hardly necessary that such a promise should be exacted from her; but now she was glad she had given it, for it seemed her only safety. She might, in some joy-intoxicated moment, forget the two untimely graves in the churchyard, and their silent warning; but that sacred pledge she could never forget, — it would prove a barrier against temptation when everything else had failed.

Phil Kermer did not merely take a little wine for the stomach's sake, nor was he, on the other hand, a drunkard any more than her father had been at his age; but that he took, now and then, something stronger than wine, and took a trifle too much, could not be denied. He had at first laughed at Emma for asking him to forego the practice; and when he found how serious she was in requiring it of him, he was vexed. He thought it absurd and injurious for any person to suppose that he, Phil Kermer, was capable of ever becoming a sot, and for her to think so was especially grievous. They had quarrelled on that theme when last they parted, and he had kept away from her as long as he could. She had been made very miserable by his absence, and now she was at once overjoyed and alarmed to see him again.

With nervous hands she smoothed her hair and arranged her collar, after hugging the little ones in bed, and finally went down stairs. Lucy and Uncle Jim soon retired, and left her alone with the visitors. There was an awkward silence of some moments, during which she read in Phil's face two things, — that he had come, full of passion and persuasion, to convince her that she, not he, was wrong; and that he was quietly waiting for Clint to go. She at once determined that Clint should not go, little thinking what he himself had come for.

A damp had fallen upon the boy's spirits, which he vainly endeavored to shake off. At length, he went to the door and looked out at the snow-storm. On his return, Emma moved to make room for him on the sofa beside her.

"I tell you, this will make lively work for us to-morrow; won't it, Phil?" said he.

Phil merely wagged his beard with a slow, lazy nod, and neither smiled nor spoke. This reserve was killing to poor Clint, but Emma came to his rescue.

"What have you to do with the snow?" she asked, to call him out, although she had already heard him brag that he was "in the ice" this year, along with Phil. That set him going again. They had the conversation all to themselves, however, Mr. Kermer only now and then giving a word or a nod when appealed to, as he sat placidly pulling his beard, and waiting for Clint to go.

At last a confused glimmering of the truth broke upon the young man's mind. It was when she reproved them for what they had been doing that afternoon, namely, boring the ice.

"You should n't bore on Sundays," she said.

"Nor on Sunday evenings, either," Phil added, so dryly that nobody could tell just what he meant by the joke.

Clint, however, took the application home to himself, and felt terribly cut up by it. He began to explain to her that boring on the Sabbath was sometimes a deed of necessity, but quite broke down before he had ended, and wound up with, "Well, I guess I had better be going."

"No, don't go yet," said Emma, so smilingly that he felt soothed and flattered, and remained. Phil gave his beard a harder pull than usual, but kept an imperturbable countenance.

Still Clint could not feel easy; and although Emma

was never so charming, her excitement giving vivacity to her manners and brilliancy to her looks, and she did her best to entertain him, it was not long before he whispered to her, with a dark glance at Phil, that he really *ought* to go. But she shook her head, with a look in the same direction, as much as to say, "Don't mind him," and whispered back, "Stay a little longer, — to please me."

Phil pretended to be looking over an album of photographs, but saw and heard everything. He no longer believed that the objection she had made to his habit of drinking was her real motive for slighting him, but became suddenly fired with jealousy of the boy. Full of ire, which, however, he had the tact not to betray, he quietly closed the book, stroked his beard again, suppressed a yawn, and lazily got up.

"Well, good evening," he said, and, of course, noticed that she did not urge *him* to stay.

Clint made a feeble motion to accompany him, vacillated, and finally remained.

Emma rose immediately, said, "Must you go, Mr. Kermer?" and stood by the entry door, waiting for him to put on his coat. He paused as he buttoned it, and looked down at her; she looked up at him, her cheeks flushed, her feet and hands like ice, her lips forcing a smile.

"Is this our good-by?" he said, in a low tone, penetrating her with an indescribable look.

"It is good night, not good by, — at least I hope so," she said. "I should be sorry to lose your friendship."

"Indeed!" He took her cold little hand, but dropped it again, smiled in his turn gloomily and bitterly, and said, "*Good by.*"

He gave her a long, searching, farewell glance, and went out into the storm.

She watched him from the door till his form vanished in the dim, white, falling cloud of snow. There were melting flakes on her eyelashes when she went back into the room, and she seemed quite chilled. Her spirits had forsaken her, and she had only vacant looks and the very ghost of a smile for poor Clint, whom we will now leave to his wooing.

IV.

PHIL ASSERTS HIS INDEPENDENCE.

MR. PHIL KERMER boarded at the very worst place in the world for a man of his tastes and temperament, namely, the village hotel. When he returned home that evening, he was not in a mood to go quietly to bed and think of his sins, which would have been by far the most wholesome thing for him to do. On the contrary, he took the very course which led him still further from the happiness which he (like so many of us) wished to clutch and make his own, without first earning it by honest endeavor.

He felt blue, in short, and thought he would assert his independence and warm his heart a little by taking a dram. Finding half a dozen good fellows in the bar-room, he invited them to drink with him. Then, as your good fellows can never bear to be outdone in generosity, each felt under obligations to treat in return. So it happened that Phil asserted his independence a good many times, for it is good fellows' etiquette to drink again with the man who has drank with you. Considerable confusion seemed to arise at last with regard to whose turn it was to treat, as well as with regard to things in general, and Phil somehow found himself doing the honorable thing again,

and still again. The result was that he, for the first time, went to bed that night decidedly and unmistakably — independent.

Clint, in the mean while, went home sober enough, — a little more so, in fact, than he had expected to be on that occasion. What he had said to Emma, and what she had said to him, I could never learn; but this I know, that lovers *have* returned from their wooing with lighter hearts under their jackets than Clint carried that night into the gloomy old house, and up stairs to his sad bed. He lay awake a long time, thinking what a fool he had been, and wishing himself where neither grandparents, nor Emma, nor Phil might ever hear from him again, until they should some day learn, with bitter remorse and envy, what a noble, great, renowned, rich man he had got to be.

Waking early, and looking out on the still, white morning (the storm was over, but the earth was covered, and the laden trees drooped with their beautiful burden of snow), and remembering that he was “in the ice,” he jumped up, and felt his interest in life revive as he thought of the exciting day’s work before him.

“Never mind,” thought he; “Phil’s a good fellow. I don’t blame him. I won’t be in his way another time. I’m his right-hand man this year, and that’s enough for me.”

So he forgave Phil, who was necessary to him; but was quite far from forgiving his grandparents, of whose happiness he was himself so necessary a part.

He ate his pie secretly in the pantry, and went out into the snow, — the first to make tracks through its calm and unsullied purity that memorable morning. Arrived at the tavern, he found Phil in bed, sick.

“A cold, — an awful headache, — that’s all.” And the haggard foreman fixed his eyes steadily as he could on his right-hand man. “Has it stopped snowing?”

“Yes; the sky is clear as a bell.”

“That ’s deused unlucky, with this headache on me! How much snow fell?”

“About five inches.”

“The wooden scrapers will do. Take the key, Clint, — it’s hanging on that nail there; go and open the tool-house, and start the men when they come. I’ll be there soon.”

“All right,” said Clint, and hurried away, proud of the importance of his duties.

The men had had warning that, if it snowed, they must be on hand with their teams as soon as the storm was over; and when the sun rose on the dazzling scene, not fewer than a hundred laborers and sixty horses were already on the pond.

Clint went around among them, pompously giving orders, only to get laughed at. When they learned that Phil was sick, they went to work in their own way, choosing the way that would most annoy Clint, in preference to any other.

“I cut ice ’fore ever you was out o’ your baby-clo’es; an’ think I’m goin’ to be gee-hawed about by you?” said old Farmer Corbett, whose contempt for Phil’s “right-hand man” seemed to be pretty generally shared by the rest.

Clint was enraged at their conduct, as well as alarmed. Phil had told him the day before, that, as the ice was, it would not do to put many teams on it together, but that they must be scattered over the pond. The men, however, would not believe but that the ice was twice as thick as it was; and, for want of specific orders from Kermer, they all went to scraping on one side. In vain Clint shrieked his commands to them to scatter. To and fro and athwart the icy field went the men and horses and scrapers, sometimes almost huddling together, just the same as if he had not interfered.

“Stop your clack, and go and git some more hammers, or mallets, or suthin’, to knock off the balls with” (for the snow was damp, and the horses’ feet “balled” badly), “if you want to do anything,” said the old farmer; and went off with his loaded scraper to the bank.

The hammers were needed; and Clint, disgusted, tramped back to the tool-house to get them. To his great relief, he there found Phil, who had just arrived in a sleigh.

“Phil, you ought to be out there!” said Clint.

Kermer, who was feeling dreadfully shaky and remorseful and cross, took offence at what seemed to him impertinent dictation. For the very reason that he was conscious of a guilty neglect of duty, he was the more sensitive to being told so by a boy.

“I know my own business,” he answered sharply.

“Yes; but,” persisted Clint, “if you can’t be out there yourself, do just come and enforce my authority. They won’t mind a word I say. The men and horses all get into a heap; and they’ll be through the ice as sure as you live. Old Corbett says I don’t know anything.”

“And so you don’t!” broke forth Phil, furiously, perhaps remembering last night, and thinking that, but for Clint, who was then in his way, he should not have made a beast of himself, as he had done, and lost his self-respect, and all hope of Emma, whose scruples regarding his one bad habit he had so quickly and so shamefully justified. “Your authority?” he went on, with quite savage contempt. “You have no authority! If old Corbett is there, it’s all right. What do you want?”

Clint, quite stunned by this violence, stammered out something about hammers. Phil gave him four, and told him to be gone. The young man, white with suppressed anger, thrust two or three of them — one a small sledge, or stone-hammer, weighing several pounds — into his

overcoat pockets, and went out of the building very much as he was accustomed, in his bad moods, to walk out of the house at home. This was the last the foreman remembered of that unfortunate transaction.

He felt at once that he had done wrong, and that he ought to call the boy back and speak kindly to him. "I'm a brute!" he muttered, clasping one hand convulsively to his forehead, and steadying himself with the other, as he staggered back against a work-bench.

There, half sitting, half leaning, with his head bowed and his face covered, he remained, feeling himself still too weak and shaky to appear among the men, and thinking no very happy thoughts, be sure, when he was roused from his stupor by a wild cry, or rather a tumult of cries. It came from the pond. He was on his feet in an instant; he knew that something terrible was happening. He rushed out of the tool-house just in time to see a thronged field of the frozen surface undulate and break up, and a reeling and plunging mass of utterly helpless men and horses go down in the ice.

V.

THE POND-RAKES COME IN PLAY.

OLD man Dracutt was sweeping snow from the doorway path when Uncle Jim stopped at the gate.

"Good mornin', Jonathan."

"Good mornin', good mornin', James!" said Jonathan, resting on his broom. "What's the good word this mornin', James?"

"No good word, Jonathan," said Uncle Jim, in a constrained and awkward manner, pulling the gate open and coming in.

“Hey! what’s the matter? — folks sick?”

“My folks are all well; children are chipper, thank Heaven!” Uncle Jim cleared his throat. “All well here?”

“Toler’ble, all that’s to home. Clinton’s off to-day.”

“Ah! Where’s Clint?”

“To work on the ice, I s’pose.”

“Sorry to hear that!” said Uncle Jim. “There’s been an accident, did you know it?”

“On the ice?” cried old man Dracutt, with an anxious start.

“So I hear. A good many men got in; and it’s feared they ha’n’t all got out again.” And Uncle Jim fixed his tender blue eyes compassionately on old man Dracutt’s face.

“Not — Clinton?”

“Some of the wet men have come to my house for clothing. I — I hope for the best, Jonathan. There’s no knowing yet; but I thought you ought to be prepared. Dear boy! he was in to see us last night, — so lively, as he always is! No, no, Jonathan! I can’t believe he is drowned!” But Uncle Jim turned away with a look that told a different story.

“I understand; you’ve come to break it to me.” Jonathan spoke calmly, though his voice was deep and husky, and he leaned heavily on the broom. “Tell me the truth James; is he drowned?”

“So the men say; but they —” James set out to explain, but Jonathan cut him short.

“Where?”

“Over by the white ice-houses.”

“Go in and tell her,” said Jonathan.

He himself did not go in (and we will not), but started at once to walk to the scene of the disaster.

“Drowned! and my last word to him was a harsh

one!" he murmured, as he went out at the gate; and again, ever and anon, as he tramped with difficulty through the snow, — "Drownded! and my last word was unkind!"

It was a mile to the spot, and the old man was more infirm than he appeared. He soon came in sight of the pond, however, and could see, far off, groups of men moving excitedly about the broken field. Some were clearing the water of the floating fragments of ice; others, in boats, or standing on the unbroken edge, were thrusting down poles, which he knew to be the long-handled, ponderous pond-rakes, with which the bottom was in summer cleared of weeds. Up and down, and to and fro, the poles were pushed and dragged, and he was sure they were searching for his boy.

With this terrible knowledge, and with this scene full in view, the old man walked the last half-mile of his toilsome tramp. He kept the bank of the pond until he was quite near, then went down upon the ice. Crossing an unbroken corner, he soon came to the men with the poles. They continued at work, while others standing by made way for him with ominous respect, — the respect which even the rudest persons instinctively show to one in affliction. There was a hush of voices as he appeared; then old Farmer Corbett turned to him and said bluntly, "It 's a bad business, Neighbor Dracutt. If the boys had only heerd to me, 't would n't 'a' happened. I kep' tellin' on 'em they worked too clust together; though I'd no idee myself but that the ice was thicker. Lucky for me, I'd jest drove off when it give way. Your boy wa'n't alone. We had thirty men and eighteen hosses in to once. But I flew round, pulled off the ropes from t'other hosses, and throwed 'em to the fellers we could n't reach. Wooden scrapers was lucky, — I vow, I believe the boys would have hitched on to the iron ones, if 't had n't been for me;

they helped keep 'em afloat, the wooden scrapers did. We broke the ice to the shore, and hild the hosses' heads above water till they could tech bottom, an' in ten minutes we had 'em all out."

"All!" said the old man, with a sudden gleam of hope.

"All the animals, an' all the fellers but your grandson; at least, he's the only one missin', fur's we know. There wa'n't no need o' his bein' drowned at all; but he'd been to git some hammers to knock off the balls from the hosses' hoofs with, an' 'pears the foolish feller tucked 'em in his pockets. They took him right to the bottom, of course. An' what I'm feared on now is, we sha'n't find him at all. This here shore slants right down steep, to about seventy or eighty feet deep, off here; an' with them hammers in his pockets, with every struggle he made, he'd be liable, don't ye see? to work his way funder an' funder down that pitch. That's what I tell 'em; but they don't seem inclined to believe a word I say. If they'd believed me when I telled 'em they ought to scatter more, an' not crowd together so on sech young ice, 't would 'a' been better for all on us, I vow."

Mr. Dracutt watched the men raking the pond for some time, without speaking, though his lips moved now and then inaudibly. At last he asked for Kermer.

"That's him with the pole, in the bow of that funder boat there," said Farmer Corbett. "He's done his duty sence he's been here; but if he'd been here afore, 't would 'a' saved all this. Nobody knowed how to go to work. Nobody would hear to me, though I telled 'em —" and so forth; the worthy farmer appearing by this time to have convinced even himself that he had foreseen the danger, and to find a dismal satisfaction in uttering prophecies after the fact.

"Don't handle your rake that way!" said the old man,

as Farmer Corbett thrust down the implement in a fresh spot beneath the ice. "Be more careful; be more tender! You may hurt the boy!"

"He's past hurtin' by this time, I guess likely," said Farmer Corbett. "The main thing now is to fish him out."

"Wal, wal! be gentle! I would n't have ye mar his featur's, nor any part of him, more'n I'd have ye tear my own flesh. If he's drowned, he's drowned; but don't mangle him. Whereabouts was he when he went down?"

"That nobody knows. It's as much as a chap wants to do, sech a time, to keep the run of himself, with an acre of ice slumpin' down under him, and the water spurtin' up about his legs; he can't keep many eyes on to his neighbors, nor do much else but mind his own business for a spell. Two or three o' them that got the duckin', — they've gone off now for dry shirts and breeches, — they said they seen Clint a standin' on the ice not more'n a few seconds 'fore it split up, though, of course, they can't tell jest where. A sudden casouse over neck an' heels into ice-water makes a feller feel curis, I tell ye, for about a minute, an' forgit things. I tried it once myself."

"How long 'fore you missed him?" the old man asked.

"I vow, I don't know as we sh'd 'a' missed him till this time," said Farmer Corbett, getting down on his knees, and feeling with his rake to the utmost depth it would fathom; "but Kermer missed him. He asked for Clint Dracutt, a'most the fust thing, 'fore ever we'd got half the men out. He knowed about the hammers in his pockets, ye see. No use!" (Drawing up the rake.) "The bottom's gittin' down out o' my reach, and I go about two-an'-twenty foot. We shall have to lash poles to the rake-handles; an' then, if we don't find him, cut holes in the ice here behind us, an' fish for him through them."

"Don't git discouraged," cried the old man, seeing that

others were at the same time beginning to relax their efforts. "Let me take the rake."

Farmer Corbett was quite willing to give it up; and the old man found a temporary relief to his distress of mind in the physical exertion of searching for the body. It was hard work, however, and his strength was soon exhausted. He was feebly hauling up the weed-entangled rake from under the verge of the ice, when some one came and took him by the arm. It was Phil Kermer, sober enough by this time.

"This is no work for you, Mr. Dracutt. Come away; let me send you home."

"No, no! I can't go till he is found," said the old man.

"I will see that everything is done that can be done," said Phil. "Come; my sleigh is here."

Still the old man refused to go. And now the foreman was called away from him by the arrival of the president of the Ice Company, driving down in a cutter to the edge of the pond, where two of the directors, who were already on the spot, went to meet him.

VI.

PHIL RESIGNS HIS SITUATION.

KERMER, on coming up, found the three in consultation.

"How is this, Kermer?" said the president, from under his rich sleigh-robos.

"Gentlemen," said Phil, "I'll tell you just how it is," the haggard face and earnest manner of the man commanding at once their sympathy and respect. "I suppose I am to blame in this matter." He hesitated, dropped his head upon his breast, clinching his hands and his teeth

tightly for a moment, then went on. "The truth is, I was drunk last night, and I was n't myself this morning. There's no use disguising the fact; I don't wish to disguise it; I don't wish to shirk the consequences. Do your worst with me, gentlemen. I'm prepared."

"But what can we do, Kermer?"

"One thing, certainly. You can discharge a foreman who has been guilty of such gross neglect of duty. You can't do less than that. You can do as much more as you please."

"But we don't know how to spare you; we don't want to spare you, Kermer," said the president. "You have been a very useful man to us. And this being the first offence of the kind, which I am sure you will never repeat —"

"It's no use, sir!" answered the foreman, in a voice shaken to its depths by strong emotion. "You don't see your own interests as I see them. You will stand better with the community if you discharge me. That's the only atonement you can make to the boy's friends. They will feel better. And as an example, gentlemen, you ought to do it, if for no other reason."

"How so, Kermer?"

"Because," said Phil, who seemed to have lived and thought more in the past two hours than in years before, and to have come to great conclusions, — "because young men ought not to be able to say that a foreman in an important place like mine can keep that place after he has caused the death of one man, and endangered the lives of fifty, by getting drunk."

The president and his two associates on the spot, being kind-hearted and just men, were greatly embarrassed to know what to do in the case. If Kermer had approached them with falsehood and excuse, endeavoring to cast the blame of the accident upon others, their duty would have

been comparatively clear ; such a foreman would certainly have deserved to be dismissed. But nothing disarms censure like self-accusation ; and the deep remorse he evinced, yet more by his manner than by his words, seemed the best guaranty he could give of sober and faithful behavior in the future.

“There is force in what you say, Kermer,” said one of the directors. “But the very fact that you say it convinces me that you are, after all, a man to be trusted. You have shown great ability and fidelity to our interests hitherto, and I don’t think one such indiscretion ought to ruin a man. What’s your opinion, gentlemen?”

The other two agreed with him, and proposed that the decision of the question should be postponed until the next regular meeting of the board. The truth was, Phil was too valuable a man to lose.

The foreman was deeply affected, but by no means persuaded, by this unexpected kindness. He struggled a moment with his emotions, then said, “Gentlemen, I thank you, this is so much more than I deserve, but it can’t be as you wish. If you won’t discharge me for the reasons I have given, then discharge me for my own sake. I can’t go on as if nothing had happened. If I could exchange places with that dead boy under the ice, I should be contented, I should be quite happy. Since that can’t be, it seems to me that the only relief I can have will be in punishment. If I don’t have some outward punishment, my inward punishment will be too great to bear. Let me go to work by the day under some other foreman, if you still want to keep me.”

“Very well, Kermer,” said the president. “We don’t discharge you, mind, but we accept your resignation, since you insist upon it, and we hire you by the day.”

“Like any other laborer,” Kermer stipulated.

“Like any other experienced laborer. You won’t object to having charge of a gang of men, under me, will you, till we can find another foreman? I shall stay and look after the work myself for the present.”

“I am at your service, gentlemen; drive me,” said Phil.

And he looked as if he would like to be driven hard.

VII.

A FAREWELL AND AN APPARITION.

THE horses and scrapers were going again busily and cheerfully, as if nothing had happened, only half a dozen men remaining with the late foreman to search for the drowned body. It was a toilsome and discouraging task, and at last old man Dracutt, chilled and exhausted, consented to be taken home.

“I telled ’em so, I telled ’em so!” Farmer Corbett repeated every half-hour, as he watched the ineffectual rakes, lengthened out by the addition of poles lashed to the handles, working their way into deeper and deeper water. And it really began to appear that he was right in his conjecture that Clint had gone down the steep slope beneath the unbroken ice. “They won’t get him now, at all, — mark my word, boys, — not without he rises to the surface an’ freezes into the ice, where we may come acrost him when we come to cut.”

As that day passed, and the next, and the third and fourth likewise, and the body was not found, the old man became triumphant, and offered to make large bets in support of his theory. He would, no doubt, have been

deeply disappointed and chagrined if the body had turned up at last and proved him to be no true prophet. But that was not to be. On the fifth day the search was abandoned, and he again had the satisfaction of reminding people, with his usual sagacious smirk and arrogant headshake, that he "telled 'em so."

The catastrophe soon ceased to be talked about. As the frozen surface of the pond was suffered to close over the spot, so the ice of oblivion seemed soon to form over the memory of poor Clint. The groups of skaters, once his daily companions, flying, on swift, ringing irons, along that shore, and sometimes pausing to observe, one to another, "I wonder whereabouts under us Clint Dracutt is!" then speeding on again joyous as ever, were types of the world out of whose busy and careless life he had disappeared. Will more be said of you and me, think you, O my friend! when the universal icy tablet is laid over our heads also?

There were three or four hearts, however (may we hope for as many such, and be grateful), that did not forget the unlucky youth so readily. Upon his grandparents, left now to their dumb and wretched loneliness, the loss had of course fallen most heavily. Yet there was one other to whom it occasioned even greater suffering, though in a different way. This was Phil Kermer. He had been really attached to Clint, and would have missed him under any circumstances that might have separated them; but the sting lay deeper than that, — he felt that he was responsible for the boy's death. With him, therefore, mere regret was consumed in burning remorse.

It was a terrible thing to Phil to be obliged to give up all hope of recovering the body. He regretted now that he had consented to remain upon the pond at all. Every day, and every hour of the day, he was reminded of the

death which his conscience told him his own negligence and unkindness had caused. It seemed to him that he was constantly walking over the grave of his murdered friend. Pass where he would on the ice, there the dead face seemed to rise beneath it, and with upturned eyes and still, livid lips reproach him for his crime. And he was now helping to make merchandise of that ice. The thought of it became intolerable to him; the very sight of the pond, which had before been his delight, filled him with loathing.

Everybody noticed the change that had come over the late foreman, and he had the sympathy and respect of the entire community. Emma Welford heard of it, and she longed inexpressibly to see him once more and speak to him one little word of comfort; all the interest she had ever felt in him, all the tenderness he had ever inspired, returning with tenfold force upon her heart, now that she knew he was unhappy.

It was generally believed that Kermer was working his way back gradually and surely to the place which he had felt obliged temporarily to resign. A week, two weeks, passed; no other foreman was engaged, and the ice was at last thick enough to cut. It was Saturday evening, and on Monday morning, if no more snow should fall in the interim, the harvesting of the crystal crop was to begin. As Phil was leaving the pond at dusk, the president stopped him and put a letter into his hand.

“Think of it till Monday,” said he, “then give us your answer.”

Phil went into the tool-house, struck a light, and read the letter. It was a formal proposition for him to resume his former duties as foreman, with an increased salary.

He put the letter into his pocket, extinguished the light, locked up the tool-house, and went home. He did not

wait till Monday, however, before coming to a decision. Before he slept that night his mind was made up. He determined to decline the offer and to leave the pond.

In leaving the pond, he would, of course, leave the town; for what would then be left to hold him there but those painful associations from which he was growing morbidly anxious to be free? But, before going, he felt he had a duty to fulfil. He had never yet had the courage to visit Clint's grandparents since the accident; he would do so now. And Emma, — ought he not to see her once more and acknowledge to her that she had always been right with regard to his one dangerous habit, and then bid her a final adieu?

The next day he wrote his letter, formally and positively declining the company's proposition, and in the evening set out to make his farewell calls. "Emma first," thought Phil, with a strange swelling of the heart.

It was a clear January night; beautiful, still moonlight on the beautiful, still snow. Phil's shadow glided beside him as he walked, and a darker shadow than that dogged his every step, — the memory of Clint. It was only two weeks since they had met together in that house, and then the boy had been in the man's way. What would not the man have given to have the boy in his way again to-night!

It is true, a horrible temptation beset Kermer as he approached and saw the light in the windows, and all his old feelings toward Emma surged up again. He believed that she would have married Clint, if he had lived. Now that Clint was gone, perhaps he, Phil — But he would not allow the thought to shape itself in his mind. To profit in any way by the boy's death would, he felt, make him a murderer indeed. "No, no!" thought he, crushing down his heart as it rose rebelliously; "this very thing makes a union with her utterly and forever impossible; I

should always feel that I had gained her by getting rid of Clint. I won't forget this now when I come to see her." And he did not forget it.

They met almost in silence at the door, so much were they overcome by the emotions the occasion called up in each. The children ran to him, as of old; and Sissy, remembering the fun she had the last time he was there, asked for Clint. "What have you done with Clint? Did you put him down under the ice? Won't the ice bite him there?"

"Hush, hush," said Emma; while poor Phil was unable to speak a word.

But the little chatterbox ran on. She wished to know how Clint could get up to heaven, now that the ice was thick and hard all over him, and would Phil cut a hole to let him pass through?

"I wish he would n't go to heaven," she said; "for I want him to come and make a wheelbarrow of Tommy, and let me be a bag of potatoeth, and thell me like he did lath time. Will you let me be a bag of potatoeth, Mithta Phil?"

But Phil, cut to the heart by the innocent prattle, said he did n't believe he could make a wheelbarrow; besides, the blacksmith's shop (namely, the old grandfather) had gone to call on a sick neighbor; then what would they do if the wheelbarrow should break down? So Sissy was put off, and the children were soon sent out of the room.

Then Phil told Emma of his determination to leave town, probably never to return. She had not expected that. She had hoped that he had come to say something very, very different. Why did he go? she asked. And he told her something of what he had suffered.

"But we all know it was an accident; then why do you blame yourself so?"

“Because I *am* to blame,” answered Kermer, with solemn self-condemnation. “And that brings me to speak of what I have come to say to you to-night.”

What could that be, if he had not said it already? Emma could not conceal her agitation. Never before had she felt so powerfully attracted toward this man. Suffering had softened him; his old self-complacency had vanished, and in its place humility, and charity, and sweetness of spirit surrounded him with their warm and living atmosphere. This change in himself, together with a similar change in her, perhaps (for she too had suffered), rendered him more than ever susceptible to the charm of her presence, and he felt compelled to keep a fast hold in his mind upon his strong resolution, to avoid yielding to that influence.

After a pause, holding her hand and looking into her eyes, he said to her: “I thought I ought to acknowledge to you, before I go, that you were altogether right in what you required of me, and that I was altogether wrong. It may seem a mere mockery for me to make that confession now; it is too late for it to do anybody any good. Yet I felt I ought to make it.”

Why was it too late? Why did he go, now that the only obstacle that had before separated them seemed to be removed? for he declared that he had forsworn his habit of dissipation forever. The real cause of his leaving her was too painful a subject for him to talk about, and he could only say that he went “because he must.” Then the conclusion was forced upon her that he did not care for her any more; that he had, perhaps, never really cared for her, and her womanly pride was roused, giving her unnatural strength for the separation. She was wonderfully dignified and cold till he had reached the door; then he opened his arms, and she fell sobbing upon his breast. He kissed her once and again, and breathed forth I know

not what passionate parting words with his farewell, then hurriedly departed from the house, like a strong man fleeing from a great temptation.

In the street, he did not know what to do with himself. He felt more utterly forlorn and desolate than he had ever believed it possible for a man to be and live. "Go back to her!" whispered one passion in his breast. "Go to the bar-room!" whispered another and darker passion. He resisted both.

He could not go at once and make his farewell call on the old couple, and so he wandered down a lane that led to the pond. Why he should choose to revisit at that time a scene which he could not behold without a pang, it is not easy to say. But sometimes pain itself, especially when associated with some object of affection or respect, has a fascination for us.

He went down to the shore, and stood by a high board fence that served as a shelter to a farmer's hot-beds, — the wintry sky above him cloudless and pure; before him the cold, shining silence of the moonlit ice. There were no skaters on the pond that night, and its stillness was broken only by its own wild and solitary noises.

As Phil was gazing in the direction of the spot where the catastrophe had occurred, he became all at once aware of what seemed a human figure walking on that part of the pond. In a little while, it appeared to be approaching him. Nearer and nearer it came, until he thought he ought to catch the sound of footsteps, but not a sound was heard. Silently as a ghost, out of the ghostly silence it came, gliding along the ice. Now it stood still, and now it threw out its arms wildly and beat its breast. And now it assumed to the eyes of the amazed spectator a mien and shape that made his blood run cold, — the mien and shape of the drowned youth, Clinton Dracutt!

VIII.

UNCLE JIM'S EVENING CALL.

AGAIN that Sunday evening old man Dracutt and his wife sat together by their lonely kitchen fire, but with no Clinton now to come in and break the awful silence and monotony of their lives. The lamp had not been lighted ; only the moonlight lay upon the floor, and the still whiteness of the winter's night filled the room with its pallid reflection.

The old man sat in his chair erect, but looking more crushed together in the neck and jaws than ever, while his wife appeared bent by an added load of trouble. There was utter silence, except that now and then a soft, low sob was heard ; the old lady was thinking of that night two weeks ago, and weeping. Then, ever and anon, from without came a deep, muffled, reverberating roar or groan, as if Nature herself sympathized with their woe. If it had been summer, you would have said it thundered. But it was the pond complaining, the thick-ribbed ice shuddering and moaning under the cold, starry night. Every sudden, prolonged peal reached the ears of the lonely old couple in the bereaved house, reminding them of their loss.

They had not spoken to each other yet, nor had there been much need that they should speak, so well had they learned in all those years to understand each other without words. But they had shown in many ways that they felt more kindly toward each other since this great affliction came upon them. And now, old lady Dracutt sitting there, weeping, in the gloom, longed to speak once more to her husband, and to hear his voice.

She was ready to say, "Forgive me, Jonathan," but was afraid to utter the words. How strangely they would sound, breaking the unnatural silence that had kept them dumb to each other for twelve years! Again and again she tried to speak, but could not bring her tongue to shape the syllables; it seemed paralyzed; she began to feel a strange, benumbing fear that she would never have power to break that silence, that it had been taken from her as a punishment for her long sin of wilfulness and hard-heartedness toward him.

While she was thus struggling ineffectually with herself, suddenly another voice broke the spell which she could not, — to her terror and joy, her husband's voice.

"I have been thinking, Jane —" said he, and stopped.

"O Jonathan! you have spoken!" she cried out, with a wild sob. "God bless you, God bless you, Jonathan!"

"Jane, I thought I had better speak," said the old man in a trembling voice. "I have been wantin' to for many days. I think I have been wrong, Jane."

"Don't say it, don't say it, Jonathan," said the old lady, sinking to the floor, and throwing her clasped hands across his knees. "I should have asked your forgiveness. I have tried to. I was trying to now, when you spoke. O Jonathan, Jonathan!"

"God forgive us! I think we have both been wrong, but I have been most in the wrong," said the old man. Then a long silence followed, broken by sighs and sobs, and the moaning peals of the pond.

"I've been thinkin'," resumed the old man, — she was at last seated by his side once more, and her hand was in his, — "that I can't, somehow, bear to have Clinton's memory passed over in this way. I think we ought to have funeral sarvices for him, even without —"

"Yes," said she, "I have felt so, too. It will be some satisfaction. I said as much to Cousin James."

"He told me you did. He told me, too, what you said about my blaming myself so much on account of the boy. And it touched me, it touched me; I did n't deserve that you should feel and speak so kindly."

"But, Jonathan," replied Jane, wiping her eyes, "you said nothin' to him that night that it was n't your duty to say. I felt that, though I hated to have him hurt."

"I don't know, I don't know. If I had been different, he might have been different. No wonder he was cross sometimes. It's the hardest thing for me to reconcile myself to the fact that my last word to him was unkind. He would n't have gone off on the pond so the next mornin' without speakin' to us, if it had n't been for that. I thought 't was my duty to reprimand him, and maybe it was. But my first duty was to set him an example of cheerfulness and good temper. What could we expect of him as long as we two were at enmity?" And the old man ended with a groan.

While they were talking, there came a rap at the door. The old man said, "Walk in," while the old lady made haste to light a lamp.

"It's nobody but me; don't light up for me," said a familiar voice, as the tall form of a hale old man appeared in the doorway.

"Cousin James!" said the old lady, still opening the wick with the lighted match.

"At this time o' night, and with a knock!" said old man Dracutt, pushing a chair toward the visitor.

"I knocked because I—I rather thought ye had company," said James, glancing his eye about the room as he sat down.

"You heard talkin', I s'pose," said old man Dracutt.

“Ye need n’t be surprised at it. ’T was nobody but Jane and me.”

“Praise the Lord!” exclaimed Uncle Jim (for we like best the name the young folks called him by). “Bless ye, Jonathan; bless ye, Jane. I hoped this sorrow would bring you closer together, and I see it has.”

“It has, it has!” said Jane.

“God’s ways are not our ways,” said Uncle Jim, with deep emotion. “He has done it. He meant it all for your good.”

“I believe so,” replied Jane. “We have had comfort in each other to-night, such as we have n’t had for twenty year. But, O James! at what a cost! I’ve been thinkin’ the sunshine could n’t melt us, and so God sent his lightnin’. If we had n’t been so hard-hearted, then our boy might have been spared to us.”

“But you will soon become reconciled to his loss,” said Uncle Jim, philosophically — so very philosophically, indeed, that old man Dracutt looked at him with reproachful surprise.

“That can never be, James. There’s only one thing now that can be any satisfaction to us. This week the ice will be cut over all that part of the pond. He may be found, froze into it. If not, then we must have funeral sarvices, jest the same as if he was. What ails ye, James? Ye don’t listen to me. I thought ye approved of the idee of a funeral.”

“So I do — that is, so I should — hem!” coughed Uncle Jim, using his handkerchief, fidgeting in his chair, and behaving strangely in other ways. “But I would n’t hurry about it. There’s no knowin’, ye know — he may be found yet — and — hem! — the fact is, there’s no sartinty — no positive sartinty — that he’s drowneded, ye know, Jonathan.”

“I wish I did know it,” said Jonathan, somewhat startled. “If I could think there was a particle of hope! James,” he went on, with increasing agitation, “what have you come here for this time o’ the evenin’? You don’t act your nat’ral self. There’s somethin’ —”

“Yes, there *is* somethin’,” Uncle Jim replied, “and I want you to be prepared for ’t.”

“For Heaven’s sake, James!” said the old lady, “what is it? Have they found the poor boy’s body?”

“Not — not exactly that. I tell ye,” Uncle Jim cleared his throat again, “there’s no positive sartinty about his bein’ drowned. The men said he was on the ice jest a few seconds before it broke up; but, don’t you see, men can’t have much recollection with regard to time, after such an accident? What seemed to them a few seconds, when they thought on ’t afterwards, might have been a few minutes; in fact, might have been five, ten minutes. Have ye thought of that?”

“Yes, yes. But all the sarcumstances, James, — they are agin the supposition. Where could the poor boy be, if not there? He could n’t have gone off. He had no money about him. Then, agin, the hammers, James!”

“The hammers! — hem! — yes, Jonathan,” said Uncle Jim, in the awkwardest manner, and with the strangest blending of cheerfulness and anxiety in his kind old face, “about the hammers. Something has come to light with regard to them; and that’s one thing I’ve come to tell you. Whatever has become of Clinton, *they* have n’t gone to the bottom of the pond, that’s a sartin case.”

“How do you know?” cried old man Dracutt, almost fiercely.

“I was told so, on good authority, this very evenin’. I know jest where them hammers are. They are lyin’ in a corner of the fence, a few rods beyond the tool-house.

The very hammers, I know it. The snow prevented 'em from bein' discovered before."

"Clinton! Clinton! then he may be alive!" broke forth the old lady, with sudden and wild hope.

"It is more than probable. In fact, a — person — has been heard from, up in New Hampshire, who answers his description. A young man come to town this evenin' and brought the news. He'll be here in a few minutes. Be calm, Jane, I — I believe he is comin' now!" (Footsteps in the creaking snow outside.) "So, do be composed, Jonathan! You know now who it is!" as the door opened.

"Clinton!" shrieked the old lady, tottering forward, and falling on the new-comer's neck, with hysterical sobs.

It was Clinton, sure enough, and Phil Kermer with him.

IX.

HOW CLINTON MISSED A RARE CHANCE.

A WORD now (while the old couple are recovering from their shock of joy) with regard to the young man's reappearance.

The reader has, of course, divined that the ghost Phil saw on the ice was no other than Clint himself. He crossed the pond because it was the nearest way home. When he stood still, he was hesitating whether to go on to the lane, or to take a still more direct course over Mr. Jones's farm. He had on india-rubber shoes, and they muffled the sound of his footsteps, preventing them from being heard until he was quite near. When he flung out his arms and beat his breast, he was simply whipping his sides to warm his hands. You may be sure that Phil did not

long remain in doubt as to the real nature of the apparition; and that he was thrilled with something besides fear, when, calling out in a loud voice from the shore, "Is that you, Clinton Dracutt?" he received the characteristic response, in gross mortal accents, "I bet ye! That you, Phil Kermer?"

When the first surprise of their meeting was over, and Phil had got from Clint a brief account of his disappearance, and Clint had learned (for the first time) from Phil that he was supposed to be drowned, they walked up the lane toward the Dracutt house. But now it occurred to Phil that the grandson's sudden reappearance unannounced might be even a more dangerous shock to the old couple than the report of his death had been. He remembered that Uncle Jim was close by, spending the evening with Mr. Jones, a sick neighbor; and he thought it would be peculiarly appropriate that he who had broken to them the bad news should now convey to them the antidote.

They met Uncle Jim just as he was coming out of Neighbor Jones's door. He went back into the house with them, where he remained to recover a little from his astonishment, and to hear enough of Clint's story to enable him to unfold the truth by degrees to the old couple; then set out on his new mission. Phil waited for him to do his errand, and for Clint to get warm by Mrs. Jones's fire, and to eat a leg of cold turkey from Mrs. Jones's larder, then took him home, entering the house with him, as we have seen.

Clint was looking well, but rather shabby. He was inclined to swagger a little, and to show a manly distaste for the fuss made over him. Old man Dracutt scarcely uttered a word, but appeared fairly dazed by what seemed to him more a dream of his grandson's return than a reality, and stood with silent tears coursing down his aged cheeks. The old lady kissed the boy often enough for

both ; and repeated again and again the question before he could get breath between the caresses to answer it, "Where have you been, Clinton? Clinton, O Clinton! where *have* you been?"

"Not to the bottom of the pond, by a long chalk!" said Clint, getting away from her, and seating himself, while all sat around him, in the dimly lighted kitchen. "I never went back on to the ice at all, after I left Phil. I just went the other way, as fast as ever my legs could carry me ; and pitched those hammers into a corner of the fence, the first thing. I had no idea where I was going ; but I was so disgusted with everybody and everything, and myself in particular, that all I thought of was to get away out of sight, somewhere.

"I had n't gone far when a man came along in a buggy. 'Give me a ride?' says I. 'Hop in,' says he. 'Rather hard travelling,' says I. 'Yes,' says he ; 'I got caught by the snow last night ; that comes,' says he, 'of travelling on Sunday.' We got acquainted as we rode along, and I found out he was a horse-doctor, and that he lived at the Port. I said I was going there to look for a situation, and told him I knew a good deal more about horses than I suppose was exactly consistent with the truth. You see, as he talked horse, I talked horse out of sympathy. We made a few stops, and got to his house about noon ; then he asked me to dinner ; and after dinner he said he could give me a job if I would like one. He had a pair of horses on his hands that he wanted to send up into New Hampshire to be boarded for the winter ; and offered me five dollars if I would go and take care of them on the way. He paid me in advance ; and the next day I started, went by railroad, and got to the place the next night. It was a country tavern ; and the landlord said he could n't keep the team, although he had agreed to, for his hostler had just

left him, and he did n't know about hiring another. 'Maybe,' says I, 'you 'd like to hire me?' We struck a bargain in about a minute, and I went to work, thinking I was going to be in clover.

"I stayed with him till yesterday morning, when I left in a hurry. I could n't stand it any longer. I tell ye, 't was rough. Big job and small pay. I began to think of home, and came to the conclusion I 'd been a dunce to leave it."

"But why did you leave it, Clint?" asked Phil. "Your getting angry with me was no good reason."

"Well, I had got mad with the old folks too."

"But was there nobody else you cared for?"

"Well — yes — no — fact is," said Clint, "there was another thing that disgusted me. You know you left me the night before with — you know who. Well, I may as well own it, I stayed and made a fool of myself. She did n't care *that* for me," Clint snapped his fingers. "I found 't was *somebody else* she cared for; and that *somebody else* made me mad as fury, next morning, in the tool-house."

Phil rose somewhat hurriedly after this, and took his hat.

"Don't go!" cried Clint. "That 's all right now, ye know."

"Yes; glad you 've forgiven me. But I — I 've a little matter of business to look after. And as I 've heard the rest of your story, I 'll see you in the morning, Clint."

With these words, Phil hastened away, to look after the "little matter of business" that had so suddenly claimed his attention, leaving Clint to relate to the old people how he had that day walked all the way from the Port, and met the late foreman, after crossing the pond.

"So you thought I was *in the ice*, this winter, with

a vengeance, did ye? Now, if that a'n't the coolest joke!"

"Yes," said Uncle Jim, "and we were talkin' about havin' a funeral sermon preached for you."

Whereupon the young man almost went into convulsions of laughter.

"I wish I'd known it. I'd have stayed away, put on false whiskers and goggles, and come to my own funeral. Would n't it have been rich? 'T a'n't often a man can do that. Wonder if the minister would have made me out a saint? Ho, ho, ho! Why *did* n't I know of it, and come to my own funeral? There never was such a rare chance for sport, and, by George, I've missed it!"

X.

A GOLDEN WEDDING, AFTER ALL.

IN the mean while, Mr. Phil Kermer walked very fast, and in a very extraordinary direction for a man of business at that time of night, namely, to Uncle Jim's door, when he knew very well that Uncle Jim was n't at home. He seemed to think it necessary that Emma should be at once informed of the joyful news of Clint's resurrection. It was joyful news, indeed, his coming conveyed to her, when the door opened, and he himself appeared almost like one raised from the dead, to eyes even then red with weeping — not for Clint.

When Uncle Jim returned home, and found a happy couple sitting up for him (of course, they could n't have been sitting up for anything else at that time of night), Mr. Phil's little matter of business seemed to have been quite satisfactorily arranged.

One other little matter remained for Phil to attend to, on reaching his own lodgings ; which was, to destroy the letter he had written to the president of the Ice Company, and to write another in its place, which consisted of two words, simply : —

“ *I accept.*”

The next day Phil entered on his new duties as foreman, with an energy that augured well for his own future and for the interests of the company.

The harvest had begun ; an army of men and horses were at work, cutting fields of ice into checkers, and breaking up these checkers into blocks to be raised by machinery, and stored in the great ice-houses ; when, toward noon, Farmer Corbett, who had been kept away from the pond by an attack of rheumatism, came limping along, with a puckered and suffering countenance, to see what was going on.

“ We ’ve begun to cut, you see,” said Phil. “ And Clint has been found.”

“ You don’t say ! Where ?”

“ I discovered him, when taking a look at the ice off Jones’s shore.”

“ I telled ye so ! I telled ye so !” said the prophet, although the spot indicated was half a mile from the deep water which his theory favored. “ Exac’ly where I said. Froze in the ice, was n’t he ? Ye remember what I telled ye.”

“ Not precisely frozen *into* the ice, — he was walking *on* the ice,” said Phil.

“ Not drowned ?” cried the old farmer, with alarm.

“ Not a bit of it ; but alive and well, Mr. Corbett.”

Whereat the prophet’s countenance, which had brightened wonderfully a moment before, assumed once more its puckered and suffering expression, and he was observed to

limp away more painfully than ever. At first, he professed an utter disbelief in Clint's return to life, declaring it to be "agin natur', and agin reason"; but after he had beheld with his own eyes the miracle of the young man moving about bodily on the pond (for Clint was "in the ice" again, with his friend Phil), he consoled himself by saying that "if the feller *had* 'a' been drownded, he'd 'a' been found exac'ly as he telled 'em."

Clint got along very well with Phil, and, consequently, with everybody else on the pond, after this. We must here do him the justice to add, that he gets along very well with the old folks too. A fortnight's rough experience as hostler and man-of-all-work in a country tavern, under a hard master, had prepared him to appreciate the privileges and comforts of home; while the great change that had taken place in his grandparents did much to bring about a reform of manners in him.

Clint missed the chance of attending his own funeral, but he had something, perhaps, quite as good in its stead.

"Did you think, Jonathan," said old lady Dracutt, one day, "that that was the fiftieth anniversary of our weddin' the night 'fore Clinton went away."

"Yes; and I've thought on 't a good deal sence," replied the old man. "I'm sorry it should have passed so. Some people have a golden weddin' on that anniversary. I don't think we deserve a golden weddin' exactly; but if any old couple ever needed to set the example of bein' married over agin, in a new sperit, it's you and me, Jane. Don't you think so?"

"I do! I do! I wish that anniversary was n't past; though maybe it a'n't too late to have our golden weddin' now. Our unnat'ral way of livin' together has been known to everybody so long, I feel as if I'd like to make some public profession of our change of feelin's, — jest have our

friends come in and see us married over agin, in a better sperit, as you say.”

Friends favored the idea, and proffered their assistance ; and so it happened that, instead of a funeral in the old Dracutt house, there was, before many days, a golden wedding.

The peculiar circumstances of the occasion invested it with extraordinary interest ; everybody seemed eager to witness the second marriage of an aged couple who had lived separated under the same roof, without speaking to each other, for so many years. Their first marriage, fifty years before, had been called a romantic one ; but this, all things considered, was even more romantic — it was certainly far more significant — than that.

Old and young were present, a houseful of guests, — those who had lived through the great experience of wedded life, and those who were just entering upon it, with youthful passions and rainbow-colored hopes. Nor were absent little children, yet innocent of the sweet but awful knowledge of love. All Emma’s little flock were there, even down to little Sissy, whose dancing, golden curls and cherubic cheeks presented a strange contrast to the gray hairs and wrinkles of the aged pair. Dear, laughter-loving child ! the world was all before her now, while they were leaving it fast behind them. Little she thought that *she* would ever grow old, and grizzled, and infirm, like them. Yet that aged bride, so bent, was once a beauteous, beaming child like her ; and who knows what shadowy cares may come on the wings of the swift years to darken and trouble that little one’s dream of life ? For when seventy birthdays more shall have passed over her, and *her* golden wedding-day shall have come, and she looks back to this day, will the long life between, with all its joys and disappointments, seem anything else but a dream ?

All the old people who could be found, that had been present at Jonathan and Jane's first wedding, were invited to this ; and, strange and sad to say, only four out of all that happy company could be obtained, — three besides Cousin Jim ! What a solemn commentary was that upon the fleeting shows of the world ! If length of years and worldly pleasure and gain were all of life, it would not seem to amount to very much, after all, — do you really think it would, my octogenarian friend ?

It was a sad though happy occasion to the aged bride and bridegroom ; and when, after the wedding ceremony, friends crowded around to congratulate them, they could not refrain from tears.

“ I feel,” said old man Dracutt, “ that we are married now, not for time, but for eternity. I don't regret that life is short, but that so much of our life has been misspent.”

“ Don't say your experience of life has not been good and useful to you,” cried cheery old Uncle Jim. “ I'm sartin it has.”

“ Yes, in one respect it surely has,” said Jane, smiling through her tears. “ The habit of not speaking to each other, under any provocation, beats everything in the way of discipline I ever heard of. It has given me a command of my own temper, which maybe I could never have got in any other way. Try it, you that need such a discipline, — but not in the way we did. O, if people would only learn to do for love what we did for pride and resentment, and *bridle the tongue*, what a mortal Paradise married life might be !”

“ Wal, wal !” cried Uncle Jim, determined that the occasion should pass off joyously ; “ I don't see but what you have about as much to be thankful for as any of us. Clint has come home all the wiser for his little trip up into New Hampshire, and —”

“And *we* have got out of the ice, too,” said old man Dracutt, smiling; “for it was us that was froze all the time, without knowin’ it.”

“Yes, yes; but you’re thawed out now, and all our hearts are softer and better for your experience. Old age a’n’t such a bad thing; I want our young friends here to learn from us to-night that it a’n’t. I believe that I grow cheerfuller than ever as I grow older; and it will always be so, if we only learn to regard life, not as a thing to be prized and clung to for itself alone, but only as a discipline, as you say, Jane, — only as a discipline and a preparation for a higher and happier futur’.”

“If I can get to look at it in that way, then I sha’ n’t feel that so much of my life has been wasted,” said the bridegroom, shaking Uncle Jim’s hand. “But, O my friends!” shaking hands with the younger guests, “may you be saved from the necessity of such a discipline as we have had! To avoid that, take from me one word of advice, especially you that are about to marry: never let anything stand in the way of perfect harmony and trust in one another; but give up everything, give up everything for LOVE!”

I don’t know how it happened, but the old man looked very particularly at Emma Welford and Phil Kermer as he said this.

NANCY BLYNN'S LOVERS.

WILLIAM TANSLEY, familiarly called Tip, having finished his afternoon's work in Judge Boxton's garden, milked the cows, and given the calves and pigs their supper, — not forgetting to make sure of his own, — stole out of the house with his Sunday jacket, and the secret intention of going "a sparking."

Tip's manner of setting about this delicate business was characteristic of his native shrewdness. He usually went well provided with gifts; and on the present occasion, before quitting the Judge's premises, he "drew upon" a certain barrel in the barn, which was his bank, where he had made, during the day, frequent deposits of green corn, of the diminutive species called *tucket*, smuggled in from the garden, and designed for roasting and eating with the Widow Blynn's pretty daughter. Stealthily, in the dusk, stopping now and then to listen, Tip brought out the little milky ears from beneath the straw, crammed his pockets with them, and packed full the crown of his old straw hat; then, with the sides of his jacket distended, his trousers bulged, and a toppling weight on his head, he peeped cautiously from the door to see that the way was clear for an escape to the orchard, and thence, "'cross lots," to the Widow Blynn's house.

Tip was creeping furtively behind a wall, stooping, with one hand steadying his hat and the other his pockets, when a voice called his name.

It was the voice of Cephas Boxton. Now if there was a person in the world whom Tip feared and hated, it was "that Cephe," and this for many reasons, the chief of which was that the Judge's son did, upon occasions, flirt with Miss Nancy Blynn, who, sharing the popular prejudice in favor of fine clothes and riches, preferred, apparently, a single passing glance from Cephas to all Tip's gifts and attentions.

Tip dropped down behind the wall.

"Tip Tansley!" again called the hated voice.

But the proprietor of that euphonious name, not choosing to answer to it, remained quiet, one hand still supporting his hat, the other his pockets, while young Boxton, to whom glimpses of the aforesaid hat, appearing over the edge of the wall, had previously been visible, stepped quickly and noiselessly to the spot. Tip crouched, with his unconscious eyes in the grass; Cephas watched him good-humoredly, leaning over the wall.

"If it is n't Tip, what is it?" And Cephas struck one side of the distended jacket with his cane. An ear of corn dropped out. He struck the other side, and out dropped another ear. A couple of smart blows across the back succeeded, followed by more corn; and at the same time Tip, getting up, and endeavoring to protect his pockets, let go his hat, which fell off, spilling its contents in the grass.

"Did you call?" gasped the panic-stricken Tip.

The rivals stood with the wall between them, — as ludicrous a contrast, I dare assert, as ever two lovers of one woman presented.

Tip, abashed and afraid, brushed the hair out of his eyes, and made an unsuccessful attempt to look the handsome and smiling Cephas in the face.

"Do you pretend you did not hear — with all these ears?" said the Judge's son.

"I — I was huntin' fur a shoestring," murmured Tip, casting dismayed glances along the ground. "I lost one here som'eres."

"Tip," said Cephas, putting his cane under Master Tansley's chin to assist him in holding up his head, "look me in the eye, and tell me, — what is the difference 'twixt you and that corn?"

"I d'n' know — what?" And, liberating his chin, Tip dropped his head again, and began kicking in the grass in search of the imaginary shoestring.

"That is lying on the ground, and you are lying — on your feet," said Cephas.

Tip replied that he was going to the woods for bean-poles, and that he took the corn to feed the cattle in the "back pastur', 'cause they hooked."

"I wish you were as innocent of hooking as the cattle are!" said the incredulous Cephas. "Go and put the saddle on Pericles."

Tip proceeded in a straight line to the stable, his pockets dropping corn by the way; while Cephas, laughing quietly, walked up and down under the trees.

"Hoss 's ready," muttered Tip, from the barn door.

Instead of leading Pericles out, he left him in the stall, and climbed up into the hayloft to hide, and brood over his misfortune until his rival's departure. It was not alone the affair of the stolen corn that troubled Tip; but from the fact that Pericles was ordered, he suspected that Cephas likewise purposed paying a visit to Nancy Blynn. Resolved to wait and watch, he lay under the dusty roof, chewing the bitter cud of envy, and now and then a stem of new-mown timothy, till Cephas entered the stalls beneath, and said "Be still!" in his clear, resonant tones, to Pericles.

Pericles uttered a quick, low whinny of recognition, and ceased pawing the floor.

"Are you there, Cephas?" presently said another voice.

It was that of the Judge, who had followed his son into the barn. Tip lay with his elbows on the hay, and listened.

"Going to ride, are you? Who saddled this horse?"

"Tip," replied Cephas.

"He did n't half curry him. Wait a minute. I'm ashamed to let a horse go out looking so."

And the Judge began to polish off Pericles with wisps of straw.

"Darned ef I care!" muttered Tip.

"Cephas," said the Judge, "I don't want to make you vain, but I must say you ride the handsomest colt in the county. I'm proud of Pericles. Does his shoe pinch him lately?"

"Not since 't was set. He looks well enough, father. Your eyes are better than mine," said Cephas, "if you can see any dust on his coat."

"I luf to rub a colt, —it does 'em so much good," rejoined the Judge. "Cephas, if you 're going by 'Squire Stedman's, I'd like to have you call and get that mortgage."

"I don't think I shall ride that way, father. I'll go for it in the morning, however."

"Never mind, unless you happen that way. Just hand me a wisp of that straw, Cephas."

Cephas handed his father the straw. The Judge rubbed away some seconds longer, then said carelessly, "If you are going up the mountain, I wish you would stop and tell Colby I'll take those lambs, and send for 'em next week."

"I'm not sure that I shall go as far as Colby's," replied Cephas.

"People say" — the Judge's voice changed slightly — "you don't often get farther than the Widow Blynn's when you travel that road. How is it?"

"Ask the widow," said Cephas.

"Ask her daughter, more like," rejoined the Judge. "Cephas, I've kind o' felt as though I ought to have a little talk with you about that matter. I hope you a'n't fooling the girl, Cephas."

And the Judge, having broached the subject to which all his rubbing had been introductory and his remarks a prologue, waited anxiously for his son's reply.

Cephas assured him that he could never be guilty of fooling any girl, much less one so worthy as Miss Nancy Blynn.

"I'm glad to hear it!" exclaimed the Judge. "Of course I never believed you could do such a thing. But we should be careful of appearances, Cephas. (Just another little handful of straw; that will do.) People have already got up the absurd story that you are going to marry Nancy."

Tip's ears tingled. There was a brief silence, broken only by the rustling of the straw. Then Cephas said, "Why absurd, father?"

"Absurd — because — why, of course it is n't true, is it?"

"I must confess, father," replied Cephas, "the idea has occurred to me that Nancy — would make me — a good wife."

It is impossible to say which was most astonished by this candid avowal, the Judge or Master William Tansley. The latter had never once imagined that Cephas's intentions respecting Nancy were so serious; and now the inevitable conviction forced upon him, that, if his rich rival really wished to marry her, there was no possible chance left for him, smote his heart with qualms of despair.

"Cephas, you stagger me!" said the Judge. "A young man of your education and prospects —"

"Nancy is not without some education, father," interposed Cephas, as the Judge hesitated. "Better than that, she has heart and soul. She is worthy to be any man's wife!"

Although Tip entertained precisely the same opinions, he was greatly dismayed to hear them expressed so generously by Cephas.

The Judge rubbed away again at Pericles's flanks and shoulders with wisps of straw.

"No doubt, Cephas, you think so; and I have n't anything agin Nancy; she's a good girl enough, fur's I know. But just reflect on't, — you're of age, and in one sense you can do as you please, but you a'n't too old to hear to reason. You know you might marry 'most any girl you choose."

"So I thought, and I choose Nancy," answered Cephas, preparing to lead out Pericles.

"I wish the hoss'd fling him, and break his neck!" whispered the devil in Tip's heart.

"Don't be hasty; wait a minute, Cephas," said the Judge. "You know what I mean, — you could marry rich. Take a practical view of the matter. Get rid of these boyish notions. Just think how it will look for a young man of your cloth — worth twenty thousand dollars any day I'm a mind to give it to you — to go and marry the Widow Blynn's daughter, — a girl that takes in sewing! What *are* ye thinking of, Cephas?"

"I hear," replied Cephas, quietly, "she does her sewing well."

"Suppose she does? She'd make a good enough wife for some such fellow as Tip, no doubt; but I thought a son of mine would ha' looked higher. Think of you and Tip after the same girl! Come, if you've any pride about you, you'll pull the saddle off the colt and stay at home."

Although the Judge's speech, as we perceive, was not quite free from provincialisms, his arguments were none the less powerful on that account. He said a good deal more in the same strain, holding out threats of unforgiveness and disinheritance on the one hand, and praise and promises on the other; Cephas standing with the bridle in his hand, and poor Tip's anxious heart beating like a pendulum between the hope that his rival would be convinced and the fear that he would not.

"The question is simply this, father," said Cephas, growing impatient: "which to choose, love or money? And I assure you I'd much rather please you than displease you."

"That's the way to talk, Cephas! That sounds like!" exclaimed the Judge.

"But if I choose money," Cephas hastened to say, "money it shall be. I ought to make a good thing out of it. What will you give to make it an object?"

"Give? Give you all I've got, of course. What's mine is yours, — or will be, some day."

"Some day is n't the thing. I prefer one good bird in the hand to any number of fine songsters in the bush. Give me five thousand dollars, and it's a bargain."

"Pooh! pooh!" said the Judge.

"Very well; then stand aside and let me and Pericles pass."

"Don't be unreasonable, Cephas? Let the colt stand. What do you want of five thousand dollars?"

"Never mind; if you don't see fit to give it, I'll go and see Nancy."

"No, no, you sha' n't! Let go the bridle! I'd ruther give ten thousand."

"Very well; give me ten, then!"

"I mean — don't go to being wild and headstrong now!

I'll give you a thousand dollars, if nothing else will satisfy you."

"I'll divide the difference with you," said Cephas. "You shall give me three thousand, and that, you must confess, is very little."

"It's a bargain!" exclaimed the Judge. And Tip was thrilled with joy.

"I'm sorry I did n't stick to five thousand!" said Cephe. "But I wish to ask, can I, for instance, marry Melissa More? Next to Nancy, she is the prettiest girl in town."

"But she has no position; there is the same objection to her there is to Nancy. The bargain is, you are not to marry *any* poor girl; and I mean to have it in writing. So pull off the saddle and come into the house."

"If I had been shrewd I might just as well have got five thousand," said Cephas.

Tip Tansley, more excited than he had ever been in his life, waited until the two had left the barn; then, creeping over the hay, hitting his head in the dark against the low rafters, he slid down from his hiding-place, carefully descended the stairs, gathered up what he could find of the scattered ears of tucket, and set out to run through the orchard and across the fields to the Widow Blynn's cottage. The evening was starry, and the edges of the few dark clouds that lay low in the east predicted the rising moon. Halting only to climb fences, or to pick up now and then the corn that persisted in dropping from his pockets, or to scrutinize some object that he thought looked "pokerish" in the dark, prudently shunning the dismal woods on one side, and the pasture where the "hooking" cattle were on the other, Tip kept on, and arrived, all palpitating and perspiring, at the widow's house, just as the big red moon was coming up amidst the clouds over the hill. He had

left a good deal of his corn and all his courage behind him in his flight ; for Tip, ardently as he loved the beautiful Nancy, could lay no claim to her on the poetical ground that "the brave deserve the fair."

With uncertain knuckles Tip rapped on the humble door, having first looked through the kitchen window, and seen the widow sitting within, sewing by the light of a tallow candle.

"Good evening, William," said Mrs. Blynn, opening the door, with her spectacles on her forehead, and her work gathered up in her lap under her bent figure. "Come in ; take a chair."

"Guess I can't stop," replied Tip, sidling into the room with his hat on. "How 's all the folks? Nancy to hum?"

"Nancy's up stairs ; I'll speak to her. — Nancy," called the widow at the chamber door, "Tip is here ! — Better take a chair while you stop," she added, smiling upon the visitor, who always, on arriving, "guessed he could n't stop," and usually ended by remaining until he was sent away.

"Wal, may as well ; jest as cheap settin' as standin'," said Tip, depositing the burden of his personality — weight, 146 lbs. — upon one of the creaky, splint-bottomed chairs. "Pooty warm night, kind o'," raising his arm to wipe his face with his sleeve ; upon which an ear of that discontented tucket took occasion to tumble upon the floor. "Hello ! what's that? By gracious, if 't a'n't green corn ! Got any fire? Guess we'll have a roast."

And Tip, taking off his hat, began to empty his stuffed pockets into it.

"Law me!" said the widow, squinting over her work. "I thought your pockets stuck out amazin' ! I ha'n't had the first taste of green corn this year. It's real kind

o' thoughtful in you, Tip; but the fire 's all out, and we can't think of roastin' on 't to-night, as I see."

"Mebby Nancy will," chuckled Tip. "A'n't she comin' down?—Any time to-night, Nancy!" cried Tip, raising his voice, to be heard by his beloved in her retreat. "You do'no' what I brought ye!"

Now, sad as the truth may sound to the reader sympathizing with Tip, Nancy cared little what he had brought, and experienced no very ardent desire to come down and meet him. She sat at her window, looking at the stars, and thinking of somebody who she had hoped would visit her that night. But that somebody was not Tip; and although the first sound of his footsteps had set her heart fluttering with expectation, his near approach, breathing fast and loud, had given her a chill of disappointment, almost of disgust, and she now much preferred her own thoughts, and the moonrise through the trees in the direction of Judge Boxtton's house, to all the green corn and all the green lovers in New England. Her mother, however, who commiserated Tip, and believed as much in being civil to neighbors as she did in keeping the Sabbath, called again, and gave her no peace until she had left the window, the moonrise, and her romantic dreams, and descended into the prosaic atmosphere of the kitchen, and of Tip and his corn.

How lovely she looked, to Tip's eyes! Her plain, neat calico gown, enfolding a wonderful little rounded embodiment of grace and beauty, seemed to him an attire fit for any queen or fairy that ever lived. But it was the same old tragic story over again,—although Tip loved Nancy, Nancy loved not Tip. However he might flatter himself, her regard for him was on the cool side of sisterly,—simply the toleration of a kindly heart for one who was not to blame for being less bright than other people.

She took her sewing, and sat by the table, O, so beautiful! Tip thought, and enveloped in a charmed atmosphere which seemed to touch and transfigure every object except himself. The humble apartment, the splint-bottomed chairs, the stockings drying on the pole, even the widow's cap and gown, and the old black snuffers on the table, — all, save poor, homely Tip, stole a ray of grace from the halo of her loveliness.

Nancy discouraged the proposition of roasting corn, and otherwise deeply grieved her visitor by intently working and thinking, instead of taking part in the conversation. At length a bright idea occurred to him.

“Got a slate and pencil?”

The widow furnished the required articles. He then found a book, and, using the cover as a rule, marked out the plan of a game.

“Fox and geese, Nancy; ye play?” And having picked off a sufficient number of kernels from one of the ears of corn, and placed them upon the slate for geese, he selected the largest he could find for a fox, stuck it upon a pin, and proceeded to roast it in the candle.

“Which 'll ye have, Nancy?” — pushing the slate toward her; “take your choice, and give me the geese; then beat me if you can! Come, won't ye play?”

“O dear, Tip, what a tease you are!” said Nancy. “I don't want to play. I must work. Get mother to play with you, Tip.”

“She don't wanter!” exclaimed Tip. “Come, Nancy; then I'll tell ye suthin' I heard jest 'fore I come away, — suthin' 'bout you!”

And Tip, assuming a careless air, proceeded to pile up the ears of corn, log-house fashion, upon the table, while Nancy was finishing her seam.

“About me?” she echoed.

"You'd ha' thought so!" said Tip, slyly glancing over the corn as he spoke, to watch the effect on Nancy. "Cephe and the old man had the all-firedest row, — tell *you!*"

He hitched around in his chair, and resting his elbows on his knees, looked up, shrewd and grinning, into her face.

"William Tansley, what do you mean?"

"As if you could n't guess! Cephe was comin' to see you to-night; but he won't," chuckled Tip. "Say! ye ready for fox and geese?"

"How do you know that?" demanded Nancy.

"'Cause I heard! The old man stopped him, and Cephe was goin' to ride over him, but the old man was too much for him; he jerked him off the hoss, and there they had it, lickety-switch, rough-and-tumble, till Cephe give in, and told the old man, ruther'n have any words, he'd promise never to come and see you agin if he'd give him three thousand dollars; and the old man said 't was a bargain!"

"Is that true, Tip?" cried the widow, dropping her work and raising her hands.

"True as I live and breathe, and draw the breath of life, and have a livin' bein'!" Tip solemnly affirmed.

"Just as I always told you, Nancy!" exclaimed the widow. "I knew how it would be. I felt sartin Cephas could n't be depended upon. His father never'd hear a word to it, I always said. Now don't feel bad, Nancy; don't mind it. It'll be all for the best, I hope. Now don't, Nancy; don't, I beg and beseech."

She saw plainly by the convulsive movement of the girl's bosom and the quivering of her lip that some passionate demonstration was threatened. Tip meanwhile had advanced his chair still nearer, contorting his neck

and looking up with leering malice into her face until his nose almost touched her cheek.

“What do ye think now of Cephe Boxton?” he asked, tauntingly; “hey?”

A stinging blow upon the ear rewarded his impertinence, and he recoiled so suddenly that his chair went over and threw him sprawling upon the floor.

“Gosh all hemlock!” he muttered, scrambling to his feet, rubbing first his elbow, then his ear. “What’s that fur, I’d like to know, — knockin’ a feller down?”

“What do I think of Cephias Boxton?” cried Nancy. “I think the same I did before, — why should n’t I? Your slander is no slander. Now sit down and behave yourself, and don’t put your face too near mine, if you don’t want your ears boxed!”

“Why, Nancy, how could you?” groaned the widow.

Nancy made no reply, but resumed her work very much as if nothing had happened.

“Hurt you much, William?”

“Not much; only it made my elbow sing like all Jerewsalem! Never mind; she’ll find out! Where’s my hat?”

“You a’n’t going, be ye?” said Mrs. Blynn, with an air of solicitude.

“I guess I a’n’t wanted here,” mumbled Tip, pulling his hat over his ears. He struck the slate, scattering the fox and geese, and demolished the house of green corn. “You can keep that; I don’t want it. Good night, Miss Blynn.”

Tip placed peculiar emphasis upon the name, and fumbled a good while with the latch, expecting Nancy would say something; but she maintained a cool and dignified silence, and as nobody urged him to stay, he reluctantly departed, his heart full of injury, and his hopes collapsed like his pockets.

For some minutes Nancy continued to sew intently and fast, her flushed face bowed over the seam; then suddenly her eyes blurred, her fingers forgot their cunning, the needle shot blindly hither and thither, and the quickly drawn thread snapped in twain.

“Nancy! Nancy! don’t!” pleaded Mrs. Blynn; “I beg of ye, now don’t!”

“O mother,” burst forth the young girl, with sobs, “I am so unhappy! What did I strike poor Tip for? He did not know any better. I am always doing something so wrong! He could not have made up the story. Cephas would have come here to-night,—I know he would!”

“Poor child! poor child!” said Mrs. Blynn. “Why could n’t you hear to me? I always told you to be careful and not like Cephas too well. But maybe Tip did n’t understand. Maybe Cephas will come to-morrow, and then all will be explained.”

“Cephas is true, I know, I know!” wept Nancy, “but his father—”

The morrow came and passed, and no Cephas. The next day was Sunday, and Nancy went to church, not with an undivided heart, but with human love and hope and grief mingling strangely with her prayers. She knew Cephas would be there, and felt that a glance of his eye would tell her all. But—for the first time in many months it happened—they sat in the same house of worship, she with her mother in their humble corner, he in the Judge’s conspicuous pew, and no word or look passed between them. She went home, still to wait. Day after day of leaden loneliness, night after night of watching and despair, and still no Cephas. Tip also had discontinued his visits. Mrs. Blynn saw a slow, certain change come over her child; her joyous laugh rang no more, neither

were her tears often seen or her sighs heard; but she seemed disciplining herself to bear with patience and serenity the desolateness of her lot.

One evening it was stormy, and Nancy and her mother were together in the plain, tidy kitchen, both sewing and both silent; gusts and rain lashing the windows, and the cat purring in a chair. Nancy's heart was more quiet than usual; for, although expectation was not quite extinct, no visitor surely could be looked for on such a night. Suddenly, however, amidst the sounds of the storm, she heard footsteps and a knock at the door. Yet she need not have started and changed color so tumultuously, for the visitor was only Tip.

"Good evenin'," said young Master Tansley, stamping, pulling off his dripping hat, and shaking it. "I'd no idee it rained so! I was goin' by, and thought I'd stop in. Ye mad, Nancy?" And he peered at the young girl from beneath his wet hair with a bashful grin.

Nancy's heart was too much softened to cherish any resentment, and with suffused eyes she begged Tip to forgive the blow.

"Wal! I do'no' what I'd done to be knocked down fur," began Tip, with a pouting and aggrieved air; "though I s'pose I dew, tew. But I guess what I told ye turned out about so, after all; did n't it, hey?"

At Nancy's look of distress, Mrs. Blynn made signs for Tip to forbear. But he had come too far through the darkness and rain with an exciting piece of news to be thus easily silenced.

"I ha'n't brought ye no corn this time, for I did n't know as you'd roast it if I did. Say, Nancy! Cephe and the old man had it agin to-day; and the Judge forked over the three thousand dollars; I seen him! He was only waitin' to raise it. It's real mean in Cephe, I s'pose

you think. Mebby 't is; but, by gracious! three thousand dollars is a 'tarnal slue of money!"

Hugely satisfied with the effect this announcement produced, Tip sprawled upon a chair and chewed a stick, like one resolved to make himself comfortable for the evening.

"Saxafrax, — ye want some?" he said, breaking off with his teeth a liberal piece of the stick. "Say, Nancy! ye need n't look so mad. Cephe has sold out, I tell ye; and when I offer ye saxafrax, ye may as well take some."

Not without effort Nancy held her peace; and Tip, extending the fragment of the sassafras-root which his teeth had split off, was complacently urging her to accept it, — "'T was real good," — when the sound of hoofs was heard; a halt at the gate; a horseman dismounting, leading his animal to the shed; a voice saying "Be still, Pericles!" and footsteps approaching the door.

"Nancy! Nancy!" articulated Mrs. Blynn, scarcely less agitated than her daughter, "he has come!"

"It's Cephe!" whispered Tip, hoarsely. "If he should ketch me here! I—I guess I'll go! Confound that Cephe, anyhow!"

Rap, rap! two light, decisive strokes of a riding-whip on the kitchen door.

Mrs. Blynn glanced around to see if everything was tidy; and Tip, dropping his sassafras, whirled about and wheeled about like Jim Crow in the excitement of the moment.

"Mother, go!" uttered Nancy, pale with emotion, hurriedly pointing to the door.

She made her escape by the stairway; observing which, the bewildered Tip, who had indulged a frantic thought of leaping from the window to avoid meeting his dread rival, changed his mind and rushed after her. Unadvised of his intention, and thinking only of shutting herself from the sight of young Boxtton, Nancy closed the kitchen door

rather severely upon Tip's fingers; but his fear rendered him insensible to pain, and he followed her, scrambling up the dark staircase just as Mrs. Blynn admitted Cephas.

Nancy did not immediately perceive what had occurred; but presently, amidst the sounds of the rain on the roof and of the wind about the gables, she heard the unmistakable perturbed breathing of her luckless lover.

"Nancy," whispered Tip, "where be ye? I've most broke my head agin this blasted beam!"

"What are you here for?" demanded Nancy.

"'Cause I did n't want him to see me. He won't stop but a minute; then I'll go down. I *did* give my head the all-firedest tunk!" said Tip.

Mrs. Blynn opened the door to inform Nancy of the arrival of her visitor, and the light from below, partially illuminating the fugitive's retreat, showed Tip in a sitting posture on one of the upper stairs, diligently rubbing that portion of his cranium which had come in collision with the beam.

"Say, Nancy, don't go!" whispered Tip; "don't leave me here in the dark!"

Nancy had too many tumultuous thoughts of her own to give much heed to his distress; and having hastily arranged her hair and dress by the sense of touch, she glided by him, bidding him keep quiet, and descended the stairs to the door, which she closed after her, leaving him to the wretched solitude of the place, which appeared to him a hundred fold more dark and dreadful than before.

Cephas in the mean time had divested himself of his oil-cloth capote, and entered the neat little sitting-room, to which he was civilly shown by the widow. "Nancy'll be down in a minute." And placing a candle upon the mantel-piece, Mrs. Blynn withdrew.

Nancy, having regained her self-possession, appeared mighty dignified before her lover; gave him a passive

hand ; declined, with averted head, his proffered kiss ; and seated herself at a cool and respectable distance.

“Nancy, what *is* the matter ?” said Cephas, in mingled amazement and alarm. “You act as though I was a pedler, and you did n’t care to trade.”

“You can trade, sir ; you can make what bargains you please *with others* ; but —” Nancy’s aching and swelling heart came up and choked her.

“Nancy ! what have I done ? What has changed you so ? Have you forgotten — the last time I was here ?”

“’T would not be strange if I had, it was so long ago !”

Poor Nancy spoke cuttingly ; but her sarcasm was as a sword with two points, which pierced her own heart quite as much as it wounded her lover’s.

“Nancy,” said Cephas, and he took her hand again so tenderly that it was like putting heaven away to withdraw it, “could n’t you trust me ? Has n’t your heart assured you that I could never stay away from you so without good reasons ?”

“O, I don’t doubt but you had reasons !” replied Nancy, with a bursting anguish in her tones. “But *such* reasons !”

“*Such* reasons ?” repeated Cephas, grieved and repelled. “Will you please inform me what you mean ? For, as I live, I am ignorant !”

“Ah, Cephas ! it is not true, then,” cried Nancy, with sudden hope, “that — your father —”

“What of my father ?”

“That he has offered you money —”

A vivid emotion flashed across the young man’s face.

“I would have preferred to tell you without being questioned so sharply,” he replied. “But since hearsay has got the start of me, and brought you the news, I can only answer — he has offered me money.”

“To buy you — to hire you —”

“Not to marry any poor girl, — that’s the bargain, Nancy,” said Cephas, with the tenderest of smiles.

“And you have accepted?” cried Nancy, quickly.

“I have accepted,” responded Cephas.

Nancy uttered not a word.

“I came to tell you all this; but I should have told you in a different way, could I have had my choice,” said Cephas. “What I have done is for your happiness as much as my own. My father threatened to disinherit me if I married a poor girl; and how could I bear the thought of subjecting you to such a lot? He has given me three thousand dollars; I only received it to-day, or I should have come to you before, for, Nancy, — do not look so strange! — it is for you, this money, — do you hear?”

He attempted to draw her toward him, but she sprang indignantly to her feet.

“Cephas! You offer *me* money!”

“Nancy!” — Cephas caught her and folded her in his arms, — “don’t you understand? It is your dowry! You are no longer a poor girl. I promised not to marry *any poor girl*, but I never promised not to marry *you*. Accept the dowry; then you will be a *rich* girl, and — my wife, my wife, Nancy!”

“O Cephas! is it true? Let me look at you!” She held him firm, and looked into his face, and into his deep tender eyes. “It *is* true!”

What more was said or done I am unable to relate; for about this time there came from another part of the house a dull, reverberating sound, succeeded by a rapid series of concussions, as of some ponderous body descending in a swift but irregular manner from the top to the bottom of the stairs. It was Master William Tansley, who, groping about in the dark with intent to find a stove-pipe hole at

which to listen, had lost his latitude and his equilibrium, and tumbled from landing to landing, in obedience to the dangerous laws of gravitation. Mrs. Blynn flew to open the door; found him helplessly kicking on his back, with his head in the rag-bag; drew him forth by one arm; ascertained that he had met with no injuries which a little salve would not heal; patched him up almost as good as new; gave him her sympathy and a lantern to go home with, and kindly bade him good night.

So ended Tip Tansley's unfortunate love-affair; and I am pleased to relate that his broken heart recovered from its hurts almost as speedily as his broken head.

A month later the village clergyman was called to administer the vows of wedlock to a pair of happy lovers in the Widow Blynn's cottage; and the next morning there went abroad the report of a marriage which surprised the good people of the parish generally, and Judge Boxton more particularly.

In the afternoon of that day Cephas rode home to pay his respects to the old gentleman, and ask him if he would like an introduction to the bride.

"Cephas!" cried the Judge, filled with wrath, smiting his son's written agreement with his angry hand, "look here! your promise! Have you forgotten?"

"Read it, please," said Cephas.

"In consideration," began the Judge, running his troubled eye over the paper, ". . . . I do hereby pledge myself, never, at *any* time, or in *any* place, to marry *any* poor girl."

"You will find," said Cephas, "that I have acted according to the strict terms of our agreement. And I have the honor to inform you, sir, that I have married a person who, with other attractions, possesses the handsome trifle of three thousand dollars."

The Judge fumed, made use of an oath or two, and talked loudly of disinheritance and cutting off with a shilling.

“I should be very sorry to have you do such a thing,” rejoined Cephas, respectfully; “but, after all, it is n’t as though I had not received a neat little fortune by the way of my wife.”

A retort so happy that the Judge ended with a hearty acknowledgment of his son’s superior wit, and an invitation to come home and lodge his lovely encumbrance beneath the parental roof.

Thereupon Cephas took a roll of notes from his pocket. “All jesting aside,” said he, “I must first square a little matter of business with which my wife has commissioned me. She is more scrupulous than the son of my father, and she refused to receive the money until I had promised to return it to you as soon as we should be married. And here it is!”

“Fie, fie!” cried the Judge. “Keep the money. She’s a noble girl, after all, — too good for a rogue like you!”

“I know it!” said Cephas, humbly, with tears in his eyes; for recollections of a somewhat wild and wayward youth, mingling with the conscious possession of so much love and happiness, melted his heart with unspeakable contrition and gratitude.

MR. BLAZAY'S EXPERIENCE.

I.

THE LADY IN BLACK.

I HAD walked through the train, carpet-bag in hand, without finding an eligible seat. So I walked back again, looking very hard at all the non-paying bandboxes, bundles, and babies that monopolized the cushions and kept gentlemen standing with tickets in their hatbands. Not a child was moved, however, by my silent appeal for justice. Not a bandbox flinched before my stern, reprov- ing gaze. Only one proprietress of such encumbrances deigned to take the least notice of me.

“There is a seat, sir!” she said, in a tone extremely mortifying to my self-respect, while her overfed carpet-bag appeared choking with merriment at my expense.

A lady in black filled the designated seat with wide-spread mourning apparel and an atmosphere of gloom. Everybody seemed by a natural instinct to avoid intruding upon her melancholy privacy. The place seemed sacred to sorrow. But as she of the babies and bundles spoke, she of the voluminous ebon skirts gathered up their folds, with a mournfully civil gesture inviting me to sit down. I sat down accordingly, awed and chilled by the funereal presence. Her bonnet was of black crape, a black veil eclipsed her face, and she wore a mourning-ring over the finger of a black glove.

"Will you have the kindness to open this window, sir?" she said to me, in a voice which also appeared clad in mourning, — so sombre, so soft, so suggestive of lost friends.

I opened it.

"Thank you," she said, and, putting aside the woven midnight of her veil, revealed the most perfect mourning countenance I ever beheld, — black hair, black eyes, and long, black eyelashes. It was a youthful face, however, and rather plump and smooth, I thought, for such stunning woe.

"Will you have the shade raised, madam?"

"O no, thank you." And out of the cloud of her countenance shone a smile, a very misty, tender, pensive smile.

I remarked, with appropriate solemnity, that the weather was fine.

"O yes!" she sighed, "it is too beautiful for one that a'n't happy."

The lady in black soon grew communicative, and told me her story. She was the widow of a physician in one of the Western States, who, besides his regular practice, had purchased lands which had increased in value, and, dying suddenly, had left her a widow with twenty thousand dollars. She was going, she added, to visit her uncle, in Shoemake.

"In Shoemake!" I repeated, with a start of interest. For I must mention here that I was going to Shoemake. My errand was to woo, and of course win, Miss Susie Thornton of that place, solely on the recommendation of my friend Jones, whose praises of his country cousin, whom I had never seen, had induced me to venture upon the rather unusual procedure.

"Is Shoemake a pleasant place?" I inquired.

"O yes!" with another sigh, and another of those

smiles, so very attractive that they would have charmed even me, had I not considered myself already engaged.

“Do you know the Thornton family?” I asked, carelessly.

“What!” said she, “do *you* know the Thorntons?”

“Not at all; only a relation of theirs has intrusted me with a package for them.”

“Susie Thornton is a very pretty girl.”

“Indeed!” said I, gratified to hear my wife commended.

“At least, she was five years ago. But five years make such dreadful changes!”

“How far are the Thorntons from the village?”

“O, not far! A nice little farm down the river. A charming situation.”

II.

MR. THORNTON.

THAT afternoon, having dressed, dined, and finished my cigar, I sallied forth from the “Shoemake Hotel” to call on my future bride.

I found the cottage; a neat little cream-colored house on a bank of the river; doors and windows festooned with prairie roses; an orchard behind, and maple-trees in front; and an atmosphere of rural beauty and quietude over all.

I opened the little wooden gate. It clicked cheerily behind me, and the sound summoned from the orchard a laboring man in rolled-up shirt-sleeves, who approached as I was lifting the brass knocker under the festoons of roses.

“How de do, sir? Want anything o’ Mr. Thornton’s folks?”

I looked at him. He might have been a porter (at

least, he was a *brown stout* fellow) ; not above five feet five, and rather familiar for such a *short* acquaintance.

"I should like to see Mr. Thornton," I said, talking down at him from my six-foot dignity on the doorstep.

"O, wal ! walk right in ! We 're all in the orchard jest now, gitting a hive of bees."

"Be so kind then, my good fellow," said I, producing Jones's letter, "as to hand this to Mr. Thornton."

He received the letter in his great, brown, horny hands, stared at the superscription, stared at me, said, "Oh ! Jones !" and opened it. "I am Mr. Thornton," he informed me, before beginning to read.

When the letter was read he looked up again, smilingly.

"This is Mr. Blazay, then !" he said.

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Thornton," I said.

He reached up, I reached down. He got hold of my hand as if it had been a bell-rope, and wrung it cordially. I knew he was glad to see me, as well as if he had told me.

"Will you step into the house or into the orchard ?" said Mr. Thornton.

House or orchard, I felt my foot was in it, and it made little difference which way I stepped.

"Wal," said he, as he was taking me to see the bees ; "so you 've come up here, thinking mabby you 'd like to marry our Susie ?"

I stopped aghast.

"I — I was n't aware, sir, that Jones had written anything to that effect !"

"A private letter I got from him yis'd'y," said Mr. Thornton ; "he seemed to think 's best to kinder explain things 'fore you got along. I think about so myself. He gives you a tolerable fair character, and, fur 's I 'm concerned, if you and Susie can make a bargain, I sha' n't raise no objections."

"Have you," I gasped, "mentioned it to Susie?"

"O, sartin!" said Mr. Thornton. "Mother and I thought best to talk the matter over with her, so 's to have everything open and aboveboard, and save misunderstandings in the futur'."

"And, may I ask, how did Susie regard a—such a—very singular arrangement?"

"Singular? How so? Mother and I looked upon it as very sensible. You come and git acquainted and marry her, if agreeable; or if not, not. That 's what I call straightfor'a'd."

"Straightfor'a'd? O yes, to be sure!" I said, and essayed to laugh, with very indifferent, if not with quite ghastly, success.

A little too straightforward, was n't it? It was well enough, of course, for a couple of hardened wretches like Jones and myself to talk over a matrimonial project in business fashion, and for me to come up and look at the article of a bride he recommended, to see if she suited; but to know that the affair had been coolly discussed by the other party to the proposed bargain made it as awkward and unromantic as possible. I even suspected that I was the victim of a hoax, and that Jones was at that moment chuckling over my stupendous gullibility.

III.

SUSIE AND THE BEES.

"THAT there 's my darter, and them 's the bees," said Mr. Thornton.

"What! that thing in the tree?" said I, using my eyeglass. "It looks like a shocking bad hat!"

"That 's the swarm stuck on to the limb," said Mr. Thornton. "We 'll have Susie to thank if we save 'em. She heard 'em flying over, and run out with the dinner-bell and called 'em."

"Called 'em to dinner?" I said, absent-mindedly.

"Ringing the bell called 'em down, till bimeby they lit on that tree. A swarm 'll gen'ly come to such noises. And Susie 's a master-hand to look arter bees."

"What 's she doing up on the ladder there?"

"She 's cutting off the limb. It 's curi's," said Mr. Thornton, with fatherly pride, "bees never tech her, though she goes right in among 'em. Sting me, though; so I keep a little back. Susie's mother, Mr. Blazay!"

At that a freckled, good-natured woman, who stood at a little distance from the tree, with her arms rolled up in a calico apron, took them out to shake hands with me, and rolled them up again.

"What are these little negro boys doing?" I inquired.

"Nigger boys! Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the paternal Thornton.

"Them 's *our* little boys, sir," said the maternal Thornton, with an amused smile. "What you see is veils tied over their faces to keep the bees from stinging on 'em. That 's George Washington holding the ladder for Susie; and that 's Andrew Jackson tending the clo'es-line."

"This is the second swarm Susie has stopped this season," said Mr. Thornton. "Both wild swarms from the woods, prob'bly. We consider it quite a prize."

"Hive of bees in May, wuth a ton of hay; hive of bees in June, wuth a silver spoon; hive of bees in July, not wuth a fly. That 's the old adage," smiled Mrs. Thornton.

"But Susie has good luck with her bees, let 'em swarm when they will," said Mr. Thornton.

"Look out down there!" cried a clear, shrill, feminine voice from the tree.

The fibres of the bough began to crack; and somewhat to my alarm I saw the great, black, hat-like mass swing down, as if about to fall to the ground. But I soon perceived that it was secured by the rope, which was passed over a limb above, and then down to Andrew Jackson's hand, who stood looking up through his veil, waiting for orders. Susie severed the bark and splinters that still held the branch, then dropped her little handsaw on the grass.

"Now, Jackson!" Slowly the boy payed out the line, and slowly the bough descended with its burden. "Hold on, Georgie!" Georgie held on, and down the ladder came Susie.

Animated, agile, red as a rose, she ran to her bees, I regarding her meanwhile with anxious interest. Taking hold of the bough where it hung, she ordered Andrew Jackson to "let it come," lowered it almost to the ground and shook it. The bees fell off in great bunches and clusters, which burst into buzzing, crumbling, crawling multitudes on the grass,— wave on wave dark surging. George Washington stood ready with a bee-hive, which he clapped over the living heap. And the job was done.

"There, father!" cried Susie, merrily, "what are you going to give me for that? Hive of bees in June —"

She stopped, seeing me.

"You shall have your silver spoon," said Mr. Thornton. "This is Mr. Blazay, Susie."

Determined to perform my part with becoming gallantry, I advanced. Unluckily, I am tall. My bow was lofty; the bough of the tree was low. Before I could take off my hat it was taken off for me. Attempting to catch it,

I knocked it like a ball straight at Susie's head. She dodged it, and it fell by the bee-hive. At that the Father of his Country rushed to the rescue, and brought it back to me with the air of a youngster who expects a penny for his services.

I was finishing my bow to Susie, when I observed a number of swift, zigzag, darting insects circling about us.

"Stand still and they won't hurt ye," said George Washington, handing me my hat. "Make 'em think you're a tree!"

I assumed the *rôle* accordingly, — rooted myself to the spot, — held my tall trunk erect, — kept my limbs rigid, — and, I am confident, appeared verdant enough to deceive even a bee. In that interesting attitude I looked as unconcerned as possible, grimaced at Susie, said what a delightful orchard it was, and felt a whizzing, winnowing sensation in my foliage, otherwise called hair.

"There's a bee!" screamed Andrew Jackson.

The General was right, — there was a bee. I began to brush.

"Don't ye stir!" shouted Washington. "That'll only make him mad! Keep jest as still!"

It was easy for the First President to stand there, with his face veiled, and promulgate that theory. But I was n't up to it. I found myself stirring my stumps involuntarily. I dropped my hat and stepped in it. The bee whizzed and winnowed; I flirted and brushed. Then came a poignant thrill! The assassin had his poisoned dagger in me.

The sublime Washington continued to shout, "Keep still, keep jest as still!" But already my movements had quite dispelled the illusion that I was a tree, and the darting and dinning about my ears became terrific. I endeavored to smile calmly at Susie, and talk as became a man

of my politeness and dignity. But it was no use. Panic seized me. I stamped, I swung my crushed hat, I took to my heels. I ran like a Mohawk; and I should never, probably, have stopped running until I reached a railroad train, had not the same destiny that brought me to Shoemaker conspired to keep me there by casting a dead branch in my way. In giving my head a brush I neglected the brush at my feet. They became entangled in it, and I sprawled my six feet of manly dignity ingloriously on the turf.

IV.

HOW I WAS ENTERTAINED.

THE first thing I heard, on recovering my faculties and sitting up, was laughter. George Washington and Andrew Jackson were rolling and keeling over with laughter. Mrs. Thornton was eating her calico apron. Mr. Thornton was suffering from an excruciating attack of colic, while Susie indulged without restraint her very ill-timed merriment.

As I got upon my feet the whole family came forward to see if I was hurt.

"Children! Susie!" I could hear Mr. Thornton saying; "hush! don't ye know no better'n to laugh? Did you, sir, git stung?"

"I — I thought the bees were coming rather near," I remarked, cheerfully, pressing my hat into shape, "so I concluded to stand back a little."

"Sartin, sartin!" said Mr. Thornton.

"Susie!" giggled George Washington, "he thought he'd stan' back a little! he, he, he!"

"Did n't his arms and legs fly for about a minute, though!" snickered Andrew Jackson.

"Shall we go and examine the operations of the bees? I feel a lively interest in bees." And I put on my hat, pulling it gayly over the aching eyebrow.

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Thornton, "the bees have been so kind o' shook up 't won't be very safe to go near 'em right away."

"Ah! you think so? A sting is nothing — a — nothing dangerous, is it?"

"O no; but it's sometimes plaguy uncomf'table," said Mr. Thornton, "that's all."

"That all?" said I, glad to hear it. "I'm sure that's nothing so very dreadful. However, if you think we'd better wait until the bees get a little quiet, I can restrain my curiosity."

Susie had found an excuse to go back to the hive. I should have been glad of any excuse to return at the same instant to the hotel. I had seen enough of her, and certainly had heard enough. My interest in the Thorntons was satiated. I had made up my mind that I did n't want to marry. The country was not so charming as I had anticipated. I very much preferred the town.

"Wal, may as well go into the house, I guess," said Mr. Thornton, leading the way.

So we went in. The door of a close, gloomy little parlor was thrown open, and I was requested to enter and make myself at home.

"You must go in and entertain him while I help Susie slick up a little," I heard Mrs. Thornton whisper at the door.

So Mr. Thornton came in, sat down in his rolled-up shirt-sleeves, put one leg over the other, hung his hat on his knee, and entertained me.

Of the entertainment, however, the most I remember is,

that I not only experienced an ever-increasing anguish in the part which had been stung, but discovered, to my consternation, that it was swelling rapidly.

“I knowed a man once got stung on the head,” remarked Mr. Thornton, bees being the topic of conversation, “and he was blind for three days arter it, and his head swelled up as big as half a barrel.”

Having entertained me with this extraordinary fact, the worthy man withdrew. I sprang to my feet and looked in the glass over the mantel-piece. Appalling spectacle! My organ of locality was growing, — it had already attained the size of a walnut, — and was fast swelling to the dimensions of an egg. I caught up my hat and pitched it recklessly on my forehead. As I was drawing on my gloves I heard whispers.

“I can't go in! I shall laugh, I know I shall!” followed by a suppressed giggle.

“Why, Susie, don't be so foolish!” said Mrs. Thornton. “Come! I'll go in with you!”

More whispers, a little fluttering, and in came Mrs. and Miss Thornton, catching me with my hat and one glove on. Retreat being thus cut off, I sat down again in the obscurest corner, with the unstung hemisphere of my phrenology in the light and the other in shadow.

Susie seated herself opposite, with her eyes downcast, looking rigid, red, and as utterly unattractive as possible. She never once opened her mouth to speak, but now and then appeared seized by an almost ungovernable impulse to giggle, after which she became more astonishingly rigid and red than before.

Mrs. Thornton and I were discussing the weather, with now and then an awful interval of silence, when Susie, who, to conceal her embarrassment, had turned her eyes out of the window, suddenly started back.

“Mother, there comes Peleg!”

And almost immediately I saw standing in the door a young man in light summer clothes, with ruddy-brown cheeks, a long nose, and a droll expression of countenance, nodding and winking like a harlequin.

V.

P. GREEN.

“COME in, Peleg,” said Mrs. Thornton. “Mr. Blazay, this is our neighbor, Mr. Green.”

Mr. Green made an extravagant flourish, shook my hand very hard, bowed extremely low, and remarked, through his nose, that he was most happy.

“Did n't know, though, ye had company,” he said apologetically. He looked around for a seat, and finally, parting his coat-tails, sat down near Susie. “Fine weather now we're having, Mr. Blazaway.”

“Mrs. Thornton and I were just remarking that the weather was fine,” I answered, dryly.

Mrs. Thornton looked disconcerted by the neighbor's appearance, and after fidgeting a minute left the room.

“Grand good weather for hay,” said Mr. Green. “Brings out the rakes — hem!”

Susie looked slyly at him, as if to see whether he meant that for a hit at me. I was n't sure about it, so I kept still.

“Smashing good crop o' hay this season; beats everything!” said Mr. Green, lifting his left foot and holding it with his hand over the instep across his right knee. “Grass look well where you've been, Mr. Blazaway? or don't you notice much about grass?”

I replied that, wherever I had taken the pains to observe, everything looked to me exceedingly Green, keeping my eyes fixed steadily on him as I spoke.

"Sho!" said Mr. Green, looking at me steadily in return, and scratching his chin. Then he turned and said in a hoarse whisper to Susie, "What an all-fired wen that gentleman has got over his left eye! ye noticed it?"

A wen? that was the bee-sting! All-fired? it *was* all-fired! Had Susie noticed it? In turning my face in order to stare down the insolent intruder who called me Mr. Blazaway, I had exposed the swelling, and Susie, who stole a glance at me just then, must also have seen it.

Mr. Green reached deep into a pocket of his light summer trousers, brought out a jack-knife, and commenced honing it on his shoe.

"Traded horses agin, Susie."

"What a hand you are to swap horses, Peleg!" she said, thawing into conversation under his genial influence.

"Put off the colt; got a four-year-old chestnut; nice, tell yeou! Bring him round and let ye ride after him to-morrer."

"Who did you trade with?" said Miss Thornton.

"Stranger. Do'no' his name. Stumped him in the road. Says I, 'I got the mate to that beast you 're drivin', friend,' says I. 'Hev ye?' says he. 'Better hitch,' says I, 'and jest step over in the lot here and see,' says I. He said he did n't object if I had anything to show; so he tied to the fence, — mighty slick critter that of hisn! 'Yes,' says I, 'either you want my animil, or I want yourn, do'no' which till we talk,' says I. Wa'al, we made a dicker," added Peleg Green, shutting his knife with a loud click, and winking significantly.

He was going on to expatiate on the merits of the four-

year-old chestnut, when, to my great relief, Mr. Thornton came to the door and called him out.

“I'd like to speak with you a minute, Peleg.” And Peleg, though with visible reluctance, withdrew.

I arose, walked straight to Susie, and frankly took her hand. She looked up with a frightened, inquiring glance, afraid, as I afterward learned, that I was going to propose to her on the spot.

“I am very glad,” I said, “to have formed your acquaintance. I shall always remember you with interest, and if I ever come this way again I shall certainly do myself the pleasure of visiting you.”

She appeared quite bewildered a moment, then a gleam of intelligence brightened her face.

“Are you going, sir?” And, as I was hurt to observe, the gleam became a gleam of delight.

“I have a call to make,” said I; “and after what is past we may as well be frank with each other. I think it is quite evident to us both that —”

“That you don't like me,” she said, while I was stammering. “That's it; and you need n't take the trouble of putting it in some more polite way.”

She laughed as she spoke; all her embarrassment had vanished; she looked radiant, even charming; and altogether such a change had come over her that I was astonished.

“Rather say that *you* have not fallen in love with *me*,” I answered.

“That's true, I have n't!” she confessed, with refreshing *naïveté*. “And do you blame me? I was almost frightened to death when I heard you were coming. And it was so odd, — just as Peleg would go and look at a colt he thought of buying!”

I sincerely entreated her pardon for the affront.

"O, no affront. I don't care now, since you don't want to marry me." And she appeared quite joyous.

"You are glad of that. Peleg will be glad too," I could not help saying.

"Yes, I suppose he will," she confessed, gayly.

"You like Mr. Green?"

"O yes; he amuses me ever so much. You don't know how funny he can be. But you must n't go now, sir," she cried, taking my hat from me. "Stay to tea, won't you?"

I hardly know how it was; but she had her way, and I stayed.

"You must forgive me for laughing," said Susie, only half penitently; "but you can't guess how glad I was that you got stung. Don't you think it was a judgment upon you?"

"You knew it?" I said, putting my hand to my egg; for the swelling had about reached that size.

"Of course I did; and that was the reason I could n't look at you. But I am very sorry now, — indeed I am," she added, compassionately, seeing how bad a sting it was. "And to think Peleg took it for a wen!"

At that she had to laugh again. But, on the whole, she manifested a good deal of true womanly sympathy for my suffering, and went out to prepare some salt and vinegar, which she said was her mother's remedy for stings.

She did not return. But presently Mrs. Thornton came in, bringing a saucer with some liquid and a rag in it, dressed my brow, and took me out to tea.

VI.

MRS. THORNTON'S TEA.

WE found Mr. Thornton and the little Thorntons waiting, — the distinguished urchins eyeing the table ravenously, as if they did not see cake every day.

Then Susie and Peleg came out of the kitchen together, looking supremely satisfied with each other, and amazingly confidential.

Mr. Thornton then let slip those dogs of war, the juniors, whose ardor he had with difficulty restrained, and with a rattle and a clatter and a rush they flew to the table, storming the bread and butter, scaling the salt-fish, carrying the breast-works of cold chicken, and assaulting the wings.

In the mean time the lovers managed to get me into the seat designed for Peleg, while the chair intended for me, next to Susie, was coolly usurped by that gentleman. Peleg kept the youngsters in a constant roar of laughter with his jokes and queer contortions of face, which I was chagrined to see were greatly enjoyed by Susie.

“O Peleg!” she exclaimed at last, “you’ll certainly kill me with your ridiculous stories.”

“Wa’al, then, I won’t tell any more,” said Peleg. “Fact, I’m a melancholic man myself, nat’rally. Studied to be a minister once : this is the way I looked,” — sleeking down his hair with a meek and droll expression. “That was when I was Presbyterian. Then I turned Methodist, and looked so,” — and out of the tearful seriousness of a broad, unctuous countenance broke a sympathetic, hopeful smile. “After that I thought of turning Baptist, and got as far as this,” — a sapient, hollow-cheeked visage, with a

one-sided pucker; "when I switched off on the Universalist track, as thus,"—changing instantly to the aspect of a fat and jolly parson. "From that to swapping horses is the easiest thing in natur'. Then I looked so,"—putting his tongue in his cheek for a quid, and inclining his head sidewise, with the honestest smooth face,—"and talked this way: *That's a dreadful kind beast, my friend; true and sound in every way!*"—spoken with a good-natured drawl that convulsed the youngsters.

I sympathized with Mrs. Thornton, who gravely reproved Mr. Green for his levity in taking off the different denominations.

"Call hoss-jockeying one of the denominations? Wa'al, we have our backsliders too," said Peleg,—"from the backs of unbroke colts. Speaking of my being a melancholic man, Susie, I was put in mind to-day how choleric I got when my melons was stole last summer. Met one o' them fellers."

"Did you? O, you must tell Mr. Blazay that story, Peleg!"

And Peleg told it for my especial edification.

"Ye see, Mr. Blazay, there's a tribe over the mountain we call Shanghays, — gre't slab-sided lummoxes, — legs so long they hev to go down sullar to tie their shoes; and feet so big they hev to use the forks of the road for a boot-jack. Wa'al, a set of 'em come over to our pond a-fishing last summer, and as fish would n't bite they concluded watermillions would (that's what they call 'em), and went over to my patch, a couple of 'em, to hook some; when I happened along and ketched 'em at it.

"'Wa'al,' says I, 'how ye gitting on? Don't be in a hurry,' says I, as they dropped the melons and started to run. 'Better take some with ye,' says I. 'Plenty of 'em. Fust-rate, too. Here, I can git ye some a good deal bet-

ter than these.' They felt awful cheap ; but I made 'em hold their arms, and loaded 'em up with the best I could find. 'There,' says I, 'you see I know a great deal better than you do how to pick, so next time you want any, s'posing you come and ask me. It looks as if I was mean about my melons, when folks hev to come and steal 'em,' says I.

"So I let 'em go. But I thought I'd like to hear what sort of a story they'd tell the others ; so I cut around through the edge of the woods and got behind a stump by the pond, where I could see what was going on, though I could n't hear much. They left their fishing and ripped open the melons, and appeared to be hev'ing a glorious good time over 'em, when a dog they had along with 'em got hold of a rind, choked, and keeled over. They thought he was dead ; and then you should have seen the old scratch that was to pay ! 'Pizon ! pizon !' I could hear 'em spluttering. They thought I had plugged the melons and put arsenic into 'em ; which accounted for my picking out such partic'lar nice ones. They dropped their slices, and spit out what they'd been eating, and made a stampede for the village, to the doctor's ; and about half an hour after they might have been seen going over the mountain, sick as death with epicac, for the doctor had give each on 'em a rousing good dose. This is the way they looked," And Peleg illustrated, while everybody laughed but me.

I had had enough of that sort of thing. I arose to go, pleading an engagement. "A lady I met in the cars, Mrs." — referring to the widow's card — Mrs. Pellet."

"Sho !" said Peleg. "Not Mrs. Dr. Pellet, — Laury Scranton that was ?"

"The very same ; and a very interesting young widow, with twenty thousand dollars."

"Widow !" gasped P. Green, with nobody's face but his

own this time ; and a very astonished face it was. " See here, ye don't say ! Dr. Pellet, he a'n't dead, is he ? "

I assured him that the excellent doctor was deceased.

" I take it he was a dear friend of yours, Mr. Green. "

" Yaas ! no ! I mean — S'pose ye wait a minute ; guess I'll walk along with ye ; got my colts to look after ; seen my hat, Susie ? "

While Mr. Green, in his agitation, was hunting for his hat, I shook hands with the family, and accepted, because I could not refuse, an earnest invitation to a farmer's dinner the next day. I then departed, pursued wildly out of the house by Peleg, pulling on his hat.

VII.

P. GREEN'S DIPLOMACY.

" THINK o' going to see Laury — Mrs. Pellet — to-night ? " said Peleg.

" I have promised to call on her, " I answered, evasively.

" I'd no idee of her being a widow, " said Mr. Green, with an aguish shake in his voice. " Got much acquainted with her ? Could n't, though, I s'pose, jest seeing her in the cars. Seem to take the doctor's death perty hard, or could n't you judge as to that ? "

" Not so hard but that she may be consoled, I should say. "

" Consoled ! yaas ! " said Peleg, sardonically. " Maybe you'd like to hev the privilege of consoling her. Would n't you like now to hev me go and show ye where the house is ? "

" O no, I would n't have you put yourself to that trouble, Mr. Green. "

"No trouble at all, Mr. Blazay. Fact is, I — I ruther think 't would be neighborly, if I sh'd drop in on her myself."

"But, I beg of you, don't go out of your way on my account."

"O no! O no!" said Peleg, keeping close at my side. If I walked fast, he walked fast; if I walked slow, he walked slow. "As a friend, Mr. Blazay," he said, confidentially, "allow me to say to you that that bunch over your eye looks bad. Seems to me *I* should n't want to be making calls on the ladies if *I* hed it."

"Thank you, Mr. Green, for your very kind suggestion. But I hardly think one so afflicted as Mrs. Pellet will look much at externals. I can now find the house very well without your assistance. Good night." And I turned the street corner.

"On the hull, guess I may as well go along too," observed Peleg; "me and Laury being old friends so."

I reminded him of his excuse for abruptly leaving the Thorntons, and expressed concern lest his colts should suffer from neglect.

"Waal, I guess the colts can take care o' themselves for an hour or so," said Mr. Green.

We reached the house, and rang.

"Hello!" said Green, "a'n't you going in?"

"Not at this present moment," I answered, walking off.

"Waal!" said the astonished Peleg, "if I'd known — Why did n't you say, and not fool a fellow this way?"

At that moment the door opened, and I left him to call alone on the widow.

Two hours later, strolling toward the house, I saw a person in light summer clothes come out; heard a voice which I recognized as P. Green's, and another which I distinguished as the mourning voice of the young widow.

They separated, and the light summer clothes came toward me at a fast walk, with an air of hurry and abstraction.

"Good evening, Mr. Green," I said, pleasantly.

"Hello! that you, Mr. Blazay?" said Peleg. "Where ye bound now?"

"Enjoying a little stroll," I replied, leisurely. "It's a charming evening."

"It is so," exclaimed Peleg, with returning agitation, "but ruther cool."

"It is," said I, "chilly. I should think you would suffer in those thin garments, Mr. Green."

"Waal, my clo'es be ruther thin," Peleg admitted.

"And, allow me to say, it seems to me your only safety is in a rapid continuation of your walk. I will not detain you an instant."

"See here!" said Peleg; "ye a'n't going in there to-night, air ye? After nine o'clock!"

"After nine?" said I. "Gentlemen seldom make calls before that hour, do they?"

I left him standing in his airy attire, gazing jealously after me. I returned to the door he had just quitted, and entered, admitted by the charming Mrs. Pellet herself.

She received me with her sweetest subdued smile; and, seated quietly at her side in her uncle's parlor, after apologizing for my unpresentable eyebrow, I had the pleasure of hearing from her own lips the full particulars of my business in Shoemake; Susie having communicated them to P. Green, and P. Green to the widow.

"I little thought, when I praised her to you," she said with gentle reproach, "that I was praising your future bride."

"Unfortunately for my hopes," I said, "Susie's affections seem to be already engaged."

"Indeed! who is the happy man?"

“Our friend who just went from here, — Mr. Peleg Green.”

The mourning eyelashes were raised with an expression of mild and sorrowful surprise.

“But Peleg — I am sure,” she said, “he does n't care for her.”

“Madam, he is her devoted admirer. You should have seen him fly to the rescue the moment he heard of my arrival. Indeed, so well satisfied am I of their mutual attachment, that I have quite abandoned my foolish project.”

Mrs. Pellet heaved a sigh.

VIII.

ONE OF PELEG'S JOKES.

THE next day I dined with the Thorntons.

Susie improved on acquaintance. After dinner she showed me her cheeses, and took me into the garden, and was gathering a bouquet for me; and, as I may as well confess, a very delightful familiarity was growing up between us, when — in rushed Mr. Green.

Again, in the evening, I went to pay my respects to the widow, and was enjoying a very quiet and pleasing conversation with that charming lady, when — in popped Peleg. Which of the two fair ones did he fancy? or had he an Oriental preference for both?

Day after day, as I lingered in the place, without well knowing why, the fellow seemed to have given up his ordinary pursuits in order to devote himself exclusively to their guardianship. He followed me pertinaciously, from

village to farm, and from farm to village, as if the great business of existence with him was to prevent any confidential communication between me and either of the aforesaid young women.

Shrewd, energetic, good-looking, not half so illiterate as he appeared, making fun wherever he went, he was, I found, a very general favorite. But my original prejudice against him, instead of diminishing, increased, and became very violent when I observed that Susie, who had soon learned to entertain me with a simple grace, a bird-like joyousness, when we were alone together, invariably grew reserved toward me the moment he appeared.

So two or three (I don't know but four) weeks passed. And still some fascination kept me in Shoemake. And still Mr. Green followed me with that suspicious nose of his, which I observed with satisfaction was long, and offered excellent conveniences for tweaking, until one afternoon found us four embarked in a sail boat on Shoemake Creek. I had invited Susie and Mrs. Pellet, and Peleg had invited himself, joining us just as we were getting into the boat.

"Hello!" said he, appearing very much astonished. "Jest in the nick o' time, a'n't I? Seems to be plenty o' room in yer canoe; guess I may as well jump in."

And jump in he did accordingly, before I could push off.

The water sets back a mile or more from the dam, and raises Shoemake Creek to the dignity of a river. Through green meadows it winds placidly between banks fringed with alders, willows, and elms, festooned with woodbines and wild grapes.

The wind failed us as we were returning, and I made Peleg work his passage. He rested on the oars, and we floated down the current, which was calm and glassy under the evening sky, and Susie sang a song that made me feel unusually sentimental, and the widow sigh, "How sweet!"

"Waal, it is some sweet," Peleg admitted, as we drifted around a bend of the stream, and came upon an exquisitely tranquil picture of cool green water embowered in cool green foliage overhanging the bank.

"Gals, I'm a going to show ye the mill-dam," said Peleg, rowing down stream. "Did you ever see it, Mr. Blazay? I come perty nigh going over the dam thing once."

"Peleg," said the melancholy Laura, "please don't be profane, will you?"

"No, I won't," said Peleg, solemnly. "I mean the mill-d—m. Can't guess how I saved myself, Mr. Blazay?"

"By using your nose for a setting-pole?" I suggested.

"Mr. Blazay," said Peleg, "I owe you one! But my nose a'n't quite so long as that man's was who always had to take two steps forward to touch the end on't. He was brother to the man that was so tall" (measuring me from head to foot) "he had to go up a ladder to comb his hair. And he could run so — 'specially if a bee was after him — that, give him a fair chance, he could come out several rods ahead of his own shadow. He ran around an apple-tree once so fast that he 'most ketched up with himself, and could see his own coat-tails jest ahead of him."

So much I got for descending to the vulgarity of a personal allusion. Even Laura was forced to smile, and Susie fairly screamed.

"Everybody laughs at those jokes; I always do," said I, "whenever I hear them. I can remember laughing at them as long ago as when I was a small boy."

"Them jokes? What very old bachelors they must be, then!" said the impudent fellow. "They must be bald enough by this time! How many years ago did you say?"

"We all admire your wit, Mr. Green," I replied, sternly.

"But I would advise you just now to bestow your chief attention upon the management of the boat, for you are getting us into a dangerous position."

Peleg grinned as he turned the boat in the current, letting the stern swing around toward the dam. The swift, smooth water shot beneath us dark and strong, breaking into a silver curve almost within reach of my cane, then plunging with thunder and foam down into an agitated and vapory basin. Mr. Green suffered us to drift almost to the brink. I was in the stern, and could look straight over the falls. The girls screamed.

"Don't be the least mite scared, gals," said the facetious Peleg, keeping the boat on the verge with easy strokes of the oars. "Even if she should go over I could ketch her 'fore Mr. Blazay's coat-tails touched the water, and row her right up over the dam again."

"Mr. Green," I cried, seriously, "take care! An oar may break, then over we go, — nothing could prevent it."

"All but Laury," said Peleg; "she can't git over a dam, ye know!"

"By Heaven," said I, alarmed, "we are going!"

"Yes, Blazay first," chuckled Peleg. "He likes to be first in everything."

"I see," said I, now much excited, "I am destined to give that fellow a thrashing."

"Sho!" said Mr. Green, "I want to know. This is a leetle more fun than I bargained fur. I 'xpected the gals would be a trifle skittish, but I did n't think Blazay would kick in the traces."

We were right over the smoking chasm, where a single false stroke of an oar might precipitate us into it. Susie, with a pale, frightened face, instinctively shrank to my side and clasped my arm. I felt a thrill, which made me for a moment forget the danger. The spray wet us, thun-

der and mist filled the air, the whirlpool foamed and boiled below, and I was happy.

"O dear, dear Peleg!" pleaded Laura, her rich mellow tones heard even above the roar of the falls, "if you have any regard for me, don't."

"I can't help it," said Peleg, pretending to lose his power over the boat, and actually letting the stern project over the dam.

I threw my arm around Susie, and she nestled tremblingly to my heart. At the sight that wretch Peleg missed a stroke. The boat shot forward, — we hung upon the brink! He struck the blades again, just in time to check our progress, and, putting forth all his strength, might have saved us, had not Laura, beside herself with terror, sprung up in the bow of the boat.

"Mercy!" she shrieked, and, flinging abroad her lovely arms, threw herself headlong upon Peleg.

Of course that settled the business. The boat swept sheer over the dam with all on board, filling and capsizing instantly.

IX.

COLD WATER.

A PIERCING shriek went up as we went down. It was the voice of Laura, which had cast off its mourning for the wet occasion. Susie uttered not a word, nor was Peleg able to make any remark, facetious or otherwise, with the widow clinging to his back, hugging and choking him desperately.

I remember a brief tumult in the water, arms tossing, crinoline floating, the boat keel upward, the eddies rolling

and sucking us. Then I was trying to swim with a precious burden, raising the dripping head above water, sinking inevitably, going down with the current, touching gravel at last, and thanking my stars that I was tall.

Wading, I emerged, bearing Susie in my arms, and carried her to the bank.

"Thank Heaven!" said I, "you are safe."

She brushed her dripping hair from her eyes, strangled a little, and looked up.

I was bending over her, kneeling. It was very romantic. I expected nothing less than that she would call me her preserver, and betray at once her gratitude and her love. She moved her lips, — her lovely but wet lips. I listened for their faintest murmur. And this is what she said, —

"Where's Peleg?"

"What's Peleg to us?" I exclaimed, sentimentally.

"He's a good deal to us, — to me, at any rate!" she declared; and I was obliged to tell her that Mr. Green had got the widow on the keel of the boat, which he was hauling to the opposite bank.

"Nobody drowned?"

"All safe, dearest!"

"You need n't call me dearest!" said Miss Thornton. And she actually struggled from my arms.

"Susie! dearest Susie!" etc.

I don't remember the rest of my speech, and probably should not repeat it if I could. The truth is just this: I had fallen in love with this same Susie Thornton, and in the excitement of the moment I was betrayed into a rather ill-timed declaration.

"Mr. Blazay!" she exclaimed, in a strange tone, and with a strange look, in which were expressed, as I fondly

believed, astonishment, rapture, alarm. "How can you! — you must not! — Peleg!"

I protested. She was very much agitated. She shivered in her drenched clothes. She laughed nervously. She ran down the stream and fished out my hat, which had floated ashore.

"Now we are even," she said, with unnatural gayety. "You have saved my life; I have saved your hat: and one is of about as much consequence as the other! Why did n't you let me drown? You might as well!"

"All right!" shouted Peleg, having got Laura on the rocks. "Accidents will happen, ye know, in the best regulated families."

Susie and I set out, climbing the banks. The thunder of the dam grew faint behind us, and, looking back, I saw the cascade gleaming white in the twilight.

"Why, Susie, child! where have you been?" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton, as we entered the house.

"O, we only just went over the dam, that's all," said Susie.

"Over the dam!" cried mamma.

"The dam!" echoed papa.

"Dam! — dam!" clamored little brothers, eagerly running to hear their sister's narrative of the shipwreck.

I turned to go. Mr. Thornton grasped my hand.

"No, sir!" he said, with tears in his eyes, and with a squeeze that brought tears into mine. "You don't leave this house to-night! You have saved our darter's life, and d'ye s'pose we'll see you go off in your wet clo'es? Not's long's my name's Thornton!"

I fear I was only too willing to stay. I wanted one word of hope from Susie; and although she appeared indifferent to my going, I did not go.

"Give him some o' my clo'es to put on, can't we, mother?"

said Mr. Thornton. "This way, Mr. Blazay; I can fit ye, I know!"

He introduced me to the spare bedroom, and soon brought me my outfit. I beheld with dismay the old-fashioned garments. But the antique style was their least objectionable feature. The dress-coat was of ample breadth, the waistcoat of voluptuous dimensions, the pantaloons baggy. But all were alike longitudinally scanty. They had been cut for a very much shorter and stumpier man. The ends of the sleeves reached a little below my elbows. The trousers-legs barely covered my knees, and appeared decidedly averse to making the acquaintance of the socks, whose position in the world was so much beneath them. Between waistbands and waistcoat I displayed a broad zone of borrowed linen. The collar of the coat rode my back like a horse-collar.

Mr. Thornton rubbed his hands, and appeared hugely tickled at his success in clothing his guest. He held the candle for me at the mirror. I looked aghast at myself as I thought of meeting Susie. How could I think of pressing my suit in a suit that so needed stretching?

I took courage, however, exhibited myself at the tea-table, and joined in the merriment my ridiculous plight occasioned.

A delightful evening ensued. Susie was in high spirits; vivacious and as sweet as Hebe, after her bath. And, further, my presence in the cottage did not prove a signal for Peleg to rush in.

The heroes were sent to bed. The old folks shook hands with me affectionately, called me their darter's preserver, and bade me good night.

The moment I was left alone with Susie, her vivacity subsided: she became serious and silent. I placed myself at her side. The fragrant, dear little hand that lay idle on

her lap, I could not resist the impulse to seize and kiss. She firmly and gently withdrew it.

Then I talked ; telling her of my previous languid, artificial life ; confessing my self-conceit and my prejudices ; avowing my infinite indebtedness to her for curing me of that folly, for inspiring me with new life, with hopes, with happiness, and all that sort of thing.

“ Mr. Blazay,” she exclaimed, shivering anew with agitation, “ why do you tell me this now ? ”

“ Why not now ? ”

“ It is too late ! ”

“ Too late ? It is not too late, Susie, if you love me. ”

“ Sir,” she cried, almost angrily, “ you must not, I tell you you shall not, speak to me of love ! You have saved my life to-night ; I am grateful ; but — ” She hesitated.

“ Say it ! Say the worst ! ”

She lifted her face, — tearful, white, inexorable, — and fixed her eyes upon me with a look I shall never forget.

“ Mr. Blazay, I am engaged. ”

This she said with that chilling resoluteness of tone which falls upon a lover's heart like death.

I began to rave foolishly of perfidy, of the trap that was laid for me when I came to pay my addresses to one who was already secretly betrothed.

“ Oh ! but I was not when you came ! ”

“ What ! ” I exclaimed, “ you have engaged yourself since ? ”

“ I have,” said Susie.

“ When ? To whom ? ”

“ The evening after you arrived, to Peleg. ”

I leaped to my feet. Wrath and disgust almost stifled love. It was the last shock to my egotism to know that she had accepted Peleg *after she had seen me !* I would

have rushed from the house, but I saw Susie laughing. Distressed as she was, she could not but laugh to see me striding thus to and fro; and then I remembered whose garments were drying by the kitchen fire, and whose I had on in their place.

It was but a fitful, nervous laugh, however, and it changed suddenly to crying. That brought me to her feet. I claimed her; I vowed that she loved me; I knew it, and I would not give her up; and more to the same effect.

Susie cut me short, arose in her dignity, and pointed to the candle.

“The light is at your service, sir, whenever you wish to retire.”

I took it, and, without bidding her good night, went, not to bed, but to the kitchen where my clothes were drying, carried them to my room, put them on again, returned to the entry, placed the candle on the table, and was going.

Susie, who had been sitting in the dark, came out of the parlor and stood before me with a face like death.

“Are you going?”

“I am going.”

“Never to come again?”

“Never to come again.”

“Good by!” she whispered, just audibly, offering me her hand. I pressed it, I kissed it.

“Susie,” I pleaded, “say that you will not marry that man!”

“I have pledged myself; I shall marry him,” she replied, in a voice that smote my heart like stone.

I regarded her a moment, — so fair, so inexorable; another's, and not mine, — then hurried from the house.

X.

MY TRUNK IS PACKED.

OUT of doors all was hushed and quiet. How well I remember that night! A dewy, midsummer night. And there, standing beneath the moon and the dim stars, I had a feeling to which the gayest may sometimes be brought, — a piercing sense of loneliness, as if I alone of all the world was without a home; an alien in the beautiful, calm universe of God.

I heard the throbbing murmur of the dam. I wandered toward it, saw its misty whiteness glitter in the moon, stood on the bank where I had first held Susie in my arms, and tortured myself with vain regrets. After I had done that long enough I walked back again, saw the light extinguished in the farm-house, and knew Susie had gone to bed. To sleep, perhaps to dream — of Peleg. I grinned bitterly at the thought; and bidding her farewell in my heart, and taking my last look at her window, I returned to the tavern.

I packed my traps, then threw myself down, and rolled and tossed in the long, dark hours, as it were in black sweltering waves, the miserablest of men; heard the birds chirp, and saw the first gray glimmer of dawn; then sank into a feverish sleep and dreamed that Peleg took us all to ride on the river in the handle of his jack-knife, with the blade hoisted for a sail.

Awakened by Peleg's shutting the blade, I found it was broad day. I arose and dressed with care. I breakfasted as usual. Then I had my luggage brought down stairs, to be in readiness for the early train. Then I paid my bill. Then the landlady came and told me there was a person

waiting to see me in the parlor. Then I went into the parlor; and there, sitting with her bonnet on, and with a little can of honey in her lap, was Susie Thornton.

My heart gave a great bound at sight of her. But I saw at once that it was not an occasion to afford me the least ground of hope. Unwillingly she had come, sent by her parents, who did not guess, and to whom she did not confess, her reason for not wishing to come.

“Mother promised you some honey, you remember. And when I told her you were going, she blamed me for not giving it to you, and made me come and bring it, with her best wishes, — and father’s.”

She got through her errand very prettily. I took the can, thanking her. But O, it was a sweeter honey than that my soul hungered for. I took her hand. She burst into tears. She stayed only to dry them, and was going, when a loud, blatant voice at the door startled us.

“Seen Mr. Blazay anywheres around this morning, any on ye?”

“Peleg!” gasped Susie.

“He ’ll be gone in a minute; wait here,” I said, flinging the long damask window-curtain over her.

Enter Peleg.

XI.

P. GREEN SHOWS HIS COLORS.

“HELLO! how do ye find yerself after that rather damp time, Mr. Blazay, hey?”

“Ah, good morning, sir! I feel, for one, as if I had had about enough of Shoemake and the kind of jokes you practise here.”

“Sho! a'n't going off huffy, be ye? See a trunk and carpet-bag in the entry here, *H. Blazay* marked on 'em; sorry you 're going.” And Mr. Green sat down.

“Have you any business with me?” I demanded. “For my time is occupied.”

“Waal, no, yaas, not exac'ly; do'n' know but I hev, and don't know as I hev. Truth is, you 've got me into the all-firedest scrape, Mr. Blazay.”

“I have got you into a — Explain yourself!”

“Yaas, you hev! an awful scrape!” And Peleg opened and shut his jack-knife vivaciously. “An' now, seems to me, Mr. Blazay, 't a'n't exac'ly the fair thing for you to scoot off so and leave me in the lurch.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Waal, to come to the pint, it's jest this: I'd got the idee into my head you was coming up here to marry Susie, and, ye see, that's what upset all my ca'c'lations. Fact is, may as well own up, I had a sneakin' notion after Susie myself; and so, ye see, when I heard a dandified sort o' chap had come to town, and marched up to Neighbor Thornton's as if he owned all this part of creation and had come to collect his rents, I allow it did give me the all-firedest stirring up ever I had in my life! I was n't long gitting into some clean clo'es, you better believe, and making tracks that way myself, — about the time you was making a bee-line from the orchard, ye rec'lect!”

“Mr. Green,” said I, stripping back my cuffs, “I have long owed that nose of yours a wrench, and I perceive that you have brought it here to afford me a gratification.”

“Yaas, I guess not!” said Peleg, coolly. “Excuse me, Mr. Blazay!” And he stuck up the blade of his knife in a manner that rather discouraged my advances. “I remember what you said last night about giving me a thrashing; but thrashing goes against my grain, as the

barley said to the flail. Hed n't ye better wait and hear what I 've got to say?"

"Go on," I said, mastering my indignation.

"Waal, as I was going to remark, you hurried up my pop-corn, Mr. Blazay, a leetle faster 'n I meant to hev it."

"Pop-corn, sir! what do you mean?"

"O, you a'n't acquainted with that kind o' confectionery? Plain English, then, I watched my chance, and, that very night, 'fore supper, popped — you know what — the question. And she took me right up, as I knew of course she would." And Peleg felt the edge of his knife complacently. "That 's what you made me do, Mr. Blazay; and now I 'm bothered if I would n't give boot if the thing was unpopped. Come!" crossing his legs and talking very much as if he had been trading horses, "what do you say to a bargain now?"

The curtain was trembling. To prevent Mr. Green's observing it I rushed upon him, towered over him, and exclaimed, "You knave! you have not even been willing that I should speak with Susie; but you have driven the wedge of that nose of yours between us on every occasion; and now —"

Peleg quietly stroked the said nose, and smiled.

"Lemme explain, Mr. Blazay. Ye see, all along, I was n't quite sure o' the widow. Laury 's an old flame o' mine, ye know. Offered myself to her six years ago; as it happened, jest after she had accepted Dr. Pellet, so, of course, I give her up. And, a'n't it curi's, I never heard of Pellet's death till the very evening I'd engaged myself to Susie! Do be so obliging as to keep your hands off'm me, Mr. Blazay, and I'll tell ye. Then, of course, the old feelings for Laury kind o' come up again, and I can't say that the twenty thousan' Pellet left her discouraged me in the least. Now, I was afraid you was after the widow,

and *I* wanted the widow. I had a suspicion you was after Susie; and, if I could n't git the widow, *I* wanted Susie. So there I was on the fence. Keep yer temper, keep yer temper, Mr. Blazay, and I'll continue. Want to know the reason why I did n't propose right off to Laury? I'd already got one bird, and what should I do with two? But I might 'a' give you a chance with Susie, mabby you think? But 't a'n't in natur', is it, 't I sh'd give the cat a bird in the hand, and take my chance for one in the bush? That's jest the case, Mr. Blazay."

"Well, sir!"

"Waal, sir," resumed Peleg, "last night, after the ducking, you know, I took Laury home. And in the excitement I kind o' forgot myself. I may as well own, I popped the question to her too. She accepted me, of course; might 'a' known she would. That's the scrape, Mr. Blazay. Engaged to two gals to once!" And he put his head shrewdly on one side, as if studying some smart plan of extricating himself.

"Well, sir! well, sir! what can I do for you?"

"Waal," drawled the jockey, "did n't know but you'd like to take one on 'em off my hands. Good respectable girls, both on 'em; kind o' hate to break any hearts, or git into a breach-o'-promise scrape; but I can't marry both, you know, without emigrating to Utah."

"Well, Mr. Green, of which of these deluded young women do you desire to be relieved?"

"I s'pose," said Peleg, "as I come first, knowed both of them, and kinder got my feelings engaged afore you did, it's only fair I sh'd hev the first pick. Now lemme see which I'll take. Now there's Susie — awful nice gal — handy about the house, you know — make a first-rate wife; not bad off either. S'pose old Thornton could give her a couple o' thousand now, and mabby three thousand more

when he dies. Not bad, if a feller can't do better. But then there's Laury's got twenty thousand right in hand; that 'ud kinder set a feller up at once, — no waitin' for dead men's shoes; an' besides, she took a shine to me 'fore Susie ever did, — that ought to be taken into the account; and I somehow think she'd take the disappointment o' losing me harder 'n Susie will; and then you come here, you know, to court Susie, and not Laury. So, on the hull, if it's the same thing to you, 'pears to me it's 'bout the fair thing for me to take Laury, and let you have — ”

At this instant the curtain was flung aside. Peleg stopped, Peleg stared, Peleg grimaced and whistled.

“ Phew! Who 'd 'a' thought it! Susie! ”

XII.

CONCLUSION.

THERE she stood, in an attitude that might have done credit to Rachel, her eyes, her face, her whole form, so to speak, scintillant and quivering with intensified scorn.

Peleg stretched himself up, plunged his hands deep into his pockets, screwed up first one side of his face and then the other, and repeated his astonished whistle.

“ Whew! Told ye so! ” squinting at me. “ Awful scrape! perfectly awful! ”

“ Mr. Green, ” said I, “ the lady desires to be rid of your society. I am waiting to see her very reasonable wishes complied with. ”

“ Don't be rolling up yer sleeves on my account! don't spread yerself so like a cat a falling jest for me! Ruther guess I'm in a bad fix, and had better back right straight

out. Ye see, Susie, no mortal man could 'a' ca'clated on Laury's turning up a widow jest as I had hooked myself to you. Now I ha'n't the least thing agin you in the world ; and I did n't mean to flunk out when I made the bargain. But my old attachment to Laury, ye know ; and here 's Mr. Blazay, a perfect gentleman, got property, likes you ; and if you are satisfied with the swap — ”

She stamped her foot again, her eyes darting fire.

“ Shall I hasten his departure ? ” I suggested. “ Door or window, which would you prefer to see him pass out of ? ”

“ Don't trouble yourself, I beg of ye ! ” said Peleg. “ You seem to understand each other, and I'm glad on 't, ” scratching his chin. “ We 'll consider it settled, if you 've no objections. Hope the trade 'll prove satisfactory all around. Ruther dull morning, Mr. Blazay. Look 's though 't might clear up and be fine bimeby, — 'bout ten o'clock, I guess. And allow me to say, Mr. Blazay, if I 've got a colt, or any animil you happen to want, I shall be most happy to talk. Waal, any time, ye know. Good morning. ”

Exit Peleg.

Susie arranged her bonnet-strings with agitated hands, and was hurrying away in haste to hide her anger and her shame, when I held out my arms to prevent her escape, and —

“ Come ! come ! ” says Mrs. Blazay, looking over my shoulder, “ you 've written quite enough about that foolish affair ! Besides, I want you to take the baby. ”

Susie's word is law. So I leave my story here.

PREACHING FOR SELWYN.

I.

MR. JERVEY'S PART OF THE STORY.

“I AM one of the keepers at the Asylum, you know. “The Asylum stands on a hill; not much of a hill, either, but just a pretty elevation of ground, with a noble lawn sloping down to the river-bank, from which it is separated by a high board fence. None of your commonplace fences, understand, such as seem often to have no other use than just to spoil a landscape. You would say that, as a general thing, a fence like that about an estate must be designed for keeping people out. This, though, was meant to keep people in. The people, in our case, are the inmates of the Asylum.” And Mr. Jervev touched his forehead significantly.

“There was a wicket in the fence, that opened into a boat-house, that opened at the other end on to the water. There the doctor kept his boat, in which we gave the patients many a fine row and sail. For he was one of your right-down sensible, kind-hearted doctors; none of your — Well, I won't draw comparisons, for fear I may be considered wanting in respect toward his very worthy successor.

“He — I mean the old doctor — believed in the wholesome influence of kindness and change of scene and mild recreation on his patients. So he was always thinking of

little things that would cheer and amuse them. Saturday nights, and occasionally at other times, the boat-house was turned into a bathing-house for a certain class of patients. Of course it was only a certain class that could be trusted either to go on or into the water. 'It always has a good effect to trust those that can be trusted,' says the doctor. Then, you know, the boat and the bath, and all such things, worked well, held out as rewards for good behavior.

"One Sunday morning, a new patient we had just got in complained to me that he had been promised a swim in the river, but that nothing had been said to him when the others went in the night before. He was so very anxious for his bath that morning, that I thought 't would do no harm to lay his case before the doctor.

" 'What do you think of him, Jervev ?' says the doctor.

" 'Very quiet, very gentlemanly,' says I.

" 'Bring him to me,' says the doctor.

"So I went and brought Mr. Hillbright, — for that was the man's name, — and introduced him with the little formality usually pleasing to that kind of people.

" 'Mr. Hillbright, Doctor,' says I.

" 'Ah ! good morning, Mr. Hillbright,' says the doctor. 'How are you this morning ?'

" 'Very well indeed, Doctor, I thank you kindly,' says the patient. He was a man of about five-and-forty, well dressed, and very gentlemanly, as I have said ; belonged to a good family ; rather fleshy ; a little bald on the top of his head ; but with nothing very peculiar in his appearance except a quick way of speaking, and a quick way of dropping his eyes before you every now and then. 'Very well indeed, Doctor,' says he ; 'only the sins of the world weigh upon me very heavily, as you are aware.' And in the most solemn manner he bowed that bald-topped head of his until

the doctor, where he sat, could have reached up and written his name on it.

“‘O yes, I know,’ says the doctor. ‘They weigh upon me too. But we shall get rid of the burden in good time, — all in good time, Mr. Hillbright.’

“That was the doctor’s style of managing patients of this sort. It did no good to contradict them, he said, but if you could convince one that his case wasn’t peculiar, that others had had similar troubles and been cured of ’em, that was the first step toward bringing him around to his right senses. So, if one complained that he had a devil, the doctor would very likely relate to him in confidence how he had had a much bigger devil, and how he had got rid of him. ‘I ’m in hell! I ’m in hell, Doctor!’ says a woman to him. ‘I don’t doubt it; a great many people are,’ says the doctor; ‘I have been there myself.’ And that would usually throw cold water on the fire sooner than anything.

“Hillbright was quite taken aback by the doctor’s candid admission and expression of sympathy; for I suppose he had never been treated with anything but contradiction and argument till he came to us. But he rallied in a minute and said, glib as a parrot, ‘I have taken the sins of the world,’ says he, ‘and I must bear them till I am permitted to preach and convert the world. Meanwhile the world hates me, and all I can do for my relief is to go down into the river and be baptized. I need n’t explain to a philosopher like you,’ says he, bowing again to the doctor, ‘that some of the sins will wash off.’

“The doctor approved of the idea, and said: ‘Jervey,’ says he, ‘always have a bath-tub at Mr. Hillbright’s disposal.’

“‘A bath-tub?’ says Hillbright, with a sort of sorrowful

amazement ; 'the sins of the world in a bath-tub? The ocean would n't hold them !'

" 'Jervey,' says the doctor, 'give the sins of the world a good plunge into the river this morning.'

" So I took the key of the boat-house and went down with my man to the shore.

" He had n't been long in the water when he made an awful discovery. The sins would n't wash off ! He must have soap, and there was only one sort that would serve his purpose. He said I would find a cake of it on the little table in his room, and begged me to go and get it.

" I did n't like to lose sight of him ; but the doctor had told me always to humor his patients in trifling matters which they considered important. 'For even if we can't cure 'em,' says he, 'we can at least make 'em comfortable' ; and going for a cake of soap was so little trouble, and besides, as I said, Hillbright was such a quiet, respectable, gentlemanly person, I thought him safe, especially if I kept possession of his clothes. They were in the boat-house locker, where I always kept the clothes of the bathers ; so I just turned the key on 'em and went for the soap, leaving Mr. Hillbright to give the sins of the world a good soaking till I came back.

" I had a pretty good hunt, finding nothing on his table but a small pocket Bible, about the size and shape of the thing I expected to find, but not the thing itself. It occurred to me in a minute, though, that this was really what the man wanted ; for where else was the kind of soap that would wash away the sins of the world ? I grinned a little at my own previous simplicity, but determined that nobody else should have a chance to grin at it, least of all my man in the water ; so I took the Bible, and says I to myself, 'I'll hand it to him as if it was actually a cake of soap, and I had understood his subtle

meaning from the first; and then see what he will do with it.'

"I unlocked the little door in the fence, and entered the boat-house, and was immediately struck by an odd look it had, as if something strange had taken place in my absence. The boat — yes, that was it — the boat was gone! I ran along the narrow side of the platform to the door opening on the river, and looked out, — about as anxiously as I ever looked out of a door in my life: there was the river, running smoothly, and looking as innocent of the sins of the world, and the morning was looking as still and lovely, as any river or any Sunday morning that ever you saw. But there was no boat and no Hillbright to be seen; boat, Hillbright, sins of the world, all had disappeared together.

"I ran back to the locker, and found the man's clothes all right. My respectable, gentlemanly patient had launched himself into society in a surprising state of nature, — a thing I had n't for a moment believed him capable of doing, he was always so very distant, I may say formal, in his deportment. What with his mystical cake of soap, and his running away as soon as I was out of sight, I own he had fooled me most completely.

"Now, I lay it down as a general principle that nobody likes to be taken in, even by a man in his senses. Still less do you fancy that sort of humiliation from a man out of his senses. Then put the case of a person in my position, — a keeper, supposed to have more experience and wit in dealing with the insane than you outsiders can have, — and you perceive how very crushing a circumstance it must have been to me.

"I ran like a deer down the river-bank, till I came to the bend, around which I felt sure of getting a sight of the boat. I was right there; I found the boat, but it was

adrift, and going down with the current, without anybody aboard. There was no Hillbright to be seen, afloat or ashore, and it was n't possible to tell which way he had gone, for the high fence had concealed his movements, and then the river-banks below were fringed with trees and bushes on both sides. So all I could do was to hurry back to the house, give the alarm, and get all hands out on the hunt for him, that fine Sunday morning."

Thus far our friend Jervey.

II.

PARSON DODD AND THE BAY MARE.

PARSON DODD was to be that day a partner in a triangular exchange. That is, Dodd was to preach for Selwyn, Selwyn was to preach for Burdick, and Burdick was to preach for Dodd.

From Dodd's parish at Coldwater to Selwyn's at Longtrot was a distance of some fourteen miles. Just a nice little Sunday morning's drive in fine weather; and one to which Dodd looked forward with interest, for two or three reasons.

To begin with, Dodd was a bachelor of full five-and-forty. He had always intended to marry, but being one of your procrastinating gentlemen, who make it a rule to put off until to-morrow whatever they are not absolutely compelled to do to-day, he had, with other things, put off matrimony. He had even paid somewhat marked and prolonged attentions — at different periods, of course — to three or four ladies, each of whom had in turn been snatched up by a more enterprising suitor, while he was

slowly making up his mind on the subject of a proposal. Very much as if he had been contemplating a fair morsel on his fork, expecting in due time to swallow it, but in no haste to do so, when some puppy had rushed in and swallowed it for him, with a celerity that quite took the good man's breath away.

Not that Garcey was a puppy, by any means. He was a brother clergyman, and Selwyn's predecessor at Longtrot; and there was a time when he liked wonderfully well to come over and preach for Dodd. And that is the way he became connected with the romance of Dodd's life.

To the last of the estimable ladies alluded to — namely, Miss Melissa Wortleby, of his parish — Dodd did actually propose matrimony, after taking about five years to think of it. But Miss Wortleby was then aghast at an offer which would have made her the happiest of women three days ago.

“Dear me, Mr. Dodd!” said she. “Why did n't you ever tell me, if you had such a thing in your mind?”

The parson stammered out that a serious step of that nature was not to be taken in haste. “There's always time enough, you are aware, Miss Wortleby.”

“Yes,” said poor Miss Wortleby, with a look of distress; “but Mr. Garcey — he — he proposed to me last Sunday, and I —”

“You accepted him?” said Parson Dodd, turning pale at this unexpected stroke.

Miss Wortleby's tears were a sufficient confession.

“The traitor!” said Parson Dodd. “He took advantage of our exchange to offer himself to you. He has taken advantage of many another exchange, I suppose, to come over and cultivate your acquaintance. Always teasing me for an exchange — the vil —”

“No, no, dear Mr. Dodd!” pleaded Melissa Wortleby,

clasping his hands. "He is no traitor and no villain. He had no idea, any more than I had, that you —"

"To be sure," said Parson Dodd, resuming that serene behavior and those just sentiments which were habitual with him. "I have nobody to blame but myself, dear Miss Wortleby."

Dodd must have seen that he was really the young lady's choice, and that it would have been no very difficult task to prevail upon her to cancel her hasty engagement with Garcey. But we must do him the justice to say that if he was given to procrastination in matters of right, he was still more slow to decide upon any course of doubtful morality. So he stepped gracefully aside, and gave the pair to each other in a very literal sense, himself performing the wedding ceremony.

Garcey was settled, as I said, in what was now Selwyn's parish; there he lived with his gentle Melissa, preached two or three times a week (exchanging very rarely with Dodd in those days, however), and laid the foundations of a wide reputation and a large family. Then he died, leaving to his afflicted widow a barrel of sermons and six children.

Melissa still lived at the parsonage over at Longtrot, and boarded Selwyn, the young theological sprig, lately slipped from the academical tree and planted in that parish in the hope that he might take root there. It was even whispered that he was likely to take root there in a double sense, succeeding the lamented Garcey not only in the pulpit, but also in Mrs. Garcey's affections. But of course there was no truth in that suspicion. Parson Dodd must have known there was no truth in it, for he would have been the last man to serve another as poor Garcey had served him. And somehow Dodd liked to preach for Selwyn.

To be quite frank about the matter, Parson Dodd had lately awakened one morning and discovered to his surprise the marks of age creeping over him. His crown was getting bald, his waistcoat round, his hair (what there was of it) silvery (but he wore a wig), his frontal ivory golden. Until yesterday he had said of growing old, as of everything else, "Time enough for that." But however man may procrastinate, the old fellow with the scythe and the forelock is always about his work; and here was Dodd's field of life more than half mown before he knew it. "Only a little patch of withered herbage left!" thought he with consternation.

Of course no *young* lady would think of having him now. He might have deemed his case hopeless, but there was the mother of Garcey's innocents! I'll not say that these living monuments to the memory of his late friend were not just a little dampening to the ardor of his reviving attachment. Of all the ready-made articles with which the world abounds, one of the least desirable is a ready made family. To bear with easy grace a weighty domestic responsibility (and a wife and six may be considered such), one should begin with it at the beginning, like the man in the fable, who, by shouldering the calf daily, came at last to carry the ox. But to commence married life where another man has left off, that requires courage. But Dodd was a man of courage; one of those who, irresolute and dilatory in ordinary matters, show unexpected pluck in the face of formidable undertakings. He had thought of all these things. And, as I have said, he liked to preach for Selwyn.

Usually, when he had that privilege, he drove over to Longtrot early in the morning, put up his horse at the parsonage, and had a good hour with the relict of the lamented Garcey before the ringing of the second bell. An hour

spent probably in Scriptural readings and conversations, or perhaps in drilling the little Garceys in their Sunday-school lessons. Whatever the pious task, his heart was evidently in it; for it was always noticeable afterward when he walked to church with the widow and her little tribe, leading the youngest between them, that his kind face beamed with peculiar satisfaction.

But, as I have hinted, there was other cause for the interest with which Parson Dodd looked forward to this particular Sunday morning's ride. Shall I confess it? The worthy man, having no family, was a lover of animals, especially of horses, — more especially of fine horses. He had lately exchanged nags (an act which in a layman is termed "swapping") and got a bay mare; to his experienced eye a very superior beast to the one he put away. He had as yet had no opportunity to try her paces for more than a short spurt; but he liked the way she carried her hoofs, and he believed her to be "sound and true." He had her of a townsman, — Colonel Jakes, — who, though something of a jockey, was never known actually to lie about a horse; and Colonel Jakes had said, as he turned the quid in his cheek, and squinted with a professional air across the mare's fetlocks, and looked candid as a summer's day, "There's lots of travel in that beast, Parson. You see how she goes off; and it's my experience she's poorest at the start. Yes, Parson, I give ye my word, you'll find that creatur's generally poorest at the start. You'll say so when you've drove her a little."

It was a lovely morning, and the heart of Parson Dodd was happy in his breast, when he set off, at half past seven o'clock, alone in his buggy, driving the bay mare, to go over and preach for Selwyn.

He was very carefully dressed in his dark brown wig, his suit of handsome blue-black cloth, and ruffled shirt-

bosom of snowy whiteness, which distinguished him among clergymen far and near. "Let me see that coat and that shirt-bosom anywhere, and I should know it was you," said Mrs. Bean, with just pride in her washing and in her minister, that very morning. "But," her eye resting with some surprise on his neckcloth, "where *did* you git that imbroidered new white neck-handkerchief?"

"A gift, — a gift from a lady," replied Parson Dodd, evasively.

He was not quite prepared to inform her that his appearance in it foreboded a change in her housekeeping. But so it was. In the note that came with it a few days before, Melissa had written with a trembling hand: "I embroidered it for my dear husband. Will you accept and wear it?" Of course, these simple, pathetic words were not in any way designed as a nudge to Dodd's well-known procrastinating disposition. Yet he could not but feel that putting on the neckcloth that morning was as good as tying the matrimonial halter under his chin.

"Wal, I don't care, it's perty anyhow!" said Mrs. Bean.

So Parson Dodd started off, wearing the fatal neckcloth, and driving the bay mare. Her coat was glossy as silk; the air was exhilarating; the birds sang sweetly; she stepped off beautifully. He knew Melissa would be expecting him, and he was happy.

"But hold on!" said he, pulling the rein all at once. "Bless me, my sermon!" The bay mare and the embroidered neckcloth had quite put that out of his head. "If I had really gone without it, I should have had to overhaul some of poor Garcey's," thought he, as he wheeled about.

He wheeled again as he drove up to the gate, and called to Mrs. Bean to go into his study and hand him down his sermon-case, which she would find lying on his desk. As

she reached it to him over the gate, he remarked, "You have n't seen how she moves off."

"No, I ha'n't," said Mrs. Bean.

Parson Dodd tightened the reins, — those electric conductors through which every born driver knows how to send magnetic intelligence, the soul of the man at one end inspiring the soul of the horse at the other. And Parson Dodd clucked lightly. But Queen Bess (that was the name of her) did not move. A louder cluck, and a closer tension of the quivering ribbons. Queen Bess merely laid her ears back, curled down her tail as if she expected a blow, and — Dodd could see by the sparkling black eye turned back at him — looked vicious.

"Go 'long!" said Parson Dodd, showing the whip.

Queen Bess quietly braced herself. She was evidently used to this sort of thing, and prepared for a struggle. Parson Dodd saw the situation at a glance, remembered the jockey's declaration that she was "generally poorest at the start," and blushed to the apex of his bald crown.

"What is the matter with him?" cried sympathetic Mrs. Bean.

"*Him*'s balky, that's what's the matter," replied the irritated parson. "Go 'long, Bess, I tell you!" And he touched her shoulder with the whip.

The touch was followed by a sharp cut; but Bess only cringed her tail more closely, and looked wickeder than ever. Then he tried coaxing. All to no purpose. It was a dead balk.

Notwithstanding his burning shame at having been shaved by a layman who "paltered with him in a double sense," and his wrath at the perverse brute, and his irritation at Mrs. Bean, who always *would* call a mare a *him*, Parson Dodd controlled his temper, and begged the lady's pardon, but told her she had better go into the house, for

it might be her presence that put the devil into the brute. (she declares that he said "devil"), then got out of the buggy, went to the animal's head, stroked her, patted her, spoke gently to her, and led her out into the street.

Then he once more got up into his seat. But Queen Bess saw through the transparent artifice; she had taken serious offence at the indecision shown at starting, and now she refused to start at all without leading. So Parson Dodd got out again, gave her another start with his hand on the bridle, then sprang back into the buggy, at the risk of his limbs, while she was going. "I wonder if I shall have to start in this way when I leave Melissa's?" thought he, and wondered what people would say to see *him* with a balky horse!

He let her go her own gait for a mile or two, then, by way of experiment, stopped her, and started her again. She seemed to have got over her miff by this time, for she went off readily at a word. Having repeated this experiment two or three times with encouraging success, (as if the cunning creature did n't know perfectly well what he was up to!) Parson Dodd began to think he had n't made such a fatally bad bargain after all. "With careful management, I can cure her of that trick," thought he.

When he had made about ten miles of the journey, he came to a stream where it was his custom always to "stop and water" when going over to preach for Selwyn. There was then an easy trot of four miles beyond, which he thought well for a horse after drinking; and, besides, he considered a little soaking good for his wheels in dry weather.

Parson Dodd got out, let down the mare's check-rein, got into the buggy again, and, turning aside from the bridge, drove down into the water, purposing to drive through it and up the opposite bank, country fashion.

In mid-channel, he let Queen Bess stop and drink. She

seemed pretty thirsty, and the cautious parson, to keep her from drinking too fast and too much, found it necessary to pull her head up now and then. This, I suppose, vexed her; for she was a testy creature, and could not bear to be trifled with. At last she would not put down her head, and, when requested to start, she would not start. In short, Queen Bess had balked again, this time in the middle of the stream.

Parson Dodd's lips tightened across his teeth, and his knuckles grew white about his whip-handle. But the cringing tail and the leering eye told him that he might spare his blows. Madam had fully made up her mind not to budge.

The parson stood up and reconnoitred. The stream was thigh-deep, and it was a couple of rods to either shore. The bridge was just out of jumping distance. There was no help within call. Parson Dodd looked at the water, then at his neatly fitting polished boots, ruffled shirt-bosom, and blue-black suit, grinned, and sat down again.

"Queen Bess," said he, "you think you've got me now. It does look so. How long do you intend to keep me here? Take your own time, madam! But mind, you make up for this delay when you do start."

It was difficult, however, for a person of even so equitable a temper as his own to possess his soul in patience very long under the circumstances. Suppose Queen Bess should conclude not to start at all that forenoon? What would Melissa think? And who would preach for Selwyn?

There was another consideration. Queen Bess had had her fill of cold water when she was warm, — a dangerous thing for a horse that has been driven, and that is not kept in exercise afterward. Before many minutes, Dodd had no doubt she would be fatally foundered; though he did not know but the cold water about her feet might do something toward keeping the fever from settling in them.

“This, then, is the creatur’ that’s usually poorest at starting! I should say so!” thought he. — “I wish Colonel Jakes was lashed to her back, like another Mazeppa, and that I had the starting of her then; I’d be willing to sacrifice the mare. Come, come, Bess! good Queen Bess! Will you go ’long?”

She would not, of course.

Parson Dodd looked wistfully at both banks again, and at the inaccessible bridge, and at the hub-deep water, and said, grimly, after a moment’s profound meditation, — “There’s only one way; I must get out and lead her!”

It is said that the brains of drowning men are lighted at the supreme moment by a thousand vivid reflections. Parson Dodd experienced something of this phenomenon, even before he got into the water. He saw himself preaching for Selwyn in unpresentable, drenched garments, — he, the well-dressed, immaculate bachelor parson; or begging a change of the widow, and exciting great scandal in the congregation by entering the pulpit in a well-known suit of Garcey’s, (“’T will be said I might at least have let his clothes alone until after I had married into them!”) or waiting to be found where he was, at the mercy of a vicious mare, by the first church-going teams that came that way. Would he ever take pride in driving a neat nag, or care to preach for Selwyn, after either of these contingencies?

“I’ll pull off my boots anyway; yes, and my coat; there’s no use of wetting that.” He stood up on his buggy-seat and looked anxiously both up and down the road, and, seeing no one, said, “I may as well save my pantaloons.” Then why not his linen and underclothes? “The bath won’t hurt me. Why didn’t I think of this before?” said he, pulling up the buggy-top for a screen.

He began with his embroidered white neckcloth, which

he took off and placed in his hat, along with his watch, and pocket-book, and sermon, saying, at the same time, "Some leisure day, Queen Bess, you and I are going to have a settlement. Lucky for you this is n't a very favorable time for it. I'll break your temper, or I'll break your neck!"

Thus talking to the shrew, and quoting exemplary Petruchio, he packed his clothes carefully in the wagon-bottom, and then — laughing at the ludicrousness of the situation, in spite of himself — stepped cautiously down into the water.

"Aha!" said he, at the first chill: "I must give my head a plunge, or the blood will rush into it." So he took off his wig and laid it in his hat. Then he ducked himself once or twice. Then he waded to the mare's head, took her gently by the bridle and led her out.

In going up the oozy bank from the water's edge, the animal's plashing hoofs bespattered him with mud from head to foot. He therefore left her on the roadside, and, taking his handkerchief, ran back to wash and dry himself a little before putting on his clothes.

He had cleansed himself of the mud, and was standing on a log beside the bridge, making industrious use of his handkerchief, when he thought he heard a wagon. Fearing to be caught in that most unclerical condition, without even his wig, he looked up hastily over the bridge. There was no wagon coming, but there was one going. It was his own. Queen Bess was deliberately walking away; for there was a nice sense of justice in that mare, and having refused to start when he wanted her to, it was meet that she should balance that fault by starting when he did not want her to. Poor Dodd had not thought of that.

Taken quite by surprise, and appalled by the horrible possibility that presented itself to his mind, he immedi-

ately started in pursuit. Bess had been either too obstinate or too mad to be frightened at the apparition of him in the water, deeming it perhaps a device to make her "go 'long." But now a glimpse of the unfamiliar white object flashing after her was enough, and away she went.

"Now do thy speedy utmost," Dodd! Remember that your clothes are in the buggy; and think not of the stones that bruise your feet. Ah! what a race! But it is unequal, and it is brief. The rascally jockey said too truly, "There's lots of travel in that beast, Parson!" The faster Dodd runs, the more frightened is she; and since he failed at the first dash to grasp the flying vehicle, there is no hope for him. He has lost his breath utterly before she has fairly begun to run. He sees that he may as well stop, and he stops. Broken-winded, asthmatic, gasping, despairing, he stands, a statue of distress (or very much like a statue, indeed), on the roadside, and watches horse and buggy disappearing in the distance. Was ever respectable, middle-aged, slightly corpulent, slightly bald country parson in just such a predicament?

Melissa would certainly look in vain for his coming, that sweet Sunday morning. And who — who would preach for Selwyn?

III.

PARSON DODD'S SUNDAY-MORNING CALL.

THE mere loss of horse and buggy was nothing. But O, his clothes! Parson Dodd even hoped to see the vehicle upset or smashed, and his garments, or at least some portion of them, flung out on the roadside. But nothing of the kind occurred, as far as he could see. Of all his fine

wardrobe, he had only a handkerchief, — and what is a handkerchief on such an occasion?

Talk of a drowning man's fancies! No thrice-drowned wretch ever suffered anything comparable to Parson Dodd's wild, swift-flashing thoughts, during the brief moments he stood there. He imagined the assembling of the congregation; the waiting and wondering; the arrival perhaps of his punctual clothes and sermon, for they had gone straight forward on the road to the parish; then the alarm, and the whole country roused to search for him.

But there was one subject demanding his immediate attention, — something must be done; and what? He could go to the nearest house and ask for clothes, if he had any clothes to go in! He was reminded of the theological paradox, restated in the very sermon he was to have preached that morning, namely, that, in order to pray for grace, we must have grace to pray. He had wished for a good, practical illustration of his view of that difficulty, and now he had it. Impossible, without clothes, to ask for clothes! Such whimsical fancies will sometimes flit lightly across the mind, even in moments of great distress.

It occurred to him that he might lie in the neighboring woods all day, and then set out for home, ten miles off, under cover of the night. But the hardships of such a course, — twelve hours of nakedness, weariness, famine, — were too appalling. No; something desperate must be done. "I must make a raid for covering of some kind!" thought the unhappy parson.

There was a little low, red-painted dwelling-house in sight, standing well back from the road, with a broad woodshed behind it, and a brown barn behind that. It was flanked by a field of waving rye, — a providential circumstance, the good man thought; it would serve to cover his

approach. "I can stand in the rye up to my neck, while I call for help, and explain my situation." So he advanced, wading through the high, nodding grain, which his hands parted before him; a wretched being, but hopeful; and with light fancies still bubbling on the current of his darker reflections.

"Gin a body meet a body coming through the rye," thought he.

A Sunday-morning stillness pervaded farm and dwelling. A quail whistled on the edge of the field, "More wet! more wet!" which sounded to Parson Dodd much like a mocking allusion to his own recent passage of the river. Glossy swallows were twittering about the eaves of the barn; and enviable doves, happy in their feathers, were cooing on the sunny side of the old shed-roof.

In the midst of this scene of perfect rural tranquillity, the barn door was opened. The parson's heart beat fast; somebody was leading out a horse. It was a woman!

A woman with a masculine straw hat on her head. She was followed by another woman, also in a straw hat, bringing a horse-collar. Then came a third woman, similarly covered, carrying a harness. The horse's halter and afterward his head were passed through the collar, which was then turned over on his neck and pressed back against his breast; the harness was put on and buckled; and then, — horrible to tell! — a fourth straw-hatted woman appeared, and held up the shafts of an old one-horse wagon, while the other three backed the animal into them, and hooked the traces.

"My luck!" said the parson, through teeth chattering with excitement, if not with cold. "Not a man on the place! All women! And there's another somewhere. Why did n't I think? It's the house of the Five Sisters!"

The five Misses Wiretop, spinsters, known to all the country round about. They were rather strong-minded, and very strong-bodied; they kept this house, and wore straw hats, and tilled their few ancestral acres, and dispensed with man's assistance (except occasional aid in seed-time and harvest), and went regularly to church, and were very respectable.

"They are getting ready for church now," thought Parson Dodd. "They go to Selwyn's. I always see them there. They are going to hear me preach!"

No doubt they would have been glad to do anything for him that lay in their power; for though they did not think much of men generally, they had a regard for parsons, and for Parson Dodd in particular; he knew that from the serious, reverential glances turned up at him ever from the Five Sisters' pew. "Yet it isn't myself they care for," thought he, "it's my cloth." And here he was without his cloth!

He asked himself, moreover, what they could do for him, even if he should make his wants known to them. Of course there were no male garments in *their* house; and the most he could expect of them was an old lady's gown. He fancied himself in that!

He reasoned, however, that these sisters and their horse might help him to recover his garments and his mare. So he advanced still nearer, and was about calling out to them over the top of the grain, when the Sabbath stillness was broken by a sharp voice, —

"Stop, you sir! Stop, there!"

He did stop, as if he had been shot at. Turning his eyes in the direction of the voice, he saw the fifth sister, with one sleeve of her Sunday gown on, and with one naked arm, leaning her head out of a chamber window, and gesticulating violently.

“Git out o’ that rye! git out o’ that rye! right straight out! Do you hear, you sir? Do you hear?”

Parson Dodd must have been deaf not to have heard. But how could he obey? Instead of getting out of the rye, he crouched down in it until only the shining top of his bald crown was visible, like a saucer turned up in the sun.

“Madam!” he shouted back, “I beg of you —”

But the sharp voice interrupted him: “Don’t you know no better? Can’t a poor woman raise her little patch of rye, but some creatur’ must come tramp, tramp through it? Don’t you know what a path is for? There’s the lane; why did n’t you come up the lane?”

Poor Dodd would have been only too glad to explain why. But now rose a clamor of female voices, as the four sisters at the barn ran down to the end of the house, between it and the field, to learn what was the matter.

“In the rye!” said the sister at the window, pointing. “Some creatur’ tryin’ to hide, — don’t ye see him? Looks like a man. What ye want? Why don’t ye come out? Scroochin’ down there! Who be ye, anyhow?”

“Ladies,” said poor Dodd, putting up his chin timidly, and looking over the grain with a very piteous expression, “don’t you know me?”

But that was a very absurd question. Certainly they did not know him without his wig. Where were those wavy brown locks, which looked so interesting in the preacher’s desk, especially to the female portion of his congregation? Could any one be expected to recognize in that shorn and polished pate the noble head and front of the bachelor parson? No, he must proclaim himself.

“Ladies! good friends! don’t be alarmed, I entreat. I have met with a —”

He was going to say misfortune. But just then he met with something else, which interrupted him.

The Five Sisters kept, as a protection to their loneliness, a very large dog. One of them, learning that there was a *creatur'* in the rye, had, before learning what that *creatur'* was, whistled for Bruce. Bruce had come. He perceived a rustling, or caught a gleam of the inverted saucer, and made a dash at the field, leaping upon the dilapidated boundary-wall. His deafening yelps from that moment drowned every other sound. He could n't be called off even by her who had set him on. Terror at the sight of a naked man (few sights are more terrifying to an unsophisticated dog) rendered him wholly wild and unmanageable. There he stood on the wall, formidable, bristling with rage and fright, and intercepting every word of the poor, gasping wretch in the grain with his furious barking.

I am very sorry to say that Dodd was about as badly frightened as the dog. He crouched, shrank away, and finally retreated, the brute howling and yelping after him, and the exasperated spinsters screaming to him to take the path, and not trample down the rye, — did n't he know what a path was for?

So ended Parson Dodd's Sunday-morning call on the Five Sisters.

IV.

MR. HILLBRIGHT SETS OFF ON HIS MISSION.

WHEN Mr. Hillbright sent our friend Jervey for the mythical soap, it is by no means certain that he contemplated escaping from the Asylum. I think, if we could hear Hillbright's part of the story, it would be something like this :—

He had detected the turning of the key in the boat-house

locker, and, hastening to it the moment Jervey was gone, had found that his clothes were locked up. What was that for? To prevent him from putting them on, of course, and walking off in his keeper's absence.

“They fear I will walk off, do they? Then I will walk off!”

Such, very probably, was his brief train of reasoning; and such, very certainly, the conclusion arrived at. Should the trifling want of a few rags of clothing stand in the way of a great resolution? Should he who bore the sins of the world, and whose duty it was to go forth and preach and convert the world, neglect such an opening as this to get out and fulfil his mission?

“Providence will clothe me!” And, indeed, it looked as if Providence meant to do something of the kind. “Behold!” There was a long piece of carpet, very ancient and faded, in the bottom of the boat; he pulled it up, wrapped it fantastically about him, and was clad.

He then pushed the boat out into the river, giving it an impulse which sent it across to the opposite shore. Then he leaped out, leaving it adrift on the current. When Mr. Jervey found it below the bend, Mr. Hillbright was already walking, with great dignity, in his improvised blanket, across the skirts of a neighboring woodland, like a sachem in his native wilds.

He had not gone far before he began to experience great tenderness in the soles of his feet. Then by degrees it dawned upon him that the loose ends of the carpet flapping about his calves were but a poor substitute for trousers; and that his attire was, on the whole, imperfect. “Too simple for the age,” thought he. Picturesque, but hardly the thing in which to appear and proclaim his mission to a fastidious modern society. Would the world, that refused to tolerate him dressed as a gentleman, accept him

now that he was rigged out more like a king of the Cannibal Islands ?

He tried various methods of wreathing the folds of antique tapestry about his person ; all of which seemed open to criticism. He was beginning to think Providence might have done better by him, when, getting over a fence, he found himself on the public highway.

He knew he would be followed by his friends at the Asylum ; and here he accordingly stopped to take an observation. He was near the summit of a long hill. At the foot of it, near half a mile off, he saw a horse coming at a fast gallop, which to his suspicious mind suggested pursuit, and he shrank back into some bushes to remain concealed while it passed.

As the animal ascended the slope, the gallop relaxed to a leisurely canter, the canter declined to a trot, and, long before the summit was attained, the trot had become a walk. The horse had no rider, but there was a buggy at its heels. Arrived near the spot where Hillbright was hid, it turned up on the roadside, and put down its head to nip grass. Then Hillbright saw that there was nobody in the buggy. The horse was a runaway, that had been stopped by the long stretch of rising ground. The horse, I may as well add, was a bay mare.

“ Providence is all right,” said Hillbright, emerging from the bushes. “ This is for my sore feet.”

At sight of the strange figure, grotesque in faded scroll patterns of flowing tapestry, the mare shied, and would have got away, but a two-mile course, with a hill at the end of it, had tamed her spirit. So she merely sprang to a corner of the fence, and remained an easy capture.

As Hillbright was about setting foot into the vehicle, — for he had no doubt of its having been sent expressly that he might ride, — he found an odd heap of things in his

way. There was something that looked like suspenders ; and, following up that interesting clew, he drew forth a pair of pantaloons ; with them came a coat and waistcoat, all of handsome blue-black cloth. " Providence means that I shall be well clothed," was his happy reflection, as, exploring still further, he discovered boots and underclothes, and a shirt of fine linen, with a wonderfully refulgent ruffled bosom. With a triumphant smile, he proceeded to put the things on, and found them an excellent fit.

There was still a hat left, freighted and ballasted with various valuables, uppermost among which was a luxuriant chestnut-brown wig. Now, Hillbright had never worn a wig. But since he had borne the sins of the world, the top of his head had become bare, and was not here a plain indication that it ought to be covered ? He accepted the augury, and put on the wig.

Next came a richly embroidered white neckerchief, for which he also found its appropriate use. Then in the bottom of the hat remained a gold watch, which he cheerfully put into his fob ; a plump porte-monnaie which he pocketed with a smile ; and a thin package of manuscripts betwixt dainty morocco covers, which, untying its neat pink ribbons, he proceeded to examine.

The miracle was complete. The package was a sermon.

" This is all direct from Heaven ! " said Hillbright, delighted, and having no more doubt of the truth of his surmise than if he had seen the buggy and its contents let down in a golden cloud from the sky.

Thinking to find room for the package in the broad breast-pocket of his coat, he discovered an obstacle, which he removed. It proved to be a little oval pocket-mirror. He held it up before him, and had reason to be pleased with the flattering account it gave of himself. The grace-

ful wig, embroidered white cravat, ruffled shirt-bosom, and blue-black suit became him wonderfully well ; they made a new man of him. Had he known Dodd of Coldwater, he would almost have taken himself for that well-got-up bachelor parson.

Then for the hat, which was a stylish black beaver, somewhat the worse for its ride ; giving it a little needful polishing before putting it on, he noticed a letter protruding from the lining. He opened it and read : —

“ Reverend and dear Sir :— We have made all the arrangements. The Ex. is all right. You preach for Selwyn at Longtrot, on Sunday, the 7th. ”
“ B. B.”

This seemed plain enough to the gratified Hillbright. “ We ” he understood to mean his unseen friendly guardians. The “ arrangements ” they had made were, so far as he could see, excellent ; he was provided with everything ! The “ Ex. ” undoubtedly alluded to his *exit* from the Asylum ; and that was certainly “ all right. ” To-day was Sunday, the 7th ; and here was his work all laid out for him. Who Selwyn was, and where Longtrot was, he did not know ; but doubtless it would be revealed.

The signature of the missive puzzled him at first ; but soon a happy interpretation occurred to him. It was evidently no signature at all, but an injunction. “ B. B. ” stood for “ Be ! Be ! ” and it signified, “ BE A MAN ! BE A GREAT MAN ! BE THYSELF ! BE HILLBRIGHT ! ”

Yet when he came to scrutinize the address of the letter, he perceived that the name of Hillbright, against which the world had conceived an unreasonable prejudice, was to be dropped for a season. “ It appears, ” said he, “ I am to be known as Dodd, — E. Dodd, — Rev. E. Dodd. I don’t see what the E. stands for. I wonder what my first name is ? ”

So saying, he stepped into the buggy, gathered up the reins from the dasher, put under his feet the carpet that was lately on his back, and set off grandly on his grand mission.

The bay mare was herself again ; she did not balk.

V.

JAKES IN PURSUIT.

AMONG the officers sent out in pursuit of the fugitive from the Asylum was the superintendent of the Asylum farm, a stout, red-faced man, named Jakes, — a brother, by the way, of our friend Colonel Jakes of Coldwater. He took with him an Irish laborer named Collins, also a strong rope with which to bind, and a coarse farmer's suit with which to clothe, the madman when caught.

The superintendent and his man put a horse before a light carryall, and had a fine time driving about on the pleasant country roads, while others of the pursuing party scoured fields and woods on foot. At last they struck the Longtrot road, and turned off toward Coldwater.

They had not driven far in that direction before they saw a man coming in a buggy.

“A minister, ye may know by his white choker,” observed Collins.

“You're right, Patrick,” said Jakes, “and I vow, I believe I know who he is! I know that bay mare, anyhow. She's a brute my brother over in Coldwater got shaved on by a travelling jockey; and he told me last week, with a grin on one side of his face, he had put her off on the minister. I bet my head that's Parson Dodd!

Good morning, sir; beg pardon!" And Superintendent Jakes reined up on the roadside. "Have you seen — have you met — hold on, if you please, sir — a minute!"

Thus appealed to, the stranger stopped his horse. Superintendent Jakes thought that face was somehow familiar, and so thought Collins. In fact, they had seen it more than once about the Asylum grounds, within a few days, as the owner of the said face knew very well. But since one sometimes fails to recognize old friends in strange circumstances, it is no wonder that these farmers did not identify the new patient in Dodd's clothes.

"We 're looking for a crazy man that got away from the Asylum this morning," said Jakes. "A man about five feet nine or ten. Rather portly. Good-looking and gentlemanly when dressed; but he ran off naked. Have you seen or heard of such a man?"

"I have n't seen anybody crazier than you or I," said the supposed parson.

This sounded so much like a joke, though uttered very gravely, that Jakes was tempted to speak of the bay mare.

"I think I know that beast you 're driving. You had her of Colonel Jakes of Coldwater, did n't you? Well, he 's my brother. Your name is Dodd, I believe."

"I have been called Dodd. But can you tell me what my first name is? It begins with E," said the driver of the bay mare, with a shrewd, almost a cunning look, which did not strike Jakes as being very ministerial. Yet he had heard that Dodd was something of a joker.

"I never heard you called anything but Parson Dodd. Yes, I have too. You made a speech at the convention; I read it in the paper. *E* stands for *Ebenezer*."

"Thank you," said the other. "I 'm glad I 've found

out. Thank you," — smiling, and then suddenly casting his eyes on the ground.

"How do you find the mare?" said Jakes, by way of retort.

"Perfect ; arrangements all perfect."

"That so? No bad tricks? Of course she 's all right ; glad you find her so," grinned Jakes.

"How far is it to Longtrot?" asked the counterfeit Dodd.

"About a mile 'n' a half — two mile — depends upon where in Longtrot you 're going."

"Do you know Selwyn?"

"Minister Selwyn, preacher in the yaller meetin'-house? I don't know him, but I know of him. How does she start off?"

"You shall see."

The bay mare started off very well ; and the fugitive from the Asylum, having obtained from his pursuer rather more valuable information than he gave in return, disappeared over the crest of the hill, on his way to the "yaller meetin'-house" in Longtrot.

"Wonder if she re'lly ha'n't balked with him yet?" said Superintendent Jakes, as he drove on. "I guess he 's a jolly sort of parson. I 've seen him somewhere, sure 's the world, though I can't remember where."

"You have, and I was there," said Collins ; "though where it was, I remember no more than yourself."

They made inquiries for the fugitive all along the route, but could hear of no more extraordinary circumstance, that Sunday morning, than a runaway horse, seen by one or two families, as it passed on the road to Longtrot.

"It must have gone by before we turned the corner," said Jakes, "for we 've seen no nag but the parson's."

At last they came in sight of a little red-painted house, standing well back from the street. "This is the home of

the Five Sisters, Patrick," said Jakes. "Guess we 'll give 'em a call."

He turned up the lane, driving between the house and the rye-field, and stopped in front of the wood-shed. The dog, still bristling from his recent excitement, gave a surly bark, and went growling away. At the same time, five vivacious female faces appeared, three in the doorway and two at an open window, and "set up such cackling" (as Jakes ungallantly expressed it) that he could "hardly hear himself think."

"Is this Mr. Jakes?" cried one.

"From the Asylum?" cried another.

"I told you so, sister! I told you so!" cried a third.

"I knowed the man was —" cried a fourth.

"Crazy!" cried the fifth, and all together.

"Dog Bruce chased him out of the rye —"

"Sneaked off behind the fences —"

"Over toward Neighbor Lapham's —"

"An' sister Delia declares —"

"Hush, hush, sister!"

"Yes, I will! She declares she believes he had n't a rag o' clothin' to his back!"

"Thank you," said Jakes, having got all the information he wanted almost without the asking. "He's my man! Thank ye, sisters! Good morning."

VI.

THE WIDOW GARCEY.

AT the bay-window of the pretty Gothic parsonage in Longtrot sat the widow of the late pastor. She was dressed in voluminous black, exceedingly becoming to her

still fresh complexion and to her full style of beauty. If "sighing and grief" had not produced on her precisely the effect of which Falstaff complained, it had not certainly wasted her to a shadow. No wonder if the contemplation of those generous proportions, of those cheeks still fair and round, and of the serene temper that served to keep them so, had persuaded Parson Dodd that there might be something yet left for him in the future better than the lonely life he was living.

There was a book in the fair hand that had embroidered the white neckcloth "for her dear husband." It was that absorbing poem of Pollok's, "The Course of Time," which she justly deemed not too lively for Sunday reading. Her serious large eyes were fixed on its pages, except when ever and anon they glanced restlessly over it, out of the window and down the pleasant, shady street, as if in expectation of somebody quite as interesting as the poet Pollok. Somebody who did *not* make his appearance, driving down betwixt the overhanging elms, past the church-green, and up to the gate of the parsonage, as in fancy she saw him so plainly whenever her eyes were on the book. Why did they look up at all, since it was only to refute the pretty vision?

Poor Melissa sat there until she seemed living the Course of Time, instead of reading it. Occasionally she varied the direction of her glances by looking at her watch; and she grew more and more troubled as she saw the hour slipping irrevocably by which the husband's friend should have given to comforting the fatherless and widow that Sunday morning.

"What can have happened?" she asked herself. "He must have taken offence at something! What have I said or done? It must be the cravat! Why did I do so foolish a thing as to send it with a note?" She could have

said what she wished to say so much better than she could write it!

The first bell rang. And now people were going to church. The children were teasing to start. They were tired of sitting still in the house. What was she waiting for? Was that old Dodd coming again to-day?

“Levi! never let me hear you call him *old Dodd* again! Mr. Dodd is still a young man, and he has been a good friend to your poor mother. There!” she exclaimed, with a little start, for her eyes, wandering down the street again, saw the long-expected buggy coming at last.

It was a peculiar buggy, high in the springs, and with a high and narrow top. She could not mistake it. She was equally sure of the stylish hat and wavy brown locks and ample shirt-frill of the driver. But in an instant the thrill of hope the sight inspired changed to a chill of disappointment and dismay. Parson Dodd did not drive on to the parsonage, as he had always done before, when coming to preach for Selwyn. The buggy turned up to the meeting-house, and disappeared in the direction of the horse-sheds.

She waited awhile, in deep distress of mind, to see it or its owner reappear; but in vain.

“Levi,” she said, “go right over to the church, and see if Mr. Dodd has come. Go as quick as you can, but don’t let anybody know I sent you.”

It seemed to her that the boy was never so provokingly slow in executing an errand.

At last she saw him returning leisurely, watching the orioles in the elms, while her heart was bursting with impatience. She signalled him from the window, and lifted interrogating brows at him. Levi grinned and nodded vivaciously in reply. Yes, the minister had come.

“Are you — are you very sure?” she tremblingly inquired, meeting him at the door.

“A’n’t I!” said the lad. “Did n’t I first go and look at his buggy under the shed? He’s got a new horse; but I guess I ought to know that buggy, often as it’s been in our barn. Then I peeked in through the door, and saw him just going up into the desk.”

Poor Mrs. Garcey was now quite ready to go to church. Since Dodd would not come to her, she must go to him; she must see his face, and get one look from him, even if across the space that separated pulpit from pew.

“How was he looking, Levi?” she asked.

“Kind o’ queer. I always thought Dodd felt big enough, but I never saw him carry his head quite so high. Looked as if he was mad at something.”

“O, I must have offended him!” sighed the unhappy Melissa, putting on her things.

With slow and decorous steps she marshalled forth her little tribe from the gate of the parsonage across the green to the church-porch. The bell was ringing again, its brown back just visible in the high belfry, tumbling and rolling like a porpoise in the waves of its own sound. Wagons were arriving, and the usual throng of church-goers were alighting on the platform or walking up the steps. In the vestibule she found a group of friends inquiring seriously concerning each other’s health, and in suppressed voices talking of the latest news. There seemed to be some excitement with regard to an insane man who had that morning escaped from the Asylum, whom nobody appeared to have seen, though he had been heard of by several through those who were out in pursuit of him. Somehow, Melissa took not much interest in the greetings and the gossip of these worthy people, and parting from them, she passed on into the aisle.

“Poor dear! She can’t forgit *him*,” whispered kind-hearted Mrs. Allgood, with a tear of sympathy gathering

in the eye that followed the gloomily draped and pensive figure.

“Huh! she’s thinkin’ of another husband a’ready!” answered sharp-tongued Miss Lynx, with a toss.

It cannot be denied that of the two, Miss Lynx had the clearer perception of the hard fact in the case. Yet as she set it forth, unclothed by grace and the warm tissues of human sympathy, it was no more the truth than a skeleton is a living body; and Mrs. Allgood’s gentler judgment was more just. Melissa had not forgotten that good man, Garcey; and if now, in her loneliness and bereavement, she cherished hope of other companionship, was it for tart Miss Lynx to condemn her? Nay, who, without knowledge of the human heart, and compassion for its sufferings and its needs, had even a right to judge her?

She passed down the aisle, preceded by her little ones (the elder of whom, by the way, were beginning to be not so very little), and followed them into the pew in which she had first sat when a bride. She would have been alone in it then, but for the two or three poor persons to whom she was always glad to give seats. But one after another a little Garcey had appeared, first in her arms, perhaps, then in the seat beside her, and thus, year by year, the family row had increased, until now it almost filled the cushioned slip. A mist of tender, regretful sentiment seemed to suffuse the very atmosphere about her as she listened to the tone of the bell, and thought what changes had come over her dream of life since she first sat there and looked up with pride to see the beloved, the eloquent — *her* Garcey — in the desk! Now, here she was again, looking with anxious eyes and a troubled heart for another.

There were the well-known wavy chestnut-brown locks, and a shoulder of the blue-black coat, just visible from the

side-slip in which she sat. But the wearer did not once deign to look at her. He held his head bowed behind the desk, as if in devout contemplation, and thoughts in which she, alas! had no share. She longed to see him lift it, and turn toward her those gracious, sympathizing features, the very sight of which was a comfort to her heart. And it must be confessed she had a strong curiosity regarding the embroidered cravat.

"I must speak with him after the service," thought she. "I will make him come to the house." And she turned and whispered to the topmost head of the little row.

"It has just occurred to me, Levi, you'd better go and put his horse in our barn. It will be too bad to have the poor beast standing under the shed all day."

"'T won't hurt anything; besides, he might have drove over there himself, if he wanted his horse put out," said Levi, with a scowl.

"You can get into the buggy and ride over," said his mother, grown all at once wonderfully solicitous with regard to the welfare of the poor beast.

The ride was an object, and Levi went.

The bell stopped ringing, the choir ceased singing, the congregation was in its place, all hushed and expectant; and still Levi did not return. His mother would have felt anxious about him at any other time; but now a greater trouble absorbed the less.

It was not like Parson Dodd to sit so long in that way with his head down. A movement of the arm, and a rustle of leaves heard in the stillness of the house, showed that he was turning over the manuscript of his sermon, or selecting hymns, or looking up chapter and verse. But all that should have been done before. He ought not now to keep the people waiting.

The silence was broken by a cough. This was followed

by several coughs, which appeared to have been hitherto suppressed. Then entered four of the Five Sisters, uncommonly late this morning, for some reason. In spite of untoward circumstances, they had come to hear Mr. Dodd — that dear, good man — preach. And now a buzz of whispers began to run through the congregation; hushed, however, as soon as the preacher rose.

Melissa, watching intently, saw the noble head of luxuriant chestnut-brown hair slowly lifted. Then bloomed the abundant shirt-ruffle over the desk, together with — yes, the white neckerchief embroidered by her own hand! But even while she recognized it, a thrill of amazement, a chill of consternation, passed over her, as the wearer, stretching forth his hands, cried out in a loud, strange voice, —

“ We will pray for the sins of the world ! ”

VII.

FARMER LAPHAM'S EXPLOIT.

WHEN Parson Dodd withdrew from the society of the Five Sisters and their dog Bruce, he descried across the fields a house and barn situated on another road, and made toward them, under the shelter of walls and fences, thinking that if he could take them in the rear, and enter the barn unperceived, he might at least secure a horse-blanket in which to introduce himself to the family.

He found, however, to his dismay, that they must be finally approached across a range of barren pasture, unsheltered even by a shrub. No friendly rye-field here; and he was too far off to make known his wants by shout

ing. He did shout two or three times from behind an old cow-house in which he took refuge, but timidly, and without the desired effect. What was to be done?

He had turned aside to visit the cow-house, in the feeble hope of finding there some relief to his forlorn condition. But it was empty even of straw.

As he cast about him in his despair, seeking for something wherewith to cover his farther advance, his eye fell upon the cow-house door. "If I only had that off its hinges, I might carry it before me," thought he. He took hold of it and found it could be easily removed. In a minute he had it in his arms. "Samson carrying off the gates of Gaza!" was the lively comparison that occurred to him,—but with this difference: whereas, in familiar Bible pictures, the strong man was represented as bearing his burden on his back, this modern Samson poised his upon his portly bosom. "Circumstances alter cases," thought he.

With arms stretched across it, grasping its edges with his hands, and just lifting it from the ground (it was not very heavy), he moved forward with it cautiously,—much like a Roman soldier under cover of his immense *scutum*, or door-shaped shield, occasionally setting it down to rest (being careful at such times to take his toes from under it), or reconnoitring his ground from behind it; but always keeping it skilfully betwixt his person and the enemy's walls.

Now, one can easily picture the amazement of the worthy Lapham family, when its younger members reported a wonderful phenomenon in the cow-pasture, that calm Sunday morning; and mother and children running to look, behold! there was the cow-house door advancing in this extraordinary manner to pay them a visit; staggering slightly, and balancing itself occasionally on its lower cor-

ners, like a door that had as yet learned but imperfectly the art of walking! Close scrutiny might perhaps have revealed to them the human fingers clasping the edges of it; or the feet of flesh and blood taking short steps under it; or the glistening crown of the bearer peeping furtively from behind. But when the vulgar mind is greatly astonished, it is prone to see only that which most astonishes; and, accordingly, good Mrs. Lapham and the little Laphams, failing to discriminate in such trifling matters as hands and feet, saw only the gross phenomenon of the perambulating door. It was like Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane.

What gave a sort of dramatic effect to the apparition was the grotesque outline of a human figure, large as life, which the boys had chalked on the outside of the door, for a target. As soon as they saw this advance, grinning at them, they were greatly excited; and one ran for the gun.

“Keep back, mother!” said he; “I’ll give the old thing a shot, if ’t is Sunday!”

“Stop! You sha’n’t, Jason! Martin, run for your father! Run!”

Mr. Lapham had been talking with a stranger at the gate, who had just driven up when the children ran out to proclaim the wonder.

“Nonsense, children!” said he. “A door don’t move across the country without somebody to help it; you ought to know that, mother. Wal! there!” he exclaimed, witnessing the miracle from the kitchen window. “It is on its travels, sure enough! Jason, run and see if you can catch that man I was talking with. Holler! scream! Be quick!”

“Who is he, father?” asked mother.

“A man from the Asylum — says one of their crazy folks

got away this morning. Run off without his clothes. He's behind that door, I'll bet a dollar!"

This seemed a very plausible explanation of the mystery; but it did not serve to tranquillize the mother and children. Was not a live madman as much to be dreaded as a walking door?

"Don't be frightened. Just shet the house and keep dark. I'll head him off. Give me the gun, I may want it." And arming himself, out the farmer sallied.

Parson Dodd had by this time perceived that his approach was creating a sensation. For want of a pocket, he had tied his handkerchief to his wrist. He now fluttered that white flag over a corner of the door for a signal; then, with his hand behind his mouth for a trumpet, summoned a parley. Looking to see some friendly recognition of his flag of truce, great was his consternation at beholding so warlike a demonstration as a man running to the ambush of some quince-bushes with a gun. In vain he fluttered his white flag, and called for help.

"I a'n't goin' to fall into no trap sot by a crazy pate!" thought shrewd Farmer Lapham, as he concealed himself.

Poor Dodd was in a terrible situation. He could not advance without the risk of receiving a bullet; neither could he lay the door down, unless, indeed, he first laid himself down, and then drew it over him for a blanket. He might retreat, but that movement, too, presented difficulties. So there he stood, holding up the target, beckoning and shouting himself hoarse to no purpose.

And now the musical clamor of church bells rose on the tranquil morning air. "*The wedding-guest here beat his breast, for he heard the loud bassoon!*" thought he; for still he could not keep odd fancies out of his brain. Yet how far off those bells sounded! — not in distance only; they seemed to be in a world of which he had once dreamed.

He thought of the sermon he was to have preached that day as something he might have written in a previous state of existence, something quite foreign to the dread realities of life.

"I can't stand here holding up a door forever!" thought he at last. And he determined to move on, in spite of bullets. So he took up the door, and resumed his march.

Observing the point he was aiming at, Lapham thought it wise to get into the barn before him, and station himself where he could keep guard over his property, watch the supposed madman, and fire a defensive shot if necessary.

Dodd, bearing up the door, did not perceive this flank movement; but advancing to within a few yards of the barn, he was astonished at hearing a voice thunder forth from a window, "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

Dodd stopped and peeped forth from behind his portable screen, showing a bald crown which was very much against him.

"His keeper said he was bald on top of his head," the farmer reasoned. And he called out, "What do you want?"

"*Rest and a guide and food and fire,*" was running in Dodd's mind; but he answered in plain prose, and very emphatically, "I want clothes."

This was another corroborating circumstance, and a very strong one.

"How came you here without clothes?"

"I lost them by a singular accident. I am a clergyman, on my way to preach."

This was conclusive. "The very chap! His keeper said he imagined himself a preacher," thought the farmer. "Wonder if I can't manage to trap him!" And he cast about him for the means.

“I’ll explain everything; only give me something to cover myself, and don’t keep me standing here!” said Parson Dodd, growing impatient.

By this time Lapham had formed his plan. “Do just as I tell ye now, and you shall have clothes. Come into the barn, turn to the right, and you’ll find a harness-room, and in it you’ll find a frock and overalls. Do you hear?”

Dodd heard, and the prospect of even so poor a covering thrilled his heart with gratitude. He came on with his door, left it leaning against the barn, and entered.

He found the harness-room as described, and seized eagerly upon the frock and overalls. But just as he was putting them on the door of the room flew together with a bang; the crafty farmer, who had hidden behind it, sprang and turned the key, and the “madman” was locked in.

Having accomplished this daring feat, Farmer Lapham, deaf to the cries of his victim, ran out excitedly to call for help, just as Patrick Collins was taking down a pair of bars on the other side of the pasture for Superintendent Jakes to drive through. Their errand was soon made known.

“I’ve ketched the feller for ye!” cried the elated farmer. And he led Jakes to the dungeon within which the entrapped parson was calling lustily.

“Unlock the door; don’t be afraid, man!” said Jakes.

Lapham opened it and stepped cautiously back while the superintendent entered, followed by Collins with a rope and a bundle of clothes.

Within stood the captive, a comical figure, in loose blue frock and overalls, barefoot and wigless, and with a countenance in which indignation at the farmer, joy at the prospect of deliverance, and a consciousness of his own ludicrous situation, were mingled in an expression which was very droll indeed.

“How are you?” said Jakes in an offhand way. “We have brought your clothes; would you like to put ’em on?”

“I would; and I am infinitely obliged to you, my good friends!” said poor Dodd, thinking the worst of his troubles now over. “How did you find — But what — These — these are not my clothes!”

“A’n’t they?” said Jakes. “You’d better put ’em on, though. They’ll do till you get back to the doctor’s.”

“To the doctor’s? What do you mean? I am a clergyman. I was on my way to preach —”

“Yes, we understand all about that. Come, on with the clothes. We don’t expect you’ll give us any trouble, Mr. Hillbright.”

“Hillbright! I am Dodd, — Dodd of Coldwater, — a minister!”

“There are two of you, then!” said Jakes, laughing incredulously. “We just met *one* Parson Dodd, in his buggy, driving the bay mare he had of my brother, going over to preach at Longtrot. He’s there by this time.”

“Dodd — Longtrot — the bay mare!” gasped out the astonished parson. “Impossible!”

“Come, no nonsense, Mr. Hillbright! Colonel Jakes, of Coldwater, is my brother, and I know the mare perfectly well, — the balky brute!”

“There is some mistake here, Mr. Jakes, — if that is your name. I knew the Colonel had a brother at the Insane Asylum, and I suspect you are he.”

“Yes, and you’ve seen me there often enough, I suppose. Now, no more fooling. I don’t want to use force, if it can be avoided; but you must go with us, — that’s all there is about it. Collins, pass along that rope.”

“Never mind the rope,” said Dodd. “Just hear my explanation, and you’ll save yourself and me some trouble. That mare balked with me in the middle of the river, and

to lead her out I had to take off my clothes and put them in the wagon, and she ran away with them."

"A very ingenious story," said Jakes; "but you would n't have thought on't if I had n't just said she was a balky brute. Come, this won't do. Mr. Hillbright, or Mr. Dodd, or whatever your name, you must go with us; and you can take your choice, whether to go peaceably or be tied with this rope. We're much obliged to you, Mr. Lapham."

Seeing resistance to be vain, Parson Dodd stepped into the wagon, stared at by the whole family of Laphams, who had come out to get a view of the madman, and was carried off triumphantly by Jakes and Collins.

VIII.

DÉNOUEMENT.

ANIMATED by the prospect of a ride, young Levi Garcey backed the minister's buggy out from under the shed, got up into it, took the reins, and was having his simple reward, when, as he was crossing the street, a slight misunderstanding occurred between him and the bay mare. She wanted to return homeward, never yet having enjoyed the hospitalities of the Garcey stable. Not being permitted to follow her own sweet will, she refused to move at all, — balked, in short. And this was the reason why Levi did not go back into church.

There he was in the middle of the street, when a man in a chaise drove up. He was the same who had stopped at Farmer Lapham's gate, and whom Jason Lapham had failed to overtake. To be more explicit, it was Jervey.

Stopping to help the boy out of his trouble, or to make inquiries concerning Hillbright, he remarked in the bottom of the buggy something that had a familiar look. He pulled it up, and recognized the strip of carpet belonging to the doctor's boat.

"How came this thing here?"

"I d'n' know. I found it in the buggy."

"Whose buggy is it?"

"The minister's, — Mr. Dodd's."

"Where is he?"

"In the meetin'-house, where I ought to be," said Levi.

"Just look out for my horse a minute," said Jervey. And he started for the church door, rightly regarding the carpet as a clew which might lead to something.

What it did lead to was the most astonishing thing that ever happened in all his remarkable experience. He had thought that, if he could get a word with the minister, he might perhaps hear from Hillbright, and lo! the minister was Hillbright himself! He did not recognize him at first in that wonderful costume, which seemed little short of miraculous; and he could scarcely credit his senses when the madman's phraseology and tones of voice (he was still praying at a furious rate for the sins of the world) betrayed his identity.

The prayer was an incoherent outpouring of mingled sense and nonsense; and the congregation was beginning to show marked signs of uneasiness and excitement under it.

"What's up?" whispered Jervey to the sexton.

"I don't know," replied the sexton. "We expected Dodd of Coldwater to preach to-day. But he seems to have sent an odd genius in his place, — in his clothes, too."

"Can we get into the pulpit without going through the aisle?" Jervey quietly asked.

“Yes, I can show you. What under the sun is the matter?”

“Your odd genius is a madman, that escaped this morning, naked, from the Asylum.”

“’T a’n’t possible! He came in Dodd’s buggy!”

“Then I am afraid some mischief has happened to Dodd.”

“A madman!—naked! He must have murdered Dodd for his clothes!”

“Keep quiet. Don’t alarm the people; but just call out two or three of your prominent men.”

I know not how many in the congregation had by this time learned the real character of the man who appeared before them so strangely in Dodd’s place and in Dodd’s attire. It had taken some a good while to find out that it was not Dodd himself. But there was one who at the first moment saw the astounding change and feared the worst.

This was Melissa. She remembered the gossip in the vestibule concerning the escaped madman, and, connecting that with the arrival of Dodd’s buggy and characteristic apparel, what else could she infer than that he had been waylaid and robbed, and perhaps killed? The fanatical extravagance of the prayer corroborated her suspicions. She glanced around and saw the grave deacons looking restless and disturbed. Then came a stranger to the door, and whispered to the sexton, who whispered to Deacon Sturgis and Deacon Adams and Dr. Cole, who got up and went out.

Next came a singular movement in the pulpit. It was at the close of the prayer, when the usurper of Dodd’s raiment unclosed his eyes, and, looking about him, saw two or three men in the shadow of the pulpit stairs. He stooped to speak with them; there was a sound of quick, low voices; then the spurious Dodd had disappeared; and lo! there was good Deacon Sturgis standing in front of

the pulpit. The whole congregation was by this time in a rustle of commotion.

"I hope the friends won't be disturbed at all," said he. "A mistake of some little importance has occurred; but everything will come out right, we trust. Meanwhile the services will go on."

Here the deacon read, with great deliberation, the longest hymn he could select. "Congregation will please jine with the choir in singin'," he said; and set the example, in a loud, nasal voice.

The singing ended, he read a passage of Scripture; then called on one of the brethren noted for having a gift that way to offer up a prayer. The prayer too was a long one. Then Deacon Sturgis read another hymn; during the singing of which Deacon Adams came in and whispered a word in his ear.

The second hymn ended, Melissa was watching in great distress of mind to see what the deacons would do, when she noticed all eyes turned again toward the pulpit. Turning hers in the same direction, she barely suppressed a scream; for there, behind the desk, appeared once more the well-known wig, effulgent shirt-ruffle, and blue-black suit. But it was no longer the spurious Dodd that was there. It was Parson Dodd himself!

Riding away with his captors in the carryall, Dodd had rendered so straightforward an account of himself, corroborating it with many particulars concerning Jakes's brother, the Colonel, that Jakes was staggered by it.

"Patrick," said he, aside to Collins, "a'n't it just possible the other Dodd is the man? You know we thought we had seen him before!"

"Ah! but they're cunning divils! Don't ye belave a word this feller says," replied Collins.

Jakes, however, was secretly persuaded of his blunder; and he so far deferred to the wishes of his prisoner as to drive over toward Longtrot in pursuit of "the other Dodd." So it happened that the real Dodd's capture as a madman resulted to his advantage, since it hastened the *dénouement* of his unhappy adventure, and enabled him, after all, to preach for Selwyn.

The *dénouement* took place in front of the meeting-house, where Levi was still holding Jervey's horse; where two men, seated in Dodd's buggy, were just starting in search of the owner, — or, rather, trying to start, for the bay mare had something to say about that; and where Patrick, catching a glimpse of Jervey coming out of the vestry with *his* madman, called to him, "Jervey, Jervey! we've got the feller!"

"So have I!" cried Jervey; and there the genuine parson was brought face to face with the counterfeit.

"Gentlemen," said Hillbright, bowing low in his borrowed plumage, "I succumb; I see the world is against me; I must still groan under the sins of it!"

"I owe you a thousand apologies, Mr. Dodd!" said Jakes.

"On the contrary," replied Dodd, having fully recovered his good-humor, "you have done me a service, though it did seem to me one while that — what with you and your Irishman, and your brother and his bay mare — the Jakes family was bound to ruin me."

"Step right into my house, friends!" said Deacon Adams. "There everything can be arranged."

And there everything was arranged, to the satisfaction of everybody, excepting perhaps Hillbright, who was reluctant to put off his Heaven-sent apparel and return to the Asylum without fulfilling his great mission.

Parson Dodd was himself again when he appeared in the

desk ; and it is said that he preached for Selwyn that day one of his very best sermons

“ What a beautiful discourse ! ” said one of the Five Sisters, thanking him for it as he was going out of church.

“ And, only think, sisters, ” said another of them, “ how near we come to missin’ it, all on account of that dreadful crazy man ! I hope his keepers have got him safe ! ”

“ I hope they have ! ” said Parson Dodd, dryly, as he walked out with Melissa, and went over to lunch at the parsonage.

The joke was out before the afternoon services began ; and when Dodd reappeared in the desk, it was with difficulty that either he or the gravest of his hearers repressed a very strong inclination to smile.

The news of his mishap reached Coldwater before he did ; Superintendent Jakes — to atone for his blunder, I suppose — having ridden over that afternoon to remonstrate with his brother, the Colonel, for putting off on the parson so vicious a brute as the bay mare. The whole thing struck the Colonel as so good a joke, and put him into such excellent humor, that he voluntarily drove the old gray over to Dodd’s the next morning, and offered to swap back, which offer was most cheerfully accepted by the parson. “ Did n’t I tell ye, ” said Jakes, “ that the creatur’ was always poorest at the start ? ” So Dodd got back his old gray, and somebody else got shaved on the bay mare.

Parson Dodd continued to travel occasionally the Long-trot road, both on Sunday mornings and week-day afternoons, until after his marriage. But now Melissa and the children (he is remarkably fond of children) make his home so delightful to him that he leaves it as seldom as possible. And so it happens that of late years he very rarely goes over to preach for Selwyn.

THE ROMANCE OF A GLOVE.

“HOLD on!” cried my travelling companion. “The gentleman has dropped something.”

The driver pulled up his horses; and before I could prevent him, Westwood leaped down from the vehicle, and ran back for the article that had been dropped.

It was a glove, — my glove, which I had inadvertently thrown out, in taking my handkerchief from my pocket.

“Go on, driver!” and he tossed it into my hand as he resumed his seat in the open stage. “I once found a romance in a glove. Since then, gloves are sacred.”

“A romance? Tell me about that. I am tired of this endless stretch of sea-like country, these regular groundswells; and it’s a good two hours’ ride yet to our stopping-place. Meanwhile, your romance.”

“Did I say romance? I fear you would hardly think it worthy of the name,” said my companion. “Every life has its romantic episodes, or, at least, incidents which appear such to those who experience them. But these tender little histories are usually insipid enough when told. I have a maiden aunt, who once came so near having an offer from a pale stripling, with dark hair, seven years her junior, that to this day she often alludes to the circumstance, with the remark, that she wishes she knew some competent novel-writer in whom she could confide, feeling sure that the story of that period of her life would make the groundwork of a magnificent work of fiction. Possi-

bly I inherit my aunt's tendency to magnify into extraordinary proportions trifles which I look at through the double convex lens of a personal interest. So don't expect too much of my romance, and you shall hear it.

"I said I found it in a glove. It was by no means a remarkable glove, — middle-sized, straw-colored, and a neat fit for this hand. Of course, there was a young lady in the case ; — let me see, — I don't believe I can tell you the story," said Westwood, "after all !"

I gently urged him to proceed.

"Pshaw !" said he, after kindling a cigar with a few vigorous whiffs, "what's the use of being foolish? My aunt was never diffident about telling her story, and why should I hesitate to tell mine? The young lady's name, — we'll call her Margaret. She was a blonde, with hazel eyes and dark hair. Perhaps you never heard of a blonde with hazel eyes and dark hair? She was the only one I ever saw ; and there was the finest contrast imaginable between her fair, fresh complexion, and her superb tresses and delicately traced eyebrows. She was certainly lovely, if not handsome ; and — such eyes! It was an event in one's life, sir, just to look through those luminous windows into her soul. That could not happen every day, to be sure ! Sometimes for weeks she kept them turned from me, the ivory shutters half closed, or the mystic curtains of reserve drawn within ; then, again, when I was tortured with unsatisfied yearnings, and almost ready to despair, she would suddenly turn them upon me, the shutters thrown wide, the curtains away, and a flood of radiance streaming forth, that filled me so full of light and gladness, that I had no shadowy nook left in me for a doubt to hide in. She must have been conscious of this power of expression, — she used it so sparingly, and, it seemed to me, artfully ! But I always forgave her when she did use it, and cherished resentment only when she did not.

“Margaret was shy and proud ; I could never completely win her confidence ; but I knew, I knew well at last, that her heart was mine. And a deep, tender, woman’s heart it was, too, despite her reserve. Without many words, we understood each other, and so — Pshaw !” said Westwood, “my cigar is out !”

“On with the story !”

“Well, we had our lovers’ quarrels, of course. Singular, what foolish children love makes of us !—rendering us sensitive, jealous, exacting, in the superlative degree. I am sure, we were both amiable and forbearing towards all the world besides ; but, for the powerful reason that we loved, we were bound to misinterpret words, looks, and actions, and wound each other on every convenient occasion. I was pained by her attentions to others, or perhaps by an apparent preference of a book or a bouquet to me. Retaliation on my part and quiet persistence on hers continued to estrange us, until I generally ended by conceding everything and pleading for one word of kindness to end my misery.

“I was wrong, — too quick to resent, too ready to concede. No doubt it was to her a secret gratification to exercise her power over me ; and at last I was convinced that she wounded me purposely, in order to provoke a temporary estrangement and enjoy a repetition of her triumph.

“It was at a party ; the thing she did was to waltz with a man whom she knew I detested, whom *I* knew *she* could not respect, and whose half-embrace, as he whirled her in the dance, almost put murder into my thoughts.

“‘Margaret,’ I said, ‘one last word ! If you care for me, beware !’

“That was a foolish speech, perhaps. It was certainly ineffectual. She persisted, looking so calm and composed that a great weight fell upon my heart. I walked away ;

I wandered about the saloons ; I tried to gossip and be gay ; but the wound was too deep.

“ I accompanied her home, late in the evening. We scarcely spoke by the way. At the door, she looked me sadly in the face, — she gave me her hand ; I thought it trembled.

“ ‘ Good night ! ’ she said, in a low voice.

“ ‘ Good by ! ’ I answered, coldly, and hurried from the house.

“ It was some consolation to hear her close the door after I had reached the corner of the street, and to know that she had been listening to my footsteps. But I was very angry. I made stern resolutions ; I vowed to myself that I would wring her heart, and never swerve from my purpose until I had wrung out of it abundant drops of sorrow and contrition. How I succeeded you shall hear.

“ I had previously engaged her to attend a series of concerts with me ; an arrangement which I did not now regret, and for good reasons. Once a week, with extreme punctuality, I called for her, escorted her to the concert-room, and carefully reconducted her home, — letting no opportunity pass to show her a true gentleman’s deference and respect, — conversing with her freely about music, books, anything, in short, except what we both knew to be deepest in each other’s thoughts. Upon other occasions I avoided her, and even refrained from going to places where she was expected, — especially where she knew that I knew she was expected.

“ Well,” continued Westwood, “ my designs upon her heart, which I was going to wring so unmercifully, did not meet with very brilliant success. To confess the humiliating truth, I soon found that I was torturing myself a good deal more than I was torturing her. As a last and desperate resort, what do you think I did ? ”

“You probably asked her to ask your forgiveness.”

“Not I! I have a will of adamant, as people find, who tear away the amiable flowers and light soil that cover it; and she had reached the impenetrable, firm rock. I neither made any advances towards a reconciliation nor invited any. But I’ll tell you what I did do, as a final trial of her heart. I had, for some time, been meditating a European tour, and my interest in her had alone kept me at home. Some friends of mine were to sail early in the spring, and I now resolved to accompany them. I don’t know how much pride and spite there was in the resolution, — probably a good deal. I confess I wished to make her suffer, — to show her that she had calculated too much upon my weakness, — that I could be strong and happy without her. Yet, with all this bitter and vindictive feeling, I listened to a very sweet and tender whisper in my heart, which said, ‘Now, if her love speaks out, — now, if she says to me one true, kind, womanly word, — she shall go with me, and nothing shall ever take her from me again!’ The thought of what *might* be, if she would but say that word, and of what *must* be, irrevocably, if her pride held out, shook me mightily. But my resolution was taken.

“On the day of the last concert, I imparted the secret of my intended journey to a person who, I felt tolerably sure, would rush at once to Margaret with the news. Then, in the evening, I went for her; I was conscious that my manner towards her was a little more tender, or, rather, a little less coldly courteous, that night, than it had usually been of late; for my feelings were softened, and I had never seen her so lovely. I had never before known what a treasure I was about to lose. The subject of my voyage was not mentioned, and if she had heard of it, she accepted the fact without the least visible concern. Her

quietness under the circumstances chilled me and disheartened me. I am not one of those who can give much superfluous love, or cling with unreasonable, blind passion to an object that yields no affection in return. A quick and effectual method of curing a fancy in persons of my temperament is to teach them that it is not reciprocated. Then it expires like a flame cut off from the air, or a plant removed from the soil. The death-struggle, the uprooting, is the painful thing; but when the heart is thoroughly convinced that its love is misplaced, it gives up, with one last sigh as big as fate, sheds a few tears, says a prayer or two, thanks God for the experience, and becomes a wiser, calmer, — yes, and a happier heart than before.”

“True,” I said; “but our hearts are not easily convinced.”

“Ay, there ’s the rub. It is for want of a true perception. There cannot be a true love without a true perception. Love is for the soul to know, from its own intuition; not for the understanding to believe, from the testimony of those very unreliable witnesses called eyes and ears. This seems to have been my case; my soul was aware of *her* love, and all the evidence of my external senses could not altogether destroy that interior faith. But that evening I said, ‘I believe you now, my senses! I doubt you now, my soul! She never loved me!’ So I was really very cold towards her — for about twenty minutes.

“I walked home with her; we were both silent; but at the door she asked me to go in. Here my calmness deserted me and I could hardly hold my heart, while I replied, ‘If you particularly wish it.’

“‘If I did not, I should not ask you,’ she said; and I went in.

“I was ashamed and vexed at myself for trembling so, — for I was in a tremor from head to foot. There was company in the parlors, — some of Margaret’s friends. I took my seat upon a sofa, and soon she came and sat by my side.

“‘I suppose,’ said one, ‘Mr. Westwood has been telling Margaret all about it.’

“‘About what?’ Margaret inquired, — and here the truth flashed upon me, — the news of my proposed voyage had not yet reached her! She looked at me with a troubled, questioning expression, and said, ‘I felt that something was going to happen. Tell me what it is.’

“I answered, ‘Your friend can best explain what she means.’

“Then out came the secret. A shock of surprise sent the color from Margaret’s face; and raising her eyes she asked, quite calmly, but in a low and unnatural tone, ‘Is this so? You are really going?’

“‘I am really going.’

“She could not hide her agitation. Her white face betrayed her. Then I was glad, wickedly glad, in my heart, and vain enough to be gratified that others should behold and know I held a power over her. Well, — but I suffered for that folly.

“‘I feel hurt,’ she said after a little while, ‘because you have not told me this. You have no sister,’ (this was spoken very quietly,) ‘and it would have been a privilege for me to take a sister’s place, and do for you those little things which sisters do for brothers who are going on long journeys.’

“I was choked; it was a minute before I could speak. Then I said that I saw no reason why she should tax her time or thoughts to do anything for me.

“ ‘O, you know,’ she said, ‘you have been kind to me, so much kinder than I have deserved !’

“ It was unendurable, — the pathos of those words ! If we had been alone, there our trial would have ended. But the eyes of others were upon us, and I steeled myself.

“ ‘Besides,’ I said, ‘I know of nothing that you can do for me.’

“ ‘There must be many little things ; to begin with, there is your glove, which you are tearing to pieces.’

“ True, I was tearing my glove ; she was calm enough to observe it ! That made me angry.

“ ‘Give it to me ; I will mend it for you. Have n’t you other gloves that need mending ?’

“ I, who had triumphed, was humbled. My heart was breaking, — and she talked of mending gloves ! I did not omit to thank her. I coldly arose to go.

“ Well, I felt now that it was all over. The next day I secured my passage in the steamer in which my friends were to sail. I took pains that Margaret should hear of that, too. Then came the preparations for travel, — arranging affairs, writing letters, providing myself with a compact and comfortable outfit. Europe was in prospect, — Paris, Switzerland, Italy, lands to which my dreams had long since gone before me, and to which I now turned my eyes with reawakening aspirations. A new glory arose upon my life, in the light of which Margaret became a fading star. It was so much easier than I had thought to give her up, to part from her ! I found that I could forget her in the excitement of a fresh and novel experience ; while she, — could she forget me ? When lovers part, happy is he who goes ! alas for the one that is left behind !

“ One day when I was busy with the books which I was to take with me, a small package was handed in. I need

not tell you that I experienced a thrill when I saw Margaret's handwriting upon the wrapper. I tore it open, — and what think you I found? My glove! Nothing else. I smiled bitterly, to see how neatly she had mended it; then I sighed; then I said, 'It is finished!' and tossed the glove disdainfully into my trunk.

"On the day before that fixed for the sailing of the steamer, I made farewell calls upon many of my friends, — among others, upon Margaret. But, through the perversity of pride and will, I did not go alone; I took with me Joseph, a mutual acquaintance, who was to be my traveling-companion. I felt some misgivings, when I saw how Margaret had changed; she was so softened, and so pale!

"The interview was a painful one, and I cut it short. As we were going out, she gently detained me, and said, 'Did you receive — your glove?'

"'O yes,' I said, and thanked her for mending it.

"'And this is all — all you have to say?' she asked.

"'I have nothing more to say, — except good by.'

"She held my hand. 'Nothing else?'

"'No, — it is useless to talk of the past, Margaret; and the future, — may you be happy! Good by!'

"I thought she would speak; I could not believe she would let me go; but she did! I bore up well until night. Then came a revulsion. I walked three times past the house, wofully tempted, my love and my will at cruel warfare; but I did not go in. At midnight I saw the light in her room extinguished; I knew she had retired, but whether to sleep, or weep, or pray, — how could I tell? I went home. I did not close my eyes that night. I was glad to see the morning come, after *such* a night!

"The steamer was to sail at ten. The bustle of embarkation; strange scenes and strange faces; parting from friends; the ringing of the bell; last adieus, — some, who

were to go with us, hurrying aboard, others, who were to stay behind, as hastily going ashore; the withdrawal of the plank, — sad sight to many eyes! casting off the lines, the steamer swinging heavily around, the rushing, irregular motion of the great, slow paddles; the waving of handkerchiefs from the decks, and the responsive signals from the crowd lining the wharf; off at last, — the faces of friends, the crowd, the piers, and, lastly, the city itself, fading from sight; the dash of spray, the freshening breeze, the novel sight of our little world detaching itself and floating away; the feeling that America was past, and Europe was next; — all this filled my mind with animation and excitement, which shut out thoughts of Margaret. Could I have looked with clairvoyant vision, and beheld her then, locked in her chamber, should I have been so happy? O, what fools vanity and pride make of us! Even then, with my heart high-strung with hope and courage, had I known the truth, I should have abandoned my friends, the voyage, and Europe, and returned in the pilot's boat, to find something more precious than all the continents and countries of the globe in the love of that heart which I was carelessly flinging away."

Here Westwood took breath. The sun was now almost set. The prairie was still and cool; the heavy dews were beginning to fall; the shadows of the green and flowered undulations filled the hollows, like a rising tide; and the horses moved at a quicker pace. Westwood lighted his cigar, drew a few whiffs, and proceeded.

"We had a voyage of eleven days. But to me an immense amount of experience was crowded into that brief period. The fine exhilaration of the start, — the breeze gradually increasing to a gale; then horrible sea-sickness, home-sickness, love-sickness; after which, the weather which sailors love, games, gayety, and flirtation. There is

no such social freedom to be enjoyed anywhere as on board an ocean steamer. The breaking up of old associations, the opening of a fresh existence, the necessity of new relationships, — this fuses the crust of conventionality, quickens the springs of life, and renders character sympathetic and fluent. The past is easily put away ; we become plastic to new influences ; we are delighted at the discovery of unexpected affinities, and astonished to find in ourselves so much wit, eloquence, and fine susceptibility which we did not before dream we possessed.

“This freedom is especially provocative of flirtation. We see each fair brow touched with a halo whose colors are the reflection of our own beautiful dreams. Loveliness is tenfold more lovely, bathed in this atmosphere of romance ; and manhood is invested with ideal graces. Don't think I am now artfully preparing your mind to excuse what I am about to confess. Take these things into consideration, if you will ; then think as you please of the weakness and wild impulse with which I fell in love with —

“Call her Flora. The most superb, captivating creature that ever ensnared the hearts of the sons of Adam. A fine olive complexion ; magnificent dark auburn hair ; eyes full of fire and softness ; lips that could pout or smile with incomparable fascination ; a figure of surprising symmetry, just voluptuous enough. But, after all, her great power lay in her freedom from all affectation and conventionality, — in her spontaneity, her free, sparkling, and vivacious manners. She was the most daring and dazzling of women, without ever appearing immodest or repulsive. She walked with such proud, secure steps over the commonly accepted barriers of social intercourse, that even those who blamed her and pretended to be shocked were compelled to admire. She was the belle, the Juno, of the

saloon, the supreme ornament of the upper deck. Just twenty, — not without wit and culture, — full of poetry and enthusiasm. Do you blame me ?”

“Not a whit,” I said ; “but for Margaret —”

“Ah, Margaret !” said Westwood, with a sigh. “But, you see, I had given her up. And when one love is lost, there sink such awful chasms into the soul, that, though they cannot be filled, we must at least bridge them over with a new affection. The number of marriages built in this way, upon false foundations of hollowness and despair, is incomputable. We talk of jilted lovers and disappointed girls marrying ‘out of spite.’ No doubt, such petty feeling hurries forward many premature matches. But it is the heart, left shaken, unsupported, wretchedly sinking, which reaches out for sympathy, and clings like a helpless vine to the sunny-sided wall of the nearest consolation. If you wish to marry a girl and can’t, and are weak enough to desire her still, this is what you should do : get some capable man to jilt her. Then seize your chance. All the affections which have gone out to him, unmet, ready to droop, quivering with the painful, hungry instinct to grasp some object, may possibly lay hold of you. Let the world sneer ; but God pity such natures, which lack the faith and fortitude to live and die true to their best love !

“Out of my own mouth do I condemn myself ? Very well, I condemn myself ; *peccavi* ! If I had ever loved Margaret, then I did not love Flora. The same heart cannot find its counterpart indifferently in two such opposites. What charmed me in one was her purity, softness, and depth of soul. What fascinated me in the other was her bloom, beauty, and passion. Which was the true sympathy ?

“I did not stop to ask that question when it was most

important that it should be seriously considered. I rushed into the crowd of competitors for Flora's smiles, and distanced them all. I was pleased and proud that she took no pains to conceal her preference for me. We played chess ; we read poetry out of the same book ; we ate at the same table ; we sat and watched the sea together, for hours, in those clear, bright days ; we promenaded the deck at sunset, her hand upon my arm, her lips forever turning up tenderly towards me, her eyes pouring their passion into me. Then those glorious nights, when the ocean was a vast, wild, fluctuating stream, flashing and sparkling about the ship, spanned with a quivering bridge of splendor on one side, and rolling off into awful darkness and mystery on the other ; when the moon seemed swinging among the shrouds like a ball of white fire ; when the few ships went by like silent ghosts ; and Flora and I, in a long trance of happiness, kept the deck, heedless of the throng of promenaders, forgetful of the past, reckless of the future, aware only of our own romance and the richness of the present hour.

“Joseph, my travelling-companion, looked on, and wrote letters. He showed me one of these, addressed to a friend of Margaret's. In it he extolled Flora's beauty, piquancy, and supremacy ; related how she made all the women jealous and all the men mad ; and hinted at my triumph. I knew that the letter would reach Margaret's eyes, and was vain enough to be pleased.

“At last, one morning at daybreak, I went on deck, and saw the shores of England. Only a few days before, we had left America behind us, brown and leafless, just emerging from the long gloom of winter ; and now the slopes of another world arose green and inviting in the flush of spring. There was a bracing breeze ; the dingy waters of the Mersey rolled up in wreaths of beauty ; the fleets of

ships, steamers, sloops, lighters, pilot-boats, bounding over the waves, meeting, tacking, plunging, swaying gracefully under the full-swellings canvas, presented a picture of wonderful animation; and the mingling hues of sunshine and mist hung over all. I paced the deck, solemnly joyful, swift thoughts pulsing through me of a dim far-off Margaret, of a near radiant Flora, of hope and happiness superior to fate. It was one of those times when the excited soul transfigures the world, and we marvel how we could ever succumb to a transient sorrow while the whole universe blooms, and an infinite future waits to open for us its doors of wonder and joy.

“In this state of mind I was joined by Flora. She laid her hand on my arm, and we walked up and down together. She was serious, almost sad, and she viewed the English hills with a pensiveness which became her better than mirth.

“‘So,’ she sighed, ‘all our little romances come to an end!’

“‘Not so,’ I said; ‘or if one romance ends, it is to give place to another, still truer and sweeter. Our lives may be all a succession of romances, if we will make them so. I think now I will never doubt the future; for I find that, when I have given up my dearest hopes, my best beloved friends, and accepted the gloomy belief that all life besides is barren,—then comes some new experience, filling my empty cup with still more delicious wine.’

“‘Don’t vex me with your philosophy!’ said Flora. ‘I don’t know anything about it. All I know is this present,—this sky, this earth, this sea, and the joy between, which I can’t give up quite so easily as you can, with your beautiful theory that something better awaits you.’

“‘I have told you,’ I replied,—for I had been quite frank with her,—‘how I left America,—what a blank

life was to me then ; and did I not turn my back upon all that to meet face to face the greatest happiness which I have ever yet known ? Ought not this to give me faith in the divinity that shapes our ends ? ”

“ ‘ And so,’ she answered, ‘ when I have lost you, I shall have the satisfaction of thinking that you are enjoying some still more exquisite consolation for the slight pangs you may have felt at parting from me ! Your philosophy will make it easy for you to say, “ Good by ! it was a pretty romance ; I go to find prettier ones still ; ” and then forget me altogether ! ’

“ ‘ And you,’ I said, — ‘ will that be easy for you ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’ she cried with spirit, ‘ anything is easy to a proud woman, who finds that the brief romance of a ten days’ acquaintance has already become tiresome to her friend. I am glad I have enjoyed what I have ; that is so much gain, of which you cannot rob me ; and now I can say good by as coolly as you, or I can die of shame, or I can at once walk over this single rail into the water, and quench this little candle, and so an end ! ’

“ She sprang upon a bench, and, I swear to you, I thought she was going down ! I was so exalted by this passionate demonstration, that I should certainly have gone over with her, and felt perfectly content to die in her arms, — at least, until I began to realize what a very disagreeable bath we had chosen to drown in.

“ I drew her away. I walked up and down with that superb creature panting and palpitating almost upon my heart ; I poured into her ear I know not what extravagant vows ; and before the slow-handed sailors had fastened their cable to the buoy in the channel, we had knotted a more subtle and difficult noose, not to be so easily undone !

“ Now see what strange, variable fools we are ! Months of tender intercourse had failed to bring about anything

like a positive engagement between Margaret and myself; and here behold me irrevocably pledged to Flora, after a ten days' acquaintance!

“Six mortal hours were exhausted in making the steamer fast; in sending off her Majesty's mails, of which the cockney speaks with a tone of reverence altogether disgusting to us free-minded Yankees; and in entertaining the custom-house inspectors, who paid a long and tedious visit to the saloon and our luggage. Then we were suffered to land, and enter the noisy, solid streets of Liverpool, amid the donkeys and beggars and quaint scenes which strike the American so oddly upon a first visit. All this delay, the weariness and impatience, the contrast between the morning and the hard, grim reality of midday, brought me down from my elevation. I felt alarmed to think of what had passed. I seemed to have been doing some wild, unadvised act in a fit of intoxication. Margaret came up before me, sad, silent, reproachful; and as I gazed upon Flora's bedimmed face, I wondered how I had been so charmed.

“We took the first train for London, where we arrived at midnight. Two weeks in that vast Babel, — then, ho! for Paris! Twelve hours by rail and steamer carried us out of John Bull's dominions into the brilliant metropolis of his French neighbor. Joseph accompanied us, and wrote letters home, filled with gossip which I knew would reach Margaret. I had not found it so easy to forget her as I had supposed it would be. Flora's power over me was sovereign; but when I was weary of the dazzle and whirl of the life she led me, — when I looked into the depths of my heart, and saw what the thin film of passion and pleasure concealed, — in those serious moments which would come, and my soul put stern questions to me, — then, sir, — then — Margaret had her revenge.

“A month, crowded and glittering with novelty and incident, preceded our departure for Switzerland. I accompanied Flora’s party; Joseph remained behind. We left Paris about the middle of June, and returned in September. I have no words to speak of that era in my life. I saw, enjoyed, suffered, learned so much! Flora was always glad, magnificent, irresistible. But, as I knew her longer, my moments of misgiving became more frequent. If I had aspired to nothing higher than a life of sensuous delights, she would have been all I could wish. But —

“We were to spend the winter in Italy. Meanwhile, we had another month in Paris. Here I had found Joseph again, who troubled me a good deal with certain rumors he had received concerning Margaret. According to these, she had been in feeble health ever since we left, and her increasing delicacy was beginning to alarm her friends. ‘But,’ added another of Joseph’s correspondents, ‘don’t let Westwood flatter himself that he is the cause, for she is cured of him; and there is talk of an engagement between her and a handsome young clergyman, who is both eloquent and fascinating.’

“This bit of gossip made me very bitter and angry. ‘Forget me so soon?’ I said; ‘and receive the attentions of another man?’ You see how consistent I was, to condemn her for the very fault I had myself been so eager to commit!

“Well, the round of rides, excursions, *soirées*, visits to the operas and theatres, walks on the Boulevards, and in the galleries of the Louvre, ended at last. The evening before we were to set out for the South of France, I was at my lodgings, unpacking and repacking the luggage which I had left in Joseph’s care during my absence among the Alps; I was melancholy, dissatisfied with the dissipations which had exhausted my time and energies, and

thinking of Margaret. I had not preserved a single memento of her; and now I wished I had one, — if only a withered leaf, or a line of her writing. In this mood I chanced to cast my eye upon a stray glove, in the bottom of my trunk. I snatched at it eagerly, and, in the impulse of the moment, — before I reflected that I was wronging Flora, — pressed it to my lips. Yes, I found the place where it had been mended, the spot Margaret's fingers had touched, and gave it a kiss for every stitch. Then, incensed at myself, I flung it from me, and hurried from the room. I strolled through the Elysian fields; stopped by the concert gardens, and listened to the glorified girls singing under rosy and golden pavilions the last songs of the season; wandered about the fountains, — by the gardens of the Tuileries, where the trees stood so shadowy and still, and the statues gleamed so pale, — along the quays of the Seine, where the waves rolled so dark below, — trying to settle my thoughts, to master myself, to put Margaret from me.

“Weary at length, I returned to my chamber, seated myself composedly, and looked down at the glove which lay where I had thrown it, upon the polished floor. Mechanically I stooped and took up a bit of folded paper. It was written upon, — I unrolled it, and read. It was as if I had opened the record of doom! Had the apparition of Margaret herself risen suddenly before me, I could not have been more astounded. It was a note from her, — and such a note! — full of love, suffering, and humility, — poured out of a heart so deep and tender and true that the shallowness of my own seemed utterly contemptible in comparison with it. I cannot tell you what was written, but it was more than even my most cruel and exacting pride could have asked. It was what would once have made me wild with joy; now it almost maddened me

with despair. I, who had often talked fine philosophy to others, had not a grain of that article left to physic my own malady. But one course seemed plain before me, and that was, to go quietly and drown myself in the Seine, which I had seen flowing so swift and dark under the bridges, an hour ago, when I stood and mused upon the tragical corpses its sullen flood had swallowed.

“I am a little given to superstition, and the mystery of the note excited me. I wonder if there was n't some subtile connection between it and the near presence of Margaret's spirit, of which I had that night been conscious. But the note had reached me by no supernatural method, as I was at first half inclined to believe. It was perhaps the touch, the atmosphere, the ineffably fine influence which surrounded it, which had penetrated my unconscious perceptions, and brought her near. The paper, the glove, were full of Margaret, — full of something besides what we vaguely call mental associations, — full of emanations of the very love and suffering which she had breathed into the writing.

“How the note came there upon the floor was a riddle which I was too much bewildered to explain by any natural means. Joseph, who burst in upon me, in my extremity of pain and difficulty, solved it at once. It had fallen out of the glove, where it had lain folded, silent, unnoticed, during all this intervening period of folly and vexation of soul. Margaret had done her duty in time; I had only myself to blame for the tangle in which I now found myself. I was thinking of Flora, upon the deck of the steamship, in a moment of chagrin so near throwing herself over, — wondering to what fate her passion and impetuosity would hurry her now, if she knew, — cursing myself for my weakness and perfidy; while Joseph kept asking me what I intended to do.

“‘Do? do?’ I said, furiously, ‘I shall kill you, that is what I shall do, if you drive me mad with questions which neither angels nor fiends can answer!’

“‘I know what you will do,’ said Joseph; ‘you will go home and marry Margaret.’

“You can have no conception of the effect of these words, — *Go home and marry Margaret*. All that might have been, — what might be still, — the happiness cast away, and perhaps yet within my reach, — the temptation of the Devil, who appealed to my cowardice, to fly from Flora, break my vows, risk my honor and her life, for Margaret, — all this rushed through me tumultuously. At length I said: ‘No, Joseph; I shall do no such thing, I can never be worthy of Margaret; it will be only by fasting and prayer that I can make myself worthy of Flora.’

“‘Will you start for Italy in the morning?’ he asked, pitilessly.

“‘For Italy in the morning?’ I groaned. Meet Flora, travel with her, play the hypocrite, with smiles on my lips and hell in my heart, — or thunder-strike her at once with the truth; — what was I to do? To some men the question would, perhaps, have presented few difficulties. But for me, sir, — who am not quite devoid of conscience, whatever you may think, — having driven Joseph away, I locked myself into my room, and suffered the torments of the damned, in as quiet a manner as possible, until morning. Then Joseph returned, and looked at me with dismay.

“‘For Heaven’s sake!’ he said, ‘you ought not to let this thing kill you; and it will, if you keep on.’

“‘So much the better,’ I said, ‘if it kills nobody but me. But don’t be alarmed. Keep perfectly cool, and attend to the commission I am going to trust to you. I

can't see Flora this morning ; I must gain a little time. Go to the station of the Lyons Railway, where I have engaged to meet her party ; say to her that I am detained, but that I will join her on the journey. Give her no time to question you, and be sure that she does not stay behind.'

" ' I'll manage it, — trust me ! ' said Joseph. And off he started. At the end of two hours, which seemed twenty, he burst into my room, crying, ' Good news ! she is gone ! I told her you had lost your passport, and would have to get another from our minister.'

" ' What ! ' I exclaimed, ' you lied to her ?'

" ' O, there was no other way ! ' said Joseph, ingenuously, — ' she is so sharp ! They're to wait for you at Marseilles. But I'll manage that too. On their arrival at the Hôtel d'Orient, they'll find a telegraphic despatch from me. I wager a hat, they'll leave in the first steamer for Naples. Then you can follow at your leisure.'

" ' Thank you, Joseph.'

" I felt relieved. Then came a reaction. The next day I was attacked by fever. I know not how long I struggled against it, but it mastered me. The last things I remember were the visits of friends, the strange talk of a French physician, whispers and consultations, which I knew were about me, yet took no interest in ; and at length Joseph rushing to my bedside, in a flutter of agitation, and gasping, ' Flora !'

" ' What of Flora ? ' I demanded.

" ' I telegraphed, but she would n't go ; she has come back ; she is here !'

" I was sinking back into the stupor from which I had been roused, when I heard a rustling which seemed afar off, yet was in my chamber ; then a vision appeared to my sickened sight, — a face which I dimly thought I had seen

before, — a flood of curls and a rain of kisses showering upon me, — sobs and devouring caresses, — Flora's voice calling me passionate names ; and I lying so passive, faintly struggling to remember, until my soul sank whirling into darkness, and I knew no more.

“ One morning, I cannot tell you how long after, I awoke and found myself in a strange-looking room, filled with strange objects, not the least strange of which was the thing that seemed myself. At first I looked with vague and motionless curiosity out of the Lethe from which my mind slowly emerged ; painless, and at peace ; listlessly questioning whether I was alive or dead, — whether the limp weight lying in bed there was my body, — the meaning of the silence and the closed curtains. Then, with a succession of painful flashes, as if the pole of an electrical battery had been applied to my brain, memory returned, — Margaret, Flora, Paris, delirium. I remember next hearing myself groan aloud ; then seeing Joseph at my side. I tried to speak, but could not. Upon my pillow was a glove, and he placed it against my cheek. An indescribable, excruciating thrill shot through me ; still I could not speak. After that came a relapse. Like Mrs. Browning's poet, I lay

‘Twixt gloom and gleam,
With Death and Life at each extreme.’

“ But one morning I was better. I could talk. Joseph bent over me, weeping for joy.

“ ‘ The danger is past ! ’ he said. ‘ The doctors say you will get well ! ’

“ ‘ Have I been so ill, then ? ’

“ ‘ Ill ? ’ echoed Joseph. ‘ Nobody thought you could live. We all gave you up, except her ; and she — ’

“ ‘ She ! ’ I said ; ‘ is she here ? ’

“ ‘ From the moment of her arrival, ’ replied Joseph, ‘ she

has never left you. O, if you don't thank God for her,' — he lowered his voice, — 'and live all the rest of your life just to reward her, you are the most ungrateful wretch! You would certainly have died but for her. She has scarcely slept, till this morning, when they said you would recover.'

"Joseph paused. Every word he spoke went down like a weight of lead into my soul. I had, indeed, been conscious of a tender hand soothing my pillow, of a lovely form flitting through my dreams, of a breath and magnetic touch of love infusing warm, sweet life into me; but it had always seemed Margaret, never Flora.

" 'The glove?' I asked.

" 'Here it is,' said Joseph. 'In your delirium you demanded it; you would not be without it; you caressed it, and addressed to it the tenderest apostrophes.'

" 'And Flora, — she heard?'

" 'Flora?' repeated Joseph. 'Don't you know — have n't you any idea — what has happened? It has been terrible!'

" 'Tell me at once!' I said. 'Keep nothing back!'

" 'Immediately on her return from Marseilles, — you remember that?'

" 'Yes, yes! go on!'

" 'She established herself here. Nobody could come between her and you; and a brave, true girl she proved herself. O, but she was wild about you! She offered the doctors extravagant sums — she would have bribed Heaven itself, if she could — not to let you die. But there came a time, — one night, when you were raving about Margaret, — I tell you, it was terrible! She would have the truth, and so I told her, — everything, from the beginning. It makes me shudder now to think of it, — it struck her so like death!'

“ ‘What did she say? what did she do?’

“ ‘She did n’t say much; — “O my God! my God!” — something like that. The next morning she showed me a letter which she had written to Margaret.’

“ ‘To Margaret?’ I started up, but fell back again helpless with a groan.

“ ‘Yes,’ said Joseph, ‘and it was a letter worthy of the noblest woman. I wrote another, for I thought Margaret ought to know everything. It might save her life, and yours too. In the mean time, I had got startling news from her, — that her health had continued to decline, and that her physician had seen no hope for her except in a voyage to Italy. She had set out in company with the H——s, and was by that time in London. I sent the letters to her there, and — you know the rest.’

“ ‘The rest?’ I said, as a horrible suspicion flashed upon me. ‘You told me something terrible had happened.’

“ ‘Yes, — to Flora. But you have heard the worst. She is gone; she is by this time in Rome.’

“ ‘Flora gone? But you said she was here.’

“ ‘*She?* So *she* is! But did you think I meant Flora? I supposed you knew. Not Flora, but Margaret! Margaret!’

“I shrieked out, ‘Margaret!’ That’s the last I remember, — at least, the last I can tell. She was there, — I was in her arms. And Flora had gone, and my dreams were true; and the breath and magnetic touch of love, which infused warm, sweet life into me, and seemed not Flora’s, but Margaret’s, were no illusion, and — what more can I tell?

“From the moment of receiving those letters, Margaret’s energies were roused, and she had begun to regain her health. There is no such potent medicine as hope and love. It had saved her, and it saved me. My recovery

was sure and speedy. The happiness which had seemed too great, too dear to be ever possible, was now mine. She was with me again, all my own! Only the convalescent, who feels the glow of love quicken the pure pulses of returning health, knows what perfect bliss is.

“As soon as I was strong enough to travel, we set out for Italy, the faithful Joseph accompanying us. We enjoyed Florence, its palaces and galleries of art, the quaint old churches, about which the religious sentiment of ages seems to hang like an atmosphere, the morning and evening clamor of musical bells, the Arno, and the olive-crowned Tuscan hills, — all so delightful to the senses and the soul. After Florence, Naples, with its beautiful, dangerous, volcanic environs, where the ancients aptly located their heaven and hell, and where a luxurious, passionate people absorbs into its blood the spirit of the soil, and the fire and languor of the clime. From Naples to Rome, where we saw St. Peter’s, that bubble on the surface of the globe, which the next earthquake may burst, the Vatican, with its marvels of statuary, the ruined temples of the old gods and heroes, the Campagna, the Pope, and — Flora.

“We had but a glimpse of her. It was one night, at the Colosseum. We had been musing about that vast and solemn pile by the moonlight, which silvered it over with indescribable beauty, and at last, accompanied by our guides, bearing torches, we ascended through dark and broken passages to the upper benches of the amphitheatre. As we were passing along one side, we saw picturesquely moving through the shadows of the opposite walls, with the immense arena between, the red-flaring torches and half-illuminated figures of another party of visitors. I don’t know whether it was instinct, or acuteness of vision, that suggested Flora; but, with a sudden leap of the heart, I

felt that she was there. We descended, and passed out under the dark arches of the stupendous ruin. The other visitors walked a little in advance of us, two of the number lingering behind their companions; and we heard certain words of tenderness and passion which strangely brought to my mind those nights on the ocean steamer.

“‘What is the matter with you?’ said Margaret, looking in my face.

“‘Hush!’ I whispered; ‘there — that woman — is Flora!’

“She clung to me; I drew her closer, as we paused; and the happy couple went on, over the ancient Forum, by the silent columns of the ruined temples, and disappeared from sight upon the summit of the Capitoline Hill.

“A few months later, we heard of the marriage of Flora to an English baronet; she is now *my Lady*, and I must do her the justice to say that I never knew a woman better fitted to bear that title. As for Margaret, — if you will return with me to my home on the Hudson, after we have finished our hunt after those Western lands, you shall see her, together with the loveliest pair of children that ever made two proud parents happy.

“And here,” added Westwood, “we have arrived at the end of our day’s journey; we have had the Romance of the Glove, and now — let’s have some supper.”

THE MAN WHO STOLE A MEETING-HOUSE.

ON a recent journey to the Pennsylvania oil regions, I stopped one evening with a fellow-traveller at a village which had just been thrown into a turmoil of excitement by the exploits of a horse-thief. As we sat around the tavern hearth, after supper, we heard the particulars of the rogue's capture and escape fully discussed; then followed many another tale of theft and robbery, told amid curling puffs of tobacco-smoke; until, at the close of an exciting story, one of the natives turned to my travelling acquaintance, and, with a broad laugh, said, "Kin ye beat that, stranger?"

"Well, I don't know, — maybe I could if I should try. I never happened to fall in with any such tall horse-stealing as you tell of, but I knew a man who stole a meeting-house once."

"Stole a meetin'-house! That goes a little beyant anything yit," remarked another of the honest villagers. "Ye don't mean he stole it and carried it away?"

"Stole it and carried it away," repeated my travelling companion, seriously, crossing his legs, and resting his arm on the back of his chair. "And, more than all that, I helped him."

"How happened that? — for you don't look much like a thief, yourself."

All eyes were now turned upon my friend, a plain New

England farmer, whose honest homespun appearance and candid speech commanded respect.

“I was his hired man, and I acted under orders. His name was Jedwort, — Old Jedwort, the boys called him, although he was n't above fifty when the crooked little circumstance happened which I'll make as straight a story of as I can, if the company would like to hear it.”

“Sartin, stranger! sartin! about stealin' the meetin'-house!” chimed in two or three voices.

My friend cleared his throat, put his hair behind his ears, and with a grave, smooth face, but with a merry twinkle in his shrewd gray eye, began as follows:—

“Jedwort, I said his name was; and I shall never forget how he looked one particular morning. He stood leaning on the front gate, — or rather on the post, for the gate itself was such a shackling concern a child could n't have leaned on 't without breaking it down. And Jedwort was no child. Think of a stoutish, stooping, duck-legged man, with a mountainous back, strongly suggestive of a bag of grist under his shirt, and you have him. That imaginary grist had been growing heavier and heavier, and he more and more bent under it, for the last fifteen years and more, until his head and neck just came forward out from between his shoulders like a turtle's from its shell. His arms hung, as he walked, almost to the ground. Being curved with the elbows outward, he looked for all the world, in a front view, like a waddling interrogation-point enclosed in a parenthesis. If man was ever a quadruped, as I've heard some folks tell, and rose gradually from four legs to two, there must have been a time, very early in his history, when he went about like Old Jedwort.

“The gate had been a very good gate in its day. It had even been a genteel gate when Jedwort came into possession of the place by marrying his wife, who inherited it

from her uncle. That was some twenty years before, and everything had been going to rack and ruin ever since.

“Jedwort himself had been going to rack and ruin, morally speaking. He was a middling decent sort of man when I first knew him ; and I judge there must have been something about him more than common, or he never could have got such a wife. But then women do marry, sometimes, unaccountably. I’ve known downright ugly and disagreeable fellows to work around, till by and by they would get a pretty girl fascinated by something in them which nobody else could see, and then marry her in spite of everything ; — just as you may have seen a magnetizer on the stage make his subjects do just what he pleased, or a black snake charm a bird. Talk about women marrying with their eyes open, under such circumstances ! They don’t marry with their eyes open : they are put to sleep, in one sense, and a’n’t more than half responsible for what they do, if they are that. Then rises the question that has puzzled wiser heads than any of ours here, and will puzzle more yet, till society is different from what it is now, — how much a refined and sensitive woman is bound to suffer from a coarse and disgusting master, legally called her husband, before she is entitled to break off a bad bargain she scarce had a hand in making. I’ve sat here to-night, and heard about men getting goods under false pretences ; you’ve told some astonishing big stories, gentlemen, about rogues stealing horses and sleighs ; and I’m going to tell you about the man who stole a meeting-house ; but, when all is said, I guess it will be found that more extraordinary thieving than all that often goes on under our own eyes, and nobody takes any notice of it. There’s such a thing, gentlemen, as getting hearts under false pretences. There’s such a thing as a man’s stealing a wife.

“I speak with feeling on this subject, for I had an opportunity of seeing what Mrs. Jedwort had to put up with from a man no woman of her stamp could do anything but detest. She was the patientest creature you ever saw. She was even too patient. If I had been tied to such a cub, I think I should have cultivated the beautiful and benignant qualities of a wild-cat; there would have been one good fight, and one of us would have been living, and the other would have been dead, and that would have been the end of it. But Mrs. Jedwort bore and bore untold miseries, and a large number of children. She had had nine of these, and three were under the sod and six above it when Jedwort ran off with the meeting-house in the way I am going on to tell you. There was Maria, the oldest girl, a perfect picture of what her mother had been at nineteen. Then there were the two boys, Dave and Dan, fine young fellows, spite of their father. Then came Lottie, and Susie, and then Willie, a little four-year-old.

“It was amazing to see what the mother would do to keep her family looking decent with the little means she had. For Jedwort was the tightest screw ever you saw. It was avarice that had spoilt him, and came so near turning him into a beast. The boys used to say he grew so bent, looking in the dirt for pennies. That was true of his mind, if not of his body. He was a poor man, and a pretty respectable man, when he married his wife; but he had no sooner come into possession of a little property than he grew crazy for more. There are a good many men in the world, that nobody looks upon as monomaniacs, who are crazy in just that sort of way. They are all for laying up money, depriving themselves of comforts, and their families of the advantages of society and education, just to add a few dollars to their hoard every year; and

so they keep on till they die and leave it to their children, who would be much better off if a little more had been invested in the cultivation of their minds and manners, and less in stocks and bonds.

“Jedwort was just one of that class of men, although perhaps he carried the fault I speak of a little to excess. A dollar looked so big to him, and he held it so close, that at last he could n't see much of anything else. By degrees he lost all regard for decency and his neighbors' opinions. His children went barefoot, even after they got to be great boys and girls, because he was too mean to buy them shoes. It was pitiful to see a nice, interesting girl, like Maria, go about looking as she did, while her father was piling his money into the bank. She wanted to go to school and learn music, and be somebody ; but he would n't keep a hired girl, and so she was obliged to stay at home and do housework ; and she could no more have got a dollar out of him to pay for clothes and tuition, than you could squeeze sap out of a hoe-handle.

“The only way his wife could ever get anything new for the family was by stealing butter from her own dairy, and selling it behind his back. ‘You need n't say anything to Mr. Jedwort about this batch of butter,’ she would hint to the storekeeper ; ‘but you may hand the money to me, or I will take my pay in goods.’ In this way a new gown, or a piece of cloth for the boys' coats, or something else the family needed, would be smuggled into the house, with fear and trembling lest old Jedwort should make a row and find where the money came from.

“The house inside was kept neat as a pin ; but everything around it looked terribly shiftless. It was built originally in an ambitious style, and painted white. It had four tall front pillars, supporting the portion of the roof that came over the porch, — lifting up the eyebrows

of the house, if I may so express myself, and making it look as if it was going to sneeze. Half the blinds were off their hinges, and the rest flapped in the wind. The front doorstep had rotted away. The porch had once a good floor, but for years Jedwort had been in the habit of going to it whenever he wanted a board for the pig-pen, until not a bit of floor was left.

“But I began to tell about Jedwort leaning on the gate that morning. We had all noticed him; and as Dave and I brought in the milk, his mother asked, ‘What is your father planning now? Half the time he stands there, looking up the road; or else he’s walking up that way in a brown study.’

“‘He’s got his eye on the old meeting-house,’ says Dave, setting down his pail. ‘He has been watching it and walking round it, off and on, for a week.’

“That was the first intimation I had of what the old fellow was up to. But after breakfast he followed me out of the house, as if he had something on his mind to say to me.

“‘Stark,’ says he, at last, ‘you’ve always insisted on ’t that I was n’t an enterprisin’ man.’

“‘I insist on ’t still,’ says I; for I was in the habit of talking mighty plain to him, and joking him pretty hard sometimes. ‘If I had this farm, I’d show you enterprise. You would n’t see the hogs in the garden half the time, just for want of a good fence to keep ’em out. You would n’t see the very best strip of land lying waste, just for want of a ditch. You would n’t see that stone-wall by the road tumbling down year after year, till by and by you won’t be able to see it for the weeds and thistles.’

“‘Yes,’ says he, sarcastically, ‘ye’d lay out ten times as much money on the place as ye’d ever git back agin, I’ve no doubt. But I believe in economy.’

“That provoked me a little, and I said, ‘Economy! you’re one of the kind of men that’ll skin a flint for sixpence and spoil a jack-knife worth a shilling. You waste fodder and grain enough every three years to pay for a bigger barn, — to say nothing of the inconvenience.’

“‘Wal, Stark,’ says he, grinning and scratching his head, ‘I’ve made up my mind to have a bigger barn, if I have to steal one.’

“‘That won’t be the first thing you’ve stole, neither,’ says I.

“He flared up at that. ‘Stole?’ says he. ‘What did I ever steal?’

“‘Well, for one thing, the rails the freset last spring drifted off from Talcott’s land onto yours, and you grabbed: what was that but stealing?’

“‘That was luck. He could n’t swear to his rails. By the way, they’ll jest come in play now.’

“‘They’ve come in play already,’ says I. ‘They’ve gone on to the old fences all over the farm, and I could use a thousand more without making much show.’

“That’s ’cause you’re so dumbed extravagant with rails, as you are with everything else. A few loads can be spared from the fences here and there, as well as not. Harness up the team, boys, and git together enough to make about ten rods o’ zigzag, two rails high.’

“‘Two rails?’ says Dave, who had a healthy contempt for the old man’s narrow, contracted way of doing things. ‘What’s the good of such a fence as that?’

“‘It’ll be,’ says I, ‘like the single bar in music. When our old singing-master asked his class once what a single bar was, Bill Wilkins spoke up and said, “It’s a bar that horses and cattle jump over, and pigs and sheep run under.” What do you expect to keep out with two rails?’

“‘The *law*, boys, the *law*,’ says Jedwort. ‘I know

what I'm about. I'll make a fence the *law* can't run under nor jump over; and I don't care a cuss for the cattle and pigs. You git the rails, and I'll rip some boards off 'm the pig-pen to make stakes.'

" 'Boards a'n't good for nothin' for stakes,' says Dave. 'Besides, none can't be spared from the pig-pen.'

" 'I'll have boards enough in a day or two for forty pig-pens,' says Jedwort. 'Bring along the rails and dump 'em out in the road for the present, and say nothin' to nobody.'

" We got the rails, and he made his stakes; and right away after dinner he called us out. 'Come, boys,' says he, 'now we'll astonish the natives.'

" The wagon stood in the road, with the last jag of rails still on it. Jedwort piled on his stakes, and threw on the crowbar and axe, while we were hitching up the team.

" 'Now, drive on, Stark,' says he.

" 'Yes; but where shall I drive to?'

" 'To the old meetin'-house,' says Jedwort, trudging on ahead.

" The old meeting-house stood on an open common, at the north-east corner of his farm. A couple of cross-roads bounded it on two sides; and it was bounded on the other two by Jedwort's overgrown stone wall. It was a square, old-fashioned building, with a low steeple, that had a belfry, but no bell in it, and with a high, square pulpit and high, straight-backed pews inside. It was now some time since meetings had been held there; the old society that used to meet there having separated, one division of it building a fashionable chapel in the North Village, and the other a fine new church at the Centre.

" Now, the peculiarity about the old church property was, that nobody had any legal title to it. A log meeting-house had been built there when the country was first settled and land was of no account. In the course of time

that was torn down, and a good framed house put up in its place. As it belonged to the whole community, no title, either to the house or land, was ever recorded; and it was n't until after the society dissolved that the question came up as to how the property was to be disposed of. While the old deacons were carefully thinking it over, Jed-wort was on hand, to settle it by putting in his claim.

“‘Now, boys,’ says he, ‘ye see what I’m up to.’

“‘Yes,’ says I, provoked as I could be at the mean trick, ‘and I knew it was some such mischief all along. You never show any enterprise, as you call it, unless it is to get the start of a neighbor. Then you are wide awake; then you are busy as the Devil in a gale of wind.’

“‘But what *are* you up to, pa?’ says Dan, who did n't see the trick yet.

“‘The old man says, ‘I’m goin’ to fence in the rest part of my farm.’

“‘What rest part?’

“‘This part that never was fenced; the old meetin’-house common.’

“‘But, pa,’ says Dave, disgusted as I was, ‘you’ve no claim on that.’

“‘Wal, if I ha’n’t, I’ll make a claim. Give me the crowbar. Now, here’s the corner, nigh as I can squint’; and he stuck the bar into the ground. ‘Make a fence to here from the wall, both sides.’

“‘Sho, pa!’ says Dan, looking bewildered; ‘ye a’n’t goin’ to fence in the old meetin’-house, be ye?’

“‘That’s jest what I’m goin’ to do. Go and git some big stuns from the wall, — the biggest ye can find, to rest the corners of the fence on. String the rails along by the road, Stark, and go for another load. Don’t stand gawp-in’ there!’

“‘*Gawpin’?*’ says I; ‘it’s enough to make anybody

gawp. You do beat all the critters I ever had to deal with. Have n't ye disgraced your family enough already, without stealing a meeting-house ?'

" 'How have I disgraced my family ?' says he.

"Then I put it to him. 'Look at your children ; it's all your wife can do to prevent 'em from growing up in rags and dirt and ignorance, because you are too close-fisted to clothe 'em decently or send 'em to school. Look at your house and yard. To see an Irishman's shanty in such a condition seems appropriate enough, but a genteel place, a house with pillars, run down and gone to seed like that, is an eyesore to the community. Then look at your wife. You never would have had any property to mismanage, if it had n't been for her ; and see the way ye show your gratitude for it. You won't let her go into company, nor have company at home ; you won't allow a hired girl in the house, but she and Maria have to do all the drudgery. You make perfect slaves of 'em. I swear, if 't wa'n't for your wife, I would n't work for you an hour longer ; but she's the best woman in the world, after all you've done to break her spirit, and I hate to leave her.'

"The old fellow squirmed, and wrenched the crowbar in the ground, then snarled back : 'Yes ! you're waitin' for me to die ; then you mean to step into my shoes.'

" 'I hope you'll leave a decenter pair than them you've got on, if I'm to step into 'em,' says I.

" 'One thing about it,' says he, 'she won't have ye.'

" 'I should think,' says I, 'a woman that would marry you would have 'most anybody.'

"So we had it back and forth, till by and by he left me to throw off the rails, and went to show the boys how to build the fence.

" 'Look here,' says he ; 'jest put a thunderin' big stun to each corner ; then lay your rail on ; then drive your

pair of stakes over it like a letter X.' He drove a pair. 'Now put on your rider. There's your letter X, ridin' one length of rails and carryin' another. That's what I call puttin' yer alphabet to a practical use; and I say there a'n't no sense in havin' any more edication than ye *can* put to a practical use. I've larnin' enough to git along in the world; and if my boys have as much as I've got, they'll git along. Now work s pry, for there comes Deacon Talcott.'

" 'Wal, wal!' says the Deacon, coming up, puffing with excitement; 'what ye doin' to the old meetin'-house?'

" 'Wal,' says Jedwort, driving away at his stakes, and never looking up, 'I've been considerin' some time what I should do with 't, and I've concluded to make a barn on 't.'

" 'Make a barn! make a barn!' cries the Deacon. 'Who give ye liberty to make a barn of the house of God?'

" 'Nobody; I take the liberty. Why should n't I do what I please with my own prop'ty?'

" 'Your own property, — what do ye mean? 'T a'n't your meetin'-house.'

" 'Whose is 't, if 't a'n't mine?' says Jedwort, lifting his turtle's head from between his horizontal shoulders, and grinning in the Deacon's face.

" 'It belongs to the society,' says the Deacon.

" 'But the s'ciety's pulled up stakes and gone off.'

" 'It belongs to individooals of the society, — to individooals.'

" 'Wal, I'm an individooal,' says Jedwort.

" 'You! you never went to meetin' here a dozen times in your life!'

" 'I never did have my share of the old meetin'-house, that's a fact,' says Jedwort; 'but I'll make it up now.'

" 'But what are ye fencin' up the common for?' says the Deacon.

“‘It’ll make a good calf-pastur’. I’ve never had my share o’ the vally o’ that, either. I’ve let my neighbors’ pigs and critters run on ’t long enough ; and now I ’m jest goin’ to take possession o’ my own.’

“‘Your own !’ says the Deacon, in perfect consternation. ‘You ’ve no deed on ’t.’

“‘Wal, have you?’

“‘No — but — the society —’

“‘The s’ciety, I tell ye,’ says Jedwort, holding his head up longer than I ever knew him to hold it up at a time, and grinning all the while in Talcott’s face, — ‘the s’ciety is split to pieces. There a’n’t no s’ciety now, — any more ’n a pig’s a pig arter you ’ve butchered and e’t it. You ’ve e’t the pig amongst ye, and left me the pen. The s’ciety never had a deed o’ this ’ere prop’ty ; and no man never had a deed o’ this ’ere prop’ty. My wife’s gran’daddy, when he took up the land here, was a good-natered sort of man, and he allowed a corner on ’t for his neighbors to put up a temp’rary meetin’-house. That was finally used up, — the kind o’ preachin’ they had them days was enough to use up in a little time any house that wa’n’t fire-proof ; and when that was preached to pieces, they put up another shelter in its place. This is it. And now ’t the land a’n’t used no more for the puppose ’t was lent for, it goes back nat’rally to the estate ’t was took from, and the buildin’s along with it.’

“‘That ’s all a sheer fabrication,’ says the Deacon. ‘This land was never a part of what ’s now your farm, any more than it was a part of mine.’

“‘Wal,’ says Jedwort, ‘I look at it in my way, and you ’ve a perfect right to look at it in your way. But I ’m goin’ to make sure o’ my way, by puttin’ a fence round the hull concern.’

“‘And you ’re usin’ some of my rails for to do it with !’ says the Deacon.

“ ‘Can you swear ’t they ’re your rails?’

“ ‘Yes, I can; they ’re rails the freshet carried off from my farm last spring, and landed onto yourn.’

“ ‘So I ’ve heard ye say. But can you swear to the partic’lar rails? Can you swear, for instance, ’t this ’ere is your rail? or this ’ere one?’

“ ‘No; I can’t swear to precisely them two, — but — ’

“ ‘Can you swear to these two? or to any one or two?’ says Jedwort. ‘No, ye can’t. Ye can swear to the lot in general, but you can’t swear to any partic’lar rail, and that kind o’ swearin’ won’t stand law, Deacon Talcott. I don’t boast of bein’ an edicated man, but I know suthin’ o’ what law is, and when I know it, I dror a line there, and I toe that line, and I make my neighbors toe that line, Deacon Talcott. Nine p’int of the law is possession, and I ’ll have possession o’ this ’ere house and land by fencin’ on ’t in; and though every man ’t comes along should say these ’ere rails belong to them, I ’ll fence it in with these ’ere very rails.’

“ Jedwort said this, wagging his obstinate old head, and grinning with his face turned up pugnaciously at the Deacon; then went to work again as if he had settled the question, and did n’t wish to discuss it any further.

“ As for Talcott, he was too full of wrath and boiling indignation to answer such a speech. He knew that Jedwort had managed to get the start of him with regard to the rails, by mixing a few of his own with those he had stolen, so that nobody could tell ’em apart; and he saw at once that the meeting-house was in danger of going the same way, just for want of an owner to swear out a clear title to the property. He did just the wisest thing when he swallowed his vexation, and hurried off to alarm the leading men of the two societies, and to consult a lawyer.

“ ‘He ’ll stir up the old town like a bumble-bee’s nest,’

says Jedwort. 'Hurry up, boys, or there'll be a buzzin' round our ears 'fore we git through!'

"'I wish ye would n't, pa!' says Dave. "'Why don't we 'tend to our own business, and be decent, like other folks? I'm sick of this kind of life.'

"'Quit it, then,' says Jedwort.

"'Do you tell me to quit it?' says Dave, dropping the end of a rail he was handling.

"'Yes, I do; and do it dumbed quick, if ye can't show a proper respect to your father!'

"Dave turned white as a sheet, and he trembled as he answered back, 'I should be glad to show you respect, if you was a man I could feel any respect for.'

"At that, Jedwort caught hold of the iron bar that was sticking in the ground, where he had been making a hole for a stake, and pulled away at it. 'I'll make a stake-hole in you!' says he. 'It's enough to have a sassy hired man round, without bein' jawed by one's own children!'

"Dave was out of reach by the time the bar came out of the ground.

"'Come here, you villain!' says the old man.

"'I'd rather be excused,' says Dave, backing off. 'I don't want any stake-holes made in me to-day. You told me to quit, and I'm going to. You may steal your own meeting-houses in future; I won't help.'

"There was a short race. Dave's young legs proved altogether too smart for the old waddler's, and he got off. Then Jedwort, coming back, wheezing and sweating, with his iron bar, turned savagely on me.

"'I've a good notion to tell you to go too!'

"'Very well, why don't ye?' says I. 'I'm ready.'

"'There's no livin' with ye, ye're gittin' so dumbed sassy! What I keep ye for is a mystery to me.'

"'No, it a'n't; you keep me because you can't get an-

other man to fill my place. You put up with my sass for the money I bring ye in.'

"'Hold your yawp,' says he, 'and go and git another load of rails. If ye see Dave, tell him to come back to work.'

"I did see Dave, but, instead of telling him to go back, I advised him to put out from the old home and get his living somewhere else. His mother and Maria agreed with me; and when the old man came home that night, Dave was gone.

"When I got back with my second load, I found the neighbors assembling to witness the stealing of the old meeting-house, and Jedwort was answering their remonstrances.

"'A meetin'-house is a respectable kind o' prop'ty to have round,' says he. 'The steeple 'll make a good show behind my house. When folks ride by, they 'll stop and look, and say, "There's a man keeps a private meetin'-house of his own." I can have preachin' in't, too, if I want. I'm able to hire a preacher of my own, or I can preach myself and save the expense.'

"Of course, neither sarcasm nor argument could have any effect on such a man. As the neighbors were going away, Jedwort shouted after 'em: 'Call agin. Glad to see ye. There 'll be more sport in a few days, when I take the dumbbed thing away.' (The dumbbed thing was the meeting-house.) 'I invite ye all to see the show. Free gratis. It 'll be good as a circus, and a 'tarnal sight cheaper. The women can bring their knittin', and the gals their everlastin' tattin'. As it 'll be a pious kind o' show, bein' it's a meetin'-house, guess I 'll have notices gi'n out from the pulpits the Sunday afore.'

"The common was fenced in by sundown; and the next day Jedwort had over a house-mover from the North Vil-

lage to look and see what could be done with the building. 'Can ye snake it over, and drop it back of my house?' says he.

"'It'll be a hard job,' says old Bob, 'without you tear down the steeple fust.'

"But Jedwort said, 'What's a meetin'-house 'thout a steeple? I've got my heart kind o' set on that steeple, and I'm bound to go the hull hog on this 'ere concern, now I've begun.'

"'I vow,' says Bob, examining the timbers, 'I won't warrant but what the old thing 'll all tumble down.'

"'I'll resk it.'

"'Yes; but who'll resk the lives of me and my men?'

"'O, you'll see if it's re'ly goin' to tumble, and look out. I'll engage 't me and my boys 'll do the most dangerous part of the work. Dumbled if I would n't agree to ride in the steeple and ring the bell, if there was one.'

"I've never heard that the promised notices were read from the pulpits; but it was n't many days before Bob came over again, bringing with him this time his screws and ropes and rollers, his men and timbers, horse and capstan; and at last the old house might have been seen on its travels.

"It was an exciting time all around. The societies found that Jedwort's fence gave him the first claim to house and land, unless a regular siege of the law was gone through to beat him off, — and then it might turn out that he would beat them. Some said fight him; some said let him be, — the thing a'n't worth going to law for; and so, as the leading men could n't agree as to what should be done, nothing was done. That was just what Jedwort had expected, and he laughed in his sleeve while Bob and his boys screwed up the old meeting-house, and got their beams under it, and set it on rollers, and slued it

around, and slid it on the timbers laid for it across into Jedwort's field, steeple foremost, like a locomotive on a track.

"It was a trying time for the women-folks at home. Maria had declared that, if her father did persist in stealing the meeting-house, she would not stay a single day after it, but would follow Dave.

"That touched me pretty close, for, to tell the truth, it was rather more Maria than her mother that kept me at work for the old man. 'If you go,' says I, 'then there is no object for me to stay; I shall go too.'

"'That's what I supposed,' says she; 'for there's no reason in the world why you should stay. But then Dan will go; and who'll be left to take sides with mother? That's what troubles me. O, if she could only go too! But she won't; and she couldn't if she would, with the other children depending on her. Dear, dear! what shall we do?'

"The poor girl put her head on my shoulder, and cried; and if I should own up to the truth, I suppose I cried a little too. For where's the man that can hold a sweet woman's head on his shoulder, while she sobs out her trouble, and he has n't any power to help her— who, I say, can do any less, under such circumstances, than drop a tear or two for company?

"'Never mind; don't hurry,' says Mrs. Jedwort. 'Be patient, and wait awhile, and it'll all turn out right, I'm sure.'

"'Yes, you always say, "Be patient, and wait!"' says Maria, brushing back her hair. 'But, for my part, I'm tired of waiting, and my patience has given out long ago. We can't always live in this way, and we may as well make a change now as ever. But I can't bear the thought of going and leaving you.'

“Here the two younger girls came in ; and, seeing that crying was the order of the day, they began to cry ; and when they heard Maria talk of going, they declared they would go ; and even little Willie, the four-year-old, began to howl.

“ ‘There, there ! Maria ! Lottie ! Susie !’ said Mrs. Jedwort, in her calm way ; ‘Willie, hush up ! I don’t know what we are to do ; but I feel that something is going to happen that will show us the right way, and we are to wait. Now go and wash the dishes, and set the cheese.’

“That was just after breakfast, the second day of the moving ; and sure enough, something like what she prophesied did happen before another sun.

“The old frame held together pretty well till along toward night, when the steeple showed signs of seceding. ‘There she goes ! She’s falling now !’ sung out the boys, who had been hanging around all day in hopes of seeing the thing tumble.

“The house was then within a few rods of where Jedwort wanted it ; but Bob stopped right there, and said it was n’t safe to haul it another inch. ‘That steeple’s bound to come down, if we do,’ says he.

“ ‘Not by a dumber sight, it a’n’t,’ says Jedwort. ‘Them cracks a’n’t nothin’ ; the j’int’s is all firm yit.’ He wanted Bob to go up and examine ; but Bob shook his head, — the concern looked too shaky. Then he told me to go up ; but I said I had n’t lived quite long enough, and had a little rather be smoking my pipe on *terra firma*. Then the boys began to hoot. ‘Dumber if ye a’n’t all a set of cowards,’ says he. ‘I’ll go up myself.’

“We waited outside while he climbed up inside. The boys jumped on the ground to jar the steeple, and make it fall. One of them blew a horn, — as he said, to bring down the old Jericho, — and another thought he’d help

things along by starting up the horse, and giving the building a little wrench. But Bob put a stop to that; and finally out came a head from the belfry window. It was Jedwort, who shouted down to us: 'There a'n't a j'int or brace gin out. Start the hoss, and I'll ride. Pass me up that 'ere horn, and —'

"Just then there came a cracking and loosening of timbers; and we that stood nearest had only time to jump out of the way, when down came the steeple crashing to the ground, with Jedwort in it."

"I hope it killed the cuss," said one of the village storytellers.

"Worse than that," replied my friend; "it just cracked his skull, — not enough to put an end to his miserable life, but only to take away what little sense he had. We got the doctors to him, and they patched up his broken head; and, by George, it made me mad to see the fuss the women-folks made over him. It would have been my way to let him die; but they were as anxious and attentive to him as if he had been the kindest husband and most indulgent father that ever lived; for that's women's style: they're unreasoning creatures.

"Along towards morning, we persuaded Mrs. Jedwort, who had been up all night, to lie down a spell and catch a little rest, while Maria and I sat up and watched with the old man. All was still except our whispers and his heavy breathing; there was a lamp burning in the next room; when all of a sudden a light shone into the windows, and about the same time we heard a roaring and crackling sound. We looked out, and saw the night all lighted up, as if by some great fire. As it appeared to be on the other side of the house, we ran to the door, and there what did we see but the old meeting-house all in flames. Some fellows had set fire to it to spite Jedwort.

It must have been burning some time inside ; for when we looked out the flames had burst through the roof.

“As the night was perfectly still, except a light wind blowing away from the other buildings on the place, we raised no alarm, but just stood in the door and saw it burn. And a glad sight it was to us, you may be sure. I just held Maria close to my side, and told her that all was well, — it was the best thing that could happen. ‘O yes,’ says she, ‘it seems to me as though a kind Providence was burning up his sin and shame out of our sight.’

“I had never yet said anything to her about marriage, — for the time to come at that had never seemed to arrive ; but there ’s nothing like a little excitement to bring things to a focus. You ’ve seen water in a tumbler just at the freezing-point, but not exactly able to make up its mind to freeze, when a little jar will set the crystals forming, and in a minute what was liquid is ice. It was the shock of events that night that touched my life into crystals, — not of ice, gentlemen, by any manner of means.

“After the fire had got along so far that the meeting-house was a gone case, an alarm was given, probably by the very fellows that set it, and a hundred people were on the spot before the thing had done burning.

“Of course these circumstances put an end to the breaking up of the family. Dave was sent for, and came home. Then, as soon as we saw that the old man’s brain was injured so that he was n’t likely to recover his mind, the boys and I went to work and put that farm through a course of improvement it would have done your eyes good to see. The children were sent to school, and Mrs. Jedwort had all the money she wanted now to clothe them, and to provide the house with comforts, without stealing her own butter. Jedwort was a burden ; but, in spite of him, that was just about the happiest family, for the next four years, that ever lived on this planet.

“Jedwort soon got his bodily health, but I don't think he knew one of us again after his hurt. As near as I could get at his state of mind, he thought he had been changed into some sort of animal. He seemed inclined to take me for a master, and for four years he followed me around like a dog. During that time he never spoke, but only whined and growled. When I said, ‘Lie down,’ he'd lie down; and when I whistled he'd come.

“I used sometimes to make him work; and certain simple things he would do very well, as long as I was by. One day I had a jag of hay to get in; and, as the boys were away, I thought I'd have him load it. I pitched it on to the wagon about where it ought to lie, and looked to him only to pack it down. There turned out to be a bigger load than I had expected, and the higher it got, the worse the shape of it, till finally, as I was starting it towards the barn, off it rolled, and the old man with it, head foremost.

“He struck a stone heap, and for a moment I thought he was killed. But he jumped up and spoke for the first time. ‘*I'll blow it,*’ says he, finishing the sentence he had begun four years before, when he called for the horn to be passed up to him.

“I could n't have been much more astonished if one of the horses had spoken. But I saw at once that there was an expression in Jedwort's face that had n't been there since his tumble in the belfry; and I knew that, as his wits had been knocked out of him by one blow on the head, so another blow had knocked 'em in again.

“‘Where's Bob?’ says he, looking all around.

“‘Bob?’ says I, not thinking at first who he meant. ‘O, Bob is dead, — he has been dead these three years.’

“Without noticing my reply, he exclaimed: ‘Where did all that hay come from? Where's the old meetin'-house?’

“‘Don’t you know?’ says I. ‘Some rogues set fire to it the night after you got hurt, and burnt it up.’

“‘He seemed then just beginning to realize that something extraordinary had happened.

“‘Stark,’ says he, ‘what’s the matter with ye? You’re changed.’

“‘Yes,’ says I, ‘I wear my beard now, and I’ve grown older!’

“‘Dumbed if ’t a’n’t odd!’ says he. ‘Stark, what in thunder’s the matter with *me*?’

“‘You’ve had meeting-house on the brain for the past four years,’ says I; ‘that’s what’s the matter.’

“‘It was some time before I could make him understand that he had been out of his head, and that so long a time had been a blank to him.

“‘Then he said, ‘Is this my farm?’

“‘Don’t you know it?’ says I.

“‘It looks more slicked up than ever it used to,’ says he.

“‘Yes,’ says I; ‘and you’ll find everything else on the place slicked up in about the same way.’

“‘Where’s Dave?’ says he.

“‘Dave has gone to town to see about selling the wool.’

“‘Where’s Dan?’

“‘Dan’s in college. He takes a great notion to medicine; and we’re going to make a doctor of him.’

“‘Whose house is that?’ says he, as I was taking him home.

“‘No wonder you don’t know it,’ says I. ‘It has been painted, and shingled, and had new blinds put on; the gates and fences are all in prime condition; and that’s a new barn we put up a couple of years ago.’

“‘Where does the money come from, to make all these improvements?’

“‘It comes off the place,’ says I. ‘We have n’t run in

debt the first cent for anything, but we've made the farm more profitable than it ever was before.'

" 'That *my* house?' he repeated wonderingly, as we approached it. 'What sound is that?'

" 'That's Lottie practising her lesson on the piano.'

" 'A pianer in my house?' he muttered. 'I can't stand that!' He listened. 'It sounds pooty, though!'

" 'Yes, it does sound pretty, and I guess you'll like it. How does the place suit you?'

" 'It *looks* pooty.' He started. 'What young lady is that?'

" 'It was Lottie, who had left her music, and stood by the window.'

" 'My dahter! ye don't say! Dumbed if she a'n't a mighty nice gal.'

" 'Yes,' says I; 'she takes after her mother.'

" 'Just then Susie, who heard talking, ran to the door.'

" 'Who's that agin?' says Jedwort.

" 'I told him.'

" 'Wal, *she's* a mighty nice-lookin' gal!'

" 'Yes,' says I, '*she* takes after her mother.'

" 'Little Willie, now eight years old, came out of the wood-shed with a bow-and-arrow in his hand, and stared like an owl, hearing his father talk.'

" 'What boy is that?' says Jedwort. And when I told him, he muttered, 'He's an ugly-looking brat!'

" 'He's more like his father,' says I.

" 'The truth is, Willie was such a fine boy the old man was afraid to praise him, for fear I'd say of him, as I'd said of the girls, that he favored his mother.'

" 'Susie ran back and gave the alarm; and then out came mother, and Maria with her baby in her arms, — for I forgot to tell you that we had been married now nigh on to two years.'

“ Well, the women-folks were as much astonished as I had been when Jedwort first spoke, and a good deal more delighted. They drew him into the house ; and I am bound to say he behaved remarkably well. He kept looking at his wife, and his children, and his grandchild, and the new paper on the walls, and the new furniture, and now and then asking a question or making a remark.

“ ‘ It all comes back to me now,’ says he at last. ‘ I thought I was living in the moon, with a superior race of human bein’s ; and this is the place, and you are the people.’

“ It was n’t more than a couple of days before he began to pry around, and find fault, and grumble at the expense ; and I saw there was danger of things relapsing into something like their former condition. So I took him one side, and talked to him.

“ ‘ Jedwort,’ says I, ‘ you ’re like a man raised from the grave. You was the same as buried to your neighbors, and now they come and look at you as they would at a dead man come to life. To you, it ’s like coming into a new world ; and I ’ll leave it to you now, if you don’t rather like the change from the old state of things to what you see around you to-day. You ’ve seen how the family affairs go on, — how pleasant everything is, and how we all enjoy ourselves. You hear the piano, and like it ; you see your children sought after and respected, — your wife in finer health and spirits than you ’ve ever known her since the day she was married ; you see industry and neatness everywhere on the premises ; and you ’re a beast if you don’t like all that. In short, you see that our management is a great deal better than yours ; and that we beat you, even in the matter of economy. Now, what I want to know is this : whether you think you ’d like to fall into our way of living, or return like a hog to your wallow.’

“ ‘I don’t say but what I like your way of livin’ very well,’ he grumbled.

“ ‘Then,’ says I, ‘you must just let us go ahead, as we have been going ahead. Now ’s the time for you to turn about and be a respectable man, like your neighbors. Just own up, and say you ’ve not only been out of your head the past four years, but that you ’ve been more or less out of your head the last four-and-twenty years. But say you ’re in your right mind now, and prove it by acting like a man in his right mind. Do that, and I ’m with you ; we ’re all with you. But go back to your old dirty ways, and you go alone. Now I sha’ n’t let you off till you tell me what you mean to do.’

“ He hesitated some time, then said, ‘Maybe you ’re about right, Stark ; you and Dave and the old woman seem to be doin’ pooty well, and I guess I ’ll let you go on.’ ”

Here my friend paused, as if his story was done ; when one of the villagers asked, “About the land where the old meetin’-house stood, — what ever was done with that ?”

“That was appropriated for a new school-house ; and there my little shavers go to school.”

“And old Jedwort, is he alive yet ?”

“Both Jedwort and his wife have gone to that country where meanness and dishonesty have a mighty poor chance, — where the only investments worth much are those recorded in the Book of Life. Mrs. Jedwort was rich in that kind of stock ; and Jedwort’s account, I guess, will compare favorably with that of some respectable people, such as we all know. I tell ye, my friends,” continued my fellow-traveller, “there’s many a man, both in the higher and lower ranks of life, that ’t would do a deal of good, say nothing of the mercy ’t would be to their fam-

ilies, just to knock 'em on the head, and make Nebuchadnezzars of 'em, — then, after they 'd been turned out to grass a few years, let 'em come back again, and see how happy folks have been, and how well they have got along without 'em.

“I carry on the old place now,” he added. “The younger girls are married off; Dan's a doctor in the North Village; and as for Dave, he and I have struck ile. I'm going out to look at our property now.”

THE END.

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