

The
Premier
and the
Painter



Chicago, November 3, 1898.

Mr. Ray Clarke Rose,

Chicago Record.

Dear Mr. Rose:-

Neither my verses nor such little plays as I
have written have yet been collected.

I am obliged to you for your very clever verses.

Yours sincerely,

Langwell

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MR. ZANGWILL'S WORKS.

THE PREMIER & THE PAINTER

By I. ZANGWILL & LOUIS COWEN.

THIRD EDITION, Crown 8vo., Cloth, 6s.

The Cambridge (University) Review : That the book will have readers in a future generation we do not doubt, for there is much in it that is of lasting merit.

The Echo : We are glad to see that a new and popular edition has appeared of Mr. Freeman Bell's fantastic romance, 'The Premier and the Painter.' Long is, of course, a relative term, and in spite of its five hundred and two very closely printed pages, Mr. Bell's work is anything but tedious. It is one of the cleverest books of the day. What can be better than the description of the Premier's breakfast party? The book contains as much wit and humour as would serve for outfit to half-a-dozen ordinary scribes.

The Graphic : It might be worth the while of some industrious and capable person with plenty of leisure to reproduce in a volume of reasonable size the epigrams and other good things witty and serious which 'The Premier and the Painter' contains. There are plenty of them, and many are worth noting and remembering.

St. James's Gazette : The diffusion of politics and the spread of what passes for education would make many strange things possible in these days; and no one can maintain that the central idea of Mr. Bell's fantastic but ingenious and amusing romance is altogether beyond the bounds of what might happen. Mr. Bell's satire hits all round with much impartiality; while one striking situation succeeds another till the reader is altogether dazzled. The story is full of life and 'go' and brightness, and will well repay perusal.

The Athenæum : In spite of its close print and its five hundred pages 'The Premier and the Painter' is not very difficult to read. To speak of it, however, is difficult. It is the sort of book that demands yet defies quotation for one thing; and for another it is the sort of book the description of which as 'very clever' is at once inevitable and inadequate. In some ways it is original enough to be a law unto itself, and withal as attractive in its whimsical, wrong-headed way, as at times it is tantalising, bewildering, even tedious. The theme is politics and politicians, and the treatment, while for the most part satirical and prosaic, is often touched with sentiment, and sometimes even with a fantastic kind of poetry. The several episodes of the story are wildly fanciful in themselves and are clumsily connected; but the streak of humorous cynicism which shows through all of them is both curious and pleasing. Again, it has to be claimed for the author that—as is shown to admiration by his presentation of the excellent Mrs. Dawe and her cookshop—he is capable, when he pleases, of insight and observation of a high order, and therewith of a masterly sobriety of tone. But he cannot be depended upon for the length of a single page; he seeks his effects and his material when and where he pleases. In some respects his method is not, perhaps, altogether unlike Lord Beaconsfield's. To our thinking, however, he is strong enough to go alone, and to go far.

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The Morning Post : 'The Premier and the Painter' is not 'everyone's book.' Its admirers will probably be few but in its way there are not many at the same time so paradoxical and so clever. The story is described as a 'fantastic romance,' and, indeed, fantasy reigns supreme from the first to the last of its pages. Mr. Bell's work is especially tantalising, since to do it any sort of justice it would require to be quoted with a frequency that a limited space renders impossible. It relates the history of our time with humour and well-aimed sarcasm. All the most prominent characters of the day, whether political or otherwise, come in for notice. The identity of the leading politicians is but thinly veiled, while many celebrities appear *in propria persona*. Both the 'Premier' and 'Painter' now and again find themselves in the most critical situations. Certainly this is not a story that he who runs may read, but it is cleverly original, and often lightened by bright flashes of wit.

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THE
PREMIER AND THE PAINTER

A Fantastic Romance

BY
I. ZANGWILL
AND
LOUIS COWEN



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1893

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THE ENGLISH AND THE GERMANS

BY

THIRD EDITION.

FIRST EDITION, March 1888.
SECOND EDITION, June, 1889.



THE ENGLISH AND THE GERMANS

1889

PREFACE.

IN the writing of History we may distinguish roughly three methods; the first, of Picturesque or Prejudiced Narration; the second, of Philosophic Narration; and the third, of Scientific or Factual Narration; and, though all have co-existed, the three methods have—broadly speaking—been sequent in their appearance on the scientific platform.

By classifying histories according to their respective methods, three species are obtained: the first is composed of those works which contain all the essentials of Historiography except the facts; the second comprises all works in which historical facts are exhibited as containing a philosophy of their own, or proving that of the writer; the third consists of those works which present Truth naked and unashamed.

But Scientific Narration has hitherto lacked extreme Specialization, and it is in the thorough application of Specialization to History that what little originality the present work may have consists. Though no greater mistake could be made than to confound this minute study of a brief episode in the career of the Elder Floppington with that extinct literary type, the "historical romance," yet the blunder is excusable when it is considered that the new method attempted by the present work is simply a *novel* method of writing history, and that real personages and real events are for the first time treated with the fulness of domestic and political detail hitherto accorded only to the creations of fiction. The advantages of this innovation are obvious. So long as historical figures are not shown in their work-a-day environment, in all their manifold relations to their fellow-creatures of every grade, so long will it remain impossible to understand the work-a-day motives which have made our national history what it is.

The writer need say little of the Herculean labour involved in thus recording the history of almost a quarter of a year, and he cannot hope that his existence will be prolonged sufficiently to enable him to complete his projected *magnum opus*, dealing with

PREFACE.

eleven-and-a-half days of what is usually considered a humdrum and uneventful year. The subjoined list of authorities includes less than a hundredth part of the volumes and newspapers consulted by him, and is intended chiefly as a guide to those readers whom the present work may stimulate to extend their acquaintance with a most fascinating period of our annals.

The writer may, without undue immodesty, claim that for more than twenty years he has been trying to familiarize himself with that epoch, to impregnate himself with its customs, its politics, and its literature—in a word, to *live* in it—a task he has found by no means easy; and if his work prove sufficiently graphic to charm one reader into the belief that he, too, is living in it, he will feel amply repaid for his long and dusty researches. He hopes that the footnotes will explain all phrases of any real difficulty; but, should he have overlooked any obscurities, he hopes the reader will do the same, and he promises to clear up all such in a future edition.

As he has throughout, and in the accompanying list, recognised his obligations to modern authors, it would be supererogatory to enumerate them here; but he cannot refrain from expressing his indebtedness to Charles Chesterfield, Esq., O.K., Rector of Grimsby University, for his kind revision of the whole work, his suggestion of numerous improvements, and especially for his aid in the preparation of the epitome, which is issued simultaneously with the present work as a compendium for schools and colleges.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

IN thanking the critics and the public for the cordial reception they have given this history, it is, perhaps, due to my readers to mention the ingenious theory of a recent writer in the *Old English Historical Review*, who, while praising my industry as a compiler, wonders my new facts did not lead me to see that the Premier and the Painter *exchanged places* (!). He explains away obvious inconsistencies by the further hypothesis of unforeseen temporarily-necessitated readoptions of their native (*sic*) rôles in Caps. v., vii., viii., and ix. of Book IV. The reviewer surely forgets how far-fetched and improbable all this is; and I am still content to present Truth naked of theory and unashamed.

J. F. B.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

THIS edition of what was, roughly speaking, "My First Book," differs only by a phrase or two from the original editions published under the joint pen-name of J. Freeman Bell. Although there is much of my own share of the work which I could not better to-day—for a writer does not always improve with age—there is more which I should like to alter; so much, in fact, that I have had to leave the text untouched, in order not to write a different book. After all, one owes some reverence to one's dead youth. I need scarcely say anything here of the genesis of this satirical, political, and philosophical fantasia, since I have so recently explained in the *Idler* how it grew under my hand out of a "Shilling Skit" which I planned with a friend, and which, through seven-eighths of the writing being left to me, evolved into an outlet for all the ferment and audacity of youth

"In the brave days when I was twenty-one."

From a practical point of view, the great mistake of the book is the sacrifice of lucidity to super-subtle satire by our reluctance to state straight out that the world-weary Premier and the ambitious House-Painter agreed to change places for a period, at the end of Cap. i.; that owing to an unexpected consequence of this compact the real Premier had to call upon Lady Harley to warn her against the love of his artisan double (Book IV., Cap. v.); while as a result of the further "unforeseen contingency" of the next Chapter, the Painter was compelled to go home again for a night to his mother's cookshop (Book IV., Caps. vii. and viii.)—just the very night of the second reading of his Female Franchise Bill, over which the real Premier was thus reluctantly forced to preside (Book IV. Cap. ix.). Missing these obvious points, many readers lost themselves in the labyrinth of resultant complications, though I still think the method of narration by indirect suggestion not without compensations for the subtle.

PREFACE.

In drawing up the main outlines, we thought the real Premier's trick of philosophic reverie, as contrasted with the go-ahead style of the working-man Premier, amply sufficient to tell the reader which was which, whenever either appeared. Surely Cowen, at least, was old enough to know better; not to expect any assistance from the audience. I cannot conclude without remarking on the shamelessness with which History has plagiarised from a romance conceived nearly a decade ago, or without thanking those critics and readers who on the first appearance of this book more than five years ago were generous in praise of the unknown "Freeman Bell." Dr. Nicoll has accused me of sneering at the late James Runciman, because in a leader in the *Family Herald* and elsewhere, he said that "The Premier and the Painter" was the most brilliant book of the generation. But Dr. Nicoll misunderstood my reference. I am deeply grateful to the dead man I never saw—he had courage, if not balanced judgment, and he did not wait till Mr. Bell was dead to praise him immoderately. I only regretted that the organs he praised him in were so uninfluential, that for long years after the publication of "the most brilliant book of the generation," I was the only editor with whom Mr. Bell's work was in request.

I. ZANGWILL.

LONDON, *July*, 1893.

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THE PREMIER AND THE PAINTER.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

WITH THE COGERS.

"SP'SHL *Hekker!* 'Ave the *Hekker*, sir! Dissensions in the Kabbernet!"

It was a dull evening in May; the sort of evening of which London appears to have a monopoly, which is not grudged it by the rest of the country. The almanacs, with one accord, and a unanimity worthy of better things, assured all who chose to look at them that the season called summer was about to dawn upon the metropolis. But Nature, in London at any rate, treats almanacs with contempt. A cold wind was blowing vigorously along the streets, making the diary-deluded pedestrian wish that he had brought his overcoat with him, and causing him to look enviously at those who had ignored the calendar. A drizzly rain was falling in an undecided, hesitating fashion, as if not comfortable in its mind as to its right to be where it was. The streets, nevertheless, were full of people hurrying to and fro; though but few of them stopped to buy the evening papers of the eager news-vendors, who shouted and displayed their contents bills with an ever-growing conviction of the inferiority of politics to other forms of crime. "Dissension in the Cabinet" might be printed in the biggest of type, with "rumour of" in the smallest; but the hurrying wayfarers wanted to get home. The ordinary Englishman might he fairly enough described as a political animal. It would be far more true than to describe him as a cooking animal, which some rash scientist has done. But in the year of disgrace with which this history deals, he was used to having his evening news'

fare highly spiced. Wars, and rumours of wars, had beguiled him into parting with stray coppers for the purchase of "specials" and "extra-do.;" and now such mild fare as family jars in the Cabinet failed miserably to tempt the "halfpennies" from their snug retreat in breeches-pockets.

Besides, the members of the Cabinet were continually disagreeing. Scarcely a day passed without the political atmosphere being darkened by reports that this, that, or the other Minister was about to resign. But none of them did. And so the indignant Briton began to feel that Ministers were playing it rather low upon him,* and made up his mind that the Ministry might hang together—figuratively, of course—or go to pieces, or do anything else it pleased, so long as it didn't impose any extra taxes, without his troubling himself in the least about the matter.

"*Hekker*, sir—just out sir, sp'shl, sir!" panted a youthful but leather-lunged street Arab, brandishing a copy of the evening paper in the face of a gentleman, who, with hat drawn down over his brows, and chin on breast, was walking slowly eastward, looking nervously about him at intervals, as if he feared recognition.

"What's in to-night, my lad?" he said, taking a paper of the youngster.

"Orful row at to-day's Kabbernet—reg'lar scrimmage, sir," replied the lad, with a grin.

"Anybody hurt?"

"They don't go at it with fists, sir. *Hekker*, yes, sir. But old Floppy'll have to give some on 'em the kick out, or else chuck up the sponge," was the reply, given with the air of conviction and superior knowledge characteristic of people talking on a subject of which their ignorance is almost phenomenal, if any degree of ignorance could fairly merit that adjective.

"I should let Floppy know, if I were you," said the stranger, with grim sarcasm, as he strode on, leaving the newspaper lad staring at him, and whistling contemplatively as he stared. Then muttering, "I've seen that mug afore," he dropped the contemplative whistle, and resumed the ear-splitting business cry.

"So Floppy had better kick some of them out or throw up the sponge. Easily said, my lad, easily said; but the doing of it—ay, there's the rub."

"What a night for May!" he murmured, as he drew his coat-collar higher up, and let his chin sink lower down. "Nature's as inconsistent as myself, but more permanent. I wonder whether the modern philosophy is right, and that even Nature is not unconscious. If so, to judge by myself, she must regret ever having

* It is worthy of remark that this phrase, now used by the gravest writers, was, at the period treated of, considered an American vulgarism. See last edition of Pugin's "History of Modern Idioms." The distich of Drychurch (who, with something of Pope's condensed brilliancy, combines not a little of his scurrility) will be fresh in every one's memory:

"For classic phrases, like patrician clans,
Owe birth to scoundrels and to harri-dans."

allowed mankind to evolve speech. That boy is right; the times are out of joint. Oh, cursed spite, that ever I was born to set them right! Even Hamlet hadn't a Cabinet to tackle, where every man is for himself, though all say they're for the State. The State's for them, rather," he chuckled.

This soliloquy, which wasn't rattled straight off, but ran disconnectedly and jerkily through the mind of the Unknown but not the Unknowable as he strode along the Strand, will ere this have let the discriminating reader into the secret of his identity. Mysteries are bores and best avoided. The gentleman was Floppy himself. "Floppy" was the abbreviation more or less affectionately used by all classes when speaking of the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington.

The Right Honourable Arnold Floppington was Premier of an Empire on which the sun never set, and in the centre of which it occasionally manifested evident indisposition to rise. He belonged to a family, whose members took to politics as a matter of course. A House of Commons might have existed without a member of the Floppington family on its benches; but the experiment was never tried. He belonged to one of the two great parties into which the State was divided. He was born a "little Conservative," and as years rolled on he became, in every sense of the term, a big one. Family connections, brilliant oratory, and, perhaps, the mutual jealousies of stronger if not abler men, had made him the leader of his party. By instinct and training he was an old-fashioned Tory, but being of a reflective turn of mind, he could not escape from living in a state of doubt, honest enough, it is true, but in which his enemies did not believe there lived more faith than in the accepted party creeds. And if his enemies doubted his honesty, his friends were not always sure of his sanity. Once at the epoch of a general election, his then opinions happened by a strange coincidence to be those of the majority of the electors, and very much to his own surprise he became Home Secretary in a Conservative Cabinet. But unfortunately the Minister's opinions were constantly in a state of flux, and so he had not held office long. And now when, having by his opposition brought about the defeat of the Reform Bill of the Liberals, he had with much hesitation consented to form an Administration, he still retained his old habits of conscientiousness, and was still liable to be tossed about on the "fell incensed points" of opposite opinions. Wherefore seeing that his colleagues had only one opinion, that it was better to be in office than in opposition, the reports of dissension in the Cabinet naturally had quite enough truth in them to deprive the morning papers of the pleasure of contradicting the evening ones.

The rain having stopped, the wind having ceased from troubling, and the hats being at rest, the unwonted calm caused him to look up from his reverie. He had reached that joint shrine of Thespis and Venus, the Gaiety Theatre. The notices "Stalls full," "Dress Circle full," attracted him. He smiled at the thought of the people whom he had found it so hard to govern, enjoying themselves, regardless of him and his government.

"Foolish theory of Hobbes," he thought, "that the Commonwealth is a gigantic man. In this case the head aches, while the legs dance. If the gigantic man's head ached like mine, the only dance his legs would care for would be the 'Danse Macabre.'"

He was now in Fleet Street, where he would have had a glorious view of St. Paul's, had it not been for the rapidly gathering shades of night, and the intervention of a railway bridge: a piece of barbarism which we, in our more æsthetic age and with our improved means of locomotion, can hardly comprehend.

Unthinkingly turning a corner, he found himself in a side street, and paused to look at a bill displayed in the window of a public-house. From it he learnt that the "Antient Society of Cogers" held their meetings there; that the meetings were open to the public, and that strangers were invited to take part in the discussions, which were on politics. "The Antient Society of Cogers" was well known; but the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington had never heard of it. The subject for debate, "The Events of the Week—Will Mountchapel resign?" attracted him and roused him from the train of thought into which he had fallen. To hear what that abstraction "the People" had to say on the great question of the day would be a novelty. He knew that in a sort of theoretical fashion, he and his Cabinet were supposed to carry out the wishes of "the People." But he also knew, that neither he nor his colleagues ever got to know at first hand *what* "the People" really said and thought. That only reached him after passing through many media, and being refracted out of all shape in the process.

"Haroun Alraschid be my guide," he murmured, as, without stopping to think of consequences, he walked boldly in.

He found himself in a long, narrow room, with a row of tables at each side, and another row down the centre. At these tables were seated some thirty or forty men, busily engaged in smoking and drinking. They were listening gravely, as belittled members of so ancient a Society, to a speaker who eked out the feebleness of his arguments by the violence of his gesticulations. At the end of the room sat the "Grand," whose duty it was to keep order, and see that no speaker exceeded the regulation time of twenty minutes; though when the speaker did not please those assembled, loud cries of "Time" were heard before the twenty minutes had expired. It was noticeable, moreover, that those who had most to say, never took long in saying it.

Dropping into a quiet corner seat, the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington seemed to realise what he had done. He might at any moment be recognised, as his portrait figured in the shop-windows side by side with those of the fashionable beauties; though it must be reluctantly admitted that it did not sell so well. Having gone so far however, he determined to see it out, and hear what treatment he and his colleagues would meet with. Hiding his face as much as possible by leaning it upon his hand, he called the waiter, and ordered a tankard of bitter. He had often dilated on the noble part that beverage had played in making the British

workman what he was : he had, when in opposition, objected to its being taxed ; he had done everything but taste it. After doing so, he determined to tell his Chancellor to tax chemicals in his next Budget.

Cries of "Time" roused the Premier from the fit of abstraction into which the People's beer had cast him. He looked up, not knowing what the cries might mean. He soon learnt they denoted that the audience had had enough of the gentleman who was addressing them, and after a peroration which failed to be heard above the din, the unfortunate debater subsided.

Scarcely had he done so when loud cries of "Floppy! Floppy!" resounded throughout the room. The Premier looked up, and felt himself turning pale. He had hoped he would not be recognised ; he had not for a moment thought that, if recognised, he would be thus addressed by the democracy. He had coquetted with democracy, it is true, but he never forgot that he was allied to Conservatism. Among his many changing veins of thought, democracy had found a place. But such democratic familiarity was like to make him an oligarch for ever.

Involuntarily he seized his hat, determined to leave the place, when loud cheers following the words "Mr. Chairman and gentlemen" made him pause. On the opposite side of the room, a plainly-dressed man had risen to address the assembly. The Premier rubbed his eyes. Was he dreaming ? For in this man, despite the obscuring difference of dress, he saw his fetch, his wraith, his double, his living image. The puzzle was solved. This, then, was "Floppy." The man's marvellous resemblance to himself had struck the habitués of the place, and hence they had playfully presented him with the name by which the Right Hon. Arnold Floppington was usually spoken of.

"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen," said the man in the dulcet high-pitched tones of the born orator, "I shall be very happy to discuss the question when I have finished discussing my supper." He pointed downward to his plate of bread and cheese, with the easy grace of a man sure of his position, and the burst of laughter and applause that followed the unconventional remark proved unmistakably that he was a prime favourite in the room. The rule of the alternation of speakers of opposite politics was even relaxed for the nonce, for as no Conservative ventured consciously to precede so satirical an opponent, a Radical was permitted to act as a stop-gap till the nonchalant Jack Dawe (for such was "Floppy's" real name) was ready to charm the expectant audience.

The Premier did not carry out his resolution of instant departure. He could not tear himself away. The scene had a weird fascination for him. His eyes rested, by an irresistible attraction, upon the remarkable lineaments of his double ; the features so strangely like his, but the whole face so alive with confident strength. The few words spoken by the man had moved him strangely—the same trumpet-like clearness of *timbre* which he himself commanded in moments of impassioned oratory, thrilled in the tones of his

wrath—and he felt himself chained to his seat by a morbid desire to hear what this almost mysterious being would say of him.

En attendant, the feeble diatribe of the stop-gap fell upon his patient ears ; but they were too hardened to tingle.

He heard, as he had often heard in the House of Commons, that everything he had done was wrong ; and cynically reflected that, if it were so, the doctrine of chances must have treated him shabbily. As moreover, he had, on certain points of detail, followed diametrically opposite policies, he felt there was a flaw somewhere or other ; but whether in him, in his opponents, or in Nature herself, he had never been able to determine satisfactorily. What gave him a good deal of rather melancholy amusement was to find that he was held responsible for everything, while his colleagues were quietly ignored. He knew it was perfectly constitutional, but as he had not unfrequently done little more than serve as the coloured glass through which the lights of his colleagues shone, he couldn't resist appreciating the joke. He grew somewhat more interested when the speaker touched upon his want of decision.

"If the Prime Minister," he thundered forth, "doesn't know what he wants, we know what we don't want—and that's him ! Why doesn't he make up his mind ?"

"If it were only as easy as making up one's face," muttered the Premier disconsolately.

"How much longer is this weathercock going to tax our patience ?"

A voice with a strong Irish brogue :

"Hear, hear ! Floppy's finished his supper."

Laughter, and some confusion. The speaker, perceiving that his opportunity was over, dashed at once into his peroration :

"But 'it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good,' he cried ; "and if the wind which blows about this weathercock stamps the Ministry with indelible disgrace, and crowns the Opposition with victory amid the crumbling ruins of the Ministerialists, I for one will call down blessings on its head ;" and striking the table emphatically, he sat down amid good-humoured applause, which, a moment afterwards, swelled into an outburst of tremendous cheering as Jack Dawe slowly rose to his feet.

Unmoved by the enthusiastic salvo to which he was probably accustomed, the man stood facing his audience, the central figure in the cloud-wreathed atmosphere, his right hand resting upon the rim of a pewter-pot, with the alcoholic contents of which he was wont to moisten his lips from time to time. The Premier, still magnetised by the subtle influence of the strange personage he had chanced upon, bent forward eagerly as though feverishly anxious not to miss a syllable of the coming speech. In the intensity of his interest, he almost forgot his dread of recognition, and he utterly missed the quaint and somewhat old-fashioned charm of the scene—the archaic simplicity of the tableau, made up of the rows of flushed, excited faces of almost every type of physiognomy, and of all ages from seventeen to seventy ; the background of imitation-

painted panelling; the long tables glittering with half-empty glasses, and with huge tankards of shandy-gaff; the whole veiled in nebulous folds, picturesquely relieved here and there by the red glow of cigars and cigarettes, or the artistic colouring of the more or less grotesquely-shaped pipes.

The man, whose oratory was now for the first time to stir the pulses of a listener of exalted position, was only a house-and-sign-painter. But in politics he could have given lessons to many of those who were bent upon educating their masters. He was in many respects a workman of the best type—studious, thoughtful, and a thorough master of his business. His intellectual faculties were of a high order, and his debating powers—not by any means the same thing—had been proved in many a tough encounter, where his extreme Radicalism had held its ground against all comers by dint of a rare talent for satire, and a sledge-hammer force of expression. The first half-dozen sentences of his double convinced Floppington that he was in the presence of a speaker of a different stamp from his predecessors, and of one whose intrinsic merits called for attention to his remarks, apart from the interest excited by his personality.

“I would willingly echo the concluding sentiment of the gentleman who has just sat down,” he began, amid a continuous current of more or less boisterous laughter, “were it not that its metaphors were as mixed as the ideas of the gentleman who preceded him. Metaphors have a bad habit of being mixed, though their intentions are generally good. Mr. Rowley’s comparison of Mr. Floppington to a weathercock is true, if not new. A weathercock at the top of the Church is all very well (in fact only a weathercock could remain there for a day); but, as Mr. Rowley rightly declared, it is out of place at the head of the State. But when he proceeded to accuse the weathercock in question of taxing our patience, I could not help speculating on the exact fiscal abilities of a vane, and I came to the conclusion that the only bond of connection between it and a Chancellor of Exchequer was the ignorance of arithmetic. Mr. Rowley might suggest to Sir Stanley Southleigh the advisability of imposing a tax upon patience, though perhaps it would be too direct to suit that great financier. We are a long-suffering people—we have stood hereditary legislators long enough to prove that—but I don’t think the receipts would be very great nevertheless. England expects every man to pay his duties, and we should not quite refuse to submit to an extra one; but what I am afraid of is, that our impatience at the new demand would seriously interfere with the official estimate of our normal amount of the commodity under taxation. Mr. Chairman, I am aware I am digressing; but if I were to remain in the route which the debate has been allowed to drift into, I should have no chance of getting to the real issue at all. I have noticed it as a remarkable peculiarity of the subjects down for discussion in this room, that they have a rude habit of leaving directly we are assembled, and of going off to spend their evenings elsewhere.” (Loud laughter.)

With these bantering words of introduction, the speaker entered upon an elaborate and philosophical, yet amusingly-couched disquisition upon the political situation. Ever and anon wild bursts of cheering and laughter escaped from his listeners—from all but that one pathetic figure in the corner, the poor, pallid stranger who leaned his throbbing brow upon his burning palm. As Jack Dawe warmed to his work, his remarks became less and less general, and at last he found himself dissecting, with remorseless scalpel, the whole public career of the Hon. Arnold Floppington. The last speaker had also cut up the Premier; but with what inferior weapons! His previous tenure of the Home Secretaryship; his factious opposition to the Radical Reform Bill; his overthrow of the last Government; the feigned hesitation of his acceptance of office; his own Reform Bill; his difficulties with his Cabinet; were all passed in review. The intricacy of his motives was laid bare; his weaknesses and his inconsistencies were exposed; his incompetence was painted in the most glaring colours; and his whole life was made to point the evils of the system of administration under which a man so hopelessly behind the times, and so terribly inefficient, could yet rise to the head of affairs.

"This, then," concluded the house-painter vehemently, "is the man who, according to gentlemen opposite, is to lead their party to victory after the dissolution—whether it be precipitated, as it almost certainly will be, by the defeat of the Reform Bill, or whether it take place in the natural course of events. This is the man whose wavering and antiquated principles are to secure a triumphant majority in the next Parliament. Let me tell my Conservative friends that their hopes are as hollow as their arguments. So long as Floppington remains what he is, so long as Mountchapel remains what he is, so long the Cabinet Chamber would be not the bureau of Government but the arena of contending ambitions, and so long as Conservatism has no better leaders than these two men, so long a stable Conservative Administration is an impossibility. Nor would even the retirement of one of them mend matters in the least. Floppington, with Mountchapel in opposition, would be a ludicrous and pitiable sight; but the sight of Mountchapel at the helm of the vessel of state would, if possible, be still more ludicrous and pitiable. The gorge of this great nation would rise in disgust at the spectacle. But if by a wild stretch of imagination one could conceive the Premier as, to apply the sinewy language of Milton, rousing himself like a strong man after sleep, or as an eagle, mewing his mighty youth and kindling his endazzled eyes at the full midday beam; ridding himself of the incubus of his Foreign Secretary (though it might be well to retain the valuable unscrupulousness of that remarkable politician), and opening his ears to the imperious demands of modern democracy instead of dulling them with the dismal drone of mummified ecclesiastics; if, I say, there was the remotest probability of this, why, then there might be some hope for Conservatism; but, as it is, the confidence of Tories in their continued political existence resembles the state of mind of the patients in a

galloping consumption. And I claim to have acted as a true friend in warning them of their impending fate, in directing them to wind up their affairs, and in adjuring them to reflect on their sins; and if I have not attempted to soften their last hours by the usual shadowy suggestions of a certain but distant resurrection, it is because the attempt would not soothe, but only terrify them by reminding them of the awful proximity of the hour of resurrection to the Day of Judgment."

When the protracted cheering that followed Jack Dawe's resumption of his seat had subsided, a supporter of the Ministry rose, who sarcastically suggested that no doubt the country would be much better governed if their friend Floppy were to replace the head of the Government. Floppy's friends cheered this suggestion vigorously—one of them calling out "he couldn't do worse, if he tried his level best."

The Premier sat motionless in his corner. He screened his face from view. Could it have been seen, its strange expression would have puzzled the beholder. He was watching his wraith with an odd, half-sad, somewhat feverish expression and with a strange unhealthy glitter in his eyes, as though the enthusiasm of the assembly had communicated itself to his jaded spirit; and when Jack Dawe, after looking at his watch, quitted the room amid a renewed burst of cheering, he was followed by the Right Hon. Arnold Floppington.

* * * * *

What would not the fashionable diarist have given to know that the Premier, that night, had to be helped to his bedroom by suggestively-winking servants?

CHAPTER II.

JACK DAWE AT HOME.

ROSY-FINGERED Morn had been long tapping on the window-panes before Jack Dawe awoke and rubbed his eyes—presumably from sleepiness. He had not slept well. The Cogers—that arena where epithets had last night engaged in deadly combat—had, in the mysterious fashion well known to sufferers from nightmare, transformed itself into a Protean something which weighed heavily and vaguely upon him in all his fantastic doings in dreamland. And now in the clear sunlight the something translated itself in a flash into its original, and the whole scene rose before him while cries of "Floppy" reverberated in his ears. A shade of anxiety followed by a faint smile appeared on his face as he fell back murmuring "Rest! Rest!" Then his eyes wandered over the gaudily-papered room, the walls of which were further adorned by an

almanac, a few lithographs, a small pipe-rack, several Board School* certificates of a highly eulogistic nature, and a large portrait of Mr. Bradlaugh, then at the height of his popularity. Over the head of the bed was a small hanging bookcase on which were ranged Swinburne's "Songs before Sunrise," "Odes and Ballads," Mill's "Logic," Paine's "The Rights of Man," Shelley's "Queen Mab," Mill's "Subjection of Women," Ingersoll's "Letters," Mill on "Representative Government," Gilbert's "Plays," some bound volumes of "Progress," (a Freethought magazine of the period), and a few works of an educational and a non-literary character. "Blessed is he," thought Jack when he had surveyed for a moment the backs of these volumes, "who can catch a truth with a small 't,' and label it 'Truth' with a capital 'T,' and thus armed confront the world! In reality truth is as many-sided as myself, and as hated." With this mournful reflection he jumped out of bed.

Assuredly a middle-aged man ought not to have gazed at himself in the glass for a quarter of an hour as our friend did when dressed. But although the Preacher pronounced that "all is *vanity*," it is probable that this dictum was based on his experience of his better halves, and it is doubtful how far it applies to men of a philosophical cast when lost in *their* reflections. Be that as it may, Mr. Dawe, on the termination of his reverie, as we shall mercifully call it, proceeded downstairs with uncertain steps. One flight was all that he had to descend, and it led into a small parlour dominated by stuffed birds flying under a vitreous sky. These were benevolently looked down upon by the counterfeit presentments of a mild-eyed man in black with a bright badge on his breast, and of a stout sharp-looking woman in blue; and the flesh and blood and bones of the latter sat on a horsehair couch and devoured eggs and bacon. She was now flabbier than her picture, and the sharpness had migrated from her nose and cheeks and dwelt entirely in her gray eyes.

"You're early, Jack," she exclaimed ere he had entered. "The bacon's getting cold." This was not spoken satirically, for Jack generally breakfasted on a second supply, which was even then getting up heat in the kitchen, which lay, for reasons that will soon be obvious, between the parlour and the shop.

"Good morning," said Jack advancing, and might have said more had not his breath been stopped by a tremendous hug accompanied by a sonorous kiss. It was not Mrs. Dawe's habit to favour him with this matutinal salute; but on this occasion there was such a strange look of worry in his face and such a new tenderness in his eyes, and she had done such a "roaring" trade the night before, that the dormant maternal instinct was aroused. He disengaged himself from the unaccustomed embrace, blushing all over and much disturbed. "*Oleum redolet*," he reflected. "As

* Board Schools were establishments in which what in that age passed for education was doled out in annual instalments, paid for by Government, at rates varying from seventeen to twenty-five shillings per instalment. These figures are, of course, those of the old pre-decimal system.

they said of my speeches, she smells of the oil. And her teeth ! As corrupt as a Greek play and as irregular as its verbs !”

But remorse speedily seized upon his tender heart, and he murmured : “ It is a small price to pay for rest. He who would eat lotuses must not spurn the plate they’re offered in.”

“ Eat lettuces !” exclaimed his mother who had caught the last sentence ; “ I didn’t know as you was fond of ’em.”

“ Never mind,” he said gently, taking a seat before the small round table. “ And what am I to have ?”

“ Why, you can have some of this ’ere cold, or you can wait till Sally brings your own.”

He frowned at standing once more by the cross-roads of action ; but began mechanically to examine the logical alternatives.

“ Then there are two courses,” he commenced.

“ Bless the boy ; he knows very well we only ’ave one for breakfast,” she ejaculated. “ Sally, bring in master’s breakfast if it’s ready. But what’s a matter with you ? Are you caught cold ? Oh, there she is. You’ll find that prime.”

“ Thank you,” said Jack with a gracious smile, as a slipshod girl with dishevelled hair and smudgy countenance laid a plate of fried eggs and bacon before him. To a hungry man the savour of these dainties was not unappetising, and the plate which held them was of unimpeachable cleanness, contrasting sharply with the slovenly appearance of that from which Mrs. Dawe was eating. It was evident that the son was somewhat more finical and squeamish than the mother. “ No, thank you. Don’t trouble. I dare say this coffee will be warm enough for me. Will you be so kind as to bring me a spoon ?”

“ Well, are you *hever* going for that spoon ?” cried Mrs. Dawe irritably. “ D’ye suppose I pays ye for openin’ your tater-trap like a Alleylujey Sister ?”

For the girl had flushed deeply. The unwonted carmine overspread her face and neck. The room had grown misty to her eyes.

Without a word she rushed into the kitchen, seized a tea-spoon, polished it vigorously, and was back again with it in less than a dozen seconds.

“ What an active girl !” said Jack, with an approving smile. “ Thank you, Sally.”

“ I’ve done your boots, master,” said Sally huskily. She struggled for a moment with a lump in her throat before she was able to add, “ They’re under the table. I couldn’t shine ’em any better ’cos the leather’s too new.” Ducking her head she brought them up for his inspection, trembling a little from force of habit before submitting her work to her usually imperious taskmaster.

“ Polish comes with age,” he murmured reflectively. “ You couldn’t shine them any better !” he cried in admiration. “ Would we all had as little to apologise for ! Your ideals must be high indeed, if this brilliant lustre doesn’t satisfy you. What a treasure you would be in a prodigal servants’ hall, although——” An

almost imperceptible shudder concluded the sentence. Decidedly the lissom charm, the piquant freshness, the shining purity of the neat-handed Phyllis was absent from Sally's person, or if latent, very latent indeed.

"When you've done showin' off them boots as if you was the Museum," Mrs. Dawe cried brutally, though her eyes twinkled a little with dim comprehension of her son's satire. "P'raps you wishes you was. I know you'd like to 'ave a p'liceman to look arter ye," she chuckled grimly.

"I never!" said Sally, with high-pitched and fiery indignation. "'E only come to arx if I'd seen a one-armed man with a tambourine as was wanted for the card-trick, and 'e paid for 'is plum-duff with a kick with a 'ole in it."

"Hush, hush," said Jack, who had ceased stirring his coffee in surprise. "You must not excite yourself like that, my good girl. I do not think your mistress was accusing you seriously, so there's really no need to defend yourself so loudly."

The maid-of-all-work stared dumbly at her master; the glittering "Wellingtons" almost fell from her hands. The suavity of the reproach was too much for her perfervid condition.

The intensity of the girl's gaze infected Mrs. Dawe. She bent her sharp, gray eyes upon her son, and a puzzled look came over her broad visage. The sign-painter seemed uneasy under this dual scrutiny. He bent his head over the smoking viands and took up his knife and fork.

Suddenly the old woman's face lit up with an expression of relief.

"Why, Jack!" she exclaimed. "Where's your Sunday togs?"

"Eh," he said, looking up vaguely. "My Sunday togs?"

"Bless the boy, ain't to-day Sunday? And you such a swell in your new trousers!"

"Oh!" said Jack.

"This comes o' bein' out late. You wake up without your wits. But come, don't let your bacon spoil. You can change afterwards. Oh, I forgot. 'Ere's your *Rejeree* and your *Lloyd's*! Let me know if there's any good murders on."

He took the newspapers which his mother handed him and laid them aside with a sigh. She started and turned pale. "Break fast without politics! Is there anything a matter, Jack?"

"I feel a trifle worried," he replied, "and I have no wish to be worried further by the criticisms of the Sunday Press."

Mrs. Dawe stared. Then seeing his lips move she said anxiously: "Why, you're a tremblin' all over."

"No, no; I am merely saying grace."

The crash which followed this announcement was caused by the rapid decline and fall of Mrs. Dawe's knife and fork. Jack smiled.

"It's disgraceful!" she exclaimed, re-assured, "to give a body such a turn by your jokes. I thought you had one boot in the grave already. As your father used to say, 'when a man is took

religious it's a sign he's took bad.' Rest his soul! he didn't believe in nothing, he didn't, and he'd maintain them principles in this world or the next. He used to say as my services 'd be wanted down below, as I was such a hexcellent frier and roaster, which—not as it's me as savs it—there isn't in the kingdom, if modesty will allow me to say it."

"I have noticed," said Jack, "that, as a rule, those only are modest who have something to be modest about."

"Well, I 'ave got something to be modest about," responded Mrs. Dawe proudly; "and that's why I ses it. I can't do better than believe in the same nothing as my late husband. And as I was a-sayin' to Salvation Polly only yesterday, in my business I don't trust nobody, and in my religion it's the same. And as for sayin' grace, it's all humbug. My customers, ses I, don't say grace, for they know if they get a square meal they've earned it, and no thanks to nobody. When I sees the poor, famishin' young 'uns a flattenin' their noses against my windows, and a smellin' the pork-pies, thinks I to myself it ain't true what your folks says that He gives food to the young ravenous when they cry. They can cry till their eyes is as red as their fathers' noses; and pork-pies'll be as far off as ever." Then she rolled up her sleeves, much to Jack's alarm. "Eat away, my boy, I must get to work now; people's stomachs never takes no rest, Sunday or any other day, does they, Jack? And what did they talk about last night? More politics, I suppose. Ah, Jack, don't eat my 'ead off if I asks ye not to waste so much time on politics—it takes you away from your work. Not that, thank Gord, you can't be idle a day; still politics is only for them as ain't got to get a honest living." Here Mrs. Dawe's features assumed a timid, conciliatory expression, narrowly verging on the apologetic.

"That is very true," said Jack, with a grim smile.

"I'm glad you're a-comin' round to common sense," said his mother, at once surprised and emboldened by the passiveness with which these tentative remarks were received. "Your dear father took as much interest in politics as you; but did he let it ruin him. as it well-nigh does you? Not he. He just took his sovereign. whenever there was an election on and marked the paper accordin',—doing a good stroke of work he used to call it, ha! ha! ha!"

"You are right, mad—mother. I have wasted too much time on it already."

"Yes, and when you might ha' been doin' something nicer, Jack." Here Mrs. Dawe beamed benevolently on her son and winked at him.

"Nicer!" said Jack.

Mrs. Dawe winked again, looked at the picture of her departed husband and beamed with increased vigour.

"Yes, you hav' been neglectin' your duty!"

"Have I?" said Jack.

"You know you have. Poor thing!"

"Poor thing!" said Jack.

"Yes, I means it. Poor thing! You have ill-treated her shameful."

"Ill-treated?" said Jack.

"You promised to finish the business months ago; but you've been so busy with your politics, I do believe it's gone clean out of your 'ead."

"Oh, the business," said Jack.

"Yes, she was here yesterday, and she complained bitterly of your neglect while you was at—Oh, drat them church bells, they seem to say if you won't sleep in church, you shan't sleep nowhere else—that's one of your father's, Jack!"

"So she wants the job done?" said Jack.

"Yes, she does; and the quicker it's done the better, she said; and so say I, and so say all of us, I hope. You're forty now, and life is short."

"And art long," mused Jack. "Though I doubt whether what this lady requires would be entitled to the denomination." "Well then," he said aloud, "you can tell her the next time you see her that I'm ready to do whatever she wants."

"Oh, that's a dear Jack!" and she smothered him with oily kisses. "I likes to see my son do what's right and proper. And, Jack, you'll see what a dinner I'll give you. I'll cook it myself."

With this threat she released him from her maternal embraces.

"And now, mother," he said, rising, "I'll dress and go to church."

For a moment her heart stood still and the old alarm seized her.

"Jack!" she panted, but remembering his specific declaration that he was not ill she let her face broaden into a smile. "That's twice in one morning," she said. "What's the good o' tryin' to make a fool o' your mother? Why, Natur' couldn't do it, and she 'ad the fust try. My gracious, wouldn't they stare to see Jack Dawe at St. John's?"

"I know I have never been to St. John's before, but that is no reason against my going there now. Jack Dawe has changed his opinion. In other points," he added, seeing her emotion, "I am willing to make large concessions; but this point is vital."

Mrs. Dawe's face blazed with astonishment and anger, for there was the old expression on the face of her son, that look of determination which she dreaded and from which she knew there was no appeal. But the greatness of the issue moved her to fight to the bitter death. Those who have known the anguish caused by a son's deserting the faith of his forefathers, the religion in which he has been born and bred, will sympathise with the poor old woman, in danger of being cut off by her son's infidelity from all spiritual communion with him in her declining years. Moreover there seemed something strangely pliant, wavering, and meek, about him that morning, strongly in contrast with his wonted imperiousness. The astonishing quiescence with which he had already given way in an important matter a moment ago, invited her to fresh victories while the humour lasted—to make hay before the erratic

sun sank below the horizon for an indefinite period. So she risked the combat. "Go to church!" she cried. "Can't I make your flannel waistcoats? Do we stand in need of any charity? It's only a step from the church to the workus. And don't you remember what your father told the parson? 'I don't go to church,' ses he, 'that I may keep out o' temptation.' 'Temptation!' ses the parson. 'Yes, ses your father, 'them as goes to church is tempted to put a bad 'apenny in the plate. And besides,' ses your father, which I knowed politics would make you wander from the right path; 'besides, ses your father, 'I don't believe in nothing, thank Gord, I don't; and a man as would go to church without meaning it, would rob a church mouse.' So sit down and finish your corfy." She laid her plump hand tentatively upon his, and not finding it rudely shaken off, she pressed him down lightly as though he were the dough of a pie-crust.

"He was doubtless a very straightforward man," he observed, settling down meekly and thinking that there was plenty of time to temporise. Her eyes twinkled with triumph; but the historical weapon was too dear to be laid aside, merely because it had vanquished the enemy. She continued her survey of her late husband's religious and theological opinions, as though her son had never heard them before.

"That he was," she replied; "and he'd always let you know 'is mind. 'I don't keep my views to myself,' he used to say; 'I lets other folks look at them. I makes my private view a public view.' And when, under my management, this cookshop began to thrive more than it 'ad ever done in *his* family, his views was more so than ever. He didn't 'ide his light under a bushel of lies, *he* didn't. And with sich a father, Jack, you wants to go to church! Shame on you! It's enough to make 'im turn in 'is grave. It's enough if a man goes three times in his life—once when he's born, once when he's married, and once when he's dead."

Jack could not help smiling at this maternal bull; not the last specimen of the Hibernian breed which ranged and occasionally escaped from their stalls in Mrs. Dawe's brain. Mrs. Dawe had now gone into the kitchen, whence a mingled odour of roast pork and beef-steak pudding began to enter on currents of air that continued to vibrate with her rather shrill tones. She was up to her elbows in dough and up to her neck in reminiscence. Ever courteous, ever shrinking from giving pain, Jack Dawe sat there with as grave attention as he would have given to the Queen. Dusty rays darting from the back-yard lit up his stained white suit, and his long white hands, and his careworn white face, and his dark eyes full of dreamy pain.

"The parson was always a-arguin' with him," continued the voice in the kitchen. "Many a set-to they used to have in the Park. When their opinions smashed together the shock was terrible—the parson was always thrown off the track and damaged severely. 'Parson,' your father would say, when he got talkin' about the delights of 'eaven and scornin' this world, 'parson, you are like

them poogilists as sometimes sees stars when they can't see what's under their noses. Your doctrines is as 'ard to swallow as Mrs. Prodgers's dumplings—and you should only try one of 'em, Jack. Them dumplings of hers is a 'elpin' *my* custom beautiful. But them as eat her widdles must stomach 'em as best they can. 'You're always a sayin', parson, that life is a dream, and that's why you give us your sermons to make your words come as true as possible.' Ha! ha! ha! Sharp man, your father. Sally, the soup is bilin'! Drat that girl, you never see her when you want her, or want her when you see her."

Even this interruption did not long check the flow of Mrs. Dawe's recollections. Jack had fallen into a reverie on the Athanasian Creed, when the words, "Your father said," aroused him.

"My father must have been a modern Socrates," he thought, gazing up at the mild-eyed man with the bright badge on his breast; "only he probably died from drinking beer instead of hemlock. I will listen to what oral tradition records of him before the apotheosis of time surrounds him with legendary halo."

Singularly enough the next words related to the fluid unknown to classic democracy.

"No,' said your father, 'I sleeps at 'ome of a Sunday. Ten sermons ain't in it with a pint of beer. Life a dream, indeed! Them as says that life's a dream usually behaves as ridiklus as if it was.' 'All right, my man,' ses the parson. 'Do you ever think of what comes after death?' 'Often and often,' ses your father; 'and I'm saving up to 'ave the thing done 'andsome.' The parson groaned. He was licked again. And when your father winked to his mates, he grew desperit, and he said: 'The time'll come as you'll sit in sackcloth and ashes for this.' Your father grinned. 'D'ye think I'm going to be a dustman late in life?' he says. 'I sticks to house-paintin'.' There was a roar at this. 'And the parson walked away,' said your father, 'as solemn as a funeral plume.'"

"And this is Demos," thought Jack mournfully, as he sipped his coffee. "Squalid as their lives seem to be, they make them loathlier by their meagre positivism. The finer aspects, the spiritual mysteries of existence are to them unrevealed. And how can any Government influence them unless it sinks to their level? As Tacitus finely said—— No, I will take no more coffee, thank you."

"But it's the finest corfy, and I gave one-and-eight a pound for it; and your other two cups 'll be wasted," ejaculated Mrs. Dawe.

She had dislocated Jack's reflections by hovering suddenly over him with the half-inverted coffee-pot. Her bare arms were thickly sown with particles of dough, and a solitary currant clung desperately to her right elbow.

"I don't care for any more," Jack protested feebly. "Give it to the girl."

"Give it to Sally! Why, lor' bless you, that gal couldn't appreciate one-and-eightpenny corfy! It would be sheer waste. I'd rather throw it in the dusthole at once, or drink it myself."

In the violence of her denunciation of her unæsthetic maid-of-all-work, the solitary currant became detached from her elbow and dropped into Jack's plate. This event turned her thoughts in a new and grave direction.

"And you've hardly touched your ham and eggs, neither. Oh, dear, dear, this will never do!"

"And yet here was the great spiritual force of the century," thought Jack, with a pitying contempt for the poor critic of the *Edinburgh Review*. "Would that I had never quitted poetry for politics! But Matthew Arnold spoke truly when he said that 'Wordsworth's eyes avert their ken from half of human fate.'"

He sighed wearily; the burthen of the mystery of all this unintelligible world weighed heavily upon him after a momentary inward vision of calm peaks and waters irradiated by the light that never was on sea or land; and he ate a morsel of ham.

"That's better," said Mrs. Dawe, who stood anxiously by.

After a moment's silent reverie, he sighed again, and murmured bitterly, "My cup is full."

"No, it isn't; it's empty," cried Mrs. Dawe, proceeding to refill it with cheerful alacrity.

"Shall I cut some more bread and butter? A man must eat, even if it goes against the grain. As your father used to say, and well was his words worth listenin' to——"

"Eh?" cried Jack with a start. "Wordsworth! What was it he said?"

"Why, he said we 'ang on to life by our teeth."

"Hang on to life by our teeth!" repeated Jack wonderingly. "Where did he say that—in 'The Excursion'?"

"Well, yes and no. It was a fav'rit sayin' of his, and sometimes he said it at 'Amstead 'Eath, in course."

"That must have been at Coleridge's house," thought Jack.

"But the fust time he said it," continued Mrs. Dawe, "was in this very parlour!"

"What, here?" ejaculated Jack, in a tone of incredulity mingled with awe. "He could never have been here." He stopped abruptly. A poet might well be eccentric, too.

"Well, that's good!" exclaimed his mother; "why, you know he lived and died here, man and boy, all his life, and his mother kept the cookshop afore me; and when she died he took a wife just to keep on the business, and you should see him make a pork-pie almost as well as I can. You haven't inherited them talents, Jack. You can make poetry, but I'm blessed if you can make pork-pies."

This juxtaposition of the poet of nature and the pork-pies of art was too absurd not to make Jack suspect some misunderstanding, but clouds of bewilderment still overshadowed his countenance. The line "And custom lie upon thee with a weight, Heavy as frost and deep almost as life," could hardly be supposed by the maddest commentator to contain a hint of its author's misery at keeping a thriving, but uncongenial cookshop. After swallowing a few more fragments of ham to save the credit of his voracity, Jack found to

his amazement that his coffee was untouched. He could have sworn that he had drunk it. However, he gulped it down as fast as he could, reflecting on the uncertainty of evidence as of everything else.

CHAPTER III.

THE CABINET TRICK.

THE Bethnal Green Road derived its name from the almost total absence of verdure which was everywhere conspicuous. In one or two front gardens a few sickly blades of grass maintained a precarious existence, but they were rebuked by the stony frowns of the grim houses around. There were several churches, and in superfluous illustration of Defoe's epigram, many public-houses. A Grecian ghost might almost have imagined the latter to be Academies and the barmen Philosophers, so vast was the attendance of the Intelligent British Workman of the epoch; and to complete the illusion, the inscriptions "Private Bar," "Public Bar," might well be deemed to relate to esoteric and exoteric discourses respectively. And, indeed, it was a fact that in them the Intelligent British Workman of the epoch congregated for symposia, in the course of which much criticism was expressed on all subjects, by means of an epithet which like a skeleton key opened all locks that hindered the passage of thought. The uses of this adjective were as numerous as those of the bamboo—to put the matter briefly, it was "all things to all men." The walls, whose ears—if polite—must have been shocked by it, were gay with paint and coloured glasses, and they closed round a scene of ravishing glitter and gaiety.

Except for these "Palaces of Delight" the road offered little that was attractive. It was one of those dull, dirty, thriving business streets which may be philosophically regarded as a natural outgrowth of the bastard civilisation of that age. On Saturday nights and Sunday mornings one side of it did duty as a market, being fringed with stalls, whose bawling proprietors might fairly be supposed to do a "roaring trade." Its sanitary arrangements were assiduously presided over by an Inspector who, however, suffered from a defect analogous to that to which Charles Lamb confesses—he had no nose.

It was in a small shop near one extremity of the road that Mrs. Dawe supplied the necessaries and luxuries of life to the labourers who, although on the margin of subsistence, showed their ignorance of political economy by consuming both. The house was one of a group of three, one storey high, whose lofty neighbours rose on each side like the turrets of a castle. Over the shop window might be seen the majestic legend recently painted afresh by Jack Dawe in letters of gold, "The Star Dining Rooms." Through the blurred

glass the "young ravenous" could take a delicious peep at the mysteries of the interior: the most prominent objects being two copper pans and a sprinkling of plates, not scrupulously clean, but unscrupulously dirty, containing roley-poley pudding and other dainties, "the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves." The panes themselves seemed to have received multitudinous scratches in some street affray, and to be covered with strips of sticking-plaster, longitudinally, horizontally, and at angles acute and obtuse. Each strip tempted the passer-by, however, with Circean blandishment, to partake of the sensual feast. Three notes of exclamation emphasised the statement that the establishment was noted for supplying *Good Articles*. "A la mode Soup" tickled the palate with dreams of vague delight. More definite were the announcements: "Hot Joints from 12 till 2," "Plate of Meat and Vegetables, 6d.;" "Beef Steak Pudding, 3d.;" and "All Joints 4d. and 6d." Presumably dearer, because unpriced, were "Roast Pork," "Steak and Kidney Pie," and "Leg of Beef Soup." Lastly, the intimation, "All Dinners sent out," must doubtless have had its effect in increasing Bethnal Green bachelordom.

As Jack, without iterating his intentions, stepped out into the street, he drew a breath of relief. The fresh air was welcome after the close odours of the Astræan cookshop, and he was a little bored and greatly shocked by the materialism so frankly expressed by his mother, who hitherto had had little occasion to reprove him for wandering from the right path. There were few persons abroad, and still fewer bore Prayer-Books to indicate their destination. The clamorous peals of the bells were unheeded by the majority of the residents, and unneeded by the minority. One of the latter was a decrepit old lady, with a huge Psalter, who was tottering along to St. John's Church, which fronted the end of the road, but who slipped down when very near her destination. Jack, who had been following her, picked her up and offered her his arm for the rest of the way, which favour she accepted rather suspiciously. Just then, mingling strangely with the restless jangle of the bells, arose the rude harmony of a music-hall chorus, given *con brio*, from behind a partition consisting of tarred planks rudely joined together. The frequent interludes suggested that this *al fresco* performance was a religious service, and that the music was sacred. The original jingle of the air was retained, but it now produced an impression of decorous vivacity from its being invested in verbal garments of an ecclesiastical cut. High up, and written in huge printing letters, and in ink whose darkness could be felt, one might read the following mysterious announcement:

On Sunday —
 THE CITY IN FLAMES.
 Come and See. 7 o'clock.
 On Sunday —
 THE HALLELUJAH MAN,
 From Sheffield.
 And the Devonshire Cook

During the pauses of harmony a loud voice was heard "holding forth," and the curious folks who were peeping through the chinks in the door could see the owner of the voice standing on a barren undulating piece of ground and gesticulating wildly. At the conclusion of each of his brief addresses he demanded hoarsely, "Why not, dear brethren?" and the chorus, taking up the riddle, awoke the echoes with a somewhat solemn effect in the quiet Sunday air. Jack's eyes filled with tears, and he was thrilled by an indescribable sensation at the thought of these poor fanatics working out their scheme of life in their own rude way, and lacking in their religion those elements of culture and delicacy which had no place in the rest of their existences.

"And this, too, is Demos," he thought, as he took the old lady across the road to the church. "Not entirely is the spiritual instinct dead in the people. With good paternal government much may still be done to raise them. Plato doubtless sacrificed Truth to perfection of parallelism with his psychological triplicity when he found the senses a sufficient analogue of the lowest class in his Republic. Christianity——"

"Hullo, old fellow, where are you off to?" cried a hearty voice in a tone of surprise. Jack stopped as he was passing through the gateway and responded mechanically, "I have promised to read the lessons for the day."

His interlocutor, who was a young man with a red and hairy face, burst out laughing with boisterous enjoyment.

"Perhaps you're going to get married?" he said, when he could once more command his breath.

The old lady looked up indignantly. Jack, who was by this time roused from his reverie, explained that he was helping his companion into church.

"That's right," said the young man with good-humoured sarcasm. "Do you feel your head burning, Mrs. Prodgers? Coals of fire in this weather are a little out of season. But I say, Jack, are you coming out for a walk now or going back home?"

"I can't come out now," said Jack.

"*Au revoir*, then. I suppose I shall see you to-night at the Monarch? You know William Morris is going to lecture there on 'Art and Socialism'—how to make the world an earthly paradise, I suppose. Ha, ha, ha!" And the hairy young man walked on, too-much immersed in admiration of his own joke, and in reflecting as to the best method of introducing it in the discussion which would follow the lecture, to note that his friend did not make any reply.

As Jack Dawe, with the old lady on his arm, entered the church, the vicar, who had just come in, stood rooted to the spot. A buzz of astonishment was heard, and here and there people stood up in their pews and whispered to their neighbours. Immediately all eyes were fixed upon him; those who had never heard of him being quickly apprised of his character. For a moment Jack was alarmed, and he turned round as if to make his exit. In an instant

the vicar, a white-haired, benevolent-looking old gentleman, was at his side, and with tears in his voice besought him to remain. "I can guess," he said, "what chance act of kindness has led your steps hither, but the Omnipotent works by just such means. Who knows what seeds of Faith the holy influences of the spot may sow in your spirit? Often have those who came to scoff remained to pray, and though I am far from attributing to you the former intention, I hope you will remain at least to listen." Well might the good man's voice falter at the prospect of saving an immortal soul. For half a century he had worked in this squalid neighbourhood, with scant remuneration; often wasting his energies on the desert air, yet never totally despairing of his stubborn flock. It was he whom Matthew Arnold has immortalized in one of his sonnets, by describing a rencontre with him in Bethnal Green. The poet found him pale with overwork, but "much cheered with thoughts of Christ—the living bread."

That inoffensive-looking man, Jack's father, had always been a thorn in his side, and by his satirical and epigrammatic powers had greatly counteracted the clergyman's influence among many of the most intelligent artisans of the neighbourhood. At his death, which took place about twenty-five years before the commencement of this history, his adversary read the Funeral Service over him and prayed for the repose of his soul. The son, who was then fifteen, had been carefully trained up by his father in the way he should go, and when he was old he did not depart from it—at least before this very day. But whereas the father had confined his aggressions to religion, the son showed himself as doughty a warrior in the logomachy of politics as in that of theology.

Absorbed in social studies, he shunned the billiard-room and the dancing saloon, and indeed most places of amusement. He had once been attacked by the bicycle mania, and he still occasionally rode out on a fine spider machine; but on the whole he preferred to spend his evenings in impugning or defending the Government, according as his party was in or out. When there was no debate on within a three-mile radius, he read, or (though much less frequently) went to the theatre. Whenever *The Weekly Dispatch*, a popular Sunday journal, offered its prize of two guineas for political verses, his attempts either carried off the prize, or received the honour of print. These were not his only appearances as an author. Inheriting the audacious profanity of his parents, he utilized the literary powers developed by the training of the Board School to concoct lampoons and pasquinades for a coarsely satirical journal, entitled *The Freethinker*. So great was his local fame that he had once been Premier in a Local Parliament, which carried on the business of the realm in a dancing academy on off-nights. And when in office, the appalling social and political reforms that he carried had well-nigh wrought a revolution in the country. Defeated, however, on the question of Female Franchise, he was forced to resign. All his measures were at once repealed by the new Ministry, and the country was saved from ruin.

The vicar was well acquainted with Jack's abilities, and regretted all the more that "the wrong party" should have got hold of him and them. If he could only be brought under other than his early influences, if the stubborn shell of unbelief could be pierced through, the vicar believed there would be found a religious heart underneath. And from him, how would the wave of Faith spread among his friends and followers! Throbbing with intense emotion, the old man felt the divine influx of inspiration flood his soul, as in his young days when his whole being vibrated with passionate thoughts that struggled for splendid utterance. He threw aside the carefully prepared sermon, and abandoned himself to the torrent. He took two texts: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and I will give you rest," and, "The fool hath said in his heart, 'there is no God,'" and sounded these two chords of emotional and rational argument with the greatest skill and effect. Now his tones trembled with pathos, now they thundered in impassioned denunciation of the wilful blindness of unbelief. Now low and pleading they thrilled the audience, and affected them to tears; anon they carried everybody along in a stream of irresistible reasoning.

At first Jack felt himself the cynosure of all eyes, and was painfully aware that the sermon was aimed solely at himself; but he soon lost all such self-conscious thoughts in the exquisite delight he felt at so powerful and felicitous an exposition. He wept with the rest at the melting pathos of the preacher's appeal, and was fired to sympathetic indignation at the eloquent portraiture of the stiff-necked race of infidels.

The audience streamed out of the church at last, many feeling themselves so spiritually set up by the magnificent sermon as to be able to dispense for some time with religious thought.

The vicar who had seen Jack apply a handkerchief to his eyes came up to him, determining to strike while the iron was hot. Jack awaited his approach with mingled feelings of pleasure and regret; he was pleased with the beauty of the discourse, and he regretted that the discourser should be no spiritual star, but only "a dim religious light."

"Mr. Dawe," said the clergyman, "I propose to call upon you to-morrow evening."

"I shall be extremely delighted to see you," said Jack, shaking hands with him. "I was much affected, I assure you, by your excellent sermon. And," he added as he turned away, "I promise you the next vacant deanery at my disposal." And he hurried off to avoid a shower of thanks.

Jack would have been distressed to see the look of pain that crossed the benevolent features of the good old man. All his lofty enthusiasm was shattered in an instant, and the reaction after his violent efforts was so great that he tottered and nearly fell. "Like father, like son," he murmured with despairing sadness. "No respect for my grey hairs. He sat in the seat of the scorner and wept fictitious tears. Help me, O my God, to save this sinful soul!"

Happily unconscious of the misery he had caused his faithful shepherd, the incorrigible Jack pursued his way homewards after bidding "good bye" to Mrs. Prodggers, who surlily declared herself able to walk home without any assistance. Before her departure, however, she had hinted to Jack that it would have done his mother good to hear the sermon instead of breaking the Lord's Sabbath and getting other people's customers away from them for that day.

The road was now much livelier than before church time. A constant succession of funerals of people in all grades of death provided the masses with "amusement blended with instruction." A gloomy, bustling gaiety was in the air. Some "criticism of life," and especially of the end of it, could be heard in which the epithet of all work played a prominent part. The fringe of stalls, too, had grown thicker. There were dealers in *new china*, ice-cream vendors, fish-mongers, and butchers; there were learned-looking quacks with lots of rhubarb, quinine, pills, and Parliamentary eloquence. There was one quack, moreover, who was regarded with intense jealousy by his professional brethren—for he was a specialist who had confined himself to the maladies curable by sarsaparilla. There were fruit vendors with undersized pints of Spanish nuts; there were costermongers with a perspective of greens vast enough to vindicate the right of the road to its ancient honourable title; there were artificial-flower girls trying hard to make the lovely rose go, though not in a Wallerian sense; there were other dealers who did not come under any definite genus, being what Bacon calls "bordering instances," though all might fairly claim that name; there were men with small aquaria in whose green depths vegetable matter floated the fluid which was called lemonade being drained off by pipes into glasses and thence into mouths in return for half-pence; then, too, there were popular processions, chiefly of children, bearing foaming jugs of the staff of life, or smoking tins of baked meat and potatoes, the lictors waiting at home to administer punishment in case of surreptitious quaffs or bites. With few exceptions the shops open were those more or less directly connected with the Sunday dinner: a few put up three or four shutters as if only in half mourning for the death of business activity on that day.

Amid this stir of life and death, under the burning sun, along the dusty pavement, Jack stalked on, regarding the scene from time to time with the greatest interest. Everything was text to him for long internal commentary, as tedious, wandering, and learned as if intended for publication. His thoughts flashed from the public-house to the Pyramids; from 'Arry to Aristophanes and Aristotle; from the quacks to metaphysics and politics; and from "cream and strawberries 'apenny a glass" to the cool valley of Hæmus.

"*O qui me gelidis*—" he muttered.

"Pretty well, thank you. How's yourself?" said a short, stout man with a clay pipe in his mouth and a paper in his hand. Jack started violently, and said he was better than he had been for a long time.

"That's right, old ch up."

Jack was passing on again when his friend exclaimed somewhat reproachfully, "You don't ask after the old woman!"

"The old woman?" cried Jack. "I have but this moment left her! She seems too feeble to go out alone, but she didn't hurt herself much!"

"What!" gasped the man, opening his mouth in utter obliviousness of his pipe which fell and was smashed into a hundred pieces. "*She went out this morning after I left and didn't hurt herself much!*"

"The facts are as I have stated them."

"O my poor Sally! She must have been mad. And that confounded Mrs. Gamp, what was she up to, I wonder?"

"Of course she ought to have gone with her to look after her."

The man stared at Jack suspiciously, but not a muscle stirred in his innocent countenance, which was overshadowed by an expression of pitying concern. After a minute's silence the stout man gasped "Well, I'm blowed, and where the devil did she go to?"

"To church, of course," responded Jack.

The man heaved a sighed of relief and then burst into a fit of laughter. "You are a oner!" he said admiringly. "Always some joke about church when one least expects it."

"I assure you I meant no joke," said Jack in a horrified tone, which caused his friend another roar.

"Well, I'm blowed," he said again. "Hang it all, you ought to go on the stage, Jack. I've no doubt you could play the most burlesque parts without a grin or laughing in your sleeve."

"There may be some truth in what you say," said Jack moodily.

"I'm blowed if there ain't a lot of truth in it," said the man, at which asseveration Jack's face grew several shades moodier.

"Well, ta-ta, Jack. I'll go and look after the old woman, for to tell the truth you did give me a bit of a turn. While she was about it yesterday she might have had triplets instead of twins, though it would be a bad look-out when the Queen's money was gone. Now, in the Republic that you are always clamouring for, who would do all that? If my wife promises to go on in that way, I'm blowed if I don't turn Tory and support our glorious Constitution. Good bye." And he hurried off home, where he found his wife asleep and Mrs. Gamp (who had counted upon two hours' freedom) carrying into effect the principles of Communism by imbibing her patient's brandy.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Gamp with drunken dignity, "that I may test the kvolity of the licker afore I lets the dear critter pison herself. There's some 'usbands," here she disdainfully spat out a few drops of spirit on the new carpet, "as thinks hany thing good enough for the pardners of their buzoms when they're layin' on the wirgin of death. 'Oh, Sairey,' Mrs. Harris used to say to me, which I am bound to say I was allus much depressed by her words which was worth their weight in gold, 'Sairey, I don't know how you can take so much trouble for the small sellery and the no perkwisits

that mean folks puts you off with. Yet your successes allus exceeds my wildest expectorations.’”

Meanwhile Jack Dawe, unconscious of the mischief he had done to this respectable Lucina, was in a state of utter collapse from several causes. He had not yet recovered from this condition of intense dejection and self-dissatisfaction, when another cheery cry of “Morning, Jack” and a vigorous handshake made him wince.

The new-comer was a man whose jovial face readily lent itself to broad grins, and it was much distended by one of them at the present moment.

“Seen the *Referee* yet?” he cried. “Sims* is awfully funny this week—he must have had a bad bilious attack.”

“He generally suffers from a cold, I believe,” said Jack; “but I never heard that he was funny.”

“What! Oh, of course, he’s not a patch on you. Since when have you put on these lofty critical airs? I’ve seen you roar with laughter at his sayings, anyhow.”

“That’s impossible,” said Jack calmly, “for he never says anything.”

“Eh!” exclaimed the Refereader. “Come now, don’t try that on me, I’m up to snuff, old man. Why, you said last Sunday that he was well worth listening to on any theme. You don’t see any green in my eye since then, I hope.”

“I grant he is but a wreck of himself. But it is surely cruel to call him funny,” said the painter, disregarding the last question.

“So he is. Why, look here—and here—there!” cried the enthusiast in a state of great excitement, pointing out paragraph after paragraph of a series of notes, headed “Mustard and Cress,” to the amazed Jack, who had hitherto been ignorant of the literary powers of the great bass. It needed not the signature of “Dagonet” to convince him that the singer had made a fool of himself in his old age. This persuasion was at first intensified by the feeling of bitterness with which he read the following epigram.

“I consider myself in honour bound to resist to the utmost of my power any such proposals for giving the Franchise to Women.”

“Letter of the Premier to a Constituent.”

“Floppy once again declares he’s bound by honour,
But at slipping bonds he can Creation lick.
When the coors in Downing Street are next thrown open,
You will find that he has done ‘The Cabinet Trick.’”

Jack read and re-read this with brow afrown and cheek blushing with shame and anger. Then his face grew sad, and in his

* A popular journalist and dramatist of the period—afterwards member for a Metropolitan borough. Not to be confounded with Sims Reeves, a famous bass, not a baritone (as the author of “Social Life in the Reign of Victoria” affirms), who seems to have been referred to amongst his friends by his Christian name.

eyes there was a look of infinite weariness. He put his hand to his aching forehead.

"You're not going to be ill, old man!" said the Refereader, who was narrowly watching the effect of the joke.

"Oh no," said Jack, with a feeble smile; "it is very biting."

"Which is a treat for those not bitten. I thought that would bring you round. But, I say, d'ye think the Premier reads the *Referee*? Because, if so, wouldn't I give something to see his phiz when he reads that!" Grinning at the idea the jovial man walked on, leaving Jack to thread his way amid the throng like a man in a dream.

Soon, to his delight, a whiff of hot, many-odoured air informed him that he was near home. He staggered through the crowd of customers in the shop and let himself fall into the arm-chair in the back parlour with a crash that made the welkin (of the stuffed birds) ring.

"Jack, Jack! what's a matter?" cried Mrs. Dawe, rushing in with a gigantic ladle in her hand, and embracing him with it. "I knew all along as you was queer. As I was just a-sayin to Mr. Green, it's too much politics—and his head was always weak. If that boy goes and dies I shall never forgive him."

"Only a slight head-ache, mother. I think I will go to bed."

"Well, you know my sentiments—you're ill from too much politics."

She shook her head and her ladle at him in grave reproof. Her large, fat face worked with contending emotions of pity and rebuke. Her cheeks were humid, but whether with tears or perspiration it was difficult to ascertain. She kissed him and ran into the shop. Much relieved at her departure he mounted the stairs feebly, and got into bed. For once Mrs. Dawe ate her Sunday dinner without him, and the dainty morsels were swallowed with much pain owing to a lump in her throat caused by her son's wasteful inability to partake of the tempting viands, which would now have to be disposed of at the same price as the inferior articles on sale in the shop.

All the afternoon Jack had Gilbert's Plays open on a pillow; but he read little, for his thoughts gave him no peace. Now and again he sought a brief respite by gazing through the window-panes at the varied scene without.

"Generous impulse of an inconsistent soul!" he cried suddenly when the lamplighter was going his rounds. "Say rather, cowardly desertion of post and principle!"

He lay back wearily upon the pillow. Silence was falling upon the road now—a silence occasionally broken by the banging of drums and the squeaking of flutes and the wondering dull murmur of crowds of hurrying boys. At last these sounds too ceased, and nothing was audible save rare approaching and receding footsteps. He heard the shutters put up and barred, and soon after, his mother entered the room, but finding him asleep she departed on tiptoe. Then he opened his eyes again. The room was filled with the glory

of the moonlight, and he could see the clear stars high up in the cloudless blue. It was a perfect night, a harbinger of summer nights to come ; and a divine calm seemed to lie even upon the fever and fret of London.

But for Jack there was no rest. Far into the night he lay tossing and turning from side to side, and from time to time his lips formed the words : "The Cabinet Trick."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PREMIER AT HOME.

"UNEASY lies the head that wears a crown," would appear to have been as true of most sovereigns at the period treated of in this history, as it has been at most other periods. We find from contemporary records that loyal and devoted subjects were frequently impressed with the idea that this earth—abode of strife, imperfection, uncharitableness, and trouble — was not good enough for sainted majesty to dwell in ; and as sainted majesty was never of the same way of thinking, but inclined to the opinion that a crown on this earth was infinitely preferable to the potentiality of one in any other, loyal and devoted subjects frequently resorted to violent and explosive methods of influencing sainted royalty's actions, if not sainted royalty's thoughts. This had a tendency, explicable on natural, scientific, and other grounds, to make sainted royalty lead a most uncomfortable existence ; an existence made up chiefly of cold shivers and precautions, with occasional narrow escapes to vary the monotony. The contemporary records from which we gather these facts differ, it must honestly be admitted, among themselves in numerous ways. This, however, does not in any way detract from the truth of the facts. On the contrary, it is an axiom cordially admitted without reservation by historians, that no event can be considered really to have happened, unless the accounts of it contain numerous discrepancies. For, it is argued, and very justly, different men describing the same thing could not possibly agree, unless there were collusion and falsification.

It has been reserved for the country that gave birth to the poet whose dictum we have quoted, to deprive it of universal application. The head that wore the crown in England lay very easily indeed. It may occasionally have been troubled, it is true, by visions of having to spend a few days in London ; of ladies who did not expose enough of the upper part of their persons to the gaze of sainted royalty ; and of Englishmen who, despite all that Oscar Wilde* and the example of the Highlands could do, stuck to

* A gentleman who became famous at this period — by objecting to trousers.

breeches with the dogged resolution of their race. But still these troubles, real though they were, were not enough to make the royal head lie uneasily. It was the Ministers whose heads should do all the uneasy lying, according to the theory of the Constitution; and they did it easily, if opposition statements are to be believed. All the troubles, cares, and responsibilities of royalty fell on their shoulders, owing to the happy working of that oft-quoted intangibility, the British Constitution, which has defied alike the battle and the breeze, the historian and the legislator.

The morning sun that peeped into the window of the room in Downing Street where the Premier was slumbering, might reasonably have expected to gaze upon a head tossing restlessly under the weight of vicarious royalty. But no such sight met the orb of day. The Premier was sleeping with the calm of an innocent child. No visions of irate opposition appeared to trouble him; the cabals against his authority, the petty intrigues that do so much to embitter the statesman's life, did not affect his slumbers. His breath did not come fitfully, or jerkily; it was the breathing of an untroubled spirit, which the cares of the world passed by. Deep and regular, it might, by the unimaginative spectator and auditor of the Ministerial repose, have been dubbed a good, steady snore; but to the penetrating gaze of the philosopher, it was symbolic of the peace that passes most people's understanding. Even a snore may teach much to the man who looks beneath the surface of things, and is not satisfied with knowing the mere physical chain of causation which precedes the coming into being of a snore. The philosophy of snoring has yet to be given to an expectant world.

The door opened gently, and a tall, handsome man entered the room, and advancing towards the sleeper, placed a hand upon his shoulder. This was John Tremaine, the Premier's private secretary, and, in the opinion of many whose opinion was entitled to respect, the real Premier. The Premier had other private secretaries, who indited the numberless notes, in which the Right Hon. A. Floppington presented his compliments and remained their obedient servant, to some obscure and inquisitive individuals, who revelled in such glory as was to be derived from the snubbing such missives generally conveyed. But John Tremaine managed all his private affairs; engaged and dismissed the servants; paid his bills; signed his cheques; and, it was jocularly whispered amongst those more intimate with the Premier, would, if events called for such a sacrifice, conduct the Premier's courtship, and represent him at the altar. He was connected in some fashion or other with most of the noble families of England, and, when at Cambridge, had devoted himself for some weeks to the study of the Integral Calculus; not from any ambition of becoming Senior Wrangler,* but because he thought it opened up a possible means of ascertaining the number of his cousins. He was on the best of terms with the leading men of all shades of thought, political and otherwise,

* The title borne by the candidate who obtained the highest place in a mathematical examination at Cambridge University.

and was thus in a position to keep the Premier well posted up in all that was going on. In addition to this, his general intimacy with all sorts and conditions of men enabled him to conduct delicate negotiations without attracting undue attention. Somehow or other, he managed to get wind of all the little secrets—a knowledge of which is such a help in the game of politics; and had Floppington been a man of stronger will, with the help of Tremaine's omniscience he might have made himself almost omnipotent. To wind up, all the records of this period to which we have had access combine in depicting him as having for his master a more than filial love and devotion.

The Premier started impatiently as he felt the hand of Tremaine on his shoulder, and turned half round in the bed. He was in that nebulous borderland betwixt waking and sleeping, that twilight of human day and night, in which the real and the non-real mingle, and waking and sleeping thoughts confuse the half-awakened. Then, as John Tremaine said laughingly, "You're very late this morning, sir. You mustn't wander off all alone at night again," the Premier sat up, rubbed his eyes, looked around as if his surroundings were strange; then he bent his gaze earnestly upon Tremaine, and said: "Where am I?"

"I'm afraid you're not very well this morning," replied Tremaine; who added to himself: "I hope to goodness those men downstairs will hold their tongues. What indiscretion has he been committing?"

The Premier paused, as if pondering over Tremaine's suggestion. The official habit of suspecting a snare lying *perdu* beneath the most innocently-worded phrase, was so strong upon him, that, even when semi-somnolent, he did not answer hastily. But at last, as if the suggestion of illness afforded him relief from the perplexities which had been making themselves visible on his face, he replied:

"You are right. I'm not at all well. I don't quite feel myself this morning. But it will soon wear off, and then——"

"Then you'll be yourself again," cheerily responded Tremaine, adding: "Now, never mind church to-day. Just have a doze for a bit, and I'll send you up some tea and toast;" and turning briskly on his heel, he left the room, muttering: "He does look shockingly seedy. What could he have been doing last night?"

Left alone, the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington raised himself on one elbow, and pondered the situation. The effects of the previous night's adventure had not worn off; and he still appeared strangely agitated. He had suddenly descended from his habitation in cloudland—from the official atmosphere in which everything was rarefied into unreality, and had, at one plunge, found himself in the thick of the every-day working world. The familiar tone in which he was spoken of, the freedom with which he had been criticised, had all jarred upon him, coming as they did, not from his equals, but from men whom he and his had looked down upon as poor creatures born to work, and vote, and die,

while their superiors thought and legislated for them in a kindly fashion, which merited reverence and gratitude. Democracy, not as a rhetorical abstraction, but in the concrete, had brought home to him the underlying common humanity of mankind. As in a flash his vision had been purified, he had gazed straight into the very innermost heart of things; and that one night's adventure had surely done more to make him a true leader of men, than all the years he had spent wandering amidst the involuted commonplaces of officialism. A moral and spiritual change was taking place in the Premier. He was wearied with the struggle of contending forces; and, at length, relaxing his hard, fixed gaze, and murmuring gently: "It will be best to stay in my room for awhile; it will give me time to learn and think," his head fell back upon the pillow, and he dropped into a gentle slumber, from which he was awakened by the entry of a servant with tea and toast. This was one of the men who had witnessed the Premier's entry home the previous night; and it was with the faintest suspicion of a smile, which all his training failed completely to conceal, that he inquired how his master felt.

"Not very well, thank you," was the reply. "And—Thomas—bring me up the *Referee*."

James stared, startled out of all propriety, not so much at being called Thomas, for the Premier left the management of his domestic affairs so completely in Tremaine's hands, that his not knowing his servant's name or surname was not surprising, but at being asked for the *Referee*. He read it himself, and, if truth must be told, enjoyed the merciless chaff to which his master was subjected weekly in its columns; but that he, himself—the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington—should desire to see it, was, as he afterwards expressed it to his fellow-servants, "a twister." He recovered himself sufficiently to say, "Yes, sir," and left the room, decided to read his *Referee* very carefully that week, as he felt sure there must be something unusual in it. In a very short time he returned with the wished-for paper, and left the Premier to his tea and toast and reading. Not very much progress had been made, for tea and toast did not seem altogether to the Premier's taste, when Tremaine entered the room and barely had time to say, "Sir William has come, sir. I thought it best to send for him at once," when he was followed by the gentleman in question.

Sir William Lancet, usually spoken of as Sir William, was one of the leading fashionable physicians of London at the time—a tall, well-set-up man, slightly grizzled, and showing signs of age, but sprightly and youthful in manner and bearing. He knew as much, or as little, as most members of the profession, of the ailments to which flesh is heir; but he was imbued with a profound belief in the recuperative powers of Nature and the potentialities of self-repair possessed by the human body. He therefore interfered as little as possible, either by medicine or otherwise, with Nature's healing efforts, and acquired considerable reputation by so doing.

His manner was brisk and cheerful; he had a confident way of speaking, which inspired confidence in the patient, who felt that with such an ally, it would have to be an exceptionally vigorous disease that did not at once lay down its arms and retire worsted from the contest. Diet he laid great stress upon, and little cards containing lists of prohibited viands were placed at the side of the *menu* by his noble patients when dining out.

"The school of medicine of which I am a humble member," he used to say, "is scientific, not empirical. Medicine need no longer be a struggle between disease and nasty stuff in bottles, the patient being the sufferer whichever be the conqueror."

This was the gentleman who, advancing to the bedside, looked searchingly into the Premier's face, and said beamingly:

"Well, Mr. Floppington, and how are we this morning?" This manner of identifying himself with the patient had been no unimportant factor in earning him the confidence of his distinguished patients.

"Just the least bit out of sorts: slight headache—nothing worth talking of," replied the Premier.

While listening to the reply, Sir William had felt the patient's pulse and inserted a small thermometer under his armpit. Then waiting a few moments, he took it out, looked at it, shook his head solemnly and asked to see the Premier's tongue. His view of this made him shake his head solemnly once more, and then seating himself by the Premier's bedside, he said gravely:

"Now, this won't do. We're feverish; we've been unduly exciting ourselves, getting heated, and then, a chill following, we are queer. Slight enough, perhaps; nothing to worry about, and yet without careful treatment most serious consequences may ensue. Now, am I not right?"

"Pretty near the mark," said the Premier. "I suppose I had better stay in bed for the day."

"For the day!" repeated Sir William, in tones which curiously blended astonishment and deprecation, "for three or four days. My dear sir, your life is a precious one. I have attended you very many years, and understand your constitution. You have great nervous energy; but you must not allow yourself to be deluded by it into the belief that you are physically strong. You must have rest, and plenty of it."

Mr. Floppington made a gesture of impatience, and, but for the restraints which civilisation imposes on the natural man, would have said, "Silly old woman!" Sir William took no heed of all this; but, being started on a pet subject, went on placidly:

"Now that's an important point by the way, that study of the constitution. We are called in to see a patient; we know nothing of his constitutional peculiarities; we treat him according to rule; but as the old proverb has it: 'one man's medicine is another man's poison,' and he succumbs. Now if we had been called in to that patient when a child, had watched him growing from babydom

to childhood, from childhood to manhood, and from manhood to middle age, we should have known exactly how to treat him. Unless we can get that thorough knowledge of a patient's constitution, we work in the dark."

"I suppose the difficulty of the pursuit of medicine is, that so few patients live long enough to allow you to obtain that knowledge of their constitution which you so desire," said the Premier.

"Just so, just so," briskly replied Sir William, unconscious of the implication of the Premier's reply, "but we're getting over it by degrees. Now there are some patients, like yourself for example, who have been under my care twenty years or more, and I'm now in a position to know how to treat them. I know every minute peculiarity of their constitutions."

"Fortunate mortals," said the Premier wearily; "I never knew before how much I had to be thankful for."

Just then the doctor caught sight of the paper lying on the bed.

"Reading that!" he exclaimed; "no wonder we are feverish and excited. We really must not read these irritating remarks. Now go to sleep, and I'll see you to-morrow. Good-bye." And off he strode, giving Tremaine, who left the room with him, copious instructions as to the course to be pursued, and a careful description of the Premier's state of health, which enabled him to forward the following announcement to appear in Monday's papers:

"The Right Honourable Arnold Floppington is confined to his room with a slight cold, accompanied by feverish symptoms. Sir William Lancet has called, and is of opinion that a few days' rest will be all that is required to restore the Premier to his usual health."

Talleyrand, when informed of the illness of a statesman, was in the habit of inquiring: "Now, *why* is he ill?" But even that astute cynic would hardly have been able to discover any deep, diplomatic reason for the Premier's indisposition at this juncture. The ordinary plumb-line of the man of the world would have failed lamentably to fathom the soul of the simple-minded Floppington.

CHAPTER V.

THE KEWBRIDGE SALON.

"FLOPPINGTON is more eccentric than ever," said Sir Stanley Southleigh.

"He is, though it's a puzzle to me what his object can have been in being eccentric at all. I am sure he would have been Premier without it," replied Lord Bardolph Mountchapel. "He can plead nothing in extenuation—not even genius. Even the leader of the Opposition would not accuse him of that;" and the speaker laughed heartily. Sir Stanley, however, continued to look grave, as if his estimate of the Premier was not identical with Mountchapel's.

Sir Stanley Southleigh was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was a genial, mild-tempered sort of man, who was believed to be a great financier. By making debts which his successors would have to pay, he enabled his party to point proudly to the smallness of their expenditure as compared with that of their opponents. His unflinching courtesy had earned him the respect of the Opposition, which he may have found some compensation for the tendency to snub him largely developed amongst the Ministerialists. Conservatism was to him the fly-wheel of the political machine; and, as such, a most useful and indispensable part of it. He was, consequently, out of sympathy with those who wished to unite the functions of fly-wheel and driving-wheel in one somewhat incongruous combination.

Lord Bardolph Mountchapel was a man of quite a different type. He was a youngson of a noble house, the founder of which had been distinguished. His descendants revered him with almost Chinese veneration, and had, in consequence, carefully abstained from doing anything notable themselves, for fear of overshadowing his reputation. It was a striking instance of noble self-sacrifice. Lord Bardolph, however, had not a particle of reverence in his composition, and had determined that the reflected greatness of this progenitor should not satisfy him. He cast aside the family tradition, and boldly ventured on the stage of politics. He had joined the Conservative party; but he determined to make it go ahead. Wesley didn't see why the devil should have all the good tunes; and Lord Bardolph didn't see why the Liberals should have all the reforms. He had elevated inconsistency to the rank of a science. Like all English gentlemen, he had a fondness for horse-racing. He had observed that the gentlemen who occupied the position of prophets on the sporting journals never pinned their faith to one horse. They suggested different horses, in different issues of their journal, as the winners. By so doing, they were always able to boast, with truth, that they had "spotted" the winner. Lord Bardolph had not failed to notice

how wisdom was thus justified of her children, and he adopted the same tactics in politics. By advocating different policies of a most contradictory character at different times, he was always in a position to quote instances of his own foresight. The chameleon of politics, he was always able to maintain that he had sported any given colour. He was the Foreign Secretary. Nobody quite knew why he had been appointed to this important post. The only reason given for it was that he had asked for it, and that the Premier had not dared to refuse him. He was a Past Master in the art of translating the dialect known as Billingsgate into English fit for ears polite; and a man who could do that was, as English politics went in that age, a most obviously heaven-born statesman. Captious critics grumbled at his want of knowledge. It was objected that he was not quite clear on the relative position of the countries with which he had to deal; and that he had on one occasion threatened to send the fleet to a country without an inch of sea-board. But such critics only betrayed their own ignorance. If he had possessed more knowledge, he would have met with less success. Knowledge would have brought reflection; and, in politics, the man who reflects is lost.

The gentlemen thus introduced to the reader were standing, chatting with several other members of the Administration, in the salon of the Duchess of Kewbridge. Her husband, as became a Duke, was an important member of the party; so, of course, held office. He did not care a brass farthing about politics. It was open to question whether he cared a brass farthing about anything; but he was never tired of saying "noblesse oblige," and he felt that his position demanded of him that he should help to govern the country. It was a source of surprise—not unmingled with sadness—to find that the country did not appreciate the sacrifice at its true value; and that the Radical papers often wrote of him, as they wrote of the inferior mortals who felt that they were honoured in being entrusted with a share in the government of the country, and not that they conferred honour upon the country by condescending to mismanage its affairs.

If the Duke, however, looked upon politics as one of the necessities of his elevated rank, the Duchess took quite a different view of the matter. She was a politician to her finger-tips. To take part in an intrigue, which had for its object the coaxing over of some refractory member of the Cabinet, or the detachment from their party of some recalcitrant adherents of the Opposition, was the very breath of her nostrils. She looked upon politics as a game of skill; and had an all-absorbing desire to know what were the real, as opposed to the ostensible, motives which dictated the moves of the players. This desire was frequently gratified, and no one was more behind the scenes than Her Grace. Her name had not figured in the newspapers when the names of the members of the Administration were published. But then, although the name of the prompter does not figure on the programme, there is no person whose services are more important.

The *laudatores temporis acti* were fond of saying that the political salon had died with Lady Palmerston. Her Grace thought differently, and with reason. She held regular receptions, at which one might confidently rely upon meeting, if not everybody who was anybody, yet a goodly number of somebodies; for, in compounding even her least exclusive social *olla podrida*, the Duchess always threw in enough celebrities to make provincial nobodies feel that they were at last moving in the society of their intellectual equals. Ministers and leaders of the Opposition formed friendly little groups, where little comedies to be enacted in the House for the edification of the public were carefully rehearsed. Members of the diplomatic corps dropped in, and tried their best to deceive each other. In order to do this successfully, they told the truth. Civilised man finds this more effective than falsehood; and, additional advantage, there is less strain on the memory.

There, too, the "small fry" of the political world were eager to show themselves. It was doubtless a great pity that any member of the Conservative party, who had a seat in the House of Commons, should not have been in what it was customary to term, Society, with a capital "S"; that Society whose doings were chronicled in the *Morning Post*, the *World*, and other long defunct journals, whose readers used to take an all-absorbing interest in such items of information as, that His Grace the Duke of Mangold Wurzel intended to wear a white hat for the rest of the season; or that the Countess of Leicester Square preferred quill toothpicks to all others. But however sad it might be, it was a fact that many Conservative M.P.'s were not in Society. Such men had spent their money, and lost their self-respect in order to get into the House; but, if they had visions of the two letters after their names opening to them the doors of certain big houses, these visions had proved as unsubstantial as visions have an unpleasant habit of being. Still, they had to be kept in good temper—the men, not the visions—and shown some little consideration; and so they had the *entrée* to Her Grace's political receptions, where they were in the world, if not of it; and where they made themselves conspicuous by their endeavours to look quite at ease and comfortable. They felt dutifully grateful for the honour conferred upon them; and Her Grace had the satisfaction of feeling that if some of her guests were not all they should have been, yet she was instrumental in keeping the Party together, and patching up many a little rift in the Tory lute, that might have made the Tory music very discordant, though it failed to silence the instrument.

This particular night, the rooms were unusually crowded, and there were all the signs of unusual excitement. The Ministry had introduced a new Reform Bill. The last Ministry had also introduced a Reform Bill, the most prominent part of which was a limited concession of the franchise to women. But the then Opposition had defeated them. Women's suffrage was not a thing the Constitutional party could tamely permit. They predicted the inevitable ruin of our great and glorious Constitution, if any woman had

a vote. They harrowed the feelings of the country by heart-rending pictures of Britannia ceasing to rule the waves, and being reduced to the sad necessity of pawning her trident. They drew maps in which the Atlantic Ocean fraternised with the North Sea, no British Isles intervening to check their loving embrace. They revelled in descriptions of "Red Ruin, and the breaking-up of laws," and, drawing largely on their own minds, became painfully familiar with chaos. They repeated *ad nauseam* the impassioned arguments of their leader, Floppington, till the fine images of the great orator grew tedious to the ear. Having done all this they, in due course, reaped the reward of virtue, and were admitted to have qualified themselves to introduce a Reform Bill of their own.

It goes without saying, that save for the absence of any provision for female suffrage, it was rather more Radical than the measure upon which the Liberals had been defeated. It goes equally without saying, that the Radicalism was due to the pressure exercised upon the Premier by his colleagues.

So far, all had been happiness and concord. But it was whispered that some bold spirits in the Ministry wanted to go further still. It was an open secret in well-informed political circles that Lord Bardolph Mountchapel and his following were determined, notwithstanding their recent opposition to the limited Liberal measure, to introduce a clause unconditionally enfranchising women, and that the Premier and the rest of the Cabinet were convinced they had gone as far as they consistently could. Hence the rumours of dissensions in the Cabinet, and all the excitement consequent upon them. Would Lord Bardolph resign, or would the Premier give way? was the question upon every one's lips. When the *Daily News* one morning announced, "it is rumoured that an influential member of Her Majesty's Government has threatened to resign if the Reform Bill does not provide for the complete enfranchisement of women," people were doubtful what truth there might be in such rumours. But when the *Standard*, the following morning, announced that it was enabled, "on the best authority, to contradict the rumours to which a contemporary had given currency," everybody was convinced that a split in the Cabinet was imminent.

The ladies and gentlemen, therefore, who were at Her Grace's reception, formed into little groups, by which the situation was eagerly discussed. The Premier prided himself upon looking at all sides of a question. He did not look at them all at once though, but in turn, and not even his colleagues knew which particular aspect of a question he was regarding at any particular moment. This charming variability gave his proceedings an interest they might not otherwise have commanded; and speculations as to what he would do next, had replaced the solution of acrostics as the pet amusement of the readers of Society journals. In nothing was the difference between the Premier and Lord Bardolph more marked than in the one quality they had in common. Lord

Bardolph was consistent in his inconsistency ; the Right Hon. Arnold Floppington was not.

"Floppington certainly is more eccentric than ever," said the Right Honourable William Jones. He was Secretary at State for War ; a position for which he was eminently fitted, as he had made a large fortune in the wholesale drug trade. He was a little man, with pale blue eyes, an aquiline nose, of which he was very proud, as he believed it resembled the great Duke of Wellington's, and with a calm placid way of answering questions, which the chronic state of his department rendered invaluable. His mind was a mirror which reflected with tolerable fidelity that of Lord Bardolph, by whom, indeed, he had been forced upon Floppington when the Ministry was forming. "I am told," he continued, "that the other morning being pestered with inquiries about what he would like for breakfast, he actually cried out, 'fry me some eggs and bacon and be done with it.' The story ends there, so I do not know whether he got his fried eggs and bacon or not. If he did, he can't have the hyper-squeamish stomach I have always credited him with."

"I daresay he did," said Lord Bardolph, laughing. "That fellow Tremaine would go through fire and water for him ; you know the debt of gratitude he owes him. If Floppington wanted the moon his secretary would at once commence negotiations with the man in possession. And I shouldn't wonder if the story's truer than the majority of the anecdotes you pick up. As that pedantic Jorley says, 'Many a man begins the voyage of life with queasy susceptibilities and ends it a cannibal.' Floppington began by kicking against 'Tory Democracy,' and here he is appealing to the plebeian heart through the medium of its stomach."

"I told the story to Rockington," observed Sir William reflectively ; "and with his usual straining to be witty, he made a stupid remark about the eggs being laid by a *canard*."

"I haven't seen the Premier since the last Council," put in Sir Stanley, "but I, too, hear strange things of him. He has passed some intimate friends without seeing them. He walks about gazing into vacancy, or as one of his secretaries described it, trying his hardest to look into the middle of next week. He was always absent-minded, but now he really seems to have forgotten who he is."

"Self-knowledge is the highest of all knowledge," laughed Lord Bardolph, "and our let-dare-not-wait-upon-I-would Premier has not yet attained to it."

"I wonder whether he'll remain firm in his opposition to the Woman Suffrage Clause," said the Right Honourable William Jones ; "he was determined enough at the last Council, but possibly at the next, he may, as he has so often done before, tell us that he sees the matter in a different light."

"He's very fond of the cold dry light of intellect," said Sir Stanley, "but his mind unfortunately is a very prism. If he would only use monochromatic light now."

"Oh, I believe he's determined this time," interposed Lord

Bardolph. "My veiled threat of resignation put his back up, and to do him justice, I don't think he'll yield to threats. His susceptibility to argument has probably rendered him callous to other and generally more effective modes of inducing a change of opinion. You see determination is such a novel sensation to him, that the charm of it may induce him to be untrue to himself, and determine him to be determined."

"And what shall you do then?" asked Sir Stanley.

"However painful it may be to go against the wishes of one's leader, I feel I have no choice. I have committed myself too deeply on the question to change now."

"I wasn't aware you found such difficulty in altering your policy," replied Sir Stanley, with mild sarcasm. "But if you don't wish to expose yourself to the dread necessity of every now and again boxing almost the whole of the compass, why don't you steer a middle course, so that you'll never have to deviate more than a few points? Besides, you know what the poet says about 'the falsehood of extremes'?"

"Certainly; and I quite agree with him," said Lord Bardolph, with a curious smile. "And henceforth I intend to act differently. I have found out the average elector can't comprehend extremes."

"Then you will give way on the Woman Question?" cried Sir Stanley eagerly.

"Not exactly that; but one extreme at a time will content me for the future," he replied, with a malicious gleam in his eyes. "It's in the plural that the danger lies. And for the moment my views are extreme upon just that point."

"I don't understand the new Toryism," said Sir Stanley, as he turned to leave the group. "You'll be advocating the abolition of the House of Lords next."

"Not while you and other friends of mine are in the House of Commons," meaningly replied Lord Bardolph; and then, he and the Right Honourable William Jones being left together, he indulged in a suppressed burst of laughter; of which the Right Honourable William Jones gave a moderately successful imitation. They were the leading representatives of the new Toryism, and the frank confession that it was unintelligible to the old school afforded them genuine gratification.

"But don't you think it will be a mistake to push your resistance too far? Will it not damage us in the eyes of the country? What about public opinion?" said the Right Honourable William Jones when the Chancellor of the Exchequer was out of ear-shot.

"And pray what are the eyes of the country?" demanded Lord Bardolph. "The country is a gigantic abstraction. Let us analyse it. For political purposes this abstraction, about which so much has been said, which is quoted so largely, which is addressed so magniloquently, for which any number of practical, shrewd, hard-headed men of the world profess to be ready to sacrifice themselves, is a few millions of men, ordinary mortals. What is their object in life? To live on; and, therefore, to get the bread and butter with-

out which life is impossible. Some few of us, the lucky ones, myself among the number, have the dead hands of those who have gone before holding out to us our bread and butter from their graves. The rest of this abstraction, the people, are daily digging their own graves in the struggle for bread and butter."

"Well?" murmured the Right Honourable William inquiringly, and looking rather confused; for to tell the truth, he rather suspected some allusion to the business he had carried on, in all this talk about bread and butter and graves.

"Well, they haven't therefore either the time or the opportunity to form any opinion of their own about politics, the way in which they are governed, or misgoverned, as every Opposition says of every Government in turn. They have eyes, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not, save and except through the skilfully devised medium which goes by the name of public opinion. This is manufactured in large quantities by editors of newspapers in their columns, and by politicians on the platform. It has made things false seem true; cheated through eye and through ear. Now in order that the eyes of the people shall view my conduct in this matter in the right light, that is to say, the light I wish them to view it in, I have taken good care to manufacture a very large amount of public opinion, whose quality, therefore, I am in a position to guarantee."

"What are your lowest terms for the article?" put in the War Minister, who dearly loved what, with the courage befitting his post, he ventured to call a joke.

Lord Bardolph calmly ignored his satellite's witticisms, and went on:

"If then Floppy indulges in the unwonted luxury of a backbone, and evolves from the molluscous into the vertebrate class of beings, I shall resign. The Ministry, I flatter myself, will not be long in going to pieces. As for myself, a large proportion of the people, looking at me through the medium of my specially prepared public opinion, will be convinced that I am the only man to whom they can look for political guidance. I shall appear as the statesman who saw that it was unjust to hinder the fairer half of humanity from indulging in the exquisite pleasure to be derived from dropping a voting paper into the ballot-box. There is a swift flowing tide in the direction of the total enfranchisement of women. I shall take it at the flood, and have no doubt it will lead me to fortune."

"You know, my dear Mountchapel, that I have always followed you, and always will. But really now, for us to advocate the enfranchisement of women—such a revolutionary measure!—is simply flying in the face of the principles of the party to which we belong; not to speak of our having objected to that small modicum of enfranchisement offered by the late Government."

"Principles were made for men and not men for principles," sententiously observed Lord Bardolph. "Besides, when we are alone, we two may drop the usual cant. There is but one principle

in politics—to get power. The present is an age of democracy; which means, I have been told, ‘government by the people for the people’—translated into Latin—*populus vult decipi et decipitur*. The Doctor wouldn’t have passed that in the good old days; but it is faithful, if not literal, notwithstanding. To my mind, rival statesmen are like rival tradesmen. The people, who are our customers, want certain things done, certain measures passed. They think, Heaven alone knows why, that they will get their bread and butter easier if plenty of work is given to the Queen’s printers, if more Acts are added to the Statute Book. We must supply their wants. We must assure the public that the Opposition firm is composed of men ignorant of the business, whose charges are exorbitant, whose goods are unsatisfactory, and that we, and we alone, are capable of supplying Acts of Parliament of first-rate quality and finish at reasonable rates, with punctuality and dispatch. Whoever does not share my views may hug himself with the consciousness of superior virtue, but as a statesman he had better put up the shutters.”

The War Minister stared in undisguised astonishment as this battalion of words hurled itself upon his auditory apparatus. He had all along felt that the policy of his leader and friend was sadly lacking in principle; a sort of sub-consciousness that this reduction of politics to the level of auctioneering was unworthy of gentlemen at times disturbed him. He was the unhappy possessor of a conscience. It was not a very big one, it is true, and its pricks were not of a vigorous description, so that he never experienced much difficulty in ignoring them; but this frank exposition of what his poor little weakling conscience now and then tried to tell him rather staggered him. What he would have replied is uncertain, for just as he was on the point of giving vent to his thoughts, the Duchess joined them.

“And so, Bardolph, you really persist in your ridiculous fad of giving women a vote?” she said, addressing him in the tone a mother might adopt towards a disobedient child. Truth to tell, she looked upon Lord Bardolph as the naughty boy of the party, who ought to have been whipped and put to bed when he made a noise, instead of being allowed to stay up with his elders to quiet him.

“Certainly, Duchess,” half-mockingly replied Lord Bardolph. “I do not believe in half measures. We, that is to say, the Ministry, have wisely awakened to the fact that to oppose the Spirit of Progress is about as wise as attempting to mop up the Atlantic, like a good old lady of whom you may have heard.”

He looked inquiringly at the Duchess, as if he expected her to claim acquaintance with the lady in question. Finding she did not do so, he resumed:

“The Spirit of Progress (with a capital P, you know) demands that all who have to obey the laws shall have a voice in making them. Women have to obey the laws, therefore they should have a voice in making them.”

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Her Grace. "It's quite time enough to give the people what they want when they get troublesome, and organise processions, and are likely to break windows. Then, I am glad to say, we have shown ourselves as ready as the Opposition to do what is right and proper; but women——"

"Well, but women?"

"Women haven't made any fuss about the vote. I don't believe any of them want it. Why should you cause a lot of bother to give women what they don't want, and haven't asked for?"

"Haven't they? What about woman's rights meetings? What about——"

"Spare me the recital of that, I beg you. A lot of unattractive, masculine women may have identified themselves with this movement; unable to exercise the power legitimately theirs, they seek after the franchise!" vehemently exclaimed the Duchess. "But women, with women's charms, want it not."

"All charming women are not like yourself," responded Lord Bardolph with a bow. "You know the text, 'Unto them that have much, shall much be given.' Its truth lies in this—that those who have much are always wanting more, and are not satisfied till they get it. You perceive the application?"

"Scarcely."

"The poor man is content so long as he has the barest necessities of life. It is the rich man, able to gratify every wish, that thirsts for more gold. And so it is the women richly dowered with all the graces that charm man and give her power over him, who long for the vote that shall give them actual political power."

"You cannot persuade me that women want the franchise. To initiate change is opposed to all our principles. Your action may prove embarrassing to the party. You are playing some game of your own."

"Your Grace is pleased to be severe; but you are mistaken in my motives. I simply believe that the course I recommend is best for the party and the country." And so saying, Lord Bardolph slowly sauntered away.

The Duchess and the Right Honourable William Jones, who had been nervously silent during this conversation, stood looking after him.

"He's as enthusiastic about women's rights as Gwendolen Harley herself," said Her Grace.

"Why, there she is!" said the Right Honourable William, turning round; "and Bardolph's talking to her."

"Um!" said the Duchess, as she bent her eyes on the Foreign Secretary and his fair companion.

The War Minister looked at her, and then at them. Then a gleam of intelligence set out on a journey over his face as he reflectively muttered, "Oh!"

CHAPTER VI.

BEAUTY AND BRAINS.

A GREAT man is dependent for much of his greatness on his making his entry into the world at a fitting time. Through not attending to this essential requisite, many a man has gone to his grave, if not unwept, "unhonoured and unsung." The sum which Milton received for "Paradise Lost" cannot be called excessive; but had Milton lived later, it is doubtful whether he would have received anything at all; in all probability, he would have had to publish his monumental work at his own risk, and would certainly have been a loser by the venture, for people would not think it a duty, in the case of a modern writer, to place the great epic poem on their shelves, though they never took it down. No better advice could therefore be given to those who wish to become great, than the counsel to be very careful in selecting the period of their birth.

This is true of all departments of human greatness, and not of literature alone. Helen of Troy was doubtless a very beautiful woman. By being born at an early period in the history of the world she contrived to be immortalised. In the prosaic epoch with which this history deals, she might have figured in the columns of the Society journals, have set the fashions, and received that highest of all tributes to feminine charms, the innocently-worded query of other women as to what the men could see in her. But she would not have set two peoples by the ears, or been handed down to posterity by a great singer.

Lady Gwendolen Harley opened her eyes for the first time a little more than a quarter of a century before the ministry of the elder Floppington; and though she played a prominent part in the world, it is not what it would have been had she graced less prosaic times. She was of medium height; the meaning of which often-used phrase appears to be that short people thought her rather tall, and tall people rather short. Her figure was well rounded and exquisitely proportioned, with a waist whose lines would have delighted Pheidias himself, from which it follows that it could not have been squeezed into a nineteen-inch corset. She had a charming face, perhaps a shade paler and more thoughtful than was consistent with perfect physical health, but, nevertheless, not lacking the sweet flush of rose on its lily fairness; eyes of lustrous gray, now sparkling with intellect, now liquid with emotion, but at all times the windows of a noble soul, fearless and true; a mouth not too small "for human nature's daily food;" a nose with finely-curved nostrils, and a somewhat lofty brow crowned by a mass of light chestnut hair.

The daughter of a man who had held high office in the State she had early married a rising politician, who was unfortunately cut

off before promise had ripened into performance. A widow and an orphan, she had found consolation in the emancipation of woman. She threw herself into the cause with all the enthusiasm of her nature. Had she been a mother, she might have given up to baby what was meant for womankind. As it was, she made the raising of the status of woman the business of her life. She wrote articles, in which she dwelt almost lovingly upon the wrongs to which woman was subject, upon the disadvantages under which she laboured, because she had to submit to laws made for her by man, and man alone. Her friends sometimes said that success in her mission would be the greatest misfortune that Fate could have in store for her. Life, without any of the wrongs committed by tyrant man to expatiate upon, would be dull and vapid indeed.

There was some truth in this. It is sad to think what would become of all those who, from the pulpit and from the printing press, are alike engaged in endeavouring to make the world moral, if, by some miraculous agency, their words took effect. A perfect world, with nothing to find fault with, is too dreadful to contemplate; and more dreadful to reformers of all descriptions than to any one else. Evidently it is only the hopelessness of their efforts which induces them to persevere.

Undeterred by such thoughts as these, or the banter of her friends, she brought all the resources of a clear intellect, a bright wit, and a noble enthusiasm to the work she had set herself—the raising of woman to a position of equality with man. Her ideal was:

“Everywhere
Two heads in council, two beside the hearth,
Two in the tangled business of the world;”

and so earnestly had she worked, that the enfranchisement of woman was already within the sphere of practical politics. Indeed, had it not been for the unfortunate opposition of Floppington, she would, ere this, have reaped the first-fruits of her labours.

Her friends wanted her to marry again. They regarded her views on the woman question as a malady for which marriage would prove an efficacious cure. Violent diseases need violent remedies.

As yet, however, she had not complied with the wish of her friends. Having adopted advanced views as to the rights of her sex, she included the right to please herself amongst them, and, with the selfishness inherent in the very best of us, meant to avail herself freely of it. Young, beautiful, clever, and possessed of an ample fortune, society was all before her where to choose; and though many men were known to declaim against strong-minded women, not one of them but would have been too glad to have the chance of proposing to the leader of the much-maligned portion of the sex. As she was strong-minded, however, they did not get the chance.

Nevertheless, society in general, and her friends in particular, felt certain that sooner or later she would marry. They took an

interest in her, of which she was quite ignorant, and for which she would not have been grateful had she known it. And Society had made up its mind—not an extensive operation—that the happy man would be the Premier of England; but whether the Premier *in esse* or the Premier *in posse* was uncertain. In a word, the enjoyment of the position of wife of the Premier was to be hers. Whether she would enter upon it at once as the wife of Floppington, or await the reversion of it as the wife of Lord Bardolph Mountchapel, it was open to her to decide: that much freedom of action was allowed her,—no more.

As therefore Lady Gwendolen and Lord Bardolph stood chatting together, many pairs of eyes were directed towards them. Animated groups filled the spacious rooms. Ministers, ambassadors, distinguished foreigners, the rank and beauty and wealth of England were gathered there; the majority discussing horse-racing or the latest scandal when they had grown tired of airing their political sagacity. The love of gossip is deeply implanted in the human heart. Peer and peasant alike share it; which accounts for the universal abuse which is its fate. Do we not all hasten to read *Memoirs* and *Reminiscences*, so that we shall not speak in ignorance when condemning alike their contents, and the depraved taste to which they pander? And as these pairs of eyes were directed towards them, be sure the owners did not fail to jump at conclusions. That is a form of athletics we are all addicted to. One can succeed in it without training. But there were restless figures here and there, whose mental gymnastics did not take this conventional form. An archbishop was discussing the indecent suggestions afforded to impure minds by ballet-dancing, as tested by his own intuition; a brilliant landscape-painter was priding himself on never having painted Nature from the nude; a professor of Esoteric Buddhism was expounding the successive re-incarnations of spirits on their upward course from Liberalism to Conservatism; an Egyptologist whose fondness for antiquities made him an enthusiastic lover of high old Toryism, was boring an interested group with his solution of cryptogramic papyri; a disciple of Maurice was boasting of his humility to an infidel native Indian, whom the Carlton was going to put up at the autumn elections; an able editor was busily engaged in a series of confidential conversations, in which the confidences were all on one side; a fascinating member of that once celebrated league, which turned “a primrose by the river’s brim” into a pitcher-plant for luring in the unwary, was endeavouring to strengthen the political faith of a somewhat slippery adherent by skilfully avoiding any reference to politics.

But the scope of this history sternly vetoing indiscriminate eavesdropping, the historian must reluctantly leave in the silence which sooner or later overtook them these, and many other ardent talkers who have long since crumbled into dust:—is not Kewbridge House too, with all its glories, a dream of the past; its heartburnings and its airy badinage, its galaxies of beauty and wit,

its very dulnesses alike sanctified by the glamour of intervening centuries?

"At last I pay my homage to the goddess of the cause, nay, burn incense at her shrine of which I am the priest," laughingly said Lord Bardolph to Lady Gwendolen, looking at her however with an earnestness that belied the lightness of his tone.

"The goddess accepts your homage," she answered with a winning smile; "but have the goodness to refrain from burning the incense of flattery. Priests are too much addicted to that sort of thing; and the dwellers on Olympus are weary of hearing their praises sung by mortals. Gods and goddesses, you know, may not be too clever, but they possess more intelligence than most of their worshippers appear to credit them with."

"The incense I burn is that of truth," replied Lord Bardolph in a mock heroic tone.

"Then be careful lest its novelty prove too much for my unaccustomed nerves," said Lady Gwendolen. "But let us descend from the empyrean, and tread the earth. Is it true that you intend to resign?"

"It is," he replied, lowering his tone confidentially.

"Why?"

"Surely you know," he said, with tender reproach. "Ministers of different creeds never pull together well, especially when one of them has just been converted to the faith he professes. So unless I can make a proselyte of my fellow minister——"

"But will he remain firm? He is so very vacillating," she said musingly; and a shade of sadness came over her face, but whether in sorrow for the Premier's vacillation or in fear lest he should prove firm, it would be difficult to determine. Probably both emotions swayed her equally at the moment. Emotions have a logic of their own, and Lady Gwendolen had never paused to analyse her own wishes: never thoroughly realised their inconsistency and never mentally faced the situation in the event either of his yielding or of his remaining firm.

"I think he will," replied Lord Bardolph, endeavouring to answer indifferently; and yet unable to prevent a note of triumph becoming audible to the keen ears of his companion. "It was not without difficulty that I—that is to say, we—induced him to decide for a Reform Bill at all. His mind kept the pros and cons of it dancing up and down, like a juggler with balls. The pros had it at last. The pros of woman suffrage, however, have not been so fortunate. I have tried to convince him of its necessity, but in vain. But I do not wonder that I should have failed, when possibly——", and he stopped, as though afraid to venture to put his thought into words.

She knew what he was about to say, as well as if he had finished the sentence. A slight blush tinged her cheek, and then left her pale, as she unconcernedly said:

"When possibly——"

"You, the high priestess of the cause had failed," he said,

lowering his gaze, and yet never losing sight of her face for a moment. He had a purpose in every word he uttered; and marksman never scanned target more eagerly, than he did her countenance.

If he expected her to betray any trace of disappointment or annoyance, his expectation was not gratified.

She laughed gaily as she replied:

"But a few short minutes ago I was a goddess, now I am but a priestess. How are the mighty fallen!" Then, with just the slightest suspicion of malice in her tones, she added: "Not every one is so readily converted as yourself. But have you fully weighed all the consequences of your action in retiring from the Ministry?"

"I have espoused the extension of the franchise to women too strongly to admit of my remaining a member of a Cabinet which will not introduce it into the Reform Bill. My honour is at stake. It may be that I am ruining my hopes of a political career by my devotion to you—to your cause. But I have put my hand to the plough and I cannot, in honour, draw back."

"Your sentiments and your conduct alike do you credit," said she, with a mocking inflection that took some of the charm from the compliment. "But it is not improbable that your pessimistic anticipations may never be realised. You may perhaps find, if you will pardon the perversion of the Laureate's words—

'That politicians rise on stepping stones
Of flouted chiefs, to higher things.'

"That poor Laureate! I often wonder whether his lines are so frequently perverted because he is popular; or whether he is popular because his lines lend themselves so readily to perversion. I incline to the latter view myself," said Lord Bardolph, with simulated gaiety. Then changing his tones he said seriously: "I know you approve my action; why then so harshly misjudge my motive? You know how I value your good opinion; you know—"

"Really you misunderstand me," replied Lady Gwendolen, evidently anxious to prevent the conversation taking the turn Lord Bardolph seemed eager to give it. "I do not misjudge your motives. On the contrary, I wished to give you some encouragement by reminding you of the possibility that your virtue might not be so unfortunate as to be its own reward."

"*Enfin je te trouve,*" joyfully exclaimed a shrill, feminine voice.

"I am sorry you have had any trouble, Madame Drapeau-rouge," responded Lady Gwendolen, beaming gracious welcome on a weazened, scraggy personage. "The rooms are certainly more crowded than I remember them for a long time."

"*Oui.* All the world expects Monsieur Floppington, *n'est ce pas?* Do you believe that he will arrive?"

"I really don't know," murmured Gwendolen, blushing, her heart beating a trifle more rapidly at the suggested prospect.

"He'd do better to stick to his St. Augustine," thought Lord

Mountchapel, sauntering away in disgust. "I didn't bargain for the old hermit turning up again."

"What a contrast between those two ladies under the chandelier! Who are they?"

"Yes. Bringing them together is a master-stroke of the Duchess's. The angelically beautiful one is Lady Harley, and the devilishly ugly one is Madame Drapeaurouge." The querist was a young newly-imported Gum-sucker.* At home he had signalled himself and his ignorance by writing a flippant satire on everything under the sun in the form of a political burlesque, and his shyness in society was only equalled by his audacity on paper. His interlocutor was the famous Marquis of Rockington, whose tragic fate has made him so popular a historical character, though his colloquial powers and his escapades alone would have ensured him such immortality as is conferred by frequent mention in the memoirs of the period. He was, as everybody knows, a violent Tory; but it would seem that his principles were based more upon an instructive repugnance to those of the *canaille* than upon reason. He loved Conservatism, although he knew it was ridiculous, and hated Liberalism because it was. The absurdity of the one was the cobweb round port, that of the other the cobweb in the garret-window. His face—which has been preserved for us by the pencil of Erlyon—was disfigured by a squint, so that he was singularly successful in his *amours*; and his mental observation of people had frequently the same obliqueness as his physical. Having a sharp eye for dulness and a dull eye for sharpness, he was a man to whom Truth was indeed a friend, but Epigram a boon companion. He was, therefore, a *causeur*, and of the type, even then almost extinct, of those who do not reserve all their talk for print. Authors found conversation with him very inspiring; but he had apparently not succeeded in inspiring himself to sufficient flights of dulness to satisfy an English audience. A comedy which he had produced at the Haymarket, had been damned for its wit; but as a compensation, a play of his, which had been brought out at the Odéon, had been hissed off the boards for its immorality. But his literary life had been the least part of his existence. He had roved over the world for adventure; in his own words, "a personification of peripatetic many-sided aimlessness."

"Madame Drapeaurouge, the famous Republican!" cried Oudeis, for such was the satirist's modest *nom de guerre*. "Impossible! How came she here?"

"As a warning to ladies of the effects of Radicalism. No one is here without some reason. For instance, that lady in green assists our cause in quite an original way. She is a high-class spiritualist medium, with a large acquaintance amongst ghosts of the best families, and she locates all the deceased Radicals in Shêol, as the modern version hath it. Apropos," added the Marquis quickly,

* This was the name given to the natives of Victoria, a province of the great Australian Empire, which at this time was a comparatively insignificant dependency of Britain.

seeing the dawning suspicion on the listener's face ; "there is Bishop Worldleigh, one of the revisers."

"From what I've heard of him, he wouldn't mind being translated afresh himself," said Oudeis, unconsciously plagiarising from his own *jeu d'esprit*. "But a revised version of *him* could not but be an improvement, whereas——"

"Take care. If he overhears you making fun of him, he will mistake you for one of his friends, and buttonhole you."

"Well, tell me about Lady Harley. I have been watching her eyes. What laughing tenderness !"

"Young man, don't be poetical and don't fall in love. Her ladyship, it is whispered, is to be led to the altar by nothing under a Prime Minister, and it is hardly likely she will wait for you. She is a special study of mine—and I perceive of yours too—it's so rare to find a woman who unites blue stockings with blue blood, and beauty with both. She is proud without being vain, and I suspect she is emotional. She loves to talk to poets, and see, she is even now turning to the young sonneteer of the *National Review*. If only she would insist less on adding to the burdens of her sex by giving them the responsibility of a vote ! But there is this difference between a man's hobby and a woman's—a man is vulgarised by his hobby, a woman beautifies hers. 'Tis pleasant to talk to her. We live in an ocean of lies, and only occasionally come to the surface to breathe."

"And do you mean to say that Floppington aspires to her hand ?"

"So his rivals fear, or, perhaps I had better say feared, for I understand that since he began to lead the opposition to the Female Suffrage Reforms of the late Government—mind, I didn't say because—there has been a coldness between them. If, as expected, he turns up to-night (which I doubt, for he's not appeared in society for months), their meeting ought to be dramatic, and I should advise you to keep your eye on it."

"It seems harder to believe she's in love with him than that he's in love with her. I wonder what's the source of the attraction—his gravity ?"

"Don't pun, there's a good fellow. No present-day pun can be old enough to be original."

"Well, I won't, though I was really in earnest. But if it isn't his gravity that she admires, what *is* it ? Perhaps she reverences his age. It must be twice as great as hers."

"My dear boy, in the first place no one thinks age venerable till he is old himself ; and in the second, there's not more than fourteen years' difference between them. She is a widow of——"

"Twenty-two, at most."

"Twenty-eight, at least. And he is about forty-two, and marvellously young for his position."

"I don't wonder at him making such rapid headway, when I consider the strength of his ambition. A man that preferred office to Lady Harley——"

"They do say he's a wonderful opportunist, but I don't believe it, unless perhaps, the greatest opportunist is he who resigns at the most inopportune moment ; for though he resigned his Home Secretaryship in the last Conservative Cabinet when the Ministry was at the zenith of its popularity, it turned out, as few had foreseen till after the event, that he had been far-sighted enough to descry the coming turn in the tide of opinion. But, as Premier, he has made a horrible mess of everything, as you know. He has had his day, though to be sure it was not an Arctic one, and in all likelihood his Premiership will be as much a failure as his verses are : we shall never see a second edition of either. He is a Christian as well as a poet, so how could he expect to manage a Cabinet ? I will say this for him, though, that he is thoroughly consistent all round in his want of originality. He took his Christianity from Coleridge, his poetry from Wordsworth, and his politics from the Family Bible, and — and the family 'scutcheon."

"But his speeches are surely original ? How they glow with the spirit of the highest traditions of Toryism ! How he stirs the blood when he calls upon his hearers to maintain the power and the glory of England, or to preserve the integrity of the Empire ! In Victoria we look upon them as models of oratory."

"Models of high falutin' !" replied Rockington disdainfully. "We shall lose the next election through him, any way ; just when there was a rift in that cloud of vulgar blatant demagoguism which has so long overshadowed the political firmament. I hope his career will bring home the much needed lesson that a man will not necessarily make practical speeches in office, because he has made poetical ones in opposition. The only qualification Floppington has for his post, as far as I can see, is his trick of reverie, which often makes him miss the sense of a long question. You smile, but you mustn't think I am talking cynically. On the contrary, I am in one of my most sentimental moods to-night. Whether Lady Harley is to blame for it I don't know, but really I never felt so sympathetic towards the poor Premier before. I have already risked my reputation by maintaining that he was sincere, and now I don't mind avowing that though he often irritates me by his ineptitude, I pity him from the bottom of my — What a nuisance these popular idioms are, you are forced to talk of your heart or your soul whether you have got them or not ? Poor Floppington, stung by a million criticasters, and worried by a hundred anxieties ! He always reminds me of a delicate hot-house plant struggling in the cold air amid a crowd of hardy perennials. But this last remark strictly *entre nous* !"

"Why ?" inquired Oudeis in astonishment.

"Because the comparison is trite ! But it's the one that naturally occurs to me for all that. Yes, Floppington is no more fitted for his place in the Cabinet than he is for anything else, save the scriptorium of a mediæval monastery. He is a pure survival of the

ages of faith; which is all the more surprising, because his family has always been so worldly."

"According to you, then, a place in the Cabinet of a Museum would be the most appropriate situation for him. But surely his Reform Bill is advanced enough."

"Granted; but what does that prove? Why, this. That his distrust in himself makes him defer to the dogmatic opinions of his colleagues. I have not the slightest doubt that the guiding spirit of the Reform Bill is Mountchapel, and I quite believe the report that he is trying his hardest to worry his chief into compliance with his new policy of extending its articles to women."

"Do you think he will succeed?"

"*Quien sabe?* But if our principles cannot win the battle, save by assuming the helmet of invisibility, or by dressing themselves in the uniform of their enemies, then may the devil save us from such victories, say I. If Hodge and the butterman *are* to regulate my morals and my taxes, why, the sooner we give up pretending that Conservatism exists to keep off the reign of pragmatic dulness the better. Let us emblazon on our banner, *Vive la bêtise*, and the country will follow us to a man. I'm sure I don't see why Mountchapel's Reform Bill—I say Mountchapel's advisedly—drew the line at criminals and imbeciles. They have just as much claim to enfranchisement as the dustman and the ploughboy, perhaps more. Criminals have acquired by experience, more or less dearly bought, a familiarity with our laws which should give their vote special value. As for imbeciles, their admission into the ranks of the electorate would afford a much-needed excuse for many of the proceedings of the Legislature. Tory democracy, indeed! If Mountchapel doesn't ruin himself, he will ruin the party."

"Then you think his policy short-sighted?"

"Very. It does not even recognise the author of its being; or at least it affects not to."

"Perhaps he hopes to flatter the Radicals by imitating them, and so to conciliate all parties."

"I don't credit him with anything so subtle as the sycophancy you suggest. The rogue is simply trying to unite the principles of Toryism with the want of principle of the Birmingham school, and between two schools the party may fall to the ground."

"But I understand that the other side is ready to snatch him up. He is not a drug in the market."

"He is not; but the Tory leaders take him as a drug with many grimaces, but in the hope he'll do them some good. For my part, I believe he's a quack medicine. At best, he's a spurious imitation of the Screwnail Elixir, and we should beware of him accordingly."

"Haven't we had too big a dose of Mountchapel ourselves to-night?" smilingly suggested Oudeis.

"I'm aware you want to talk about Lady Harley," replied Rockington, a trifle piqued. "Perhaps you'd better talk *to* her."

"I don't see much chance of getting a word in," said Oudeis

ruefully, glancing in her direction, "even if I had been introduced, which I haven't. But she *can't* be twenty-eight. It would be impossible for her to look so young."

"In the dictionary of youth, there is no such word as impossible. For aught I know she may be thirty," responded Lord Rockington, moving off through the crush.

"*Une femme a l'age qu'elle paraît avoir,*" cried Oudeis.

"*Une femme n'a jamais l'age qu'elle paraît avoir,*" retorted Rockington, turning his head. "Well, Duchess, didn't I prophesy you wouldn't get the lion out of his jungle of Parliamentary papers, after all? Next week, perhaps, when he's resigned——"

CHAPTER VII.

TRANSFORMATION.

LORD ROCKINGTON, though he expected the meeting between Lady Harley and the Prime Minister to be dramatic, was not aware of all the grounds of his own expectation. Should it take place, dramatic it would certainly be, though not in the vulgar sense of the word. The characters would strike no attitudes, group themselves into no tableaux. But for complicated play of emotion, and for shock and interaction of passions, the situation would be as dramatic as possible. Nobody but the two chief personages of the drama themselves knew the precise nature of their amorous relations; indeed, it may be doubted whether even their own knowledge was perfectly definite. To judge by the sequel, each seems to have had his or her own view of the depths of their intimacy. Anyhow, however far matters had gone between them, this much was certain, that the mild importunities of the unenterprising Premier had never quite overcome Lady Gwendolen's fatal objection to him on the score of incompatibility of belief, for the Enfranchisement of Women was almost a religion with its beautiful champion. But Her Ladyship knew no more than the veriest outsider why Floppington's appearances in Society—always extremely rare—had ceased altogether on his taking office; or why he had not called upon her since the beginning of his vigorous crusade against the Radical Reform Bill. In moments of buoyancy, she put his absence down to the pressure of business; in seasons of despondency, to a mistaken belief that she could never forgive him for overthrowing her cause. It did not occur to her that he might fear the living argument of her personality, the intoxicating magic of her liquid eyes.

Meanwhile, Lord Mountchapel had improved the opportunity. Although always an admirer of Gwendolen, he had repressed the

nascent passion for one whose affections were by all accounts pre-engaged, and had staunchly supported Floppington in the anti-suffrage course which led to office. But when he was left in possession of the field, his admiration rapidly changed into love, and he set himself to win the object of his affections. He had not advanced very far as yet, though he had undoubtedly made a certain headway. He had succeeded in turning a conventional acquaintanceship into a somewhat intimate friendship by confiding to her his conversion to the cause; and it would be too bad of Floppington to reappear on the scene and perhaps renew his relations with her. The only consolation he would have would be the reflection that the Premier had in all likelihood handicapped himself fatally by his conscientious objections to Woman Suffrage.

This consolation he was soon compelled to administer to his chafed spirit, for on emerging from the depths of an enthralling conversation with the editor of the *Times*, and from the corner in which it had been carried on, he found that the guests were nearly all gathered in the next room, an apartment of noble dimensions, ornamented with the most exquisite taste, though not after the ephemeral fashion of the period. The various detached groups, of which the company had previously been composed, had coalesced. Evidently somebody of importance had arrived; and as he approached the outer fringe of the crowd, he saw to his vexation that it was the Premier. He was the centre of attraction to which all these human atoms had gravitated; and, if the truth must be told, the atoms had drawn somewhat too close to be pleasant.

The Premier looked rather hot and excited. And yet he looked better than on the night he visited the Cogers. The careworn air, the aspect of weariness, the appearance of being perpetually engaged in the study of some intricate problem, the solution of which continually baffled him, had all disappeared. He had all the air of a man who has seen the storm-clouds of doubt roll away, and has gained a glimpse of eternal truth that had been long hidden from him; he was bright, alert, active.

This important change for the better was of course noticed by everybody, and everybody, equally of course, commented on it in more or less decorous whispers to his, or her, nearest neighbours. His Grace the Duke of Kewbridge noticed it, and said to his wife: "He has made up his mind to let Bardolph do his worst. He must have been dreadfully worried about it, certainly; and no doubt it was the cause of his prostration last Sunday. But it would have been worse than suicide to have given way to him; it——" but here he got excited and raised his voice, so Her Grace playfully placed her ducal hand upon his ducal mouth; and the ducal eloquence subsided into an inarticulate murmur, just as the ducal pronouns were getting very much mixed.

His Grace had no warrant for his remarks; but they put into words not only his own thoughts and wishes but the thoughts of almost every one present. The editor of the *Standard*, who had just dropped in, must have arrived at the same explanation of

the Premier's improved bearing, for in the very next issue of that weighty journal a paragraph appeared to the effect that—on the very best authority—it was anticipated that Lord Bardolph Mount-chapel would very shortly place his resignation in the hands of Her Gracious Majesty. And not content with this, there was a leader in which the resolution, foresight, and other qualities of the Premier, were lauded to the skies; while the presumption, impertinence, and ignorance of Lord Bardolph were duly scarified. The article wound up with a brilliant flourish, in which the world was reminded that it was a great man who remarked "*il n'y a point d'homme indispensable*;" and that it was left for Lord Bardolph to assume the contrary.

Lord Bardolph knew nothing of the rod the next morning's newspaper had in store for him. He was in happy ignorance of that as of most other things. And as he neared the Premier, whose animated talk was keeping a throng of listeners, he whispered to Lady Gwendolen, who had left Madame Drapeaurouge and who now found herself at his side:

"Floppington's very lively. He has evidently quite recovered from his indisposition. I wonder if he's holding forth on his pet philosopher, a German, Haydn I think they call him."

"Hegel I think you mean."

"Yes, yes, that's right. Floppington talked to me about him one night. He started with a medium-sized zero, and evolved the universe from it," said Lord Bardolph, summing up the secret of Hegel in the complacently condescending manner he adopted in his treatment of most subjects. It was an important factor in his success.

As they joined the Premier's listeners, that gentleman paused for a moment to give them a beaming glance of welcome; and then, rummaging in the tail pocket of his coat, he resumed:

"Then you certainly don't read the *Ref.*, for in this week's——"

"The what?" interrupted Her Grace, perfectly astounded.

"The *Referee*, I mean," said the Premier, whose search in his pocket had proved successful; and he flourished a copy of the journal in question as he spoke.

"That rag!" contemptuously exclaimed Sir William Jones.

"It's not rag, Sir William," mildly interposed Sir Stanley Southleigh, "I inquired into the matter in connection with my last Budget. I believe it's hemp or espartograss," and the Chancellor of the Exchequer looked wonderingly round as a hearty laugh greeted his remark. Sir Stanley had never been able to divine why people laughed when he did not make a joke, while they remained perfectly stolid and unmoved when he uttered witticisms the concoction of which had consumed much midnight oil.

"Rag indeed! I always read it," said the Premier, waxing enthusiastic. "It wouldn't be Sunday without my *Ref.* After the hard work of the week, it's delightful to lie in bed Sunday morning, with a pipe in my mouth, and hear the clock strike ten as I read 'Mustard and Cress.'"

Scientific men have demolished the thunderbolt, and have proved that it does not exist, that it cannot exist, and that it never did exist. They may be right; but in publishing this conclusion they have been strangely neglectful of the vested interests of authors. Imagine, therefore, dear reader, that despite all men of science have said and done, the thunderbolt has a real, tangible existence. Imagine that one of the greatest possible dimensions had plunged down the ducal chimney and deposited itself at the very feet of the assembled guests; imagine the consternation it would cause; and then you would have but a feeble idea of the consternation the Premier's avowal had upon those who listened to him. The thought occurred simultaneously to many of them that his many eccentricities had culminated in this—which admitted of only one explanation—lunacy, and that had he not been Premier, this explanation would have been forthcoming earlier.

The Premier stopped waving the *Referee* as he caught sight of the horror-stricken faces round him. He paused for a moment as if puzzled, and then burst into a peal of Homeric laughter.

"Ah, ah, ah!" he gasped when he could speak. "Did you think I was speaking of myself? I was only quoting the words addressed to me by an artisan, whose acquaintance I made some time back, when I went on a 'slumming expedition;'" and he laughed again. Giving his hearers time to recover their wonted composure, he continued gravely and earnestly: "And that is the way thousands of workmen—men who vote, who may by their votes sway the destinies of this empire—spend the Sabbath morn. Ah, my Lord Bishop," he said reproachfully, turning to Bishop Worldleigh, who stood by him, "how is it the Church fails to reach these men—that it has not the slightest influence on their lives? It should not be so; for if you cannot make poor men believe they will be better off in the next world, they will be Radicals in this."

"I think you judge too hastily," said the portly Church dignitary, in a somewhat offended tone. "*Ex pede Herculem* is not a mode of reasoning to be adopted with safety; and though you have made the acquaintance of an artisan who stays in bed on the Sabbath to read the periodical you hold in your hand, I do not hesitate to affirm that the Church does not fail to reach the labouring man."

"Well, then, it is the labouring man who fails to reach the Church," briskly retorted the Premier, laughing heartily at his own joke. Some of those standing round laughed also. But many, from an inward conviction that the subject was a religious one, put on that expression of mingled sorrow and deprecation usually seen on the faces of mourners, who know they will be considerably benefited by the reading of the will.

"This number," continued the Premier, when the owners of both sorrowful and laughing countenances had reduced their possessions to the normal condition, "was sent to me by some enthusiastic Radical who thought it might do me good to know what was

thought of me. I only wonder that he did not head it 'Sinner, repent!' or 'Know what awaits thee!' What do you think of these lines?" and he gravely recited as follows:

"Floppy once again declares he's bound by honour,
 But at slipping bonds he can Creation lick.
 When the doors in Downing Street are next thrown open,
 You will find that he has done 'The Cabinet Trick.'"

A merry peal of laughter greeted the recital, in which the Premier himself joined. All present felt the applicability of the verse, though they did not quite realise the meaning of the hint conveyed in the last line. This was excusable, however, as the writer himself, unless gifted with more of the prophetic spirit than was generally supposed to be available for modern use, could not have been any wiser than his readers. Lord Bardolph, in a semi-audible tone, whispered, "Floppy to a T." But many present had an ill-defined feeling, for which they could not have accounted, that the application of the lines was rather past than present. It may have been imagination, which we all know plays us strange tricks; but some subtle change seemed to have operated in the Premier. Outwardly he was the same; but those who looked beneath the surface were vaguely conscious of a spiritual change. So might Henry V. have appeared to those who, knowing him as a madcap Prince, gazed upon him as he announced his intention to

"Mock the expectation of the world,
 To frustrate prophecies, and to raze out
 Rotten opinion, who hath writ me down
 After my seeming."

"I am told," went on the Premier, "that I am made fun of in this fashion weekly, so that I can conscientiously recommend some of my friends to become subscribers."

"Really," said His Grace, who, as a member of the Cabinet, felt that he ought to say something; "really, I think this is going too far. Liberty of the Press is all very well, all very well, but this is license; and license should be put down, really should be put down." His Grace had a knack of repeating words and short phrases. He thought it gave them emphasis.

"Oh dear no!" laughed the Premier. "What for? I dare say it amuses the writer; I suppose it amuses his readers; and I am sure it amuses me."

At this moment one of the Premier's private secretaries, who had been hovering uneasily round the edge of the group of listeners surrounding the Premier, succeeded in his long-continued endeavours to catch the Premier's eye. He would have done so sooner, but for the fact that the visual organ of the First Minister of the Crown, unlike that of the Speaker, is unused to being caught; and judging from its expression, it did not relish the process. However, business is business, and so, jestingly uttering

a few words about the cares of State pursuing him everywhere, the Premier took his secretary's arm, and retired into a smaller room.

The withdrawal of the centre of attraction led to the breaking up of the aggregation of human atoms into its constituent parts. The great cluster resolved into small clusters, the atoms composing which were one and all busily engaged in talking about the Premier, till some one or other brought the news, which diffused itself rapidly by some law as yet unknown to philosophers, that some noble lord had married his sister's maid. This bit of intelligence rapidly deposed the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington from the position he had previously occupied as food for conversation.

His business over—it did not occupy ten minutes—and his secretary gone, the Premier remained seated in the chair which he had taken in order to hear what his secretary had to say. It was a comfortable chair, if not exactly what the possessor of an artistic eye would call a beautiful one. But it fulfilled the functions of its being. One could sit in it with a pleasant sense of being at rest, instead of being tortured, as is often the case with chairs that please the artistic eye, by the thought that Nature must have made the human body fearfully and wonderfully—angular. And, therefore, on the Socratic theory at any rate, it might lay claim honestly enough to the possession of beauty. A screen stood almost directly in front of it, and so, nearly hid its occupant from view. From the other room there floated in the buzz and hum of conversation, and the frou-frou of ladies' dresses. But the Premier remained in the comfortable chair, and showed no inclination to move out of it. His eyes were half-closed, and a cynical smile played timidly round the corners of his mouth; and his lips half-parted as a peal of laughter made itself audible. Perhaps he was thinking with how little wisdom, and with how little honesty the world is governed. The old careworn, irresolute look was on his face. He had given the best years of his life to politics, and possibly he was reflecting on his folly, and wondering whether it was worth the constant fret and worry, in order to be lampooned by an irresponsible writer in a Sunday paper. If he and that writer could only change places for a time, the lesson might do some good to the irresponsible wielder of the pen. Or perhaps he was not thinking at all, but only indulging in the luxury familiarly spoken of as "forty winks."

The latter supposition must be reluctantly admitted as the more probable, for when a low, soft voice gently uttered his name, he jumped to his feet, and rubbed his eyes vigorously, as if he were polishing up their lenses.

"I am pleased to find you alone," continued the sweet voice which belonged to Lady Gwendolen. "I have been hoping for a few words with you, but you have hitherto been unapproachable. How is it I have not seen you for so long?" she added, her voice unconsciously taking a tenderer inflection. "Even if

you had no leisure for morning calls, this is not the first Wednesday of the session."

"I really couldn't manage to come here before," replied the Premier, with a strange look of earnestness. "Heaven knows how gladly I should have jumped at the chance if it had been offered to me. I assure you I took the very first opportunity."

Lady Gwendolen's eyes sparkled with delight and a tender expression came over her face. That there should be a breach between them on account of his political conduct had plainly never occurred to him. It was only her own feverish imagination that had conjured up the spectre. The busy statesman had always been longing to see her.

"You are looking better now than then," she said, surveying him affectionately. "You have lost that haggard, worn air, which made your friends fear for your health. I did not expect to find you looking so well, especially after your recent illness."

"My recent indisposition," corrected the Premier. "The indisposition in question prevented me from going to church, but I do not believe it affected me much otherwise. It certainly wasn't serious. Still late hours and talking politics at the Co—, at the Commons, tell upon the most robust constitution sooner or later. But, I believe"—with a mocking smile, the meaning of which Lady Gwendolen could not fathom—"I believe I am myself again. How hot it is here!" he added, with an evident desire to change the subject.

"Let us go into the conservatory then."

Without another word he offered her his arm; and as they disappeared in the conservatory, Lord Bardolph and the Duchess came into the room in search of the Premier. Lord Bardolph, with an ugly frown on his face, was about to follow them, when the Duchess touched him lightly on the arm.

"For the first time in my life, I regret being a woman. I wish I were a man," she said.

"Why?" said Lord Bardolph, forgetting his annoyance for the moment in his astonishment at this speech from the Duchess.

"Because I should like to plunge my hands in my trousers' pockets, and indulge in a long, low whistle."

CHAPTER VIII.

BACCHUS AND VENUS.

"THIS is delightful," said Lady Gwendolen, as she entered the conservatory. "What a contrast!"

Lady Gwendolen was right. The contrast was great. The gorgeous salons they had quitted were oppressively hot and dazzlingly light. The air was vibrating with whirling passions, conflicting ambitions, repressed emotions. It pulsed with life, the keen, eager, restless, almost feverish life of London Society. Here in the conservatory all was repose. The atmosphere was still—by contrast almost painfully so—and redolent of the odours of many blossoms, that brought with their fragrance a delicious sense of peacefulness and rest. The pale blue light of the moon fell upon huge spreading ferns and rare plants, and cast their shadows in weird forms upon the chequered floor. It threw a ghostly radiance upon the marble figures, whose cool, glossy white contrasted so well with the green foliage. And then, as a cloud flitted across the moon's face, all would be darkness, with vague, shadowy figures that the imagination involuntarily clothed with the life of pixies and gnomes. The plashing of a fountain fell slumberously on the ear with an indescribably soothing effect. The busy hum of life from without barely stirred the sleeping air. The keynote of the harmony was repose. It was a place in which to commune with one's own heart and be still.

Lady Gwendolen seated herself, and looked up at the Premier, who stood leaning against a pillar. It may have been the moonlight, or it may have been fancy, but her face had lost its vivacity, her eyes had lost their sparkle. They were fixed upon the Premier's face with a look of intense interest—the look that a woman only bestows upon the man who is her ideal—but with something of sadness in it, too, as though he had not yet reached the height on which she would fain have placed him. She felt that his abilities were worthy of the great post he held, that his lofty morality made him the very Bayard of statesmen; but his vacillation, the result of his earnest endeavours never to judge hastily, destroyed all the power for good he might have been expected to exert, and reduced him to the level of a party-leader, who followed more often than led. But that night, she, in common with every one else, had noticed the change for the better in him; and now that they were together, she could not altogether repress her anxiety lest it had been but a passing phase of his many-sided character.

As he stood there, it appeared probable enough that this was indeed the case. All his confidence was gone. He seemed strangely troubled, and ill at ease. But then a *tête-à-tête* by moonlight, in a dimly-lighted conservatory, with one of the most beautiful women in England is, however pleasurable, apt to be burdened

with momentous consequences. The more exquisite the enjoyment, moreover, the nearer to that melancholy which is the undercurrent of all pleasurable emotion ; so that the Premier's agitation was easily accounted for.

"They tell me," said Lady Gwendolen, at length breaking the silence, which was almost oppressive, "that you are still determined to resist the demand for Woman Suffrage." She said this half-reproachfully, as though she expected to have heard his determination from himself, and not from the impersonal "they," responsible for so many rumours. "I am glad, and sorry, if that be possible, at the same time."

"That is strange. Why?"

"Can you ask? I am sorry because your determination delays—only delays, mind—the final success of the cause I have so much at heart."

"And glad?"

He was evidently determined to force the confession from her beautiful lips. Well, he was welcome to what pleasure he could extract from the sweet, shy response.

"Glad, because I, I—am your friend ; and I am proud to see you defy those who would force you to abdicate your position as leader, or hold it on sufferance. Such a situation would be unworthy of you. That, sir," she concluded with mock stateliness, tossing her head with a charming affectation of wounded dignity, "is why ; and I am glad to see that you have got the better of your vacillation, and at last are a changed man."

"You are right, I am a changed man," said the Premier, suddenly brightening up and straightening himself. "And if Lord Bardolph thinks that I am going to dance while he pulls the strings, Lord Bardolph will come a pretty considerable cropper."

Lady Gwendolen looked somewhat astonished at this fresh, free, vigorous, and unconventional use of the vernacular. Truth to tell, the Premier's speech was ordinarily deeply tinged with philosophical terms, and apt to be vague and hazy. This departure in the direction of plain, if not altogether classical English, was rather to be welcomed than condemned ; and so, after just a momentary hesitation Lady Gwendolen decided.

The Premier waved his hand in the direction of a statue of Bacchus, the laugh on whose carven image might have disconcerted him and disturbed the even flow of his oratory. Luckily, it was in a dark corner, and so he proceeded, regardless of the laughing god.

"I intend having my own way in the Cabinet for the future. I have to bear all the responsibility, and I don't intend being responsible for the policy of other people any longer." He was confident enough now, and the ring of earnestness and conscious power in his tone showed that he meant what he said, and was capable of action in accordance with his words.

"The great thing," he continued, again waving his hand towards the dark corner, where a stray beam of moonlight for a second

made the Bacchus visible, "is to make up your mind, and let the rest of the Cabinet see that you have done so. There will not be much opposition then. A Minister may threaten to resign; but if you take him at his word, he'll be as much disappointed as the lady whose lover foolishly forgets that her 'no' is only an indirect way of saying 'yes.'"

By the light of the moon, a blush might have been seen to flicker over Lady Gwendolen's cheek as he uttered these words, and she looked keenly at him, as though half suspecting some hidden application. But he continued calmly in the self-possessed, unhesitating style so eminently uncharacteristic of the man.

"In politics, as in most other affairs, he who hesitates is lost. My motto is, 'Do the right thing, if you can;' but it will be better for the country to do the wrong one than to flounder about doing nothing in futile search after what is right."

"How your views have changed! When last we talked together"—and an under-current of regret seemed mingled with the musical flow of the words—"you thought and spoke so differently. Then it was, 'Do what is right, come what may.'"

"Well, don't I say so still? If it is better for the country that I should do the wrong thing rather than nothing at all, don't you see that the wrong thing becomes the right? It is not the contrast of the right thing with the wrong thing that I am now speaking of, but simply the alternative of anything or nothing. If I did not add this rider to my motto at our last conversation, it was because I had then had no real experience of practical life. Since I have taken on my shoulders the duties and responsibilities of the Premiership, I have discovered that Life spells Action, and not Thought; that there is no standing still in it; and so I am not likely to under-rate the value of determination in future," philosophised the Premier, his words ringing out clearly, almost sharply, in the stillness of the conservatory. "But for my want of determination, a whippersnapper like Lord Bardolph would not have talked of making and unmaking Cabinets. I beg your pardon," he added with a sudden change of tone, "I forgot that you and Lord Bardolph——"

With a sudden movement, Lady Gwendolen rose to her feet, her eyes blazing with anger, rather at the apology indeed than at the disparaging manner in which Lord Bardolph had been spoken of, though in both the Premier had shown himself strangely deficient in his usual gracious tact.

"You mistake. Lord Bardolph is nothing to me." Then, as if feeling she had said too much, she sat down and covered her face with her hands.

The Premier was deeply moved. The sight of this beautiful woman, physically and intellectually the highest development of her sex, wounded almost to tears, and by him, stirred tender chords within his breast. He bent over her, and whispered gently, "Dear Lady Gwendolen, forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive," she answered; for, woman-like, she forgot the sting to her pride in her joy at having him address her

thus tenderly. Then, too, must there not have been a little outburst of jealousy in his words? What but jealousy could have made him speak his inmost thoughts so openly of one who was a colleague? And she was more pleased at the jealousy, than hurt at what he had implied. The scent of the rose was well worth the prick of the thorn.

"Let us forget Lord Bardolph," she said, smiling at him, as, his face still full of contrition, he gazed upon her. "I like to hear you talk of yourself. I love to hear you speak so boldly of what you will do. I am proud to think that I may have helped to waken you to a truer consciousness of your own powers," and her voice sank to a gentle whisper.

The moonlight fell full upon her lovely face, as she spoke thus. Ah! moonlight and beauty, what have you not to answer for? Premiers are but mortal men, and as Floppington gazed into the crystal depths of her eyes, his hand pressed hers tenderly.

"You shall be my good angel," he said. "I will be guided by you."

She did not resent the gentle pressure of his hand on hers, as she replied: "I would not have you act against your convictions for my sake. If I thought you could be tempted even by me, to be false to yourself, I could not—you would forfeit my good opinion. No, on one question at least we must be content to differ; the question to which I mean to devote my life."

"But we do not differ."

Lady Gwendolen jumped to her feet, snatching her hand almost violently from his. Had she heard aright? She stood staring at him blankly. A whirl of conflicting emotions surged within her brain, and she pressed her hand to her forehead, and it was as one in a dream that she repeated his words, "but we do not differ!"

"No, I am at one with you in the Enfranchisement of Woman. It is a burning shame that she should have no voice in the making of laws which she must obey; which weigh often enough more heavily on her than on man. It is a wrong that has endured too long. It must be righted now;" and his voice thrilled as he spoke, and he shook his hand as if threatening the Bacchus, who still laughed on.

Still the same dazed look in her eyes. Was she dreaming? No, all around seemed real enough. The moonlight played on fern and palm. The splash of the fountain sounded painfully loud, as she murmured: "But when we were last together, you said it was impossible."

"I said——" he paused irresolute for a moment, then with a gesture of determination he said in low tones, vibrating with emotion: "Why should I hide it from you any longer? Happily I need no longer veil my olden fears from you, for fear you should laugh them away. Now that I have myself proved their hollowness, I need no longer hesitate to expose my apprehensions. You must know, then, that I was never so opposed to the Enfranchisement of Women as you seem to have imagined."

"But considering that in all our conversations you paraded your three or four objections with obstinate vehemence, and that you wrecked the late Government on the question," she ejaculated, scarcely knowing what to think, and all her joy in his conversion swallowed up in the terrible doubt of how the world would take such apparently shameless inconsistency. Would it not have been better if he had not budged from his unsound convictions? Yet what but this right-about face had she been hoping and praying for all along?

"I know, I know," he interrupted hastily. "But listen before you condemn me. No, I was not so inimical as you thought to the objects of your association. If I was so alive to the objections to it, it was because I dreaded that I was too alive to the arguments in favour of it. Some of my dearest friends were staunch advocates of it—you know the cynical moralists say that the wish to believe is the father to the belief—the influence is subtle and often unsuspected. I believed in the justice of your cause; but my knowledge of this—this cynical analysis—led me into the opposite extreme. I was misled by the fear of being misled. But since I last saw you I have exorcised the phantom fear and looked things straight in the face."

He made the explanation awkwardly, almost blunderingly; but this very awkwardness, suggestive as it was of infinitely delicate reticences, heightened the emotion of the listener, affected almost to tears by the confession itself. What a sudden light was flashed over their past interviews and over his life! The tragedy of a man's soul was revealed by these few reluctant sentences, its paths softened only by the thought that poetic justice was to be dealt out at last. Little wonder that his health had threatened to give way. At this moment, Lady Gwendolen felt immeasurably inferior to her lover. Surely love should have cleared her vision, if she lacked kindred nobility of spirit to read the secrets of his soul. How she had made him suffer by making herself, however indirectly, a reward for the profession of her miserable doctrines! Ought she not to have divined that to a man of his Quixotic temperament, of his quintessential conscientiousness, the prospect of gain was almost enough to turn the scale on the other side? How she had misunderstood him! Yet no word of reproach had passed his lips. Intense feeling kept her silent. Unconscious of her remorseful condition, and, perhaps, mistaking her silence for incredulity, Floppington went on: "There is another motive which swayed me—a motive which I call right, but which the world may, for aught I know, call wrong. Even at the risk of crushing individual measures, I felt how unsafe it was to allow the reins of power to remain in the hands of the Radicals; men whose reckless driving will sooner or later destroy religion, and all that you and I hold sacred. They will scoff at me as inconsistent, not perceiving the larger consistency of my course. But I must bear my cross," he said with infinite sadness. A sublime light shone in his eyes; the spiritual fire that illumines the face of a martyr.

"Let the world think what it will," she cried, ineffably touched,

her whole spirit vibrating under the penetrating charm of his mellow accents. "There is one at least who would stake her life on your honour."

The Premier gave her a smile of gratitude. He was undoubtedly glad to have retained her sympathy, especially as she had appeared so shocked at his inconsistency.

"I am afraid you are very rash," he said with cheery good-humour, as if ashamed of his display of emotion. "You mustn't risk your life, you know, before your society has to wind itself up on account of having nothing more to make capital of."

A faint smile crossed her face, and then she trembled with an overpowering influx of almost delirious joy.

"And you will add the clause to the Bill?" she said eagerly, her eyes bright with happiness, yet humid with unshed tears brimming up from a full heart beating with other and sweeter than political hopes. Then, half-sadly she added: "But what will Lord Bardolph say? Will it not be a triumph for him? For he will think you have yielded to his threats."

"If he thinks that, he will discover his mistake very soon," replied the Premier evasively. "If his Lordship doesn't know he's the fly on the wheel, let him keep his place unmoved till the next turn. Like Charles the First, he will be crushed by the Revolution."

A merry laugh rippled from Lady Gwendolen's lips; but it was not so much a tribute to the Premier's grotesque way of putting things as an outlet for the waves of delight that surged within her brain.

The Premier laughed too; the humorous aspect of the whole affair appealed much more strongly to him than to her. But his face grew grave as he said: "We shall have a hard fight. I shall have many prejudices arrayed against me. My own men will desert me. May I count upon your influence? You were no doubt brought into communication with the leading Radicals, without whose support I could not hope to do anything. Fate has created in you a valuable intermediary between the rival camps, and I should like to commence negotiations with the enemy as soon as possible. You will smooth my path, will you not?"

"Always. You know I am yours entirely," impulsively burst forth Lady Gwendolen, stretching out both her hands and taking hold of his.

How beautiful and noble she looked as she stood there in the pale light, her face radiant with happiness and aglow with enthusiasm. Of what lofty deeds would not a man be capable, inspired by her! As the Premier gazed at her and felt the soft warm clasp of her hands, he was thrilled to the core by a strange emotion, in which something of vague and indefinable sweetness was blent with an almost solemn perception of the beauty of high endeavour: as if the sweet seriousness of Gwendolen's face had spiritualised itself in his mind. He bowed reverently and kissed her hand.

At that moment a cloud passed over the face of the moon, and hid the Premier's earnest expression from the view of the mocking Bacchus.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. DAWE ON POLITICS AND MATRIMONY.

JACK DAWE, as the reader already knows, occupied the humble yet occasionally lofty position of a house-and-sign painter. His earnings were sufficiently large to prevent him crossing the boundary-line between Ultra-Radicalism and Socialism, even if he had not been the sole heir of an ancient demesne. His professional reputation was unsullied by a single blotch of paint in the wrong place, and it was achieved after a long and arduous preparation in youth. A touch of artistic instinct lifted his lions and cows far above the vulgar herd. His griffins and unicorns seemed to have been photographed from life, and their air of vitality was such as to vindicate their originals' claims to reality, and to the right of sending representatives to the International Assembly at the Zoo. His letters over shop-windows were remarkable for bold experiment in perspective. His native road contained many illustrations of his genius, notably a blue beer-barrel, which occupied the centre of a white-painted wall. The magnificent scale of the work called forth all his powers. Of him, as of Shakespeare, no man can say that he had a great opportunity without rising to the height of it. An eminent art critic, to whom it was pointed out as an early work of Turner's, said of it ("Modern Sign-Painters," Vol. VI., pp. 35-6), "It would be impossible to overpraise the wholly admirable chiaroscuro, the subtle tinting, exquisite in its delicate gradations to finer and finer shades of blue, caught from his accurate observation of the Maiden Lane skies, the vigorous and ideally-realistic rendering of the bunghole, and the highly imaginative details which make of the tap a vision of sensuous beauty surcharged with high poetic meaning. In reality, and in esteem, this blue beer-barrel is the greatest spiritual painting of our time." Happy the artist who has himself for Hanging Committee, whose gallery is the town, who has the world for spectator!

Jack Dawe received two orders by the first post on the Monday morning which followed his sleepless night. His mother brought

them in, treading gingerly in immense list slippers (a size too small), for Jack had not risen with the newsboy, the London lark. She found him with his face turned to the wall, and with his eyes tightly closed. Depositing the post-cards, together with the *Daily News*, on the table, she left the room, murmuring, "Poor boy, he sha'n't go to work, not if they stand on their 'eads for 'im, 'cos it's better to knock up your work for a day than yourself and your work for a week. I'm sorry I blowed 'im up yesterday for neglecting his business. Yet he agreed with me that politics ain't for those as has got to get a honest living. P'raps when he's better I shall be able to make him spoon instead of spout."

No sooner was she gone than Jack extended a feverish hand and clutched the post-cards, for anything was welcome to him after the intense mental conflict of the night, which had ended in a dull quiescence induced by sheer weariness. One demanded his immediate presence in Poplar to paint some doors and shutters green, with the intimation that the job would not be saved for him later than ten. The other was from an old friend in the Whitechapel Road—a publican—who informed him that, in a recent storm, his signboard had been blown down and smashed to pieces, in common with the noble lion that he had been so pleased with; he therefore requested the artist to portray another at his convenience, any time during the week.

"After all," mused Jack, "painting doors green is better than making Mountchapel's face of that colour with envy, and painting lions is better than living in a den of wild beasts."

And lo, he found himself suddenly chuckling, much to his own surprise, and he blushed as he saw the field of unsuspected motive laid bare in a momentary flash.

"He'll meet his match!" he cried, with a glee he could not repress. "He'll meet his match, and at his own weapons. 'Tis Greek against Greek."

And in a moment the heavy clouds of depression rolled away, and a feverish gaiety filled his soul. "Fool that I was!" he cried, "to spend the night in sighs, when I should rejoice! For three months the calm realms of Thought and Poetry once more open to me; action unnecessary, save of a novel and refreshing kind; the study of Humanity possible, and perhaps its spiritualisation. *Euge, amice, euge*, thou hast found the Elixir of Life, thou hast got back thy youth! This, this is the land of the Lotophagi, who eat flowers as food!" And he was about to jump out of bed, light-hearted, and filled with mercurial vivacity, when the entrance of Mrs. Dawe caused him to postpone his intention.

"Good gracious me!" she said, in much alarm, occasioned by her overhearing the last two sentences. "The boy is gone mad, a-talkin' of witchcraft and the devil! And what flowers do we eat except cauliflowers?"

"Reassure yourself; I am perfectly well," he said gaily.

"It don't seem like it," she said dubiously. "There's been something queer about you ever since yesterday mornin'; I can't

quite make out what it is. You don't look quite right about the eyes, and your face is paler than it's been for years. 'Ave you been whitewashing yourself?"

He smiled faintly. "I am afraid many people would consider that impossible."

"Well, you ain't yourself," she continued, with some asperity, "and I'm sure it's all over goin' to talk politics. I wish you'd never 'ad nothing to do with 'em."

The words escaped Mrs. Dawe involuntarily, and she paused half-affrighted when she had uttered them. It was true her mild expostulation of the day before had escaped the stern filial reproof which she felt her audacity deserved; but she could not expect such luck twice. Judge, then, of her surprise when her son exclaimed earnestly, "So do I!" She uttered a cry of joy. Then she remembered it must be his physical weakness that modified his natural imperiousness. Her mood softened, the acridity of her tones died away, but she was not one to lose an opportunity. "Ah, Jack, I'm glad you've got sense enough to see there's some left in your poor old mother. If you 'adn't been so 'eadstrong you'd been a 'appier man, and somebody else 'ud been a 'appier woman."

The painter's eyes gleamed with a sad, tender light.

"As your late father said," continued Mrs. Dawe, perceiving the impression she had wrought: "A man with a weak 'ead can't afford to be 'eadstrong,' and your 'ead was allus too weak for politics. Not as I wishes to insinuate that you don't take arter me. You're clever enough in your own way, but I've 'eard that to get on in that line of business you must be too clever by 'arf. And when politics spiles your appetite, as well as wastes your time, it's 'igh time to give it up. It don't make no difference to me, whether the Liberals or the Conservatives is a-ruinin' the country, and I don't see what it's got to do with you. Floppy's a rascal, and trade's as bad as 'imself, but I don't see that sore throats is likely to benefit any business except doctors!"

"Well, you will be pleased to hear that I intend taking a long rest from politics," he observed kindly.

"Fortune smiles indeed upon my determination!" he reflected. "'Tis an unexpected happiness to be able to brighten her sordid existence by doing nothing to effect that object. The saint *malgré lui!*" But had he foreseen the long, half-delirious hug that awaited him, accompanied as it was by inarticulate sounds of delight, he would not have forgotten that every pleasure has its price.

"That's my dear old Jack!" she cried, when she had exhausted herself and him. "It reminds me of the good old times when I used to spank you. Ah, you was a wicked boy sometimes, Jack, even afore you took to politics. D'ye remember when you stole a baked potato as took all the skin off your hand when you was taking the skin off of it, and your father said you was punished nat'rally, as Roosso recommended; but I said that the nat'ral punishment was not in the hands but only in that part of the body created

on purpose for it, and your father said, 'P'raps you're right, spare the slipper and spile the child.' Here Mrs. Dawe paused to take breath, and smiled with the air of a law of nature apologising for its harsh conduct on the ground of benevolent intentions. Jack smiled too, not the smile of forgiveness blent with security with which one receives one's old schoolmaster, but a smile of amusement at teleological views such as Bacon declared to have strangely defiled philosophy.

"Shall I bring you up your breakfast or will you come downstairs?" said Mrs. Dawe, suddenly reverting to actuality and the present. "It's a lovely day (though rather hot for cooking), and you can go in the Park if you ain't ekal to paintin'. We ain't so poor as all that, though there *was* five pounds of meat over yesterday, and I'm afraid it'll turn."

"If you will kindly prepare the meal," said Jack, "I will be down immediately. Plain bread and butter, please, without ham and eggs."

"No ham!" she cried reproachfully. "Why, I've got such a lovely, streaky bit this morning, fit for the Pry Minister hisself."

"What will do for the Postmaster-General," said Jack with a malicious smile, "will not do for me."

"Well, I know what I'll do then. I'll brile you a two-eyed steak, as old Charley calls 'em, a real Yarmouth one as I bought fresh yesterday arternoon, provided the weather ain't been too much for it."

So saying she left the room, and Jack began to dress. A few moments later, voices were heard in loud expostulation, and the House of Commons rose vividly to his mind. Mrs. Dawe appeared to be accusing Sally of ingratitude and dishonesty, declaring that she must have ruined her many times over unbeknown to her. The girl was even more shrilly protesting that without her the business would have gone to the dogs, and that she had thrown it out because it was "no good;" and her mistress retorted that without *her*, *she* would have gone to the dogs, and that *she* would be thrown out because *she* was "no good." She followed this up by warning Sarah against giving her "any more of her sauce," and by reminding her of the proverb (which she had just adapted from another) that "cheeking never prospers."

Jack on coming down to breakfast found his mother flushed, panting, and perspiring, while Sally could be heard viciously banging together saucepans in the kitchen under pretence of cleaning them.

"There ain't no bloater," said Mrs. Dawe, with tears in her eyes. "That wiper that I suckled at my buzzum has gone and bolted it."

"Thank God!" murmured Jack.

"You must help yourself," she added, "for I'm busy inside."

"Thank God!" repeated Jack.

Left to himself he unfolded the *Daily News* and reperused one of its leaders with much satisfaction.

"The news of the indisposition of the Premier," it said, "follow-

ing immediately upon the rumour of a stormy Cabinet meeting, is sufficiently pathetic in its significance. 'O that mine enemy would write a book.' is no longer a cry of dark meaning in these days of universal paper-staining. 'O that mine enemy would wreck a Ministry,' has a truer ring of infinite malevolence. 'Worry,' is the laconic but pregnant phrase in which SIR WILLIAM LANCET is reported to have summed up the state of the case to a friend, and whosoever has followed MR. FLOPPINGTON'S career from the moment he returned from BALMORAL pledged to manufacture an Administration from the antagonistic materials at his command, will for once unhesitatingly endorse the view of a disciple of GALEN and HIPPOCRATES. Who does not remember the affecting picture of the new Premier escaping for a few minutes from the invidious task of selecting his Cabinet and rushing into the Park, literally gasping for breath? And since then, every day has demonstrated his inability to harmonise the heterogeneous elements that make up his Cabinet and—himself. Surely he cannot still retain any hope that his Reform Bill will ever advance beyond a first reading. Striking as are the defects of this measure (and we have already pointed them out *ad nauseam*) we do not deny that an abler man might have pulled it through the House. MR. FLOPPINGTON is constitutionally unfitted for his present post, however respectable his talents. Give him a sentimental theme to rhapsodise about, and he will astonish you by superficial brilliances. Set him a problem in practical politics, and he breaks down hopelessly. Still we should be unfeignedly sorry if the state of MR. FLOPPINGTON'S health necessitated his retirement from Parliament. He is a valuable member of the House, though such a mere ornament in a Government. It will be remembered that in the Indian drama of HARICHANDRA (which deals in its own rude way with the problems of JOB and of our modern FAUST) WIS WAMITRA——" Jack did not pursue the recondite illustration any further. The first few sentences made him quite happy, and even the shame he felt at hearing for the first time of *Wis Wamitra* could not dispel his content. As he confessed to himself, he could not be expected to be as omniscient as journalists, who are as polyglot as certain bibles, if not as holy. Psychologists warn us against the phrenological fallacy of localising the mental powers, but it is certain that the memory of the modern man *is* localised—on his bookshelves.

After breakfast Jack strolled into the kitchen, but the heat of a roaring fire, on which stood an open cauldron, forced him to retreat into the parlour.

"You won't go to work, will you?" cried his mother, who was peeling potatoes.

"There is much to be said *pro* and *con*," he replied musingly. "Where are my brushes?"

"Why, where should they be? Nobody's moved them."

"I don't see them," said Jack.

"Great 'eavens!" cried Mrs. Dawe, rushing in with a nude potato. "Who could ha' stoled them? Why," she continued, after

a rapid glance into the back-yard, "there they are, under the shed all right."

"Why, so they are!" he cried, lugging in a couple of paint-pots and regarding them with much interest. "Who will ever paint *me* in my true colours?" he was thinking. "What is dishonest biography but a painting white or a painting black; honest biography but a piebald painting that makes the man into a clown; and autobiography but a rouging of one's face?" He took a pot in each hand and entered the kitchen on his way out. "It can be but a very rude art," he muttered; "and I could sketch pretty well as a schoolboy." He was mistaken in this modest depreciation of his profession, as has been shown by the criticism quoted above. The artist may be rude (when ill-paid) but not the art. "A mere twirling of the brush would probably suffice to paint a door," he continued, whirling the brush round in the pot and splashing the paint all over the kitchen.

"Lor' bless the boy," Mrs. Dawe exclaimed, very red in the face (at intervals), "I saw a tiny drop fly into the soup." And the unfortunate cook found herself reproached the next day for not reproducing the novel and subtle flavour which had characterised the soup of the day before. But as it is not given to mortal cooks to read the future, Mrs. Dawe exclaimed angrily, "It's gettin' a little red."

Jack peered anxiously into the cauldron, without, however, perceiving the least rubicund trace.

"I don't see——" he began.

"In course you don't," she interrupted harshly. "Why don't you keep your eyes open? A-splashin' about in the paint as if you was a duck!"

He cowered visibly under her wrath. The pots trembled in his hands.

"Well, my good woman," he observed mildly, "if I have spoilt the soup I am willing to make compensation. Would a sovereign cover the damage?" he added, smiling grimly; "or the matter can be referred to arbitration!"

Mrs. Dawe burst into tears, at which unexpected event her son was utterly confounded. Long as he had known his mother, he was not yet familiar with all her idiosyncrasies. "As if I cared about the spilin' of the soup!" she sobbed.

"What, then, is it?" he inquired in amaze.

"It's—the soup—bein' spiled that—I care about. I can't get any more—done—in time—for sendin' out—and I'll get—a name like Mrs. Prodgers."

"Mrs. Prodgers!" cried Jack, hoping to change the subject, "I saw her yesterday, poor old woman!"

"Poor old woman, indeed!" cried Mrs. Dawe, drying her eyes. "She ought to be briled on her own gridiron. She's always a-cursin' you and me behind our backs."

"Well, she fell on her own yesterday, poor thing!"

"Fell on her back!" screamed Mrs. Dawe giefefully. "Did

she? Tell me the truth, Jack. Don't play with your poor old mother's feelin's!"

"Do you suppose I would make such a statement if it were not true? She seemed a good deal hurt."

"It's a punishment on her," said Mrs. Dawe solemnly, "for goin' to church on a Sunday instead of attendin' to her business, and for trying to take people's customers away from them by pretendin' to be more religious and consekently more reliable."

"Whatever do you think?" cried a neighbour, rushing unceremoniously into the kitchen. "I'm a-emptyin' out my front bedroom!"

The neighbour was a small woman with black eyes. Black eyes are normal in all Oriental regions, and so, of course, very common in the East End of London.

"A-emptyin' out your front bedroom!" echoed Mrs. Dawe, as if the stability of nations had been shaken. "What for?"

"Why, it's in this way," said the small woman in much excitement. "Three weeks ago my gal Jane comes home from work with her finger tied up. 'What's a matter?' ses I. 'I've cut my finger,' ses she. 'Bad?' ses I. 'Bad,' ses she. A week arter I ses to her, 'Ain't ye going to take that dirty rag off? Your finger must be better.' But she wouldn't, and kept it on till this mornin'. The sight of it aggravated me fearfully, and this mornin' I pulled it off in a temper. And what should I see on that 'ere finger but a weddin' ring!"

"Good 'eavens!" gasped Mrs. Dawe. "And Jane is married?"

"Married!" said the woman grimly. "And I ses quietly, seein' it was no use. 'And who's your 'usband?' 'Billy Simpson,' ses she as bold as brass. 'And where d'ye live?' 'Nowheres at present,' ses she. 'We bought some furniture, but we 'ad to leave it in the shop, and if you'll let us 'ave your front bedroom, mother, we'll bring it 'ome.' And just now my blessed son-in-law walks in, smokin' a pipe quite comfortable like. 'Mother,' ses he, 'I'll give you 'arf-a-crown a week for the room,' and so I thought it was best to say nothing."

"There you was right," said Mrs. Dawe. "As I often tells my customers when they grumble about the beef, you must make the best of what you've got, for what's done can't be underdone."

"And as I shall be in a bother at 'ome to-night," continued her practical neighbour, "I've come to see if you can't buy this order for the Foresters'. Me and Jane was a-goin' to-night, but we can't now. Admit two to the balcony—you can 'ave it for fourpence."

"What do *you* say, Jack? Why, where is he? Jack! Jack! Oh, there you are! Come 'ere. 'Ere's Mrs. Green wants to sell a order for the Foresters'. Shall we go to-night, you and me, and leave Sally 'ere?"

"The Foresters'!" said Jack wonderingly. "What is there to be seen there?"

"Why, fust of all," replied Mrs. Green quickly, "there's the Great Macdermott; and then there's Jenny Lee, the Vital Spark;

and there's the Bounding Brothers of Bokhara ; and there's Nemo, the ventriloquist, with his nigger, and his old woman, and his little dog that barks whenever the nigger laughs ; and I dunno what else, and all for fi'pence."

"Fourpence you said," cried Mrs. Dawe indignantly. "But I don't want to go, Jack ; I leaves it to you."

"Well, I don't think I should find much entertainment there," replied her son. "No, thank you, Mrs. Green."

"There, did you ever see the likes o' that ?" Mrs. Dawe burst out. "I *do* 'ave so much enjoyment, as you're a witness, Mrs. Green ; and whenever I wants to go out for a night, this brute of a son o' mine wants to stay at home."

"It's a shame !" said Mrs. Green ; and Jack quailed beneath four scornful eyes.

"And I forgot," she added compassionately, "there's the unhappy nobleman, Sir Roger ; and you would *so* enjoy yourself, Mrs. Dawe. Good mornin' to you."

"Stop, stop !" cried Jack frantically. "If Sir Roger is there, I'll go."

"That's just like you," said Mrs. Dawe. "When you 'ear as there's something as *you'd* like to see, you wants to go. I've arf a mind not to go for *your* pleasure. 'Owsoever, Mrs. Green, if you likes to take thrippence for it, I don't mind givin' it, for, as you see, I don't care much about it."

"Well, I'm not the one to quarrel about a penny," said Mrs. Green. "'Ere you are !"

"Hooray, Jack !" exclaimed Mrs. Dawe, when she was gone. "I've been that longin' to see Tichborne, you can't tell. I'd ha' given a bob for it any time this ten years. So mind you're 'ome in time—seven at the latest."

"Very well," said Jack resignedly. "If I must go to see the impostor, I——" And then he stopped and blushed.

"Now wasn't that clever of Jane ?" said Mrs. Dawe, changing the subject. "I shouldn't think she 'ad it in her."

"What did she do ?" said Jack.

"Why, didn't you 'ear ?" she replied. "She went and got married on the sly, unbeknown to her mother. Fancy me not bein' at your weddin' ! It's almost as strange as not bein' at your own funeral. Ha, ha, ha !"

Why did the laugh end almost in a sob, and a strange prophetic shiver thrill mother and son ?

"I'm a old woman," said Mrs. Dawe, with sudden gravity, "and if you don't make haste about it, I shall be nailed down afore you're tied up. I've been waitin' for it for years. Your father used to say, 'Don't let that boy be a bachelor. Tell him if I should die afore my time (and his words was true, Jack, for when you was six feet high he was six feet low), tell him that it's ungrateful to his posterity, for how would *he* like it if *I* had kept a bachelor ?' Twenty-one is the time when a man as can afford it is of age to marry. Them as the gords love marry young."

"I wish I could," sighed Jack, whom his mother's remarks had sent into a mournful day-dream. "I suppose the gods don't love me."

"Well, the girls does, anyhow," retorted Mrs. Dawe.

"Possibly—for my position. But then I don't love them."

"Except one," said Mrs. Dawe insinuatingly.

"Except one," he repeated sadly; "and her I can't marry"

"Can't marry her!" cried Mrs. Dawe, nearly cutting her finger.

"What's a matter now?"

"I could not, without violating my conscience and sense of honour," he answered, with a sad smile.

"Eh? Just listen to the boy! You can't marry her without violating your conscience and sense of honour; and if you don't marry her, you'll prove you've got neither. It makes me giddy to think on it. You're treading on the co:ns of a dilemma, Jack, and sich things is allus very painful."

But Jack was no longer listening. He was immersed in a profound reverie, his eyes were full of tears, and his lips were moving; and in place of Mrs. Dawe, greasy, fat, paint-spotted, loquacious, arose a vision of radiant beauty, a face exquisitely mobile, with tender gray eyes, in which love and pity were strangely blent with a certain wild enthusiasm. "I thought I had completely conquered it," he was murmuring; "but a casual word has revived it in all its intensity. Yet for months I have not seen her face, fearing lest I should take the glean of her eyes for the light of truth, and the music of her voice for the voice of reason. Oh, eternal contest of passion and duty! Yet am I not unhappy in the renunciation; but, with Romola, I can only tell my happiness from misery by its being what I would choose before everything else, because my soul sees it is good."

"Well, this is a rum go," cried Mrs. Dawe, looking up suddenly.

"Why, the boy is a-cryin'!"

"Two things there are," said Jack, uttering the guttural German in a low, solemn tone, while a saint-like calm overspread his worn features, "which, the oftener and the more steadfastly we consider them, fill the mind with an ever new, an ever rising admiration and reverence: the starry heaven above, and the moral law within."

"'Eaven a'one knows what's a matter with him," cried Mrs. Dawe, with exasperation tempered by bewilderment, "a-grumblin' and a-croakin' as if he lived on frogs, like them dirty Pollywoos, and all 'cause a pretty gal is in love with him. And you won't 'ave her, eh?"

"I have long given up all hope," responded Jack, in a semi-automatic fashion.

"Well, *she* ain't, and *I* ain't, and we'll soon let you know," was the angry reply. "Why, you couldn't set eyes on a finer gal, not even if you was to search till you was blind. And she's got such a good place now. She's too good for you, that's what she is."

"She is, indeed," asserted Jack warmly, his eyes still fixed on an inward vision.

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself for not marryin'

her," said his mother somewhat illogically; "and arter keepin' company with her for years, too!"

"I have already told you——" At this point Jack started, awoke, and stopped.

"You're a hass," said Mrs. Dawe shortly. She stopped to skim the soup, and continued: "A gal in a thousand, and if you throw away this dirty water, you'll never catch another fish like 'er. And so heddicated! And so mad in love with you! Why, when I told 'er on Saturday night that you was gone out again 'cause you was allus engaged with politics, I thought she'd a had a fit; and she said she wished politics was a girl."

"Why?" cried Jack, startled.

"So that she might scratch her eyes out, you know. That'll show you how much she loves you; and if you love her, why, make an end of it at once."

"But I don't love her," said Jack, meditatively watching Sally, who was furtively trying to mount a bicycle in the yard, which was out of her mistress's line of vision.

"That don't matter," was the unexpected response. "You must do that afterwards. As your father said, you needn't marry the gal you love, but you must love the gal you marry. And why shouldn't you love her? She's none of your Mrs. Prodgers's sausages. She's good stuffin' in a neat brown skin—a broonet as'll be faithful to death; none of your blondes, fair but false, like new tombstones, as your father said. Mark my words, Jack, them as looks as lively as kittens is often as wicious. Marriage often turns turtle-doves into cats and dogs. And you've kept company with her so long that you know all her ins-and-outs. And yet, tell me, Jack, have you ever found anything wrong in her?"

"Never," said Jack, with a slight smile.

"There!" said Mrs. Dawe triumphantly. "You're quite safe—for, as your father said, marryin' in haste is like buyin' a 'ouse without lookin' at the drainage. You must either part or die afore your time. But this gal—Lor' bless you, *she'll* never make cinders of your meat."

The heat of the kitchen, combined with his mother's gabble, had by this time given Jack a headache. He put his hand to his weary brow.

"At present you're a trifle skittish," she continued.

"*Me miserum!*" gasped Jack, "skittish!"

"And if you was to marry 'Lizer, you'd be settled."

"*Verum est*, it is too true," groaned Jack. "I certainly didn't bargain for any 'Lizer," he muttered.

"And I'll give you the business, and send Sally packin', and 'Lizer and me'll attend to the cookin', and you needn't go out, but make yourself generally useful about the shop. You're in a position to marry, I'm sure. Not like Bill Simpson, who ought to ha' been warned in the words your father said to a poor young chap fifty years ago—'Arter the union,' ses your father, 'the Union.' Yes, that Jane Green is a fool for all her cleverness."

Here Jack resolutely put on his hat and took up his painting apparatus.

"Well, if you *will* go, mind you're 'ome at seven at latest," cried his mother. "I wouldn't miss Tichborne for the world, though it's certainly a risk to leave Sally all alone. If she don't take a good penny for herself, she may take a bad 'un for me. Good-bye, and mind, if you don't make up your mind, I shall worry you till you do."

The rapidity of Mrs. Dawe's encroachments would have made her reputation in a higher field. It was only a day since her son had shown the faintest symptoms of allowing himself to be pecked at by the maternal hen, and here she was already reasserting the empire she had long ceased to wield. It is surprising how quickly the human animal accommodates itself to changed relations, and how soon it forgets that they were ever different.

"I was on to you enough when you didn't marry her" (Mrs. Dawe's suppressed desires took the solidity of actual occurrences, when looked at through the stereoscope of memory), "but now that you say you *won't*, you've jumped from the frying-pan into the fire. You'll get not a moment's peace."

"Not a moment's peace," echoed the unhappy painter as he strode through the shop. "No peace even with *dishonour*. Truly have I jumped from the frying-pan into the fire."

CHAPTER II.

THE PAINTER PAINTS A LION.

"I WILL begin with the tail," said Jack Dawe to himself.

He was perched on a ladder confronting a huge signboard. The blazing rays of the sun beat fiercely upon his battered broad-brimmed white felt hat, and he was already "spotted like the pard." Below him slept drowsy Whitechapel—not in calm slumber but in the uneasy sleep of a somnambulist. Nobody seemed awake, yet everybody was working, or going to work, or coming back from it. The mud of Saturday was dried up, and seemed to form an integral or a fractional part of the road. Dogs, preceded by their tongues, strolled languidly along, and from some unexpressed law of precedence, everybody made way for them. It was just noon, and thirst reigned supreme.

Jack Dawe had, immediately on his elevation, clutched his brush, and was just beginning to make a dab on the white surface, when it struck him that a little preliminary reflection would be advisable. The reflection had begun well, but in a short time it had strayed away into quite other fields of thought (passing on its way under the tunnel of theology). Occasionally it deviated into painting, but only for an instant. At last, after the lapse of a quarter of an hour, a shrill voice inquired, "Well, master, when are you a-going to begin?"

Looking down, he perceived to his horror a crowd of small ragged boys, and of smaller ragged girls carrying large babies, gazing upwards with expectant eyes, while from a whitewashed court at the side of the public-house, a row of close-pressed faces was lit up with eager anticipation. To have beheld a nascent and chaotic lion assuming form and colour, and growing each moment more and more terrible under the creator's hand, would be something to brag about to their playmates.

"The sanctity of the *atelier* is invaded," he murmured grimly. "I must to work, else my critics will be impatient. But how shall I begin? This work is not unpleasant after all, if it were only a little cooler. If peace is not to be found in the house it can be attained on the ladder. High up on the concrete ladder dwells calm, high up on the social ladder, unrest. Better be pestered by young rascals in the open air than by old ones in the torture chamber."

"Well, how are you getting on, old man?" inquired the proprietor, sauntering out in his shirt-sleeves. "Hullo! Why, you haven't begun yet?"

"No—o," said Jack, with a start, "I—you see—I—it's so hot."

The proprietor took the hint, disappeared, and immediately reappeared with a foaming tankard of beer.

"Take a pull at that," he said. "That'll make you right."

Jack shuddered. "No, thank you," he stammered.

"Good heavens, Jack! Surely you haven't joined the teetotalers, who are tempted by the devil to take the bread out of our mouths?"

"You mean the beer out of your customers' mouths," said Jack feebly.

"Ha! ha! ha! Good, my boy. I can enjoy a joke even against myself. But d'ye remember when you said you wouldn't take the pledge because you weren't a pawnbroker? Well, that joke has gone the round of the entire profession, and your health has been drunk in every bar in London for it. Lord, you don't know how celebrated you are. You've done more harm to the League by your chaff than'll be repaired in a hurry. Come on! Take a good swig, and don't try any of your larks on me."

Unable to resist, Jack put the pewter to his lips. He was pretty thirsty, and somehow the fluid seemed cool and inviting, and he drained the pot.

The proprietor received back the empty tankard with a knowing grin. "Run away to school, you young vagabonds," he cried, threatening to throw it among the throng (which if he had done he would never have seen it more), and much to Jack's relief the juvenile crowd fled in all directions.

It was when left alone that Jack made the observation which commences this chapter:

"I must begin with the tail."

So saying, he made a rough, almost perpendicular smear to represent a raging tail. Then he paused and viewed the tail critically.

"It is the easiest part of the animal," he said, "and yet it doesn't seem natural."

He paused for another minute, lost in thought.

"Fool that I am!" he cried. "Of course it's unnatural. Who ever saw an unowned raging tail? The unnatural is that which departs from normal associations. And what does 'Nature' connote as opposed to 'Art,' unless it be the primitive associations only?" Then he gave a curl to the smear, but the result was unsatisfactory. He had often made the British lion wag his tail, but painting that tail was a task that called for higher powers.

"It seems a very weak tail," he observed confidentially to himself. "My animal will not be like the Conservative party, which is at present strongest in the tail. My talent seems to have grown rusty. Yet at school my caricature of the Head was good enough to get me into a scrape."

He paused once more. A flood of recollections poured upon his soul—the good old times, his old schoolfellows, his old successes. The hot air was filled with shadows. With tears in his eyes, he began to recite from Æschylus the sacrifice of Iphigenia.

Every moment the doors of the public-house swung on their hinges, and men and women, wiping their mouths with satisfaction, or licking their lips in anticipation, stared at the painter, who, waving his brush about frantically, was uttering gibberish in tones of melting pathos.

"And plain as a picture fain to speak." The line recalled him to reality. A boy was screaming somewhere below, and, looking down, he found he had not been alone. The same youthful spectators were gazing at him with rapt awe, and one was sitting on the pavement, rubbing his eyes, and crying loudly.

"You brute!" cried a slatternly woman in a plaid shawl. "I seed you a-dashin' the paint into the poor children's eyes all the while I was a-comin' up the road. A-grudgin' 'em the sight of your rotten picture!"

"Go away, my good woman," said Jack mildly. "You are under a delusion."

"I'm under your ladder," retorted the woman, violently shaking it, "and s'elp me Bob if I ain't a good mind to chuck yer down!"

"Go away!" repeated Jack, much alarmed, and feeling in his pocket.

The woman saw the action, and, picking up the screaming small boy, she embraced him passionately. "My poor Bobby!" she cried. "I'll 'ave the law on the brute for this! Keep still, you little devil!" she added, *sotto voce*, to the child, who had vague fears of being kidnapped, and who writhed accordingly. "Keep still, d'yer, or I'll bang yer 'ead on the pavement for yer!"

"After all," thought Jack compassionately, "maternal affection is common to all ranks, and perhaps I did hurt the poor lad." And he threw the woman half-a-crown.

"You little liar!" she exclaimed, releasing the child, who fled away as fast as his legs could carry him. "What d'ye mean

by cryin', when the gentleman didn't mean to 'urt yer?" So saying, she winked at Jack, and crossed the road to the opposite public-house.

"I must really get on," thought Jack; "the body can be done with a few strokes."

He worked away vigorously for five minutes. Formless dabs of red paint were added to formless dabs, till the whole began to grow into an elongated oval. But now he discovered that the tail was really unnatural, for he had made it about a quarter of the width of the space allotted to the body, and he did not know how to diminish it.

"It is Destiny," he said. "Hitherto Fate, working by a remarkable *harmonie préétablie*, has driven us both into this course. But the *harmonie* seems to fail here. If it is the greatest art to conceal art, I have achieved perfection, for I have concealed mine beyond all chances of discovery." An organ commenced to play as Jack began on the head, and unconsciously his brush jerked up and down in time to the music.

"*Væ mihi!*" he sighed. "How hide these horns? I shall have to give the poor animal water on the brain." At this point he heard a long, low whistle. It came from his employer, who was looking up in speechless astonishment.

"What do you call that?" he said at last. "That ain't a lion!"

"Of course not," replied Jack feebly. "It is a—a lion in embryo."

"A lion where?"

"Unfinished, you know—before birth," he explained.

"And d'ye mean to tell me that lions have horns before birth?"

"Some lions have," said Jack, with logical accuracy.

"Well, you know more about them than I do, old man. But stop it now, and come and have a chop with me inside; it's dinner-time."

Nothing loth, Jack descended and ate the chop, amid a sullen silence that much disturbed his friend and "the missus," the latter of whom kept plying him with ale to enliven him.

"You're sure you ain't ill, old man?" the publican said earnestly, when Jack was preparing to remount. "Because if you are, you can finish it when you're better, and when you can handle the brush better."

"I assure you," protested Jack, "I'm handling the brush better to-day than ever before."

"Think so?" said the publican doubtfully. "It looks funny. However, you know your own business best."

The crowd was anxiously waiting, and a slight cheer greeted his arrival. "They will see it out to the bitter end," he thought. No sooner was he in position than it struck him that, by giving the lion an unusually flowing mane, the horns might be utilised as hair. He set to work with extra vigour.

"Toot-a-tootle, toot-a-tootle, bang! bang!" The former mellifluous strains suddenly broke out from a paper-covered comb, played by a man whose beating of a drum produced the latter.

"Punch and Judy!" exclaimed the children in a breath, and some rushed to the new attraction. But many still refused to budge, and followed the growth of the lion with keen excitement.

"At last!" exclaimed Jack bitterly. "At last I am an equal attraction with a Punch and Judy man." He finished the head quickly, and surveyed the whole with a puzzled look.

"There seems to be something wanting, but I don't know what it is," he murmured. "Ha! How foolish! I forgot the eyes." He inserted two green spots, descended the ladder, and called the publican.

"Finished?" said the latter. Jack nodded.

"All right, I'll be out in a minute."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the proprietor, holding his sides.

"It's a good lion enough," said Jack moodily. "Look at the head."

"I don't say anything against the head, old man. *But where's the legs?*"

Jack ran up the ladder without saying a word, but looking very dazed. In a few minutes he had supplied the missing members.

"Well, it looks a little better now, Jack," said the publican after a critical examination. "Perhaps, after all, I should have had more custom if you had left the lion without any legs. But candidly speaking, old man, don't you think it's a leetle different from the last one?"

Jack was silent. Suddenly he had a brilliant idea which recalled the painter in his best days.

"You have heard of Evolution?" he said.

"Eva Lution? Oh, yes," said the publican readily. "She's the woman that says we come from monkeys, ain't she?"

"And do you believe it?"

"Oh, yes, it's true enough. *Some of us do.*"

"Now, how long is it since I painted your last lion?" he asked, with a confidence probably born of a brain heated to unusual activity by his recent potations.

"Well, it might be three years and it might be more."

"Now don't you see that in three years lions will develop?" said Jack.

"Is *that* it?" said the puzzled publican.

"That *is* it," replied Jack decisively, though wondering not a little at his own audacity. "You've no idea what changes can come over lions in three years."

"Ah, well, I'll take your word for it. Here's your money. Good-bye, old man. Have another glass? That's right. Good-bye, and drop in now and again."

What was this sudden dimness that made all objects sway before Jack's eyes as he walked down the Cambridge Road? He got down the road as best he could till he reached the grounds of the Bethnal Green Museum. It was four o'clock. In five minutes he would be at home. But he would first sit down on a bench and rest for a moment, placing his paint-pots beside him. When he

awoke he felt a trifle numbed. He looked at his watch sleepily—half-past eight o'clock.

"I must have slept for some time," he muttered. "But how did I get here? I don't remember anything after I turned out of Whitechapel Road. How my head aches!" He staggered home. Mrs. Dawe was standing weeping at the door of the cook-shop, attired in bonnet and shawl, and ran forward to meet him, her eyes blazing with fury.

"Is this seven o'clock?" she shrieked; "and I have been waitin' 'ere, dressed, since six o'clock, like a waxwork."

"It's half-past eight," he said, a little thickly. "Where are you going?"

"Good 'eavens, he's forgotten where I'm goin'!" she screamed. "Why, you're drunk, you beast!"

Jack drew himself up.

"I'm not," he said indignantly.

"You are," she shrieked, wringing her hands. "I knew what ud 'appen if you went to church yesterday. But it's my fault, it's my fault for not marryin' you off as your father wanted. Spare the wife, he used to say, and spile the man. And I won't spile you no more, Jack, not if I has to drag you to church by the 'air o' your 'ead."

With trembling footsteps Jack was seeking to hide himself indoors, when a terrible exclamation made him turn pale, look quickly round, and sink miserably into an empty cauldron.

"You drunken beast," shrieked his mother, "*where's your pots and brushes?*"

It may be doubted whether, throughout the vast realm ruled over by—well, to discard fictions, by the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington, any man crept into his bed that night more miserably self-dissatisfied than that intelligent house-and-sign painter, Jack Dawe. Painful as the events of the day had been, they were capped and the images of them deadened by the horrible climax of its close.

When Jack Dawe and his mother arrived at the Foresters' Music-hall (an average specimen of those now obsolete places of entertainment), they found that "the Claimant" (whose memory has survived how many immortals!) had already taken his turn. This was the last straw, and Mrs. Dawe, in her just indignation, lost any lingering vestiges of that dread of her son which only a few days ago had sufficed to curb her aggressive spirit in all but her most impetuous moments. The painter needed all his powers of inattention to cope with the moroseness of the old woman who, conspicuous by her flaunting shawl and bonnet, sat beside him on a wooden bench and interlarded the performance with more or less audible remarks. The balcony was occupied by men and boys in fustian and corduroys, a sprinkling of better class people, and a fair proportion of young women accompanying their sweethearts. The atmosphere reeked with smoke, and was heavy with alcoholic scents.

Downstairs, "gents" sat in luxurious stalls and sipped ale or spirits, or even champagne, and there was a general sense of gilding and looking-glass. There was a chairman whose hand was continually being shaken by new-comers, who had the air of asserting thereby a familiarity with the mysterious world behind the scenes. This functionary held a hammer with which he tapped on a table, not with the auctioneering signification of "Going," but with the opposite meaning of "Coming." He also used it to lead the applause and to restore order. The entertainment was fairly innocent, and where it was unrefined it but reflected the general coarseness of the working man of the period before he had been humanised by the spread of People's Palaces and University-Extension Lectures. The great philanthropic movement—the civilisation of the English aborigines, as Maxville has called it—was then in its infancy, and "beer and skittles" was the highest ideal of mortal beatitude (as is evident from a proverb now fallen into desuetude). A rouged and powdered "serio-comic" lady, in the voluptuously-cut evening dress then in vogue, flashed upon the stage, realising the vague visions of romantic costermongers, singing and dancing with saucy archness—a very dream of delight, recalling the halcyon days of youth to blear-eyed coal-heavers. Then came some clever legerdemain, conjuring, and ventriloquism, with interludes of comic singing (the last neither comic nor singing, though it more than passed muster in both respects, being received with unbounded cachinnation). At last the sensation of the evening appeared in the person of "The Great Macdermott," still known to students of philology, anthropology, and comparative mythology, as the High Priest of a Neo-Pagan cult entitled Jingoism; and it was during his tenure of the stage that the ridiculous and lamentable incident took place which formed a fitting climax to a day so auspiciously begun. The series of misadventures which had befallen the painter, supplemented by the captious observations of the peevish old lady at his side, had driven him to such a state of desperation that nothing but a strong sense of duty would have retained him in his filial attendance upon her; his head was throbbing with a dull pain, his brain was distracted by feverish and remorseful thoughts, his soul was sick at the indelicacy and silliness of much of the buffoonery, and he was depressed by the coarseness of moral fibre displayed by the audience. The illustrious *artiste* was in the middle of a "topical song," a species of composition in which success depended on the discovery of a telling phrase; which found, rhythm, music, and sense were superfluous, though these redundancies were sometimes present. The chorus of this particular specimen, which chorus he rarely deigned to sing, but which the audience bawled out to the waving of his hand, triumphantly and arrogantly asserted that something would knock something else into the middle of next week or be knocked by it into the same time. After John Bull and various other persons and things had played an active part, and Prince Bismarck and various other persons and things passive parts in the process described, the lyrical

inspiration culminated in a vigorous panegyric on the Premier, who was placed in the former category, and was represented as capable of performing, or about to perform, the operation indicated upon sundry statesmen of his acquaintance who wished to ruin English women by giving them votes. At the mention of Floppington the audience (like all music-hall audiences, Conservative to the backbone) could no longer contain themselves; they rose at the singer; they huzzahed themselves hoarse; they waved their hats and rattled their sticks and umbrellas; and then abandoning themselves to a frenzy of delight they sang the Floppington chorus three times over, while the *artiste* looked complacently on with the air of a man who is sure of his effects. But amid all the enthusiasm one solitary dissentient hiss made itself heard. It proceeded from that fiery Radical, Jack Dawe. His unutterable and contemptuous disgust had completely overturned his mental equilibrium. That these people, who had never studied the man as he had, whose gross tastes utterly shut them out from the comprehension of the Premier's motives, whose sympathies were utterly worthless as a test of worth, that these ignorant and coarse-grained creatures should presume to patronise Floppington, and that the singer should pitch so false a note of adulation, worked him into one of those irrational fits whose occasional recurrence at long intervals in this history will show what unknown and tenebrous depths lay beneath his placid exterior. The sound of disapprobation, the provocation of it magnified manifold by its singleness, raised the passions of the audience to fever-heat. Cries of "Turn him out," resounded from all quarters. This absurd failure of logic and justice completed the painter's irritation. He repeated his hiss, and the orders for his removal redoubled in intensity. He persisted in his hissing, and was accordingly ejected from the premises amid a scene of indescribable excitement to which Mrs. Dawe contributed not a little. As soon as the disturber was removed, the audience (including Mrs. Dawe, who would have her money's worth, and who was captivated by the lilt) set to with tenfold enthusiasm, and declared over and over again, to the ever accelerated waving of the vocalist's hand, that Floppington was able to knock, and would knock, divers politicians into the middle of next week.

CHAPTER III.

ARCADIA.

A WEEK of idleness for Jack Dawe—a week of delicious saunterings through sunny lanes, whose simple and contented inhabitants greeted him pleasantly as he walked along, musing yet not unobservant; of pensive rambles through quaint courts, where the crumbling walls were eloquent with the picturesque pathos of antiquity; of afternoon wanderings in shady alleys, where loose-clad loungers filled the quiet air with fantastically wreathed cloudlets of

smoke, and sipped cool tankards with easy, epicurean *abandon*; of delightful promenades in starry groves, where the solemn evening air was stirred by sweet strains of music, and where the pale moonlight fell in calm beauty on the forms of maidens whirling in the rural dance; where satyrs frolicked, and youth engaged in light-hearted wrestlings, and, with quick dexterity, hurled the graceful dart of banter; of nocturnal walks under the awful mystery of the stars, when London was hushed as in the dull, heavy slumber of a sick man, and the church-steeple rose weirdly in the air, though the cloudless moon suffused the earth with a silvery sheen; when all sound had ceased save occasional snatches of melodious song, and the steady tramp of the watchman, and the bewitching accents of the daughters of Hesperus. It was a week fertile in reflections. Walking through these wondrous regions, he felt his life, his experience, his conceptions of the universe, expand. He saw new meanings in the poet revered from youth, he was awed by the opening of bottomless depths as he wandered in undreamed-of spots where Nature's every sight and scent and sound was sweet. He marvelled at the equality with which the Great Mother treated her children, and still more at the truly wondrous and wholly feminine address by which she had been able to persuade so cool a head as Paley's of the fact.

Yet could not his Nature-worship have been so deep as he thought it, for, far from yielding to all the charms that she displayed to him in his daily pilgrimages, he was frequently disgusted, and occasionally horrified. The manners of the peasantry filled him with alternations of pity and indignation. The sunny lanes, the quaint courts, the shady alleys, the star-lit groves—why was he not soothed by their peaceful beauty, and refreshed in spirit by their fair repose? What was this new sadness that filled his soul when he murmured his favourite lines:

" For Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her."

Had he quite lost the old sense of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower? And had that divine power—precious possession of the spiritual man—been lost by the sully of his purity? Alas, that we should have to record it! Not only had the once industrious workman become a *flâneur*, but he lived in an atmosphere of deceit in which delicate feelings might well be asphyxiated. In the morning he left home, balanced between two resplendent paint-pots (freshly-bought); late at night he returned home, balanced between two empty paint-pots; during the day he walked about unencumbered by paint-pots. He took his meals in distant dining-rooms, choosing restaurants of a class that must have been beyond his means. One morning he was perforce detained at home to write brief letters of refusal, on the ground of excess of business; and his mother made good use of the opportunity to carry out her threat of worrying him into marriage or the grave. During the rest of the week he had kept out of her way. Armed with a latch-key, he had been able to defend himself against her tongue.

Yet he did not spend a happy week. True, he learnt much ; he was often interested, and now and then amused. In all these respects he was sensible of a vast contrast between his present idle existence and the busy life he had led hitherto. But his heart sent up many despairing cries to Heaven—and this, too, was strange, for, as the reader knows, he had never cried to Heaven before.

Sunday came round once more ; once more the church bells rang ; and once more Jack went over to the minority. The vicar stared at him with a puzzled look, then sighed, and turned away his head. The calm of the church was soothing after his weary pilgrimage. As he entered, a sudden dimness came over him, he bowed humbly, and returned to the fold. The solemn roll of the organ, the sweet voices of the choir, the sunlight streaming through the stained glass dappled with leafy shadows, these had their wonted effect. The new associations, linked by a myriad electric chains of emotion, banded themselves together against the old and conquered. By the time the service was over, the rays of sun light had given place to serried lines of rain ; but Jack hardly noticed the change. He walked home in deep, contrite thought.

“De Tocqueville was right,” he reflected, as he entered the shop, “when he corrected his first opinion, and placed doubt at the head of human evils. But henceforth I falter no more. The truths one so glibly repeats ere one has felt their meaning, must be doubted to be believed. Life is based on suffering, and in suffering must we seek the solution of the mystery of existence.”

“Why, Jack, you’re wringin’ wet,” cried his mother, who was rapidly piling up potatoes and pudding, and doing an enormous trade ; “you won’t be able to go out on your bicycle. But ‘it’s an ill wind that blows nobody any good,’ as your father said, and I’ve been wantin’ to talk to you all the week about something partik’ler, but you’ve been that busy I’ve never been able to get a word with you, like a eel.”

Jack turned pale, and for an instant meditated flight ; the next, he smiled sadly. “Life is based on suffering,” he repeated to himself.

“I believe you, my boy,” cried Mrs. Dawe, smiling in self-approval, as she issued her plates without a moment’s cessation.

“I believe you, my boy,” cried the company generally, with much mutual winking.

“They are poor, they have suffered, they know, they have found spiritual truth,” thought Jack, with a flash of intuition. Evidently they were all earnestly acquiescent, from the doddered old man with the rat on his cheek, who was eating peas with his knife, to the flash youth of sixteen in his Sunday paper collar, who was leering suggestively at a soup-swallowing, wide-mouthed maiden of thirty.

“Without sufferings,”* croaked the old man who was infested by the pictorial parasite, “the world couldn’t stand a day.”

“‘Ear, ‘ear !” from the company.

* “Suffering” was the pronunciation given by the Cockney lower orders to the name of the standard gold coin of the period.

"In what a transcendental and mystic shape this cabalist puts his views," thought Jack, passing through the crowd and retiring to his room. He was much cheered by the general intellectual and spiritual level evidenced by this consentience of the company, and it was a much-needed corrective and counteractive to the experiences of the past week, going far to endorse the results of his morning's reflections. "One is always dazzled by a first glance at evil, as at beauty," he observed to the heedless walls. Especially was he pleased with his mother's approval of the sentiment. "As well as I thought myself religious when I was not," he added, as he washed his face vigorously, "so may she be religious while she thinks she is not." It was, therefore, just as well that he did not hear her dilating on the text.

"Without sufferings," she was remarking, while the audience looked up to her with such rapt admiration that Sally was all but sent round with a second supply of black-pudding—"without sufferings life would go to the dogs. If it wasn't for sufferings, would I fry myself over the fire for you like Sally Mander? If it wasn't for sufferings, would a man get 'ard labour for stealin'?" ("Hooray!" from a small boy who was meditating the purloining of a saveloy, but who quailed beneath the Argus eyes of the shop-keeper.) "Would the Queen sit in a 'eavy crown, 'oldin' a 'eavy spectre, in all weathers, if she didn't get her screw reggyar? Why is one man poor and another rich? Why?"—the speaker paused rhetorically—"Because one's got money, and the other ain't." (Immense enthusiasm.) "Why has one man got to shine other people's boots, while another wouldn't stoop to shine his own?" ("'Ear, 'ear! Bravo!" from a shoeblack, who immediately repented of his zeal, for his soup went the wrong way.) "Tell me that," continued Mrs. Dawe fiercely, stamping her foot dramatically, "one man's got to eat humble-pie——"

"Pork-pie, you mean," said the doddered old man, chuckling.

Mrs. Dawe glared at him, and the youth in the paper collar cried, "Shut up." The old man subsided into his peas, snivelling pathetically.

"One man's got to eat humble-pie," repeated the oratress, "while another can be as proud as Satan, or his wife Lucy Fer. It's 'cause one's got money in his stockin', and the other ain't even got a spare stockin' to put it in if he had it, that's all. I don't believe in nothing, thank Gord I don't, but my poor 'usband used to say—none of you 'ere knowd 'im except Bill Brown" (Bill Brown was the old man, and this mention of him restored at once his prominence and his self-respect), "'cause he died long afore your time, and many's the things he said sitting on this 'ere very counter, and well do I remember once when he smashed a dish as fell on a boy's head and cut it open, as made everybody roar."

"Will you kindly repeat the remark your late husband made?" said a quiet young man with silver studs and a green tie, who prided himself on his company manners, "I didn't quite catch it."

"I'm sure I spoke loud enough," said Mrs. Dawe. "He said, 'I

don't believe in nothing, thank Gord I don't ; but I *do* believe in money."

"Thank you very much, madam," said the quiet young man, "and will you oblige me with another hayputh of peas?"

"You know I don't make less than a pennuth," returned Mrs. Dawe. "And if I lets you 'ave it this time, you mustn't make a practice of it."

"You may rely on my honour, madam," said he, putting his hand to his heart.

When the press grew less, Mrs. Dawe left Sarah as chief of the commissariat department, and retired to the back parlour to dine with her son.

Jack was very happy. The reaction from his anguish during the past week was so great, that he chatted with his mother quite gaily. He even allowed her without wincing to dart a few hymeneal arrows at him, and he said grace internally so as not to alarm her. It was not to be expected that he could convert her as rapidly as a Board School boy converts a vulgar fraction.

After dinner, Mrs. Dawe put the finishing stroke to his happiness. She left him. Perhaps she thought she had done enough sharp-shooting. Or more probably she felt her victim was safely trapped, and she wished to roll on her tongue the delicate morsel of potentiality as well as to sharpen her weapons on her husband's grindstone.

Jack stretched himself on the sofa and gazed at the stuffed birds. Returning from a ramble in the African forests, and from an interview with Hannibal, he fell to thinking of the small man with the bright badge on his breast, and being in a wondrous charitable mood he felt very kindly towards him, too. Then, with a peaceful smile on his weary face, such as had not been seen on it for months, he fell into a calm, dreamless sleep.

Sleep, Jack, sleep while thou canst ; for lo ! the nights come wherein sleep shall be sought and often in vain. Sleep, Jack, sleep, for bitter shall be thy awakening. For behold the nights come, wherein, if thou dreamest, a face shall haunt the visionary halls of sleep—a woman's face, dark, with fierce and passionate eyes full of the wild glory of the South.

CHAPTER IV.

PLOT AND PASSION.

"AND here, Mrs. Dawe, is the answer." The speaker was a tall young woman, coquettishly attired in a black cashmere dress, a fringe cape, and a Princess bonnet, for the shape of which last the curious reader is referred to *Myra's Journal* in the British Museum. Round her shapely brown throat glittered a snowy-white collar relieved in front by a dainty silver brooch, and in her hand, which displayed a most refreshing contrast of black silk glove and creamy

turned-up cuff, she held a most bewitching parasol. The rain had now ceased, and Nature was as bright as the maiden's face. From both, clouds had recently passed away. The girl had arrived at the cookshop with looks as black as night, and with a most determined expression of countenance. Her dark eyes glittered dangerously, her pretty lips were pressed tightly together, and that dark-red hue which is so lovely on a brunette's cheek, glowed with unwonted intensity. But Mrs. Dawe's tidings had restored serenity, and all was sweetness and light.

"It's no use, my dear 'Lizer," said Mrs. Dawe, rejecting the proffered journal. "You know I can't read and write; not as I regrets it to be sure, for, as my late 'usband said, 'a man as can't read and write is more likely to make his mark than a man as can.' D'ye twig?"

"Oh, certainly," said Eliza, trying hard to convert an expression of perplexity into one of admiration. "How true! How sweet!"

"And if I had gone to school and learnt to read," continued Mrs. Dawe, "what would be the use of reading to me at my age? Why, I'm glad of a nap as soon as I've got a moment's rest, and I falls asleep in a second. I don't want no book, I don't."

"A lady like you," remarked Eliza suavely, "has no need of books such as a poor, simple person like myself feels. Your mind is, if you will pardon me the flattery—for I assure you I'm speaking only the plain truth—your mind is a book which you are never finished reading, for it is always to be continued in our next. You don't want to know what's in other journals."

"You've hit me off hexact, 'Lizer," said Mrs. Dawe complacently. "And now, do read what the Headitur says, for I'm dyin' to 'ear it."

Eliza coughed, and then read the following without the faintest blush, either native or exotic:

"A Slighted Fair Old Reader. (*That's me, Eliza Bathbrill.*) You must act very cautiously for fear of provoking an irreparable breach (*as if I cared*), as you say you have loved him sincerely for two years and three months. Our advice is to appeal delicately to his sense of honour; and if this fails, to throw yourself openly on his mercy, at the same time taking care to let him know that you will show him none yourself. But once more we say, Be cautious. Write again. We think with you that you have been badly treated."

"Badly treated!" exclaimed the widow. "Badly ain't the word for it. He's neglected his dooty shameful, and if my old man had treated me like that when *we* was keepin' company I'd ha' bashed his hat in, 'usband or no 'usband. He's used you like a umbrella, only using you when it's raining. That Headitur is a man who knows what he's about, and I've a good mind to send him them two pork-pies I've got over, done up in brown paper and tied neat with red string, if you think he'd pay the carridge."

"Don't mention pork-pies," said Eliza with a deprecatory snigger, "for the thought of your cookery always makes my mouth water."

"And mine too," said Mrs. Dawe naïvely, "although I stuffs 'em myself. And I think we'll have one each and clear off the stock."

"And now," continued Mrs. Dawe when the pork-pies had gone over to the majority, "shall I tell him you're here? Hark at him snorin' away inside! He's been asleep since two, and now it's near six, as if he was paid for it so much a hour. And you take my tip and do as the Headitur says, which is so sensible and sich as I would ha' advised you myself if you'd ha' asked me."

"But you say it's all right now and he's given up politics, and his heart is fancy-free except for me."

"Never you mind that," replied Mrs. Dawe stoutly. "What's good advice yesterday can't be bad to-day, don't that stand to reason? You tells him delicately that he's got no sense of honour if he don't do what's right--that's the first thing."

"Ye-es," murmured Eliza.

"Then you've got to throw yourself on his lap and show him no mercy if he resists--that's number two; and then you've got to write again. All that is very easy. But I'll tell you what's much easier," cried Mrs. Dawe, struck by a brilliant idea, "let him read the paper and it's as good as done."

"Oh no," said Eliza quickly, "that wouldn't do at all."

"I don't see it," said Mrs. Dawe coldly, "if you let him see what you're *goin'* to do, you won't have the trouble of doin' it."

The philosophic and diplomatic profundity of this remark overpowered Eliza, who could only murmur feebly :

"That is true."

"Howsoever," added Mrs. Dawe with a willingness to compromise that would have delighted John Morley in his early days, "what's true of other men may not be true of Jack. He's a queer customer sometimes, though I believe his 'art's in the right place under his liver arter all. Anyhow, do as pleases you--'every man to his taste' as my 'usband used to say. I'll go and wake him, and I wish you luck."

So saying, Mrs. Dawe shuffled towards the parlour. But ere she reached it she turned back to observe to her prospective daughter-in-law: "And I *should* like to see you married quick, 'cause you see these 'ere slippers is gettin' too old, and they'll come in 'andy afore I sells 'em to the china-woman."

Full of this laudable desire Mrs. Dawe entered the parlour and shook her son roughly.

"All right," he murmured sleepily. "Is that fellow Partlet done yet?" Then yawning tremendously he sat up and stared around him.

"Wake up," cried his mother. "There's glorious news!"

"Indeed!" he said, brightening up. "Has Mountchapel yielded?"

"What nonsense you *do* talk! It's much more glorious than that. The gal you love is here."

"Impossible!" cried Jack. "How could she know I was here? God bless her!"

"Gord bless 'er," echoed Mrs. Dawe delightedly. "She's a dear, lovely critter."

"But how do you know it's she?" said Jack suspiciously. "You *must* be making a mistake."

"A mistake!" shrieked Mrs. Dawe. "You'll be tellin' me I don't know my own son next!"

At this exclamation the last scales of sleep fell from Jack's eyes, and his brow grew gloomy with disappointment.

"What a fool I was to think she would come here!" he muttered.

"What a fool you are now," cried Mrs. Dawe sharply; "for as sure as your name is Jack Dawe she's a-waitin' in the shop that longin' to see you that she couldn't sleep for weeks, and come all the way from 'Arley 'Ouse a-purpose."

Jack started, and his cheeks flushed with joy.

"From Harley House!" he exclaimed. "It is she! Noble girl! She has sought me out. She has risked herself in these wilds with her usual scorn of conventionality! Oh, why did I not confide in you, my better self? Oh, my darling! how in the fire of thine eyes is all but my love consumed!"

Mrs. Dawe rushed rapturously into the shop. "Now's your time to fix the day, 'Lizer," she whispered breathlessly; "he's 'ead over 'eels in love with your eyes."

Eliza snatched up a tin pan, looked at her eyes, gave a few hurried touches to her hair, adjusted her parasol, called up a look of indifference, and strolled nonchalantly into the parlour.

Jack was standing at the door, his eyes filled with tears of sacred joy. A feminine form painted itself in blurred tints on his retina. But yet how well he saw every detail of her marvellous figure and of her *spirituelle* face with its exquisite features, its tender mouth, and its dreamy eyes strangely lit up with a wild radiance—what need had he of eyes to see these oft-imagined traits? He felt all his soul helpless beneath her influence, and drawn to her as the waters to the moon.

"Ask me no more," he whispered, "for at a touch I yield."

Eliza took the hint and supplied the touch. In an instant they were folded in each other's arms. All Jack's being thrilled in ecstatic rapture. Never before had he felt her warm cheek touch his, or his spirit faint under the heavy scents of her hair rich with spices of the South. He forgot truth, honour, life, death, time, place, and all but her. He clasped her more tightly to his heart, "and their four lips became one burning mouth."

There was a moment of delicious silence.

Jack's brain was in a ferment—the isolated elements of experience were linked by an electric chain that lit up the dark places of the universe.

"Love is the principle of existence." At last he had found *le mot de l'énigme*.

"Oh, this is prime, Jack," sighed Eliza; "this is like the olden times when we were first betrothed. Give me another."

A fierce spasm of pain crossed Jack's melancholy countenance

—he turned deadly pale and staggered back—then he blushed a fiery red and tried to disengage himself.

“Don’t be a fool, Jack,” cried Eliza, holding up her lips in demand for an encore. “There’s nobody looking.” And abandoning passivity for activity she attempted a kiss that just grazed the extremity of his rapidly-retreating chin.

For a moment the usually glib Jack could hardly find fit expression. Nothing in his political training had prepared him for such an amorous *contretemps* as this—for in politics love’s antithesis was the master-passion. Truly had he suffered in the *pays de l’amour*, comparative stranger that he was. Young, he had neglected the opportunity of studying the customs of the country; old, he could not gracefully extricate himself from so simple a situation. That he, of all men in the world, should have kissed the wrong person seemed to him an event without precedent (and perhaps he was right), and he was naturally indignant with fate at so unparliamentary a proceeding on its part.

“I—I—beg a thousand pardons,” he stammered at last, and his voice was hoarse with shame and disappointment. “I am infinitely grieved. It was an accident, I assure you, my dear m——”

“Well, you *ought* to crave forgiveness,” retorted Eliza, “jerking your head back in that fashion just as I was imprinting a loving kiss. You don’t deserve to get another any more, ’oo naughty boy, ’oo,” she added with reproachful tenderness.

“This is too much,” groaned Jack, breaking away from her desperately, throwing his wonted chivalry to the winds and retreating behind Mrs. Dawe’s arm-chair. But Eliza followed him laughingly, and taking his head in her arms she began to smooth his cheek with her gloved hand, murmuring affectionately: “And did ’e poor Jacky fink I really meant not to give him no kissy-wissies never no more?”

“Good God, miss!” he cried, unceremoniously removing his head, “for heaven’s sake don’t talk to me like that.”

Jack could tolerate babies, he even regarded them with mystical reverence. But baby-language, even though invested with the classic grace of a Lytton, gave him an acuter shock than a wrong accent in Latin or Greek would give a scholar.

“Miss!” exclaimed Eliza in a tone of angry reproach. “For heaven’s sake don’t talk to *me* like that, sir.”

“I—I beg pardon, madam, I—I thought——”

“Madam?” Eliza’s voice had become a little grim, and Jack trembled beneath her flashing black eyes. “But I deserve it all for my folly,” he thought, “and for yielding to passion, vile wretch that I am. As Æschylus observed, the doer must suffer, though the gods sometimes resort to strange retributive devices.”

“Then you are not married. I thought so at first,” he observed, trying to assume a cool, conversational tone.

“Oh, I see,” said Eliza, with a slow smile. “This is another of your jokes. He! he! he! How exquisite! No, I’m not married, Jack,” she added coaxingly; “but we’re going to be, ain’t we,

darling?" And, with a sweet smile, she laid her head on his shoulder, and looked up lovingly into his eyes.

"I shall go mad," thought Jack, his head throbbing, and the arteries on his forehead swelling with suppressed emotion. "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

"Oh, Jack!" sighed Eliza ecstatically. "Oh, if my head could only lay on your bosom for ever! Oh, I am truly blessed! Never had girl like me so noble and so faithful a lover, and, in return, never has a heart beat truer than mine. In misfortune I will never desert you, and, should adversity come, I would welcome it to be able to say to you, 'Jackey, my own true loved one, wait till the clouds roll by.'"

This prospective picture affected her so, that she burst into tears.

"And this," thought Jack in horrified disgust, "is the creature that Mountchapel would give the franchise to!" "My poor girl!" he exclaimed, "can't you see you're making a mistake—no, no, I don't mean that—I mean I can't marry you. So go away, my—my dear Eliza, now be reasonable and go away. I can't marry you—I can't indeed."

At these terrible words Eliza sprang away from him and to her full height, and glared savagely at him.

"You can't marry me?" she shrieked, raising her parasol threateningly. "Say that again, you vagabond, and we'll die together!"

"I don't believe in nothing, thank Gord, I don't!" Mrs. Dawe's voice might have been heard exclaiming at this juncture. "And I don't want no shepherds a-lookin' arter me as if I was a baby. Nor my son neither. He'd be that wild if you was to disturb him now I wouldn't answer for the consikkences. Now, don't you try to soft-soap me! You won't get round me; I'm too fat. Ha! ha! ha!"

But the lovers, with all the egotism of their tribe, were too intent on their own feelings to pay any attention to the vigorous dialectic that was being waged in the shop.

"Say that again!" repeated Eliza hysterically, "and you shall wed a corpse!"

On Jack refusing to accede to her request and to take the nuptial consequences, she staggered to the sofa, and was plumping down in a swoon when she observed a paper upon it, much crumpled from Jack's having inadvertently lain upon it. Struck by a sudden thought, she stopped and pulled a journal from her pocket, looked at it, and said humbly: "I crave your forgiveness, Jack. My great love mastered me."

"Come now, that's a little more sensible," said Jack. "Put down that parasol, there's a good girl. Now sit down on the sofa and calm yourself."

"Oh, I am calm, Jack," she said rapidly, meekly obeying his directions. "I know I haven't been very cautious, but I haven't provoked an irreparable breach, have I, darling? I know I'm very passionate at times, like all my sex."

"Yes, yes, Eliza, you are a little too passionate; and if all your sex are like that, Heaven alone knows what politics will become when——"

"Well, I don't say," she interrupted, with ill-concealed pride, "that all women have feelings as vivid and as easily stirred as my own. Few women can love as passionately as me. Oh, those were happy times when our affections were young!"

"Oh, don't cry any more," said Jack hastily, foreseeing the coming tempest by a small handkerchief, no bigger than a man's hand, that appeared on the horizon.

"Well, as it affects you so much, my darling, I will try not to," said Eliza, choking down her emotion very audibly, "though tears would be a relief to my overcharged heart."

Jack's eyes grew moist. "Poor creature!" he thought, "she seems very much affected; and, indeed, she is very unfortunate. Such a pretty girl, too."

"And when we're married, Jack," continued Eliza, "I'll never cry except you particularly wish it. And you'll be a good husband to me, won't you, dear?"

"Now do calm yourself, Eliza," said Jack, quite overcome by the meek pathos of her words. "She, too," he was thinking, "has constructed her glittering dome of many-coloured glass to stain the white radiance of the future, and shall it, alas! be shattered too?"

"I *am* calm," she replied, "but I can't help being excited, to think however in the world I can get my things ready at such short notice. But I'll try my best not to disappoint you."

"What things?" said Jack, though with a glimmering of the truth.

"My trow-see-aw, you stupid old darling. You can't expect me to marry you as I am."

"You can't expect *me* to marry you as I am," retorted Jack, frowning. "In fact, I can't marry you at all."

The girl breathed hard. "Be cautious, be cautious," she repeated to herself.

"And is all my appeal to your sense of honour thrown away, then?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Look here," and she drew out of her breast a heap of letters tied up with a lock of hair. "Look at this: 'Yours till death, Jack Dawe.' 'Your devoted lover, Jack Dawe.' Yes, look at it well. You are Jack Dawe, and you must accept the situation."

"Her reasoning is not unsound," thought Jack. "However, I will examine into the premises."

"Well, well, my good girl," he said aloud, "we'll talk it over."

"You didn't say I was a good girl in these letters," she exclaimed, unable to repress her anger. "They were written fit for a princess to receive; and I'm sure all the other girls were jealous, and said you must be a prince in disguise. Once upon a time I was your black-eyed devil, your rosy and rapturous Saccharissa, your adorable Aspasia, your clinging Cleopatra, your——"

"Enough!" cried Jack. "And how long have you loved me?" he continued, in a calm, judicial tone.

"All my life; but especially for the last two years and three months."

"Why especially during that time?"

"Because it is exactly two years and three months since I first saw you; but I always loved you and dreamed of you."

"Ah!" said Jack, "and how long have I loved you? Be precise, if you please."

"Well, with your sense of honour, Jack, you wouldn't have written these verses, dated exactly two years and two months ago, if you didn't really love me—or these—or these."

"Enough!" cried Jack, when he had read the passionate effusions. "I am convinced. Any judge would think with me, and no jury would disagree on the subject. I'll do my best for you—you may depend on me. What is fair is fair; and you're a pretty girl, too, whom no man need be ashamed to call his wife. You shall have your way in three months at most."

With a low cry of joy, Eliza ran to him and kissed him passionately, and clung to him in loving gratitude.

"Oh, Jack," she exclaimed, "I'm so glad I appealed to your sense of honour. And you promise me that in three months——"

"Yes, yes, I promise," he said hastily, trying to worm himself gently out of her embraces, but making very gradual progress. "But I want you to promise me something in return."

"Anything you like, Jack; and I will gladly grant it you."

"Well, you mustn't come to see me during the three months. I—I'm so busy."

Eliza made a *move* and a move of one hand towards the dreaded pocket-handkerchief.

"Oh, Jack, you're too cruel," she said, in trembling tones. "What, never?"

"Well," he said, relenting; "well, hardly ever. Once or twice at most, you know. I have a very—high respect—love, you know, for you, but——"

"Well, I'm satisfied, darling," she cried, stopping his mouth with a kiss, "to be your black-eyed little devil again."

"Mrs. Dawe!" she shouted. "I want you to promise me again in her hearing," she explained. "Only to make sure, you know."

"Yes, my child," said Mrs. Dawe, opening the door and uttering a cry of joy as she beheld the lovers. The vicar stood behind her. Shaken in his belief in Jack's obduracy by his reappearance at church that morning, he had, after earnest prayer, resolved to have a spiritual talk with him; and had, by a little judicious flattery of Mrs. Dawe's cooking, using temporal weapons for the glory of Heaven, at length overcome her scruples and obtained access through the shop.

"Don't mind me, my children," he said, beaming benevolently on the affianced pair, the girl embracing the man with a sweet smile on her face. "Don't mind me, I've done the same when I was young."

"Now there will be no difficulty in waking his soul to faith," he said to himself. "What is it that Clough says somewhere about married people—that they all

Incline to think there is a God,
Or something very like him."

On perceiving the clergyman, Jack wriggled out of the Elizabethan bower formed by his sweetheart's arms, feeling totally out of harmony with this environment. But he was glad of the appearance of the visitor—in itself and in its effects. At one stroke it terminated a disagreeable interview, and initiated an agreeable.

"My dear sir," he said, holding out his hand amicably, "I am delighted to see you. Will you take this arm-chair?"

"He *would* see you," put in Mrs. Dawe apologetically; "though I told him we was honest folks, as didn't want nothing to do with religion."

"Oh, Mrs. Dawe," protested Eliza, a shade more independently than before. "But we *must* get married in church, and," she added in a whisper, and with a slight blush, "supposing you were to become a grandmother, you would surely be wanting to have the babe christened, especially after I have been months picking out a name for him, and looking through all the numbers of the *London Reader*."

"You are wrong, 'Lizer," replied Mrs. Dawe loudly; committing an *ignoratio elenchi*, and forgetting propriety in her indignation. "You don't want no *London Readers* while I'm 'ere to tell you what's right and proper. It's the custom in my late 'usband's family for the name to dissend from father to son accordin' to the Fifth Commandment. It isn't as I cares about the Commandments, but I'm sure something 'ud 'appen to the child if we didn't call it Jack Dawe." Jack's head was turned away, so that his face could not be seen by the vicar, who for his part was attentively surveying the bicycle in the back-yard.

"Jack Dawe!" cried Eliza. "They're both very good names, but do you think I'd have a child of mine put off like a pauper with only two names? Why, Oliver Twist—as you may have heard of, Mrs. Dawe—asked for more."

"Then I hope he didn't get it, the discontented rascal. Why, I've lived all my life with only two names, and no one never heard me grumble. And how many names do you want to weigh the poor little thing down with?"

"Three at least," replied Eliza. "I know," she added with honest pride, "that I've only had two myself. But because I was neglected is no reason why I shouldn't strive to bring up my children better."

"Three!" ejaculated Mrs. Dawe. "Well, I can only warn you in the words of my late 'usband, 'two's company and three's none.' And what's your third name, pray?"

Eliza looked mysterious. "I couldn't find anything suitable in the *London Reader*," she began.

"I told you so," interrupted Mrs. Dawe in triumphant contempt.

"And I was for a considerable period weltering in the depths of despair, when one day as I was in a shop buying a parasol, and couldn't find one to my liking, and the shopman was quite polite when I walked out without purchasing, which was hardly to be expected, the right name darted to my lips like a flash. It'll read beautiful—Jack F. Dawe."

"But what *is* the other name?" said Mrs. Dawe.

"I'm telling you. Jack Floppington Dawe. Jack F. Dawe—don't you see? What do you say, Jack? Isn't it appropriate and high-sounding?"

Jack murmured something which would have been unintelligible even if Mrs. Dawe had not completely drowned it by a vigorous exclamation of "Floppington! Why Floppington? I calls it a very vulgar name—sounds like Flopping Down, Flopping Down."

"But it's so appropriate," protested Eliza, "that Jack's boy should be called after Floppington."

"After Floppington!" cried Mrs. Dawe in pretended amazement. "Why, who *is* Floppington?"

The vicar uttered an exclamation of surprise. "Surely you must know Floppington," he said. Mrs. Dawe shook her head.

"Why, I'm sure you do," cried Eliza indignantly. "He's the Prime Minister, and as everybody says Jack is so like him, as if they were brothers——"

"Of course there's a good deal of exaggeration, Mr. Dawe," said the vicar, turning to him with a smile, "in the resemblance that people pretend to find between you and the Premier—that sort of thing is always exaggerated, and it's only natural. Now, to me, and it is perhaps that my observation is more subtle than most people's, ignoring the strongly-marked features for those less obtrusive parts where idiosyncrasy shows itself—to me, I say, you appear actually different types. If you have studied Botany, you will have remarked that it is not by the most obvious resemblances that we classify our genera."

"In reading Mill's chapter on Classification last week," said Jack, "I was much struck by the inutility of attempting to draw rigid lines of demarcation, and it seemed to me that by applying the principle of evolution to character——"

"Ha!" said the vicar with satisfaction, "how soon has Mill's Logic fallen out of date; and, believe me, his views on theology will not find acceptance much longer."

"Floppington!" cried Mrs. Dawe, who had by this time condescended to recognise his existence. "Well, I does remember once when I was out with Jack, a boy called him Floppinton and threw mud at him, but as for your saying, 'Lizer, that they're like two brothers, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am sure I meant no harm, madam," said Eliza humbly, "and I am only repeating what everybody says."

"Parrots never says nothing good," retorted Mrs. Dawe sententiously. "And besides, from all I've heard of this 'ere Floppinton, not to speak of music 'alls, as is too full of drink to be relied on, I

should be ashamed to call sich a one my son. He ain't worthy to lick my Jack's boots."

"Beware of hasty judgments, my dear madam," interposed the vicar. "Your son is no doubt an estimable man, but he seems grieved himself at such an atrocious comparison. Let him that is guiltless cast the first stone. The Premier may not be perfectly sincere; indeed, though far be it from me to judge him, I am sure he's dishonest and given to paltering with his conscience; but then public life is always private sin, and we all live in glass houses."

"I'm sure some on us do," Mrs. Dawe burst forth, "a-lecturing the others as cool as cucumbers. But I ain't a politician or a parson, thank Gord! and I can speak my mind. I've been told by persons whose words I *can take*"—here Mrs. Dawe looked witheringly at the vicar—"that this vagabond of a Floppinton has been and gone and ruined the country. His measures was all short. If a poor shopkeeper's weights was as false, he'd ha' got dragged up and fined 'eavily long ago. Ask any business person ow's business, and see what they'll tell you. Why, since Floppy's been Pry Minister, bread's rose awful. He'll spile every blessed 'arvest."

"What nonsense!" cried the vicar, lifting up his hands in pious horror, "surely every one knows that only Providence can do that."

"Well, I'm sure he's quite as wicked as Providence," retorted Mrs. Dawe, "and from what I've heard, I'd lay odds he's wickeder. Why, he's the cause of all them Irish murders."

"This is perfectly absurd," cried the irritated vicar. "Now, who could have told you that?"

"Why, one who knows more o' politics in his little finger than you in your whole body, though he promised me when he was going mad to get married and give it up. There he sits. He knows better than anybody else what a rascal Floppy is—except himself, of course. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Dawe," said the vicar severely, "you ought to know better than to make these libellous statements. He's not so bad but what he'd be terribly grieved even to hear that such crimes are attributed to him. We should beware of grieving our fellow man."

"And yet you come lecturin' to him," cried Mrs. Dawe. "I'm sure Jack sticks to what he said."

"Not if he is sensible," said the vicar, frowning at him.

"I—I am sure I don't—don't recollect saying anything of the kind," stammered Jack.

"Oh, Jack! fie, for shame!" cried his mother. "I can see the parson's converted you—you're tellin' crackers already. You know you said it sittin' on that chair with the loose leg, and you fell down as you said it; and when you got up and was rubbin' yourself all over your back you ses, 'Floppy changes his policies like his shirts—when one looks a bit dirty he gets another.' And I ses to you, 'But what does he do with the dirty ones? Throw 'em away?' 'No,' ses you, 'but he has 'em washed and mangled till they looks, like new, and then he claims they're the same.' You know you hates him like pison, and got yourself kicked out of the Foresters'

last week, and spiled my pleasure, because your feelings was so strong. And do you think, 'Lizer, I'd have the disgrace in my family of havin' a grandchild called Floppinton, and havin' it stuck right in the middle of his name, too?"

"But it sounds nice," said Eliza sulkily. "And who knows what luck he might have—he might become——"

"Pry Minister? Gord forbid!" interrupted Mrs. Dawe. "You might as well make him a Harchbishop at once."

"But Jack is so like the Premier," still protested Eliza; "and I love him all the more for it."

"The imagination of man, and woman too, is evil," interrupted the vicar; "and, my child, I do not think your future husband looks quite pleased at your remarkable sentiments."

The next moment Jack darted an angry but unobserved glance at the vicar for his interference, for Eliza came up to him and began stroking his face.

"Don't look so sulky, darling," she said; "not that it isn't nice to see you lowering like a majestic, rainy sky. I was only joking. I would rather kiss you than ten Floppys." And she translated her words into action.

"This is my good-bye," she added; "for I must get back to Harley House"

Fatal name! How vividly it brought before Jack's mind the appalling contrast between the first kiss and the last!

"Good-bye, dear Mrs. Dawe," said Eliza, kissing her on both cheeks with affection tempered by deference. "I can't tell you how happy I feel. My heart is as light as a bird."

"And mine's as light as a feather," replied Mrs. Dawe, returning the dual salutation with affection, tempered by superiority. "And it would be as light as a air-balloon, if you didn't argy so much. My late 'usband used to say 'that fightin' with argyments ain't necessary in a woman's spear. They 'as their 'ousehold duties, and besides them there's nothin' to argy about but dress, and *there* argyments ain't allowed, for it's the fashion to follow the fashion.' Not that it's any good in a man's spear neither. Many's the time he's argyed with 'is mates that argyin' to convince anybody—and especially a parson—is like pourin' a pint of depillory fluid over a bald 'ead and expectin' to see a bushel of 'air spring up."

"Alas for the House of Commons! if that be true, as it may possibly be," thought Jack, looking at the vicar, who was nodding his head approvingly and murmuring: "By faith, not words, are ye saved."

"I shall take care to remember your advice, dear Mrs. Dawe," replied Eliza. "Although I have not a bald head at present, the time may come when your lamented husband's words will prove useful. Good-bye."

Curtseying to the vicar, Eliza hastened into the shop, for she heard the roll of a "bus." The 'bus was heard to stop at the door and the conductor to cry "Right." Then a sudden thought struck Mrs. Dawe, and she rushed into the street. The 'bus had started

and was rapidly diminishing on the horizon. "Hi!" cried Mrs Dawe. "Stop! Hi!"

The 'bus came slowly to a standstill. Mrs. Dawe hurried up with as quick a waddle as her corpulency and her tight old slippers would allow, and reached it gasping for breath.

"'Lizer," she panted, putting her head through the window. "Suppose—it should—be a girl—after all."

Eliza turned pale and put her hand to her heart.

"It all comes from argying too much," observed Mrs. Dawe compassionately to the alarmed occupants. "And *never*, my poor 'Lizer, as my late husband used to say, "never count your eggs before they're chickens."

CHAPTER V.

THEOLOGY AND MEDICINE.

"BY faith, not words, are ye saved," repeated the vicar musingly, proud of the *mot.* "I am speaking to you, my dear Mr. Dawe, as one who would wish nothing better than to help a man of your ability with his own experience. No arguments can induce the spiritual condition, any more than they can persuade a deaf man that Beethoven is divine. As Pascal pointed out long ago, our simplest notions admit of no real definitions. And this is the only point on which I have been able to agree with a recent writer, called Professor Drummond, who argues that the spiritual life is equally incapable of definition."

"Indeed!" said Jack, much interested, and settling down for an enjoyable talk with one who was evidently a man of culture and general reading. "And pray what was your opinion of the book as a whole?"

"I opened it at boiling point of enthusiasm," replied the vicar, "and left off at zero. It is neither religion nor science—in short, 'tis General Booth masquerading as Herbert Spencer."

"There's some truth in your epigram," said Jack; "yet you seem to depreciate General Booth somewhat unduly. Whatever his motives may be, he certainly does more good among the people around us than Herbert Spencer."

"I confess I do not see the point of the satire," remarked the vicar, looking displeased.

"My dear sir," returned Jack, "I honestly assure you it's a very neat epigram."

"You have read the book, then," cried the vicar, forgetting indignation in astonishment.

"Most certainly," was the reply. "Do you think I could afford to miss it?"

The vicar made no reply—he could not speak.

"Everybody spoke so highly of it," Jack continued, "that I devoured it in the very first interval permitted by the cares of business."

“And I presume you read it with a predisposition to ridicule it in the brutal style of Bradlaugh or Foote!”

“As to the gentlemen you mention,” replied the painter, “I have never read any of their writings, nor am I anxious to do so, for I am given to understand that they do not argue with, but laugh coarsely at you. I hope I am always open to reasoning but coarse satire would, I should think, have no effect upon me. And in accordance with my ordinary custom I read *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* in a most susceptible temper—anxious, indeed, to harbour any legitimate reconciliation between religion and so-called science; and I found the analogies it disclosed wonderfully suggestive.”

“Indeed!” cried the vicar; “then I congratulate you on a receptivity for which I had not given you credit. To desire truth is to partially attain to it. It is half the battle; and with the blessing of God we shall speedily rout the deadly hosts of sense.”

“The deadly hosts of sense,” repeated Jack musingly, not oblivious of Eliza; and the vicar writhed under his own words, which seemed to acquire new meaning in an adversary’s mouth.

“In a world of mystery,” he said, “it is idle to rely on so-called common-sense. Common-sense deals but with the limited and clearly-defined, and can never attain to the unlimited. The eye of the soul sees no trimly-cut Dutch garden, but a vague, majestic prairie stretching out into infinity. With Aquinas, we must believe in order to know, and with St. Paul——”

“Pardon me,” interrupted Jack, “was it not Anselm who said: ‘*Credo ut sciam*’?”

“You are right,” replied the rector in much astonishment. “But how is it you are so well-informed?”

“In youth,” replied Jack modestly, “I made some acquaintance with mediæval theology. I was always anxious to gain some acquaintance with every form of thought.”

“Great Heavens!” cried the rector. “And yet you were uninfluenced by the products of the age of Faith?”

“Was that possible? I could not but find repose in the moral submissiveness of a Lanfranc, nor be uninspired by the love of righteousness that breathes through the writings of an Anselm. Of Abelard’s books I confess to have learnt most from his Autobiography. The Angelical Doctor was overwhelmingly convincing on many points when I read him, but the impression was feeble afterwards—in the multitude of reasons there was confusion. At one time I was much attracted by the mysticism of Bonaventura and St. Bernard.”

“I confess my own reading has not been so extensive as yours,” said the rector, in a tone of incredulity blent with astonished belief. “I have been more of a man of action than you. Except St. Augustine——”

“Yes, he’s always a-readin’,” put in Mrs. Dawe, opening the door and admitting herself and a curiously complex and many-scented odour. “He’s got a book called ‘Songs Afore Sunrise,’

and long afore cockcrow he *does* read it, too. But I don't mind that, 'cause when he reads it to me I always feels like I could do a jig to it; it's as good as 'avin' Jimmy playin' on the fiddle. Drat you, you needn't knock so loud on the counter as if you was a post-man—d'y'e think I'm as deaf as a post?"

"Swinburne and Aquinas!" thought the rector. "My young friend's tastes are singularly catholic. His mind must resemble the compound scent of his mother's cookery. That such talent and such culture should be found in a house-painter! And if, as is likely, his companions are equally intelligent, I fear me a Democracy is irresistible."

"You spoke of Augustine just now," said Jack, after a meditative pause. "What new depth of meaning I find already in him! Never before had I comprehended Love, Sin, Suffering. Only when he has felt in himself the struggle of Evil with Good" (and he thought of Eliza), "and has himself been racked by religious doubt" (and his mind ran rapidly over the incidents of the past week), "only then is a man able to do justice to those wonderful 'Confessions.'" His voice faltered, and the rector's suspicions were banished by its genuine sadness. He forgot all Jack's satirical and mimetic powers, the feigned tears in church, the gravely-uttered praise and promise of promotion, he saw only his soul suffering and longing for light.

"You have at last, then, begun to doubt the teachings of your childhood, my son?" he cried joyfully.

"Alas, yes," was the mournful reply.

"Nay, grieve not," said the vicar, shocked once more at such hardened infidelity. "Rather rejoice with me at the methods God has seen fit to employ to illumine your soul."

"Though doubt was terrible, I have learnt much from it," said Jack, "and I rejoice that you have come to strengthen me at such a crisis."

Sacred joy and thanksgiving filled the heart of the venerable clergyman. Obeying a sudden inspiration, he knelt down and in trembling tones repeated for another the aspiration of the dying Goethe for more light. It was a solemn scene, and when the grey-haired rector rose with streaming eyes, Jack was ineffably touched.

"I shouldn't like to be the parson's old woman," thought Mrs. Dawe, who in the midst of her duties caught a glimpse of the scene through the glass of the sitting-room door, "if she's got the job of patching up the knees of his trousers. If he often does that when he gets a new pair, it's never too early to mend."

"I should have some hope in Democracy," said the rector when he was calmer, "if it did not promise to ignore any Higher Control."

"It's pourin' cats and dogs," remarked Mrs. Dawe, re-entering the room, "and I'm a-feared 'Lizer with her parasol 'll get wet to the skin. Not that *you* seems to care much, sittin' comfortable on your sophy. But I wants some paper to wrap up some veal and ham pie for Mrs. Trotters. I thought I saw some lyin' about 'ere

afore." Casting her eyes anxiously about, Mrs. Dawe disappeared under the table.

"My own hope," said Jack, disregarding the interruption, "is that we shall some day return to the admirable constitution of the ancient Jews—I mean a Theocracy. A very visionary ideal, I grant you, but the hours we spend in Utopia are the happiest of our lives. In my theological writings——"

"You have written on theology?" gasped the vicar.

"As a student and layman merely, of course. In them I have always advocated a union of Church and State."

"I could ha' swore it was in 'ere," said Mrs. Dawe, reappearing empty-handed from under the table. "Why, Jack, you're a-sittin' on it, I do believe. Yes, that's it. You don't want it, do you? Don't be frightened, this ain't the number of the *Free Thinker* that's got your thing in it about the Angel Gaybrill and the Hokey-Pokey—ha! ha! ha! It makes me laugh whenever I thinks of it. What are you opening your mouth like a fish for? I'm *sure* it ain't—'cause this one's got a picture of an angel standin' on 'is 'ead and a little chirrup goin' round with the 'at, while the one your poetry was in 'ad a pictur of the devil in 'is cookshop—and, of course, I remembers it particular. Well, if I don't call that manners for a parson to run out like a madman in a strait-waistcoat without sayin' good evenin'. Why, he's been and forgot 'is umbreller in 'is 'urry. 'Tould serve 'im right if he got drenched to the skin, poor old man. Hi! Parson! Hi!"

A moment afterwards, Mrs. Dawe, with dripping hair, rushed back into the parlour in a state of great indignation.

"May I be crushed to a jelly," she exclaimed, addressing her son, who was lying prostrate on the sofa, his mild countenance wan with despair, "if ever that man darkens my back parler agen. I got wet to give 'im back 'is rubbishin' umbreller, and he took it like a sleep-walker on a tight-rope, without a word of thanks. He must be a nice man to 'ave in a 'ouse. I pity 'is old woman and the little 'uns if that's the sort of father they've got to put up with. I remembers when I was married, a second cousin of your father on the mother's side, a nice little chap he was, he burst a blood-vessel ten years ago, singing a song that began :

'The minister's boy to the war 'as gone,
'Is sword he 'as girded on 'im.'

and I'm sure I don't wonder at it arter to-day. These ere two pages 'll do for Mrs. Trotter. You can 'ave the rest if you ain't read 'em yet."

Thrusting the remnants into Jack's nerveless hand, she withdrew into the shop to wrap up the pie.

Involuntarily Jack's eyes scanned a few lines of print. A pointed logical remark roused him from his dull lethargy—his shattered energies pieced themselves together—he read on. The arguments were powerful, scathing, virulent, coarse, but delivered with an irresistible air of contemptuous superiority.

"Can I have been deceiving myself all my life," he asked himself bitterly, "and were my eyes opened for once only to be immediately closed, unable to bear the light of truth?" He turned to another column that made him flinch every moment under cruel, Voltairean sneers. Then he found some brutal jokes under whose weight the delicate, dew-hung, gossamer web of Theology was rent to pieces and shrank to naught and vanished in the morning wind. A vigorous and enthusiastic article on the Religion of Man thrilled him with pity for the suffering it depicted, and with noble resolutions to aid in relieving the temporal wants of humanity in lieu of the spiritual. Then he read some anecdotes which chilled him again. He dropped the paper.

"Is the truth with these men, then?" he reflected. "Surely I find here some of the thoughts I hardly dared think during my weary wanderings. Alas, is the Life of Man but a wretched dream and the Universe but a soulless bubble; and must I spend the rest of my days in the City of Dreadful Night? Then is Schopenhauer right and Consciousness an evil interruption of the blissful repose of the Unconscious. What is man that he should dream of righteousness, and of power over Nature? I thought my soul impregnable, and lo! to-day it yielded at the first assault of the flesh—yielded in intention if not in actuality. Where is the grandeur of the moral world within and the starry universe without? Of dust are we and our emotions, of dust are the infinite spheres, and to dust shall all return."

"Jack," cried Mrs. Dawe, who had re-entered and was watching him anxiously. "Jack, you looks very ill and gloomy. You must take a pill."

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

THE PREMIER'S SATURDAY NIGHT.

It was Saturday night in the great city. As it happened to be a fine night, London had turned out into the streets and other places in search of amusement; and all open-air entertainments were being especially well patronised. For listening to music, without having walls around one, and a roof above one's head, and a hot and vitiated atmosphere to breathe, was a pleasant novelty in those days when scientific knowledge was confined to a few *savants*, and the answers to examination papers.

The theatres, too, were fairly full, as Saturday night was so evidently cut out by the social arrangements of the age as the night on which people could best enjoy themselves, that, even with the mercury making frantic attempts to escape through the top of the thermometer tube, theatres and music-halls might rely on a decent attendance for that particular night of the week. Another source of amusement for vacant minds was talking politics. Chemistry turns all sorts of waste produce to account, and manufactures things of beauty from the refuse of our manufactories. The same utilitarian spirit must have been at work in those Saturday night holiday-makers who managed to extract their amusement from political philippics. Ordinarily, hot weather would, paradoxically enough, have cooled the ardour of these gifted beings, and their favourite seat would oft have known them not. But this particular summer, things were more exciting than usual, and so summer failed in its wonted eliminations. And on this particular Saturday night, the conduct of the Right Honourable A. Floppington was being discussed, as warmly as the heat of the weather would permit, all over the metropolis, for on the following Monday would be held that Cabinet Council which would decide whether Floppington's Ministry was to go to pieces or not.

All this did not trouble the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington very much. The bustle and excitement of the outer world, the stir of the motley phantasmagoric figures shifting restlessly on the

magic-lantern of the gay and sombre city, evidently failed to penetrate within the walls of No. 10, Downing Street, where the Premier, not yielding to the general desire to be in the open air, was sitting in his own bachelor snugery, which was, in truth, a very *sanctum sanctorum*. It was a small, and comfortably rather than elegantly furnished room. The walls were lined with books; not those graves of information called Blue Books, printed by a grateful country in the interests of the butter-man; not the things in book's clothing which so roused the ire of gentle Elia; but real books, the work of the lords of fancy and the kings of the imagination. The Premier was delighted to leave the stern realities of politics, to forget "the world out of joint" in the music of the poets he so dearly loved, or in the thoughts of those metaphysicians whose endless and resultless speculations had so strange a charm for him. From the top of the book-shelves there looked down upon him the busts of his great predecessors, Pitt, Peel, and Beaconsfield.

The Premier was seated, with a book in his hand, at a table in the centre of the room. He had a pipe in his mouth, and was lazily puffing rings of smoke, which he watched as they curled up towards the ceiling; while at intervals he cast his eyes upon his book, an English translation of Hugo's *Hernani*.

"I can understand what it's all about now," he said to himself; "but I couldn't understand a word when I saw Sarah Bernhardt play in it at the *Gaiety*. They do talk French so dreadfully fast, to be sure;" and shaking his head, as if in condemnation of the speed which Frenchmen employ in the use of their own language, he resumed his book. He was a true Briton and patriot, and felt in his heart of hearts that he could have given them a few hints on the subject worthy of attention.

He read and smoked on quietly for a few minutes, absorbed in the glowing words of the great poet.

Then putting down his book, he resumed his contemplative gaze at the aspiring smoke rings, and his soliloquy at the same time.

"Ah," he continued, "this speech of Don Carlos before the tomb of Charlemagne is superb. I wish I could get into the style for my next speech. I fancy it would make them sit up in the House."

It will have been already observed that the Premier's language contained many strange but vigorous figures of speech; and he smiled softly, as he conjured up a vision of the Members listening with open-mouthed astonishment to a melodramatic harangue.

"It isn't quite the style of *Don Juan*, which Dizzy thought proper for the Commons, nor that of *Paradise Lost*, which he deemed most suitable for the Lords; though I rather think if the *Paradise Lost* style were common there, it wouldn't be long before they'd bring in a bill for their own abolition; but I think it would fetch them;" and he stopped his soliloquy for a moment to mix himself some whisky and water, which he sipped with gusto.

Refreshed by the stimulating drink—for he had not exceeded in

the matter of water—he plunged into the play again, and for a time silence reigned in the room, broken only by short, unintelligible sounds that issued at intervals from his lips. The world might wonder how he would surmount the troubles which surrounded him; his countrymen might condemn him or praise him; he was indifferent to it all. The cares of the Empire sat but lightly on his shoulders; and not a thought of them impaired his placid enjoyment of the poet's lines. It is this power of living the life of the moment, which makes men great.

“How fine the finish is, too! That bit, when after acting in a manner worthy of an Emperor, he addresses the tomb of Charlemagne, and asks if he has done well, is splendid. I wonder whether he found clemency pay, though. I must look it up one of these days. History is not one of my strong points. And yet, it would not be altogether out of place, if the man who makes history knew something of the way in which others have made it before him. It might improve the quality of the article,” and he laughed inwardly at his own irony.

He put down the book, and his thoughts wandered to the past.

“What a squeeze there was to get in that night, to be sure! The gallery was half-a-dollar, and how the people crowded to pay it! But it was worth the money and the trouble to see the play, acted as it was, though I couldn't make out a word they were saying. When the divine Sarah breakfasts with me next week, I must tell her that I went to the gallery to see her play *Doña Sol*, and I'll give her a graphic description of what I went through. She'll think me mad, I dare say, which will be a thoroughly English idea. Curiously enough, the British public doesn't think much of *Floppy*,” and he laughed to himself at this frank way of putting matters. He was much given—too much given, most people said—to introspection; but he didn't introspect flatteringly, which is more than can be said of most men who are as philosophically inclined.

He laughed so long that he let his pipe go out. He rose to take another from a rack suspended over the mantel, for he was too old a smoker to smoke a hot pipe. Having found one to his taste, he leisurely filled it, and as he did so, a fresh train of thought was started. He lit the pipe, and then, instead of resuming his seat, he set to walking up and down the room with short, jerky strides.

“I wish Monday were here and gone,” he mused. “I don't half relish that Cabinet Council. However, I am quite decided what to do as regards Lord Bardolph. He isn't alone in the Cabinet though, I think; but I c'on't care. If one of us has to give way, the name of the one who does so will not be—Floppington. Won't it be a joke, though, if he resigns, and then finds that I intend giving women the franchise after all? It would save a deal of trouble if I told him so first; but then he and his partisans would say that I had caved in, and my influence would be gone. People may suggest what motives they please for my action in this matter, but fear of Lord Bardolph shall not be one of them.”

He stopped in his hurried walk before the bust of Lord Beacons

field, and stood looking closely at the Sphinx-like countenance, as if eager to discover what that great Parliamentary thought of the matter.

"You had a pretty hard time of it," he continued, apostrophising the bust, "but you conquered, and so will I."

Again he started pacing the room, his mind still busy with the thoughts of the struggle to come; but a confident smile played about his lips, and showed that the momentary fit of despondency—if such it could be termed—had passed away. Then his pace slackened, he shook his head at the bust of Lord Beaconsfield, and finally resumed his seat. He did not feel inclined to resume his reading of *Hernani*; and for some moments all his energies were absorbed in the struggle to find a thoroughly comfortable position in his chair; a struggle which has been going on for generations without the requisite development being evolved. Our kin beyond the sea have, it is true, hit upon a fairly successful device in reposing the heels upon a table or mantel; but this is to some extent independent of a chair, and to that extent, therefore, imperfect. The Premier tried it however, among many others, but gave it up with a sigh, as he said:

"I never could feel quite comfortable with my legs up in the air like that. One must be born to it, I think," and then, with a vicious pull at his pipe, which had the effect of making the room as cloudy as his ideas were said to be by his opponents, he resumed his thinking:

"Lord Bardolph disposed of, I expect the rest of the Cabinet will let me have my own way in the matter; they will sing small when they find I am not to be frightened by him. Then there is the House to be considered. Will the measure get through safely?" and the Premier knitted his brows, and let his pipe go out, as he pondered this question. "I think it will," he continued; "the party will, of course, follow the Cabinet; and the Opposition—well," and here he smiled grimly, "some of them, at any rate, are too deeply committed to my views to oppose me. But what a sensation there will be when everybody learns that Floppington is changed! Ah! Lady Gwendolen, Lady Gwendolen, you will have much to answer for, but the gentleman known to the democracy as Floppy will have much more;" and the thought of the respective apportionment of responsibility between Lady Gwendolen and himself apparently afforded him much amusement; for he laughed heartily, as though coolly making the Conservative party pass Radical measures was a practical joke, and not a serious step fraught with gravest consequences to his country.

"They'll say that I'm as devoid of principle as Bardolph, after this," he went on when he had become tired of laughing; "but the Conservatives have devoted quite enough attention to the preservation of antiquities. Under my leadership they shall now turn their back on the past, and face the future. After all," he continued, mechanically striking a match and relighting his pipe, "it's very easy to carry on government. The permanent officials rule the

roast in the departmental work; and as for legislation, you can carry anything you want, if you let your colleagues in the Government fully understand that you intend to boss your own show. Domestic affairs are quite safe in my hands, and as for foreign ones, I'm Radical enough to think that they are quite secondary as a general thing. There's a good deal more fuss than importance about them. Still, I must get some ideas on the business for Monday, as it won't do to let Bardolph have his own way. Besides, he may resign. Let me see," and he got up and began reflectively turning over a heap of papers. At last he settled down with the *Daily Telegraph* in his hand. "Yes, I'll see what ideas I can get from the *D.T.* about this latest move of Bismarck's;" and crossing one leg over the other, and giving vent to a tired sort of sigh, he set to work at his very important task.

"The Island of BOBO," he read, "is situated somewhere in the Indian Ocean. It is a barren rock, of such ridiculously small dimensions that none of the maps to which we have access contains the name; and we understand, also, that it is not marked upon any of the maps at the Foreign Office. It is believed, however, to be identical with the island which, under the name of SKI-HI, was blown up by internal convulsions, as recorded in the ancient Chinese records. The date of this event is variously placed at from 6300 to 6150 B.C. It also figures prominently in the mythologies of India, and——"

"This won't help me," said the Premier, running his eye rapidly over a long history of this unknown and unmarked-on-any-map island, in which the part it had played during the empires of Assyria and Persia was given at full length, with the introduction of a number of names, containing quaint and unpronounceable combinations of consonants, which led the reader gently on to the comparatively modern period of Greece, Carthage, and Rome, and so by a series of easy gradations to the nineteenth century. "It's very interesting, and the writer must be wonderfully clever; but—— Oh, this is more practical;" and he took up the thread of the article again.

"Altogether," he read, "a more desolate spot cannot be imagined. No waving palms lift their fronds in silent adoration to tropical skies; no cocoanuts afford sport to countless myriads of monkeys; no sound of life is heard upon its arid wastes. All is desolation. It has no harbours; and if it had, no fleets would enter them. But the German flag is now waving over this barren spot of earth; and this fact at once raises this island to an important position in the geographical world. It may be said, 'What does it matter if the German flag does wave over so insignificant and so valueless a spot?' It may not matter to the recreant Englishman who thinks the honour and glory of his country are cribbed, cabined and confined within the narrow limits of the British Isles; but it does matter to every Englishman who thinks with pride of that greater empire upon which the sun never sets, and who feels within his bosom that patriotic glow which tells him that there is not on

the globe a spot of land, however insignificant and barren, but that it is written in the scroll of the heavens that the English flag, and not the German, shall wave above it. PRINCE BISMARCK must be made to understand this clearly. If he is made to understand the immutable natural destiny of England by diplomatic means, well and good. We shall rejoice at it. But if not—if he prove obstinately blind to the manifest intentions of the all-ruling forces of Nature, then it must be England's mission to open his eyes, by the roar of Woolwich infants belching forth their iron lessons from the turrets of our iron walls!"

The Premier dropped the paper with a half-ludicrous start of amazement on reading these brave words; for had he not read in another paper, but the day previously, that the English Navy was a shadow, a skeleton, utterly incompetent to defend the shores of England, and still more incompetent, therefore, to attack other shores; and had not this other paper called loudly for the immediate impeachment of himself and the First Lord of the Admiralty, if they did not at once make the navy stronger than the combined navies of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America? He sat gazing sheepishly into vacancy for a while, in a vain attempt to reconcile the readings of the different days, and then shook his head mournfully as he said:

"I shall have to stick to one paper for the future, and tell my secretaries so. Becoming acquainted with the contents of several is so very confusing."

And having delivered himself of this truism, the Premier sat thinking, looking reflectively the while, as was his wont, at the up-curling rings of smoke.

"Perhaps the *D. T.* is right after all," he resumed, "and self-assertion is as valuable in foreign affairs as I know it is at home. Besides, a spirited foreign policy is one of the traditions of the party I have the honour to lead; and I had better leave them a shred or so of their old professions to swear by," and then, with a nod of his head, as if to imply that he had finally dismissed the subject, he took up his book. But somehow or other he could not read. The train of thought into which he had wandered since he had been charmed with the noble speeches of Don Carlos, had put him out of harmony with the world of the drama. The real world, in which he moved, and lived, and had his being, was too much with him; and it was with an air of discontent with himself that he threw down the book, and let his thoughts stray as pleased them best—all will-power over them entirely gone. It was not without a pitying exclamation of self-contempt that the Premier found himself forced to let his thoughts take the reins, and came to the conclusion that a man might control the destinies of a vast empire, but not the mysterious workings of his own brain. For some time, if one might judge from the expression of his face, his thoughts were not pleasing, though through all their varying phases, the look of calm, almost assertive self-reliance, the quality in which till very recently he had shown himself so deficient, was never absent. But gradually

his face softened, and a tender, wistful look came into his eyes as he thought :

"Ah, Lady Gwendolen, your cause will triumph. But in the after years will you ever think of the ephemeral May-fly, the poor insect of a day we used to sing about at school?" And as he leaned his head upon his hand, the air of assurance vanished; he looked worn, and haggard, and hesitating as of yore.

His reverie was interrupted by a knock at the door, followed by the entry of a servant.

"Lord Bardolph Mountchapel wishes to see you, sir."

"To see me?" said the Premier, gazing at the servant, as if in a dream. "Ah, yes," he continued, "I expected him. Show him in here."

The servant vanished; the Premier sprang to his feet. The interview he had been expecting, and upon which he felt so much depended, had come at last. He hastily emptied his glass of whisky and water. All despondency had died away. He was his newer and better self again.

Lord Bardolph entered, and the two shook hands, looking warily at each other the while, as do two boxers before commencing to fight. Outwardly, they had always been friends, and even rather intimate friends, though each had ever been conscious of some antagonism; but this had never been allowed to interfere with their personal relations. Each, too, had a sort of admiration for the other. The man who could not make up his mind because he thought too much, felt something like admiration for the man who made up his mind at once because he didn't think at all.

"Whisky?" said the Premier interrogatively, when Lord Bardolph had settled himself comfortably in a chair, which he did with an ease that made his host quite envious.

"Thanks, no, I don't drink," was the reply. "You see, I think of founding a school of Conservative abstainers, as a set-off against the Radical teetotalers."

"Have you sworn off smoking, too?"

"No. Thank goodness, the Radicals all smoke; so I feel quite at ease with my conscience in doing ditto," and, suiting the action to the word, he lighted up a choice regalia selected from the box the Premier held out to him. But you," he continued, looking at the Premier, who had set to work again on his pipe, "since when have you smoked that thing?"

"Since I was—I mean only lately," returned the Premier somewhat confusedly; "really good cigars are so very expensive."

"You economical, Floppington!" laughed Lord Bardolph. "Well, I must tell Southleigh in time that he may reduce his estimate of the revenue from customs;" and then the two men smoked silently for a time. At length the silence was broken by Floppington, who said :

"What do you think of doing about that Bobo business?"

"Nothing," was the laconic reply.

"Nothing?" mechanically repeated the Premier.

"Yes, nothing. The fact is," Lord Bardolph went on, "that

we're too near the election to do anything in foreign affairs that may compromise us. It's right to try and make the other side blunder into a spirited foreign policy when they're in power; but that's no reason why we should blunder into one ourselves."

The Premier seemed puzzled at the new phase of Conservatism his colleague was developing. No doubt the hen of the fable that hatched a duckling was unable to account for the fondness her new-born offspring manifested for water, and was terrified accordingly. Such conduct must have quite transcended her range of experience, and, if a hen of philosophical tendencies, have caused her to regard the theories of some gallinaceous John Stuart Mill with suspicion ever afterwards. But though no fable has dealt with it, the surprise of a duck that hatched a chicken, on finding the new-comer had an invincible objection to any medium less solid than *terra firma*, would be equally great, though contempt would accompany it rather than terror; and the Premier's bewilderment was of this description.

"Surely," he remonstrated, "we can't allow Bismarck to go on annexing without even a protest. England must put her foot down somewhere."

"But as one of the Radical fellows said," replied Lord Bardolph, "England isn't a centipede. Deucedly clever remark that. I feel that I could have made it myself," he went on musingly. "But it's just like the Rads. They anticipate my wit as well as my policy."

"But what about public opinion?" said the Premier. "We can't afford to run counter to it. See what the *Telegraph* says," and he took up the paper he had been reading, and handed it to his companion.

"Just like you, to bother with public opinion," sneered Lord Bardolph, "as if you didn't know how it was got up; as if you hadn't taken shares in a newly started manufactory of the commodity yourself."

"But it is cowardly," said the Premier, who, however, was apparently reconciling himself to the non-intervention Conservatism of his colleague. "As you said in one of your speeches, no Conservative Minister will ever shrink from defending British interests, whenever and by whomsoever attacked."

"Did I?" queried Lord Bardolph, "I forget. But you flatter me by remembering what I said. I thought only the Opposition did that, when they want to be disagreeable. However, as we are pledged to protect British interests, and we have persuaded everybody that we are only too eager to do so, our non-intervention simply shows—"

"Our inconsistency," interjected the Premier.

"Not at all; but simply that there are no British interests to defend," was the calm reply.

The Premier sat quiet a few moments, smoking reflectively as he allowed this new version to sink into his mind. His receptivity and readiness to respond to new impressions have been already

pointed out. So it is not surprising that he ended by agreeing with Lord Bardolph, as Lord B. expected.

"Perhaps you are right," he said ; then, looking up and throwing back his head with a quick, imperious gesture, he went on, "I think, therefore, you may be allowed to have your way in this affair."

The husband of patient Griselda could hardly have been more taken aback had that good lady suddenly launched out in the style of the lamented Mrs. Caudle, than was Lord Bardolph by the words of the Premier, and the tone in which they were said. There was underlying it an assumption of superiority, a tacit taking for granted of mastery, that set the teeth of Lord Bardolph's self-sufficiency on edge. The Premier had yielded, it was true ; but there was about his very yielding something of stern resolution which was unwonted, and which awoke Lord Bardolph to the fact that victory in the struggle he contemplated would not be gained so easily as he had anticipated. As he sat there, watching his chief, who, busily intent on mixing himself another glass of whisky and water, appeared to have quietly dismissed the whole subject from his thoughts, he felt a foreboding that victory might not be his at all. *De l'audace, de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace* had been his motto ; and he had invariably acted upon it, and with success. Was it about to fail him now ?

Not if he could help it. Fortified as he was by the knowledge of the support he knew he might expect from many of the members of the Cabinet, and relying on the success of the intrigue into which he had entered, his momentary doubt passed away. Other than political reasons, too, swayed him ; and it was, metaphorically speaking, with the gloves off that he resumed the attack.

"By-the-bye, Floppington, you had an awfully long tête-à-tête with Lady Gwendolen, at the Duke's the other night. Did she convert you ?"

"Convert me !" said the Premier in a tone of laughing astonishment ; "why, I fancy my mind was made up on the question of Woman Suffrage before Lady Gwendolen gave a thought to it."

"I dare say it was. But that's some time ago," said Lord Bardolph pointedly.

"So it is ; and yet I haven't changed my views. Curious, isn't it, Mountchapel ?" banteringly replied the Premier. "But then, you know, it's the unexpected that always happens."

Lord Bardolph was feeling uncomfortable. The Premier was evidently enjoying himself at Lord Bardolph's expense, and that gentleman felt considerably aggrieved, and began to lose his temper. It was very unwise, no doubt ; but the phase of character displayed by the Premier was so utterly unlike all previous manifestations that some allowance must be made for his inexperience in dealing with it.

"Then I presume you do not see your way to falling in with my views, and doing as I wish," he said, a tone of anticipated triumph breaking in his voice. He felt that he had the game in his hands. If, on the one hand, the Premier, vacillating as ever, yielded the point at issue, his own position in the Cabinet and in

the country would be immensely strengthened. It would make him Premier in all but name. If, on the other hand, the Premier proved obdurate, his obduracy would be softened speedily enough, when he found Lord Bardolph was not alone at the Council. Lord Bardolph, in fact, didn't see what course but acquiescence was open to the Premier, when he should find himself in a minority in his own Cabinet ; unless, indeed, he informed the Queen that he could not continue to carry on Her Majesty's Government. That would mean Floppington's fall, which would be synonymous with Bardolph's rise.

Politics formed the web, his love for Lady Gwendolen the warp of his conduct, and so deftly was the web woven that no possible contingency (as far as Bardolph could see) was unprovided for. Whether Floppington yielded or not, an increase of influence in the spheres of both politics and love must inevitably ensue.

And yet, carefully as he had laid his plans, cautiously as he had mapped out his line of action, confident as he was in the impossibility of the failure of his intrigue, an under-current of doubt kept mingling with his anticipations of victory. He could not account for it. He tried to shake off his forebodings as foolish, but could only do so momentarily. They had vanished as he uttered the last few words to the Premier ; they returned with the Premier's reply :

"I shall be only too pleased to do as you wish, when your wishes are coincident with mine."

"I don't think you recognise the importance of your wishes coinciding with mine," retorted Lord Bardolph, who, being somewhat nettled, was led on into saying more than he had intended. "You can't do without me."

"Nor with you, to all appearances," blandly replied Floppington.

He did not know how Bardolph was playing his game, but he knew what the game was ; and he knew that now or never was the time to assert himself. The necessity for this process had occurred to him often enough before ; but he had never yielded to the necessity.

He always knew the right thing to do, but never did it. But he did it this time ; so that it is a perfectly fair inference that he must have been under the impression he was doing wrong.

"Let us understand each other," went on Lord Bardolph ; "we are alone and can speak openly. If you think you can do without me, you are at liberty to make the experiment ; but I prophesy it will be a failure."

"Is Bardolph also among the prophets?" asked Floppington, with that coolness which generally has the effect of exciting heat in the person addressed. Lord Bardolph ignored the remark, however, and went on :

"If you want to keep in office—and I suppose you do—there is only one course open. You must go to the country with the Radical programme. Thank goodness there is no such thing as political copyright. It's all very well talking about preserving the Constitution. It's admirably suited for the peroration. It is the cheese to help digest the banquet. But the banquet itself must consist of

good, substantial promises to outbid the Radicals. You do not see this fact. I do. You are still haunted by antiquated superstitions as to party traditions and party principles. I am free from all such weaknesses. I am the admitted exponent of this go-ahead Conservatism, which is the only Conservatism that has a chance. At our meetings I am the only speaker that draws."

"Because the taste for burlesque has not yet died out," said the Premier, who, incredible as it must appear to all who know anything at all of Floppington, seemed bent on provoking a quarrel with his colleague.

"Because people are tired of stick-in-the-mud politics," almost screamed Lord Bardolph, whose temper was now fairly roused. "Because people are sick of shilly-shally; because people want a leader whose conception of leading is not going backwards. Without me you can't hold the reins of power a single day; and you must have me on my own terms, or not at all."

"Your terms are too high, I am afraid," said the Premier. "You have said what you had to say; now listen to me. I am the Premier, and I am going to have my own way in the Cabinet. If you, or any one else, think you can dictate terms to me, you are mistaken. As Premier, I am—and intend to continue—the motive power of the Ship of State. You appear to think I am only the figure-head."

For a moment or so Lord Bardolph was dumb. That Floppington the molluscous should speak in such a strain was impossible. It must be a dream. And yet it was the real flesh and blood Premier that stood before him, for he had risen as he uttered the last words, pale and defiant, as Lord Bardolph never remembered to have seen him before. As he called to mind the eccentricities he had recently displayed, the thought struck him that Floppington was mad. But an instant's reflection convinced him that the man facing him was sane enough; a man of inflexible determination and iron will. What magic power had wrought the transformation he could not even conjecture, but he intuitively recognised that Floppington was his master; that his own reckless audacity would simply shiver to atoms if brought into collision with Floppington's newly-manifested resoluteness. The game was slipping from his hands in the very moment of victory. What if the men who had promised to support him deserted him when confronted with the new Floppington! In his despair he threw prudence to the winds, and played his last card.

"Then you refuse to yield to my wishes. You will carry out your own ideas."

"That is certainly my intention," answered the Premier, who appeared to grow cooler as Lord Bardolph became more and more excited.

"You had better think twice before you persist in this latest fad of yours—obstinacy. If you persist in opposing me I shall resign," and as he uttered the threat he narrowly watched the Premier's countenance to judge its effect. He still hoped that it would make-

the Premier waver ; for he still entertained the idea that—despite his apparent defiance—the fear of a secession from the Cabinet, and such an important one too, would shake Floppington's resolution. But he was mistaken.

“ If I do not submit to your dictation, you will resign ? ”

“ Yes,” blurted out Lord Bardolph, not pausing to deprecate the Premier's mode of expression.

“ Then resign, and be d——d,” said the Premier, now thoroughly roused. “ Good night ; ” and Lord Bardolph, too surprised to utter a word, left the room, and found himself in Downing Street, without having the ghost of an idea how he got there.

Left alone, the Premier resumed his seat. Mechanically his eyes wandered over the yet open pages of the book he had previously been reading. He had formed the bold resolution of ridding himself of Lord Bardolph, and he had succeeded. For some few minutes he sat thus, exultant at his victory, and yet oppressed by a sense of the responsibility of so grave a step. He knew that he had made an enemy not to be despised. Shaking off, by an effort of will, the despondency that followed his exultation, he rose to his feet, determined to cut out the path he had proposed to himself, be the obstacles in that path what they might. His eyes again fell upon the bust of Lord Beaconsfield, the inanimate witness of the strange scene that had just taken place. It may have been imagination, for he was somewhat unnerved after so trying an interview, but to his excited gaze, the carved face seemed to smile approval of his daring ; the spirit of his great predecessor appeared to animate the figure, and it was with something akin to awe that he said half aloud, half to himself :

“ Great Beaconsfield ! have I done well ? ”

CHAPTER II.

THE CABINET COUNCIL.

THE Premier stood in the lofty Council Chamber—the mystic Rath-zimmer, into which no profane optic ever penetrated while a dozen or so elderly gentlemen were busily mismanaging the affairs of the Empire—the studio where designs for monuments of human folly were turned out with neatness if not with despatch. To the imaginative eye the room was littered with torsos of legislative acts.

Summer being at hand, a bright fire blazed in the grate, and the Prime Minister, the nominal head of the artistic firm, stood with his back to the fireplace, his legs bestriding the hearthrug like the Colossus of Rhodes, his hands supporting his coat-tails. This, the favourite attitude of English gentlemen, is doubtless adopted for the unselfish purpose of acting as a self-adjusting screen ; and from the force of habit, Floppington took up the position, though there was none yet to screen. His gaze wandered over the long green table with its array of inkstands and blotting-paper, the latter ready to

absorb the contents of the former in the interests and at the expense of the country, and he felt chilled by the frigid formality of the preparations.

"I suppose it's all right," he murmured in a discontented tone. "But how much pleasanter it would be if there were pipes and pewter on the table! These meetings so often end in smoke, that it's a pity they cannot be accompanied by it. They talk much more comfortably at the 'Cogers,' and do less damage. I am sure I could get on much better without these fellows discussing my plans. I don't half like this fuss—I hope it'll all go well, yet somehow it makes me uneasy. But hang it all, what have I to fear? Now that I have tackled Bardolph, the worst is over."

And, with a sudden accession of energy, he turned round and began poking the fire vigorously, when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. He dropped the poker. "It's of no use deceiving myself," he muttered. "I feel as nervous as a girl going to her first ball."

"Good morning, Mr. Floppington," cried Sir Stanley Southleigh. "I am glad to see you looking so well."

"And I intend to look well after the country," said the Premier, laughing somewhat forcedly, and shaking his old friend's hand heartily. "And how is the revenue getting on?"

"So-so," replied Sir Stanley, as though speaking of his wife's health. "It gives me great anxiety."

"Oh, don't *you* worry so much, old fellow," said the Premier. "I'll look into it soon."

Sir Stanley looked at him with a bewilderment that was not lessened when the Premier went on after a pause: "Now, what do you say to a graduated income-tax?"

Sir Stanley blew his nose, hesitated a minute, and finally stammered: "That is a question I am not prepared to answer without notice."

By this time most of the other members of the Cabinet had arrived, and a general handshaking was taking place, accompanied by a lively conversation on a variety of topics, amongst which racing appeared to take the most prominent part. Nobody seemed inclined for business, and it was with a look of placid resignation, half pathetic, half comical, that the members of the Cabinet obeyed the intimation of the Premier that a Cabinet Council might not inappropriately devote some of its time to a consideration of political questions.

"We cannot wait longer for Lord Bardolph," said the Premier, when all were seated; "we are already somewhat late."

Several of the Ministers looked curiously at each other as the Premier spoke, and a smile, suggestive of something amusing to come, flitted over their countenances. It was but momentary; nevertheless it did not escape the notice of Floppington, who, in his turn, indulged in that saturnine smile which boded mischief.

"But," said Sir Stanley, "we can scarcely discuss our line of action in connection with the Bobo difficulty in his absence."

"Why not?" said the Premier. "He and I chatted over it the other night. Lord Bardolph thinks we'd better not interfere, and I've allowed him to please himself in the matter."

The Ministers looked at each other again; this time with a stare of blank astonishment in place of the smile. They had often, amongst themselves, regretted that Floppington was hardly strong enough for his position; that he was led instead of leading, and that he could never make up his mind to face responsibility; and they had frequently compared his invertebrate condition with the stiff backbone which characterised, or was supposed to characterise, the Foreign Secretary. The cool, masterful tone in which he now spoke, the assumption of autocratic authority, and the tacit implication that the Cabinet existed simply to ratify his decisions, surprised them so much that they were unable at the moment to feel the wound inflicted upon their self-love.

"What, knuckle under to Bismarck?" burst in the Home Secretary; "we, the great Conservative party, to swallow a peace-at-any-price policy?"

"I beg your pardon," interposed Floppington mildly; "we simply give up a war-at-any-price policy. I can't see that it matters a rap to us whether the German flag flies over a barren rock or not."

"But surely we'll instruct our Ambassador to protest?" ejaculated the Irish Secretary.

"What for? Are you prepared to fight Germany about this matter? If so, well and good. But if you're simply going in for the traditional spirited foreign policy, which consists in writing angry despatches, and having a hasty look round to see if we have any guns that will go off without hurting our own men, I, for one, object to any longer treating foreign policy as a farcical comedy. Spirited foreign policy, indeed! Dutch-courage foreign policy would be nearer the mark."

The determined air of the Premier had its effect. Sir Stanley, though, made a feeble protest: "Surely we are not going to allow it to be said that we are afraid? Just think what we should have said had a Radical Government acted in this meek fashion."

"Very much the same as we should have said had they acted in a cocky fashion. It is a maxim of our glorious Constitution that the King can do no wrong, and his Ministers—no right."

His colleagues laughed in an embarrassed fashion at their chief's sally. They evidently did not relish the cavalier way in which they were being treated; and the Premier must have guessed as much, for he continued:

"I'm responsible for the policy of the Government, I believe; and unless you can give me a better reason for altering it than a craven fear of what the Radicals may say, further discussion will be waste of time. Besides, I may remind you that Lord Bardolph is in complete accord with me on this point," with a slight but perceptible emphasis on the "this." "There is not the slightest need for strong measures."

"Quite so," eagerly put in the Right Honourable William Jones. "We don't *want* to fight."

"I think Mr. Floppington is right," said His Grace the Duke of Kewbridge. "We have too often in the past—too often in the past been identified with what, for want of a better term, I may call 'Maddermottism.' It will, in my opinion, take the wind—take the wind out of the Radical sails, if we can infringe their monopoly of peace principles—infringe their monopoly of peace principles."

No further objection was raised. The attitude of Floppington and the support it met with from the Duke and from Mountchapel, effectually silenced remonstrance, and with a "Well, well, we had better leave it to you and the Foreign Secretary" from Sir Stanley, the discussion ended. Perhaps its most important result was the conviction it sent home into the minds of every one of the Ministers that Floppington meant to rule in reality as well as in name. The determination might be but temporary; he might soon relapse into his old vacillating, reflective, and dreamy style; but for the moment, at any rate, they were subdued by his stronger will. By fits and starts he had been resolute on previous occasions—taking up the attitude with the same unexpectedness as his opinions; but this time it seemed as if he had reasoned himself into making a serious effort to assert himself. This was the more strange on account of the overwhelming difficulties of his position, both in the Cabinet and in Parliament. And it was, perhaps, characteristic of the man and conclusive evidence of his unfitness for affairs, that he should have been weak enough to choose so fatally inopportune a moment for vindicating his strength. However, time would clear up the puzzle of the Premier's apparent metamorphosis, every moment would clarify their yet hazy impressions, and they could afford to wait the development of the drama.

At this juncture Lord Bardolph hurriedly entered the room, and apologising for being unpunctual, took his seat at the Council table. The Premier watched him keenly from under his bushy eyebrows, and Lord Bardolph moved uneasily and shifted in his place. He was evidently ill at ease. The conversation, dropped as he entered, was not resumed. Those in the secret knew that Lord Bardolph was about to make an important statement; those not in it, had an intuition that something of grave import was going to happen. And so a hush fell on them, a hush of expectancy, a stillness fraught with varied hopes and fears. It was broken by Lord Bardolph addressing the Premier.

"I presume you have not mentioned anything of our conversation," he said.

"Only that part of it which referred to the Bobo affair," replied the Premier. "Our interview closed with an announcement of your intentions, and I did not feel at liberty to say anything about them."

There was a touch of savage triumph in Floppington's voice, as he made this reply, which to some extent belied the exaggerated calmness of his demeanour. All present felt that there

had been a struggle for the mastery between him and Mountchapel, and that he had gained the victory. This was very embarrassing to those who may best be described as Mountchapelites. They had laid their plans and based their calculations on certain hypotheses, which they had taught themselves to look upon as certainties. If the Premier gave way on the question of the extension of the franchise to women—and this was thought no unlikely contingency, as he had often proved most squeezable after a show of rigidity—the ascendancy of Lord Bardolph would be unquestioned; and the Premier would, in the eyes of the country, be a nonentity in the Cabinet of which he was the nominal head. If, inconsistent in inconsistency, he remained steadfast and adhered to his resolve, Lord Bardolph's resignation, which would inevitably follow in that case, must prove a fatal blow. The Cabinet might stagger on without him, but it was an open secret that his defection would be the signal for the defection of his followers in the Ministry, and Floppington would find his power shattered, and himself discredited. So that the Mountchapelites fondly hugged themselves with the delusion that they were playing a game which they were bound to win in one eventuality, and their opponent to lose in the other. The indifference of the Premier to Lord Bardolph's resolve, his obvious you-may-go-to-the-patron-saint-of-politics air, and the altogether indefinable but perfectly appreciable change in his style and bearing, struck them therefore with dismay. Their feelings must have been very much like those of the gentleman who learned swimming by stretching himself out on the table, and imitating the movements of a frog in a basin in front of him, when he first tested practically the difference between swimming on a solid and in a fluid. A conviction of the instability of all things mundane flashed upon them, and they felt with Heracleitus that there is nothing fixed, nothing stable.

While thinking all this, they had naturally kept silence, and in this had been followed by those of the Cabinet who were not Mountchapelites, but who could see that something strange was happening. At last Mountchapel rose, doing his best to appear at ease, and to maintain that outward aspect of calm and coolness which had played no unimportant part in making his reputation. The British public dearly loved a lord; they perhaps even more dearly loved a "plucky 'un," or a "cheeky 'un;" and when the two were combined in one and the same person, what wonder that the British public exhibited tendencies to worship the combination?

"Mr. Floppington," commenced Lord Bardolph, "has already, I understand, put you in possession of our views on the Bobo business. We happen to agree upon that, and I presume the Government's line of action has been agreed to."

There was a feeble muttering of "Hear, hear," and "Just so," from his colleagues, who were all intently watching him, as he nervously proceeded:

"In the course of a conversation I had with Mr. Floppington

the other night, I found that there was no prospect of the alteration which you all know I so ardently advocate being made in the Reform Bill. I have strained every nerve to prevent any rupture in the Cabinet, the disastrous effects of which, to the party and to the country, I know too well. But Mr. Floppington finds it absolutely impossible to adopt my proposal."

"I beg your pardon," interposed the Premier, "I merely said I intended to have my own way in the matter."

"Mr. Floppington is an adept at hair-splitting," replied Lord Bardolph, evidently irritated at being unable to irritate the Premier, or draw any signs of emotion from him. "Whatever the words he used, they conveyed to my mind the idea that it would be impossible for me to continue longer a member of a Cabinet, which neglects a measure of which personally I have been one of the staunchest advocates. To hold office longer would be dishonourable. I have therefore no choice but to take the necessary steps to place in Her Majesty's hand my resignation of the post in her Government I have the honour to hold."

A murmur, not of astonishment, as the declaration was not unexpected, but yet of something bordering on it, ran round the table; but it was instantly hushed as Lord Bardolph continued:

"I need not say what regret and pain it causes me to be thus compelled to sever my connection with colleagues with whom I have always worked in perfect harmony, and to part from a chief who has always commanded my admiration as a leader, and my warmest regard and esteem as a friend."

All eyes were turned to the Premier, as these words were uttered in a tone that all felt was not in consonance with the sentiments expressed; for all knew that strong personal feeling was no insignificant factor in the motives actuating Lord Bardolph. Floppington, however, if conscious of this, betrayed it in no wise as he said:

"I can cordially reciprocate the regret expressed by Lord Bardolph. It pains me to lose a colleague who is a source of strength to any Government; but I must submit to the force of circumstances and of the reasoning which has induced him—not, I am aware, without grave consideration—to take so important a step."

Several other members expressed themselves in similar terms; and one or two suggested that possibly Lord Bardolph might be induced to reconsider his decision. But very little discussion proved the impossibility of any such reconsideration; the Premier in his blandest tones regretting that the determination at which he had arrived apparently precluded Lord Bardolph from working with him, and Lord Bardolph cordially agreeing in all that the Premier said. A desultory conversation ensued, in which the details of the steps to be taken in connection with the resignation were agreed upon. Lord Bardolph then took his leave, giving some of his colleagues a meaning glance as he left, the significance of which did not escape the Premier.

A constrained silence followed his departure. What was to come next? Some had intended following Lord Bardolph's lead, and tendering their resignations also; but an intuition, if such it may be called, impelled them to wait, and to do nothing rashly. It warned them that the Premier, in his new mood, might prove an uncomfortable sort of person to quarrel with or to defy, and they obeyed its monitions. Floppington at length addressed his colleagues, his eyes roving restlessly from face to face, as if he were anxious not to miss the least shade of expression that his words might cause to flicker over their countenances.

"The next point we have to consider is the Reform Bill. In its present form, I am afraid it does not stand too good a chance of steering clear of the rocks and quicksands that beset it. On the one hand, we have those of our friends who are afraid to venture into the paths of reform. They are hide-bound in tradition, and do not seem to recognise the fact that Conservatism, if it is to be a power, must advocate and promote change as actively as Radicalism. Of course, there is a vital distinction," he continued smilingly, noticing that some of those seated round the green table looked as if they were disposed to disagree with him; "the changes we bring about are improvements, those brought about by Radicals are revolutions."

A hearty "Hear, hear!" from the more youthful members of the Cabinet greeted this explicit statement of a vital distinction, while the elder ones contented themselves with a subdued rumbling murmur of applause.

"Our bill," went on the Premier, "may fail to win the approval of the older school of Conservatives; but I have every reason to believe that they will not fail, when the critical moment comes, to remember that, *on* principle, we have always placed party discipline before principle."

"Quite so," said Sir Stanley; then, suddenly awaking to the implications involved in the Premier's words, he would have entered upon an explanation, but his friends laughed heartily at what they thought one of Floppington's little jokes. A species of humorous depreciation of himself and party was eminently characteristic of their philosophical Chief.

"On the other hand," resumed Floppington, "there are those amongst us, among the party as well as around this table, who think the Bill does not go far enough; they think, not altogether without reason, perhaps, that to make a measure of progress essentially Conservative in the truest and best sense of the term, it should be so complete, so thorough, as to leave no excuse for officious meddling Radicals to tinker it, under the pretence of mending it, hereafter. These Conservatives will not support our Bill, because, in refusing to extend the franchise to women, it does leave opportunities for improvements hereafter. They will join with the Radicals, and, when united in opposition against us, with a possible addition to their ranks from men who are timorous if honest members of our party, to say nothing of the Parnellites, it will be

difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to pass our great measure of reform."

The Ministers were listening with all their ears. The situation, as expounded by Floppington, was no new one. It had been impending for some time past; but some means of getting over the difficulty must have suggested itself to the Premier, for surely all this talk was but the preliminary to pointing out a road whereby to escape from the *impasse*. And yet, with Lord Bardolph out of the Cabinet, what could this road be?

"I need not say that all these circumstances have been duly weighed by me. I have long been aware that some among you are in favour of extending the suffrage to women, though, with a forbearance for which I cannot thank you enough, you have refrained from thrusting your convictions forcibly upon me. The time has come when I may candidly admit to you that I fully see the necessity of making this concession to the wishes of so many of our supporters."

Here the Premier paused for a second, coolly scanned the faces of his colleagues, who might one and all have sat as models for a picture to be entitled *Dumbfounded*, and then calmly resumed:

"I shall therefore, with your consent, on which I feel sure I may reckon in advance, arrange for the acceptance in Committee by the Government, of a clause enacting the desired change with regard to the admission of women to the suffrage. We shall, perhaps, alienate the support of some of our party; though, as I have already said, I have every hope of party discipline preventing any unfortunate display of independence. But we shall secure the adhesion, on the other hand, of many valued followers, who, in common with the noble lord who has seen fit to leave the Government, have long been warm advocates of the change I am now prepared to adopt. Moreover, our Radical friends, the enemy, will be in honour bound to support us. They may use strong language as to our presumption in carrying what they have been pleased to consider a Radical measure; but they dare not oppose the measure because it is the work of Conservative men. They always arrogate to themselves the consciousness of superior virtue in politics, and it is only fair they should have for once an opportunity of displaying that superiority to purely personal and party considerations, of which, as a matter of fact, they have done little else than boast. Really Screwnail and his friends will be under an obligation to us for giving them the chance. With their support, then, in the bargain, we may, I think, rely on our measure being safely passed through the House." And with these words the Premier resumed his seat.

A short silence followed. The members of the Cabinet looked at each other, one idea informing all of them, one question on the tip of every tongue. The Right Honourable Arnold Floppington waited calmly for the question which he knew must come, sitting Sphinx-like, gazing immovably straight in front of him, with an admirable air of not knowing what was to follow. Then the short silence was broken. Sir Stanley, feeling by some subtle, indefinable

consciousness that all were expecting him to translate their one and only thought at the moment into words, said :

“ But why, if you have come round to this view of the question, has Lord Bardolph resigned? It is inexplicable.”

The quiet, business-like, passionless tone in which the statement of the Premier's policy had been made, was abandoned in a moment. Scarcely had the question for which he had been waiting left Sir Stanley's lips, than he jumped to his feet, his frame vibrating with energy, his voice trembling with triumphant emotion, as, one hand on the table before him, the other pointed half-menacingly at the faces confronting him, he replied :

“ Why did Lord Bardolph resign? I will tell you. Because I am not the man he thought me ; because I knew every detail of his plans, every winding of his schemes. He fancied to force me to grant women suffrage, so that he might pose before the country as the actual Premier, while I was but a puppet whose strings he condescended to pull. Of my own initiative I have taken the step announced to-day. Had I done so with Lord Bardolph in the Cabinet, his plot—in appearance at any rate—would have succeeded. It was evident that one of us must perforce cease to be a factor in the Ministry, and I was determined that it should not be myself. I kept back, then, my resolution on the Suffrage Bill ; and when Lord Bardolph, in the interview to which he has alluded, asked if I intended doing as he wished, I replied that I intended having my own way in the matter. I naturally regret that, with the ill-considered impetuosity of youth, Lord Bardolph should have rushed to the conclusion that my way and his way were different ways ; but, having done so, it was inevitable that he should leave me the burden of governing without him, a burden I do not think beyond my strength.”

All were silent. The Premier's tone was almost insolent, but those who had plotted against him dared not say anything ; those who were true to him forgave all in their delight at seeing him exert that long-latent power with which they had always credited him. He continued :

“ One word more, gentlemen. Lord Bardolph was not alone in his plans. He hoped that some of his colleagues would support him ; without that hope, even his audacity might have shrunk from the game he was playing, from staking so much on the hazard of a die. If, therefore, any gentlemen present wish to resign, I shall be obliged if they will do so at once. Her Majesty, too, will save time by accepting their resignations wholesale.”

Two or three of the Ministers wriggled uncomfortably in their chairs as the Premier was speaking. They were not at all sure that he would refrain from mentioning names, and though they had not scrupled to plot against him, they nervously shrank from being found out. It is satisfactory to perceive from this that, though politicians, they were not altogether devoid of some lingering traces of morality. And it was with an almost audible sigh of relief that they saw the Premier resume his seat, saying :

"This, gentlemen, concludes our business for to-day. At our next meeting I shall lay before you the text of the clause I propose the Government shall agree to support. I presume it will be the work of a united Cabinet."

CHAPTER III.

LOVE AND SUFFRAGE.

WHEN the relative positions of the man and the woman come to be reversed, the latter becoming the "superior sex," and the former, presumably, the "better half" of the connubial unity, the amorous "fair one" (if indeed the title be not inherited by the male) may indite sonnets to her beloved's eyebrow, and the masculine charms may at length meet with poetic appreciation. The feminine eye has too long had the vested right of misleading the morn, or of abashing the constellations; the feminine face has too long possessed the monopoly of floriculture: these women's rights are men's wrongs. Still it must be admitted that the ladies, when justifying their choice, make up for their reticence as to our physical traits by flattering our moral features, which, as they are less apparent, are less able to contradict the ideal portrait.

Seldom has a finer opportunity of glorifying her lover, *salva conscientia*, fallen to the lot of a woman than that which Lady Harley was now taking by the forelock. Since the *réunion* in the Duchess's salon, she had neither seen the Premier nor heard from him. She had passed most of the time in a state of girlish light-heartedness and vivacity. Full of her two-fold secret, she seemed to herself (for science was among her accomplishments) to breathe a non-nitrogenous atmosphere. It was a delightful experience, too, though curiously verging on the pathetic, to attend a meeting of the National Society for Women's Suffrage and to listen to half-enthusiastic, half-despairing reports and discussions. The goal seemed still far off to these earnest workers, the recently manifested strength of antagonism to the enfranchisement of women had saddened them, and some of them were reconciled to the belief that the rumour of success would never penetrate the silence of their graves. There was one sickly, elderly lady whose noble sacrifice for the cause (the circumstances were known to Lady Harley, but not to the world, which ridiculed her) had greatly stimulated her to her own humble efforts. But hope had fled with health, and her work was now limited to electrifying her friends by the lightnings of her bitter indignation. How Lady Harley would have liked to tell the poor creature that the day had come! But she restrained herself. In a few days they would know all. Tears started to her eyes, and she was thrilled by the pathos of long-deferred success. She said a few hopeful words, reminding them of the reports that were in the air. More she dared not say, and even while speaking, a dreadful chilling doubt invaded her soul.

What if, after all, the Premier underwent another phase? Was it not incredible that at one stroke Fate would ensure her own happiness and, in some measure, that of all other women? And if he did undergo another phase, the ultimate success of their movement would be as distant as the most pessimistic Member imagined. For, while Floppington retained his supremacy over the House (and his influence, being due to the magic of his oratory, was independent of his possession of office), she knew that it would be well-nigh impossible to obtain the coveted measure if he should put himself at the head of the Opposition. A charm so potent that it had temporarily withdrawn not a few of the Liberals from their allegiance was not to be counteracted without "backward mutterings of dissevering power" from the enchanter himself. With his advocacy, however, with the aid of his eloquence, which could not fail to convince the members of his own party and add them to the already convinced Liberals, it would be easy to free the ladies, at present, so to speak,

"In stony fetters fixed and motionless."

Her conscience sometimes plied her with uneasy queries as to whether she had sold herself for the benefit of her sex. After impartial examination, however, she acquitted herself of the charge on the plea that she had loved him in his character of man, irrespective of his character of political animal, and had only refused to unite her life with his because she felt that it would be a sort of desertion of her colours to merge her political personality in one so diverse. And she might feel not the less of honest pride in this heroic self-sacrifice on the altar of principle, because it had ceased to be necessary. It thus appeared that her conscience had been over-busy, and it now received an effectual snub which somewhat diminished its officious zeal.

But on the morning wherewith this chapter deals, all doubts were set at rest by a glorious announcement in the *Standard* which almost compensated for her slight disappointment at not having received during the week some hastily scrawled note addressed from the House, such as she thought she had a right to expect.

"We understand," ran the obviously official paragraph, "that at the Cabinet Council held yesterday, it was unanimously resolved not to resist the introduction into the Franchise Bill of a clause extending the franchise to women, should such an amendment be proposed in Committee. It is expected that the Opposition will be conciliated by this deference to their views, and the second reading of this long-debated Bill may now, therefore, be regarded as a certainty. It is supposed that the first part of the sitting was taken up with Lord Bardolph Mountchapel's explanation of the motives of his resignation. His lordship left at half-past two, probably immediately after his explanation, and was received with cheers by a crowd which had assembled to watch the arrival and departure of the Ministers. The sitting terminated at a few minutes before three."

The other dailies were all at sea, and destitute of this compass, they floundered about wildly. It had long been suspected that the Foreign Secretary and his chief were at loggerheads, but it was thought that the unsuccessful career with the small chances of life of the Reform Bill was at the bottom of their differences. So it was a huge joke to the world at large, which had read the *Standard*, and which saw that Mountchapel was the only honest man in the Cabinet, to peruse the dogmatic leaders of the other journals, which gravely laid it down that Floppington's reluctance to follow him in his inconsistent willingness to enfranchise the female sex had forced him to resign his portfolio. One could hardly imagine a more delicious commentary on these dogmatic utterances than the glaring evidence of their incorrectness supplied by the paragraph in the ministerial organ. Nevertheless, the next day they were as omniscient as ever.

As for the astounding alteration in the ministerial programme, and consequently in the ministerial fortunes, it would require a volume to reproduce the hundreds of columns of praise, or of blame, or of both in varying proportions. An eloquent denunciation of the Premier's tergiversation will be found in Dullman's "Memoirs of Mountchapel," and an eloquent defence in Prosie's "Short Sketch of the Ministry of the Elder Floppington." Floppington himself went on his impassive way, displaying the iron will of a Bismarck, and indifferent alike to invective or laudation. Had it not been for an accidental opportunity outside the House, he would probably never have broken his austere and stoical silence.

From the *Standard* Gwendolen turned to the other journals, to find them one and all weltering in that slough of ignorance which has been described, and without a suspicion of the intentions of the Government whose speedy disintegration—now that it had lost its tower of strength—they prophesied with no uncertain tone. The Franchise Bill would be rejected by a majority of at least one hundred, made up of Liberals and Parnellites; Parliament would dissolve, and the brief period of Tory ascendancy would be at an end. They had evidently received no inkling of the "wise concession" dexterously eulogised by their Conservative contemporary. The exhaustive ignorance of the rest of the press gave Gwendolen a curious feeling of illusion. She almost felt that she was dreaming the good news. But no, that was impossible. As she glanced casually over the papers she felt that she was incapable of inventing, even in sleep, the ancient history which, alive with capitals, glared at her from the serried lines of the *Daily Telegraph*. Besides, she remarked a few errors in one of the leaders of another journal—though not enough to allow it to be mistaken for an ordinary article—and she knew that in dreamland such self-criticism is rare. But though she soon began to laugh softly and joyously to herself at her absurd doubts, everything did not yet wear the clarity of morning. There was a mysterious unreality about Lord Bardolph's resignation which still puzzled her. The conclusion, natural to every one else, that his retirement the day after a mo-

mentous Cabinet Council could be no mere coincidence, but the result of antagonism to the determinations of that assembly, was not natural to one to whom he had, weeks ago, confided the secret of his conversion. She could not entertain such a supposition for an instant. The *Standard*, which alone might have supplied the solution, was evidently as ignorant as the rest of the press was confident, hinting vaguely at a difference between the Premier and the Foreign Secretary as to the method of dealing with the Bobo difficulty; and she was too full of pleasurable excitement to rack her brain for other hypotheses. No sooner had she finished her perusal of the morning papers than, afire with love and gratitude, she betook herself to her desk to write, in the first flush of enthusiasm, the leading article for the next issue of the monthly magazine devoted to the enfranchisement of women, and it was then that she enjoyed the exquisite pleasure of writing prose dithyrambs on her lover.

As if in revenge for previous criticism, this asserted that he had never done anything wrong, that in all his aberrations he had followed the Jack o' Lantern of conscience; that Humanity—and especially the long-oppressed half of it—owed him an eternal debt; that no nobler spirit had ever swayed the destinies of the nation; in short, to read it you would have thought that the man was just dead.

This rhapsody was foamed out at the point of a spluttering quill by her ladyship while seated in her study—for she had early appropriated to herself a chamber for this masculine purpose, nor could it be distinguished from the den of the ordinary male, save by the absence of pipes and litter.

Her morning dress was very plain, but then as she was not, the absence of ornament served only to set off her charms, which were such as perhaps an exceptional woman here and there might have preferred to a vote. Excitement and happiness had lent a lovely, delicate flush to her usually pale cheeks, and a bewitching sparkle to her usually dreamy eyes.

The leader finished, the fair writer laid down her pen, and contemplated the MS. It was written *in* as well as *by* a beautiful hand, and each letter was unmistakably itself, and quite unindebted to its neighbours for its legibility. There were no erasures, because there was no laboured composition; there was a direct route between her heart and the point of her pen, and her thoughts travelled express along it. Yet on re-reading her work, she found that the execution fell far short of the conception. But she must defer touching it up, for many daily duties claimed her attention. She returned to the charge on the first opportunity, which did not present itself till nearly four p.m.—by which early hour, by a happy accident, all her usual visitors had come and gone—full of new enthusiasm ready to vent itself in words. She settled to her desk once more, and began “toning up” her fervent sentences. Immersed in this agreeable occupation, with the image of the Premier ever before her, she suddenly woke to find that the bodily man himself had called and was waiting to see her. Her heart gave a great leap of

joy ; he had kept his word, he had taken up the cause of her sisters, and now he was come to claim her gratitude, her collaboration, her sympathy, her love. Determining to receive him where she was, in the study where the happiest hours of her life had been passed, she put his praises into her desk, and her pen into its receptacle on the richly chased silver inkstand which her grandfather had bought in Venice to serve as an ancient heirloom—the family, though rich in genuine ancestors, being rather out of other antiquities—and replaced the books she had been referring to in their exact homes on the shelves. Even at this supreme moment she had that soul for detail which marks great genius or great mediocrity ; but she had the soul of the artist, for she felt that her rhapsodical abilities would be raised to a much higher power by the coming interview, and also the soul of a woman in so far as that expresses itself by a heightened colour, a quickened pulse, a pleasing fear, and a great rush of tender thoughts and recollections. The pale, wistful face of the Premier, the premature furrows on his brow, the slightly stooping figure, as they now rose before her nearly with the vividness of reality, roused that almost maternal feeling of pity, which in a woman is akin to love. Hers should be the envied task of smoothing those lines of care, of invigorating and encouraging that jaded spirit ; a fair vista of happiness stretched down the years that were to be fruitful in noble work and lofty thought. His soul, weary of the pursuit of Truth under difficulties in the clamour of the forum, would, haply, receive new light from the glimmer of the fire on the shrine of Vesta.

The clock began to strike four ; the Premier's footsteps, falling with slow and grave precision, were heard outside, and—her ladyship, at the last instant, turned involuntarily to the mirror, forgetting she was not in her boudoir. She had an inaccurate feeling that her hair must be ruffled, but there was no looking-glass to which to turn for help. Such an article had been strictly banished from it, probably as likely to cause reflections antagonistic to the *genius loci*. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Under a similar lack of this necessary of life, mistress and maid displayed equal ingenuity.

Eliza Bathbrill, on the eve of a love-meeting with Jack Dawe, consulted a tin pan.

Lady Harley, on the eve of a love-meeting with the Honourable Arnold Floppington, consulted a silver inkstand.

CHAPTER IV.

HISTORY IN BLACK AND WHITE.

AT the last stroke of four the Premier entered the study. It was as if he had timed himself to arrive at that hour. A man who shared the love of Lucretius for getting at the *causas rerum* might

reasonably refuse to accept the coincidence as accidental; and were he furthermore acquainted with the logical habits of mind of the Premier, he might even suspect that, since the fashionable time for visits was between three and five in the afternoon (as the books of etiquette rather paradoxically laid it down), the great Minister had extracted the definite from the indefinite by taking the arithmetical mean. Could it be that he regulated his conduct by the canons enunciated by those "Members of the Aristocracy" whose literary performances displayed at once the emptiness of their intellects and their purses? Surely not! For, take the crucial test of deportment in society, and in the street; what can be subtler in social philosophy than the degrees of intimacy with which a man must know and address others? Yet, as we have already seen, the Premier seemed to know everybody, and, *dictu horrendum*, to speak to people to whom it was certain he had never even been introduced. This conduct the shrewd observer would probably set down to that sudden thirst for popularity and that conservatively-democratic spirit which the Premier had latterly given evidence of, though he might doubt its efficacy in flattering the multitude of small men; for the Premier not unfrequently displayed such an extraordinary ignorance of their petty careers as to deserve, in their eyes, the imputation of being ignorant of modern history, and in the effort to grasp this multiplicity of detail, muddled himself so completely as to injure his memory of even recent transactions and conversations with his best friends and warmest supporters.

The Premier entered the room, hat in hand; the stern footman retired, and the lovers were left alone.

With a sweet smile of welcome, Lady Harley advanced to meet him, and gave him her hand.

"In the name of my sex," she exclaimed, in low, silvery accents, "I thank you."

"Don't mention it, don't mention it," said the Premier hastily, dropping her hand after a limp pressure.

Did her ladyship feel slightly disappointed at her lover's neglect to take advantage of the privileges of his position, if only to the extent of a tighter squeeze of the hand? Not at all; for did she not immediately tell herself that she revered him the more for it, and that she must try to lift herself to his height? She credited him with an ideal purity which was beyond her who was fascinated by the mystic glamour which Rossetti had thrown around Cupid, with the effect of apparently transforming the mischievous little god of paganism into a mediæval angel.

"He is indeed a *preux chevalier*," she reflected, as she looked at him nervously twirling his hat round; "a modern Knight of the Round Table, who has passed his life searching for the Holy Grail. Never have those lips touched the face of a woman." Then a gleam of humour played about the corners of her mouth as she reflected merrily that a man so utterly *sans reproche* was almost wasted on her who had not a grain of jealousy in her composition,

and that he would be a god-send to a female Leontes, who could in turn be utterly *sans peur* of the slightest infidelity.

Yet how love that was sure of its earthly goal had already changed even him! Seen in the broad daylight, what new vigour seemed to dwell in the face, what unwonted erectness in the figure! But had this assertive vitality been purchased at the price of other qualities? She would fain have answered in the negative; yet, as the interview proceeded, she could not but think that an indefinable something had vanished, a certain *cachet* of aristocratic reserve and delicate modesty—perhaps the fair but unsound fruit of indecision, which could not be expected to co-exist with definite views and specific action. Nor could the eyes, which had once gazed unflinchingly on the sun of truth, retain the dreamy poetry of yore.

“Pray sit down and let us talk,” she cried gaily, “if, indeed, the State will allow me three minutes of you.”

“The State allow!” he replied with contemptuous pride. “The State is not my master. I am the master of the State.”

He was nothing loth to talk; in truth, he had come for that purpose. He considered her a most interesting woman, and he felt a strong intellectual attraction towards her. He thought her pretty, too, and indeed she looked quite fairy-like to-day in her dainty gown of cream tussore silk:

“Clothed in white samite—mystic, wonderful.”

But physically she was hardly “his style”; she was too blonde, too ethereal. Yet when, in the salon of the Duchess of Kewbridge, finding him at one with her and her society on the vital question of female enfranchisement, she had said: “You know I am yours entirely,” the admiring glance which accompanied this offer of aid had thrilled him perhaps a little more than if it had been shot from an eye less bright. The subtle emotion of the moment, with its dim revelation of new spiritual perspectives, had been transitory and hard to recall. Though he had not been unconscious of a certain curious fascination, the feeling was as placid as it was novel. When her image had flitted before his mental vision in the busy hours of the past week, the thoughts it called up were tender rather than deep. And now, as he sat in this sunny room with its dainty bric-à-brac, its brightly-bound volumes, and its mistress, whose mere presence would have lighted up the dustiest library, and distracted the attention of the veriest Dryasdust, he experienced the same quiet and unanalysable charm.

Gwendolen made him sit on her own chair before her desk, and found great satisfaction in gazing at him installed there as her lord and master, and she vowed to endeavour to realise the fine image of the reigning Laureate, and be to him “as noble music is to noble words.”

After a few moments of contented silence she said softly: “Is there any danger of defeat?”

"In what direction could the danger lie? I'll answer for the Conservatives, and surely the Liberals can't refuse their help to enable me to achieve a reform which they professed to have so much at heart. They won't go in for a sort of dog-in-the-manger policy; 'We couldn't pass it, therefore you sha'n't.' Besides, I count on your influence for overcoming any tendencies in that direction."

"I suppose women are more timid than men. I confess that at moments it all seems to me too good to be true," she said with a pensive smile.

"Nothing is too good to be true, except, perhaps, the morality of a bishop. You mustn't be influenced by such superstitious fancies, either for hope or despondency. I am confident because I have looked facts in the face."

"But facts are Janus-headed," she pleaded laughingly. "And the best physiognomist may overlook one of the faces altogether, or even if one face is a sufficient index, the facts may have their head screwed the wrong way on. As far as I can understand your intentions, you are about to give us woman suffrage pure and simple, and I can't help being uneasy lest the Liberals may refuse to follow you so far. For, as you know, their projected gift was much more conditional."

"I have thought of that, too, and a host of essayists and journalists are already at work to point out the illogicality and inconsistency of such a course. They will show that to the man who is honestly convinced of the electoral rights of woman there is no half-way house, no halting-place. Matthew Arnold said to me the other day: 'The English do not think clear or see straight;' but I claim to be an exception, for when I was once convinced of the principle I tracked it to its remotest issue, and I hope to go on putting a healthful pressure on my countrymen till what is now the exception proves the rule. When the Liberals do anything, they only illustrate the good old plan of 'how not to do it.' They don't realise that two half-measures are never equal to a whole one. They seem to fancy that political arithmetic follows the laws of the avoirdupois table."

Gwendolen smiled.

"Well, at the risk of another rebuke for my superstition, I must avow that I have doubts about the attitude of the House of Lords. It did not appear too favourably disposed towards even that modicum of enfranchisement offered us by the late Government."

"I won't rebuke you for that," said the Premier graciously, "because I may educate you out of it. I have a plan in my head for extirpating one deeply-rooted superstition at least. I don't mean the House of Lords, though, to be sure, that is a superstition in more than one sense, a sort of horse-shoe supposed to guard the Constitution from the malevolence of democratic witchcraft. But I *will* rebuke you for your ignorance of modern politics. Don't you know that the House of Lords will never veto a Bill introduced by

me? Besides, it never really resists a reform in the long run. As Swinburne says :

' For whatever a man of the sons of men
Shall say to his heart of the lords above,
They have shown him verily, once and again,
Marvellous mercies and infinite love.'

Lady Harley smiled a little at this application of the poet's lines ; but there were clouds upon her brow.

" But, Arnold, you don't seriously believe that so many of our common friends in that assembly are swayed, not by thorough judgment, but by blind favouritism ? "

" I don't deny the thoroughness of their judgment," he said, with an embarrassed laugh. " The blind favouritism which they display is the best proof of it."

" I was sure you were joking, Arnold," said Gwendolen with an air of relief. " I do think the House of Lords represents all that is best in the theoretical and practical intellect of England. Of course, it's only an opinion. I don't profess to have studied Freeman or Maine very deeply. (Wasn't it you that made me read Maine, by-the-by?) I wasn't going to fly in the face of my own theory of the sexual differentiation there ought to be in politics when we get our vote—my own doctrine that a woman's views should be limited——"

" They *are* limited," interrupted the Premier sharply, rather piqued by the outburst of feminine prejudice.

Lady Harley looked up at him in surprise. " To the subjects she is able to understand better than men," she concluded. " That is to say," she added in revenge, " they should be *unlimited*."

" And so they are," he replied curtly, " for they are usually vague and formless."

She gave in with another good-humoured smile. She could find nothing to reply, and wondered why she had not enjoyed more this delicate fencing, and how she could have been fool enough to momentarily mistake badinage for impoliteness. Perhaps it was that she had not hitherto found him quick at repartee, though occasionally able to parry adroitly. His ordinary conversation was tinged with humorous melancholy rather than sparkling with wit.

" Are you going to write a comedy ? " she asked satirically.

" I took part in one yesterday," he replied. " At the Cabinet Council."

She laughed.

" You are getting cynical. I hope we women are not the cause of it."

" Oh no. You have not been able to become office-seekers yet."

" Trust me, we shall purify and soften the struggle for power. But tell me—what sort of a comedy ? "

" Well, the dialogue was heavy, but the situations were decidedly good."

" Especially yours."

"Especially mine. I believe I am the only one who strives to play seriously, and yet they do not think me a good actor. But we have managed a thing generally considered impossible."

"How is that?"

"Why, we play successful English comedy without love in it. There's not the least bit of love between any of the characters, and yet there is every prospect of a long run."

"That is clever, but too savage," said Lady Gwendolen. "To speak thus of your colleagues!"

A strange dissatisfaction, an ominous foreboding was chilling her amorous enthusiasm, yet she set everything down to a certain feverish gaiety which she thought she could read in the Premier's eyes. Her "*parfait knyghte*," speaking thus cynically of the highest duties of State, was showing himself in a new and not altogether pleasing light. Surely, Sir Galahad never made jokes on his noble companions.

Yet she was mistaken if she inferred that the Premier thought lightly of the responsibilities of his lofty station; like most cynicism, his excluded the utterer, and all his heart and soul was in the reforms which he was planning or carrying out.

Lady Harley was glad that the conversation had at length drifted into love.

"If you have worked so long together without love," she continued after a pause, "what might you not have done with it?"

"Why, done with politics," he exclaimed. "Politics, properly so-called, would have ceased to exist, but the work of Government reform would have advanced with electric strides. But I think I must modify my criticism on my colleagues. As a rule, we Conservatives love one another much better than the Liberals do. Our mutual attachment is strong enough to overcome even grave differences of opinion; we don't break up the party for the sake of a few scruples; we don't shatter ourselves into independent units each with his private fad; and if our love is not stronger than death——" He paused to take breath, and the air ceased for a moment to vibrate with his loud, strident tones, and to be agitated by the emphatic sway of his gesturing left hand, which described irregular geometrical figures with the tall hat which he held in it. With his right hand he now mechanically took up a goblet of ancient Venetian glass which stood on the desk, and put it so rapidly to his lips that he had half-drained its contents before a look of surprise appeared on his countenance, and he set it down, evidently somewhat annoyed with himself for taking it up. No one who is aware of Carlyle's opinion of the quality of London water in those days will be surprised to learn that he found the liquid disappointing.

Lady Harley was staring at him, quite puzzled by this irony which yet appeared so earnest.

"You speak harshly of our party," she said at last, seeing that he was disconcerted. "But I can partially understand your bitterness. You must not expect all our class to rise to your height of unselfishness." These sympathetic words did not suffice to dissi-

pate the clouds of self-dissatisfaction that rested on the Premier's brow.

He replied hurriedly : "As you say, it is our own party, but that should not blind me to their defects. But they have had their own way too long, they shall now be carried along willy-nilly on the torrent of my reforms."

"I am glad to see you so resolved," she said, looking at him tenderly, "for the sake of my sex, and," she added, with a blush, and an irresistibly lovely abasing of her eyes, "myself." Somehow the conversation showed a strong tendency to drift away from a certain subject, and this could not be entirely permitted.

"The social organism," he continued, "shall no longer wait for those changes of Government which are as necessary for its health as changes of underclothing are essential to that of the individual organism. For years I have studied the defects of the British Constitution——"

"And neglected those of your own," she interrupted with gentle reproach. "These lines on your brow"—she rose and passed her hand lightly over his forehead—"tell a sad tale of over-work prompted by noble motives."

The Premier's face brightened under the effusive sympathy of her touch. "I am certainly not suffering from *over-pressure* now," he said, for like other great men, notably the People's Bill (Shakespeare), he dearly loved a pun.

Lady Harley laughed a low laugh of delight. Decidedly the *preux chevalier* was improving, and would unbend to her, though to all other women as magnificently stiff as a Court elegiac.

"But, seriously, you know how precious your health is to yourself and to—others," she said.

"I know how necessary I am to the State," he replied earnestly. "But do not be alarmed, I was never better in my life."

She put what was presumably a second compliment laughingly aside, and said with tender admonition :

"I will not have you worried too much. You shall not entirely subordinate the physical to the mental."

"I do not now," he replied. "I assure your ladyship——"

"Gwendolen," she interrupted sweetly.

How kind she was ! What a pity she was so fair and delicate ! As it was, she set the chords of tender emotion vibrating in his breast.

"I assure you, Gwendolen," he recommenced, "that I do take exercise, and in spite of a thousand worries, of many of which you know nothing, I feel more vigorous and active than ever before. My strength and courage seem to rise to the height of the work I have to do. My constitution, as you sympathetically observe, is not good, and it is true that I neglected it in early life ; but I hope to make up for that now. Since the bicycle has become popular I have taken exercise in that form as frequently as possible."

"On a bicycle !" she exclaimed. There seemed to be some-

thing absurdly unheroic in the idea of Sir Galahad careering through the streets of London on that unclassical steed. But she told herself that this was mere prejudice; that modernity, like youth, was a fault that would mend as the bicycle grew older, and received the consecration of the past.

"On a bicycle!" she repeated. "But how is it I have never heard of that before?"

"You see," he stammered hesitatingly, for he was doubtless reluctant to reveal his weakness, "I—I should be—continually caricatured on my bicycle—Floppy overturned, and sprawling, and all that sort of thing, in cartoons, you know. You must keep what I've told you as a secret."

"I will if you wish it. But how do you avoid detection?"

"In the gray dawn I slip out of Downing Street, procure my bicycle, which I keep at a stable in an obscure street, ride through unknown districts for an hour, then return, letting myself in with my latch-key, often to the suspicion of the pee—the peevish policeman on his beat."

This picture of the stealthy proceedings of the great legislator made them both laugh.

"Well, I am glad," said Lady Harley, "that you do not neglect your health."

"And necessity makes me take my exercise at the healthiest hour," added the Premier. "I assure you, Gwendolen, it is a most delightful sensation, that of careering along in the early morn like the wind, with head erect and fearless of interruptions. I often say to myself that it is thus I will urge on my Ministerial career while it lasts."

"While it lasts! Do you, then, fear defeat at the coming General Election?"

"Hardly. I shall move heaven and earth to secure our continuance in power when Parliament dissolves after I have passed the Reform Bill, and what other reforms I can squeeze into the short time. Then I shall retire, knowing that I leave my work in good hands."

"Retire!" ejaculated Lady Harley, in supreme astonishment. And, indeed, there was occasion for amazement. To hear the descendant of a long line of English statesmen calmly announcing his determination to retire from active life just when the ball was at his foot, and when the responsibilities of office had at last awakened him to a consciousness of his own strength, overwhelmed the woman living amid the thick of contemporary politics, and ambitious for the man she loved. Had he alleged that Nature cried aloud for repose, her mind would have been easy; but as he was in the prime of life, there was some chance of his carrying out his threat. But her amazement was instantaneously dissipated by a flash of comprehension.

"Yes," replied the Premier gravely. "My mantle will fitly fall on the shoulders of Lord Bardolph Mountchapel—the Radicals are

so slow. He was superfluous in the present Cabinet, and so he has retired. In the next he will, whether nominally or not, be at the head of affairs."

"Mountchapel!" she exclaimed. In the midst of a tumult of emotions, she could not help feeling that the poor fellow deserved some compensation for having lost her. For what woman is ignorant of how she affects her masculine environment? But at the same time she felt that her own worldly spirit would never rise to such unselfishness as to permit her future husband to abandon to another the first position in the world. She knew his rare nobility of soul had led him to overlook her own eager interest in public life, her own earthly ambitions, and to think she would be happier if he were hers alone, and not the State's. But she would not spoil the ecstasy of the moment by terrestrial considerations. There was plenty of time to disabuse him of his Quixotic notions, and induce him to discard his chivalrous resolve. For the moment she surrendered herself to the intoxication of the thought that he was willing to sacrifice the delights of power for her sake. Epicurean that she was, she put the question point-blank, that she might enjoy the answer.

"And what is the reason of your retirement?"

The Premier looked embarrassed.

"That is a delicate question," he answered mysteriously.

Lady Gwendolen saw a world of tenderness in his eyes as he said this.

"Could I guess?" she inquired sweetly, laying her hand on his shoulder.

"Not if you tried ever so hard," replied the Premier emphatically.

The delicately playful turn which the conversation was taking enchanted Lady Harley. The stern Minister could then even enter into that fanciful, innocent gaiety so dear to the hearts of lovers, and possible only where there is a perfect common understanding.

"Will nothing shake your resolution to retire?" she asked.

"Nothing." As the word left his lips he brought his right fist down on the desk with startling vehemence. "What an old muddler I am!" he muttered.

"Nothing!" she repeated, pleased with his demonstrative affection. "Not even," she added slyly, "if a certain event did not take place."

"I was mistaken in announcing my determination so emphatically," he said hurriedly, much to her delight. "I have just seen a possibility which would render it inexpedient to resign. But my continuance in office will not materially alter the aspect of affairs; for in that case I foresee the loss of all my energy with the sure ascendancy of Mountchapel as in the former case, so that I shall still do my best to secure our return."

"Then unless you resign, you will be left a shadow of your present self."

"That is the alternative."

Was ever flattery more subtly conveyed? Could the most gallant frequenter of the French salon in its palmiest and most euphuistic days, have found a more delicate way of telling her that without her love, life would not be worth living, but that its flame would flicker on wearily in its old way till it went out? She remained silent, but her looks were eloquent. The Premier appeared anxious to change the subject.

"The present Conservative programme—which we intend to stick to this time, though the *Acts* have never yet answered to their descriptions—contains these chief points as a foretaste of future changes: Annual Parliaments, Payment of Members——"

"These were demanded by the workmen in the Five-point Charter, and rejected then, were they not?" inquired Lady Harley.

"They were rejected, and shall I tell you why?"

"If you please."

"Because," explained the Premier grimly, "in those days the Conservative working-man had not been invented. The poor men made the mistake of appealing to Radical demagogues instead of to the gentlemanly instincts of the Tories. But now the latter are eager to atone for the past, and as Fate has made me their representative, I shall carry out their laudable desires to the full. I know their perpetual anxiety for a reinvestigation of the principles of political economy, so I shall organise commissions of inquiry on various topics." He smiled sardonically as he said the last two words.

"If possible, I shall deal immediately with the great questions of finance; and first as to the Income Tax"—he had become excited by this time, and his left hand was in vigorous rotatory action—"I shall probably propose a graduated tax with the first rung of the ladder very high up. After careful consideration of Mill's arguments I do not believe that he has made out his case against it. He was too much misled by that fictitious automatic regularity which Ricardo pretended to have discovered in the action of human motives. As if a growing tax would hinder the growth of capital; a man might as well grumble that his shadow grew taller with him, or cut off his nose to spite his spectacles, as my father——"

A crash drowned the last words. Unaccustomed to orate hat in hand, he had not accurately measured distances, and in its orbit the hat now came into collision with the goblet of water which he had carelessly placed down on the edge of the desk. The glass was swept on to the silver inkstand, whose venerable antiquity did not save it from accompanying the glass to the floor. The white samite, mystic, wonderful, of Lady Harley's robe was desecrated by splashes of ink and water, and the bright carpet displayed a polygonal black stain. The Premier escaped unspotted, but his hat was ruined and reduced to the level of those of some of his colleagues. He sat gazing speechlessly at the havoc he had wrought.

Lady Harley burst into a merry laugh.

"I feared your reforms would end in destruction," she exclaimed.

The Premier did not reply. He stooped down moodily to pick up the fragments.

"Oh, pray don't trouble to do that," she said. "I'll send in a housemaid. I hope you are not going yet, I am so interested in the graduated Income Tax; and if you will excuse me a few minutes I will change my dress."

"I am so sorry that the accident occurred," observed the Premier simply. "It deprives me of your company for a few minutes."

"Thank you." She made him a laughingly elaborate curtsey, and quitted the study.

Those Comtists, who are still striving to extract (not painlessly) the philosophy of history, are kindly requested to mark the manifold, immensely complex and far-reaching consequences of the fall of an inkstand.

CHAPTER V.

STAINS OLD AND NEW.

"WHAT exquisite delicacy!" exclaimed the Premier, as he looked at the débris that strewed the carpet. These words did not refer to the workmanship of the glittering fragments of Venetian glass, but to the courteous nonchalance and merry carelessness with which Lady Gwendolen had treated the catastrophe. "At last I meet a woman," he thought, "who does not become utterly irrational the moment a breakage occurs. Shall I ever forget the row when I broke that blue and gold tea-cup? I have never dared to touch another since. And yet I paid for it three times over. I wonder how much this goblet was worth. I must replace it as soon as possible. What a sweet, and tender, and talented woman she is, to be sure; so quick to give and take, and so able to understand my views on the Income Tax! Actually, a woman that one can talk to without once speaking about love! And she isn't a bit proud. The aristocrats are not so bad as they're painted, after all; her gentle courtesy, and refined grace, and delicate charm are irresistibly winning. I feel that this interview has given me strength to fight the battle of the oppressed. What matters if I must vanish like a bubble on the breast of the river so long as the stream flows onward? I shall die forgotten, but not forgetting, O my country!" He stood for a moment, stirred to the soul by a rush of lofty emotions. Whatever of unselfishness existed in his complex personality now welled up pure and fresh, forcing its way through the overlying strata of pride, prejudice, sense of power, desire for self-applause, and a score of other feelings that choked its silver current. And it was to Gwendolen that was due this awakening of the finer chords of his spirit, now vibrant with tender emotion and noble resolution. Such an intellectual *camaraderie* with a woman who was bewitching and beautiful, and from whom seemed to emanate an exquisite aroma of purity and delicacy, would, he felt sure, lessen the cares of office and brighten the short tenure of power that yet remained to him.

"Oh, what can I give you in return, my good angel?" he exclaimed aloud. "Except a vote," he added smilingly.

"Oh, Jack, what a romantic coincidence! How came you here? And dressed like a real aristocrat, too!" exclaimed Eliza all in a breath, as she entered through the half-open door. Her lovely face was in a glow, and her dark eyes were gleaming with the excitement of the surprise. Her shapely arms were bare to the well-moulded elbow, the sleeves having been rolled off their creamy plumpness for the better performance of her lustral functions.

Her sudden irruption greatly startled the Premier. For a moment he could only stare at her in such horrified surprise as the rudeness of the matter and manner of her speech might well occasion.

"Hush, hush!" he exclaimed, as soon as his emotions would allow him to speak. "You must not speak to me like that. You mustn't speak to me at all."

Eliza's face fell, and the corners of her mouth twitched ominously.

"Oh, you *are* cruel," she cried; "and, besides, you asked me what you could give me. I don't want a vote; give me a kiss."

"Shut up," cried the irritated Minister. "I've told you once not to bother me, and isn't that enough?"

"You did, Jack," replied the housemaid humbly; "and with sorrow at my heart I promised to obey you, and hardly ever come to see you for three months. But now that you have come to see *me*!"

"Don't be a fool. How can you think I've come to see you?"

"I know you have been speaking to her ladyship; but I am sure you spilt the ink on purpose to get an opportunity of speaking to *me*."

The great Minister glared at her speechlessly. The overwhelming audacity of this idea took his breath away.

"I don't care now," cried Eliza rapturously, answering what was perhaps a passionate look of love with one of tenfold intensity, "I don't care now whether you've got a sense of honour for me to appeal to or not. You see you can't live without your Eliza, you dear old Jack——"

"Don't call me Jack!" interrupted the Premier, trembling with suppressed rage and excitement.

The light of joy died suddenly out of the girl's face—at one stride came the dark.

"What, not even that?" she pleaded piteously.

"You are mad! My name is not Jack," cried the Honourable Arnold Floppington brutally. "Oh, of course, you are going to cry."

"I am not, Jack."

"Once for all," hissed the Premier, "I tell you, never call me Jack!"

"What then? Mr. D——?"

"Nothing at all. Call me nothing at all. Don't address me at all. Do your work, and go, and don't talk."

This last peremptory remark was too much for the girl's feelings, and she furtively wiped away a genuine tear with a corner of the duster. That her emotion did not assert itself in a more violent manner, can only be explained by a certain air of hauteur in the Premier which seemed to act repressively upon all nascent outbursts of passion.

"Do your work," repeated the Premier a shade more gently. "You were sent to wipe up ink, not tears."

"I will, darling," said Eliza in a tone of angelic sweetness. "I have sworn, without waiting like most girls for the ceremonial, to love, honour, and obey you. If you order me to wipe up the ink, I will do so."

"It is not for me to give orders here. That is for your mistress. So wipe it up, come."

"As *you* have ordered it now," replied Eliza, settling down to her task, "I will. Oh my, the carpet is quite spoiled! This *is* a mess!"

"Yes, this *is* a mess," murmured the Premier with rueful humour, as he listened fearfully for the returning footsteps of Lady Gwendolen.

And in truth it was not a pleasant predicament for a Premier to be in.

"My sins have found me out," he groaned.

What youthful folly was it that now clouded his brow with too late remorse? Could he be suffering from the effects of that hey-day in the blood which Goethe has taught us to regard as a craving for Experience? But then how, in that moral nineteenth century could a Minister ever be in danger of being found out? Perhaps, however, we have here a case of quasi-atavism, Nature having in some respects reproduced in Floppington a Premier of the old school. But what is the exclamation that bursts suddenly from his lips, at the end of a rushing train of recollections?

"D—n Swinburne!"

"Oh, Jack—I mean oh, without the Jack," cried Eliza reproachfully. "What has he been doing to you?"

Floppington did not reply. He gazed moodily at the handsome housemaid, who was rubbing the carpet with nonchalant grace, her white cap making a delightful contrast with her glossy, neatly-brushed hair.

"Two years ago," he mused, "a creature such as this could move my very soul, though disgust soon supervened. Strange that a few months of imaginatively sensuous manhood should disturb a life long settled down to the comparative calm of politics."

"Do tell me what's the matter between you and Swinburne," continued Eliza, pausing and turning a tenderly-beseeking look full upon him. "Is he a rival of yours that I do not know of? Have no fear, dearest. You know my heart is yours. It shall never be his."

"I wish it was," muttered the Premier, and smiled grimly at the idea.

Eliza noted the smile.

"You see," she observed gently, "how love can drive the storm-clouds off your brow."

"What a diplomatic little minx it is!" thought Floppington. "By what insidious steps has she advanced to affectionate familiarity with me already, despite my chilling reception of her! And I have been outflanked by her—I, Prime Minister of Great Britain and Ireland, the head of the country that is at the head of the world. And she is doing her work with provoking slowness, as if awaiting her ladyship's return. And I suppose etiquette won't allow me to cut my stick."

"Do get on with your work, my good girl," he said aloud, deciding to manoeuvre in turn, "because her ladyship may return at any moment, and I shouldn't like you to get a blowing-up for not being finished."

"Her ladyship never blows me up," retorted Eliza, much hurt by the shock to her dignity; "she merely reproves me. I appreciate your kindness, but I wish you wouldn't be so vulgar."

Vulgar! He, the scion of one of the noblest English families, the illustrious successor of the Palmerstons and the Derbys, to be called vulgar, and to be put into an apologetic position by a pert housemaid presuming too much on her good looks! This, then, was the way the sex required his unselfish exertions to give them a louder voice in the affairs of the nation.

"Don't be angry, darling," pleaded Eliza, seeing the blackness of his brow. "I don't blame you for falling into the mistake. You haven't lived in the best families, you know."

"I wish *you* hadn't," he growled.

"Well, I'm sure you can't complain that I give myself any airs on account of my superior station," she urged meekly. "But if you're jealous, say the word, and instead of waiting three months, I'll abandon everything and gladly share your humble cottage at once."

"No doubt," he sneered. "And would you like to be clad in a simple white dress, and stand at the door embowered by eglantine and honeysuckle?"

"Oh, you are a duck," cried Eliza enthusiastically. "However did you read my thoughts?"

"By reading them before they were yours," he replied enigmatically. "And if you don't want to ruin your chances of idyllic felicity," he added with a dangerous glitter in his eyes, "you'll clear out of this room as quickly as you can, and keep a still tongue in your head about the relations between us. I'm here on business, and I'm not supposed to waste my time on pleasure."

"You've got a job here to paint," she cried, clapping her hands. "I shall see you often, then. And who knows how many nice teetateets—I beg your pardon, Jack, tête-à-têtes—we might get by accident, like to-day."

"No," he replied, in a lugubrious tone. "I am sorry to say that after seeing you here to-day I shall never be able to come again."

"Poor fellow!" she sighed, complacently affected by the genuine ring of regret in his tone. "Well, I'll make up for it by coming to see you."

A silence of some minutes ensued, during which Eliza Bathbrill's rubbings and the Premier's irritation increased in intensity. Floppington had no sooner exchanged these few familiar remarks with the servant than he bit his bantering tongue. It was as though he had been inadvertently drawn into answering questions in the House, without the preliminary invention of the true reply. He probably felt, too, that those stores of affability which were so useful for electioneering purposes were wasted on one of the people who did not yet possess a vote. Moreover, it struck him too late that he ought to have refused altogether to recognise her.

"Well, I'm sure, dear, I can't get this stain out," cried Eliza.

"There are some stains, it would seem," thought the Premier bitterly, "that can never be washed out."

He looked down at Eliza. The golden sunlight streamed down upon her, and she was in an attitude not unlike that of the Madeline of Keats—but he smiled grimly at the touch of commonness, that potent shatterer of romance, which was imparted by the nature of her occupation to a maiden who, born under more frescoed ceilings, might have swayed poets and financiers by her vacuous beauty. The very sunlight seemed vulgarised by her presence, and instead of lying sacredly and reverently on this delightful, peaceful shrine dedicated to the nineteenth century god, Culture, it seemed to be glaringly asserting that it was there to bring out the earthly beauty of flesh-tints. He frowned. The temple was deserted of its goddess, and a rash mortal had mounted on the empty pedestal. But Eliza Bathbrill was a bad dream which the returning reality of Lady Gwendolen would soon displace, and the Premier felt that the *mauvais quart d'heure* he was now spending would educate him to an even warmer appreciation of his hostess. Somehow he seemed to realise for the first time how much the womanly charm of the latter, the candour and tenderness of her gray eyes, the crystalline ring of her laughter had wrought upon his spirit. In the first thrill of this discovery he felt that during the remainder of the interview and for the future, he would never be able to return to that half-contemptuous and wholly independent attitude which he had originally adopted.

"Fool that I was," he thought, "to speak to her as to other women! There are many women fitted for the Harem, but few for the Home."

This reflection was intended to glance at Eliza Bathbrill, but whether viewed particularly or generally it showed the Premier's ignorance of human nature. Too much is usually forgiven to epigrammatic ignorance, so it is just as well to remark, that in all probability Eliza would have settled down (after the *Sturn und drang* of the *London Reader* period of her development) into the happy, humdrum domesticity which follows an enthusiastic youth. Indeed, her conduct compares favourably with Guinevere's. She

saw that it was her duty to love the highest, and accordingly she loved the highest she could find. She had resisted many worldly temptations. She had not become a barmaid, nor even an actress. She had neither hungered after the mashers of the Gaiety Restaurant, nor persuaded the critics that beauty is dramatic genius.

The disgusted Premier was seeking among the dead a refuge from the living—in plain language, he was looking at the books. The scholarly eye of the man was fascinated by the well-laden shelves filled with volumes evidently chosen with the novel intention of reading them. A beautifully-bound copy of Rossetti's sonnets, occupying a prominent position, attracted his attention. The leaves opened and remained supine with that facility that they can only gain by practice. He chanced upon the exquisite lines beginning,

“To be a sweetness more desired than Spring.”

Enraptured, he read the sonnet aloud. As he was commencing, Lady Gwendolen appeared noiselessly at the half-open door of the study. On hearing the first syllables in tones made tender by emotion, she paused so as not to disturb the flow of the magnificent words. It was an unexpected pleasure to hear her lover recite a poem so appropriate to the occasion, and to find that he who had comprehended only Wordsworth could now delight in more passionate erotics. At last, then, he understood that there was something sweeter than Nature, and that was Woman. She laughed silently, with that laugh of delight that verges on tears.

As Eliza heard the first line she pricked up her ears. At the second, “a bodily beauty more acceptable,” she blushed with pride. The reader was evidently reading at her. She paused from her work and remained motionless, at once petrified and electrified. As the harmonious sounds ceased and the spell was broken, she sprang to her feet.

“Oh, you darling Jack,” she cried. “It's nearly as lovely as the poems you used to write to me. I'll never doubt you any more.”

So saying, she rushed into his arms. Startled, he dropped the book and repelled her rudely. At the same instant he became conscious that steel-gray eyes were piercing him like swords. He turned as pale as Gwendolen herself.

“Bathbrill,” said Gwendolen in piteous, quivering tones, that even indignation could not render firm. “What is the meaning of this?”

“I beg pardon, your ladyship,” said Eliza humbly. “This is not the place or time for love-making, I am aware. But I never expected to see Jack—I mean Mr. Dawe—here, and my feelings overcame me. It's not his fault, pray don't blame him.”

The terrible suspicion that throbbed in Gwendolen's heart as sharp, physical pain, and that made her catch her breath, was turned into certainty. She gazed wearily at Eliza, and the fatal beauty of the girl was burnt into her brain with pencils of fire. The

caresses that her entrance had made him refuse—doubtless he had lavished them often enough on his paramour, this wronged girl to whom he was only plain Jack Dawe. Bitterly did she remember her late unuttered thought: “Never have those lips touched the face of a woman.” And that it should be this of all women! *Le preux chevalier!*

“And I may as well tell your ladyship now,” continued Eliza, thinking to improve the situation, and speaking at her lover as well as to her mistress, “that I shall leave in two months, as we are going to be married. Jack has been always putting it off, but he has promised me faithfully this time.”

It wanted no more. “The vile wretch!” Lady Gwendolen longed to cry; but her tongue refused to articulate the words. She cast an agonised look at the Premier and his victim. She saw that he was cowering miserably beneath her glance; but her blurred vision could not perceive the hopeless tears that trickled down his ashen cheeks. For he read in her eyes her suspicion—and the shattering of his dreams.

“Very well, Bathrill,” said Lady Harley, with an effort. “You can go.”

As the door closed upon the poor girl, Gwendolen sank into a chair. Her eyes were closed. The Premier rushed forwards, thinking that she had fainted. He took her hand to chafe it. She snatched it away fiercely, opened her eyes, and flashed a look of bitter reproach upon him.

“I am innocent, Gwendolen,” he pleaded wildly; “I am innocent!”

“Ah, why did I hope for happiness?” moaned Gwendolen, covering her face with her hands.

“Oh, if I could make you happy I would die!” he cried. “I love you, Gwendolen. I am a nobody; but my life is yours to do with it what you will. I have no hope that you will be mine; but pray, pray believe I am innocent.”

Lady Gwendolen lifted her head. “Enough of this pitiful burlesque sentiment,” she said in a low, scornful tone. “By your own confession, you are a skilful comedian. I understand many things that puzzled me before; my eyes have been opened.”

“I love you, Gwendolen!” repeated the Premier despairingly. “I am innocent!”

Again she covered her face with her hands.

“And if I am not innocent I will atone. I love you; but I hope for no return save the permission to dedicate my humble life to your happiness. What, O my dear lady, can I do for you?”

“You can ring that bell in the right-hand corner,” replied Gwendolen in a tone of utter misery.

In a second the Premier had done so. A tall, stately footman appeared.

“Show Mr. Floppington out,” said Gwendolen apathetically.

The footman stared, and looked from one to the other.

The Premier drew himself up to his full height, took his hat

calmly, made an elaborate bow to Gwendolen, and left the fateful chamber. In the hall he scowled majestically at his attendant, and gave him half-a-sovereign.

"It's d—d awkward!" he muttered furiously as the door slammed behind him. "It's d—d awkward to have another fellow looking like you. D—n Jack Dawe!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE AUTOCRAT AT THE BREAKFAST-TABLE.

"GOOD gracious me!" said the Professor, looking round nervously. "There are thirteen of us!" The Professor was a man who believed that consciousness was a superfluity, and who, abandoning the search for a great central and unifying verity, taught that Truth was only to be found in atoms—from which it should not be hastily inferred that he was in the habit of breaking his word.

The genial host burst into a hearty laugh.

"You have a quick eye, Mr. Dallox," he said. "In fact, my intention was to have that number during the series of breakfasts I intend to give, in the hope of laying the superstition that still haunts the minds of many. I wonder," he added jocularly, "which sphere of life is to lose a shining light—science, or painting, or literature, or the drama, or politics."

"Don't you consider politics a branch of the drama?" asked Mr. Bab, looking curiously around the table.

"You may laugh, Mr. Floppington," intervened the Professor, evidently contemplating the extinction of his own superfluous consciousness with anything but satisfaction; "but amid the mass of superstitions it is extremely illogical to suppose that there would not here and there be a germ of truth."

"A germ of truth!" cried Mr. Dagon. "Do you mean to say, Professor, that Truth is catching? And if so, do you propose inoculation to make us truth-proof?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Bab. "It has long been recognised that Truth is a disease of language."

"Mythology is, you mean," corrected Mr. Claviger.

"Perhaps he wishes to insinuate that the bulk of our truth *is* mythology," interposed the Premier.

But the Professor's train of thought was not to be thrown off the track by these interruptions. "The fact that any superstition has come down to us is, on Darwinian principles, a proof of its usefulness." He went on: "The doctrine of the survival of the fittest is as applicable to the history of religion as to the——"

"Survival of the fittest!" Mr. Dagon exclaimed contemptuously. "If there were any truth in that, we should be a nation of epileptics."

The Professor paused and frowned, but the irreverent Dagon,

supported by the sympathetic smile on the venerable countenance of Mr. Claviger, refused to be sat upon.

"Survival of the fittest!" repeated Mr. Claviger with equal scorn. "Even the beautiful regions of superstition must be invaded by the demon of Darwinism, which can explain everything we don't want explained. Any counter-jumper could have written the 'Origin of Species' if he had a mind to do it."

"Quite so," said Dagon; "it's only the mind that would be wanting."

"That is very clever," murmured Bab. "A quotation, I presume."

"My dear sir," replied Dagon, "we haven't all got good memories enough to be original. Originality is, I take it, only undetected plagiarism."

"Still," put in Sir John Momus, the illustrious low comedian, "coincidences will happen even in the best-regulated plagiarisms."

"Moi, savez-vous que je suis affreusement superstitieuse?" interposed the great French tragédienne, whom Dagon had already secretly dubbed the skeleton at the feast.

"Before discussing superstition," said the host, "suppose we define it. It seems to be a belief in that part of the supernatural in which the definer does not believe."

"Oh, please don't be so clever, Mr. Floppington," pleaded Nelly Shepherd, pausing in her manipulation of the leg of a fowl. "You are as unintelligible as the lines of my new part."

"I'm sure I intended no pun," said the Premier in a hurt tone.

May I fill your glass? His sprightly neighbour assented laughingly, and the little incident seemed to remind the company that they had assembled for more than a feast of reason, and for some moments everybody helped everybody else with that lavish expenditure of unselfishness which causes many people to use up their whole stock at table. It was not without a feeling of pride that Floppington surveyed the snowy expanse of cloth glittering with silver and precious glass, and fragrant with flowers, around which sat men and women whom he had admired and revered for years. The sight of the noiseless servants hovering behind the guests, so exquisitely respectful and attentive, so alert and graceful in their movements, added to his serene content. For a moment, indeed, a frown crossed his face. But this was probably due to the vision of another scene which flashed upon him, suggested by contrast—a scene lacking in the daintiness and refinement which surrounded him. It must have been that thought of hungry mouths which sometimes hovers about the table of Dives, and spoils his luxurious meals. Whatever the thought was, it was transient. The Premier busied himself in helping his guests, and for some minutes there was that silence which prevails among well-bred people endeavouring to obscure the fact that they are masticating.

Suddenly Sir John Momus was observed sitting bolt upright with a grave expression on his round countenance, as if he had been surprised by the irruption of an idea. But he said nothing

till Sir Hugh Erlyon, the President of the Royal Academy, who was the comedian's *vis-à-vis*, taking upon himself to interpret the general sentiment, observed deferentially: "You were about to remark?"

"That it was a very fine day," replied Sir John, his eyes, which were fixed on vacancy, dilating into a perplexed stare as a current of laughter, musical and unmusical, ran round the table.

"To me there is nothing ridiculous in the occasional reminder that Nature has a beautiful picture on view," said Sir Hugh.

"I didn't know you admired Nature," observed Mr. Bab. Sir Hugh looked up in horror at Mr. Bab, who added deprecatingly: "I only mean, you know, that, as an artist, she's just a little bit too realistic, eh? French school, and all that sort of thing. Frankly, now, Sir Hugh, do you think you'd make her an R.A.?"

Before the President could decide this delicate question, Momus interposed: "I don't know about making her an R.A. But she certainly wouldn't do for a President. All *her* stars are remorselessly skied."

"The truest art is to conceal art," sententiously observed Momus's friend, Lord Thespis, who since he had been raised to the peerage had begun to cultivate an oracular habit. He accompanied the remark by that mysterious and winning smile which never deserted him, even when he thought he had said something original.

"The truest art is to conceal Nature," amended a quiet voice, proceeding from the Marquis of Rockington, who had hitherto amused himself in talking of old times with the fair tragédienne, and who now began to show the cloven hoof. The warm friendship which had sprung up between the ultra-cynical and sceptical man of the world and the orthodox Minister was not the least remarkable phenomenon accompanying the Premier's abandonment of his reserved habits.

"I beg your pardon," said Momus firmly, coming to the defence of his friend, with the natural authoritativeness of a man who was playing every night in a classical burlesque, "the Latin original is *artem*."

"Art or Nature," responded the Marquis in a bored tone. "You artists manage to conceal both to perfection."

"Unfortunately for satirists," interposed Mr. Claviger, "the weakest part of an epigram is generally the truth of it. Surely no one will now venture to affirm that Turner was unfaithful to Nature. Look, too, at the glorious effects of rain, and mist, and cloud, depicted by so long a line of British landscape painters."

"Perhaps it is owing to the climate that English artists have taken so naturally to water-colours?" put in Mr. Dagon.

"Oh, no doubt the environment largely affects the artistic instincts of a people," said Mr. Dallox.

"Oh, do please explain that big word," said the sprightly Miss Shepherd, with an arch side-glance at Mr. Claviger, who smiled in return.

The Professor laid down his fork, and cleared his throat with an Albemarle Street cough.

"Est-ce qu'il va nous faire un cours?" whispered the divine Sarah, throwing a reproachful glance at Miss Shepherd.

"Never mind, old boy," said Nelly, with that delightful *chic* in which she was without a rival. "I'll let you off. Besides, you could never make me understand."

"Nonsense!" said the Professor sharply. "Have you not heard that my books are noted for their popular character?"

"I never knew before that you had succeeded in making the Lobster a popular character," said Dagon, "though you have analysed him so minutely in your best-known scientific fiction. To make popular characters you should sketch broadly *à la* Dickens. All you have done is to show that he is rather a queer fish, and that we all knew before."

"Anyhow, he makes very good salad," said Floppington. And everybody laughed, which encouraged the host, who had hitherto been somewhat silent, enjoying the conversation as if he had paid for it, though a little overpowered by the talent assembled round his hospitable board.

"I always endeavour to speak the language of the people, and I am sure a great part of my success is due to this," continued the unruffled Professor.

"No doubt," said the Marquis drily. "The most popular philosopher is he who makes people think they think."

"For my part I must confess," said Mr. Alderney Lightfoot, desisting from his long attempt to find enough rhymes to silver to furnish a rondeau. "I think your books too clear to be of any value as literature."

"I cannot serve two masters—Sense and Nonsense—at once," replied the Professor warmly.

"It strikes me that you scientific gentlemen don't always serve the master you think," said Mr. Claviger. "When I see Miss Shepherd dancing, I thank Heaven that made her graceful and happy, whereas the eye with the Evolution squint can only see in her a cross between a dodo and a daddy-longlegs."

Miss Nelly made a comic *moue*, which, together with the ridiculous description of her, set everybody laughing. But Mr. Claviger went on with sombre solemnity:

"It is not for nothing that ever since the year of the publication of the 'Origin of Species,' the sky has been darkened by a storm-cloud. But what care we now if the fathomless depths of blue—the visible type of infinity and eternity—have been indignantly veiled from our grovelling vision? Intent on the physical processes of growth, we have forgotten the breath of the Spirit. Man is dead, but the 'featherless biped' who is left alive is untouched by the beauty of the Heavens and the Earth. Would, at least, that their beauty were untouched by him! The miserable creature must needs scar the faces of both with lines of ugliness, leaving himself nothing to worship but Sunday, and he goes and worships that in

churches which he can't even pay for. If he had the least grain of honesty, he would rather go and pray in the coal-hole."

"The fourth commandment according to Claviger!" cried the Premier in a horrified tone. "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it coaley! Mr. Claviger, do you know you are shockingly irreverent?"

"And, Mr. Claviger," observed the Marquis reflectively, "if man is the miserable creature that you say he is, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ought to see that the discovery of his descent is kept from the monkeys. They would probably be ashamed of their newly-discovered poor relations."

For once Bab smiled, and exclaimed, without seeing till too late how the idea might have been furbished up for his next comic opera :

"Yes ; imagine what a shock it would be to the merry Punchinello on the barrel-organ to learn that it was related to the oleaginous organ-grinder."

"The barrel-organ is a much-maligned instrument," said Sir Arthur Connor. "It has done more to popularise music than the pianoforte. By its means the grand compositions of the great modern masters are brought home to the very poorest. It makes its way into dark regions where no pianoforte has ever penetrated ; the foulest air is made musical with gay and chorded melody."

"You leave out," said Bab, "that it is more quickly learnt."

"And leaves less scope for false notes. Perhaps that's why no genius ever plays it," added Rockington.

Mr. Alderney Lightfoot looked up from his plate.

"Nothing affected me more," he said simply, "than to see the little children in a squalid court kissing the hem of the Italian's robe, and begging him to go on playing ; evidently regarding him as the fountain of all that divine sweetness. It was a subject for the Master."

"I'm sure you could do it as well," exclaimed Floppington enthusiastically.

Mr. Lightfoot shook his head.

"No one could embody the touching tenderness of the theme in all its penetrating pathos and infinite ideality, but the one starry soul whose winged verses will hold him for ever poised in the pure ether of sacred remembrance, the one sweet seraph who has veiled his awful face from mortal sight."

"Would you mind passing the salad, Mr. Lightfoot?" said Sir John Momus.

"Well, if you don't think you could make anything of it," said the Premier. "suppose you give the subject to Mr. Dagon. I should be so proud if anything said at my breakfast-table resulted in a new ballad of Babyland."

Mr. Lightfoot appeared shocked, and passed the salad-bowl with much dignity.

"I!" exclaimed Mr. Dagon. "I hope I know my place better."

"Don't be so modest, Dagon," said Mr. Bab, with some spite-

fulness. "No one could possibly make a better thing out of squalid courts and squalling babies than you do."

"Well, if they could I should like to see it," cried Floppington. "Do let me persuade you to please the great army of reciters, of whom I am one."

"Do you hear that?" said Bab. "Mr. Floppington wants you to write a lesson for the day."

"And does he not write lessons for the day?" Floppington inquired with some embarrassment.

"And are not those lessons read on Sunday too, and in the Church of Humanity?" added Lord Thespis solemnly.

"What French observer was it," interposed the Marquis, "who discovered that the favourite Sunday dish of the British working classes was liver, garnished with a little mustard and cress?"

"For shame!" cried Floppington; "if the world at large is interested in Mr. Dagon's dyspepsia, it is because he has a heart of gold."

"A liver of go'd," murmured Mr. Bab. "He makes money out of himself, like the man in Douglas Jerrold's story."

"When you have done with my liver, gentlemen," said Mr. Dagon, smiling good-humouredly.

"I am sure you are not eating anything. Mr. Dagon," Floppington said, with much solicitude. "Let me help you to some of this *pâté de foie gras*."

"*Pâté de foie gras!*" gasped Mr. Dagon.

"It is delicious," urged the Premier.

"It is indeed!" said Mr. Dallox reverently. "The goose, whose liver it once was, must have died happy, knowing that by its death it would confer the most exquisite sensations upon poster——"

"That was because it was a goose," interrupted Miss Shepherd.

"I don't believe it died happy," said Sir Hugh, "but it was doubtless happy to die, which is not the same thing. The greatest coward, suffering so from enlargement of the liver, would have welcomed death."

"Not even a goose liveth unto itself alone," continued the Professor, whose gift of happy Scriptural or quasi-Scriptural quotation had endeared him to the Philistines. "Infinite are the vibrations of its guttural quack. The atoms that constitute its liver have now passed into my being, to be invested with a higher collateral consciousness, a sublimer capacity for emotion and understanding."

"From which it logically follows that your next lecture will, at bottom, be the work of a goose," Mr. Claviger burst forth.

"Yes, why not?" Mr. Dallox responded calmly. "All forms of matter are equally sacred. There is no reason——"

"But surely, Mr. Dallox," interrupted Mr. Dagon, "you don't mean to class yourself among the scientific quacks of Mr. Claviger's denunciations?"

"There is no reason," repeated the Professor, taking no notice of the impertinent punster, "why we should despise any of the manifestations of protoplasm. Rather should we reverence them."

"And do we not reverence geese?" the Marquis asked blandly.

"Do let me persuade you!" again pleaded Floppington, in the silence which followed this remark.

"You know not what you ask," Mr. Dagon replied. "I thought everybody knew how bitterly opposed the atoms of my liver are to the introduction of those of any foreign liver."

"What? Is *pâté de foie gras* indigestible?" inquired the Premier.

"Happy mortal!" ejaculated poor Mr. Dagon. "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise. I think the prayer to be saved from his friends must have been first framed by an unhappy dyspeptic."

"Perhaps by Carlyle?" suggested Rockington.

"I am glad the prayer wasn't granted," said Lightfoot. "Mr. Froude was perfectly right to unmask that canting Calvinist, to brush off the glory of grass beneath which that venomous viper polluted the Arcadian air with rancid respiration."

"The happiest men, like the happiest women, are they that have no biography," said Rockington.

"Still, I'm sure Mr. Floppington intended to be a true friend," interposed Mr. Bab. "*Similia similibus curantur.*"

"But I'm afraid," added Momus, "that our friend Dagon is an incurable jester."

"There is one joke at least," said Dagon gloomily, "that I ought to have been allowed to make. Suppose you had got to discuss whether life was worth the living. Now *could* I have helped saying that that depends upon the liver?"

"It *is* hard," admitted Bab, "that in a question of literary coincidence, the prior writer always gets the benefit of the doubt."

"The Greeks picked upon the liver as the seat of passion," observed Sir Hugn, "which shows that their popular physiology was in advance of ours."

"All such popular generalisations point to a great truth," said the Professor: "the interconnection of physical and mental phenomena. This is one of those great truths which are known to all but the very dull or the very philosophic. Nature is simple—her great facts are patent to every one in possession of his five senses."

"Fiddlestick!" cried Mr. Claviger. "The divine human soul is not bound down by the five senses."

"Well," admitted the Professor, with a flash of latent humour in his keen gray eyes, "at least, it is only the philosopher that can go out of his senses."

"It is better to be out of one's senses with Plato, than in them with Darwin," retorted Mr. Claviger. "I will never believe that I am related to a blackbeetle."

"There's no answering for the indiscretions of one's ancestors," murmured the Marquis.

"Oh, you disgusting creature!" said Nelly, rapping Mr. Claviger across the knuckles with her fork. "Just as I was enjoying this oyster sauce, too."

"You mustn't judge by appearances," said the Professor impressively, "the vital genera shade off into each other. The

Ornithorhynchus graduates towards Reptiles ; the Ichthyosaurians present affinities with Amphibians, in their turn allied to Ganoid fishes. The Lancelet or Amphioxus—oh !” for the Professor, too, had received castigation from the irate actress.

Everybody began to laugh but the two culprits, who rushed at each other verbally like two schoolboy pugilists whom everybody is trying to part. Their tones grew louder and louder.

“Order, gentlemen,” cried Floppington, rapping the table with his closed fist like the chairman at the smoking concerts in public-houses.

There was another burst of laughter, above which rose the eager clamour of the lecturing duet.

“Order ! Chair !” vociferated Miss Shepherd, gulping down a glass of champagne, “Order !”

“*Ces gens sont tous fous !*” soliloquised Sarah, calmly continuing her unfaltering promenade through the courses marked on the chart. “*Savez-vous, M. Floppington,*” she said in low silvery accents, turning towards him with a serpentine movement, “*ça commence à m’embêter. Et vous, vous ne dites rien ? Causons ! Vous m’avez vu dans *Fédora* ?*”

“Oui,” said Floppington, blushing.

“*Je ne me rappelle pas, cependant, vous y avoir vu. Faut que vous vous soyez blotti dans la foule.*”

“Oui,” said Floppington.

“*Un monarque devrait se montrer partout. Vous avez tort de rechercher l’obscurité. Et moi qui ne savais ! Où la vertu va-t-elle se nicher dans le monde de la Gaiety, car vous êtes la vertu personnifiée, n’est-ce pas ?*”

“Oui,” said Floppington.

Sarah laughed her delicious laugh. “*C’est du Hugo tout pur ! L’être intelligent fait de l’égoïsme une vertu, l’imbécile en fait une vice. Mais qu’avez-vous donc aujourd’hui, M. Floppington, que vous répondez tout en monosyllabes ? Vous n’êtes pas un vrai diplomate. Ne savez-vous pas que le meilleur moyen de se taire, c’est de parler ? Le langage ne nous fut-il pas donné pour déguiser nos pensées ?*”

“Oui,” said Floppington.

Sarah clapped her hands. “*Mr. Floppington falls of accord with me,*” she cried. “*Ah, Monseigneur Rockington, you have then been giving him of your lessons ?*”

“*Why, what new heresy has he been guilty of ?*” inquired the Marquis from the other end of the table.

“*He says language was given us to conceal our thoughts.*”

“*I beg your pardon,*” said the Marquis. “*Really these gentlemen are so busy quoting their books that I can’t hear.*”

“*Well, I’ve always admitted—*” began Floppington, and paused.

“*Silence !*” cried Nelly. “*Order for the Chair ! Order for Mr. Floppington !*”

A sudden hush fell upon the company.

"He says that language was given to us to conceal our thoughts," repeated Sarah.

"Our want of thought," murmured Mr. Claviger, with a disdainful glance at the Professor.

"Well, I do say it," cried Floppington.

"Then, ladies, you may claim your gloves!" said Bab. "It was distinctly understood that the slightest allusion to politics should be punished."

"The punishment is an honour," said the Premier, with an admiring glance at Mr. Bab.

The ladies bowed gracefully.

"Oh, do talk politics," said Nelly, looking appealingly at the company. "Do make them talk politics, dear Mr. Floppington," she said, putting her hand on his shoulder.

"Shall I unmake my own laws?" he asked.

"Oh, bother your laws!" cried Nelly.

The company looked aghast, but the courtly Premier preserved a polite smile.

"Miss Shepherd thinks stolen politics sweetest," drily observed the Marquis.

"That's another forfeit!" cried Nelly, clapping her hands and repressing a tendency to whist'e an air of Meyer Lutz.

The high spirits and *entrain* of the actress seemed to exhilarate the Premier. He poured himself out another glass of Perrier-Jouet. "I'll make this concession," he observed gaily. "The ladies shall talk the politics and the gentlemen buy the gloves."

"How jolly!" Nelly cried, bursting into a laugh. "But I'm afraid I don't know anything about the subject."

"What a promising candidate for a constituency!" exclaimed Sir Arthur Connor.

"Is a promising candidate a candidate who promises?" inquired Nelly. "Because I'm ready to promise anything except marriage. But really, although I'm even now singing a topical song—of course in the Conservative interest, Mr. Floppington—with oh! such enthusiasm, I confess I don't know the difference between a Liberal and a Conservative."

"That is not your fault," said Bab; "the nomenclature of politics is of a very unscientific description."

"The difference is simply this," said the Marquis: "the Conservative believes that Providence is on his side, the Liberal that he is on the side of Providence."

Everybody's eyes turned to the Premier's face. But if the student of divinity was shocked, he allowed no trace of the emotion to appear. He even smiled oracularly and observed: "I firmly believe that Providence *is* giving the Tories a lift."

"God created sex, and man politics," interposed Sir Hugh Erlyon. "For my part I prefer the natural division of humanity to the unnatural."

"Politics were invented to keep the upper classes out of mischief," put in Mr. Claviger sententiously.

"And to get the lower classes into it," added the Marquis.

"I don't think the unnatural division, as you call it, does any harm," said Sir Arthur.

"But it causes so many other divisions," exclaimed Dagon.

"I agree with Sir Arthur," Lord Thespis remarked with his mysterious smile. "Great minds agree—to differ."

"That is so," observed Momus earnestly. "My friend Thespis and I have more than one set of opinions between us."

"Well, since modesty and politics are the order of the day," said the Marquis, "I must confess that I disagree *in toto* with my right honourable friend, Mr. Floppington, on the very vital question of representative government."

"Well, for my part," said the host, "I detest people with dubious views. A man who professes to belong to no party usually combines the defects of all. So out with your tirade, Rockington."

"Society is to be nothing but a Mutual Administration Society, forsooth!" cried the Marquis. "Govern me, and I'll govern you. I refuse to be governed by Monsieur Prudhomme for any consideration whatever."

"Hear, hear!" cried Mr. Dallox.

The Marquis became animated.

"Democracy is nothing but an offshoot of Positivism, with its deification of a humanity which consists largely of total abstainers from any manifestation of its better qualities. Everything is to be regulated by the combined action of petty National or pettier Local Boards. They will soon be wishing to depose the Creator, and administer the affairs of the universe and regulate all the phenomena of Nature by representative government."

"Excellent!" cried the Professor. "If people were only clear-headed enough to understand that that is the logical outcome of their attacks on the oligarchical and monarchical principles! Government by average opinion is only a circuitous method of going to the devil."

"And by any other method they'd go there straight!" cried the Premier with flashing eyes.

"You forget, Professor," interposed Dagon, "that the gentleman they're going to is a Conservative."

"Oh, oh!" cried Momus, turning to his friend, who was then playing Mephistopheles.

"I don't mean that," said Dagon hastily. "I mean that his Satanic Majesty would naturally be an enemy to the Radicalism and Republicanism that threatens to upset all thrones."

"Well, really, Lord Thespis," said the Premier, "I never could understand why you were one of us. In your theatrical character you are so full of new plans."

"He believes in reform in no direction except where it is least necessary," said Dagon.

"I deny the analogy," said Thespis. "The theatre is not the world."

"*Pardonnez-moi!*" cried Sarah. "All the world's a stage. What's good for the one must be good for the other."

"So the ladies of the world seem to think who paint," said Bab.

"I'll owe you one for that, Mr. Bab," cried Nelly playfully. "You know I paint, and I'm no more ashamed to confess it than Sir Hugh Erlyon himself."

"Miss Shepherd has found the Elixir of Youth," said Sarah.

"Thank you," cried Nelly, with a pretty grimace.

Mr. Alderney Lightfoot came to the rescue.

"What is earlier born than the sunshine, and yet what is more beautiful? Eternally fresh as——"

"As your metaphor," interrupted Bab.

"Happily the comparison won't hold in detail," said the Premier.

"Miss Shepherd is frequently with us."

Nelly laughed in delight, and held out her glass, which the Premier filled. The other guests smiled silently, as feeling the insincerity of the compliment, for the Premier had never taken a course of Gaiety burlesque even medicinally. They felt sure he had no accurate conception of Miss Shepherd's performances, and that he had only added her to the party for the sake of representative completeness—for logical, and not for personal reasons.

"She's certainly a wonderful woman," Sir Arthur said in a low tone to Mr. Bab. "Her skin is as well preserved——"

"As a general's," concluded Bab. "We must keep that. You ought to get up a good jingle for that. Her skin as well preserved as a general's—as a general's."

Sir Arthur immediately began to hum.

"Who's going to oblige with a song?" cried Floppington, catching the sounds.

There was a general laugh at Sir Arthur's expense, but the Premier seemed to be as disconcerted as the musician.

"I am afraid I missed that," said Mr. Alderney Lightfoot, starting up. "I do believe I was lost in thought."

"No wonder," murmured Bab; "it's a *terra incognita*."

"Is anybody going in for Johannisberg?" the Premier exclaimed hastily. "My butler tells me I haven't exhausted the bottles presented to me by Prince Bismarck."

"I wonder whether he gave them to you to illustrate his socialistic principles?" observed Dagon. "If so, he is more consistent than that immensely wealthy Marquis of Dash whom I was talking to the other day, and who amazed me by coolly telling me that he agreed with Proudhon, that *la propriété c'est le vol*."

"I don't see the inconsistency," said Mr. Bab. "It's quite certain *he* never took any trouble to acquire property."

"I don't go in for Socialism," said Floppington; "but I must confess the rule of society seems to be, that to him that hath nothing to do, much shall be given."

"You have put your finger on the plague-spot of Society," said Dagon earnestly. "Really, Mr. Floppington, you have no concep-

tion, if you will allow me to say so, of the growing bitterness of feeling in the lower classes. Living, as your class does, in its clubs and its mansions, it isolates itself from the true current of national life, and—I must say it even at the risk of displeasing you—thereby becomes stagnant and foul.”

The Premier seemed to catch his enthusiasm. “Go it, my boy; give it to us!” he cried.

The adroit way in which the Premier rebuked his too presumptuous guest was generally admired, and almost every one perceived the subtle reproof implied by the ironically familiar “my boy.” There was a moment’s constrained silence, which was broken by Mr. Dallox, who neatly dragged the talk out of its dangerous course. “I have been thinking of your remark that democracy was an offshoot of Positivism,” he said to the Marquis. “I had an idea that you were a Positivist yourself.”

“I?” cried the latter. “I am a *student* of mankind.”

Bab laughed. “Then you agree with me that Pythagoras was a fool to tell a man to know himself.”

“Yes. It would make most people as miserable to know themselves as not to know their richer neighbours.”

“Yet the cynical Pope said the noblest study of mankind is man,” said Thespis.

“The cynical Pope is not infallible,” observed Dagon.

“The noblest study of mankind is woman,” cried Momus enthusiastically.

A pained look came into the Premier’s eyes. The company observed it, and Momus looked shamefaced.

“Qu’est-ce que c’est que le crédo du Positivisme?” asked Sarah.

“There is no God but Humanity, and Harrison is his prophet,” answered Bab glibly.

“Le Positivisme c’est un pas en arrière,” the Marquis explained to the tragédienne. “Comte, en voulant donner sa religion à l’homme, avait oublié que c’est l’homme qui veut donner son compte à la religion.”

Sarah smiled.

“If we talk French to her,” said the Premier, “she will never learn English. I think I shall make a point of speaking to no foreigner in his own tongue.”

“Carlyle was right in one thing,” said Mr. Dallox. “He had none of this preposterous reverence for the masses.”

“He wasn’t a Newman,” said Momus.

“He was fairly Catholic in his antipathies,” said Bab. “No one can accuse him of narrow-mindedness.”

“Do you think that Catholicism is gaining ground in society?” said Lord Thespis to Sir Hugh.

“There is only one religion in society,” said the Marquis: “tree worship.”

“Eh?” cried the Professor, startled. “A survival—what do you mean?”

“Family tree worship,” amended Rockington.

"In all its branches," added Momus.

"You remind me of one of the best things I ever said in a speech," said the Premier to the Marquis. "Some cad had been arguing for hereditary legislation."

The guests looked at one another. Was the Premier unconsciously revealing the future?

"And I recollect perorating with great effect as follows: 'And finally, I am convinced that my cocky young friend has as little knowledge of history as of the good society he eulogises. The slightest peep at Debrett would have told him that almost all people of birth trace their descent either to an ancestor of whom they would be ashamed, or to one who would be ashamed of them.'"

"I don't remember reading that in your speeches," said Sir Hugh.

"No," said the Premier with a forced laugh. "That was in the days when I was a comparatively unknown man."

"It is strange to think," said Lord Thespis, "that the great men of the next decade are now struggling unrecognised. Truly—for a time at least—the world knows nothing of its greatest men."

"And it's not satisfied without knowing everything," added Bab.

"Rather say, its greatest men know nothing of the world," said the Premier with strange bitterness, "for, after all, the world of culture that we call Society is the only real world for an intellectual man."

"You seem to regret your long, almost total seclusion," said Sir Hugh sympathetically.

"I do," said the Premier simply. "I regret bitterly the long years I passed cut off from it by the artificial barriers of prejudice."

"The world rejoices that you have overcome that prejudice," said Lord Rockington. "It cannot bear to be looked down upon."

"I confess I did look down upon it," he replied. "But now that I have come to know it, amid much that is hollow and rotten I find a solid substratum of delicate and refined feeling, of noble action, and of true thought."

The sincerity and frankness of the simple-minded host moved the company to admiration.

"Yes, the old order has much that is good, and will not change so quickly as the Radical imagines," mused Sir Hugh. "As Schiller said in the lines you so beautifully translated—as I would say to every hot-headed revolutionist:

'Du willst die Macht,
Die ruhig, sicher thronende erschüttern,
Die in verjährt geheiligtem Besitz
In der'

How does it run?"

"It's as much as you can expect a politician to do to remember his own speeches," said Floppington.

"Surely no one expects him to do that," said Bab. "Politicians should cultivate badness of memory by all available methods."

The Premier laughed. "That is like Mark Twain's phrase. I

wish he wasn't out of England now, by-the-by. He speaks somewhere of a man devoting his life to the acquisition of ignorance."

"The phrase is not so paradoxical as it seems," said the Marquis. "Think of the divinity student's laboriously acquired knowledge of theology."

Sir Hugh sent his lordship a warning glance, but the latter had already tested his man, and had never known a sarcasm of his resented by the Premier.

"I have heard most of the great preachers," he continued; "they are all so lavish; they use up in one sermon a stock of ignorance which could be spread out over a dozen."

"That comes from giving over Religion to a prejudiced body," said Mr. Dallox. "Why are we scientific men not permitted to occupy the pulpits? I consider myself a preacher, and purposely entitled a work of mine 'Lay Sermons,' to show that I thought the field of Conduct as much mine as any ecclesiastic's."

"To me the objections to lay-preaching seem well founded," observed Mr. Bab. "Only duly qualified practitioners should be allowed to administer narcotics."

The Premier burst into a roar of laughter.

"Would they administered innoxious narcotics only!" said Lightfoot. "It is poison that they administer."

At this exhibition of bad taste the guests looked at the Premier, in whose eyes tears of enjoyment stood.

"Oh, no, no!" he cried, perceiving their glances. "My dear fellow, remember that we are not all so unprejudiced as you."

The exquisite courtliness of this rebuke was lost upon the poet, who launched into an alliterative diatribe, while Miss Shepherd amused herself and the company by making grimaces.

"Both the spirit of reason! Don't you think we've had enough of reason," interrupted Bab, taking advantage of a failure of breath in the speaker. "Suppose you give us some rhyme for a change."

"Hear, hear!" from the company, and laughter.

"Yes, Mr. Lightfoot," urged the Premier, "do let us hear one of your forthcoming poems."

"I am so fond of poetry," said Nelly, looking up at the poet with languishing eyes.

Mr. Lightfoot was stammering out a refusal, when the great tragédienne exclaimed: "Ah si, Monsieur Lightfoot, M. Hugo m'a tant parlé de vous."

"But it is addressed to Death," said the poet, softening, "and perhaps——"

Sarah broke into a silvery laugh. "Moi craindre la mort, moi qui me suis suicidée tant de fois! Est-ce que cette thème vous effraye, Mademoiselle Shepherd?"

"Miss Shepherd has died occasionally, I am sure," said the Marquis.

"I warn you that it expresses in poetry the ideas I have just been enunciating in prose," said Mr. Lightfoot.

"That doesn't matter!" said Bab, adding *sotto voce*: "Poetry is none the worse for having none."

Without further prelude, the poet began in a thrilling voice, rising and falling with emotion, the following verses:

"TO DEATH.

"O bitter, blind Death that biddest us hasten
 From the Heaven of Earth to the Hell of Heaven,
 From sorrows that strengthen to joys that chasten,
 And the Stygian sphere of the virtues seven,
 From the fiery flash of the sun fierce-hearted
 To the sorrowful sheen of the Heavenly bar;
 O bitter, blind Death, when from Earth we are parted,
 Make us as blind as thine own eyes are.

"O dismal, dumb Death that stillest the beauty
 Of the words of delight, and the whispers of lovers,
 And the clarion call to sweet Glory and Duty,
 And the thunderous tones that defiance discovers,
 And givest for shout of the man sea-hearted
 Sanctimonious songs from each sensual star;
 O dismal, dumb Death, when from Earth we are parted,
 Make us as dumb as thine own lips are.

"O dreary, deaf Death that drivest us mortals
 From the sacred soft sound of our loves' sweet kisses
 To the passionless praise at the Heavenly portals,
 From the proud human pain to the blind bovine blisses,
 From the shrill wild sound of the wind free-hearted,
 From the discords that soothe to the concords that jar;
 O dreary, deaf Death, when from Earth we are parted,
 Make us as deaf as thine own ears are."

As the last words died on the air, Floppington, the Marquis, and Sarah, broke into rapturous applause. The rest of the company preserved a discreet silence, save that Momus whispered to Dagon: "I wonder whether he'd allow me to sing that in my next burlesque"; that Bab responded: "It would be out of place; it's funny"; and that Dagon inquired whether the poet's dread of going to heaven wasn't a little bit superfluous.

The Premier was the last to cease rapping the table. When he had done so, he became conscious that he was the cynosure of all eyes.

"You see how impartial I am," he said, smiling. "It is not every critic that can separate the form from the matter. Mr. Alderney's *technique* seems to me perfect. I recollect once trying to imitate him."

"You flatter me," said the poet. "I should be delighted to see the result. Your appreciation of delicate effects of harmony is well known to us poets."

"Oh, it's such a long time ago," said the gratified Premier, "but: it began like this—

*"When the Peerage and Priests and Perpetual Pensioners
 That are flame to the flesh shall be flesh to the flame——"*

A suppressed titter ran round the table at this satirical impromptu.

"Ah, Mr. Floppington," said the poet, "would that you, who have a giant's strength, used it to bring that day nearer!"

"Ah, Mr. Lightfoot," responded the Premier evasively, "you could do that by bringing out a cheaper edition of your poems. The present price is simply prohibitive to the working man."

"Thank God!" came with the suddenness of a bullet from Mr. Claviger's lips. "I can understand the pessimism of a Leopardi, even the saddened meliorism of one to whom the fair breathing world with its heroic types of passion and strength is but a Pentonville omnibus. But the modern poet's indecent and jubilant jig on the grave of his dead faith!"

"It is not the death of his faith that the poet celebrates; it is the resurrection of his manhood," cried Mr. Lightfoot, erecting his flabby-muscle arm. "It is freedom; it is the glory of the world, and of his own soul; it is the unutterable loveliness of man, and the ineffable splendour of Nature that no God created and that none can destroy."

"That is going too far," interposed Mr. Dallox, seeing the lightning in Mr. Claviger's eye. "May I venture to suggest that you have not yet got the better of your early imprudence? Agnosticism is much more respectable than Atheism."

"Respectability!" gasped the poet. "I will none of it. Respectability is the bugbear of little minds."

"But surely good taste requires moderation," said the horrified Professor.

"Good taste!" shrieked Mr. Lightfoot. "Good taste is the canon of little critics."

"Look here, Momus, let us have *Trying a Magistrate*," said poor Miss Shepherd, shuddering. "What with dismal, dreary, deaf and dumb death, and all the rest of it, I've got an awful fit of the blues."

The Premier looked at her sympathetically.

"No wonder," said Mr. Claviger. "Death is neither dismal, nor dreary, nor deaf and dumb."

"Lightfoot has evidently personified Death as a funeral mute," said Mr. Dagon.

"Instead of a majestic and awful Angel, leading man from time to eternity," added Mr. Claviger.

"Surely, Mr. Lightfoot," said Sir Hugh, "immortality is imperatively demanded to remedy the injustices of this world."

"That's calling in a new world to redress the balance of the old, isn't it?" asked Floppington, colouring with pleasure at the marked effect of his *mot*.

"I doubt whether any one nowadays seriously believes in his future existence," put in the Marquis.

"There are people who doubt their present," sneered Mr. Claviger. "Great sceptics who affirm that it cannot be denied

that nothing can be affirmed ; but I never knew that any one took them seriously."

"Well, I am convinced the modern man is more concerned about his stomach than his soul," persisted Rockington. "He violates the decalogue, but he would shudder at infringing the dietary laws of his doctor."

"I'll take some *pâté de foie gras*," called out Mr. Dagon hastily.

"I beg your pardon," said the Marquis. "I was thinking of the people who carry their text-books of religion to the dinner-table and consult them piously at every course. Fortunately, many of them read the *Lancet*, and can't eat even the most digestible dishes without suspecting germs, and adulteration, and what not!"

"To the pure all things are pure," remarked the Premier ; and in the laughter that followed this apposite quotation, he drank off another glass of champagne to hide his glowing countenance.

"L'Angleterre c'est la religion ! L'Angleterre c'est la moralité !" cried Sarah enthusiastically.

"C'est vrai," said the Marquis, "very few of us break more than one commandment at a time"

"There, madame, you will observe the superiority of our national character," put in Bab. "We believe that to do anything well, we must do one thing at a time."

"Observe too, madame," said the Marquis, "the perfection to which we have carried division of labour. Such of us as can afford it are moral by deputy. We are great lovers of Christianity in others, and we found Sunday-schools ; we admire chastity, and—— But I will not enumerate.

. Mæx (contendere noli)
Stultitiam patiuntur opes ; tibi parvula res est.'

So Horace said nearly two thousand years ago."

"He was old enough to know better," said Nelly. "I knew it was something improper by your quoting it."

"I suppose if Horace had written nowadays he would have been as obscure as his own allusions," observed Dagon.

"Nonsense !" cried Rockington. "Our best Society poets are to Horace as water unto wine."

"A Butler's analogy in your mouth !" exclaimed Dagon, and the ridiculous pun convulsed the company.

"Talking of analogies," said the Premier, wiping his eyes with his napkin, "I found among Mis—among my books the other day a most curious volume of American origin. The writer tried hard to prove the doctrine of the Trinity—how do you think?"

"By asserting it?" said the Marquis.

"Well, it came to that," answered the Premier, smiling. "The proof was that everything in Nature runs in triads : sun, moon, stars ; man, woman, child ; and so on. The joke was that nearly

all the supposed triads were purely verbal and not in Nature at all. Spiritual intoxication had made the writer see not only double but treble."

Mr. Claviger was staring at the speaker in indignant surprise. "If I recollect aright, Mr. Floppington," he said, "it was your influential puff in the *Nineteenth Century* that gave the book its ephemeral success in England. Why, you said it was a most subtle and penetrative book, marking an era in theology."

"Ah!" said the Premier reflectively, "it is by these landmarks that the retrospective soul traces its progress. Shall animals evolve and not man? Shall man evolve and not Floppington? Happily I have learnt to base my faith on deeper and more logical grounds."

"The only theological analogy I ever heard that would bear examination," interposed the Marquis, "was the comparison of a Calvinist Elect to a successful lottery ticket."

"It's a fine thing to be a Calvinist Elect," said Bab with a sigh. "I once knew one of the tribe. After a long and happy life he got entangled in a succession of law-suits, which so disgusted him with the lawyers that he committed suicide to escape their company for ever."

"I don't believe a word of your stories," said Nelly, laughing.

"I admire your scientific caution," said Mr. Dallox.

"Can't somebody oblige by unfolding the sun myth in my story?" asked Bab anxiously.

"Scientific caution is a bugbear that makes a man afraid to trust the clearest teachings of his own God-created soul," said Mr. Claviger.

"There you go!" said the Professor, with a calm, superior smile. "A man must look before he leaps, mustn't he?"

"But he needn't look through a microscope!" cried Mr. Claviger. "To the whole man, to the man for whom all your science exists, the world is something more than a museum of curious phenomena, which life was given us to label. Your demi-god Spencer has pigeon-holed the universe very neatly—but *après?* We live by admiration, hope, and love; and can I admire ferrocyanide of potassium, or put my trust in sewer-gas, or entertain a passion for the seventy elements?"*

"What a Don Juan!" whispered Nelly.

"You can love gold!" murmured Dagon.

"Believe me," concluded Mr. Claviger earnestly, "it is only by emotion that the world is saved from being ridiculous."

"It is only by emotion that the world is made ridiculous," amended Bab.

"And it is only by ridicule that the world is saved from being emotional," added the Marquis.

"Epigram is a good servant but a bad master," said Lord Thespis, "and I am afraid you gentlemen have been enslaved by

* This was (roughly speaking) the number of elements recognised by the old pre-Mandottian chemistry.

it. For my part, I prefer the original apophthegm to your revised versions."

"Revised versions are always in need of revision," said the Premier. "I am afraid the gentlemen who undertook the recent revision of the Bible have done more to unsettle faith by their action than the entire secular press has succeeded in doing during the last decade."

"Why?" inquired Sir Hugh in much astonishment.

"You see it brings so strongly before people's minds that the Bible wasn't written in English."

"I wonder," put in Rockington reflectively, "whether they were trying to prove the Bible verbally inspired by substituting words of their own."

"It reminds me of the Scotch Professor," said Dagon, "who in his lectures on 'Poetry as Criticism of Life,' proves that if you remove the violent Radical passages all the poets are Tories."

"Mat's definition of poetry is better known than his poetry itself," observed Sir Hugh.

"His strong point seems to be weak definitions," observed the Marquis. "Fancy an old Irish beggar-woman whom you have just relieved coming out with 'Och, and may the Power not oursilf that makes for Righteousness bless you and your childer.' But what will we not worship, now that our religion is gone?"

"I had the honour of dining the other day in the company of the King of Whytawai," said Sir Hugh, "and both at the dinner and at the reception his Sable Majesty was the focus of enthusiastic interest. That sort of thing seems to me worse than even the worship of blue china."

"There's a man of good taste for you, Professor," cried Bab. "He is a cannibal of a high order, by all accounts. In him you have the love of humanity in its purest and most primitive form."

"But his love is of the fleshly school," added Dagon.

"Some people are born to greatness," said Nelly; "some achieve greatness——"

"But most thrust it on others," concluded Lord Thespis.

"Oh, you *are* rude!" cried Nelly. "Taking the words out of my mouth."

"But you didn't want them to remain there," said the Premier chuckling.

"It has often struck me," said Sir Arthur, "that the introduction of quotation marks into a musical score would be an advantage."

"They would be quite unnecessary in your own case," said Dagon gravely.

"But still one occasionally feels the want of them," said Sir Arthur. "There are times when one could better express his meaning by the help of a quotation."

"The absence of quotation marks is shared by conversation, too!" observed Sir Hugh.

"Music and conversation are even more intimately related than

that," said the Marquis. "At least, that has been my experience as an observer. I say observer because I have no ear. To me music is the most gratuitous of all forms of noise."

"Gratuitous!" exclaimed Nelly; "when Patti——"

There was a burst of laughter, amid which Dagon could be heard protesting that music *was* gratuitous, for one simply got notes in exchange for gold.

"No ear," mused Sir Arthur. "Well, it has its compensations. The music of the future is no worse to him than the music of the present."

"I am interested neither in the music of the future nor the future of music," said the Marquis. "At least, only to the extent of wishing that it may have none."

"*Absit omen!*" cried Sir Arthur. "But I admit that if the music of the future *is* to be the music of the future, music will have no future, and the future will have no music."

"*Taurum expellas furcâ, tamen usque recurret,*" said the Marquis laughingly. "I really think, Mr. Floppington, my emendation gives a much more pictorial image than Horace's."

"I don't go in for worshipping images—not even those of poetry," said the Premier, with a somewhat forced laugh.

"Indeed!" cried Dagon. "I understood you were a great admirer of Tennyson!"

"Well," said the Premier guardedly, "what if I am?"

"Oh, nothing! Only I thought all Englishmen worshipped the Idylls of his manufacture."

"To tell the truth, gentlemen," said the Premier with a sphinx-like smile, "I really don't know what I admire."

"Most people admire what they don't know," said Momus. "Omne ignotum pro magnifico—yes, my appetite's most terrific, oh!" he added involuntarily.

"I think Tennyson stands quite alone in present-day English literature," said Bab.

"He has feet enough to stand alone!" exclaimed Momus and Dagon simultaneously.

"Browning is surely on the same level," observed Sir Hugh.

"I said *English* literature," said Bab coldly. "And even if we are to take foreign poets into consideration, that man is only half a poet who merely writes the verse and leaves it to a Society to put in the meaning."

"Poetry was not written to afford parsing exercises for school-boys," said Mr. Lightfoot angrily.

"Perhaps that's why Society is so tolerant to even the most antinomian poetry," said Mr. Dallox, smiling. "It knows the poet means nothing."

"I think that on the whole modern novelists display more invention than modern poets," observed Sir Hugh.

"And modern historians than modern novelists," added Dagon.

"Truth is rarer than fiction, but I don't think it's stranger," observed Lord Thespis.

"Truth is stranger than fiction," corrected the Premier oracularly. "Why, even within *my* experience things have happened which *nobody* would believe, which would even be declared impossible, but which, in reality, are much more possible than probable. I have known the wildest attempts succeed by their very audacity."

"Perhaps that is the cause of the success of American fiction," said the Marquis; "for I think it requires the highest audacity on the part of an author to venture to be so tame."

"I like American cheese better than American fiction," said Floppington. "No Boston man would dare to rise to the height of a really great argument such as I could suggest. Greatness in a book seems to the Yankee mind to mean a collection of little-nesses."

"I anticipate a great development in Transatlantic novel-writing," said Dagon. "One day we shall read announcements like this: 'The Portrait of a Peer, a novel in two libraries, by Henry Howells.'"

"At that rate Richardson will soon cease to be a classic," exclaimed Bab. "He will begin to be read."

"Still, even American fiction is better than our modern novel of culture (displaying any culture indeed but that of the art of fiction), with its sham æsthetics and its picked-up philosophical jargon," said Dagon.

"Yes; what do they mean by putting in such words as 'Hypostatisation'?" said Nelly.

"What do they mean?" cried the Marquis. "Evidently you skipped the preface, or you would have read these words: 'If the author only succeeds in sending one human being to his dictionary, he will feel he has not written wholly in vain.'"

"If all quotation were banished from the face of the earth," intervened Mr. Claviger, who had been sitting with corrugated brow, "we should have far more independence of thought. I mean quotation in the widest sense, so as to get rid of party shibboleths, scientific catchwords and cut-and-dried opinions of every description."

"Vous voulez donc faire un monde de Trappistes," cried Sarah.

"Is it not strange," continued Mr. Claviger, turning reflectively to the Professor, "that men should put a formula into their mouths to steal away their brains?"

"I should say only those do it who have none to steal," said Bab.

"Many people talk glibly of an inspired musician, an inspired poet," said the Premier, "as if that settled it, when the real question seems to be, inspired by whom?"

"Exactly so," said Thespis. "That is where the other arts have the advantage over acting. In the actor alone is the spontaneity of inspiration actually made manifest."

"I don't see that," said Sir Arthur. "If there were no rehearsals, there might be some truth in it. I think Diderot and

Lewes have smashed up all that stuff about the passion of the moment."

"You have not kept *au courant* with the latest literature on the subject," replied Thespis in a hurt tone. "I sent you my pamphlet, I believe."

"What is the opinion of Mr. Claude on the point?" inquired the Premier.

"What makes you ask that?" said Thespis.

"Oh, I thought he would go the whole hog in the competition with you," said the Premier. "By-the-by, what makes him always play the same old part under different names?"

"He evidently believes that a brave man struggling with adversity is a sight for the gods," replied Dagon.

"If that is so, he must have scored tremendously in Hamlet," suggested Thespis slyly.

The Premier laughed boisterously, and the chiming of a marble clock mingled with his cachinnations.

"Good Heavens!" cried Nelly. "The Matinée!"

Sir John Momus and Lord Thespis started to their feet in consternation, and looked at each other's faces and watches.

"Oh, you two are all right! You're only down for monologues," cried Nelly. "I wouldn't miss poor Ben's Ben for any money."

"And I promised to be a juror in *Trial by Fury*," said Dagon.

"Don't worry! There'll be plenty of Jewry," said Momus, "to do honour to one of its body."

The Premier, inwardly cursing the *matinée*, accompanied Miss Shepherd to the door. "Good-bye," he said; "you didn't enjoy yourself. Oh, I could see you were bored. I am afraid the company *was* badly mixed. But it's my first trial, Nelly, you see. I shan't ask you to meet such serious people again. We shall have a rare old time of it, all to ourselves, eh, Nelly? Well, good-bye. Always glad to see you."

"What a stunning good fellow he is, when you come to know him!" soliloquised Nelly, as she was whirled towards the Strand. "Who would have thought it? I'll join the Primrose League this very day, and get Farnie to put an extra verse to my topical song."

When the Premier returned to his guests he found them discussing the influence of Judaism on Art, and commenting on the fact that while there were great Jewish names in music, in acting, and in poetry, painting seemed to be uninfluenced by Semitism. The Professor was laying it down that the reason was that Jews had been too subjective for centuries, and had withdrawn themselves from the observation of external nature. They could produce great philosophers like Spinoza, but they would have to wait long for a man with equal grasp of the objective world.

"I was much interested in the discovery that Jews have had no influence on painting," observed the Marquis laughingly, when everybody had said his say, "because it's a favourite theory of mine that modern Art is essentially Mosaic."

"I don't quite see the force of the pun," observed Dagon.

"It's not a pun," protested the Marquis.

"Well, I don't see the point of the paradox," said Mr. Claviger in a puzzled tone. "Modern Art essentially Mosaic?"

"Yes. The more I see of modern Art, and especially of spiritualistic and allegorical Art, the more convinced I am of the truth of my theory. Mr. Dallox will correct me if I quote the Mosaic Art canons wrongly: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.'"

The Premier's enjoyment of the remark was intense. Tears ran down his cheeks, and he swallowed some more wine in his delight. "I don't think the lower classes would stand any Mosaicism in *their* Art," he observed as soon as the laughter had subsided. "You wouldn't think, Sir Hugh, that I know something of Art practically."

"Indeed!" said Sir Hugh, much interested, and with visions of making the Premier an R.A., and himself an Earl. "Do you paint?"

"I *have* painted," replied the Premier, "though of course I have never exhibited. In the partial eyes of my poor mother, I might have attained a high place in the profession."

"Well, I am sure there were few better judges of pictures in England," said Sir Hugh. "I don't forget, Mr. Floppington, how she patronised me when I was young and unknown, and prophesied that I would one day get to the top of the ladder."

"Well, I gave up climbing the ladder," said the Premier, "and I can't say I regret it. I certainly prefer cabinet-making to painting," and he laughed boisterously. "I am afraid people wouldn't stand *my* pictures in their dining-rooms," he added.

"I don't know that they would be worse than the majority," said the Marquis, smiling. "As a rule, the worst use you can put a picture to is to hang it."

"And the best use, O Philistine?" queried Sir Hugh scornfully.

"Sell it!" exclaimed the Marquis. And more hilarity followed.

But the departure of Miss Shepherd had disintegrated the party, and shortly afterwards the Premier was left alone to soliloquise like Marius before the ruins of the breakfast.

CHAPTER VII.

CONFIDENCES.

FOR a few minutes the Premier remained grinning at the parting complaint of Mr. Bab that he had had no opportunity to let off one of his best impromptus, but soon his countenance grew thoughtful. "I wonder whether they put on their mental Sunday-clothes," he murmured; "but whether their conversation was forced or not, I feel that I can talk quite as intellectually or as wittily as any of

them." And he took to bestriding the room with feverish steps, his breast swelling with a new sense of triumphant power.

He began to meditate a lavish hospitality. His bachelor condition soon recurred to him. More than ever he saw the need of a woman to grace his hospitable board, to be queen of a salon which should be famous throughout Europe, to supplement his political successes by social triumphs. His only near relative, a married sister, was travelling with her husband in their yacht, and drawing up a diary of her tour for use in Sunday-schools. With the rest of the family he fraternised hardly at all. They were a keen, worldly lot. He had never mixed much with them, and now that he was Prime Minister he thought it better to have as little to do with them as possible. He had a horror of doing anything for his family, were it even giving away the smallest Colonial appointment. He for one would be clean-handed. The horny-handed should have nothing to reproach him with. Was it strange that the image of Gwendolen hovered before him now and saddened his gay mood? If he could have seen her sweet face on the other side of the table instead of the grave countenance of the popular comedian! Once more he wrestled with his despair.

The entrance of Tremaine roused him. The secretary's face flared with news like the contents bill of an evening paper.

"Ah, Tremaine!" said the Premier. "I am so sorry you couldn't breakfast with us."

"What's the odds?" cried Tremaine. "Business before pleasure. Did it go off all right?"

"Stunning on the whole. Though they didn't all hit it off as well as I had hoped."

The secretary smiled with an expression of superior foresight. Then his face clouded. "It is as I feared," he said. "Mount-chapel has put himself at the head of a coalition of old Tories and Anti-Suffragist Liberals, and he expects to gain over many of even the Suffragist Liberals."

"Oh!" said the Premier indifferently. "You *can* put a young head on old shoulders, you see."

Tremaine did not smile at the mild joke. He simply stared at his master. The latter yawned heavily and lit a cigar.

"I suppose there'll be awful disappointment at Brooks'," he remarked, puffing listlessly at the fragrant regalia. "They must have expected his lordship to join the party altogether."

"Oh, I know there was some negotiation. Bailey was the intermediary, but it seems the talking it over led to nothing."

"I never for a moment entertained the idea that he would join the Liberals," said the Premier, with another yawn. "The fellow wants to be cock of the walk, and the Liberals have so many fighting cocks that it wouldn't pay. But I thought he had gone too far in the direction of Female Franchise to recede. What's his platform now?"

"We shall know for sure by to-morrow, but I believe he takes up the ground that there is no adequate security for your accepting

the clause in Committee, after the House has given you a majority on the second reading. I had some conversation with a Liberal who had been at the meeting this morning, and he let drop these significant words: 'There are ways by which a Government, though ostensibly working hard for the insertion of a clause, can succeed in failing to carry it.' Of course I at once saw the idea of the combination."

The Premier's eyes twinkled with enjoyment.

"A master-stroke!" he exclaimed in admiration. "It enables him at once to lead those who want the suffrage and those who don't, and without loss of consistency too, even in the eyes of his late colleagues in the Cabinet. It's really splendid!"

Tremaine did not appear to share his master's impersonal delight.

"Yes, for Mounchapel. I see plenty of rocks ahead," he observed moodily.

"On which he'll be the first to split."

Tremaine shook his head gravely. He had always trembled at the inevitable consequences of the Premier's audacity in making an open enemy of this man, though, of course, he did not dare to reproach him.

"It's of no use underrating him," he said. "You'll have a hard fight to get the Suffrage Bill through the second reading now."

"I'm sick already of the beastly long discussion," said the Premier. "There's too much freedom of speech given to the twaddling rank and file. If there was a twenty minutes' rule as there is at the—but I don't intend to let the debate run on beyond Monday, and that'll be too long."

"Why, it's been an unprecedentedly short debate," muttered Tremaine.

"And then they'll be coming with other confounded amendments in Committee, not satisfied with adding on the Female Franchise clause," grumbled the Premier. "It's time an end was made of all that bosh. It's lucky I'm a Conservative, and the Lords, at least, will let the Bill alone."

The secretary looked at his master in fresh surprise. "But, surely," he ventured to remonstrate, "now that Mounchapel is to be the head of a strong faction——"

"D—n Mounchapel," cried the Premier. "That's not the first time you've looked at me as if I were only fit for a lunatic asylum or a seat in the House of Lords. I won't stand it, do you hear? By the way you funk about this and funk about that, and lecture me as if I didn't know my book better than fifty secretaries, one would never guess that I was the man at the head of the affairs of the country. Once for all, am I the Prime Minister of England, or are you?"

During this extraordinary outburst the secretary was too bewildered and shocked to do anything but stand in dazed silence. But when it was over, he said with white lips: "I understand, sir. I have seen it for some time. I will no longer obtrude my services

upon you." He turned on his heel and left the room like a man in a dream. A crowd of thoughts and pleasant memories jostled in his consciousness. How he had once revered this man! Somehow, the tears came into his eyes. Then he felt himself grasped by the arm.

"What do you mean, Tremaine?" cried the Premier anxiously. "Surely you won't desert me, too. You know I can't do without you."

The young man flushed deeply. To be entreated thus by the proud Minister was a new experience. But he had been wounded very deeply. Gently detaching his arm, he moved away.

"Don't be obstinate, my dear fellow," said the Premier in piteous tones. "I've got so much to consult you about before I go down to the House. It isn't as if I were in the habit of blowing you up; I mustn't go in for champagne in the morning any more, I see."

A pang of remorse shot through the secretary's heart, that he had exposed the Premier to the humiliation of this confession. His conscience told him, moreover, that he *had* sometimes presumed upon his position. It was true that Floppington had always admitted him to an extraordinary familiarity, or rather, perhaps, it was his own strong character that had imposed this intimacy upon his master's weakness. Not that their mutual confidence was unprecedented. He knew that Lord Beaconsfield's secretary had attained to an almost equal familiarity. Still, in view of the greater self-reliance and confidence that seemed to have come with the tenure of power, ought he not to have refrained from any half-conscious attempt to play the part of Mentor? Besides, it would be nothing less than ungrateful and dishonourable to abandon the Premier at this critical moment. Without a word he turned back and re-entered the room.

"That's a brick," said the Premier, dropping into his chair with a sigh of relief. "Have a cigar." Still without a word, Tremaine took a cigar, and for some moments the two men smoked in constrained silence. Each in his own way was strangely affected by the reconciliation.

"See here, Tremaine," said the Premier suddenly. "I'm glad this has happened. It'll give me an opportunity of coming to an explanation with you."

The secretary could not repress a look of astonishment.

The Premier smiled. "There you are again! That's just the look that has been annoying me for days past. You're not a diplomatist. We were talking about that over breakfast—not about you, but about the use of language for concealing one's thoughts, and I suppose facial expression was given us for the same purpose."

The young man took the good-humoured hint. "What the devil is he driving at now?" he thought.

"To put it plainly, Tremaine," continued the Premier, dropping his bantering manner, and darting a sudden, straight glance into the other's eyes. "You find me changed."

The secretary laughed uneasily. "Well, I do somewhat," he admitted.

"In what respects?" said the Premier, in a voice firm, but just a shade tremulous. He still kept his piercing gaze fixed on the secretary, who in his embarrassment had ceased smoking. "I am anxious to know how I impress the world. I want the truth from you, Tremaine, for I shall get it from nobody else."

"Well, sir," answered the secretary hesitatingly. "You are a trifle more imperious, perhaps, than of old. And—and—of course you have become much more of a Society man. You've gone out more in a fortnight than you used to do in a year. And your spirits are better, and you make more jokes. And—I really believe that's all."

"On your word of honour?" said the Premier, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"Well, you are a little more slangy than you used to be."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the Premier. "You noticed that, did you? Yes, I think I've done that part of the business to perfection." He was convulsed with laughter. All sorts of strange suggestions flashed through Tremaine's mind.

"Well," said the Premier, recovering himself with difficulty, "I suppose you are curious to know the reason of the change."

Tremaine looked offended. "I hope I am not liable to improper curiosity, sir," he said. "Nor do I desire to seek your confidence on any point not connected with my duties."

"That's all rot, as somebody I know used to say. It's not in human nature. Between us two there ought to be perfect frankness and no tomfoolery. Anyhow, I am going to let you into the know, for I'm sure you'll respect my secrets. You've read *Martin Chuzzlewit*?" Tremaine shook his head. "Well, *Our Mutual Friend*?"

"No," said Tremaine, lightly, but in reality trembling with curiosity. "I don't read any fiction but our own protocols."

"You *are* a duffer, spoiling my illustrations like that. Well, to cut it short, if I am not the old Floppington you used to know, the reason is, that I am *playing a part*. I thought I'd make you open your eyes. Well, this is how it all came about. A couple of months ago, when things were as black as night for my Ministry——"

"They are just as black now," said the secretary.

The Premier laughed. "That's all you know about it, my boy. Take a match. You have let your cigar go out. There had been a Cabinet Council in the morning, at which Mountchapel hinted at resignation if I didn't let him have his own way. As that was impossible, I had almost determined to resign myself. The night came, and I had not yet decided what to do. At last I dashed out into the street and went for a walk in the hope of getting rid of a splitting headache, and to see if things would be clearer in the cool air, and at last found myself in—in Fleet Street."

"A long walk," murmured the enthralled listener.

"I believe you. All at once my attention was attracted by a bill

in a public-house window, stating that the subject for the night's debate was: 'Will Mountchapel resign?' Obeying a sudden whim, I drew my hat over my eyes and went in."

"Why, it's just like the *Arabian Nights!*" cried Tremaine. "Like what's-his-name and his vizier. I am sorry I wasn't with you to complete the parallel."

"Haroun Alraschid is the man you mean. It struck me at the time. Well, entering, I found myself in a long room with mirrors all round it, and benches laden with decently dressed men, nearly all eating or drinking at little tables, or having done so, or about to do so. My entrance attracted no attention. The room was crowded. There was a fellow on his legs addressing a sort of Mr. Speaker; and so, on securing a bit of table, I ordered my pint of beer as I saw I was expected to do, and burying my head in my hands and sipping my beer slowly, I listened. You are interested, eh? Oh, I know what you're smiling at. You begin to remember that Saturday night? Well, yes, you've guessed right. I did finish the beer—quite unconsciously in my excitement. The fact was that the man was an uncommonly clever chap, in proof of which I need only tell you that he predicted that I would never pass the Bill unless I added this Female Franchise clause to it. Well, I have often been smashed up in the Commons and elsewhere, but I was dissected by this fellow. The metaphor well expresses the difference. My enemies in the House pounded me to annihilate me. This fellow—whom I honestly reckon the best friend I ever had—this fellow cut me up only to demonstrate scientifically where I was diseased. He took my whole life to pieces and analysed me till I blushed in my hat. He asked how it was that a man who had come into office with a majority at his back—a man of such reputed high principle and oratorical power—couldn't keep a Ministry together for three months? And he answered his own questions in a style that almost made me feel he was more fitted for my post than myself. He pointed out, in elaborate detail, how and where I had gone wrong; and, better still, how I could get right again. Little by little the man's enthusiasm took possession of me. My heart throbbed with fierce determination. And when the speaker sat down amid well-deserved plaudits, I dashed into the street—another man. Yes, another man," repeated the Premier solemnly. "I entered the room resolved to resign. I left it resolved to rule. I had a strange feeling that Providence must have directed my steps—you know I was always a religious man, Tremaine—and I determined to be guided by the audible voice of Heaven." The Premier rose, and began to pace the room. His words came quickly and passionately. "The man said: 'Let him get rid of Mountchapel and assert himself more.' I have got rid of Mountchapel and asserted myself more. The man said: 'Let him add the Female Suffrage clause.' I have pledged myself to accept the clause as an amendment. The man said: 'Let him drop his poetry and be a Minister of the people.' I have dropped my poetry, and am trying to become a Minister of the people.

"You understand now what I meant by saying I was playing a part. In opposition to my nature I am schooling myself in every possible way to be a practical man of the world, as my heaven-sent adviser directed me. Perhaps in time habit will give me a second nature, and I shall cease to play a part. In the meantime, the belief that God is with me has made me strong, though I am weak; resolute, though I am wavering; confident, though I am doubtful. The faith that inspired Joan of Arc inspires me. Fear, distrust, doubt, cannot chill me with their icy touch. I shall triumph."

The sublime conviction of this last cry sent an electric shock through the breathless listener. Involuntarily he extended his hand in congratulation, and the Premier clasped it with an emotion he made no effort to conceal. At this moment Tremaine felt ready to make any sacrifice for his beloved master.

"As for the slang," said the Premier with a forced lightness that the secretary well appreciated, "I have made a special study of it. A Minister of the people must speak the language of the people."

"Well, really," said Tremaine, smiling, "you speak it like your mother tongue."

"Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. I think I could give you points, though I admit I have learnt something from you."

Tremaine blushed. "And now I can learn something from you. Where, in Heaven's name, did you pick it all up?"

"Society novels, my boy. See what you miss by not reading fiction." Tremaine laughed. "All the Treasury clerks read fiction," said the Premier, "though they are ashamed to confess it, for they hide their novels whenever I look in. By-the-by, I shall want an extra private secretary."

"Why?" asked Tremaine.

"You see," replied the Premier nonchalantly, "I really can't see any fit man to succeed Mountchapel at the Foreign Office, so I am going to take the work on my own shoulders."

This startling announcement took away the secretary's breath. He stared at the intrepid Minister in mingled admiration and amazement.

"There's nothing to funk about," said the Premier, with a bright smile. "I shall get Grantley to post me up in no time. What's an extra department? Besides, it saves dissension in the Cabinet, don't you know? I can't be in a minority of one any more."

The secretary could not resist the infection of his master's spirits. He smiled too. "But the Press will protest," he ventured to urge.

"The Press protest?" demanded the Minister haughtily. "Do you think I care a snap of the fingers for the opinions of the Press? What right have the seedy scribblers or the editorial nobodies one meets in drawing-rooms to interfere with my disposal of the offices at my command?"

"As representatives of the public," murmured the secretary.

"Representatives of the public. Yes, I know," said the Premier with a disdainful laugh. "Pothouse journalists! And what in Heaven's name can they find to say?"

"Why, that the Constitution demands that the two offices should be separate, because in all important matters the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should consult and should defer to the Head of the Government."

"Well, it seems to me that there's no danger of that article being violated now that Mountchapel's gone," replied Floppington sharply; "I can't act without consulting myself, can I?"

Tremane dared not say more. He changed the subject.

"By-the-by," he cried, "I had almost forgotten. There's a letter from Ponsonby grumbling about the delay in selecting the new Mistress of the Robes."

"Bother the new Mistress of the Robes and *her* mistress too!" cried the Premier irritably. "As if I haven't got enough trouble with her reports! These humbugging little appointments are enough to drive a man mad. If it wasn't for the pleasure of having these big pots under one's thumb," he muttered to himself, "I'd chuck the blooming thing up in disgust. But after all, they come in very handy at a crisis like this."

This last reflection was not uncalled for. Indeed, he intended to leave no stone unturned to secure the second reading of his Bill, and the passing of his measures generally. During the whole of his term of office he was an ever-spouting fount of honour, ejecting profuse side-streams of stars and ribbons, of Commissionerships and Colonial Governorships, together with smaller jets of baronetages and peerages, while a great shining central column dashed its spray to the skies, fascinating the heaven-seeking gaze of devout Churchmen. It is not every Prime Minister who is lucky enough to be able to keep this glittering central jet at work, as its subterranean machinery is only kept in order by the breaking down of other mechanisms.

Sir Archibald Alison wrote many ponderous volumes to prove the first half of Rockington's epigram—that Providence was on the side of the Tories; but an unbelieving generation had grown up who knew not Alison, and were consequently ignorant of the political leanings of Providence. To them, this great truth must have been brought home by the amount of ecclesiastical patronage that fell to the share of Floppington. His opponents had been in office a long time before an adverse division in the House and in their own ranks had compelled them to retire to the cool shades of opposition. During that period it was noticeable that the Bishops were given to flying irreverently in the face of the Psalmist's statistics of mortality. They went on clinging to the Church long after they were able to enter one unaided, the props of the Church being themselves in need of propping; while as to minor dignitaries, it was noticed that the Canons, being of Government manufacture, did not go off; and the Deans must have considerably increased the dividends of the insurance companies.

This was very sad. Liberal Churchmen were getting tired of waiting, forgetting that they also serve who only stand and wait. But no sooner had the Liberals gone out and the Conservatives come in, than all was changed. It is true that in the early months of the new Ministry things ecclesiastical went on as usual. Nature does not make changes by leaps. But when the English summer came, then, as the Member for Queeropolis brutally put it, the ecclesiastics migrated in shoals to a warmer clime; and Floppington found himself with quite a plethora of patronage at his disposal. The party enjoyed it, without a doubt; but Floppington did not. The many rival claims he had to dispose of as each piece of preferment fell vacant worried him. He seemed to have the great drawback to a man in authority of being conscientious. Perhaps he had an exaggerated idea as to the duties and qualifications of a bishop or a dean; but certainly he could not be brought by his supporters to see that being the second cousin of a duke who had subscribed liberally to the election fund at the Carlton, gave a man a *prima facie* right to a bishopric or a deanery. "A man should have something of the apostolic spirit," he said to Tremaine; and he shook his head in a dissatisfied way when that gentleman calmly replied: "Quite so; but it's as easy to find it in the second cousin of a staunch Tory as anywhere else, especially if you look for it." Still, on the whole, he managed fairly well; though when he conferred an important appointment on a Radical, his supporters felt dissatisfied. They thought that when Providence showed such an evident desire to be saved by Tory Ministers, it bordered on blasphemy to refuse to gratify it. But then Floppington got a good deal of praise for his impartiality, which consoled him and pleased the party. They felt it a great thing to be led by a man who could rise superior to mere considerations of party, provided he didn't rise too frequently.

But much of this impartiality was yet to vent itself. Up to the present period of our history he had done little to earn the ingratitude of the receivers of his patronage. But now the news that Lord Bardolph Mountchapel was organising a faction against him reminded him afresh of the necessity of looking after, if not exactly the waverers, yet their brothers, and their cousins, and their uncles. It struck him that the few hours which would elapse before he went down to the House could not be better employed than in going over his lists of appointments and applicants, the latter known to him in ways ranging through infinitely subtle gradations from direct demand to indirect refusal.

He whistled occasionally as he went on, but not from want of thought. Now and then he dictated a letter to Tremaine, or gave him a rough draft which was passed on to the assistant secretaries in an adjoining room.

"It's awfully hot," said Floppington, pausing for an instant. "I think I could work better without my coat." He took it off, and slung it carelessly over the back of a chair. "All real working men work in their shirt-sleeves in this weather. You'd better do ditto."

"I'm not very hot," said Tremaine, smiling. "If a national crisis should arise now, you would be found somewhat like Cincinnatus."

"Except that I should be a dictator already," replied the Premier with a hearty laugh. "I wonder how many people in England would accept a Garter on condition of wearing the full robes in addition to their ordinary clothing all through the Dog Days."

"Let me see," mused the secretary. "The male population of England is twelve millions."

"Mostly fools," added the Premier laughingly. "Well, I dare say you're right. Anyhow, the male population serves to recruit the Upper House, whither Blenkinsop will appropriately lead the way. You know his mania for shaking hands with real live lords. Well, he will soon be able to gratify it by shaking himself by the hand from early morn till late eve."

"Blenkinsop to receive a peerage!" cried the secretary, in one of those fits of irrepressible surprise for which he had just been reproached. "Blenkinsop!"

"I don't see why he should be debarred from the honour," the Premier answered with comic indignation. "He's done nothing!"

Tremaine smiled faintly. "No, indeed," he said. "He hasn't even made himself obnoxious."

"If promotions were made on the principle of rewarding obnoxiousness," replied the Premier reflectively, "what did not the Parnellites deserve at the hands of the late Government?"

"They would deserve the same from any Government. It becomes increasingly plain every day that they vote against any English Ministry whatever its creed. Mr. Parnell will probably be known in history by a name analogous to Warwick's—the Ministry-Maker or, better still, the Ministry-Breaker."

The Premier was surveying his confidential secretary with an amused smile.

"Never prophesy unless you know," he said, with bantering condescension. "As a matter of fact the Parnellites, after having shown themselves the truest friends of the Conservatives by voting with them *against* Female Suffrage and bringing them into power, will now, by remaining staunch and voting with them *for* it, keep them in power."

Tremaine's expression of utter amazement sent Floppington into fits of laughter. After a moment the secretary's face took on a sympathetic radiance. The conviction of victory with which his whole being had momentarily vibrated at the "I shall triumph" of Floppington, again penetrated his soul, but this time the impression was calmer and more likely to last.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

SALLY AND THE PAINTER GO THROUGH PERILS TOGETHER.

JACK DAWE did not take the pill his mother recommended, and his mental atmosphere continued overcast by the November fog of pessimism. He walked about listlessly for days, with the aspect—but not, alas, with the unconsciousness—of a somnambulist. As, with haggard and feverish looks, he stalked aimlessly along the squalid regions, he might well have seemed their soul of misery incarnate. Sleep received him grudgingly, and regaled him with visions of Eliza, who alternately shriveled him up with the scornful fire of her fierce black eyes, and maddened him with the tender dialect of the nursery. Of that other face, with the dreamy gray eyes—which the humble painter had probably first caught sight of in a box at the Lyceum—Somnus vouchsafed not a glimpse; a fit punishment for his infidelity to Eliza and his presumption in looking so high. A cat may look at a king, and a painter at an heiress; but only to paint her, *bien entendu*. When morning came he rejoiced that night was gone; when evening came he was glad that it was near. Coming down in his slippers one morning to breakfast, he found, to his surprise, everything dark. A few rays of sunlight stealing through chinks in the parlour-shutters showed that outside it was day, though they did not diminish the obscurity.

“It is perhaps thus with the few gleams of intuition which traverse the darkness of the spirit,” mused Jack, softly descending the last stair. “They do not dispel it, but point, maybe, to a great Source of Light somewhere. Or,” he added, with a melancholy smile, “these rays resemble the glittering speeches of my early days, which were more concerned to prove the brilliancy of their source than to light up the questions at issue.”

He threw open the shutters, and hearing a scampering of tiny feet, he turned round in time to see the “vanishing point” of a tail.

“At least,” he muttered, “I have not skulked into a hole, fearing the light of Truth. Steady, my child, steady!”

The last remark was prompted by a bound into the parlour that made the stuffed birds tremble on their perches, and Mrs. Dawe and her late husband clatter ominously against the green and gold wall. Sally, slipshod, with defiant, unwashed face, dishevelled hair, grimy, turned-up nose, and panting bosom, almost fell into his arms, unable to recover herself after clearing three stairs at a jump.

"I don't care," cried Sally breathlessly. "I wish it was twelve o'clock instead of nine; and a jolly good job too!"

"Have you overslept yourself?" asked Jack mildly.

"What rot! Overslept myself, indeed! No, it's all over my dreams which was 'strordinary long, that's all."

"Your dreams! And what are they about?" Jack inquired with amused interest.

"You!" Sally jerked out with a sullen, defiant bluntness.

"Me!" said Jack, smiling. "Why, my good girl, what can you dream about me?"

"Don't call me a good girl, 'cos I ain't," returned Sally snappishly. "Lately you've been that gentle with me that I can't bear it no longer. You never used to speak a good word for me with the old 'un before, or say 'Thanky' when I brings yer yer boots, as if I was a borned lady, and you'll have to drop it; d'yer?"

Her indignation brought tears into her eyes.

"My dear child," said Jack, who stood amazed before this singular outburst, "whatever has put such ridiculous ideas into your head?"

"Dunno. P'raps they growed 'overnight." In spite of the hard sullenness of the tone, her voice trembled a little.

"Then you had ridiculous dreams. All dreams are nonsense, you foolish girl!"

"This wasn't no nonsense, and I'd dream it again if I 'ad the chance. You see this 'ere pin."

"Yes," said Jack, looking curiously at a long white pin, which Sally had extracted from the bosom of her dress.

"Oh my, didn't she scream!" cried Sally voluptuously.

"Who?"

"Why, 'er."

"Eliza? You pricked Eliza!"

"Pricked ain't the word. You see, she was sittin' with you on this 'ere sophy with 'er arm round your neck, and as I was in the yard a-cleanin' the knives and forks I 'eard 'er a-spoonin' through the open window, and all at once I takes out this 'ere pin and runs it right into 'er shoulder. She give such a screech I woke up in a fright; and when I looked out of a window and see Tim Popper playin' 'is whistle and carryin' 'is books, I knowed it was nine o'clock, and I rushed down."

"But, my dear child, you acted very wrongly in wounding an innocent young woman for no reason whatever."

"Oh, go it, I knowed you'd take 'er part."

"But just consider the question logically. You should not be cruel, even in dreams——"

"I'll dream what I like without asking your leave," retorted Sally.

"You are not amenable to reason," said Jack, still mildly. "Instead of being sorry and your conscience pricking you——"

"I'd prick 'er with my conscience if I 'ad the chance," cried the irritated Sally, bursting into loud sobs

"Hush, my poor girl," whispered Jack, in wondering alarm. He felt as impotent before the complexities of the female character as before those of his own.

The admonition but increased her sobs in volume and in intensity.

"Hush," he repeated, "you'll wake Mrs. Dawe."

The sobs ceased immediately. Supreme surprise excluded all other emotion.

"What, ain't she up?" gasped Sally. "Then she's dead!"

"Dead!" gasped her son, turning deadly pale as the horror of the situation flashed across him. Dead thus suddenly, without saying farewell to her only child!

"Impossible!" he cried.

"That's why I never yerd 'er this mornin', and that's why I never waked. For the ten years I've been 'ere she's allus been up at six."

"But she may be ill," urged Jack.

"Ill, what rot!" cried Sally. "She never was ill in 'er life!"

Jack had by this time recovered some of his equanimity. "What a striking illustration," he remarked to Sally, "your mind is of Mill's theory of unbroken experience!"

"What rot!" returned Sally. "I never 'ad a week of unbroken experience in my life. Arx missus. And we don't keep no cat, worse luck."

So saying she was rushing upstairs, when a shrill shriek of "Sally!" from the upper regions made her heart go pit-a-pat as though she had heard a voice from the grave.

"Well, did you ever?" queried Sally. As this is one of the questions which have this in common with the problems in pretentious philosophical books, that no one expects an answer to them, Jack did not give any. Besides, the Teutonic vagueness of the phraseology rendered doubtful the precise question at issue.

"Oh, you're 'ere at last," cried Mrs. Dawe, sitting up in bed as Sally entered. Her face, massy, large, and round, like Satan's shield, was covered with discordant beads of perspiration and oil, and topped by a dirty cotton nightcap. The room was large and square, covered with discordant strips of carpet, and topped by a dirty ceiling.

"I came as quick as I could. What's a matter a-shriekin' like that?" said Sally. "I thought you was dead."

"I know you'd murder me if you could," cried Mrs. Dawe, "a-lettin' me call you for hours. You'd walk a jolly sight quicker at my funeral."

"What rot! You know you've got to creep along at a funeral."

"You hussy! To mention about my funeral, indeed! It makes my flesh creep—but I'll show you who's got most life in 'er."

Suiting the intention to the words, Mrs. Dawe tried to jump out of bed, and fell back, groaning.

"Oh, my 'ead," she moaned, "it's a-turnin' round like the merry-go-rounds in the Park."

"Oh, what's a matter, dear missus?" cried Sally anxiously, running to the bedside. "Shall I go for the doctor? Shall I fry you a bloater? Shall I——"

"Lift up my 'ead, you fool," cried Mrs. Dawe sharply, "and prop up my back. D'you think I'm going to lay down? That's better. What's the time?"

"Half-past eleven," replied Sally with an air of reproachful superiority. Her audacious retroussé nose, shaded at the point by a black smear, jerked itself towards the ceiling as she made the statement.

Mrs. Dawe's eyes dilated with horror and shame, and she made another ineffectual attempt to rise. "Why didn't you wake me?" she gasped.

"When I come in at six," replied Sally, with the childlike blandness of the Heathen Chinee, "you was that sound asleep that I thinks to myself, 'Poor thing! it's a pity to wake 'er.' So I arxed Jack, and he ses, 'Can't you manage, yourself, for once? Let 'er sleep, she works so 'ard.' So I done everything as quiet as I could."

"It's just like Jack! If he'd only ha' let you wake me then, I might ha' been all right. I'll pick that little bone with him when I see 'im."

Sally bit her lips with vexation. In her anxiety to do Jack a good turn she had, like a coward, transferred the blame to his shoulders.

"It's lucky I bought everything last night," resumed Mrs. Dawe. "Have you stuffed the big plum-pudding with the pennuth of plums in the brown bag under the counter, and chipped the cold potatoes, and warmed the beans in the blue dish, and——"

"It's all done, every inch on it, missus. And I've put on that nice joint of beef for the allimud soup——"

"The beef!" shrieked Mrs. Dawe. "The ninepenny-apenny beef! Why, I bought that for myself."

"D'yer think I'm a fool?" responded Sally calmly. "It's the same beef that was in last Sunday's mock-turtle. And I've scrubbed the shop, too, so that'll save me doin' it to-morrow, the usual day, though it *his* aggravatin' the way people won't wipe their feet, even if they see it's just been cleaned."

"It is aggravatin'—and what always puzzled my late 'usband," put in Mrs. Dawe, mollified by the girl's zeal, "was 'ow the devil people can walk about with such innocent faces and such dirty boots. But I ain't a-goin' to lay in bed ill at my time of life; I'll try to get up."

"Oh, don't, missus, don't," cried Sally. "You're tremblin' all over."

"I must. I ain't tremblin' a bit."

"You shan't. You're ill."

"Ow can I be ill when there's no one to look after the bizness? It ain't nat'ral."

"There's me! And there's Jack been servin' all the mornin' and doin' a roarin' trade with the 'ot peas."

"With the 'ot peas?" cried Mrs. Dawe eagerly. "I knowed they'd take."

"But 'e's goin' out now," added Sally. "I see 'im just take 'is paint-pots. I can serve, missus."

"I dunno so much," replied Mrs. Dawe suspiciously. "'Owso-ever, I wants a cup o' tea, 'cause there's something buzzin' inside my forred, so let Jack bring it up in a jiffy. Jack, mind, not you. Let 'im make 'aste, or I'll 'ave to come down myself."

Sally bounded downstairs, overturned Jack, who was on his knees, rushed to the cupboard, opened it, and dragged out the tea-caddy, all in a minute. "Where's the teapot?" she gasped.

"You're in a great hurry, my child," observed Jack as he picked himself up. "How is Mrs. Dawe?"

"Can't speak," panted Sally. "Drat the spoons, where are they?"

"But I heard her," said Jack.

"She said she'll be down if you don't bring her up a cup of tea at once. She thought it was made, you know. She can't get up. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Do not be so distressed," said Jack soothingly. "I dare say it's nothing serious."

"Ain't it, oh my eye!" responded Sally. "I'm in for it if she comes down."

"Sally," screamed the voice from above, "is Jack comin' with that tea?"

"Oh, lor," murmured Sally; "and the fire not alight yet!"

"Can I help you?" inquired Jack with sympathetic politeness.

"Quick, make the fire," Sally gasped, "while I fills the kettle and measures out the tea."

Jack hesitated.

"Sally!" cried the voice again.

Jack rushed into the shed and reappeared in an instant laden with coal and wood.

"At last my honour is hopelessly blackened," he murmured grimly, as he caught sight of his face (which now rivalled Sally's) in the chimney-glass.

He threw his burden into the grate in a promiscuous heap, tore off a page of a newspaper which was lying on the table, ignited it, and placed it on the top of the grate. A momentary flare, and the paper was consumed.

"Oh, ain't you clever?" contemptuously cried Sally, dashing in from the kitchen with a very small kettle of cold water. "You must put the paper under, quick."

"The fire of Revolution, too," mused Jack as he hastily lit

another sheet, "will be lit up from the bottom." Thus speaking, he set fire to the red fringe which depended from the mantelpiece, without perceiving it, and tried to ram the paper under the thickly wedged mass that stuffed up the grate.

"Lord a mussy on us," exclaimed Sally, briskly turning the kettle into a fire-engine. "Get out of the way," she exclaimed rudely. "And get a cup and saucer, quick."

Jack Dawe sighed and meekly obeyed the maid of all work.

"Jack!" cried the voice, trembling with indignation.

"It's all right, missus," Sally screamed back. "Jack says you must 'ave a extra good cup, so we're a-makin' of it."

"I won't wait 'ere much longer," the voice replied with angry determination.

Sally speedily differentiated the chaotic mass in the grate, and applied a light.

Her master, a blue-and-gold cup and saucer in hand, stood anxiously surveying the scene.

As the paper blazed up, new hope was kindled in both their breasts.

But the next moment hope and the flame died away together.

"I've been and wetted the sticks when I was making out the mantelpiece," cried the exasperated girl, with an oath. "Run for some more."

"Hush!" said the horrified Jack, running to get the bundle of wood, but the admonition was lost in another cry of "Sally! Jack! Are you deaf?"

In a second the dexterous Sally had the wood in a blaze. Then arming Jack with the bellows, she hastily got everything ready for the critical moment when the kettle should boil. Jack puffed vigorously away, and produced an immense volume of smoke. Suddenly Sally uttered an exclamation. "Why, what idjuts we are! The gas!"

Quick as thought, she turned the gas on to the full, and snatching up the kettle held it over the flame. Jack looked on in helpless admiration.

"Froude is right," he murmured. "Action is greater than speech."

"It's nearly done, missus," Sally screamed; "only we're that busy in the shop."

In a few minutes the tea was ready. Milk, sugar, spoon, were inserted—the fight against time had been won.

"Saved!" gasped Sally, falling exhausted into an arm-chair, as Jack, grasping the saucer tightly, began to mount the stairs with cautious rapidity.

"How an external interest takes one out of himself!" he was reflecting. "It is thus true, as Hegel says in his transcendental exposition of Christianity, that only by going out of ourselves are we saved."

At this point, having reached the top of the staircase, he attempted to ascend an imaginary step, stumbled, and let the cup go out of the saucer without being able to save it.

"O Lor'!" gasped Sally as she heard the crash. "He's been and gone and done it!"

"Jack!" screamed Mrs. Dawe, "if you've smashed any o' the blue-and-gold service, don't come near me for love or money! Let me die in peace."

Jack hastily gathered up as many fragments as he could see, and bore them mournfully downstairs.

Sally, crushed by defeat, with pallid but firmly-set features, threw them hastily into the dust-hole. Not for a single moment did the brave girl's presence of mind desert her. Shouting out that she had fallen down and dropped a tin pan, she firmly poured out the rest of the liquid into the cup which trembled in her master's hand.

But it was too late. Mrs. Dawe's shuffling step was heard on the landing above. The old woman was unable to bear the uncertainty of the fate of the blue-and-gold service; her dauntless energy had conquered physical weakness. She was coming.

"Cut!" whispered the devoted Sally. "Here's the paint-pots." She dragged them in hurriedly from the shed. "I'll say you went out long ago."

"Never!" replied Jack, setting them down firmly in the corner. "I will not desert you, my child. It is not your fault."

She thanked him by a look.

"Then stay here," she whispered, "and keep 'er out o' the shop till I takes down the shutters. Try to get 'er up to bed."

Jack obeyed instinctively, as one always obeys the born commander.

He took up his position with his back to the glass of the door of communication, and with beating heart awaited his mother's approach.

She came like Night.

"D'you call this a tin pan?" she shrieked, before she was well within the room.

Her son looked at the fragment, which she thrust into his eyes, and hung his head on his breast.

"'Ow dared you touch the blue-and-gold set? Ain't I warned you a million times not to lay a finger on 'em?"

Then, looking round, her voice took a higher range with each successive discovery.

"A fire in my best room, a-spilin' all the furniture, as if the one in the kitchen ain't good enough! The gas blazin' away in broad day as if it was below!! I'm ruined!!! The paint-pots on the new carpet, and the mantelpiece set on fire!!!! And you've gone and burnt the only *Free Thinker* I ever loved 'cause it 'ad that picture of the Devil in his Cookshop, just to spite me!!!! This is all one gets by bein' ill. But it's all over yer not wakin' me this mornin'. Jack, you wicked, foolish boy, you've killed your only mother."

With these ominous words, Mrs. Dawe, having by this time overtaxed Nature's endurance, fell forwards on the sofa.

Quivering under the accusation, and acutely conscious that it

was not altogether false, Jack rushed to the couch and lifted up her head. The globular mass drooped heavily on his arm; she had fainted. Turning in frantic remorse to the table, he seized the second blue-and-gold teacup and dashed its heated contents into her pallid countenance.

Little did Mrs. Dawe think, when she clamoured for the cup of tea, that she would receive it in this fashion. The divinity student may draw the obvious moral. But the two-and-eightpenny Bohea (surpassing in quality the coffee that the poor woman had recently declared wasted on Sally, and better thrown away—alas! how do our words return to us with stings in their tails!) produced no effect except upon the gorgeous carpet and the horsehair covering of the sofa.

Again Jack looked wildly round—for something fluid to throw over his mother—his eye fell on the paint-pots. Poor Mrs. Dawe!

Luckily at this instant, Sally, after a cautious peep through the door, flung it open and burst into the room in wild consternation.

Jack breathed a sigh of relief—all would be well now. With such confidence had the noble girl inspired him in so short a time!

“Oh, my poor missus,” sobbed Sally, bending over the inanimate form, her long dishevelled hair floating vaguely over her mistress’s fat face with its corpse-like hue. “Oh, my poor missus, I said you was dead the moment you didn’t get up—and I was right.”

But there was no time for grief now.

“Some water!” she commanded, loosening the dress which Mrs. Dawe had hastily assumed. “Lots of it.”

Jack hastened to fill a large soot-covered saucepan, and set it down on the floor near the sofa.

“Why didn’t you bring a pan?” said Sally sharply. “You’ll ruin the carpet.”

The streams of tears were dry on her face now, but their beds were plainly marked by contrast with the sooty regions around. She dipped her hand into the saucepan and bathed the cold brow of her mistress, waiting between each application of the liquid to see its effect. During one of these intervals she observed Jack’s eyes fixed on her, and immediately afterwards catching sight of her face in the saucepan, she applied the water to her own countenance instead of to its original destination, and wiped herself hurriedly with her greasy apron. If the ruling passion is strong in death, it is especially strong when the death and the passion are divided between two persons. O all-potent Vanity, that pressest into thy service a saucepan of water, a tin pan, a silver inkstand!

Presently Mrs. Dawe gave a sigh and opened her eyes.

Jack uttered a cry of joy. “A truly wonderful girl,” he thought, “who seems to do the right thing by instinct—would we dreamers were equally blessed! Under this humble exterior lives (as her true complexion lived under the soot) a pure and fearless spirit. Truthfulness, Veracity as of one of Carlyle’s heroes, looks from her eyes. With education, with meditation on the eternal verities inarticulate as yet to the ear of her soul, but ever striving to get

themselves heard, with listening to the Silences, what noble womanhood might not emerge from this dreary girlhood! By the side of her, that dreadful Eliza Bathbrill appears but emptiness and discord."

"Jack," groaned Mrs. Dawe, passing her hand over her humid forehead, "put up the umbreller, but beware of squalls. It's a ill wind as blows umbreller-makers no good, as your father——"

She closed her eyes again and fell back exhausted. A dead silence ensued, disturbed only by the splash of another handful of water.

"My poor 'ead," she muttered, reopening her eyes after a moment of anxious suspense. "It never felt like this afore—seems as if it was somebody else's 'ead. But two 'eads is better than one. Is that tea a-comin'. Jack?" She raised herself on her elbow and gazed vaguely round.

"It's all right," cried Sally cheerfully. "'And over the cup, Mr. Dawe."

"It's s—spilt," stammered Jack, cowering under her anticipated scorn.

"What's a matter, Sally?" inquired Mrs. Dawe feebly. "What are yer a-kneelin' on the floor for, like the parson the day he runned away and forgot 'is umbreller—corduroy trousers can't stand it—let alone yours."

"You're ill, missus," replied Sally. "You must go to bed."

"Go to bed!" cried Mrs. Dawe, partially recalled to reality by the horror of the idea. "And the business?"

"Jack is lookin' arter that."

"Come 'ere, Jack." He obeyed, and received a maternal kiss. "You won't go out to-day, Jack, 'specially as the 'ot peas is sellin' like wildfire, all out of my own 'ead, too. 'Ow much did you take this mornin'? A 'eap o' money?"

"Yes," cried Sally. "You must 'umer 'er," she whispered.

"But you needn't give 'em a 'eap o' peas for their money. And above all spare the winegar—it ain't good for their digestions. Lean down. I've got summat to tell you."

He put his ear to her mouth.

"Beware of Sally," she breathed; "and look arter the till."

"And now," she added aloud, "that you've promised to take the shop for the arternoon, I'll go to bed."

She rose, made a few steps, staggered and fell into Jack's arms.

"We must carry 'er," said Sally. "I'll take 'er 'ead, 'cause I can walk backerds better than you."

"It will be too heavy for you," said Jack hastily.

"Yer very kind," replied Sally; "but yer might drop it. The legs don't matter."

"Men always drops women when they're tired of 'em," groaned Mrs. Dawe.

"But I'll be very careful," said Jack, cutting the question short by seizing the head.

He was very proud of this decisive action, as, staggering under

the weight, he gingerly made the backward ascent, Sally bringing up the rear of the procession.

"Can it be," he reflected, "that the world gives one only what he takes; and that in the same peremptory fashion one could get to the head of the body politic, and keep it too? Wise Mountchapel!"

They deposited Mrs. Dawe on the bed.

"Go for the doctor!" ordered the maid of all work. Jack went for the doctor. Sally put her mistress to bed, and waited anxiously for Dr. Thomas, though an under-current of "Jack" ran through her mind. For the first time in her life she had tasted the sweets of power; not of that vulgar power which is obeyed grudgingly, but of that gentler force which in this case seemed to render Jack as pliant as wax, and as obedient as a party man. The old awe with which she had once regarded him had been shaken by his sweet reasonableness and delicate chivalry during the past few weeks, and the last remnants had just been destroyed by the maternal contempt that his awkwardness excited. There was still a vast gap between them, of course; but what firmer bridge than the common memory of common danger?

Presently Dr. Thomas came, saw, and prescribed. Sally, armed with hieroglyphics, was despatched in haste to the surgery. On her way through the parlour, Jack, who was ruefully surveying his grimy face in the glass, stopped her.

"How is she?" he inquired.

"He says she's bad, but 'e 'opes she'll be all right."

"A meliorist, like George Eliot," observed Jack. "Sally, do you know I consider you a very extraordinary girl? You have behaved like a heroine. How shall I reward you?"

"By tellin' me," was the blunt reply, "who yer like best, me or 'Lizer?"

Jack smiled at the *naïveté* of the question.

"Ingenuous soul," he thought, "where Nature's innocent instincts are still free from the veneer of conventionality!"

The instinct for poetry is one of Nature's strongest, if not most innocent. In tender moments scraps of Rossetti sang themselves in Lady Gwendolen's brain as she gazed into the eloquent eyes of the Hon. Arnold Floppington. Gazing into Jack's eyes now, Sally chanted softly to herself the classic lines:

"Stand upright upon your feet
And choose the one that you love best."

"I like you very well," replied Jack, seizing the opportunity, "but you see Eliza is educated, and so must you be. I'll see what I can——"

"But supposen," interrupted Sally eagerly, "I could read and write, too; which would——?"

"Education means more than reading and writing, my dear child. Reli——"

"Well, suppose I knowed everything," urged Sally, determined to press the point, "would yer like me as well as her?"

"Better, my child, better."

Sally uttered a cry of joy.

"I'll begin this very day. Will yer learn me?"

"Gladly," replied Jack, his face brightening at the thought of a definite work to do, and his eyes filling with tears at the enthusiasm for knowledge on the part of the poor drudge.

Sally uttered another exclamation of delight, seized his hand, put it to her lips, and danced through the shop into the street.

CHAPTER II.

LIFE BEHIND THE COUNTER.

BEHOLD, then, Jack Dawe installed, for the first time in his life, behind the counter of the Star Dining Rooms. In point of fact, Mrs. Dawe had never before had occasion to demand his services in this respect, nor to interfere in any way with his daily duties. As Sally remarked, illness never made its appearance in her mistress's organism, which was in such a state of physical perfection as to go through its daily and yearly cycles of work with the punctuality of a planet—whence, perhaps, the name of the establishment. No wonder, then, that its sudden failure to appear at the shop in its diurnal orbit should have been ascribed by Sally to complete extinction, not to say evaporation.

As Mrs. Dawe insisted on Sally's staying with her whenever the girl was not actually engaged in cooking, there was no alternative for Jack but to take his mother's place. We blush to record it, but the reader—who will probably by this time have discovered in him the not unusual combination of lofty views with colossal laziness—will not be surprised to hear that he grumbled internally at the work both as work and as derogatory work! Derogatory, forsooth! The priggishness of the *nouveaux riches* is as nothing to that of the *nouveaux instruits*. What right, moreover, had he to grumble who had brought down this infliction on his own head by lying in bed late, and not going to work at the same hour as his professional brethren? In truth, it would not have been easy to find his equal in the *dolce far niente* line, even amongst the hardest-worked functionaries of the Royal Household. The trifling physical exertion of fishing up Irish stew caused this hyper-sensitive being the extremest agony; he served up a dish of French beans, not at all heavy, with stifled groans; he ladled out the *à la mode* soup with a face as woebegone as if he were buying the liquid instead of selling it. Utterly regardless of his mother's hard-earned hoards, he gave one half of the customers too much change, and the other half too little; the latter complained of the injustice, the former did not. Mrs. Dawe's till suffered, and was purified and cleaned out accordingly. Destitute, too, of the smallest *esprit de corps*, he dragged his mother's reputation in the dust. Unable to distinguish by sight between the various genera of Bethnal Green pastry, unskilled in judging of the interior

by the indications afforded by the formation of the crust, he made guesses as to what was wanted, as wild and random as if he were a Prime Minister serving out Acts of Parliament, instead of a waiter serving out meat-pies. Ministers of every kind are notorious for proportioning the intensity of their dogmatism to that of their ignorance, but, to give Jack his due, he did not insist that a man was eating eel-pie when—with much use of sanguinary language—the man brought the yawning compound full of parti-coloured morsels of ham into close proximity to his nose, and ordered him to see, taste, and smell it.

Only in Art criticism is such insistence possible.

“Can it be,” he asked himself mournfully, as his first customer, who was a dirty little boy, pointed out that a sausage was not precisely identical with a saveloy, “that I am unfitted for whatever part I undertake to play? So it has always seemed. I am always making absurd mistakes in everything, even when the task appears of the simplest, as now. Would the consequences were always as harmless as now! Poor old vicar!” He sighed bitterly, and overturned a huge salt-cellar.

“To judge by results I must have been doing that unconsciously all my life,” he reflected, with a sad smile irradiating his melancholy though delicately noble countenance, and illuminating his dreamy eyes with a pathetic brightness. “’Tis strange how old superstitions cling to one, and how the practical superstitions of the old religions survive the faiths themselves, as though they were the osseous skeletons that lived when the superstructures of once glowing flesh have long since crumbled to dust—I beg your pardon!”

The first ragged little boy had vanished (in company with the greater part of the plateful of smoking sausages), and there stood in his place another ragged little boy (sent by him to put the finishing touches to his work), but Jack Dawe did not notice the difference. The little imp had just completed his annexations when Jack perceived his presence. But the boy preserved wonderful equanimity. He was one of the shining lights of the Board School round the corner, which always put him forward as a show boy. Incredible as it appears, it is a well-authenticated fact that the best educationists of the age expected that the multiplication table would moralise the masses.

“’Aypenny plate of peas, please,” he demanded calmly, knowing that Mrs. Dawe did not “make ayports,” and so foreseeing a dignified exit.

To his alarm Jack began shovelling peas upon peas into a plate. Every instant the danger of the discovery of the empty plate increased; delay would be fatal.

“D’yer call that a ’ayport?” said the show boy, rejecting the heap with feigned contempt, but determining to let his friends know of the revolution in the business. “Whyn’t yer give a feller valley for ’is money? Blest if I don’t change my cookshop.” With this Delphic *double entente* he was quitting the shop when Jack observed

mildly (though with much internal approbation of his own business powers): "Come back! You haven't paid me for the saveloy."

The boy heard no more than the first two words; he was off like a shot, leaving Jack staring blankly at the vacant doorway.

"The political economists tell us," he muttered at length, "that Society is based on the universal desire to get something for something else; this theory would do for primitive times, but as the higher civilisation advances, is there not a universal desire to get something for nothing? The invention of printing is thus utilised for puffery; the burglar profits by the latest scientific discoveries, and is, strange to say, among the best educated men of——"

"Come along, you little wagabond. 'Ere he is, Mrs. Dawe—I beg your pardon, Mr. Dawe—I 'ope Mrs. Dawe isn't ill. He just run into my arms." So saying, the policeman dragged in the small boy by the ear.

"I suspected summat," he added. "Turn out your pockets, you young scamp."

"I shan't," screamed the boy, struggling hard for liberty. "Leave me go, or I'll 'ave yer locked up."

The sublime audacity of this threat took away the policeman's breath.

"Lock me up," he gasped. In an instant the boy had writhed from his grasp. But only for an instant. He darted after him and brought him back, both panting for breath.

Eight greasy saveloys, brown, savoury, smoking, were now brought to light.

"You dare touch my saveloys!" cried the boy, still defiantly. "I'll take yer number if yer does; I bought 'em at a place in Whitechapel.

"Boy," said the policeman solemnly, "they are still smoking. Where do you expect to go when you die?"

"Not before the beak," cried the boy, breaking down at last. "Don't take me before the beak—I'll tell the truth. The other boy who was 'ere first give 'em to me."

Jack looked sad. "You grieve me, my boy," he said, "by your falsehood. You know there was no other boy here before you. However, I suppose you are hungry?"

"Ain't 'ad nuffin' to eat for three days," cried the boy eagerly. "Father and mother is dead, and I've got three little brothers."

"Poor fellow!" cried Jack. "I thought as much. Take some potatoes. Excuse me for offering you cold ones, to-day's are not ready yet. But why did you not ask?"

"Why, it's all gammon, Mr. Dawe," exclaimed the horrified policeman; "his father keeps a ice-cream stall, and rubs his face with walnut-juice to imitate a Italian at the top of the road. There you are, he's bolted again." And the zealous functionary was dashing out again in pursuit, when Jack cried: "Let him go, if you please."

"Let him go! After taking eight saveloys for nothing!"

"Excuse me," replied Jack, politely but firmly, "he did not take

them for nothing. In the first place, he taught me to distinguish between a sausage and a saveloy. And in the next, his abstraction of them supplied me with food for reflection on the *nexus* that binds together modern society, and I found it to be the possibilities which gregariousness affords of over-reaching your neighbour. Good morning."

The policeman left, tapping his forehead significantly.

"I heard he was a bit cracky," he muttered, "never cracking his jokes in the shop at dinner-time as he used to do, and behaving strange all round. But I never thought he was as bad as this. You never know what to expect of them political fellers! And don't he look old and ill! I wonder," he added, resuming his beat, "what 'ud become of our wives and families if all thieves was offered cold potatoes with apologies."

As dinner-time approached, the straggling line of customers began to be changed into a more and more serried file. The invading tide, beginning with wavelets of small boys, and creeping up steadily and surely, gradually overflowed the high-water mark of Jack's powers of attention. The diversity and multiplicity of the orders drove him to distraction. Thought was completely submerged, not a single reverie could raise its head above water. The "bore" was at its height a few minutes after one, and the appearance of Sally at this juncture was as welcome as that of an additional customer was unwelcome.

Sally, who came to take stock, remained to serve, and took the tide at the flood. Instead of returning at once to her sick mistress with news of how the day was going, the girl—encouraged by the glad smile with which Jack greeted her, and seeing his infantile impotence—joyfully lent a hand. Her self-sacrifice was not lost upon Jack, who knew well how the vials of his impatient mother's wrath were filling upstairs.

Relegated, temporarily, to the single function of dispensing the hot peas, on which there was a tremendous run, he worked away more manfully, occasionally stealing an admiring look at the devoted and dexterous drudge, who, smiling from pure lightheartedness, was here, there, and everywhere, at the same instant.

Without, the midday sun was heating the dreary road to unhealthy sultriness, and the glorious blue sky, strewn with the most delicate cloud-gossamer, daintily woven into structures of faëry, looked down on another expanse strewn with litter and disease-germs. Within, one perceived an atmosphere laden with clouds of steam, with odours more or less subtle and intermingled, proceeding from the eaters as well as from the eaten, and with the breaths of unwashed adults and children; the sounds of a score of munching mouths, the clatter of knives and forks and spoons and plates, the rattle of money, the gurgling and sucking-in of soup, the orders—ranging from fortissimo to pianissimo—the bursts of laughter, the half-inaudible remarks spoken with full mouths, the inchoate quarrels about "shoving" and the monopoly of too much room; the frequent sighs of the master of the shop, whose brow perspired

externally and ached internally; and through all the din a continuous current of conversation on the one topic of which the morning papers were full. Some of this discussion shall be faithfully reported, with the exception of ornamental superfluities.

"I don't see what a woman wants with a wote," observed a burly man with a ragged black beard. "It's a-flyin' in the face of Providence, which orders that women should have the kids, and men the wotes. A nice thing if you wote one way and your old woman another—the blessed Act 'll make no end of family quarrels, as if there wasn't enough already."

"That's all my eye," replied a tall, thin man with a very red nose. "There needn't be no family quarrels at all about it. If my old woman don't wote as I want 'er, I'll give 'er a black eye that'll stop 'er going outside the door to wote at all. Family quarrels, indeed! You Tories always exaggerates."

"Get out with you for a pair of fools," interposed the man with the rat on his cheek. "If you stop your wife woting you diminish your income. As a married man I value the Act at I don't know how many extra half-pints for me a year."

"Yah! We've got you, then!" exclaimed the shrill treble of a withered old charwoman. "We won't marry you!"

"I don't think *you will*, old gal," cried a young man in a paper cap. There was a general burst of laughter mingled with applause that made the young man blush and roused Jack's dormant faculties.

"Have I done anything foolish?" was the first thought that suggested itself. But a few minutes' listening convinced him that the laughter had not been directed at him. It also naturally enough gave him rather a shock to find under discussion a subject on which he had himself reflected lengthily, and at the discovery, a rapid succession of vivid images and trains of thought coursed through his mind. The debate, which was good-humoured on the whole, and far from dull, seemed to be the freer for the absence of Mrs. Dawe, who was wont to come down on the orators with the sledge-hammer of posthumous aphorism; even the silent members ventured to express their opinions.

"And with all due deference to the Honourable Arnold Flopping-ton," concluded the polite young man in the paper collar, who had modestly waited till nearly everybody else had spoken, "I think he's a great fool; don't you, Mr. Dawe?" He paused and looked at the hitherto silent Jack, with the reverence of a disciple. The last word remained to be spoken.

Jack started at the sudden appeal to his judgment, but was silent.

"Don't you think he's a great fool?" repeated the young man in astonished disappointment.

"I am sure he is," replied Jack.

The company gave a buzz of applause, and the young man coloured with pleasure.

But there was one recalcitrant member. This was the rat-ridden man, who had a personal grudge against Jack Dawe.

"I don't see it at all," he remonstrated stoutly.

"Then your mind is illogical, my friend," replied Jack calmly.

"I ain't so mad as you," sulkily answered the man, who would never have dared to make such a remark in Mrs. Dawe's presence.

"Silence!" cried the polite young man.

"Shut up!" screamed Sally, "or I'll chuck the soup in yer ugly face."

"I ain't going to shut up," muttered the man. "I ain't going to be silenced by a stuck-up Radical. I maintain that Floppy ain't a fool. Floppy'd make ten of the likes of *him* any day. Floppy knows what he's about."

"That shows your mind *is* illogical," retorted Jack, warming up. "He *is* a fool, and he *doesn't* know what he's about. For if you looked at the matter logically you would see plainly that he should either have allowed the suffrage to be given to women long ago, or that he should never have permitted it to be introduced at all."

"Oh, of course, that's always the way with you Radicals. You're all as alike as the peas I'm eating. Now I'd wager Mr. Dawe, that when the Radicals introduced something of the sort you were among the first to praise it to the skies and to abuse Floppy for opposing it. Whatever Floppy does is wrong with you."

"It is not so," replied Jack earnestly. "I judge the man by his works, and not his works by the man. And in sober truth, whatever he does *is* wrong. But why argue with a prejudiced man like you? As for this female suffrage business, your mention of peas made me reflect that modern politics is like a game of thimble-rig—one never knows under which thimble the pea of reform will be found. The Conservatives——"

"I don't know what you're speechifying about, old man," exclaimed a young man with a good-humoured visage, rushing into the shop, "but I suppose it's all right. I'll take a plate of those peas, Jack, quick."

Jack stopped short in his harangue and mildly built up a broad-based pyramid of peas to such a height, even for him, that Sally rushed forward to stay his generous spoon.

His measures would certainly have maddened his mother now, ruinous as they were before.

"No, you don't," cried the young man, whisking the plate out of Jack's hand, and bolting its contents all down in a few seconds, to the admiration of the company.

"Give us another, Mrs. Dawe," he cried—"I mean Jack. But hang me if you ain't like an old woman altogether now!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the rat-ridden man, while Sally, who was sluicing the dirty plates, started up with flashing eyes.

"Where's your old jokes?" continued the young man. "And why don't you come to the 'Cogers' any more? We miss you awfully. By Jingo, you must come to-night! What a grand opportunity you'd have of slinging into Floppy! It just wants to be done in your styck. We shall lose a treat. And it'll be specially

apropos. We ought to make a field-night of it in imitation of the Commons, and we don't want a lot of prosy duffers to spoil such a splendid opportunity. They made enough mull of Floppy's jockeying Bardolph Mountchapel out of the Cabinet. How differently you would have handled that theme, now!" The young man heaved a regretful sigh. "Don't let this slip, anyhow."

"What opportunity?" inquired the painter wearily.

"Why, the subject for to-night is the Governmental Concessions. And d'ye mean to say you haven't heard the rumour about Floppy's marriage? It first appeared in last week's *Truth*, I think. They say he's going to get spliced to one of the leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement—Lady—what's her name?—Lady Harley. Two and two are four, ain't they, Jack?"

For an instant the close steamy shop, with its fumes, and its uncouth crowd with their munching jaws vanished, and by some link of association a pale dreamy face shone before Jack's eyes through a mist of tears. He staggered, and a cry of sharpest pathos rent the air:

"Oh, Gwendolen! oh, my love!"

A roar of laughter greeted this transpontine effort.

"Bravo, Jack!" cried the young man in a burst of admiration. "Do that again to-night and you'll bring down the house. I've never seen you do anything so funny in your life. But go on: 'Oh, Gwendolen! oh, my love, give me your hand, and I'll give your grandmother a vote.'"

* * * * *

"I can't stop up, missis," cried Sally, as the clock was striking three. "I can't do more than run up and see to you every now and agen; we was never so busy in all our borned days. And everybody is a-sayin' as 'ow the cookery is better than they ever tasted afore."

The intense delight depicted on Mrs. Dawe's face during the utterance of the greater part of this sentence vanished as she felt the sting it carried in its tail.

"You're a liar!" she exclaimed, turning purple in the face. "You can no more cook than I can—than I can fly. The only dish you can do is Irish stew, and a nice mess yer make o' that, too."

"Well, I made a nice mess of it to-day, anyhow," replied Sally, grinning. "And Jack's doin' a roarin' trade in it this very moment. It's as much as he can do to take the money."

"Crow away, my gal, when you've got your missus on the heap. But it isn't no dust-heap; I ain't yet carted out as rubbish into the cimitery. We'll see who's got most life in 'er yet. Crow away, Sally, but remember, as my late 'usband said, the cheekiest cock don't crow when he's stuffed."

So saying, Mrs. Dawe vindicated her vitality by once more jumping out of bed.

"Very good," said Sally sullenly, "if you *will* kill yerself, yer must take the consikkences. Y'ain't a-goin' down in your bed-gownd!"

"I ain't a hopera singer, ham I?" demanded Mrs. Dawe with indignation, as she staggered out through the door. "I'm goin' to listen 'ow many asks for Irish stew, that's all."

Sally received the information with a tremulous quiver of the lips, and the old defiant look came into her face. There was a moment of intense silence, broken only by the loud beating of the girl's heart, and the stertorous breathing of the old woman.

"Why, Sally," shrieked Mrs. Dawe, "I don't 'ear a customer in the shop!"

"You must be very ill indeed, mum," said Sally compassionately, "for there's a dozen if there's one. Did yer tell the doctor as you was deaf?"

For answer, Mrs. Dawe snatched up a blanket, enveloped herself in it, and rushed down the stairs dragging Sally behind her tugging at the blanket to keep her back.

"Oh 'Eavens, I'm ruined!" cried the distracted old woman, beginning to wring her hands as she at once perceived the shop completely deserted, the shutters up, and the door closed though not bolted. "I'm robbed. Where's Jack? My own son leavin' the business at the mercy of the neighbours! I'm ruined!"

"What, ain't Jack here?" said Sally innocently. "Then he's just this moment gone."

"Gone!" she screamed. "And so is the business. And where's he gone, the vagabond?"

"Oh, missus, he's got such a wonderful order. I seed the tellygraph come. Jack said it would bring 'im a mint of money, and he told me he was goin' to paint it soon, and while I was up just now he must have served all the customers and shut up the shop, and so——" Sally's breath and inventive powers failing at the same time, she stopped.

Her mistress, without heeding her, had rushed to the till. A scanty sprinkling of coppers alone redeemed the bottom from bareness.

"He's took all the silver," Sally hastened to say, seeing the deadly horror of Mrs. Dawe's expression. "He knowed he couldn't trust me."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried Mrs. Dawe; "you've been tellin' me a large parcel of lies. It's 'cause you never taken no more, not 'cause he couldn't trust yer. D'ye think I'd a picked yer out when yer was that 'igh if I didn't know yer was honest and truthful as the day? No, you never taken no more; you see yer can't do without the old woman, arter all." This reflection gave her such acute pleasure as almost to counterbalance the shock administered by the emptiness of the till. She turned round suddenly to enjoy her triumph in Sally's humiliated countenance, and instead—poor creature—discovered the girl in the act of furtively concealing the paint-pots. She raised her eyes in horrified astonishment, and the blanket slipped off her shoulders to the ground.

"That undootiful jackanapes," hysterically sobbed the woman in dirty white; "he ain't gone to paint at all. I know what it is—

he's gone to get drunk again, like the day he went to the Foresters', when he lost his paint-pots. He only cares for his own pleasures, he does; he don't valley the money I earnt by the sweat of my brow, cookin' all day long, a bit. He goes and shuts up my shop in the middle o' the day to go on the spree. Oh, oh! and my good name and all the custom'll go to that ugly Mrs. Prodgers; oh, oh!"—here Mrs. Dawe could utter nothing but sobs for some time—"a spiteful, mean, religious old cat, who would pray for you behind your back—pray for you behind your back."

The thought of being eclipsed by a woman who would do this was too dreadful to allow of any other idea being contemplated for some time.

"*I'll go to bed,*" the broken-hearted creature moaned threateningly; "*I'll go to bed.*"

Sally sat at the bedside all the afternoon with humid eyes, attending on her mistress with the gentleness of an unprofessional nurse.

Mrs. Dawe sobbed for a long time in sullen despair, refusing all her handmaid's tender ministrations. At last she fell asleep.

Then Sally got a number of the *Freethinker*, and, in the intervals of readjusting the blankets which the uneasy slumberer was continually throwing off, she studied the formation of the letters of the alphabet.

CHAPTER III.

RESUMES THE HISTORY OF MOUNTCHAPEL.

NEVER in the whole course of his career had Bardolph received such a knock-down blow as that administered by the mild sentences of the *Standard* paragraph. The calm, deliberate, official tone made him shudder with the conviction of impotence, and when the first shock of pure surprise was over, he felt like some Arctic voyager hemmed in between inexorable icebergs advancing surely and majestically to crush him to powder. Nothing in his experience, even of himself, had prepared him for the sublime audacity of the *coup* dealt him by the astute and wily diplomatist whom he had imprudently quarrelled with. He had expected a visit from one or other of his colleagues after the Cabinet Council; but the omission of one and all to put in an appearance had not made him very uneasy. Had he known how overwhelmed they were in all senses by the now historical proceedings of that Council, he would not have been so overwhelmed himself by surprise, indignation, alarm, and remorse. And the first emotion was never absent from his agitated consciousness. Not even the epigrammatic Frenchman who has taught us to expect nothing but the unexpected could have been more surprised at the occasional falsification of his anticipations than was the pragmatic Englishman at the failure of his own insight. That Floppington—he the dreamer, the prize-poet, the one man that could awe the frivolous Commoners with solemn, religious

perorations, the simple-minded scholar with the gentle vein of humorous melancholy—that this man should have all along been as consummate an intriguer, as worldly a man and politician as himself, lowered his view of human nature and galled him to the quick. Bardolph had imagined that his web was so cunningly woven, that while every fibre was linked with and strengthened by every other, each was at the same time independent of the rest. He did not want the Conservatives to be beaten at the coming General Election, and what better catchword than Female Suffrage, pure and simple? He did not want the Premier to take office again, and how could he better cut the ground from under his feet than by advertising Female Suffrage as an essential plank in the Tory platform? He did not want Lady Harley to risk her happiness in the incompetent hands of Floppington, and how could he better ingratiate himself with her than by posing as a martyred convert to Female Suffrage, whose conscience would not allow him to retain his position in an unjust Administration? And yet with one shameless stroke his rival had severed the triple strands. The good election cry would be spoilt in advance; the promissory note would be discounted; and it would be hard to find another prospect equally alluring. Whatever of prestige and gratitude was to be gained by the gift of the Franchise would attach to his chief, who had coolly filched from him, at once his motive of opposition and his enlightened principles. And in the game played for love, he had conquered him by the Grecian, and therefore un-English method of appropriating the trumps and substituting them for the worthless cards of the other suits. But not content with the destruction of the ambitions of his underling, the unscrupulous Minister had endeavoured to annihilate even the comparatively humble political status to which he had laboriously attained. He had forced him to leave the Cabinet under the impression that he was resigning because of his disagreement with him, and then by an unparalleled manœuvre he had cut away the basis of the disagreement and left the unhappy Ex-Minister in a position which, from one point of view, was as ridiculous as it was humiliating.

What lurid light the self-revelation of the Premier threw upon the events of the past few months, from the day on which he had, with Cromwellian reluctance, accepted the virtual sovereign power of the Constitution! The masterly hypocrisy of Floppington's dealings with his Cabinet filled his late Secretary for Foreign Affairs with disgust. Wise after the event, Bardolph recalled certain long-distant observations of the Premier, displaying flashes of satirical insight which, though they had startled him somewhat at the time, he had passed over too carelessly. It was evident now that the Premier had always been aware of his cabals, and could not refrain from occasionally letting slip a sub-cynical remark, which seemed, even when uttered, to point to a passively humorous tolerance of the situation. Bardolph ground his teeth at the recollection of these phrases, the product not of self-conscious impotence as he had imagined, but of dormant power.

But if Floppington imagined he had done with Lord Bardolph either in the sphere of politics, or in the realm of love, he was greatly mistaken. If he chuckled at the finesse by which he had disarmed the certain opposition of an Ex-Minister to the struggling ministerial measure, it could only be because he had not gauged the Protean resources of his antagonist. Defeat could not wither the noble lord, nor conscience stale the infinite variety of his policy. Like that ingenious toy, the bottle imp, it was impossible to knock him down. He gave his contemporaries such an impression of superabundant vitality that it was understood that if you cut him up each fragment would assume independent life. Whether this excessive modifiability of function, this physical Jack-of-all-trades-ism, was only the obverse of defective organisation shall be left an open question; but it may be pointed out to the scientist that the better organised a political party is, the greater and not the less is the homogeneity of the parts.

Bardolph, being thus brimming over with vitality, was far from giving up the ghost. Not only did he hit upon a plan which enabled him to offer a determined resistance to the second reading of the Reform Bill, but with his usual ingenuity he utilised his opposition for the apparently impossible purpose of posing as a consistent and lofty-minded statesman and of retaining the favour of Lady Harley.

But before the general conflict in the House grew to a head, and before the hostile armies divided for the bloodless fray, Bardolph had the luxury of a duel with his hated rival. Every Ex-Minister has his night, and by the laws of the combat, Bardolph was allowed his innings first; and for an hour and a half he did nothing but make savage thrusts, and administer vigorous prods, and deal vicious digs at his unresisting opponent with a keen, brightly-polished, poisoned dagger, or belabour and thwack him with a ponderous and crushing sledge-hammer. Marvellous to relate, Floppington bore the blows and the stabs without moving a muscle. A contemptuous and placid smile dwelt upon his passive countenance, as though he were guarded by invisible mail. The invulnerability of his enemy maddened the already wildly-slashing swash-buckler. But in vain he foamed at the mouth. His scathing virulence did not seem to scathe anybody but himself, for his righteous and justifiable indignation grew unrighteous and unjustifiable under the extravagance of its manifestation.

At last the young champion sank down upon a bench exhausted, and the imperturbable Minister, rising, answered him with winged words.

Never had Floppington addressed the House with so majestic a mien, or so dignified an air, as that assumed by him at the commencement and the conclusion of his famous reply to the grave accusations of Mountchapel; and even in the middle of it, though he, perhaps, marred its classic severity by his late-born love for popular phraseology, his manner never lost its haughty serenity. So must have fronted the tribunal of his fellow-citizens, that old

Roman worthy who, for all refutation of the charges brought against him, was content to deny their truth.

The Premier began by administering a severe reproof to the peccant Cabinet Minister for the breach of confidence committed by him, in revealing the secrets of the Cabinet and publishing to the world the private discussions of its members. He regretted that the noble lord should have so far forgotten what was due alike to himself and his colleagues, and more particularly to the Head of Her Majesty's Government, as to have allowed himself to use his imperfect recollections of confidential conversations for the purpose of substantiating certain charges which he had thought it necessary to bring against his late chief and some of his late colleagues.

"Such behaviour," said the Premier, thumping the table emphatically, "is unprecedented"—and somebody crying "Question?" he added amid laughter—"at least in *my* short experience of the House."

The right honourable gentleman went on to express his conviction that, in time, the noble lord would himself see, and even acknowledge, with what imprudence and indiscretion he had acted. Then drawing himself up with a sudden accession of august indignation :

"Meantime, sir," he cried, "the noble lord has forced upon me the necessity of unveiling to the world the relations between myself and him, and as he has courted public scrutiny so far as to exhibit a caricature of them, he cannot complain if I correct the coarseness of his strokes, and convert his daub into a faithful portrait. The issue raised by the member for Wadding is altogether false. He has trailed the red herring of Women's Suffrage across the track, and given a fishy complexion to the straightforward facts." (Laughter.) "All I shall say on the point is that his secession from my Ministry was quite unconnected with any specific political question, but was due to the impossibility of the noble lord's working harmoniously with myself and the rest of his colleagues. The late Secretary for Foreign Affairs seemed, in his independence and self-sufficiency, to have taken Palmerston as a model, and he endeavoured to impose his wishes on the rest of the Cabinet. The noble lord forgot that I was no more a replica of Grey than he of Palmerston." (Cheers and laughter.) "The experiment of dual control appeared to me as little satisfactory in home as in foreign politics. Sir, this is the sole and sufficient explanation of the disagreement between me and my late colleague, who seems to forget the logical canon, that explanations are not to be multiplied beyond necessity." (Laughter and cheers.) "We did not disagree on the woman clause in the Reform Bill because it takes two to make a disagreement, and we had both grown convinced of its necessity." (Cheers.) "Nor did I extract his...Nestorian counsels (laughter) under false pretences, and then repudiate their author as he imagines. Let me tell him that I had determined upon my present policy long before he had the faintest conception of his own views." (Cheers and laughter.) "Let me tell him—what he knows as well as I do—that he resigned

because I was compelled to intimate to him that two Premiers in a Cabinet were one too many, and that, in my opinion, two Heads were not better than one." ("Hear, hear," and laughter.) "But the noble lord has not confined his denunciations to me. Her Majesty's Government as a whole he has essayed to scarify. He has predicted that under that organised hypocrisy, as he has with such originality termed it (laughter), the country will go to the devil. Sir, the member for Wadding has long been the Old Moore of politics (loud laughter); but if he fancies that the country will follow him (immense laughter) in his distrust of Her Majesty's Government (more laughter) I shall not attempt to disturb his cheerful faith." (Laughter.) "The Laureate, in a celebrated passage of *In Memoriam*—and what more appropriate poem could be cited on the present occasion? (loud and prolonged laughter)—says:

'Leave thou thy sister where she prays,
Her early Heaven, her happy views.'

If we alter the sex throughout the couplet, and change prays to prophesies, and throw in the member for Wadding's devil in exchange for Tennyson's heaven, the verses will express my sentiments exactly." (Loud laughter.)

"So, although I do not share the noble lord's belief that Government without the noble lord is only a roundabout method of going to the devil (laughter), I shall follow the spirit of the poet's advice by leaving the noble lord where he prophesies, and making no attempt to dispossess him of his devil (loud laughter) or of his happy views. I feel sure he will extend a similar tolerance to my own faith. Weakened as Her Majesty's Government undoubtedly is by the retirement of the noble lord, I believe it will still be able to totter on." (Laughter.) "While I sincerely deplore the loss of the coadjutorship of the noble lord, I console myself by the hope that in process of time, when the noble lord is cured of the excesses and impetuosities of youth; when the rigorous discipline of life shall have taught him the lesson that self-will pushed to the verge of egotism is not quite the same thing as resolution; when in the course of years he settles down into the sober and solid wisdom of a late maturity; and when study shall have given him a profounder mastery of Imperial and financial questions; his undeniable talents, his unquestionable ability in debate, will qualify him to again render valuable services to the State." (The right honourable gentleman resumed his seat amid cheers from all parts of the House, having spoken for ten minutes.)

While the grave senators were convulsed with merriment, Bardolph was convulsed with more malignant passions. The formidable indictment of dishonourable conduct which he had preferred against the Prime Minister, and which had at first made a weighty impression upon the House, had temporarily, at least, degenerated into a subject of inextinguishable laughter. Floppington delivered his speech in his newest manner, with his latest innovations in dramatic gesture and rhetorical pause. Despite the dignified tone

of the bulk of the speech, the timid hesitativeness of his application of the epithet "Nestorian," the half-frightened stopping short after "if the country will follow him," as though he had just perceived the implication, the mournful tone of his reference to *In Memoriam*, recalled the methods of American humorists on the lecture-platform, rather than of the great Christian orator of earlier debates, with his solemn invocations and his lambent flashes of melancholy humour. Poor Bardolph writhed under the excoriating lash of Floppington's contempt. He could have borne anything sooner than this frank avowal of the Premier's ability to dispense with the services of one who had hitherto been regarded as indispensable to a Tory Ministry. So lightly did his late chief appear to value him, that he would not even condescend to take him seriously, and, refusing to bandy arguments with him, had treated his pretensions with lofty arrogance, airy badinage, and unstatesmanlike sarcasm. The public humiliation was intolerable, and could not fail to damage powerfully his political status. The Ex-Secretary was an emotional creature at bottom. He could not imitate the external immobility of his adversary. He shifted about in fiery restlessness and twisted his moustache furiously. The Radicals, who had appeared sympathetic at first, had ended by joining in the hearty laughter at his expense. He had not bargained for the simple outspokenness of the Premier, whose statement was tantamount to the assertion that the Foreign Secretary had been virtually deposed from his lofty position. He darted fierce glances at the Treasury Bench, and vowed vengeance on his unprincipled colleagues, especially on those who were his friends. None of the latter had, as yet, sent in their resignations. The fact was that they admitted the justness of their chief's standpoint. The older members who had served in the last Conservative Government, had all along been wondering at the dominating tone assumed by the pert youngster, the new man, ignorant or disdainful of the traditions of the Cabinet, and at the patience with which the Premier had tolerated the insubordination of his inferior. It was now plain to his fellow Ministers that the attitude assumed by Lord Mountchapel on the Women's Suffrage question had been the last straw that broke the back of even so long-suffering a camel as the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington.

The views of these gentlemen found expression in a peculiarly bitter article in the next day's *Standard*, which obviously took its cue from the speech of the Prime Minister. After commenting severely upon the indiscretions of the youthful Ex-Minister, whom it characterised as an "overgrown schoolboy," it proceeded to treat the whole affair as burlesque, and as necessitating a like levity in the handling of it. "MR. FLOPPINGTON was well advised," it said, "in refusing to continue the critical discussion of the actions of an imaginary being. If the House were in the habit of sitting for the purpose of analysing the creations of fiction, no doubt MR. FLOPPINGTON could add a valuable quota to the discussion of the noble lord's conception of MR. FLOPPINGTON, since his total absence

of relation to the character under analysis would be a guarantee of impartiality. The utterances of the Member for WADDING have long revealed an embryonic talent for origination, but never before—we speak under correction—had his genius flashed forth so decisively as last night, and it ought not to be long before his speeches appear in the appropriate three volumes of the moral Mudie.* Only an Italian improvisatore of the highest order could rival him in his rapid invention of character, dialogue, and incident, and all the while his eye rolled in the fine frenzy which we have been taught to associate with the process of giving to airy nothings a local habitation and a name. It was well that the unsullied reputation of the great statesman who directs the destinies of the nation reassured his supporters, or they would have passed several bad quarters of an hour while the late Foreign Secretary was making his clumsy but forcible onslaught. And their faith was fully justified in the sequel. LORD BARDOLPH MOUNTCHAPEL, like all ambitious poets, attempted the historical drama, but the demands of art caused him to overdraw his villains and throw too spiritual a halo over his martyrs. After the literary historiographer usually comes the prosaic investigator; after the sprightly man of romance the dull man of facts; and it frequently turns out that the villains are no worse than the martyrs, and the martyrs no better than they should be. But rarely does the man of facts tread so fast on the heels of the artist as he did last night. How the noble lord could have ventured upon misrepresentation so gross in the face of the knowledge that immediate contradiction and exposure was inevitable, it is difficult to understand; but his conduct is of a piece with his wonted policy of living from hand to mouth. Nothing is so favourable to discontent as resignation, and the Ex-Minister evidently sacrificed everything to the promptings of spleen and dissatisfaction."

Even the *Daily News*, which took the passage of arms far more seriously, and spoke of it in language far more cautious, accepted in the main the undisguised avowal of the Premier that he and Mountchapel could not (as the pressmen put it) run in a team, and that they were forced to separate by incompatibility of temperament; while the *Pall Mall Gazette* crystallised much fluid thought by pithily suggesting that in the Premier's opinion the machine of Government was not a Sociable, and that Floppington preferred to skelter down-hill alone.

By the Opposition, indeed, the fall of Mountchapel was hailed with more or less open delight. Not only must it weaken the Government, but also it held out some prospect of the desertion of a formidable adversary to their own ranks. The audacity and independence of the Premier impressed as much as they astonished the

* The allusion is to Mudie's Library, a philanthropic institution founded for the purpose of compelling authors to expand a word into a sentence, a sentence into a page, and a page into a volume (to reverse the saying of Joubert), in order that the supply of reading-matter might not run short; and also serving as a succedaneum for the absent censorship of the Press.

House; and even the mental sluggards whom the announcement of the ministerial intentions had failed to arouse began to recognise that their conceptions of "Floppy" must be overhauled.

Following hard upon the unpleasant incident in the House there came to Bardolph the unpleasant rumour that a marriage had been arranged between the Premier and Lady Harley. The rumour was to some extent confirmed by some remarks in the number of *Truth* which appeared after the Cabinet Council. This smart Society journal, in some respects the prototype of the "Causerie" leaflets that played such an important part in the social life of the reign of Albert I., asserted, "on good authority," that now that woman was to have a vote, the Premier was to have a wife; and inquired satirically whether he had vowed to remain a bachelor so long as every possible partner, whatever her beauty or talents, must be devoid of the crowning grace of suffrage. The next paragraph congratulated Lady Harley on the prospective victory of her cause.

This blow was not calculated to lessen the rancorous activity of his opposition to the Reform Bill. As Tremaine had shrewdly divined, he was leading a sort of patchwork coalition, the components of which were only united by a common desire to throw out the measure. It was not till the night preceding that on which it was almost certain that the division would be taken that contradictory reports reached his ears concerning the Premier's marriage. For gibing the heel of *Truth* came the *World* with a playful rebuke of its rival, and stating, "on higher authority," that far from there being any truth in the malicious insinuations that the Minister's head had been unduly influenced by his heart, there was even a coolness between him and the lady in question.

Bardolph determined to pay Gwendolen a visit the very next day, in order to ascertain, if possible, how the ground lay; and for other reasons. It was perhaps prudent, in view of future contingencies, to make clear to her the grounds of his opposition. Moreover, he had not met her since the Duchess's reception, and he hungered for a sight of her face and a quiet talk to soothe his troubled spirit. Despair had, indeed, almost stung him to the proposing point.

CHAPTER IV.

BARDOLPH GOES A-WOING.

IT is well that so few people are able to read their own biographies, for, though less false than their autobiographies, the errors generally lean to the wrong side. And although the writer has been able to find no contemporary volume devoted to the life of Lady Harley, the remark will still apply to the ana concerning her which appeared from time to time in the contemporary press. It was well, then, that she was not in the habit of looking at herself in the distorting

mirror of ephemeral literature, for at one period she would have found her lineaments invested with an expression of appealing piteousness which she was utterly incapable of assuming. Lady Gwendolen was not one of those social nobodies who resemble amateur authors in their eagerness to see their names in print, and whose selfishness leads them to such extremes of altruism that they are anxious to be a *bonne bouche* "in everybody's mouth," rather than that the supply of scandal should run short. So when, as happened in the course of time, a certain amount of commiseration began to be felt for her, her ignorance of its existence prevented her from enjoying this sympathy of the public. But she did not suffer the less because this compassion was wanting. She bled in silence, like the wounded fawn, whose cries would only bring the hunters on its track. For some days after her miserable discovery she remained in a state of utter prostration. Floppington had been to her the embodiment of her ideals of honour, delicacy, chivalry; and with the fall of the concrete man, it seemed at first as if these ideals, too, had been shattered. The thought that her life would not be an utter failure, since she was soon to see the emancipation of her sex, afforded her but little comfort in those dark days. She realised now how much selfish joy had entered into that sacred rapture which had been hers when the Premier announced to her the change in his views. How childish seemed now that first moment of delicious two-fold anticipation! The cool, fragrant conservatory, with its waxen exotics, often rose dimly before her through a mist of tears, but darkness reigned therein, save where a ray of moonlight fell upon the mocking, stony countenance of Bacchus.

Life without love seemed a poor thing to one whose intellect, keen as it was, always worked on the lines laid down by emotion. It was true that she had let the Premier understand that she could never be his so long as he was of his old mind on the Woman Question, but the voluntary breach was very different from the present. That had all the exquisite pleasure of renunciation combined with the soothing hope that it would sooner or later be unnecessary. Bitterly disappointed in her first marriage, she cherished unconfessed visions of future happiness. No sooner was the first shock of marital bereavement over, than there sprang up in her soul an aftermath of the earnest aspirations and high ideals of her girlhood. And now once again the fatal sickle of conventional immorality had remorselessly cut down the golden harvest.

A week passed before Gwendolen could settle down to her old life. Making a resolute effort to shake off the past, she sat down one afternoon to answer her neglected correspondents. As she opened her desk, she perceived her unrevised eulogy on the Premier. She took it up with a sigh, and read it through with half-humorous scepticism. It seemed to belong to a world of dream in which she had dwelt ages ago, and to which she could no more return than to the innocent days of childish happiness. But its perusal wrought a good effect. It appealed to her sense of fun.

The rhodomontade, silly and false as it now appeared to her, she could yet look at with the melancholy but humorous tolerance of larger experience. The fresh fount of brightness and merriment which often sparkled through her seriousness could not but preserve her from protracted mental unhealthiness. With half mockery, half pity of herself, she thought of those lofty expectations of masculine virtue which she, now grown worldly-wise, would never more entertain; of the self-deception which made her admire the delicate Gallican compliments of her lover while longing for one word of healthy, honest passion; and of her wilfully-blind misinterpretation of that presumptuous rudeness which he had never shown till he thought himself certain of her hand.

It was a dull, cold day, and a cheerful fire gave cosiness to the study. Lady Gwendolen tore up the paper into small bits, and musingly burnt the fragments, one by one. By the time the last morsel was consumed she had persuaded herself that her love for Floppington was equally annihilated, that she was now perfectly calm, and that her final freedom from illusions and conflicting interests would enable her to devote the rest of her life to the service of humanity. The half-checked thought even crossed her mind that she might, in years to come, make a *mariage de convenance* (for love was plainly a delusion), with the proviso that the "convenience" should be tested by the additional possibilities of well-doing.

It was while smiling sadly at this not inglorious substitute for romance in life that she was informed Lord Bardolph Mount-chapel had called to see her. She started, and sent back a message that she was unwell. Then, with her usual impulsiveness, she recalled the servant and said she would see him where she was. It suddenly flashed across her that here was one more sufferer by the Premier's duplicity. In a dull sort of way she had glanced through the newspapers during that week of hyper-sensitive shrinking from all contact with the outside world, and, though startled, she had not been amazed to learn the true reason of her friend's resignation of his secretariat. It goes without saying, that she was more inclined to credit the story of the man with the grievance; and, while she could not repress a feeling of admiration for the courageous frankness of the Premier's defence, she still felt, and was not alone in feeling, that he had shirked the impeachment of his methods of getting rid of an undesirable colleague. Surely nothing but a pure love of intrigue, such as animated Pope, could have induced him to dismiss a subordinate by the needlessly round-about plan of pretending to disagree with him upon an important question. Or had he been unable to find a decent pretext for dismissing him, and so resorted to an unprecedented manoeuvre, counting upon the unpleasantness of the Ex-Minister's position to ensure his silence? Anyhow, one thing was plain. The younger politician had fallen a victim to the sharp practice of the old parliamentary stager. She had not followed the debate on the Reform Bill, nor the kaleidoscopic combinations of parties; taking it for

certain that the second reading would be carried. Had she done so, she might not have thought the conduct of Lord Mountchapel so childlike and bland. As it was, she felt herself drawn towards him more than ever by the magnetism of common suffering. When he entered the cosy room she went to meet him with a tender smile of welcome. She gave him her hand sympathetically, and allowed him to retain it for a moment, feeling somehow strengthened by the air of determination and jauntiness visible upon his vivacious countenance. The mercurial Bardolph had had time to recover from the effects of his recent duel, and he had found balsam for his wounds in the support of a portion of the press (notably the *Times*) and in the thought of the coming defeat of the Reform Bill. Gwendolen's feelings soon passed from pity to admiration. The smartness of his dress, the gay rose in his button-hole, the brightness and directness of his glance, the erectness of his well-poised head, all pointed to an internal consciousness of power. She began to wonder whether her opinion of this blunt, cynical man of the world, who made no pretensions to superfine emotions, did not need revision. A woman, who had already blundered so fatally in her reading of character, could not but have her confidence in her own powers rudely shaken.

Smiling still more winningly in her remorse she motioned him to a chair. Bardolph's mind was as sensitive as the Stock Exchange. Small forces could produce in it what seemed to less delicate minds disproportionate effects. Thus, though he had been impressing upon the Premier how necessary it was that the Conservatives should give woman a vote, yet, when he found himself juggled out of the Cabinet, he saw the danger of entrusting the reform of the franchise to a party containing men so unprincipled. The moment seemed propitious for benefiting his country by imitating the rôle of Disraeli *versus* Peel in circumstances surprisingly parallel, except in the one fact that he himself agreed in the abstract with the principle to whose success he was so violently opposed. This exception necessitated a change of method, but not a diminution of rancour, and he at once organised a strong faction of all those opposed to female franchise, basing his own antagonism, as has already been explained, on his disbelief in the genuineness of the ministerial promises; and, as is often the case, up to the last moment both parties felt certain of victory. But when he heard the contradiction of Gwendolen's engagement, he began to feel a reviving sense of the undesirability of procrastination in so important a reform, and a reluctance to allowing it to pass into the hands of the Liberals. He determined to offer himself at once in marriage to her ladyship, and if she accepted him to defer to her views on the subject. Should she think his well-meant opposition was doing harm to her cause, he was prepared, even at the eleventh hour, to throw it up and save the Bill, whose fate he felt sure was in his hands. This course could easily be made to redound to his credit. There would be no inconsistency in his voting for the second reading; indeed, he knew that bets had been offered that

he would vote for it in the end. He would then appear as a man who, in his magnanimity, refrained from breaking up the party, and was not ashamed of giving way to the majority, even at the last moment. The reflected light thrown on his past action would show how unjust had been the suspicion of personal motives.

On the other hand, Gwendolen's refusal of his suit would prove that she meant to marry Floppington after all, and there would be no reason why he should desist from harassing a renegade and defeating his measures, for the sake of a flirt with unsound views on political expediency.

"Of course you will be in the Gallery to-night," was his first remark.

"No," replied Gwendolen simply. "Why should I?"

"I thought you would care to hear Floppington's speech," he replied bluntly.

She started slightly, and coloured up. The name seemed to rankle her wound afresh.

"Indeed?" she murmured, with a show of indifference.

Bardolph, who had watched her sharply, pierced through the assumption. "Is it possible," he exclaimed, "that you will be absent on so critical an occasion?"

"What, is the debate over, then?" cried Gwendolen, startled into excitement.

"To-night, in all human probability," returned Bardolph, "the division on the second reading will be taken, and if the Government get a majority—well, you know what they promise!"

"To-night!" echoed Gwendolen, with flashing eyes.

"Didn't you know it?" asked he, in intense surprise.

"No," she returned. "I—I have been so busy at home all the week that I have not been able to give sufficient attention to the course of events. But I shall certainly be present if that is the case."

Ere she had finished, the young statesman, with his usual decisiveness, had taken a complete diagnosis of her mental condition. There had undoubtedly been an irreparable breach between the lovers, and her affection had changed to indifference, perhaps to loathing. To conceal his exultant perturbation, he said the first thing that came to his lips—a jumble of classical reminiscences in the worst taste.

"Then Demosthenes will be cheered by the presence of Egeria."

"I do not understand you," said Gwendolen coldly.

"Then I suppose the allusion is wrong," he observed lightly. "Unfortunate man that I am, my friends are always down on my classical, and my enemies on my political facts."

Gwendolen hastened to change the subject. "Will you speak?" she inquired.

"Certainly. I have reserved myself for to-night," he answered with calm determination.

"And which side do you take? You oppose us now, perhaps," she said languidly.

"Lady Harley!" Bardolph half rose from his chair and threw a look of eloquent reproach at Gwendolen, who was gazingly wistfully into the fire. "*Et tu, Brute?*" he exclaimed bitterly. "Is Saul also among the proph— I mean, are you among those who think evil of me, and are ever impugning my motives? I am opposing the Premier, it is true, but not you—oh, I hope never you! And I thought that you, at least, would do justice to the purity of my motives."

Gwendolen was moved by the ring of pathos and sincerity in the words. "Pardon me if I have wronged you," she said gently. "But so far am I from impugning your motives in opposing the Premier, that excepting, indeed, your passage of arms with him last week, I did not know you were doing so. And I can to some extent sympathise with your action, knowing as I do how badly you have been treated."

An irrepressible smile of triumph flitted across his face. "Yes," he exclaimed eagerly, "I have been vilely betrayed and duped."

How strange it was that her best friends were always destined to hamper the success of her cause? Yet she received the news of Bardolph's antagonism with indifference, feeling it not unnatural and confident of its inefficacy.

"But you cannot expect me to sympathise with your aims," she went on, smiling sadly. "For even if your opposition is to the Premier and not to us, you must see how the course you say you are taking injures the cause you professed to have at heart."

"Ah, Lady Harley," replied Bardolph reproachfully, "I am sorry to find you taking that superficial view. You were right in saying you have not kept *au courant* with the march of events. But when you have heard my speech to-night, you will confess that I am the truest friend of your cause. And you will rejoice with me, when, as I anticipate, the Government is beaten, or wins by so small a majority that the Reform Bill will have to be dropped."

"The Government beaten!" Gwendolen exclaimed in alarmed astonishment. Was it the irony of fate that one of her lovers should always be the instrument of destroying her hopes, on the very eve of their fulfilment? She looked at Bardolph with an irrepressible flash of indignation. "I thought an enormous majority of the members agreed with you?" she said a trifle maliciously.

"Yes, so they do," he replied nervously. "We are nearly all agreed on the principle. But you see many men believe that after the experience of Ministerial manœuvres afforded by the treatment of me, the Government are not to be trusted to keep their promise of getting the Female Suffrage clause inserted in Committee. You must acknowledge, Lady Harley, that they have good reason for refusing to vote on what is probably a false issue. There never was such a curious division—nor such a strange jumble of parties. Nobody thinks of the actual Reform Bill at all. Everybody is going to vote for or against a clause which is, as yet, non-existent, and which, I honestly believe, will never be added to Floppington's measure. He is trying to hoax the House into assuring the pass-

ing of his Bill, and if he succeeds, why, you may take the word of a practical politician for it, that the enfranchisement of your sex will be indefinitely postponed. You see, then, that I am working with, and not against, your cause."

The earnestness of Bardolph's accents wrought a visible impression upon Gwendolen. He saw the advantage he had gained and continued meaningly :

"But I am not inflexible, Lady Harley. I have acted according to my best judgment, and I have given you the grounds of my action. But I may be wrong in doubting the sincerity of the Government. You may have reasons for trusting it, and if you think I am doing your cause more harm than good, I am ready to reconsider my opposition. That is why I thought it right to see you before the irrevocable division, and to ask your advice as a leader of the cause. I could not find time to come before, but it is not too late yet. If I intimate to my adherents that I have seen reason to believe the intentions of the Government are honest, they will follow me into the Ministerial lobby in a body—that is, of course, except the independent members and the old Tories, who are against the principle of the proposed clause. Even though I were to be the butt of the entire Radical press for my sudden revolution (and the Radical press exists only to misrepresent me), I would bear all that and more for your sake, Gwendolen." He uttered the name quickly and tentatively, and lingered over the preceding words.

"How can I tell what is best?" she asked mournfully, ignoring the last phrase altogether. "If, as you say, so many men mistrust the Government, there must be some grounds for their want of confidence. And if we should gain nothing by the Premier's parliamentary victory——" She sighed, and did not complete the sentence.

An awkward silence of some minutes ensued. A sudden dimness fell upon the study and a heavy driving rain dashed against the window panes. Gwendolen shivered drearily. "Will you come to the fire?" she asked.

Bardolph drew his chair to a corner of the fire and sat down opposite Gwendolen. Her delicately-cut mobile face was very pale, and the ruddy firelight flickering over it invested it with a weird charm. Her eyes appeared to have grown larger and more pathetic. The halo of a saint who had done with earthly joys seemed to surround her. Bardolph did not break the delicious silence. It seemed to him that he could be satisfied to remain there for ever with her, out of the storm. For the first time in his life, repose seemed better than action. He had come to ask her to be his wife, but he could not utter the words for fear of cutting short those divine moments of quasi-domestic bliss.

Gwendolen, for her part, was thinking of her visitor's factious opposition to the Reform Bill. At one moment she thought his fears of treachery justified; at another, she reflected on the purity of the Premier's career up to a few days ago, and was tortured

with disquieting suspicions that even in the Mountchapel affair he might be found guiltless were all known. She knew that men whose private lives would not bear investigation had often served their country faithfully, and she asked herself whether it was fair to test the sincerity of his promises to the public by her personal knowledge of his character. After all, might not Mountchapel's attitude needlessly delay a great reform? And was Mountchapel himself quite sincere? She had always repressed any suspicion of him, though, as in her last talk with him at the Duchess's, she had now and again transfixed him with a playful dart. He had certainly confided to her his changed views on the enfranchisement of woman before any of the other Ministers had made the least sign of concession, and now he had to all appearance suffered something of martyrdom for the cause. But what had made him come over so unexpectedly in the first instance? At last she observed musingly:

"Thinking doesn't seem to help one much. You come to me for advice, and it's so hard to give it, despite the cynics. Perhaps I could make up my mind better if I were sure you were quite frank with me. Forgive my bluntness, Lord Bardolph, but there is no need for pretence between friends—and we are friends, are we not?—and the interests at stake are too great to be risked lightly."

Bardolph's heart bounded vigorously at this remark. Accustomed as he was to receive people's slightest observations as though they were political manifestoes, and to see in them all sorts of suggested subtleties and *équivoques*, the implications of this remark removed his last doubt.

Refusal of his suit was impossible now. The woman had evidently made as sharp a right-about-turn in love as the man in politics. He settled himself more comfortably in his chair, and warmed the hand he was about to offer to her ladyship.

It was with a mental vision of himself gleefully tearing up the projected speech which he was carrying in his pocket, that he replied after a pause:

"Dear Lady Harley, how can I be franker with you? In my hands lies the fate of the Reform Bill. I have transferred the decision to you, and it is for you to raise or lower your thumb."

"You have certainly sketched the situation frankly," she said with a quiet smile. "But you forget that I am dependent upon you for the data of my decision. You are an ex-gliadiator with an intimate acquaintance with the champions of the arena, whom I, for my part, know only in their non-professional character. And if you assure me," she added with sudden determination, "that the combatant-in-chief is fighting unfairly, and that you have no *arrière pensée* in informing me of it, but are actuated by a pure love of justice, why, I'll take your word, and there's an end of it."

"Well, I can assure you of this," he answered earnestly: "Floppington never swerved from his opposition to your cause, though I pointed out, time after time, that he was flying in the face

of justice, and the good of the party. And it is impossible to believe that he changed his mind so suddenly. Even if he was goaded into promising the extra clause, his conscience would not allow him to keep his promise."

Gwendolen could not help smiling again at this paradox, as well as at the *naïveté* of Bardolph's use of double-edged argument.

"But you changed your mind quite as suddenly," she said slyly. "Come, my lord, be your true self, and tell me candidly why you gave us your support."

Her truthful gray eyes looked at him banteringly, yet gravely. He was silent. He felt unable to make one of his glib replies; something told him that the moment was one in which she would instinctively recognise a sham, and that to give her his confidence was to enter into closer relations with her. Perhaps, indeed, her suspicion that he had never been quite open with her, had always kept a certain impassable gulf between them. But he feared to shock those delicate cloistral scruples that had never known the necessities of practical politics.

"Pray do not torture your brain for a compliment," said Gwendolen. "I will take it for granted that you thought the cause could not be wrong because I was always in the right. But what else wrought your conversion?"

Still he was silent. But he reflected that as they were going to be one, her portion of the unity must be approximated in character to his, and the sooner the better. The window rattled impatiently for his answer.

"I don't see why you shouldn't know my sentiments exactly," he burst out. "If representative government be not a fiction, the business of us legislators is to represent. The people wish for reforms, and I see no reason why the honourable duty of carrying out their desires should not be undertaken by whosoever can manage to get to the front. Well, I *have* got to the front, but I am young and ambitious. That seat in the Cabinet, which would have satisfied most men, never contented me. I want to be at the head of affairs. It's very natural. In fact, it is only another phase of the universal competition of life, as you would know had you studied concrete politics as I have. Each of the two parties—like rival shop-keepers—endeavours to get the temporary monopoly of the manufacture of Acts of Parliament, the reward being honour, and sometimes pelf. The supply is determined by the demand, as it is in everything else. So it really doesn't matter what party is in power except to the leaders, and the public gets its reforms and is satisfied. I do claim to be honestly convinced that woman should be enfranchised, but I don't deny that the ever growing demand for female suffrage hastened my conviction of its justice. But even supposing I was influenced only by the consideration that as a representative I was bound to supply the demand, would that make any difference to the newly enfranchised sex? Well, then, that is the position I take up. The distinctions between Conservatives and Liberals have grown obsolete. There are plenty of signs that the

Conservatives are at last tired of being perpetually told by the Radical policeman to 'move on,' and of being badgered from reform to reform. Well, we now move on so fast that the Radical policeman can't catch up to us, but toils laboriously after us in the path of reform. I might even say that the distinctions have been reversed, for nowadays the Liberal talks of going forward and stands still, while the Conservative talks of standing still and goes forward."

He had risen in the excitement of exposition, and now stood eagerly bending over her chair. He felt he was carrying his hearer with him, and he was glad he had taken the bold determination to allow no humbug in future between himself and her. "Believe me, Lady Harley," he said earnestly, "to think differently from me is to live in a world of dreams. The belief in political ideals, which each party exists to expound and to pursue, dies away with all the other beautiful delusions of youth."

Gwendolen buried her face in her hands. His last words touched a now familiar discord. Alas! it was all too true. Life, always seeking for ideals which it was never to find, seemed so dreary, so dreary, and to be fitly symbolised by the chill rain and by the mournful wind that sobbed without; while the existence of common people was like the red, comfortable glow of the cheerful fire. Why could she not resign herself to the workaday felicity of the practical folk who took life as they found it; why was she destined to be always unhappy? She raised her head.

"I am very ignorant of that concrete world you speak of," she said humbly, "but illusion is the salt of life, and I, at least, could not live utterly devoid of it."

"That is another illusion of yours," replied Bardolph, with good-natured superiority. "You will soon get an acquired taste for some more modern substitute for that salinity. When a man of the world loses his illusions, he devotes himself to spreading abroad the illusion that he still possesses them. He scatters what you call the salt of life very liberally, and the stupid buffaloes congregate in public places to lick it. He who would retain his fellowship in the University of Politics must not wed himself for life to a principle. He may flirt with all without much danger, but it is safest to dispense with them altogether. To put the matter in a nutshell, the first principle for a modern politician is to have none."

Gwendolen was looking sadly at the fire. A reaction against this brutally-cynical Bardolph was beginning. Her eyes filled with tears at the thought of all that might have been, and her mind with tender memories.

"I am grieved to hear such a report from a practical politician," she said softly. "Especially," she added, with a slight blush, "as my previous experience of Ministers had taught me that, in their public career at least, principle *is* sometimes adhered to in the face of temptation. And I always understood that nowadays the standard of honour has been raised—men do not sell themselves for round sums, as in the time of Walpole."

"It is not the standard of honour that is higher, it is the standard of self-valuation. Nowadays, we think no *round* sum could purchase us. Sometimes," he continued slowly, "'tis but a smile of the Siren of Politics that we crave."

"From what you tell me of her powers of transformation, this Siren of Politics must be a veritable Circe."

"She is," cried Bardolph enthusiastically.

This remark appealed so much to Gwendolen's sense of the ridiculous that she burst into a laugh that had somewhat of the merry ring of yore. But she checked herself half-way.

"I suppose I'm wrong again," he said ruefully. "But I repeat, every man has still his price."

"Not every man," said Gwendolen in a low tone, which was almost a whisper. "There are some who are to be bought neither by power nor its emoluments."

"Then they are bought by love," replied Bardolph, unthinkingly accentuating each word, or rather thinking only of his own case.

Gwendolen started and flushed deeply in righteous indignation. "It is not true," she exclaimed hotly. "He changed from conviction, like Peel in the——" she stopped suddenly.

It was now Bardolph's turn to start. "The devil," he ejaculated mentally, "is it only a lovers' quarrel after all, and have I been wasting my time?" "When I say every man," he said aloud, "I, of course, do not speak of men like Floppington, who before the strange aberration which led him to manoeuvre me out of the Cabinet, was the soul of honour. Putting that aside, he is the only honest politician I have ever known, and in fact the exception that proves my rule. And don't you remember how I explained to you, a few moments ago, my fears that this very honesty will keep him from giving you the promised clause?"

He paused and looked down at Gwendolen, whose head was turned away. She was distressed and ashamed of her passionate outburst. That Bardolph's guess was perhaps accurate, only added an extra sting to her pain.

"It's all up!" he thought, with a suppressed groan, as he gazed around the bright room shut in from all worldly troubles as from the wind and rain—at the empty chair by the fireside in which he had passed those moments of transitory rapture. "Confound Floppington! Not content with filching my policy, he has stolen the woman I love! Traitor, you shall writhe to-night, despite your stoical pretences."

He looked at his watch, feigned to start, and took up his hat.

"I fear I must go. Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand. She gave him hers. He held it for a moment.

Something in her eyes—a look of remorse, bordering on tenderness—made him retain it just as he was about to drop it.

"Look here, Gwendolen," he cried, "I'm not going to make a fool of myself. I came to tell you I love you, and I all but went away without telling you. You know very well I have loved you

for some time. Will you accept me? To judge by the daily abuse of me I am sure of the Premiership. I shall rule England, and you will rule me, for you know I am helpless in your hands. Will you accept me?"

Gwendolen had months ago foreseen the possibility of this offer, but she did not expect its realisation either in such a shape or at such a time. Conflicting emotions kept her silent. When it came to the point, the thought of allying herself with this of her two lovers brought a revulsion of feeling. Bardolph still kept possession of her hand. He began to hope that the silence gave consent.

"I cannot make up my mind so suddenly," she faltered.

"Why not, Gwendolen?" he asked tenderly.

Again she found nothing to reply, and Bardolph was preparing to cut the situation short by clasping her passionately in his arms, when the butler entered, bearing a card. With a smothered oath he dropped her hand.

"Mr. Floppington!" cried Gwendolen, involuntarily flushing scarlet, and then turning paler than before. "Oh no, I cannot see him. I can never see him any more!"

Not a muscle moved in the butler's stolid countenance till he arrived outside. Then he grinned and winked.

"Gwendolen!" exclaimed Bardolph, in feverish exultation, "say you consent!"

But Gwendolen had thrown herself into a chair, and was sobbing convulsively. He went to her and stood for a moment looking at her helplessly. She controlled her emotion with an effort as he leant over her.

"Gwendolen!" he cried, distracted by alternations of confidence and alarm. "You are troubled. Give me the right to protect you."

"Forgive me if I wound you, dear Lord Bardolph," she replied softly, "but I shall never marry again."

Her beautiful eyes looked at him pleadingly, her mouth quivered with emotion. She seemed so weak and helpless that her determination had an ironically pathetic effect, and fell lightly upon Mountchapel's ears.

"No, Gwendolen," he exclaimed passionately, "I cannot believe that you will be so cruel."

He bent over her in imperious tenderness. She was so weak and overcome at the moment that she felt herself in danger of being dominated by his stronger will. Not thus had Floppington wooed her. She felt her energies of resistance giving way. Her womanly gentleness, that shrank from paining him, unfitted her to repulse him decisively, even if a certain hesitation had not been engendered in her by the expansion of her experience. But she must conquer the lethargy that was creeping over her. Bardolph saw that she was yielding.

"You will not refuse to ensure my happiness and to entrust your own to my keeping," he went on. "Dearest Gwendolen, I

have unveiled my soul to you. You will not refuse to share and sweeten the struggle for power."

He saw a change come over her face as he finished the sentence, an expression of resolute calm blent with a tinge of relief. Her lips parted for the first time since she had declared her intention of remaining in her desolate widowhood. His heart beat quickly with the prevision that in another moment that divine form would be clasped in his embrace, those beautiful lips pressed close to his.

"What is it now?" she asked in tranquil, passionless tones.

Bardolph turned his head quickly, and, to his horror and disgust, he beheld the same domestic tendering a card to his mistress. "He won't go away. He said will you please read what's on the back."

Gwendolen took the card, and read as follows :

"As you value the happiness of your life, give me one minute — Floppington."

This enigmatical sentence, coming upon her at the critical moment when the happiness of her life was at stake, affected her with the solemnity of some divine oracle. A wild hope that her old love was guiltless instantaneously flashed through her excited brain. She shook with nervous tremor.

"I will see him," she breathed.

"Adieu, Lady Harley," exclaimed Bardolph harshly. "I fear I have been wasting too much of your time."

"No ; if you are my friend, stay. I shall be stronger. He will be gone in a minute," she replied incoherently.

"As you will," he said sullenly.

She made no reply. Her eyes were fixed on the doorway, watching for her fallen lover. In a moment he appeared, and at the woeful sight her overstrung nervous system gave way, and she sank back on her chair in a swoon ; for his face was the white face of a phantom, and his eyes were sunk deep in his head, and the flesh had faded from his cheek-bones. His clothes hung loosely upon him as though his body had shrunk, and they exhaled the damp. But what words can paint the horror of his haggard glance in which one seemed to read the concentrated misery of the human race ?

CHAPTER V.

WEAVING THE NET.

THE astonishment of Lord Bardolph Mountchapel at the ghastly spectacle of the Premier was so intense that he stood riveted to the spot, staring dumbly at his former chief, and not noticing the condition of Lady Harley. His well-tested principle of *nil admirari* broke down at last, as well as his incapacity for failing to understand anything under the sun. He even forgot for a moment his bitter irritation at an interruption so inopportune.

The Premier, for his part, started back on seeing Bardolph—the surprise was evidently mutual. Both seemed to feel the delicacy of the situation; and Mountchapel wondered what tone it was best to take with the man who had ousted him from the Cabinet, and whom he was perhaps to oust from the Premiership that very night, unless the line taken by Lady Harley should yet interfere with his scheme of revenge in the few hours still remaining.

For he was by this time wrought up to such a pitch of amative-ness that he had determined to forego his opposition to the Premier in the event of her ladyship's consent to his suit. He told himself that he would be generous in his joy; and, lost in contemplation of the altitude of his sentiments, his inner vision was turned away from the earthly fact that since Gwendolen had manifested more than an inkling of distrust in his motives on this particular question, magnanimity would pay better than rancour from all points of view, political or amorous. If, then, he should end by leading a large section of his following into the Governmental lobby, he would find it awkward in view of possible reconciliations to have still further widened the breach between himself and the Prime Minister. On the other hand, if he should be left free to wreck the Ministry after all, it would be humiliating to have done anything to fill up the gap, or to have treated Floppington with anything but lofty contempt. The problem of how to behave was, therefore, not easy. It was, indeed, a problem that baffled all his political sagacity, and reduced his usually clear-cut ideas to an indecisive pulp. Never before had he stood "by the parting of the ways" so doubtful as to the route he would ultimately follow. He fumed at the fate which left him at this crisis ignorant whether Gwendolen would be his or Floppington's, ignorant whether his principles would force him to support the Reform Bill or to oppose it, and ignorant whether he was to be the Premier's henchman or his adversary. And to think that in a moment more he might have acquired definite views on all these points!

The Premier cut the knot. After an instant's hesitation he advanced into the room and extended his hand, which shook tremulously.

Bardolph was thunderstruck. Could the Premier, in his well-founded dread of defeat, be desiring a compromise? And did he fear him sufficiently to gulp down his hatred and make the first overtures? And what meant that deadly pallor and woe-begone air? Had there been a hopeless breach with Gwendolen, and did the unfortunate man feel his happiness being undermined in all directions?

Feeling that a smile of triumph was irresistibly dawning on his countenance, he utilised it as one of welcome, and after a moment of intensely rapid reflection, he put out his hand in return.

"Has the beggar been touching himself up with chalk," he thought, "and getting himself measured for clothes too big for him in order to appeal *ad* Gwendolen's *miserericordiam*, as he is now doing to mine? He's artful enough for ten Premiers."

But the grasp of the Premier's burning hand dispelled this idea.

"He's really ill, the fool!" Bardolph admitted to himself. "No wonder he's knocked himself up. The tremendous amount he's done lately! He works as if he were paid by the job. He can't take things easily. And then he worries even about his love affairs, and makes a mull of them. While I make business into pleasure, he makes pleasure into business. He won't be in very good form to-night, that's evident."

Soliloquising thus complacently, he shook the Premier's hand with a dignified cordiality that committed him equally to alliance, to antagonism, and to neither. Floppington took no notice of the Ex-Minister's *nuances*, but turned to Gwendolen, of whom he had caught but a blurred glimpse—the first brief vision of a white figure, and a pale, angelic face, played upon by the ruddy tints of tongues of flame. He bent upon her a look of infinite tenderness.

"Pardon me for forcing myself upon your ladyship," he began in grave, trembling tones, "but the greatness of the necessity must be my excuse for refusing to accept your decision."

Bardolph writhed under this humiliation of his rival. Surely the irony of fate would not allow the breach to be healed in his presence. He turned his back on the Premier and stared at the window-panes, down which the rain-drops were now coursing more slowly. "The man who humbles himself before a woman," he moralised, "dishonours his sex." Gwendolen did not stir.

"I hope my message did not alarm you—Good God, what have I done?"

The sharp cry of remorse startled Bardolph. He turned his head and saw his rival peering anxiously into Gwendolen's face.

"What is to be done?" whispered the Premier hoarsely. "She has fainted!"

For answer Bardolph rang the bell with violence. Then, pushing the unresisting Floppington unceremoniously aside, he bent over the helpless form and gazed at the unearthly beauty of the motionless face. The wind gave a final sob and died out, and the sky began to lighten.

"A curse seems to fall on whomsoever I would love or befriend," mused Floppington bitterly. "I must have the evil eye."

When assistance came, he looked on passively, though anxiously, while Bardolph briskly superintended the restorative measures; the young statesman showing alike his common-sense and his science by ascribing her ladyship's prostration to the heat of the fire, and by ordering the affrighted servants to open the window.

"Again I find," reflected the Premier, "that speech is silvern, and action golden."

At last quivering eyelids foretold Gwendolen's return to consciousness. Bardolph had the window closed, dismissed the domestics, and tenderly bathing her forehead, he awaited the

moment of grateful illumination in her eyes. But when she opened them and perceived Bardolph, a look of wonder came into them.

"Arnold!" she murmured. "Where are you? I dreamt you were here."

She closed her eyes again.

Bardolph's brow grew as black as night. He looked sharply at the Premier, who stood a few yards off. Instead of the expected look of tender exultation, he read only one of hopeless misery. Could the words not have reached him?

With a prolonged shudder, Gwendolen raised her head and looked round the room. As her gaze rested on the Premier she received a fresh shock, and she understood what had happened. At the sight of the gaunt, hollow-eyed, careworn man, her eyes filled with tears, and an expression of womanly pity and loving tenderness came over her face.

The Premier caught the glance, and their eyes met. He made a step forwards.

"Gwendolen!" he cried in tones of searching pathos.

"I will not intrude upon your ladyship any longer," sneered Bardolph. "Good-bye, Lady Harley. Adieu, Mr. Floppington; we shall meet again to-night."

The parting threat of his rival was lost upon the Premier. His eyes were fixed upon Gwendolen with a look of hopeless yearning. She was deadly pale, and trembling under a rush of formless emotion and indefinite thought. Pity was vaguely blent with anger softened by time to despairing regret, and with a shuddering sense of relief at having awakened from a bad dream when on the point of falling into some bottomless gulf. The havoc wrought upon the Premier by her dismissal of him touched her woman's soul to sympathetic tenderness, and with renascent love came a dim revival of that belief in his nobleness with which it had always been associated. Swifter and swifter ran the current of old emotion till, with a sudden impulse of divine forgiveness, she stretched out her hand in reckless self-abandonment to the torrent, and in her tender eyes and tremulous lips one read a lofty but passionate spirit moved to its depths. But as the feverish hand of her lover touched hers, a feeling of mortal sickness came over her, for the contact seemed to burn the man's impurity into her own blood, and there seemed to emanate from his very garments something of coarse dissipation, offensive no less æsthetically than morally, at which all the purity and delicacy of her nature revolted; and the terrible details of his baseness flashed upon her anew. She drew away her hand quickly with an irrepressible shudder of disgust.

"Oh! why have you come here?" she cried in heartrending tones, in which indignation vainly struggled with renewed despair. "I cannot, I cannot forgive you."

A wild startled look shot across the Premier's countenance.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "You know?" A nervous trembling seized him afresh, and the pallor of his face grew deeper.

Gwendolen was struggling with a desire to burst into a wild flood of tears. But the sight of his cowardly agitation froze her to an icy calm.

She flashed a chilling look of contempt upon him.

"Did you then entertain any hope," she said slowly and bitterly, "that I have not guessed all? Dupe as I have been, I am not so simple as not to know everything now, Mr. Jack Dawe."

The Premier winced at the name as if a red-hot iron had touched him, but the start which he gave was as much due to astonishment as to agony. Gwendolen saw that he writhed under the recall of his baseness, and in her present mood of righteous indignation, the painful fascination of inflicting deserved punishment added pungency to the lash of scorn.

Floppington stood before her with bowed, contrite head. He was silent from agitation and indecision as to what to say. He opened his mouth and shut it again with a perplexed, hesitating expression. There seemed something tragically ridiculous about the man. A sudden semi-hysterical fit of sneering laughter seized her.

"These be thy gods, O Israel!" she exclaimed. "This is the nobler sex which woman cannot replace at the Council-board. There stands he silent whose every word is hung upon by the gullible country he has so long deceived."

"Deceived, Lady Harley?" cried the Premier piteously.

"Yes, deceived!" replied Gwendolen hotly. "Where is the world to look for models if not in its leaders? And you could preach the loftiest morality in your speeches, while in your innermost heart you were capable of deeds that you tried to hide from all the world. You have betrayed the trust of a whole nation. But why do I discuss this loathsome subject with you?" she added with a shudder. "Your conscience must be fatally blunted if it tells you otherwise."

"I always relied on your clearer intuition," said the Premier earnestly, "and I will trust it now. But God knows if I sinned, it was in carelessness. I followed the mere whim of the moment, and bitterly have I repented it since. As I wandered about London on the fatal night of our rencontre, world-weary, sick of the din and contest of politics, its lies, and its endless intrigues, a fever in my blood—oh! who but myself can gauge the strength of the terrible temptation to—"

"Sir!" interrupted Gwendolen. "You forget yourself! Would it not be better to reserve these details for your boon companions?"

How chill her heart and the room had grown! Yet there was a bright fire leaping in the grate, and the rain had ceased, leaving behind a sunny freshness as of early spring, and outside, moist-feathered birds were twittering among the glistening dripping leaves. Not for her would the dark hours any more glide into light and song. As she uttered the last word she wished that she had not been weak enough to admit him once more. In time she might have grown to believe again in some substratum of delicacy,

honour, refinement, not destroyed by an isolated *faux pas*. But now all such tender webs of soothing thought were for ever impossible. It was plain that his nature was vulgarised and debased to the core.

A spasm of pain distorted the Premier's countenance. "You judge me harshly," he replied humbly. "'Tis true I have deceived the world, but what evil have I done that cannot be repaired?"

"You are right. *Nothing* is lost, *sans l'honneur*."

"*L'honneur!*" echoed Floppington in dismay; "surely you are exaggerating. I cannot believe I have been guilty of anything really dishonourable. Aquinas himself, who was the first to lay such stress on the subjective side of moral action——"

Surprise and indignation had rendered Gwendolen momentarily speechless; but when she heard this impudent, casuistic appeal to the Angelic Doctor, all her ardent nature flashed out in lightning that made the Premier quail before the dark recesses of his spirit which it illuminated.

"It is not really dishonourable to lower yourself to the level of an untutored peasant; it is not really dishonourable to masquerade in another man's name, leaving State affairs to regulate themselves as best they may; it is not dishonourable to trail the reputation of a noble family in the dust; nor to——"

"Oh, spare me, spare me!" he entreated, cowering before her arrowy glance and holding his hands before his face as if to ward off the shower of verbal darts; "I did not think of all that. Spare me!"

"Spare you!" cried Lady Gwendolen; and her words were dagger-thrusts. "And did you spare *me* when you made me a subject of ridicule, of scandal in my own house? Did you bestow a thought upon what your infamous conduct would probably expose *me* to? Did you——"

The Premier interrupted her by a cry of pain. "Oh, my God," he thought, "what madness was mine! I who would die to save her pain have recklessly exposed her to all this! What must her delicate spirit not have suffered! Yet God knows I thought our lives sundered beyond the possibility of such an intimacy."

"Did you not subordinate all other considerations, great or little, to your own selfish desires?"

"I did, I did," moaned the Premier. "I was blind, but you have opened my eyes."

He uncovered his face and stretched out his hands towards her in piteous supplication.

"Forgive me," he said in a low tone that vibrated with infinite pathos. "If you knew what I have suffered! Forgive me!" Gwendolen was moved in spite of herself.

"What is my wrong beside hers?" she said softly. "Ask *her* to forgive you!"

"What do you mean?" said the Premier with an air of innocence that irritated Gwendolen afresh, and sent through her a thrill of indignant pity at all the countless sufferings of her sex.

"I have wronged no woman but you." Gwendolen looked straight into his eyes and said with bitter reproach:

"Is it not wrong, then, according to your remarkable code, to persuade a poor housemaid that you are going to marry her in three months?" The Premier did not flinch before her withering glance. She saw a proud look of low cunning in his eyes and a wicked smile playing round the corners of his mouth, as, after a sigh of relief, he said with the easy affability of an accomplished *roué*:

"Is that all? Now, whatever wrongs I have really committed, I cannot see that I did anything blameworthy there. I acted for once like a man of the world: at one stroke I ensured my own repose and her happiness. Of course," he concluded, breaking into a melancholy little laugh, "you don't suppose I ever meant to marry the girl."

Gwendolen started from her chair, her sweet face rigid and pale, her gray eyes flashing fire, her figure drawn up in regal majesty, her imperious forefinger pointing to the door.

At the shock of this attitude the Premier's heart almost ceased to beat. "Don't send me away," he cried wildly. "I don't understand it all. I have so much to say to you."

Still the imperious forefinger pointed to the door while she made a movement towards the bell.

"Gwendolen!" The cry was wrung from his innermost heart.

The forefinger was relaxed, and the hand fell to her side. "If you have really anything to say," she said after an instant's silence, "I will listen to you for five minutes. Then we part for ever."

"For ever!" The Premier looked round the room in a dazed fashion. He was conscious of serried rows of rich morocco bindings, and of workaday chairs and fire-irons; but all this concreteness seemed curiously out of harmony with the dream-like minor key in which his inner life was playing itself out. Mechanically he went to the window and opened it, admitting a rather chill breeze. He closed it immediately, and then walked to the fireplace and stood looking reflectively into the fairy structures and arcades of red-hot coal. All at once he turned round and found Gwendolen's eyes fixed curiously upon him. He started. "For ever!" he repeated musingly. "So much for human vaticination. Do you remember, Lady Harley, my prophecy that your sex would have to wait for ever for its enfranchisement?"

"I never thought," said Gwendolen, sadly, "that the day would come when I should wish that we were indebted for this act of justice to some other man than you."

"'Tis true I am the agent," replied Floppington, "but a very indirect agent. My own opinions are unchanged. You know why I allowed it to be introduced. It was part of our agreement to——"

"I deny it! There was no agreement," exclaimed Gwendolen passionately. "I thought that you had altered from conviction, though I know better now. Did you think to buy me thus? Or did you fear that Bardolph Mountchapel was too strong for you?"

"You are mistaken," replied the Premier, mildly. "I agreed to let him have his own way just for the sake of the experiment."

"A very paltry evasion of my last question and one worthy of you. You allowed him to prepare the public mind and to persuade the Cabinet to the new course—in fact, it is to him that the gratitude of our sex is due and not to you. And all the while you knew you intended ultimately to oust him out of his office so that you might reap all the glory of his great measure!"

The Premier was about to protest, but Gwendolen went on rapidly: "Perhaps you are going to say it was not dishonourable to play such a trick as you did on Mountchapel!"

"That can hardly be called a trick," returned the Premier with the faintest suspicion of a mischievous smile. "I certainly paid him back in his own coin, unchristian though it may have been, and I cannot honestly say that I regret that he has lost his place in endeavouring to deprive me of mine. He met his match. Besides, all's fair in love and war, they say."

"Ah!" ejaculated Gwendolen, scornfully. "At last a ray of truth! Is it thus that you revenge yourself on a rival, sir? Thank Heaven that our interview is at an end." She rang the bell. An electric shock seemed to pass through the Premier.

"I deeply regret having intruded my presence upon you," he said quickly and with infinite humility. "How could I foresee that my visit would be as superfluous as it has proved? I did not mean to take up your time in discussing my political rival. It must be plain to you that I came to show you—I know not exactly how, for I had sworn to tell no one—that the man whom rumour declares to have replaced me in your affections, my rival in love," a faint, sad smile passed over his face as he said the words, "is an impostor, or at least not what he pretends to be, and that, of course, you mustn't marry him."

"How now?" exclaimed Gwendolen, flushing deeply. "Will you dictate to me? Am I to give my heart where you choose? If you had a spark of gentlemanly feeling in you, you would have spared me this last insult of interfering in my love affairs."

"You must not," he repeated in wild astonishment; "you don't know him; he is vulgar, uncultivated, a stranger to refinement."

"Continue to heap indignities on the head of a defenceless woman," interrupted Gwendolen in low tones vibrating with intense scorn. "But what is to be expected of one who slanders the absent? You to constitute yourself a judge of refinement! You to dare speak thus of a man who was magnanimous enough to praise you far beyond your deserts!"

"He magnanimous enough!" gasped the Premier.

"Unable to win by fair means you resort to foul, in love as well as politics. Well would it be for the country if you made way for him altogether. Mine would not then be the only grateful sex." She said the last words very calmly, for a footman had just entered.

"If I made way for him altogether!" repeated Floppington, disregarding the domestic, who was welling over with delightful excitement. "Is this your real opinion? Do you think it would be better for the country?"

"Most decidedly," she replied, quietly. "Adieu, Mr. Floppington! *Pour toujours!*"

His lips twitched painfully. He moved slowly towards her as if intending to take her hand. She remained perfectly rigid, her delicate fingers grasping a chair tightly to keep herself from trembling. Her gray eyes were cast down, but as he came close to her, they were raised to his with a hard, glittering expression that seemed to interpose a bar of steel against his further progress.

"My punishment is greater than I can bear," said the Premier in a whisper that was half a sob. "You will at least keep the secret you have surprised."

Gwendolen shuddered perceptibly, but made no answer. Her eyelids drooped once more.

"What is done cannot be undone," he pleaded humbly. "It is not my secret alone."

She raised her eyes again and flashed upon him a look of fierce, contemptuous indignation. "It wanted but that," she said bitterly, nevertheless retaining enough self-possession to speak French; "but since you must have a categorical answer, yes, I will keep your shameful secret."

A twinge of pain shot across the Premier's face. He gazed at the pallid, firm-set, unquivering mask that hid a world of agony behind its cruel, white beauty, and he bowed his head as if before some stony image of remorseless and unexultant Justice.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNFORESEEN CONTINGENCY.

THE afternoon continued fine. There was a softness and coolness in the air after the rain and in the clear light the faded façades of houses stood out with a delicacy of outline that made them almost picturesque. Yet to the bent figure walking slowly along the busy pavement, the atmosphere was charged with a wistful pathos, and thick-shadowed with olden memories. Faces that had long fallen into dust, voices whose musical or unmelodious ring vibrated no more save for the ear of remembrance, scenes hallowed by the mystic glamour of childish association, these accompanied him as he almost unconsciously threaded his way through the throng of pedestrians. The present had vanished, nor did he ask himself why his mind was not busy with it. The events of that day or of the day before, or of the past week, seemed to him to belong to the life of somebody else, and to concern him no more than a tragic story one vaguely remembers to have listened to with dull apathy. But something had thawed the frozen stream of forgotten experience

and it burst into life and motion. Aspiration, struggle, failure, regret—so ran the gamut of his life, which year after year did but reproduce in different keys or with other discords. He had settled down surveying his past with the quiet mournfulness of the philosophic observer by the time he reached the Bethnal Green Road, down which he forgot to turn.

"Finds himself a fool at forty," he muttered. "T'would probably be the same if, like cats, we could make nine experiments in the art of living. Yet it seems hard to have had only one life to bungle. Too late have I found that each man belongs by nature to one of two classes—the first formed for action, the second for criticism. The function of the former is to do all the work of life, that of the latter to find fault with it when done. By these two agencies, each as indispensable as the other, does the world's work progress—and I wishing to play a part in both—I beg your pardon!"

"Whyn't yer look where yer a-goin' to?" growled a juvenile voice.

Jack Dawe looked at the small boy who was wiping beer-splashes off his grimy garments. It was the hero of the saveloys. The recognition was mutual.

"If yer don't pay for that 'ere champagne yer spilt," cried the boy, whirling the can rapidly to show off his power of retaining the contents, "I'll have yer locked up, s'elp me Bob I will."

The sight of the lad brought Jack back with a shock to the realities of life. The heat and effluvia of the dinner in the shop came upon him with almost the intensity of actuality, and his gorge rose.

Then with the image of the dining-rooms came that of their sick proprietress, and with a self-reproachful frown he strode forward more rapidly.

"Come back," shrieked the boy, with an excellent imitation of Jack's morning manner and matter. "Ye haven't paid me for that champagne!"

Some passers-by looked on admiringly, but Jack merely quickened his step.

"Stop thief!" cried the boy, running a few yards after him. Jack smiled a smile of humorous melancholy, tolerant alike of the boy and of his admirers.

"'Tis but Mountchapel in miniature," he murmured.

Suddenly a bright idea struck the small boy. He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a huge pellet which he hurled at the high hat of the pedestrian. The large, mealy Regent caught the target neatly between brim and crown, and there crumbled into floury dissolution, ruining the glossy silk in its own destruction. It was the cold potato Jack had given him after freeing him from the grasp of the policeman. Jack staggered under the force of the blow. Recovering himself, he took off his hat and looked at it ruefully.

"Said I not he was an embryonic Mountchapel?" he muttered.

He was replacing it on his head, when a distant valedictory cry of "Yah, what a swell!" was borne to his ears. He started slightly. "Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend, for the lesson thou hast taught," he murmured with a sad smile. "It is thus that good is still evolved out of ill."

Looking about now, fully awake to the outer world, he discovered that he had gone too far, so he determined to go down the Hackney Road,* which ran almost parallel to the Bethnal Green, and then skirt round into the latter.

"It is too late now to go back," he said aloud. He walked on in silence. Suddenly, as he was passing a hat shop, he turned into it, and reappeared in a few moments wearing a soft sombrero more in keeping with his daily functions, and at the same time free from the static seediness imparted to the other by the dynamic force of the potato. He next crossed the road, and entered a large clothing establishment. Here he exchanged his morning coat (which was as ill-fitting in every particular as if the wrong measure had been carefully taken express) for a long, loose paletot, which fitted anybody because it fitted nobody. It was evident that the small boy's satire had struck home. His ill-considered ambition to emulate Pelham had brought upon him the abhorrent indignation of a youthful Carlyle, and he had hastened to rid himself of garments so obnoxious to a juvenile hater of cant and pretence. Hence, doubtless, the thanks and the theological soliloquy recorded above. But had he known the wretched effect he produced in his swellish clothes, he would not have needed the boy's reproof to make him lay them aside together with his foppish ambition. To escape being ridiculous he must either change his mind or his tailor.

Once more attired with befitting simplicity, he struck forward with extra vigour, fretting internally at the scant progress he made. That he should be conscious of the length of the route was a healthy sign; but that he was not entirely out of the clouds was proved by the surprise with which he remembered the existence of omnibuses when one rumbled past.

He stood still till there was some danger of being left behind, when he rushed madly forwards; typifying thus the procedure of Conservatives like Floppington.

While he is rolling homewards we shall have time to point a moral, even if we do not adorn the tale by so doing. *Facilis descensus Averni!* By what imperceptible gradations has the humble painter descended from honest daily work to aimless vagabondage, thence to contempt of his mother's occupation, thence to desertion of his post and his sick mother, and lastly to masherdom! And as this means could not have been extensive he must necessarily have belonged to that needy but noble species of the race which elects for plain living and high collars.

At the bottom of Hackney Road Jack alighted, and turned sharply to the right. A few minutes more, and he was ascending

* For this and other localities mentioned in the text, see Bigwood's "Map of Old London."

his native road. Here and there he observed shop fronts whose glory was partially eclipsed by shutters.

"They that look out of the windows shall be darkened," he said solemnly. "Peace be to thy soul, whosoever thou art! If thou didst not find life worth the living, mayst thou find death worth the dying!"

"Who is dead?" he asked of a little unkempt girl who stood at the door of one of the shops which were in mourning.

"The woman in the cookshop," was the reply.

Jack's heart ceased to beat, but even in the first rush of thronging thoughts came an interrogation as to why the dread truth had not instantly burst upon a mind brooding upon sickness.

"Mrs. Dawe?" he inquired breathlessly.

"That's her," said the girl.

"My God!" he ejaculated. "What shall I do?" He walked on slowly in mournful agitation. He shivered in the warm air, for he felt the piercing blast of the bleak February day when he saw the sodden earth flattened on his father's grave. The sunlight was darkened by dull lines of rain, and through the gray mist he heard the iron bell that seemed to translate into sound all the ineffable dreariness of the day and his spirit. Above the rattle of wheels and the buzz of life he caught the high, vibrating tones in which the minister uttered the solemn words—words which had ever since been associated with the *timbre* of his voice—"And the spirit return to the God who gave it."

"Dead!" he muttered. "Cut off without warning, and even I not at thy bedside to admonish thy parting soul! Well, O wise Rabbi, mightest thou say: 'Repent one day before thy death.'

May He whom thou hast denied receive thee into His infinite mercy. Poor lonely Mrs. Dawe, whose son's ways could not be thy ways, nor his words thy words; and from whom thou wast divided in thy death as in thy life. Poor unit of the vast multitude of Demos, how little those who quarrelled over making laws for thee knew of thy limited life—limited, yet so much to thee—of the spiritual blight that ate into thee amidst thy material prosperity, or of the years of ceaseless, unrepining drudgery, lightened by no larger hope than the petty gains of day by day. Faithful to thine husband whose words yet live upon thy lips, how often wast thou wont to set the counter in a roar! But thou hast joined him now where thy *mots* avail not, nor thy cunning cookery, nor thy succulent sausages. What profits it now that Mrs. Prodders is deserted of her customers, or that the fame of thy pork-pies will survive thee? What to thee is the beauty of thy stuffed birds and thy Brussels carpet, what the glory of thy blue and gold tea-set? . . . But who am I to moralise on thee, I, whose shifting life, querulous, restless, useless . . . noxious to the happiness . . . of others . . . is as a shadow to the concrete definiteness of thine?"

A sob that overmastered him and half-surprised him, interrupted his reflections. Looking up, he found that he had reached his home.

Some children were trying to peep through the closed shutters, as if they thought to see the corpse behind them. As Jack paused at the shop door and lifted up his hand to knock, they turned their attention to him as a connecting link between themselves and the dread unknown, and watched him with mingled awe and curiosity.

"That's 'im," he heard one whisper. "*It's 'is mother.*"

"Don't you wish you was 'im, Bill?" replied another. "To ride in a carriage all to yourself."

Jack's hand dropped to his side.

"Of what use is it," he thought, "to go in now? I had better arrange about the funeral, and get the sad task over this very afternoon."

He stood still in anxious meditation. Then, suddenly conscious again of the staring group of children, he started, and looked at them sadly. How used he was to grimy pinafores, patched knickerbockers, and pinched faces!

"*Whereas . . . and whereas . . .*" he muttered bitterly. "A coach and four! Nay; a herd of buffaloes are daily driven through them all! After so many years of philanthropic effort, so many yards of barren words! You would like a ride, would you?" he said aloud, putting his hand into his pocket.

The children looked at each other suspiciously, then by common consent they turned tail and fled, scared like timid animals by the unexpected.

Jack was looking blankly after them when an omnibus rolled up, and he sprang into it, as though its advent had determined his course. The vehicle was almost empty, and he threw himself into a corner. As the 'bus started he caught a glimpse of the window of his own bed-room, with the solitary pot of mignonette on the sill, and his thoughts travelled into the adjoining room and rested upon the plump, white, stony face, made solemn by death. He buried his head in his hands.

The sound of his mother's name roused him from his reverie. Glancing round, he found the conveyance full, and himself wedged tightly into his corner. His nostrils were assailed by a strong smell of fish, and his ears by a dialogue which was being carried on by two feminine voices issuing from the other end of the bench on which he sat.

"Poor old soul! To be took so sudden. All last week she was in the best o' sperrits. Only yesterday she was that 'arty she threatened to 'ave a beggar locked up—and to-day she's dead!"

"Her old man was took all of a 'eap, just the same. It runs in the blood. I lay Jack goes off, too, like a barrel o' gunpowder. Yes, a barrel of gunpowder—mark my words, Betsy Baker—for as sure as eggs is eggs he'll blaze up like Old Nick."

"Blaze up?" echoed Betsy Baker.

"Blaze up—or I'm no prophet! That man has took to drink o' late, and from what I 'ear he guzzles enough to burn up a 'orse. My Bill seed 'im one day when he was buildin' in 'Aggerston. He-

didn't 'ave no paint-pots, and 'e was walkin' along, knockin' agin everybody, and drunk as a lord. Another time, one o' Bill's mates met 'im in 'Ackney Wick, in a fit of Delilium Trimmings, a-talkin' to 'isself."

"On a workin'-day?" inquired Betsy Baker.

"Yes, and on a Wednesday—not even on a Monday. He was on the booze agin, and without 'is pots and brushes."

"Shame!" exclaimed Betsy Baker. "The man as gets drunk except on a Saturday night is a beast."

"Right you are, Betsy! As we learnt at Sunday School, 'six days shalt thou labour, and the seventh thou shalt——'"

The voice stopped in evident confusion, and went on in a different tone :

"I dare say the old woman knew it, for all she looked so jolly, and as I said to Mrs. Prodgers when she argyfied that it was 'cause Mrs. Dawe was a Bradlaugh, as I said to her, ses I : 'Mark my words, Mrs. Prodgers,' ses I, 'that Jack 'as been the death o' her, or I'm no prophet.' The fust time that she found out he had took to drink, that night he was chucked out o' the Foresters', it made 'er nigh mad. She loved 'im like the 'air of 'er 'ead, and to see 'im go wrong and pine away to a shadow, all in a few weeks, cut 'er to the bone."

"There may be some truth in that, Mrs. Green ; but I 'eard another story. They say that this Eliza Bathbrill he used to be so sweet on 'as chucked 'im up, since he went to the devil, and the old woman who 'ad set 'er 'eart on the match died of a broken 'eart."

"You've got it quite wrong, Betsy. It was the old woman that chucked up Elizer 'cause she was that extravagant with 'er silks and satins that you may lay your life Jack paid for 'em. Many and many a row she 'ad with Jack about it, but 'e wouldn't give 'er up, and *that* was the broken 'art she died of, not the one *you* mention."

"You none of you know nothing about it," chimed in a third voice with some asperity. "It was Jack that chucked up Elizer to spite 'is mother for jawin' 'im for spendin' all 'is wages in drink."

"Any'ow," summed up Mrs. Green, "it's all 'is doin's which-ever way you look at it. The old woman 'as 'ad enough trouble to turn 'er 'air gray twice, even if it 'adn't been gray any time this ten years. That Jack 'as been the death of 'er, or I'm no prophet."

Jack was cowering in his corner, his sombrero drawn over his forehead, his paletot buttoned to the throat, his head turned away to avoid detection.

"Am I the Canon or Guido Franceschini?" he asked himself. "My concerns certainly seem as explicable in as many ways as those of the people in the *Ring and the Book*. And more than these are doubtless busy with me! I wonder how Browning would tell *my* story. Shall I ever let him know of the opportunity of gaining new laurels?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SORROWS OF AN UNDERTAKER.

THE same evening a cab dashed up to the "Star" dining-rooms, and a figure attired in a loose paletot and a spreading sombrero jumped briskly out, pushed double his fare into the hand of the driver, and strode in two steps to the shop door. The look of anxiety, worry, and even irritation on his face was intensified when he was stopped by a meek man in black; but any feeling of resentment at the interruption was momentary, for he paused and said:

"Well, Mr. White?"

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Dawe," said Mr. White, "to be compelled to make this mournful call, and I sincerely sympathise with your distress; but I know the deceased lady would not like to employ any other undertaker than the one who gave her such satisfaction when he buried her husband. Fearing that in your trouble you might forget me, I ventured to anticipate rivals in these days of competition, when we shall perhaps soon have people ordering their funerals at co-operative stores, or cremating themselves because it is cheaper, or exporting their bodies abroad for the benefit of the foreigner——"

"Don't impugn Free Trade; you shall have the order," interrupted Jack.

"Thank you very much, sir. Will you kindly look at this card and choose your style? We do it in deal, without plumes, for three-ten; but I could not honestly recommend it. Note how far superior, in the matter of gold-headed nails, waving plumes, and artistic hearse, is our nine-ten funeral. Take my word for it, Mr. Dawe, in coffins, as in everything else, a really good article is economy in the long run."

"Let her have the nine-ten, poor old soul," replied Jack.

"You are a good son, sir," said Mr. White, much affected. "I will do my best for her and for you, and bury her in such style that you shall not regret it. Were all sons like you, sir, we undertakers would have no reason for grumbling that business is bad."

Jack started as if stung, and his face flushed with self-reproachful shame.

"You are right," he thought bitterly. "Poor mother!" The long years of childhood flashed across his mind, ere a thoughtful manhood had somewhat sundered their lives. He knew that her love for him had never failed, and of the associations of forty years, only the tender reminiscences now stood out clearly, bathed in sacred light.

"Has my neglect hastened her end?" he asked himself. "And I was not even at her death-bed!" Struggling with such thoughts as these, he replied negligently, "Business bad then?"

"As gloomy as it can well be, sir. It's enough to drive an undertaker to suicide."

"To give himself a job?" asked Jack. His impatience to enter had given place to a certain reluctance, and he seemed to grasp at the opportunity of staving off the dreaded moment, at least till he grew calmer internally.

"No, sir," replied Mr. White, "but because he can't get a living."

"Out of death cometh life," murmured Jack.

"Everything is against us lately," proceeded the undertaker. "For one thing I observe that the marriage rate is falling seven per cent."

"I should have imagined the death rate would have interested you more, unless you think that marriage and suicide are connected."

"It isn't that, sir. But marriage brings into the world more people to die, you see. And if people defer marriage till they can afford it, the children are more likely to grow up to benefit our posterity instead of us. Then, sir, look at the newfangled fuss they are making nowadays about Horrible Londons and Bitter Cries. The slums, hotbeds of immorality and unhealthiness as they are, are the very best fields of infant and adult mortality. In short, sir, what with the spread of sanitary knowledge and the extension of medical science, people are kept so healthy——"

"That were it not for quack medicines and elixirs of life your occupation would be gone."

Mr. White stared and concluded as though he had not been interrupted :

"That the good old epidemics are impossible."

"I am glad he has reminded me," thought Jack, "I must take up the Slums Question." Then, feeling a little better able to endure the mute reproach on the dead face of his mother, he knocked sharply at the door with his closed fist. There was no answer.

"That girl of yours is awfully cheeky, if you will allow me to say so," observed Mr. White. "I knocked for ten minutes before I could get an answer. Then she looked out of the upper window and asked what I wanted. When I stated my business she asked me who sent for me, and why I poked my nose where I wasn't wanted, and other saucy things, and at last said I was drunk and shut down the sash. I went next door to ask whether any other undertaker had called. The shopkeeper said not as far as he knew. He was a busy man, and the first he heard of the sad affair was from a customer, who asked him who was dead next door. Knowing that the old lady had not been able to serve in the shop, he at once guessed the truth. He, too, has been knocking here, but could not get in at once ; and, having no time to spare, went away. That girl is not to be trusted, sir, for to my own knowledge several persons who saw you rush frantically along the road this

afternoon in search of the doctor, and whose inquiries you did not answer in your grief and anxiety, were served in the same rude way—either not answered at all or shouted at to go away.”

Jack shook the door violently. Still no reply. A look of pain came into his eyes.

“I deserve to be shut out,” he thought, and emotion overpowered him once more.

“He does look ill,” reflected Mr. White. “But not so much as I had been led to believe by those who met him this afternoon. They said he was like a ghost, but that must have been through fright. But I mustn’t grumble.”

“Shall I take the measurement at once, sir?” he asked aloud.

“No, no!” replied Jack hastily. He hesitated, and then added: “Well, perhaps it would be better for you to accompany me at once.”

“Ah, sir, it is a sad task for us to bury friends. We do not pretend to regret the death of strangers, but when a family is endeared to us by burying all its members in turn”—he stopped to wipe away a tear and then proceeded with more resignation—“our only consolation is the knowledge that we have done our duty by them.”

Jack was about to knock a third time when a shrill voice descended upon them.

“Y’ain’t gone yet?” it screamed. “If ye don’t sling yer ’ook in a jiffy, I’ll chuck a pail o’ water over yer, ye black, drunken beast.”

Then, putting her head out of the window, Sally caught sight of her master and uttered a cry of joy. In another moment the door was flung open, and she appeared on the threshold with a scrap of newspaper in her hand. Jack stepped in and Mr. White was following him, but Sally snatched up a ladle and repulsed him indignantly.

“Sally!” exclaimed Jack, darting an imperious look at her. “Come in, Mr. White.”

The girl shrunk under the glance, and lowered the ladle.

“What does he want ’ere?” she murmured sullenly.

“Mind your own business,” cried Jack sharply.

At this unwonted reproof the tears came into Sally’s eyes, and she stood still in silent, grieved astonishment.

Jack was looking curiously round the darkened shop, with a mixture of conflicting emotions. The presence of death seemed to invest the well-known objects with strangeness and pathos.

“Where is she?” he said gently.

“In her own room, of course,” replied Sally shortly, only half-repressing a sob.

Jack was moved by her grief.

“It’s a reproach to my coldness,” he thought. “Ah! surely nothing dies but something mourns.”

“You can stay here, Sally,” he said aloud. “Follow me, Mr. White.”

Passing through the kitchen, he walked through the small parlour with a shudder doubtless occasioned by the cold, desolate appearance of the fireless room. He paused a moment to gaze at the oil-painting of his dead parent, and turned away to the stuffed birds with another shudder. Remorse seemed to seize upon him once more, for he murmured :

“Why did I ever leave her? Whether I am at all guilty in the matter of her death or not, I have ruined my own life. I can never be happy here any more. This room, that once seemed to me so sweet a place to rest in——”

Sally interrupted his reflections by putting her head into the room, and asking the two, in a humble tone, to tread softly. She still held the ladle in her right hand, but listlessly and almost unconsciously, so that it hung down with the inertness of a beaten dog's tail ; and her glib tongue was silenced by the half-consciousness of a fence of dignity and authoritativeness round her master—a superiority to interrogation and advice which recalled certain experiences of days she had hoped gone by for ever.

The two men obeyed the reverent instructions of the household drudge. Hat in hand they mounted the narrow stairs. The shadow of death seemed to lie upon their dark windings, and its coldness upon the small, square bleak landing upon which the three bedrooms opened. The air was charged with vague, mysterious noises that made them both shudder with a ghastly awe they felt to be unreasonable. Jack paused with his hand on the door of the room where the dead woman lay. A sudden superstitious sense that the corpse was stirring restlessly in its bed seized upon him, and many weird fancies that had haunted his childhood chilled his blood.

Smiling scornfully at his folly, he threw open the door. The last rays of the dying sun rested upon the tawdry room, and lit up that white upturned face on the pillow, that redeemed by its solemnity the meanness and bareness of the apartment.

The whole scene flashed upon his vision in the tenth of a second, and ere his hand had loosed its hold of the door, a slight movement seemed to agitate the face of the corpse, and a loud snore was borne to his ears. He started, turned pale with excitement, and tightened his grasp on the knob. At the same time Mr. White gave vent to a bitter cry of astonished disappointment :

“Why, she's alive !”

Jack's pallor turned into a flush of hot indignation. “The cruel trickster !” he cried. He stopped short and passed a hand over his brow in bewilderment. “But they all thought so,” he murmured. “Can I have been deceived in common with the whole neighbourhood ?” He pulled out his watch sharply and glanced at it. With a half-suppressed oath he thrust it back into his pocket. An expression of grim determination came over his face. “It was a curious coincidence that she should just die to-night,” ran his thoughts, “and so I felt even at the first shock of the news. My irritation was excusable after all. Who knows the mischief this may do ?” He glanced at the undertaker, who was staring frown-

ingly at the unconscious sleeper. "But I'll soon settle his hash for him," he murmured. "Mr. White," he added, raising his voice, "I am very sorry that you should have come on a fool's errand." As he made the remark his eyes naturally wandered to the pale face of his mother, and the flush of indignation on his own face deepened into one of shame as it flashed upon him that his first thought had not been that of joy at her being still alive. Poor, hard-working, gray-haired mother! How ill she looked! At best she could not be with him long.

"A fool's errand!" repeated Mr. White, forgetting the above fact in his anger. "Then this *is* another of these jokes of yours of which I have heard so much. None but an Atheist would play such a practical joke on his own mother, not to mention the whole neighbourhood. But I'll have the law on you, and you shall pay dearly for wasting the time of an undertaker, whose hands are full, and to whom every instant is precious."

"That will do, sir. My time is more valuable than yours, and if you have anything more to say, I must refer you to my secretary." He stopped in the middle of the last word, as if to add to the effect, and completed it with a mysterious and irritating smile.

"You may laugh now, Mr. Dawe, but he laughs best who laughs last. I can well understand that a man who would make fun of death would make fun even of an undertaker who has buried all the best families in Bethnal Green. I sincerely rejoice——"

His angry countenance was turned towards Jack's, and his tones increased each instant in shrillness.

Suddenly a look of alarm came over Jack's face, he shot a warning, threatening glance at the irate Mr. White, and whispered "hush" imperiously.

"No, sir, I will not hush. I repeat I sincerely rejoice that I did not bury your mother and lower my rep——"

"Bury me!" gasped Mrs. Dawe. She sat bolt upright with the blankets tucked round her like an Indian squaw. Her eyes dilated with horror and indignation, and her gray hairs stood up rigidly and perceptibly raised the level of her dirty-white nightcap.

"Bury me alive! Help! Police! Sally! My own son has brought Mr. White to bury me alive, like he buried my husband, 'cause he's tired of waiting for the property. But you *shan't*, you Irish assassin, you shan't murder your poor old mother not while I'm alive. You'll 'ave to wait long for the property. Help! You shan't bury me," she shrieked, seizing a pillow and flourishing it threateningly, "if you shan't bury me not if I die for it." The pillow fell from her hand, and she sank back exhausted by the violence of her ravings.

Jack went to her and kissed her. "Don't be a fool, mother," he said soothingly. "Who wants to bury you?"

"You!" she cried. "Don't gimme me any o' your crocodile kisses! What 'ave you brought Mr. White 'ere for? But thank Gord, I've woke up in time to smash up your plans and your cauffins too. It ain't *my* deal yet, as your father used to say."

"Mr. White, will you have the goodness to retire now," said Jack severely, "or are you not satisfied with the mischief you have done?" But that functionary's resentment had not yet abated.

"I am glad to see you suffer by your own joke," he replied. "But before I go I demand some compensation. You have ordered a nine-ten funeral, and, as a matter of business, I can claim that that funeral shall take place."

"With pleasure," responded Jack cheerfully; "if you will perform the rôle of corpse. And unless you are prepared to undertake your own funeral at a day's notice, you had better clear out."

"Pranks are expensive," returned Mr. White stolidly. "I claim a sovereign at least."

The last words died away in an inarticulate gurgle, and he staggered under the weight of the pillow which Mrs. Dawe had hurled at his face.

"A sufferin'!" she shrieked. "Then it's *you* at the bottom of this; ye want to rob poor, honest' folks, ye thief, and steal the skin off their backs, and turn their own sons agin them, just for the sake of a job. But I won't be buried by you, nor the likes o' ye, not if I 'ave to live a 'undred years to escape ye!"

She stopped suddenly to listen to Sally's shrill vociferations, and the sounds of a scuffle below.

"Yer shan't go up!" Sally was screaming. "Y'ain't a-goin' to worry 'im no more; ye know 'e don't want you. Don't stick your bonnets, and your silks and satins in *my* eyes. 'E says I'm worth twenty o' you any day. Stealin' in like a 'ighway robber, just because I'd forgotten to bolt the door."

MR. WHITE.—"This is assault and battery! I'll have the law on both of you! Your neighbours shall hear of this disgraceful conduct, Mr. Dawe. You shall suffer for it." (*Da capo.*)

ELIZA BATHBRILL.—"You impertinent minx, stand out of my way, or you shan't stay in *this* house! Put down that ladle, you shameless hussy, and go and wash your dirty face! Let me pass, or I call Mr. Dawe instantly, and blast your career at one fell blow! Don't come near me, you ragged slut, you tatterdemalion! I am the mistress here now that Mrs. Dawe is dead!" (And so forth.)

MRS. DAWE.—"Forgotten to bolt the door! Thieves! I'm ruined. Oh, Jack, you wretch, you villain! I can never forgive you what you have done to-day. You shut up the shop, and leave the door open, don't take any money in, and leave it all go out; you burn my mantelpiece and my *Free Thinker*, spoil my carpet, waste my gas, and break another blue-and-gold teacup, and then, to prevent me finding it all out, ye want to bury me alive. But I won't be buried alive, Mr. White." (*Et cetera.*)

SALLY.—"Don't lift up yer parasol to me, 'cause ye'll begin with the wrong party! Yah, my fine lady, 'ow did ye like that pin I dug into ye last night? My, didn't yer squeal like a pig! Don't ye try to slip past now, or I'll spile your beauty with a sutt'ry fryin'-pan. Mrs. Dawe dead! Wouldn't ye like it! Ye're off your chump! Keep off, d'yer?" (*Da capo.*)

JACK DAWE (soliloquises).—"This house is a Bedlam! What a home! Alas! I feel more than ever how vulgar it is. Great Beaconsfield, will they never stop! And I must stay here listening to this petty babble, while in another place the great battle of women's suffrage is being fought. It almost drives me mad!" (And much more.)

The quartet, together with its inaudible accompaniment of soliloquy, was abruptly terminated in the midst of a *fortissimo* passage by a howl of disappointment. This last note brought to a fittingly sombre and ghastly climax one of those weird *fantaisies de diable* which only the melancholy genius of the English lower orders of that day was capable of extemporising in their full perfection. This particular performance, however, was rather different from the ordinary, which was *al fresco*, and in which the themes of the one singer were taken up by the other with the finest instinct of harmony, so that the most complicated fugues chased their own tails till the tap of the imperious bâton brought the music to a sudden close.

The howl came from Sally. Eliza's righteous indignation had left her no ears except for her own voice; but when Mrs. Dawe made an unprepared transition into her shrillest key, she caught the speaker's ear, and blanched her cheek. It would seem then that the old lady was not dead, but shrieking. Eliza was startled, but not altogether displeased. Although Jack had at last consented to approximately "name the happy day," she feared he might yet slip through her fingers, and even the joy of his inheritance of the business was not sufficient to counterbalance this dread. Mrs. Dawe was a strong ally; and, all things considered, it would be kinder for her to defer her decease till after the marriage than to leave Jack to the imperceptible impulses of his "sense of honour." Her heart swelled with a genuine joy which she felt to be all the more noble that she would have been the gainer by Mrs. Dawe's death, and she burned to congratulate that personage on her indifference to rumour. Excitement lent her audacity and agility, and she flashed under the uplifted ladle and was half up the stairs before her adversary realised what had happened. Sally gave chase, but too late. A moment's wild commotion on the staircase, and Eliza rushed frantically into the room, shut the door with a bang and fell breathless into Jack's arms with a cry of "Save me, my love." Hardly had she done so when the door was again burst open, and Sally, fire in her eyes, and a ladle in her hand, made for her cowering prey. Mrs. Dawe, seeing the danger of her favourite, neatly dispossessed the drudge of her weapon as she flew past, and whirled it round in the direction of Mr. White with an exclamation of reproach. The latter leapt just beyond its whizzing circuit and retreated to the door with renewed menaces. The duel between the undertaker and his corpse recommenced; both parties making occasional lunges at Jack; one of Jack's arms was around Eliza, who was resting upon his bosom apparently in a swoon, and the other was keeping off the irate Sally, who, unable to effect anything

vi et armis, burst into heartrending sobs, and, brandishing the fragment of newspaper, incoherently demanded a reading lesson. And amid all the din and horror of the scene, cheers and counter cheers rang in the ear of fancy and chafed his soul, and filled it with bitter indignation.

"Great Beaconsfield!" he thought. "The whole house is disorganised—my mother scolds me as if I were a child—this infernal girl chooses to faint on my breast, a liberty she would never have dared to take a month ago—and, worst of all, this unwashed, miserable Sally has the d——d cheek to kick up a devilish row and attack people with ladles in my very presence, besides clamouring for free education, as if I was bound to teach her because I have advocated it. A nice return of evil for good! While I have been working like a horse and without a single mistake, I find everything topsy-turvy here. If I don't bestir myself while I have the chance, the house will become utterly unbearable, and if I once leave it I shall never be able to return."

Eliza, on hearing the news from her brother, with whom she was staying (having been dismissed from her place a week ago and paid in lieu of notice), had donned a black dress and a plain bonnet hastily decorated with crape, and wended her way to the desolated home. The sobriety of her present costume gave her the demeanour of a Puritan, but of a Puritan whom the merry monarch would have longed to convert to his more orthodox Christianity. It toned down the passion of her dark eyes, touching with a gleam of tenderness and purity those orbs in which a poet might think to read the secret of the universe. But at this moment Jack was not dazzled by her beauty, not because her eyes was shut but because *his* were open. His first action was to deposit the burden in the arms of Mrs. Dawe, who therefore hurled the ladle at Mr. White as the readiest means of getting rid of it. As she took careful aim at him, the weapon, in accordance with the law of projectiles, struck Sally at the other end of the room. Her, staggering under the shock, Jack took by the nape of the neck and dropped downstairs. This exhibition of *sang froid* moved Mr. White in more senses than one. *Fiat experimentum in corpore vili*, thought the undertaker, who naturally knew something of the dead languages. Seeing that nothing, or rather something, was to be got by delay, he retired disgracefully, leaving the enemy in possession of the bedchamber; and a motley audience outside was soon entertained by the story of his wrongs, involving as it did another fact of unprecedented interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PAINTER DESPAIRS OF THE PEOPLE.

THE news spread, and everywhere the shutters retreated at its approach. Combined with the natural rejoicing (not because Mrs. Dawe was such a favourite, but from the reaction) were a sense of irritation as at having been cheated out of pity, and a natural sympathy with the undertaker. Still it was felt that the latter had acted injudiciously in quarrelling with a potential nine-ten funeral.

All the next day and during the week, little parties from her greatest cronies to her most casual acquaintances called to gaze upon the woman who had survived her own death. These did her as much harm as if they had been the mothers, and sisters, and aunts of a Funeral Association.

Dr. Thomas, calling in the evening, soon after his patient's revival, summarily expelled an advance-party of such, and temporarily dispelled the knots of outsiders that had congregated round the shop. All the rest of the week the business was magnificent, but it was not Jack that conducted it. Eliza, who came to bury Mrs. Dawe, remained to praise her and to serve in her stead. For although Dr. Thomas said that Mrs. Dawe must not be worried, and that he could not answer for the consequences if the noisy shop were kept open, Dr. Brown, whom Jack also called in, said that she must not worry, and that he could not answer for the consequences if it were kept shut. Mrs. Dawe accused the former of wishing to ruin her, and the latter of neglecting her; and they would both have refused to attend but for the pacificatory remonstrances of her son, the smallness of their practice, and their common belief that the other would treacherously endure the humiliation of return. The unhappy Jack was likewise constantly twitted with desiring to destroy her by flying in the face of his father's axiom: "Between two doctors one falls into the ground." But we are anticipating.

Some mysterious instinct must have informed Eliza that Jack had dropped Sally, for she opened her eyes just in time to witness Mr. White's retreat. The ladies, being in need of mutual consolation, kissed each other profusely.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Dawe," cried Eliza, "I am so grieved to find you ill, especially as I came here to tell you good news. I have left my place this very day in order to prepare my *trou-see-aw* for our wedding, which, as you know, takes place in about two months."

Jack started, then frowned, and bit his lips as a flood of bitter memories poured upon him.

"Yes," he thought, "I remember she said so then, the infernal little jade. Was there ever such a d—d piece of foolishness as making her a fresh promise of marriage? What claim after all has she upon me? My punishment is greater than I can bear.

She has done me irreparable mischief, she has been a drag upon my career."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Dawe. "And didn't you know I was dead?"

"No," replied Eliza. "What do you mean?"

Mrs. Dawe burst into tears.

"I wish I was," she sobbed, "I wish I was and they 'ad buried me alive, I should 'ave been well out of it. I am tired of ungrateful sons, and I would rather be buried and layin' with my 'ead on the cold tombstone than on the buzzom that I nussed from a child."

"Look here, mother," interrupted Jack. "If you are going on like that I shan't stay in the house."

She sobbed on, Eliza vainly uttering neutral soothing monosyllables.

"Very well," he said, with icy determination. "Then I'm off to the Cogers."

"I don't care if you go mad now," said Mrs. Dawe. "Go and spout as much as ye like now, though ye promised me not to go no more; but a man as wouldn't mind breaking 'is poor old mother's 'eart can't be expected to care about breaking a promise. Go to the Cogers and break yer 'ead over politics, go on."

"There you go, talking rot again!" he cried desperately.

"Don't ye remember politics made ye neggelect yer painting?" she said indignantly.

"Yes, I do, and a good job too."

"A good job! I tell ye again, politics is only for those as ain't got to get a 'onest living. Besides, you could never do no good in politics, yer 'ead is too weak."

"The world is not of your opinion, mother," he answered with proud disdain.

"The world! Who's to know what ye can do and what ye can't better than yer mother, who knowed ye before anybody else? Ye can bury me alive, can't ye?"

The thought renewed her momentarily-interrupted sobbing, and Jack shuddered.

"Shut up!" he cried savagely. "Good-bye, I'm not going to stand it." And he threw open the door.

"Go on!" shrieked Mrs. Dawe. "Thank Gord I've got a daughter if I ain't got a son. Go on! Leave yer dyin' mother and get drunk, ye beast, as ye did at the Foresters'. Everybody knows what a drunkard ye are."

Jack staggered under the blow. "Drunkard!" he gasped.

He slammed the door furiously, and was rushing downstairs when something moved him to enter his own room. He stood with his hand on the knob, in angry thought. "As you make your bed you must lie on it," he murmured bitterly. "It's a fine situation when I come to take stock of it: Eliza present and odiously assertive, and expecting marriage in two months; my mother ill herself and treating me like a baby; Sally perfectly mad; my very

movements constrained by a mad promise ; and, best of all, here am I with the reputation of a drunkard !”

Throwing open the door, he looked curiously into his room, as if he expected to find it as changed as everything else. From the leap of Sally into the parlour in the morning till her involuntary fall therein in the evening, the day had been full of crowded hours of excited life. The perils and catastrophes of the forenoon, the descent of Mrs. Dawe and her helpless ascent, the scenes with Sally, the unwonted attendance in the shop with all its novelty and its varying incidents, criminal and professional, the debate on woman's suffrage, the disgusted abandonment of his duties, the agitated promenade, the return, the reception of the bad news, the frantic rush into the omnibus, the second return, the colloquy with the undertaker, the discovery of Mrs. Dawe's true condition, the quarrel with Mr. White, the affray between Sally and Eliza, the fainting of the latter on his bosom, the disposal of the former, the unbearable reproaches of his mother—what wonder that these numerous events produced an illusion of the sense of duration and that it seemed to him years since he had last seen the little dingily-papered bed-room.

Nothing was altered. The pot in which flourished the solitary mignonette glowed redly in the dusk, the jug and basin showed ghost-like in the gloom of their corner, the dark outlines of the iron bedstead were dimly felt from the luminous presence of the cream-coloured quilt, the pipe-rack over the mantelpiece gleamed with its long clay pipes, and the small hanging bookcase was revealed by the vague glimmer of a few brightly-bound volumes. With the unhesitating instinct that comes of familiarity, he walked over to the bookcase and ran his hands along the well-loved books with a strange sense of pathos. He knew them all by the touch, and the feel of each of them was like the grasp of the hand of an old friend. How dear they were to him, one and all, in their different ways. There was Mill, so advanced on the whole, but yet so tentative and sober sometimes, with a giant's strength for demolition, but not using it as a giant. Jack's own mind had not this largeness, this tolerance of intolerance, nor any diubety in its own conclusions. These numbers of *Progress* were more the expression of himself with their scornful rejection of the fetishes that made life sacred and beautiful to many, with their passionate enthusiasm for democracy and their fiery denunciations of oligarchy. Then there was Swinburne, the interpreter of all this congenial one-sidedness in mighty verse of rushing metre and misty magnificence. The poet's lofty indignation and bitter invective on the one hand, and his Pagan sensuousness on the other, had often moved his spirit to corresponding passion ; but he had only vaguely understood the mystic pantheism at the root of both, the spiritual materialism, the keen delight in existence, and the deification of love. Perhaps this lack of receptivity was more than compensated for by a superior sense of humour, fun, and satire, which he had inherited

from his father, and which made the *New Pilgrim's Progress* a rival to Swinburne in his affections.

He lingered long in the darkness with his hand on the bookcase. There was a sense of restfulness in the caressing attitude, and the silence, broken only by a few murmurous sounds, somewhat soothed his irritation; but he was still agitated by tumultuous thought. At last he went to the window and threw it open. The night was warm and heavy, but rather dark. He leant out of the window and gazed along the dusky stretch of street, shot here and there with points of fire in mid air, and quivering on both sides with occasional wavering *al fresco* gas flames. At frequent intervals bright masses of light betokened the presence of public-houses. A louder hum rose to his ears, and the subtle scent of the solitary mignonette impregnated the air near him. Sitting thus musingly he suddenly became conscious that he had a book in his hand, and the next instant was aware that it was *Songs before Sunrise*.

"Your battle shall be fought," he cried, grasping the book with fierce determination, "but oh, how slow it all is! Once upon a time I used to think that if I could be king for a day, I would make this the best of all possible worlds by instantaneous reforms. In that time all the tyrants could be executed, Virtue universally rewarded, and Vice punished. Alas for the childish dream. Life is no fairy-tale, but a cruel comedy of errors, a muddle where the fools have seized upon the duties meant for the wise, and the wise have been thrust into the places of the fools, and, unkindest cut of all! they have got so rooted into their surroundings, that an attempt to change places must bring unhappiness to both." He had risen in his excitement, and he now walked to the fireplace and lit the gas, before resuming his position at the window. He opened the book, intending to read, when the night was disturbed by the distant strains of an advancing band and the softened roar of a somewhat weird, popular chorus. A convulsive shudder agitated his frame.

"There is the enemy!" he exclaimed bitterly. "But I will crush them, them and their sympathisers in the Church, and the Church itself. The knotted cords stood out in his forehead as he made this determination to do the little in his power to disestablish that mighty institution.

Louder and louder grew the sounds, he caught the outlines of waving banners, and a few incessantly repeated words now became audible: "When we end the journey we shall wear a crown, O Jerusalem!"

"Wear a crown!" he muttered. "You are welcome to your heavenly ones; but we shall soon get rid of the few earthly crowns that remain, eh Swinburne? . . ."

The procession passed, and the road was once more left to its dreariness. He turned over the pages, but he could not read. He kept looking out into the darkness, watching the dimly-described figures, the frowsy workmen trudging home with their tools; the coarse, reckless factory girls; the nondescript shifting crowd that

stopped and stared at the notorious shop; the shabby women carrying baskets of potatoes . . . never in his most passionate moods had he so strongly felt the meanness and misery of the life that surrounded him, and of his own existence. It was all so hopeless, so hopeless.

And his mother! Compared to that of many of her neighbours her condition was prosperous. But what was physical want to the want she shared with them—the lack of refinement, culture, delicacy, of all that makes human beings other than a plexus of animal functions? The ineffable blankness and weariness of comfortable bourgeois existence appalled his spirit. And for *un*comfortable bourgeois existence, an immense pity now seized him. But he felt with novel keenness the flatness, the narrow limitations of both—mental and moral poverty was the lot of the people of his perorations, whatever their physical condition. Not that it was their fault; centuries of misgovernment, of unjust social laws, were responsible for this dulness. Everything would be remedied, now that they were allowed to legislate for themselves, if they only had the sense to send to Parliament such men as himself, who knew what they wanted better than the dullards themselves. But—and he ground his teeth at the reflection—the fools would not choose their representatives out of their own class. Here was a man whose heart had always beat in sympathy with them, who was unselfishly prepared to devote himself to their happiness; and yet what chance would he have had of entering Parliament if he had presented himself for election in the ordinary way? . . . Woman Suffrage, Manhood Suffrage, what was the good of it all if the people still went on in their old stupid way, dazzled by wealth and making a wrong use of their new powers by excluding the few specially gifted individuals they chanced to produce? The women were about to be enfranchised, it was true, but to whom would they give their votes—to him who had always advocated their cause, or to, say, Floppington, who had reluctantly, after years of opposition, yielded to a pressure to which *he* had more or less contributed?

A never-before-felt disbelief in the lauded instincts of the people overpowered him. He gazed stonily out into the street, his brow frowning, his face distorted with gloomy pain. Never before had the “good time” prophesied by Radical bards seemed so near at hand—never before had so thorough a friend of the people been at the helm of state, ready to turn to solid fact all the golden visions of dreaming democracy—and never before had Jack Dawe’s ardent nature been so chilled by despair of Progress! The night of the second reading of one of the greatest Reforms in history was the night of his first unfaith in reform!

With this sudden cynicism came a renascence of irritation. He turned over the leaves of his book petulantly, scanning a rhetorical line here and there with an incredulous smile. Even the daringly infidel passages failed of their old effect.

“If religion were true, too, after all!” he murmured with a strange smile of self-mockery. At last he came to a poem which

arrested him. It was not one of his favourites, and indeed had always seemed to him rather meaningless even in the earliest days of that passion for Eliza which, at the best of times largely factitious, was now for ever dead. But from the new tone of his thoughts, or from whatever other cause it might be, he now read and re-read the verses, lingering with particular emotion over the last stanza.

“ I that have love and no more
Give you but love of you, sweet.
He that hath more let him give ;
He that hath wings let him soar,
Mine is the heart at your feet
Here, that must love you to live.”

The tears came into his eyes, and the expression of pain gave way to one of tenderness. His moodiness and irritation fled before a rapture of abnegation, a humble consciousness of inferiority, a trust in the purity and nobility of human nature. The summer night was filled with beauty and the soft air with calm. The star-light lay sacredly upon the squalid road and upon the human figures that flitted across it.

After a few minutes he rose gently, put out the gas, and went into his mother's room. Eliza was sitting by the bedside, patiently adjusting the pillows as Mrs. Dawe tossed to and fro in uneasy sleep. He bent over his mother and kissed her. Then, bringing in a chair from his own room, he sat down and watched her struggles with a pitying eye.

To Eliza he said a few kind words, but the hitherto dormant feminine instinct of nursing was aroused, and the girl warned him not to awaken the sleeper. Still further moved by this novel trait, he sat for ten minutes in thoughtful silence. At the end of this time he grew weary of inactivity, and seeing that he could do no good, quitted the room and re-entered his bedchamber. The old uneasiness had seized upon him, he could not rest. He could not forget that this was the great night of the Debate on the Reform Bill. He had so longed for it, and so looked forward to be present at it. He was so interested in the question, it had occupied so much of his attention ! And now to be shut out of participation in the moment of triumph ! He walked up and down the room with impatient strides. The darkness was transformed to brilliant light; the small apartment swelled into a vast, lofty hall crowded with the intellect and the beauty of England. There was the stir of life, the rustle of intense excitement, the low buzz of enthusiasm and interest. And now a sudden hush falls on the vast assembly, to be broken by ringing cheers that stir the orator's blood and lift his soul to the sublimest heights of eloquence. It is the Premier that has risen. Princes and peers, scientists and historians, duchesses and countesses, ambassadors and envoys, generals and admirals hang in breathless silence upon the inspired words of the great commoner. Again and again unanimous plaudits shake the roof

as that silvery voice trembles with pathos or rises like a trumpet in righteous denunciation. So vividly was the scene present to him that he saw the gleam of stars and orders and caught the flash of diamonds.

And to miss all this through a false rumour whose incorrectness he had not discovered till too late ! It would be useless to attempt to gain admission now ; all his anticipatory trouble was nullified by this deception. He clenched his fists and set his teeth at the thought. Half-an-hour afterwards he was still pacing up and down in the darkness like a caged lion. Filled with tumultuous passion his thoughts grew wilder and wilder. At every step bitter exclamations burst from him, furious expressions of contempt and indignation. All at once he stopped with sudden resolution. He dashed his hat on his head and hurried downstairs. As he approached the parlour he heard a low, melancholy sound like the inarticulate moaning of a wild beast. With a nervous thrill he impatiently struck a match. In the momentary flare he saw an inexpressibly grimy form, cowering in a corner. The face was pale, stony, and sullen, the eyes wild and bloodshot, the hair dishevelled, and the hands knotted convulsively together. He shuddered in disgust. Turning round towards the fireplace he beheld his paint-pots and shuddered again ; and, as the match gave its last flicker, it might have been overwrought imagination that showed him another white, ghastly face glaring savagely at him from under a light sombrero.

“Oh, master,” cried Sally, starting up and laying a hand on his arm. “What’s a’ matter ? Yer ill.”

He shook her off rudely, strode into the shop, opened the door which he found unbolted, and hurried into the street, unceremoniously cutting his way through the little gossiping crowd. There was a murmur of remonstrance. The hero of the saveloys was among the group, and the existing discontent found in him a genius to express it. Spontaneously there came to him a derisive phrase, and the more he pondered it afterwards the more *ben trovato* it seemed. As he thought of the lofty pyramids of peas, and the almost immoral pennyworths of pudding, what wonder if the coarsely expressive hoot suddenly changed into the definite cry of “Mad Jack !”

Jack started as the words, followed by a jeering laugh of approval, reached his ears.

“Mad Jack !” he repeated grimly. “Yes, mad if you will ; but there is method in his madness. Mad Jack ! Truly has he all the cunning of insanity !”

CHAPTER IX.

AY OR NO?

IN return for the privilege—so coveted by Jack Dawe—of being present at the memorable division, the reader is requested to possess such soul as he has in patience, while the writer goes back a little to recapitulate summarily the effects of the sudden change of front on the part of the Government. Designated masterly strategy, or disgraceful opportunism, according to the special bent of the designator, it had, of course, altered the whole aspect of affairs, and had knocked on the head all the forecasts as to the fate of the Bill, which editors, local politicians, and the general public had been happily and harmlessly engaged in forming. To their credit, be it said, they did not long stagger under this unexpected blow. They rallied quickly, and were speedily engaged in drawing up fresh prognostications conformable to the new condition of things political; betraying in this as in other, if less vital matters, that power of rising superior to the buffets of adverse fortune, which, in the opinion of the writers of that age, shared with the abundance of coal, the freedom of the Press, and the Corporation of the City of London, the honour of making England great.

The general opinion, an opinion supposed to be shared by the official whips, was that the change was in favour of the Government, though whether it would do more than merely decrease their minority was a moot point; the probabilities of ministerial success varying daily in harmony with the incessantly shifting combinations of political atoms. It had already alienated some of their old and staunch supporters, it is true. But these were veterans, whose joints were stiff, and back-bones rigid, and who were unfitted for the rapid evolutions of modern political warfare. The number of the irreconcilables was moreover very small. John Tremaine had been busy among those, who, it was feared, might not take kindly to the new Conservatism. He pointed out that to turn out men with whom you disagreed on only one point, to replace them by men with whom you agreed on only one point, was conduct utterly unworthy of sensible men, conduct suitable only for faddists and Radical sentimentalists. This argument had worked wonders, and they agreed not to be dissentients. It was not that they hated Woman Suffrage less, but that they loved their party more. Had it not been for the almost certain defection of the Mountchapel faction, the few who were unmoved by Tremaine's reasoning would have been more than counterbalanced by the accession of strength the Radical vote would give the Government, for the Radical leader had announced his intention to support the Ministry.

This announcement was very welcome, though, as ever in human concerns, there was an *aliquid amari* in the proffered cup of Radical aid. For Screwnail, in his powerful speech, had spoken

freely as was his wont. "I will support this measure," he said, "because it is a good measure, a measure I have always consistently advocated, and one that, to my mind, can only be fraught with the best results. But though I go into the lobby with Ministers, the one pang of regret I shall feel in recording my vote in favour of one of the dearest aspirations of my life will be, that I am in the same lobby with men who have taken up this movement, as before they opposed it, from sheer want of principle; who have no solitary shred of heart or conscience; who look upon legislative measures as means to keep themselves in power, and who, to secure that end, readily juggle and palter with the destinies of this great Empire. Not the least amongst the benefits I hope from the admission of women to the Suffrage will be the introduction of some measure of purity into political life, so that it shall in the future be impossible for a Minister to rule who is swayed by party and personal motives alone. And the Nemesis that dogs the footsteps of the wrong-doer will decree that the Minister, who, inspired by unworthy motives, has given women direct political influence, has in that very act signed the political death-warrant of himself and his imitators." Although Floppington was hit very hard by all this, especially the allusion to personal motives (which was generally felt to be in bad taste) he did not reply, but smiled good-temperedly, and, it was reported, said to a colleague, "If he only knew everything, how differently he'd talk;" which was generally thought to be a very vague but also a very profound remark. Screwnail, however, did not go unanswered. His remarks as to the inconsistency of the Cabinet were not dealt with; but his condemnation of its motives led the Minister who replied to taunt him with the implied purity of his own motives and the general assumption of moral superiority which his tone conveyed.

"He cannot shake himself free from commercial associations," said the Minister, "morality is to him like any other commodity; and so he thinks that Brummagem* morality, like other Brummagem productions, may be palmed off by means of bold and sufficient advertising."

This sally was much applauded, and the Government were felt to have the best of the argument. That the rights and wrongs of any question could be settled by gentlemen calling each other names does not appear a very logical proposition; but as Parliamentary Government was admitted to be a great success, it must have had merits not apparent to the modern logical vision.

Lord Bardolph, it was generally known, would vote against the Bill, and go into the same lobby as the old Tories, whom he was in the habit of speaking of disrespectfully as fossils; with which petrified beings would be further associated for the nonce a small number of Free-lances and a large number of Liberals. The mantle of Beaconsfield, which had fallen on the shoulders of the temporary

* A term supposed to be a corruption of Birmingham, and applied derisively, for what reason is not known, to the manufactured productions of that town.

leader of the Opposition, was indeed a garment of many colours. No surprise was felt that his lordship should vote against the Minister who had out-played him in the little game of bluff they had been indulging in. The only conjecture was as to how he would conceal the cynicism which prompted his opposing a measure of which he had been one of the foremost champions, in order to gratify his spleen against the man who was supporting it. Public opinion, however, backed the noble lord to square the difficulty neatly.

So far, therefore, the elements of the problem were constant, to use the language of the mathematician; but in the Irish party, the variable existed. These formed a resolute, compact body of men, about eighty in number, and, therefore, amply sufficient to turn the scale in any division, carried out upon the ordinary lines of party cleavage. They had one object in view, and only one, to wring certain concessions from the English Government. This steadfastness of purpose made it exceptionally difficult to prophesy what would be their course of action upon any particular question, and this applied to the new Reform Bill. Would the prospects of Home Rule be furthered or retarded by supporting the Government, was the question would-be prophets had to answer, and, as the connection between the data was somewhat recondite and obscure, it is not matter for wonder that solutions of the most contradictory character were evolved by rival seers. Some believed they would support Lord Bardolph, who was understood to be of opinion that Conservatism was connected with the verb "conserve;" that "conserve" meant "to keep," and that therefore a Conservative was one who kept all such ideas, Radical or otherwise, Home Rule amongst them, as promised to be politically remunerative. He had, moreover, been seen in communication with certain members of the Irish party, speaking to them in dark corners, and holding mysterious confabulations in retired nooks: all circumstances pregnant with food for Gossip's insatiable appetite. But then Tremaine was known to be a warm friend of the Irish leader; and some conjectured that this friendship was not, as it really was, purely personal, but was inspired by the deep sagacity of Floppington, who would thus, without attracting undue notice to his manœuvres, be enabled to coquet with the Home Rule party.

The important character of the debate and the uncertainty the representatives of Erin brought into calculations as to the probable result, caused a good deal of excitement. And when it was understood that honourable members had finished giving their own versions of the leading articles of the leading newspapers to a much-suffering Speaker, and that only the member for Wadding and the Premier remained to speak, everybody tried to get admission into the House to be a witness of the closing scene of the great agitation. From princes of the blood downwards, every class in the nation was represented in the spaces devoted to those not members of the House, where they made experiments as to the amount of heat, discomfort, and vitiated air that the human frame

could support before succumbing ; and for every individual fortunate enough to thus aid the cause of science, there were at least a thousand who were wofully disappointed because they could not also contribute to the advancement of learning. But even transcendentalists have to content themselves with talking and theorising of space of many dimensions. Ordinary space of three dimensions is all that is available for occupation by human beings, and consequently only a given number of persons can be present on any important occasion. Even in our more enlightened age, space of four dimensions is not yet a reality. We can only hopefully anticipate the time when it shall have replaced the inconvenient form of space now tolerated ; and when the whole nation, if desirous of the process, shall be comfortably stowed away in an ordinary drawing-room. Then, as now, crowding was uncomfortable, and so the rank, and fashion, and beauty, and intellect that squeezed and perspired to be present on the last night of this debate, doubtless felt that there was something patriotic in the sacrifices of comfort they were making.

The members of the House, however, thought differently, and the House was comparatively empty. Orator after orator had dwelt at much length upon the vital importance of the change they were discussing. Supporters and opponents had concurred in this one thing, at any rate, that the whole civilised world was deeply concerned in it ; that humanity from the frozen pole to the torrid zone was hanging upon the words of English legislators ; nay, some of the more perfervid had boldly described the whole solar system as deeply absorbed in the prospects of the struggle, and as likely to have their revolutions affected by the revolution projected in England. And yet the men, who thought and said and presumably believed all this, were not in the House absorbed in their work. The Parliamentary machine was a curious one. The component parts had various ways of aiding in the legislative achievements of the whole ; and when seated comfortably in the smoking-room, in an atmosphere almost as nebulous as the primeval chaos from which the smoking-room and himself had been evolved, an M.P. was, in reality, doing his share as a wheel or lever to the best of his ability. For most work was gone through, as we learn from contemporary writers, when the attendance in the actual legislative Chamber was sparse. A full House meant lots of talk, possibly on some bit of spicy personal gossip, but very little work ; and the most important of the duties of Parliament, that of voting supplies, was generally carried on in an almost empty House. Paradoxical it may seem, but it is nevertheless true, that in legislative efficiency the whole was not greater than the part, and unlike other machines, the law-making one did not gain in Power what it lost in Time.

Over and above these general reasons, there was a special one why the uncomfortably-crowded visitors looked down upon a scene of ease and comfort ; on members stretching themselves at full length, and contorting their bodies into all kinds of knots and twists. As

already stated, it had been arranged that Lord Bardolph and the Premier were to close the debate, and that the division should be taken immediately after the Premier's speech. But the Premier had not yet arrived. Lord Bardolph, lolling lazily on a back bench, refused to speak in his absence, and so the Whips had to keep the ball of debate rolling in the meanwhile. Various members, some glad of the opportunity of speaking, others the reverse, got upon their legs in obedience to the earnest entreaties of the Whips, and displayed great if not altogether unsuspected powers of emptying the House of Commons. Meanwhile, much consternation prevailed amongst the official ring. A messenger, who had been sent to Downing Street, returned with the message that the Premier had gone out early in the afternoon, hurriedly, and had left no word with Mr. Tremaine as to his movements. And thus it was that the evening came on, and that the setting sun looked down upon a House of Commons, bored, and wearied, and anxious for the termination of an important and epoch-making debate; yet sustained by a sub-consciousness that something unusual had happened, or would happen, as member after member looked in, and found that Smith, or Jones, or Robinson was still prosing, and that the Premier was still absent from the Treasury Bench.

Suddenly a change came o'er the scene. The parboiled "strangers," shaking off the lassitude that had mastered them, craned forward with looks of eager excitement. Honourable members came trooping in hurriedly, springing up as if by magic, till, in a very few moments, the House was uncomfortably full, many members having to do as best they could without seats; for an eminently practical people had a chamber for the meeting of their legislative assembly which contained fewer seats than there were members, acting upon the maxim, true enough as a rule, that *de non apparentibus et de non existentibus eadem est ratio*.

The Premier had come. Slipping in quietly behind the Speaker's chair, he had taken his usual place. It was at once noticed that he looked ill and worried; he kept for a few moments hurriedly glancing round him, as if unaccustomed to the place, and then sank back into a heap of loosely-fitting garments, from which protruded a pair of nervously-twitching hands. His colleagues regarded him anxiously, and with sage shakes of the head whispered among themselves that they feared his recent display of will and energy had been but a spurt, and that he could keep it up no longer. And then the gentleman in possession of the House, as he caught sight of the Premier, felt that his mission was ended, that he need no longer talk against time; and, without waiting to do more than finish the sentence he was engaged in, he subsided into his seat. A murmur of excitement, then a hush, and the words, "Mr. Speaker," in Lord Bardolph's clear, hard, and assertive voice, made themselves heard from behind the Treasury Bench.

Lord Bardolph did not waste time, but at once, and without any preliminary skirmishing, announced his intention to vote against the second reading of the Bill.

"I am not skilled," he said, "in the arts of deception. I cannot twist language to conceal my thoughts; nor can I keep the whole world in the belief that I intend one thing, and then, suddenly, without a word of warning, veer round and do another. I leave these arts to other, and possibly, abler men."

Here he looked full at the Premier, who, however, never stirred from the position he had assumed on his entry.

"Therefore," continued his lordship, "I may, without preamble, declare my intention to vote against the Government to-night."

He went on to point out how much there was in the Bill with which he was in fullest sympathy; much which he had advocated and helped to put into the very shape in which it now presented itself.

"I regard it," he exclaimed fervently, "with almost paternal love. But for one defect, the absence of any provision for the admission of woman to the duties and rights of citizenship, I should never have quitted my post in the Government, and might have stood sponsor for a really genuine Reform Bill. But it was not to be," said his lordship, endeavouring, not unsuccessfully, to infuse some pathos into his naturally unsympathetic voice. "I need not recapitulate the circumstances which led to my secession from the Ministry. But, sir, scarcely had I quitted office, hardly had the echo of my footsteps ceased to sound in the Council Chamber, than the Head of Her Majesty's Government executed a marvellous strategic movement, and, at an early stage of this debate, it was announced, on behalf of the Government, that a clause granting the franchise to women would be introduced in Committee, and receive Government support. This was said authoritatively. The right honourable gentleman, the leader of this House, who, I understand, will follow me, will doubtless repeat this assurance, and may even accompany the declaration with one of those psychological analyses, with which he is ever ready to explain away his many vacillations and inconsistencies. It remains therefore for me, in such plain, simple English as I may command—for I lay no pretensions to the scientific jargon of my right honourable friend—to explain why I now declare my intention not to vote for the second reading, when, apparently, all that I have so strenuously contended for is granted. Some, I know, will attribute my action to personal motives. They will think I am actuated by feelings of revenge. In the exercise of my duty, I will not shrink from misrepresentation, and I will do what I think right, how cruelly soever my motives may be misconstrued. I have no confidence in the Government. I am no believer in sudden conversions, and think political hysteria as objectionable as religious hysteria. I am not going to support the second reading of this Bill blindfolded; and then, for what to my mind is the most important of its provisions, open my mouth and swallow thankfully what the Government choose to give. Who is to know what this clause will be which they promise shall be introduced in Committee? What guarantee have we that it will secure a majority? None; absolutely none whatever! When a

Reform Bill makes due and proper provision for the enfranchisement of women I will support it heartily, no matter who or what the authors may be. But I will have nothing whatever to do with this Bill, which omits all reference to that vital question, but whose authors promise they will propose something, which is pretty certain to be rejected, to effect the desired object."

His lordship concluded with an eloquent peroration, in which he invoked various abstract substantives to bear witness to the purity and fidelity of his conduct; and sat down amidst long-continued plaudits. His audience all thought he had acted with skill and tact in a difficult situation; he himself had but one idea which surged to and fro in his brain, keeping time with the music of the cheers:

"What will *she* think?"

The Premier rose slowly, hesitatingly, limply; his whole bearing in glaring contrast with his demeanour on the last occasion he had crossed swords with Lord Bardolph in public. A feeling something like pity welled up in the hearts of those who gazed upon him; one thought flashed through all minds—the Bill was doomed. The Premier must have learnt the well-kept secret of the Parnellites, and knew that they had decided to support his rival. This—and this alone—seemed a feasible explanation of his dejection. And when he spoke the contrast was deepened. The brightness had left his voice; it was clear, penetrating, musical as ever, but its vivid vibratory tones were gone, there was something suppliant in its modulations, as befitted an oration that was explanatory, almost apologetic. He reviewed the provisions of the Bill, briefly criticising the objections that had been raised by preceding speakers. But he felt that the one point for which all were waiting, and in comparison with which all else was leather and prunella, was the promised clause. He admitted that those who had charged him with inconsistency had, at least, a show of reason on their side; but he pointed out that responsible Ministers must be largely guided by practical considerations. There was such a thing as spoiling the ship by being parsimonious in tar, and so the great measure of reform which he had been desirous of inaugurating might have suffered total shipwreck had he foolishly insisted on disregarding the wishes of so many who were at one with him on the remainder of the measure.

"The member for Wadding," he said, and here for the first time he quickened into something like animation, his voice vibrating with strange, indignant bitterness, "does not believe in sudden conversions. No more do I. But then he has no right to assume that the conversion of the Government was sudden. It must have been the result of a slow and long continued process of thought, the outcome of long continued and prolonged deliberation for the end of which his lordship was too impatient to wait." He continued to defend the course taken by the Ministry, still in the same strange, tentative fashion (more as if endeavouring to excuse his colleagues to himself than himself and his colleagues to the

country), but it was noticed as significant that he did not say one word in defence of the promised clause *per se*—did not utter one syllable in vindication of the justice of the reform it attempted, while the whole *apologia* was wanting in heart. Towards the conclusion he again dealt with Lord Bardolph, and again he shook off his lassitude, and spoke with somewhat of his old verve and fire. "The noble lord said," he remarked, "that he would not shrink from misrepresentation. He has not done so, for he has misrepresented his late colleagues. He says he has no confidence in them, and if there is any real meaning in his inuendoes, he implies either that we will not keep our promise to introduce the clause enfranchising women, or else that we will so word it as to secure its rejection, and that our promised support of it is a sham. It is unnecessary for any English Minister to reply to such charges. Not even the fact that they are made by one who has held office under the Crown can raise them above contempt. The noble lord has worked with the men he thus stigmatises for some time. It says but little for his penetration that he should not have made the discovery of their true character sooner; it says something for the motives which have actuated him, and which he deprecated, that he should have made and published the discovery after leaving them;" and with a peroration of the usual type as to the result of the debate, the Premier resumed his seat, leaving upon his hearers the impression that he spoke as a defeated man.

Then the rush to the lobbies took place, and those who were last noticed how the Parnellites were voting. A short interval, and then members trooped back excitedly to their places. The stream of "No's" thinned, while that of "Ay's" was yet in full and vigorous tide. Before the tellers for the Government stood before the Speaker's table the result was a foregone conclusion. Still, the breathless hush of repressed excitement hung over the assembly till the numbers were announced, and it was known that the Government had a majority of thirty-nine. The Parnellites had voted with the Government; the Premier had outbid Lord Bardolph. Then, throwing off all restraint, honourable members, staid and veteran legislators, jumped upon the benches, tossed their hats in the air, and made hideous and inarticulate noises that Pandemonium might have envied, and tried in vain to rival. Lord Bardolph shook his fist at the leader of the Irish party, who smiled calmly, serenely, inscrutably. And amid all the din, the cheers of triumph, the counter cheers of those who tried to make-believe that defeat was as welcome as victory, the congratulations, the handshakes, and the despondent head-shakes, one figure sat still and unmoved. His head bent down, an expression of sadness on his worn features, his whole being a prey to a lassitude that betokened despair, dejected and not elated by the victory which he had gained, though a few weeks ago victory had appeared impossible, the Premier wrote his usual despatch to the Sovereign.

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The moon was shining above the terrace, though the sun had

not yet set. The sky was crimson overhead, a burning depth of colour shading away into impalpable and indefinable tints. A thin, vapoury mist was rising from the river, hanging like a film of smoky lace over the brown water, tinged with a chocolate reflection of the evening sky. Through it, softened and beautified by its veiling, the south side of the river, its factories, its hospitals, its wharves, loomed blackly forth; while the rushing of the steamers and the whishing of oars came softly upwards. The terrace was deserted, save for Lord Bardolph pacing hurriedly up and down, his whole figure vibrant with expectancy. The debate over, dinner had proved too strong an attraction to honourable members, who found that empty stomachs were as imperious as empty heads. As he turned, he caught sight of a lady advancing towards him. He quickened his step, and stood before her. "Well?" was all he said, and then, turning, he walked on by her side.

His monosyllabic question remained unanswered. Lady Gwendolen was too agitated to speak. She had consented to see him on the terrace after the debate; she had braced herself for the interview, and she shrank from it. And, as they paced side by side, a surging tide of conflicting emotions kept her silent, till at length Lord Bardolph spoke again.

"Am I to congratulate you on your victory?" he said, half earnestly, half mockingly. "The Parnellites are your champions, and have kept the Government in."

"I do not know," she answered slowly, speaking scarcely above her breath. "I have so often pictured this debate to myself, indulged in fond visions of the triumph of my sex; and now that it is come, I am not glad—I am perplexed—I am sad."

"Then, I shall not congratulate you," replied Lord Bardolph. He was gaining confidence. The Premier's attitude, his tone throughout the debate, the utter absence of more than a solitary spark of his old vigour, had all told Lord Bardolph their tale. He alone knew why the Premier sat dejected in the moment of victory, why no flush of gladness had passed over his visage when the numbers were announced. The reconciliation, for which Floppington had hoped, had failed to come to pass. And, while the knowledge sent the blood pulsing madly through his veins, while his whole being trembled with eager delight, he felt a throb of pity for that rival who had lost the prize he now felt sure of gaining, for him to whom victory had brought the sting and bitterness of heart-breaking defeat; and he dimly comprehended the tragic irony of the situation that a leader of men should, for the sake of a woman, have thrown to the winds his reputation for statesmanship and honesty of purpose, and have made the sacrifice in vain.

"I am afraid you were right this morning," said Lady Gwendolen. "This victory of my cause is but a sham, and we are no nearer enfranchisement than we were. The promised clause is but a political device, that will be kept to the letter and broken in the spirit."

"True," said Lord Bardolph. "Did you notice how he avoided

uttering one word on the great question ; how he kept silent on that point ?”

Had she noticed it ? As the Premier spoke, every word of his defence stabbed her to the heart. When he opposed the measure she loved him ; had he supported it from conviction, she would have loved him still. But despite his mendacious sentimental apologetics on that night at the Duchess's, it was now plain to her that he had supported it because he thought it expedient, as well from amorous as from political motives. And she despised him for so misreading her as to believe she could be bought thus. As his nerveless, fibreless defence went on, as he laid it bare in all its sordid trimming to partizan exigencies, she wondered afresh whether this could be the Bayard, the *preux Chevalier* whom she had been proud to love. And her heart, throbbing though it was with unselfish hope, died within her, as there flashed once more before her those other scenes which reminded her that the *preux Chevalier* had ceased to be one in private life as in politics, that the chivalry and nobility had gone, and that she had been on the point of giving her soul in keeping to a simulacrum of virtue, to a ghastly mockery of honour ; and as such shreds of illusion as still clung to her even after the terrible scene of the morning dropped from her at the last revolting discovery that he was trying to back out of the promised enfranchisement of her sex, in order to avenge upon all women the disdain of one.

The Premier was utterly unworthy of confidence. Had he but made a less despicable display of wounded egotism, had he at least had the manly courage to carry through under the new circumstances what he had undertaken under the old, he might still have retained some vestige of her respect. But, alas, the self-appointed champion of her cause was its most insidious enemy. It was the man who had denounced him, who had just voted against woman suffrage, that was the real friend of her sex. It was the cynic who had repudiated the possession of principle that alone obeyed his conscience. She shivered with remorseful recollection of her shallow misreading of Lord Bardolph's noble disclaimer of nobility.

Not a passing shade flickering over her mobile countenance had escaped the attention of her companion. He saw she was shaken and yielding ; and thinking “ now or never,” he boldly put his fate to the touch.

“ Lady Gwendolen,” he said, real intense passion thrilling in his tones, “ I asked you a question this morning, I ask it again. I love you. With you by my side, I feel strong enough to do anything. Can you not love me ?”

“ No, no,” she murmured agitatedly, “ do not ask me. You do not know ; you cannot—”

“ I do know, Lady Gwendolen, I do. Love has opened my eyes. But think—I say nothing of your life darkened and shadowed. You are too unselfish to be swayed by thoughts of that. But think of the cause you have at heart ; think of how in-

spired by your love my life would be consecrated to the removal of injustice."

He paused. She was under the spell of his earnest words; magnetised by the manly power that appeared to inform him. She was troubled. Would it not be selfish to sacrifice him and the cause to her disappointment? She must rise above mere considerations of self. Nay, could she even be certain that she did not love him? Her ideal of manhood had been shattered by the Premier; it was not the Premier alone, it was manhood that was disgraced in her eyes. But now, as Lord Bardolph spoke, love and honour and truth appeared to breathe in his utterances; she saw him not as he was; her weakened, excited fancy draped him with the manly motives she had almost lost faith in. And it was to an ideal Lord Bardolph, a Lord Bardolph the product of her own pure imagination, that she at length said: "Yes."

CHAPTER X.

THE ROMANCE OF A HOUSEMAID.

"So ye see, Eliza," concluded Mrs. Dawe, "that with Jack's turnin' up 'is nose and chuckin' up the shop, and worritin' Sally into soup-ladles, the business is like to go to the dogs—not the dogs to the business as my 'usband said of Mrs. Proddgers' sausages. The moment my heye is off that gal I sees 'er up to little duffs and tricks no good to 'er, but just for the sake of cheatin' me, which would make 'er fortune if done honestly in the way of business. The moment my heye is on 'er she cleans 'er saucepans like a busy bee, or makes dumplins like a madman in a strait waistcoat."

"Then I had better take charge of the shop till you are better," observed Eliza decisively.

Mrs. Dawe rose on her pillow, and looked at her suspiciously before replying:

"I don't say Sally would lay a finger on a 'aypenny that wasn't 'ers except it belonged to 'er honestly. 'Owsoever, no reasonable being wants to cut off 'is nose to spite 'is spectacles—unless he's a fool. What's mine is Jack's, and what's Jack's is yourn, and, cons.ckently, what's yourn is mine. But for all that yer not fit to take my place—and show me the woman in the whole world who is! Ye can't cook no more than Adam."

"I know I can't," said Eliza meekly, "because I was always brought up as a housemaid, and I hope I always knew my place better than to cook as well. But I don't want to cook any more than Adam did. I've got Sally to cook for me, just as he had Eve."

"More fool she not to 'ire a gal," interrupted Mrs. Dawe.

"How could she? She was the first woman—lady, I mean—that ever lived."

"Ho! ho! ho! ho!" chuckled Mrs. Dawe. "Fancy the fust lady in the land doin' 'er own 'ousework! After marryin' a man, too, who 'ad just come into such large estates before there was any lawyers to do 'im out of 'em. But now I come to think on it, there's no wonder Adam and Eve weren't too proud to wait on theirselves, for, as my late 'usband said, 'they couldn't trace their dissent to the Conkyrer!'"

"Then that settles it!" cried Eliza. "But I can stay here serving till the shop shuts, occasionally running up to look after your comfort. How fortunate it is that I left my place in time! Jack couldn't be expected to desert his painting and stand behind the counter. And when the shop shuts he can see me home every night. It will be delightful!"

"Every night? Delightful?" echoed Mrs. Dawe reproachfully. "It's just like you, 'Lizer, to wish a poor lone woman to lay 'ere years upon years while things is goin' as wrong as a crab. But I've never been ill afore, except when I was a infant without any sense, and I ain't a goin' to stand it. I mustn't get up for a week, indeed! How does Dr. Thomas know I mustn't? It can't be right a person should lay in bed for a week. A nice state of affairs if all the world 'ad to. Why, all the businesses would go bankrupt! But *you* are only thinkin' of your Jack seein' ye 'ome. I know ye'd both be glad to see *me* to my long 'ome——"

"Hush, hush, dear mother. You know you mustn't talk." Eliza soothingly smoothed her face and tucked her in; but in vain.

"Mustn't talk, indeed! The doctor only said that 'cause he couldn't stand my tellin' 'im truths as ugly as the nose on 'is face. And as for Jack seein' ye 'ome, if he comes 'ome as he did last night, a nice time for you and 'im to be gallivantin' together. I 'eard 'im come in, and just as he was strikin' a match in 'is bedroom the clock struck two. This is what comes from indulgin' boys. As my 'usband said: 'The devil's door is opened by a latch-key.' I shall take it from 'im, see if I don't. I've 'ad my own way for some time and managed 'im as if I was 'is wife instead of 'is mother, and I mean to be missus in my own cook-shop as long as there's a drop of gravy in my joints. Last night he tried to come 'is old tricks and be masterful agen, but did you see 'ow I shut 'im up by not answerin' 'im? He 'ad to run out o' the room. And jolly sorry he was, too, by the way he kissed me this mornin' be.ore goin' to work, and while he was sayin' 'good-bye,' he looked at me as solemn as if I was never to see 'im no more, and there was tears in 'is eyes, which made the blowin' up I was goin' to give 'im, for keepin' late hours, stick in my throat. Let me give ye a word of advice, 'Lizer, if ye want to be missus after yer married, for unless ye take care you will find yerself in the wrong shop. All the Dawes are fond of 'avin' their own way; we can't abear to be crossed. We ain't very talkative (except my late 'usband and my son), but we knows what we wants and we sees that we gets it. Even my late 'usband was fond of 'is own way, only I was fonder, and he was that busy sayin' things (over and over agen he said

the same things as if he was a preacher) that he 'ad no mind to interfere with me. Now that's what ye must do with Jack—encourage him to say things about other people, and he'll leave ye alone. And when he says so and so ought to be done, it's no use contradictin' 'im then, ye must always contradict 'im before'and. Once he's made up 'is mind to a thing, the boy's as obstinate as a bull, and even when he was young 'is father found that out, for he said I was allus bringin' forth bulls, when I only 'ad one, though to be sure that one is as pig-headed as a dozen bulls."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dawe," said Eliza, "and now here is your medicine."

"A nice way of thankin' me," grumbled Mrs. Dawe. "I wonder 'ow much he's goin' to charge for that little bottle. He only sends me a thimbleful at a time to run up the bill more. I don't want no luxuries, only plain medicine; but he'll charge for it as though it was fit to be put on the Queen's table. It's a great shame a woman should take to drink in 'er old age and ruin 'erself when she don't want to. There ought to be a Blue Ribbon Army to fight agen the doctors. As my late 'usband said: 'Medicine is like creeds; ye've got to swallow 'em both, and little good they does ye.'" So saying, she swallowed the draught.

Eliza was thus installed in the shop, and had a foretaste of her future position, as Dante had of Paradise. She was a woman worthy of alliance with the house of Dawe, being blessed with an equal fondness for having her own way. She, too, knew what she wanted, and saw that she got it. Jack to a dowerless girl was a lover who, except in age (in which superiority is often inferiority), was superior to every other likely man she had ever met. He was good-looking even when one saw him at work on lions and unicorns, and—startling paradox—when the paint was washed off his face, he was almost handsome. And when he was laying down the law on political matters, Eliza felt proud of the noble, intellectual expression on his animated countenance. Then, too, his resemblance to the Premier invested him with a faint halo of disguised Princeship, that caused her youthful fancy to please itself with a hundred dreamy webs of ideality.

Moreover, no heroine of her acquaintance had had a more ardent lover in the fiery days when affection was new. What brother painter (from R.A. to 'Arry) could lend himself more tenderly to all the romance of passion—the exquisite rainbow tints on the bubble of Love? What brother poet could indite amorous verse of softer splendour, or more rapturous encomium? When, in addition to all these formative elements of tender emotion, the cock-shop is thrown in, there seem almost superfluous *raisons d'être* for that whose existence is often best explained by the absence of any.

That this ardour had gradually cooled on the male side was due to no fault of hers, unless excess of affectionateness be one. The dynamic energy that blazed forth as anger in moments of irritation flashed out as love in instants of tranquillity. But the limitations,

for which she was not responsible, chafed the sensitive Jack when his love grew old enough to know better, and to be ashamed of its youthful outbursts. Eliza lacked the infinite variety of Cleopatra, and at that critical period of his existence it was Cleopatra, more than any other woman, that seemed to him to express the ideal of femininity. He bitterly regretted his engagement to her, and took to treating her with contemptuous rudeness in the hope of a breach. His visits ceased, his answers to her letters grew curt. But Eliza had the rare virtue of Fidelity, and though her visions of personal happiness were obscured, she retained her belief in the desirability of things in general. Reversing the conventional functions of Hero and Leander, she descended upon her lover like a Grecian goddess (whenever she could leave her "place"). To escape her, Jack betook himself to the Cogers' whenever he could, and on Sundays fled on his bicycle, which had grown rusty from disuse. The nymph could therefore only register an occasional success in the pursuit of her sweetheart, and even when caught he was as coy as Adonis, and far more insulting in his rebuffs. It was often all but impossible to restrain herself from tearing his eyes out; but, while there was a gleam of hope, and while Mrs. Dawe was on her side, this must be reserved. The marriage was put off indefinitely, and at last things came to a climax. The poor girl saw the gratification of one of her ambitions—she obtained a situation in such a great house as Lady Harley's. But all her proud joy was dulled by Jack's conduct. The letter she wrote to him announcing the news was unanswered, and she could not get a holiday for a month. So long a period of totally severed life could not but complete the estrangement, and she was not familiar enough with her surroundings to find means of getting away, such as she afterwards discovered. In this crisis she wrote to the Editor of the *London Reader*, but the Editor, whose fingers were already in hundreds of amorous pies, was slow to reply. An unexpected opportunity enabled her to dart down to her lover's demesne on the Saturday on which this history opened. Unfortunately he was at the Cogers', and the poor girl was again baffled. At last, however, her holiday came; and, armed by this time with the Editor's advice, she hastened to the Star Dining Rooms once more. She came, a bitter woman, and left, a happy girl. Just reward of sublime Patience! The only drawback to her happiness was the rankling doubt suggested by Mrs. Dawe as to the sex of her firstborn. The prohibition against frequent visits took little from the rapture of success. In the first place, Obedience would make a virtue of necessity, and in the next, she felt that the pertinacity which had carried her so far would carry her further if required. On the Editor she showered much gushing gratitude, promising *him* a piece of bridecake in three months, and *herself* that, in future moments of trial, she would persist in the meekness of spirit which had realised the hope that her natural passionateness would have destroyed.

As she now stood behind the counter, with an imperative eye on the sullen and smutty Sally (whom nothing but Jack's stern

threat of dismissal had set to work that morning), she felt that doubt was no longer possible, if, indeed, any vestige of it could remain after his tender reading of that poem to her at Lady Harley's. A new series of tender familiarities with her lover had culminated in a swoon in his arms. With his old chivalry he had protected her from an insane adversary, whom he had dropped downstairs in the approved heroic fashion (Sally took for the nonce the proportions of a wild bull at least). And last night he had come into the sick room with such a look of tenderness for her in his eyes, that she felt any manifestations of similar emotion superfluous on her part. Anxious to concentrate her attention on the nascent intuitions of nursing, she allowed a wish for silence to escape her, and did not repent when she saw his quick, responsive obedience. The scene was vividly present to her now, and her heart leapt lightly with triumph. She was glad that the constant irruption of Mrs. Dawe's cronies and acquaintances into the sick room rendered frequent ascents thither unnecessary. The novelty of Nightingaleism had worn off, and she was weary of the restlessly-tossing, querulous old woman in the dull, tawdry bedchamber, with its cracked wine-glass, dirty spoon, and dusty phial. The busy shop was more in harmony with the dancing heart of Youth, with the stir of entrance and exit, the sense of touch with the bustle of outside life, and the panorama of admiring faces. For the girl drew; and in the unprecedented earnings of the day, her presence was almost as potent a causal element as the return to life of Mrs. Dawe. It is the mark of perfect beauty to appear improved by every change of vesture, and Eliza, arrayed in a white apron, stood the test admirably, and seemed an exquisite incarnation of idyllic simplicity. The till groaned under piles of coppers, and her heart swelled with its contents.

Jack did not appear in the shop till the evening, much to the disappointment of the admirers of his innovations, and even then he only lingered a moment. The "new dispensation" of rations had been as brief as a French *régime*. The floods of soup resumed their normal price, the old landmarks reappeared, and the boundaries between pennyworths and twopennyworths became once more visible.

On seeing Eliza, Jack started.

"Good-evening, Jack," said Eliza sweetly.

"Good-evening," replied Jack politely. "I did not expect to see you."

"Did you think I would desert you in the hour of trial? A halfpenny change, thank you. Do I not know how repugnant it is to your aristocratic nature to serve behind the counter? So, darling, I have determined to suffer instead. We don't sell bloters. You'll get beauties three doors up."

"You are very kind, child," said Jack, visibly affected by this altruism. "I had come, & much debate, to the conclusion that it behoved me to fulfil all the duties of that position in life in which I find myself. But I will not deny that I accepted these kitchen

duties not with pleasure, but for the humiliation of the spirit, and as—what shall I say?—a Fiery Baptism.”

“Good gracious, Jack, you’re not going to turn Baptist?”

“You appear alarmed,” said Jack, smiling benevolently, and with a delightful sense of escape from thralldom. “Why should I not turn Baptist?”

“You can’t mean it!” protested Eliza anxiously. “There’s a Baptist butler at Lady Harley’s, and of ail the stingy, ugly wretches—— Tell your mother I can’t cut it any leaner.”

Eliza, bending over the savoury joint, missed the sudden flush on her lover’s cheek, nor did she catch the low murmur of “The riddle’s solved, *hinc illæ lachrymæ!*” But soon his face was clouded by perplexity; he leaned his head on his hand and stood thinking. “It is not at all clear,” he said dubiously.

“That’s what *I’m* always telling Mrs. Dawe,” grumbled a stout man with his spoon in his hand. “The soup is so full of little bones that there’s sure to be an inquest one of these days.”

Eliza shot a reproachful glance at Jack. She could not understand this failure of *esprit de corps*. And, indeed, a world in which people should criticise themselves instead of one another might well seem to violate the conditions of possibility.

The painter caught the look and an alarmed light flashed into his eyes, instantly succeeded by an expression of remorseful pain. “You are no longer at Lady Harley’s?” he asked in the hopeless tone with which one courts a dreaded answer too well foreknown.

Eliza raised her head once more, and exclaimed lovingly: “Oh, you dear stupid old Jack, didn’t I tell you that yesterday? How could I be here if I was there?” She shook the carving-knife playfully at him, and laughed a low, silvery laugh of enjoyment. The airy grace of the flourish, the brightness of her face, and the charm of her laughter wrought upon Jack, and he brushed away a tear. “Poor girl!” he thought. “She opposes a brave heart to misfortune. Hers is a fine nature at bottom, though she be liable to volcanic outbursts. But these are perhaps necessary to show the intensity of those bright spirits which are in danger of the suspicion of superficiality.”

“You shall not suffer,” he said resolutely. “I will make amends. I will see that you get another—and, if possible, a better—place.”

Eliza saw the joke, and her eyes brimmed over with fun.

“I don’t think my last mistress will give me a character,” she observed slyly.

“That need not trouble you,” replied Jack in grave reassurance; “it will be enough if *I* recommend you. You will be engaged without further inquiry.”

Eliza laughed again, partly with delight and partly at the pun. Then, checking herself, she said with a pout: “But I have been engaged so long that I am quite tired of it.”

Jack looked sad.

“I can quite understand that!” he said sympathetically, as the:

long years of drudgery flashed across his mind. "Poor bright young creature, meant for the sunshine and the open air."

Eliza felt a thrill of self-pity. "I don't ask for the sunshine and the open air," she said, with quivering lips. "I only want to be settled in my new life; I hate this delay, this uncertainty. And I don't mind working ever so hard then."

Jack blushed. "She reads me a lesson," he thought. "Carlyle taught truly that idleness is the root of evil. The healthy, human soul cannot endure the burden of aimless days, unsanctified by work."

Eliza rounded the counter by a swift, graceful movement, and stood before Jack, turning a seductive face up to his, her hands clasped together, and her softly flashing eyes humid with love and tender beseechment. The shop was momentarily empty of customers.

"Can't it be before six weeks?" she pleaded.

"Certainly, my dear. There is no reason why you should have to wait more than a fortnight or a month at most."

Eliza seized his hand and rained burning kisses upon it. "Oh, say it again, say it again," she cried, "and ease a suffering heart." The fervency of her gratitude was slightly disconcerting to Jack, but he patted her hair kindly with his disengaged hand, as he replied sadly: "Do you doubt me, child? Know that my word is sacred. Did I not hold my pledge inviolate you would never more have seen me here."

"I know, I know your sense of honour," murmured Eliza, meeting his pensive gaze with eyes welling over with tenderness. "You never meant to wrong me."

"Meant to wrong you?" said Jack softly. "God knows I never meant to wrong any one. But, alas! whom have I not injured?" He paused in melancholy retrospect, and added: "I have injured you, child, but I will do my best to brighten your future existence."

"And I to brighten yours," returned Eliza, looking up to him again, with a bright glance of affection and gratitude. She still held his hand in hers, and, lulled to a trance of happy confidence, was content not to disturb this moment of calm though deep delight by the more passionate manifestations of amorous inebriety. She seemed once more to breathe the air of the dream-land of early love, and had a delightful feeling of being in a serial, and a curious but delicious sense of having to be continued in our next.

The poor girl's gratitude touched the painter and softened his despairing mood. "She brighten *my* life!" he thought, smiling sadly. "Yet, why despise the impulsive movement of grateful emotion? 'Tis in these moments that soul speaks to soul; and shall I reject such offering, I, whom no one else in the world wishes well?" But ere he could reply, Eliza's temporary Paradise was lost by a demand for apple-dumplings, and she could not help eyeing the customer with irritation. She felt vaguely that something was wrong somewhere in a universe so much more unlady-

like than that constructed by the female novelist. The web of existence was no better than an amateur patchwork quilt, if it permitted affairs of the heart and affairs of the stomach to be interwoven in this blundering fashion.

A few minutes of silence ensued before the man got rid of the dumplings, and the lovers of the man. Then Jack, who had been anxiously watching his betrothed, said: "I can see you don't like life behind the counter. It would only pain you to serve instead of me, and I have no right to demand such a sacrifice from one meant by Nature for happier things."

"Sacrifice!" cried Eliza, paling. "What do you mean? Is it a sacrifice to work for one you love and honour? I do not care what Nature meant me for, I desire nothing better; I am happy in my choice."

"Noble creature!" thought Jack. "Vainly would she conceal what I know by sad experience. And did she not say just now that she would suffer for me? Ought I then to take advantage of her devotion? 'Tis a difficult problem. I do not know whether Kant's formula will avail me here. 'Act so that thy conduct may be a law to all beings *under similar circumstances.*' Ay, there's the rub. *Quæsitum*—ought I or Eliza to serve Demos with sausages? *Data*—given a man born for failure in higher things—"The thread of thought was suddenly snapped by a violent shudder and a grimace of disgust as the horrors of the day before flashed upon him. "'Tis vain to struggle," he resumed. "Yet, let me not fall into the common error of mistaking prejudices for moral intuitions." He frowned, and Eliza's blood, already chilled by the shudder and the grimace, ran colder than ever. In the brief interval while the man was eating his apple-dumplings, what had occurred to cause this sudden change of attitude? She was sure she had done nothing wrong. Perhaps he really thought she ought to look higher. If so, she must reassure his morbidly-conscientious mind. She felt (somewhat ungratefully) that she would be happier if he took less care of her happiness.

"You shall not get rid of me," she exclaimed passionately. "My duty lies here."

Jack's brow cleared. "She, too, has been busy with the ethical problem," he thought. "I will abide by her more instinctive decision."

"Eliza," he replied gravely, "I accept the sacrifice, for it *is* a sacrifice—"

"Speak not of it," interrupted Eliza, with equal irradiation of countenance. "Ambition yields to love."

"A noble sentiment, child," responded Jack. "What, indeed, would existence be without these little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love? But they shall not be unremembered by me. I confess I have wronged you in thought as well as in action, but henceforth you may command me."

The remorseful and apologetic condition of her lover moved Eliza's womanly soul to the quick. The sight of the strong man in a moment of weakness called forth an effusion of love and pity,

and the impression was the stronger for its novelty. She leaned across the counter to him with an impulsively caressive action not the less spontaneous because accompanied by a subconsciousness of the resemblance of the scene to an illustration in the *London Reader* (with the substitution of a stile for the counter). Ere Jack could divine the bliss in store for him, her soft arms were round his neck, her soft cheek was pressed to his, and her soft voice murmured in his ear: "It is you that shall command *me*, my own darling Jack." The situation was charming in its *naïveté*. 'Twas a beautiful picture of innocent candour set off by the nineteenth-century conventionalities around them, a precious moment of stolen love perilously poised between the past and the future of custom. But the Beautiful cannot be attained without effort, and in this case it was not attained without Eliza standing on tiptoe and stretching forward in such a manner as to come into contact with other things besides Jack's face, to wit, a dish of steaming, rich, brown, greasy, odorous potatoes. For the moment, however, she heeded them not any more than she would have heeded the pressure or scent of hawthorn bushes, and their effect was at least equally picturesque. An impressionist could not wish for a better subject.

As for Jack, his emotions may be best described as indescribable. But ere his warring impulses could agree among themselves, the *tête-à-tête* in its literal sense was disturbed by a crash that shook the windows.

"You cat!" shrieked Eliza, releasing Jack and embracing her toes instead. The *débris* of two large willow-pattern soup-plates strewed the floor.

"Why was your toes in the way then?" retorted Sally, darting an indignant look at her new mistress, whom the audacity of the remark rendered speechless.

"Are you hurt?" inquired Jack politely; though conscious of a feeling of relief.

For reply Eliza leaned against the wall with shut eyes and tightly-pressed lips.

Jack felt a sympathetic twinge. "Is it the law of life," he reflected, "that one's good is another's evil, and pain is always the obverse of pleasure?" Suddenly he caught sight of Sally grinning in intense enjoyment.

"Sally," he said as severely as unreasoning gratitude would allow, "if you have sinned through carelessness, you need not aggravate your crime."

"Why shan't I? She haggravates *me*," returned Sally. "Besides, she's only shammin' Abram. I didn't drop 'em 'ard enough to 'urt 'er."

"You minx!" screamed Eliza, starting into activity. "Then you admit you dropped them on purpose."

"No I didn't. I only dropped 'em on yer toes. Shouldn't wear such thin, kid boots. I can't 'elp droppin' 'em, can I? Two things is bound to go in a week, and if it ain't plates why then it's cups."

"Is Fatalism induced by the knowledge of the Law of Averages?" thought Jack.

"The lazy, impertinent rascal!" cried Eliza, stamping her foot in majestic indignation. "I wonder you keep her."

But Jack was still musing on Fatalism. Sally put her arms akimbo and tossed her head.

"Keep me, indeed!" she exclaimed, swaying her body from right to left in an irritating fashion. "I keeps myself by 'onest work. More likely 'e keeps you."

"Jack," cried Eliza, hysterically, "dismiss that girl at once."

"Eh," replied Jack, looking up vaguely.

"Dismiss that girl at once. I insist upon it," repeated Eliza.

Jack hesitated. "I can hardly take such an important step without due reflection," he replied; "but I promise you the matter shall have my fullest attention."

"She ought not to stay in the house another instant. I don't see what reasons there can be for her remaining another instant." Sally still maintained her irritating attitude, and she increased its effect by a confident grin. It was true that in the morning Jack had threatened her with expulsion; but now that he had returned in an obviously gentler mood, she felt that the threat was of a piece with the temporary dementia of the previous evening.

"Well, for one thing," replied Jack slowly, "you see one has an affection"—Sally's grin broadened with delight—"for old retainers."

Sally's face fell.

"I ain't a old retainer," she cried. "I'm as young as she is, any day. I don't want no powder, I don't, except a sedlitz powder, and that goes *inside*."

"You ought to have gunpowder inside you," retorted Eliza, exasperated almost beyond endurance, "and I'd like to put a match to you."

"Yah!" chanted Sally. "Guy Fox, Guy! put 'er up the chimney pot and there let 'er die!"

"You ignorant, uneducated creature," replied Eliza with infinite disdain. "You don't even know whether Guy Fawkes was a man or a woman."

"If ye think I can't read and write as well as you," retorted Sally, "ye're jolly well mistaken, 'cause Master Jack's promised to learn me."

Eliza started, and turned upon Jack a look compounded of stupefaction, sorrow, horror, and wrath.

"You promised to teach her!" she gasped. "It is false!"

"I—I did make a—sort—of—a promise," he stammered.

Eliza interrupted the avowal by a dramatic gesture of despair.

"Then it is true!" she whispered hoarsely.

Jack quivered beneath her contemptuous glance.

"You don't think it wrong?" he inquired anxiously, all kinds of vague, uneasy ideas flitting through his mind. . .

"Wrong?" echoed Eliza, with a high, scornful laugh, "oh no, it isn't wrong to destroy the value of education."

"Eh?" cried the puzzled painter.

"What's the good of being able to read and write if everybody can? What right have servants to be educated? Why, they'll think themselves as good as their mistresses. The world will be turned upside down."

Jack stared.

"You think servants should not be educated," he said.

"Decidedly not," returned Eliza with a proud toss of the head.

"But *you* are educated, and are not *you* a servant?" he inquired.

"A servant!" she exclaimed indignantly. "I am no longer a servant to be tyrannised over by a capricious mistress. Now that I am a mistress myself, why do you remind me of the unhappy past?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE KEY OF THE DEVIL'S DOOR.

"GOOD-EVENING, Mr. Dawe," said Mrs. Green, as she entered the shop from the kitchen, having been sitting upstairs with three or four other females; for, as has already been told, when Mrs. Dawe woke up that morning she found herself famous, from the mere fact of waking up at all.

The body of gossips, which was perpetually changing (though so continuously, and with such substitution of similar atoms as to maintain a kind of unbroken identity), first roused the sufferer's spirits by the inspiration of *its* presence, and then lowered them by the inspiration of *her* oxygen. What wonder, therefore, if the heaviness of the atmosphere, and perhaps of the conversation, weighed at times upon her so that she slept with equal heaviness.

"I ain't inquisitive," said Mrs. Green, pausing on her way out, and surveying the group with compound interest. "But Mrs. Dawe woke up in a fright and said she dreamt that you, Mr. Dawe, was smashin' up the business; and we 'ad a 'ard job to keep 'er from rushin' downstairs, and we swore there was nothing a-matter, and then she quieted a bit, and said she must a-bin dreamin'! But we all knew it was crockery, 'cause plates and dishes is slippery customers to deal with. If you was already married"—here Mrs. Green sighed, not smiled—"I'd a-known you was throwin' things; and if my daughter 'adn't tried to 'ide 'er weddin'-ring by pretendin' to a-cut 'er finger, she might still a-bin a 'appy gal, in as good a place as one could wish to 'ave, at 'leven bob a week, and a excursion to the Forest once a year."

This interruption relieved the prevailing moral tension. Eliza assumed an air of impenetrable hauteur, but Sally, preserving the contour of a two-handled vase, sent her a saucy leer of smiling

triumph, preceded by a wink and a slight toss of the head, intended for the edification of Mrs. Green. By this gesture-language, well understood of the people, the good lady obtained more than an inkling of which way the wind lay. Eliza was fully aware of the fact, and pretending to have missed the sense of Sally's expressive observation, she examined the suddenly-perceived stains on her apron, and waited impatiently for Mrs. Green's exit. To her horror, however, Jack did not seem to share her views as to the undesirability of a stranger's presence.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, "do you then think that eleven shillings a week and an annual excursion are enough to make a girl happy?"

"Lor' bless me!" cried Mrs. Green sharply. "Everybody can't be as well off as you and *your* gal, no more than they can afford to lay out nine-pun-ten in one day in funerals. Us common folk must put up with silver and copper, just as we must put up with bein' mocked at, and called madam by people as I've 'eard called by wuss names, and not so different neither."

"You forget yourself," exclaimed Eliza with dignity.

"Ma'am, if you *please*," Mrs. Green answered her with proud disdain, "like all my other tradespeople does."

"I am very sorry, ma'am," interposed Jack in much distress; "I assure you my question was conceived in no mocking spirit, but was prompted by a sincere desire to ascertain the modes of thought, and especially the standard of comfort of people of your status."

Eliza suppressed a smile, compounded of enjoyment of the sneering irony and of relief from the shock of the simulated apology; but Mrs. Green's insight was not so keen.

"I don't know what you mean," she said, mollified by the earnest ring of the words. "I don't set up for bein' heddicated; there wasn't no Board Schools in my young days; though p'raps my Billy might know what you mean by the standard o' com'ort. Seems to me it's the sixth, for I know he got least whacked in it. But as I was sayin', the gal who stepped into my Jane's shoes when she got married to the most drunken wagabond, and of all wagabonds a drunkard is the wusst (beggin' your pardon, which no offence is meant), she was glad enough of the chance of 'leven bob a week, for nice, easy work it is, too, is tailorin', compared to some other trades, and regular nearly 'arf the year; and only from eight to nine, which gives a gal two or three hours to eat and rest in, except when they're very busy, and works till twelve."

While Mrs. Green was talking, a few straggling customers had entered—the advanced section of the coming army of supper-seekers—and the mutual animosities of Sally and Eliza were temporarily quenched to meet the common need.

"Impossible!" cried Jack. "The recent Act only permits such work till eight p.m."

"Lor' bless me! The gal never told me that. But she was allus a sly 'un, and it was just like 'er to get married on the sly."

Only till eight! That explains things. I never *could* make out 'ow she could ha' found time for courtin'."

Found time for courting! The unconscious pathos of the phrase went to Jack's heart.

A man, who was eating mashed potatoes just touched by the odour of roast beef, pricked up his ears. He was lean; he was sharp-eyed and feverish; he was out at elbows.

"What nonsense!" he interposed. "You must be very ignorant if you don't know how the Capitalist grinds work out of human machines. Act or no Act, your daughter never left off till nine, take *my* word."

"Then the hussy kept back the money she got for overwork."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the man. "Money, indeed! She was lucky to have the overwork to do."

"Do you mean to say, sir?" inquired Jack anxiously, "that this great measure, for which I so long contended, is systematically violated?"

The man burst into another roar of bitter laughter.

"I am sorry you had your trouble for nothing, not that, of course, your efforts could do much—meaning no disrespect. Why, bless you, I know all the tricks these small workshops are up to when the Inspectors sometimes come round—and who shall inspect the Inspectors? They keep 'em knocking till they've turned out the gas and gone to bed, and got up in their dressin'-gowns, while the girls get into cupboards and what not. I have heard of a case where they stowed the work away in a jiffy, and got out wine, and oranges, and cards, and were having a birthday party when the officers came in. An Act of Parliament, even when prompted by the best motives, is, in my opinion, a thing invented to appease the consciences of our rulers. It costs nothing, and it does nothing, or, at most, very little; like the vow of reformation which makes one feel so satisfied with himself. Is every infant vaccinated; are there no children running the streets or slaving under taskmasters; is there no false weight or measure; is all our food unadulterated; are all our houses in perfect sanitary condition; do all our factories close at eight; is there——? But you appear shocked. Surely you know all this!"

"Latterly, in moments of despondency, I have indeed feared that the truth was such. But, on reflection, I dismissed the idea as very much exaggerated."

"Exaggerated!" cried the man, in a voice muffled by large fragments of potato. "You may take it as an axiom, sir, that the State can never interfere without doing more harm than good."

"Then you would leave the millions to despair," said Jack wearily.

The man's lean face lit up with animation, and his eyes glowed with more feverish intensity. He hastily gulped down the last morsels of potato, which, in their own tyrannical way, had been impeding his freedom of speech.

"I would bid the millions hope, not despair," he cried.

"Then you have another remedy than State interference?" asked Jack, catching his enthusiasm.

"Yes," said the man, slowly turning to depart, "I have! We want no tinkering legislation, we want a complete recasting of the relations of Capital and Labour, and of the conditions of Society; individual selfishness must no longer be the key-stone of the arch of civilisation. In one word, sir, we want"—he paused dramatically in the doorway, while every gaze was bent on him—"we want *Socialism!*"

His eyes flashed with the fervour of a prophet-martyr; his pinched features were ardent with noble emotion. And so, with the image of that pale face flitting before their vision, with the sound of those fiery words ringing in their ears, he left them.

"But, sir," Jack burst forth, "what is Socialism but State interference raised to infinity?"

There was no reply.

"Who is that man, Jack?" inquired Eliza.

"I do not know," replied Jack; "but he is certainly an honest, earnest, unselfish, well-informed man, though far from sound in his economics. What is the matter?"

"I'm sure it's not *my* fault," said Eliza, half crying with vexation. "I thought you knew him, and I forgot for the moment that he hadn't paid for his mashed potatoes."

Jack was staggered for an instant. The next, a flush of shame overspread his cheek. "I am sure he is an honest man," he said. "What right have we to doubt it, because in the heat of high argument he forgot base mundane matters? Such obliviousness of earth, perhaps more than Fame, is the last infirmity of noble minds, which doth the clear spirit raise to live laborious days."

"Live luxurious days, you mean," cried the exasperated Hebe, "at other people's expense—the rogue!"

"You libel him," said Jack mildly. "I might have done the same myself."

"Oh Jack, for shame. You would never have robbed a poor old woman."

"I do not mean intentionally. Yet had I echoed Goethe's remark in its full sense—who knows? If I had been in his place——"

"Don't talk nonsense, Jack. You can never be anybody but yourself."

"So it would seem," he replied sadly, "though I once had a higher opinion of my powers." Then, seeing her puzzled face, he added quickly, "but you need not take the petty loss so much to heart. What were the potatoes worth?"

"Twopence."

"Here is a shilling," said Jack; "I will redeem his honour."

Eliza laughed merrily, and the cloud of annoyance vanished from her pretty forehead. "You take it out of one pocket and put it into another," she exclaimed.

"Perhaps," said Jack moodily, as he perceived the fallacy, "you have given a general definition of benevolence."

A man, who had entered with the Socialist, and who had been listening with much interest to this duologue, now sauntered out with an air of much amusement, and his departure broke up the group.

And now there was a sudden stir of entry as well as of exit, for night had fallen, with its balmy, twinkling splendour and its suggestions of rest and supper. And the moon from its peephole in the clouds looked down among other things on an Indian file of appetites such as the autocrat in it might envy. And savoury dishes leaped out of the oven, fully prepared for the fray, like Minervas from the head of Jove, only better than wisdom, and cauldrons of odorous soup dared the descent down unknown gullets, and lo! there arose the wonted sounds of much gurgling, and carving, and munching, and lip-smacking. And the two Hebes longed for Briareus with his hundred arms; but he came not, and Apelles and his two arms went away. For his soul was weary and desired not such refreshment, neither did he hanker after the astral flesh-pots. Wherefore, staying not even to minister to the needs of his fellow man, he sought the upper air. And, as he went, he spoilt all the charm of Sappho's line: "O Hesperus, thou bringest all good things," by adding bitterly, "and the sittings of the Senate among them. Miserable men, who have deserted their ancient convictions for the sake of power and at the bidding of a reckless upstart! . . . Shame on me! Do these unworthy suspicions yet rankle in me? Do I not know too well the base emotions, the petty jealousies and mortifications that give birth to them? Why should not his eloquent advocacy of his own views have moved them as it once moved me?"

The failure of an attempt to ascend an imaginary stair cut short his reflections and informed him that he had reached the last term of the series. As he turned to the right towards his own door, the chatter of voices in front of him reminded him loudly of his duties to the author of his being. These authors of our beings, by the way, did not seem sufficiently protected by copyright even in their own country, to judge by the instance of rival editions which this history hath made mention of.

Jack knocked at the door and received a quartette of invitations to enter.

Mrs. Dawe presented at this moment little of the conventional appearance of the invalid. Perhaps, to do so requires practice like everything else, and she had never been ill before in her life. She struck Jack as more like the lady of the *Hôtel Rambouillet*, who held receptions in her bedchamber. To add to her resemblance to *Arthénice*, she wore a nightcap. But here the likeness to *la Marquise* ended. Mrs. Dawe was not given to euphemism, nor did the ladies of her court dignify her nightcap by any such title as "the innocent accomplice of falsehood." In fact, her animation at the moment was due to some scandalous reminiscences which Mrs. Jollikins, a

raconteuse of a high order, was narrating with such gusto as to give her the air of two posthumous volumes. And, indeed, it was the general impression that she "talked like a book."

On Jack's entry there was a suppressed disappointment, and the leaf of Jollikins' memoirs was turned down. It was felt that the session was at an end. The ladies rose to go with a reluctance creditable alike to their heads and to their hearts. For the attraction was purely intellectual, a feast of reason and not a flow of bowl, Mrs. Dawe not having offered them even a taste of her medicine.

Jack sat down on one of the vacated chairs and fixed a curious glance upon his mother who was bubbling over with amusement at an equivocal story. He seemed reassured to find her so improved, and so far from being in a scolding mood. But his strange, reflective observation of her underwent no change. He could not get rid of the sense that she had returned from the grave—a proceeding highly unjustifiable in one who had been duly philosophised over—and he was engrossed in those vast speculations which have ruined some if they have enriched others. All at once Mrs. Dawe uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"The gas!" she exclaimed. "Turn down the gas. That's the wust of 'avin' folks come to see ye, they want a better light than is good for their eyes or the gas bill."

Jack obeyed her promptly. The room was stiflingly hot, and he was glad to find motives of economy doing the work of physiological reasons. As the glare dwindled and took a more subdued tone, Mrs. Dawe's spirits received an inverse exhilaration. She even forgot the dull aching pain that had lain with her all day on the pillow, and that was the only intimation vouchsafed to her of the presence of her new guest. The prompt obedience of her son encouraged her to complete the victory of the morning, and regain the ground lost on the evening before. For some weeks past, Mrs. Dawe had tasted of power, and to be dethroned from the novelty of dictatorial rank without a moment's warning was enough to upset a stronger mind than hers. It was true that her new kingdom had only one subject, but then she could boast of the unity of the nation. Her rule might be considered despotic, but was she not the mother of her people? This close relationship to her subjects did not, however, avail to mitigate her rancour, when they rose as one man and defied her—a proof that the love of power is greater than the power of love.

Mrs. Dawe, in short, could no more enjoy life without her whilom authority than any other historic personage under similar conditions, and there were precedents to warrant an attempt to regain it. Napoleon indeed failed, but we have it on classical authority that Dionysius became a schoolmaster at Corinth.

"Jack," said Mrs. Dawe in solemn, bleating tones, "ye was out late last night."

Jack flushed, but said nothing. What scenes were these that rose before him, what pictures for ever hung in the private galleries of memory?

"Two o'clock is a time when all honest people is abed."

"You are right. M.P.'s are excluded from that category," Jack remarked, still with a contemptuous bitterness that would not yield to reason.

"Hexactly. And as you ain't neither a M.P. nor a cat, you've got no call to be out late screechin' in Parliament, or on the tiles." Mrs. Dawe's tone became sharp and peremptory as soon as she heard Jack assent to the correctness of her views, but for once she struck a false note.

"I do not see, madam," he replied with proud politeness, "that the hours I keep are any business of yours."

Mrs. Dawe turned pale. Had matters then irrevocably returned to the *status ante quo*? The crisis was delicate, but in the current of angry emotion prudence was drowned while trying to cross it, and Mrs. Dawe burst forth: "I don't see they're any business of yours, neither. A man as is got a old mother to keep on the brink o' the grave can't afford to knock 'isself up for the next mornin' till he goes on the parish, for I can't afford to keep ye. As yer late father said (though to be sure he was never late till he was dead) it's all very well for the moon and stars to keep late hours, *they* ain't got no work to do by day. When I was young, I no more thought of flyin' in my mother's face when she asked me to be 'ome early than I thought of flyin'. I ain't by no means a old woman yet, and I've got plenty o' life in me; but I feel that I shall soon be gone," here Mrs. Dawe broke down and began to sob, "and then my blood will be on *your* shoulders."

A woman's tears are known to be her most potent engines of war. What assertions will not a man swallow when these lustrous drops provide the necessary grain of salt? And while the male animal is barking out his absolutely unanswerable argument, does not the "crusher" say in its trembling heart: *Après moi le déluge*? What are the dykes and seawalls of logic before this briny flood?

Jack was thrown off his lofty pedestal by the shock, and he looked uneasily at his shoulders. His heart smote him somewhat at the thought of a possible neglect of duty on his part. So he replied gently: "Come, come, you are ill and must not excite yourself. You must take more care of yourself. I shall see that you do."

"A lot *you* takes care o' me or o' what I says. D'ye think it does me good to keep awake worritin' for ye, and waitin' to 'ear ye come in till two o'clock?"

"Certainly not, especially in your present condition. But I am not aware that I ever came in so late."

"Well, did I hever 'ear so howdacious a lie! It was lucky I was awake last night and 'eard the clock strike two and 'arf expected it to strike three only it didn't with my own ears. P'raps ye'll say ye didn't want to bury me alive next! Ah, I thought ye couldn't deny it. A guilty conscience is like bilin' water to a lobster, as your father said."

"Well, well," said Jack, shrinking from this triumphant re

proof. "I shall not be out so late again, as far as lies in my power that is."

"Then I tell ye what, Jack," said Mrs. Dawe, with eager eyes gleaming with victory. "I don't want yer promises to be like *my* piecrusts but like Mrs. Prodgers', which ye can't break if ye try ever so 'ard. So you'd better let me mind yer latchkey for ye."

"I am not accustomed to have my words doubted—at least not so explicitly."

"'Tain't yer words I doubt, my boy," said Mrs. Dawe earnestly. "It's yer deeds. If ye think ye could slip in quietly any time ye like ye might be easily tempted to forget yer duty, but if ye knew ye couldn't get in without wakin' everybody ye might be more careful."

The cloud on Jack's face deepened. "How keenly she interprets the past!" he reflected mournfully. "Again that cruel but too true charge—easily tempted to forget my duty."

"And remember, Jack," continued Mrs. Dawe, with ghost-like solemnity, "remember yer late father's words—the Devil's door opens with a Latchkey."

A malicious smile flickered for an instant round Jack's mouth, to be quenched by a sigh.

"Believe me, it was the wust day of yer life when ye asked for that latchkey. It'd been better if ye'd never got it; but ye allus *would* 'ave yer own way, and who could refuse *you* anything? If ye knew what's good for ye, ye'd give it up at once."

"I cordially agree with you in every respect," replied Jack grimly, yet with an air of reverie. "Unfortunately, however, I am afraid my sense of honour will not allow me to follow your advice."

"Well, of all the strange things *I've* seen," gasped Mrs. Dawe, "your sense of honour is the funniest; sometimes it's in two places at once, and sometimes it ain't to be found 'igh or low. It ought to be in a show, it ought. Whenever ye're quite licked, and I'm lookin' to see ye chuck up the sponge, up ye chucks yer sense of honour instead. Gimme the latchkey this minute, and d——n yer sense of honour."

Jack looked shocked, and even frightened.

"You can have the latchkey," he said hastily, "I don't want to use it any more."

His mother's face flushed with triumph, and she fell back exhausted. Jack felt in his right waistcoat pocket and frowned. Evidently the key was not in its usual receptacle. He tried the left pocket, but it was not there. Nor was it in the upper pocket, nor in his inner coat pocket, nor in his breast pocket, nor in either of his trousers' pockets. He recommenced the search, and his brow darkened to a deeper and deeper black as the returns from each intensified the probability of failure. The watcher's brow, too, went deeper and deeper into the shades, except for one moment, when her whole face lit up at the sight of a handsome purse which, if purses are to be judged by their looks, betokened an interior as well lined as an alderman's.

"Come forth, ruiner of many lives," he muttered, fumbling impatiently. "Who shall estimate all the mischief thou hast done!"

"Look 'ere, Jack," said Mrs. Dawe sharply, wearying of the pantomime, "if ye think to put salt on my tail, ye'll find ye've only put pepper on my tongue. Give me the key I tells ye, and thank Gord ye ain't got a fool for a mother."

Jack bit his lips. "There is nothing on earth like suspicion," he thought, "for irritating yourself and your victim at the same time."

"I must have lost the key," he said sternly; "and, as I can't use it, it's all the same as if you had it."

"Ye're a liar," screamed Mrs. Dawe, "it's in yer purse; ye know it is."

Jack turned as red as fire. With an impulsive movement he drew out his purse and threw it open, displaying a gleaming cylinder of sovereigns, whose volume precluded the possibility of the presence of such an article. Then he closed it with a snap, turned on his heel, and left the room in high dudgeon, leaving Mrs. Dawe in speechless astonishment.

CHAPTER XII.

A SOCIAL SOCIALIST.

HIS aimless movements hurried him downstairs, and in an instant he found himself in the parlour, wondering why he had come there. He paused.

"More rash steps," he said with a self-mocking smile. "After all, what matters the talk of a sick, fretful old woman? I should have been more considerate. Thus always comes reason after impulse—though it usually devotes itself to justifying the action of its predecessor. What Frenchman was it that asked whether he would be less the toy of chance because chance had its seat within the mind instead of without? Truly a pregnant remark which Spinoza——"

"A great speaker, is he now?" came at the moment from the shop, in tones which thrilled Jack to the marrow. "I'm so sorry I can't see him to-night. But I'm glad to hear he's an orator. All the better for the Cause when I *do* convert him. We want 'tongues of fire' like those 'on Harlech gleaming' as the poet writes."

"Roast tongues is one-and-twopence a pound," interposed Sally.

"The fiery tongues I mean are worth more than that, my girl," replied the voice.

"Then they must be very long. Missis's 'usband used to say that cooked tongues is the only ones as are the better for bein' longer!"

A boisterous laugh ensued ; but the owner of the voice did not feel with the crowd.

"This is the abode of genius," he said in hushed tones, when the guffaw had subsided. "I remove my hat in awe and reverence."

"If you took my advice you'd never put it on again, old man," cried another voice.

A second burst of laughter was interrupted by the entrance of the master of the shop.

The painter-purveyor's eyes took in the group in a second. His eyes rested, moist with emotion, upon the keen, fearless face of the Socialist, pathetically set-off by his threadbare garments, both seeming to have frayed themselves away with enthusiasm. Then they turned and shot a bolt of honest indignation upon the un-wavering countenance of Eliza.

"Good evening, sir," said the Socialist, his face lighting up with joy. "Here I am, back again, like a bad penny, or the Fair Trade fallacy. You will have guessed why I have returned !"

Jack quailed before the clear glance which the man fixed upon him. Blushing at the recollection of his momentary suspicion, and at the necessity of white unvarnished truth if he would not put the man to shame, he replied :

"To continue the argument ? I assure you I have learnt something from the discussion."

"So have I—always to settle the £ s. d. before coming to the Q. e. d." said the man, turning the disagreeable corner with a dexterity that aroused Jack's envy, and with a philosophic smile that won his heart. "When, ah ! when, shall we have a state of society in which the Q. e. d. shall come before the £ s. d., where intellect shall have the precedence over wealth, where Pluto shall yield to Minerva ? At present, sir, the political fabric is based neither upon the twelve tables of Rome, nor upon the two tables of Sinai—but upon the interest tables of the ready reckoner. Were not this the case, we should be not misled by a plutocracy, but guided by a brainocracy, as in Fourier's scheme. We should not—in all candour be it spoken—have men like you languishing in the uncongenial atmosphere of a cook-shop, while men like Floppington are allowed to imperil the destinies of so many millions of their fellow beings.

Nay, sir, I hope you are not offended by plain-speaking. Truth, unlike murder, will out ; and, if I have been rightly informed, I but re-echo sentiments which you have expressed with a commendable absence of that false modesty which is the bastard child of pride. I rejoice, sir, to see the torrent of ambition plunging even more restlessly—not that I wish to reproach *you* with want of ardour—out of its ancient course, and if Heaven would give me strength to turn its stream in the direction of justice, I shall die not all unhappy."

There was a thrill in his voice and a tear in his eye as his solemn accents died away.

Jack's hand was over his throbbing eyelids and his worn figure was bowed over a vegetable tureen.

"No," he decided. "How could he mean it as a reproach? Thus, then, all the world says I was right (in that respect at least) either directly or by implication. *Opinione regina del mondo*, have I anticipated thy commands? . . . I have known the incense of adulation wafted from the happy isles as I swam the sea of thought. Yet, what am I but a child amid its depths and currents? And if a fellow-swimmer has made for himself a chart by which to steer his course shall I not profit by it, instead of drifting aimlessly by the light of the Will-o'-the-wisp of my own reason? . . . 'Tis no wonder that *he* is right, as the *vox populi* declares. 'Truth hath he found in huts where poor men lie.' Is it not, then, the decree of Providence that I am now destined to come to the end of my search, after much buffeting? At last I recognise the Etzbah Elohim that pointed my path hither. Let me then refuse welcome to no soul-guest, lest Wisdom be among them."

Having come to this determination, he begged the stranger, if he could spare the time, to favour him with his company within, for the purpose of discussing matters too weighty for a popular assemblage. He felt that a great argument could be raised neither from the vapours of soup, nor from the fumes of cabbage. The offer was accepted after some hesitation, and the two, the heart of each swelling with solemn joy, quitted the shop amid the mutual winking of the customers and the suspicious looks of Eliza.

The man dropped into the comfortable arm-chair which Jack assigned to him, nestled within its capacious arms, crossed his legs and sighed, while Jack lit the gas and opened the window to admit the salubrious breeze from the backyard.

"You seem to think," began the host, leaning thoughtfully against the mantelpiece, "that you hold the recipe for Universal Justice. If this be Socialism, I must repeat that you have yourself argued for the impotence of State action. How do you reconcile your views?"

"The present impotence is due to the clashing of private interest with public expediency, in many departments. (It does not exist to any great extent in the region of crime, for example.) When the former ceases to exist, there will be an unimpeded force working for good."

This seemed to his hearer a pregnant remark, and it proved itself to be so by being delivered of several fine masculine ideas which kept Jack busily attending to them for several minutes. During this interval of silence, his soul-guest surveyed the parlour furtively. The Brussels carpet, the gilded pier-glass, the stuffed birds, all excited his disapprobation.

"Ah, sir," he said suddenly, "you're too comfortable here. It's not amid its luxuries that one can see the miseries of our civilisation—the very chairs and tables fight against reform. In fact, if luxury were thus to penetrate into the lowest strata of society I should see very little hope of its reconstruction." He heaved a despairing sigh.

"Am I not yet in huts where poor men lie?" murmured

Jack. "I am sorry, sir, I have no worse accommodation to offer you. Perhaps your own apartments will be more congenial to unprejudiced thought. Or, shall we adjourn to the backyard?"

The man darted a curious look at him from the corner of his right eye.

"I am afraid we must manage to make this do," he replied after a pause. "Luckily, the true philosopher is indifferent to his surroundings, easily content and apt to make the best of everything. As for my apartments, I have no residence of my own to which I could invite a friend—may I venture to call you a friend? Thank you, sir. Nor, even if I had the space, have I any means of entertaining him in a fitting manner; my own meals being taken in public, as you are aware."

Jack started, and his hand wandered involuntarily about as if in search of something.

"Can I help you?" inquired the guest anxiously.

"Pray forgive me for my inattention," said Jack in remorseful tones. "You will take a glass of wine. I have some very fine Johannisberg, a present from Prince Bismarck."

A lightning gleam lit up the Socialist's eyes, and died away immediately.

"Oh, no, no!" he answered vehemently, just as Jack desisted from his search and looked blankly around. "I could not, thank you. I do not want anything after my supper which you saw me take. Blessings on those mashed potatoes which were the means of uniting our lives."

"How Nature utilises the animal instincts for nobler purposes," Jack was thinking as he answered with a pathetic remembrance of the meagre meal: "You will at least join me in *my* supper?"

The man shook his head.

"You are very proud," said Jack with a winning smile; "and not content with rejecting the classical principle of the symposium—*in vino veritas*—you violate the still more popular axiom that man was not born to eat alone."

"Say no more. No one shall call me proud," was the proud response. "Command me as you please."

"Then I command you to command what you please," said Jack gaily. "Bread is more than the staff of life, it is the cement of friendship. It is thus that the material universe subserves the spiritual; nay, even symbolises it, as Swedenborg perceived. Though I must confess that his efforts after perfect parallelism seem to me as useless as Hegelian attempts to deduce inanimate Nature. These magnificent conceptions are but depoetised by detail, like the similes of Donne, which even Johnson—"

An exclamation of alarm from his guest interrupted him, and he stopped.

"Oh pray, continue," cried the man. "I merely thought the girl was going to drop a cauldron of soup as she passed through the kitchen. She seems very reckless. It would be a pity to waste such odorous soup."

"Sally!" cried Jack. In a second the girl was at his side, looking mutely up to him like a faithful dog. Her face was flushed and perspiring, and cross-barred with black; but it grew almost white with indignation when Jack administered a mild rebuke and begged her to be more careful.

"He's a liar!" she shrieked. "Everybody's agen *me*. I ain't bin near the kitchen for the last five minutes." This shameless mendacity provoked a second reproof, which, in its turn, provoked further protestations, until at last, the question at issue having gradually been transformed into another, he pacified her by assuring her that he had every confidence in her good intentions, and she returned as light-hearted as she came.

"I beg your pardon for this interruption," resumed Jack. "You were saying, I believe, that Dr. Johnson——"

The man stared, but answered as he buttoned his coat: "My observation will keep for another time. I will not detain you any longer from your supper. Good night, sir."

Instead of taking the proffered hand, Jack dashed his own to his brow and ran frantically into the shop.

"Sally!" he cried. "Lay supper for two inside. Bring the best you have."

"We ain't got no best," whispered Sally. "I must cook it 'specially. But I ain't a-goin' to cook for 'im."

"Don't be obstinate, Sally," he pleaded. Sally melted immediately.

"Well, mind you gives 'im the bones," she murmured.

Jack returned to his guest, and, after profuse apologies, succeeded in reseating him in the arm-chair. The little tussle with his host seemed to rouse the man's spirit, for, from this moment till supper was brought in, he was unflagging in rhetoric, reasoning, and repartee. And if he was silent during the meal it was only due to the length of his host's monologues, which politeness forbade him to interrupt. Once, indeed, his otherwise mental commentary took the form of a whistle stifled in its birth. This was when Jack expounded his views on the German criticisms of Genesis. It subsequently transpired that his own opinions on those points were almost identical, and he sneered at Natural Selection (as became a Socialist and a Christian), to find himself gently rebuked for intolerance of what might be a partial truth.

Jack was delighted to discover that his guest was no secular Communist, but one of the school of Maurice and Kingsley. He got down his long, gleaming clay pipes from the rack in his bedroom where they had lain unsmoked for weeks, despatched Sally for a packet of Old Judge (a tobacco recommended by his friend), and the curiously-assorted pair passed a most convivial and argumentative evening *in nubibus*. Each appeared to find the other charming, and there was a reciprocal influence of thought on thought, a common flexibility of opinion, and a mutual modifiability which was as enjoyable as it was rare. On the whole, however, the Socialist maintained a conscious and oracular superiority over his

friendly opponent. His utterances were more *ex cathedra*, literally as well as metaphorically, for Jack walked about the room for the most part, while *he* remained plumped in the soft recesses of the arm-chair. Just when the conversation had reached the apogee of interest, he looked at the gilt clock ticking brazenly with loud inaccuracy and declared that he had vastly overstayed his time. Despite Jack's entreaties he buttoned himself up resolutely, and the last few moments were spent in straggling conversation on various topics. The beauty and intelligence of the oil-painted faces of his host's progenitors came in for a meed of praise, and the news of the mother's illness was received with becoming regret. A light allusion to the nobility and unselfishness of countenance of the head waitress developed into a lengthy appreciation under the warmth of Jack's smile of assent.

"I cannot promise to come again for some time," he said at last, "but as you say you are always at home in the evening, I shall endeavour to form your mind whenever I can. I wish you a very good night, sir." He made a few steps into the shop, plunged his hands into his pockets and straightened his shoulders for the homeward walk. Then he stopped with a jerk and turned on his heels.

"How stupid!" he cried, coming towards Jack with an annoyed air. "I find I've unconsciously put the rest of the Old Judge into my pocket. Yours is the proper place for it."

"You are welcome to it, my dear sir," returned Jack. "I am a poor smoker myself."

"Nonsense, sir," cried the Socialist with equal heartiness. "It would be inconsistent with my convictions to keep it all. No, sir, we share and share alike."

With these words the Socialist drew out the mass of sweet-smelling weed and proceeded to divide his friend's property with the utmost conscientiousness. So strict was his sense of justice, that there was not a fibre's breadth of difference between the two portions. Jack watched the progress with an ever-growing admiration of his guest's scrupulosity, and he allowed the man to ram his share into his pocket without further protest. Then the Socialist stowed away his own half hurriedly (for it was now eleven o'clock), and bade him a hasty adieu, almost overturning the shutter-bearing Sally in his exit.

Eliza came into the parlour, fagged and dead-beat.

"Oh, Jack," she cried, "what a roaring trade you do do! I am glad for your sake; but the work is dreadful. It is wonderful how you can do for love what you would not do for money."

"Poor girl," said Jack, passing his hand over her hot forehead. "Have you, too, discovered that barter is not the one principle of existence? But a noble-minded man, a seer indeed, has set me hoping that the reign of universal love is at hand. Nay, Sally, why march you like a regiment of cavalry? Fie, fie, unknit that threatening, unkind brow."

"You are too kind to her," murmured Eliza, leaning back with closed eyes on Jack's shoulder. "Oh, I am so tired."

"Serve ye right," snapped Sally. "I could a-done everything without ye. One pair of 'ands is enough."

"Then *you* are not wanted," retorted Eliza, "and the quicker you take your departure the better." With these words and a disdainful glance she went upstairs to say good night to Mrs. Dawe and to put on her things.

At the sight of the proudly-mounting symmetrical back Sally put her oleaginous apron to her eyes.

"Don't cry," exclaimed Jack. "You shall not be dismissed, so you may disregard her inuendoes. Now you *are* crying. Oh dear, this is very annoying. I wish I could promote a better understanding between you. There, do calm yourself, my child. All quarrels are the result of misconceptions, I assure you, while hearts are longing for each other. Moreover, remember that your little troubles are but a grain to the misery of humanity."

"Suppose it is a grain," sobbed Sally. "Ain't I a grain too?"

The astonishing profundity of this remark (spoilt though it was by the subsequent addition of "and as good a grain as 'er any day") staggered Jack.

"Said I not there were wondrous potentialities in her?" he thought. "I must set to work upon her education without delay."

Sally, being informed of this determination, dried her eyes. "And you mustn't believe the lies she tells ye when yer seein' 'er ome," she postulated.

"Of course not," said Jack, putting on his overcoat in a flurry and looking somewhat dazed.

Eliza came down equipped for the walk, veiled, gloved, parasoled, ladylike. An interesting languor pervaded her, and her liquid eyes swam lustroously. She took Jack's arm and moved gracefully through the shop and conducted him into the street. Then, without a word to Sally, who stood at the door looking after them with little thrills and shivers and shudders and eye-dartings, she walked down the deserted road, with slow, mincing steps, leaning proudly on her lover's arm.

That night she slept with great perseverance, and would not be turned aside from the thorough performance of her nocturnal functions, even by the most tempting dreams—and there were not a few of Love's young ones hovering about her pillow. This sound practice is much to be commended—indeed, the unflagging ardour with which Eliza carried on any sleep which she had once begun, never giving over till she had completely finished it, howsoever long it took her, made her a model of sturdy resolution. Still, to prevent discouragement to many a struggling aspirant, it must be admitted that the heroine was, on this occasion at least, greatly aided by circumstances. The hour came, and the woman. But had Fortune not provided her with the opportunity of earning Mrs. Dawe's bread literally by the sweat of her brow, it is not improbable that her rare force of spirit, her unique talent for slumber, would have effected a similar result.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT.

ELEVEN o'clock, and a glorious night! Windy withal, and sombre when sputters of inky cloud spread over the sky as over a firmament of blotting-paper—hiding the pure, argent disc of Heaven's own mintage. Free of Eliza, Jack once more had eyes for the beauty of wild skies, and the dusk sadness of streets. An afterglow of the evening's enthusiasm warmed his heart, and with quick thoughts, and slow steps, he paced the almost deserted pavements that coiled round and then slunk away from the sleeping Victoria Park. He forgot the flight of time and the want of a latchkey; and the landscape, with its twinkling perspectives and reeling figures, often tempted him out of himself.

Crouched beneath the tangled jungles of Night, the serpents of streets lay numb and torpid. Yet were many alive at fanged head and poisonous tail, and occasionally a central ganglion quivered with vitality. For the demon of alcohol had galvanised them with his electric thrill, and touched them with unholy fire. The public-houses were full, and many a one vomited brawling choruses. Before the glistening bars, Disease held his ghastly revels, while Death grinned in the corner and rubbed his hands.

Mushrooms in growth, and toadstools in operation, they studded the meadows of stone, flaunting and bright-eyed as poppies, and, like them, offering to drowse the wakeful care. Without, waited frequently meek-eyed women or children, or more rarely, meek-eyed men. The attitude of unconscious martyrdom was eloquent of the Past, and in the multiplying mirror of Jack's consciousness, their patient figures stood watching in wistful silence through how many nights and years. . . .

There was a slimy canal trailing away in phosphorescent blackness. By day it did its dull, tedious work—it was something in the coal trade—but at night it put off all restraint, and came out in its true colours as a ghoul, a vampire, that sucked the blood out of a man's face, and made the pale wretch shudder with superstitious awe and foreboding. Yet malarious, grimy, and loathsome as it appeared, many a mortal had found its sluggish breast the sweetest resting-place. The fascination of silence, dreariness, and depth took hold of Jack, and he leaned over the parapet and gazed into the slumbrous waters.

But no East End canal could be serious long. Whatever look of solemnity and barren forlornness it endeavoured to assume, its terrors were lost on a gang of noisy revellers who now passed over it. In vain its shadows folded their arms austere, and drew their togas round them. It could not keep its countenance before men for whom Earth had neither weirdness nor mystery. The awful despair and melancholy died out of its eyes, its sombre vitality vanished, and it returned to a dull and muddy blankness.

"They are happy, these beatified oysters," said Jack.

They were, these sponges of a larger growth, and more deliberate imbibition. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we work."

"Thus," says an essayist of the period, "runs the unspoken motto of many a British workman, who lengthens his days by honouring his father and mother, and stealing a few hours from the night as they did. And if he cannot sip Falernian with Horace or champagne with Tom Moore, he can swill beer with fellows as jolly as either. Then he sings light, laughing lyrics of love, with unmetrical choruses, where the syllables must form improper *liaisons* to come under the tune—an evil that philosophers tell us always arises from overcrowding—and where grammatical forms that can never agree in more polite society dwell together in friendliest concord. His notions of musical harmony are confined to singing the melody an octave lower than his companions, or in a different key from theirs; and should he by any chance attempt a few chords, he proves all the rules by supplying all the exceptions. Notes that live, like husband and wife, in too intimate connection to harmonise together, make ineffective attempts at fraternising, while consecutive fifths tread on each other's heels."

With the passing of this cheerful, straggling procession the Canal reasserted itself, and tried to brazen out its momentary lapse into prosaic griminess. In the warm air it breathed out its soul in strange sepulchral scents, while overhead, dull, bloated, bedraggled clouds lay like ghastly corpses lazily drifting on aerial tides.

Jack shuddered. The silence and loneliness were intensified by the dying away of the rough notes and the tramp of feet. His nerves were overstrung by the incidents of the last few days. There was oppression in the heavy air, and the lurid darkness was filled with shapes, and impalpable forms in his rear closed around him. The Universe was a charnel-house, and he the only living person in it. Everywhere was corruption, putrescence, death. He made a step forward. That faint glow far ahead, how welcome it was with its suggestions of life and cheerfulness! And if it suggested boisterousness too, why, aggressive vitality was better than none at all. Even under the pressure of formless awe, he was not unconscious of a new insight into the motives which drove the men he had just sneered at to the public-house. The dreariness of his surroundings might well symbolise the misery of their home-lives, and the plaintive thought stirred him like a dying cadence of music to noble remorse and larger sympathy. The sound of distant footsteps arrested his own. He peered through the gloom, and lo, advancing fearlessly in the midst of all these terrors, was a small, barefooted maid. On she came with steady stride, an image of purity and innocence, like Una in the Enchanted Forest, and in her hand she swung a beer-can.

"A little child that lightly draws its breath—what does it know of death?" murmured Jack. Her clear eyes returned his glance unabashed. She was very, very little, and had an old-fashioned air. Her dress, like "the clouds in the night rack," was "ragged

and brown." The quaint candour of her interrogative scrutiny amused Jack, whose heart had already gone out to the dear little thing who walked unmoved where he had feared to tread.

"How old are you, my child?" he inquired kindly.

"I'm more than seven," sharply replied the little maid, tossing her head.

"Do you go to school?" he asked, laying a gentle hand upon her shoulder. The small figure palpitated under his touch.

"*Il s'out le tremblement des feuilles,*" thought Jack. "It is infinitely suggestive that men so diverse as Victor Hugo and Wordsworth should find their point of contact in reverence for the child. It is not enough for the races to feminise themselves as Renan says. They must become as little children."

All the arch roguery was gone out of the girl's face.

"Oh, please, sir," she screamed as soon as her breath came back. "I was only larkin'. I ain't five yet. I didn't know as you was the School Board. Five next Chrismus, 'onner bright."

She jerked herself from under his arm, but Jack caught her with a quick action.

"My poor child," he said, "do not be frightened of me. Will your mother buy you a pair of boots if I give you the money?"

The barefooted maid looked up, still fluttering.

"D'ye mean it?" she asked cautiously.

"Of course."

"'Onner bright?"

"Honour bright." As he said the words a pang traversed his heart, and somehow the words *sauf l'honneur* tingled in his ear. "What will your boots cost?" he added abstractedly.

"May be fifteen bob, may be a quid," replied the child promptly.

Jack put his hand into his pocket. For some time he fumbled amid meshes of tobacco. Then gradually a look of astonishment came over his face as he realised that his purse was gone—gone under the very nose of the Old Judge. But amidst all the consternation of the discovery, the disappointment of the little girl was vividly present to him.

"Don't fret, child," he said, smoothing her tangled locks; "I have mislaid my purse, and have nothing with me but paper; but if you will come with me to my house——"

"Now what little game are you up to, eh?" cried a rough voice. At the same moment Jack's arm was rudely seized by a helmeted apparition in blue that seemed to have just been solidified out of the enviroing darkness.

Angels and Ministers of grace defend him!

An electric shock of repulsion thrilled through his being as the bull's eye flashed full in his face. His eyes darted indignant lightnings.

"How dare you?" he exclaimed haughtily. "Unhand me!"

The policeman flinched before his angry scorn. But he had not tramped a London beat ten years for nothing.

"Lor' bless you," he said good-humouredly; "It's no good coming that dodge on *me*. I've had my eye on you for some time, and when I hear a female screamin' at this hour and come up and find it's you, why it looks a bit suspicious, don't it now?"

The violent shock of horror and antipathy at this, his first contact with the dread majesty of the law, subsided even as the constable was addressing him, and never, henceforward, did his pride shrink up in all its pores with such unutterable disdain as on this occasion. *Il n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.*

"From your point of view," he replied mildly, "I admit that it does."

"This is a soft-sawdery chap," reflected his captor.

"But," continued Jack, "now that I tell you that you have made a mistake, you will please move on."

"Me—move—on!" gasped J 30. "Not till I know more about this affair anyhow. Tell me, my little dear, what's he been sayin' to you? Has he been trying to take away your change?"

The little dear spoke up sharply. The unworthy trick of dangling a visionary pair of boots before her glistening eyes had cut her to the heart.

"As I was a-goin' 'ome with the supper-beer," she said, "'e stopped me and wanted to know 'ow old I was."

He turned his lantern on Jack with fresh interest.

"What a sickly debauched-looking face," he thought. "I shouldn't like to have *his* sins to answer for."

"So then," proceeded Una, "'e arxed me if I went to school, and if I would like a pair of boots, and wen I ses 'yes,' 'e ses 'e's 'lost his purse.'" The disappointment was too keen, and she broke down and sobbed bitterly, and diluted the Barclay and Perkins.

"My poor child!" said Jack, much affected. "If you will give me your name and address you shall be amply compensated. The child has spoken the exact truth," he added, turning to the policeman. "Truth is the natural instinct of the young soul, which comes trailing clouds of glory. You see, therefore, that you are guilty of a misapprehension."

J 30 was not inclined by any means to admit this either in its mental or its physical sense, but before he could speak, Jack went on: "But, although you are mistaken in this instance, I rejoice to have had this practical testimony of the zeal of an often-abused body of men. I shall remember your number and recommend you at head-quarters for promotion."

J 30 had had many a strange experience but never such a one as this. He stared, he dropped his hold of Jack's arm, he grew frightened and confused. Surely, here was something more than chaff, or the stratagetics of injured innocence. The sincere and authoritative ring of the words carried alarmed conviction even to prejudiced ears. Nay, as he looked again, was there not a noble

dignity in the pale face, a condescending majesty in the bent figure? What a fool he had been! But Fortune favours fools, and surely there was no cause for remorse—rather was there reason for rejoicing. The mysterious stranger seemed to recognise that he had done his duty, and had even promised him advancement.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he faltered. "Even a policeman is liable to mistakes now and then."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Jack fervently. "You have done your duty. Would we could all say as much!"

"As for promotion, sir, I never expected it," he responded with truth. This non-expectancy was, of course, the natural state of mind in one who was conscious of having always deserved it. How, indeed, could he anticipate that he would blunder into it like Shadwell into sense?

"There is nothing certain but the unexpected," said Jack musingly.

"Well, I shall be glad of it, for the sake of my wife and children, if it does come. Much as I should value the honour, I needn't tell you that, as a family man, I shall value the rise more. Twenty-eight shillings a week is hardly enough to keep ten bodies and souls together."

"Twenty-eight shillings a week," muttered the painter bitterly, "for guarding the commonweal in the concrete. And for neglecting the commonweal in the abstract the first Minister of the Crown gets——" He paused suddenly, perceiving that the policeman had overheard his reflections.

"With all due respect, sir," observed the officer, "it would be ungrateful in a policeman to admit that Floppington, God bless him, has been neglectin' his duty, after that Bill of his."

Jack's eyes filled with tears, but he replied warmly: "Honour where honour is due. Floppington had little to do with the Act you refer to. Because he happened to be Prime Minister, you must not suppose that all the good was done by *him*." He paused, and added with bitterness: "As for all the evil, that of course is *his* work only." Then, taking Una's name and address, he patted her kindly on the head and sent her home with fresh hope. He watched the little form tripping gaily along the cold stones till it was lost in the gloom, and his heart swelled with emotion at the vision of Truth and Cheerfulness incarnate. He pictured the squalid home lit up by her presence, the rough father and mother softened by her innocence. But had he foreseen the "whacking" she got for "bein' so long with the beer and spilin' the supper, and then tellin' a 'eap of crackers to get out of it," he would, perhaps, have found it of a piece with his previous experience, and might have indulged in philosophical reflections.

The voice of J 30 broke the silence.

"You said something about missing your purse. Can you think of how it went? I mean—for instance, did you notice any one brushing near you?"

"It does not matter," interrupted Jack.

"Excuse the presumption, sir. I do not wish to inquire who you are, but if you want to explore these regions you should provide yourself with an escort. By applying to our inspector——"

"Thank you," replied Jack abruptly, "I prefer to go alone. Good night!"

"Good night, sir," cried the policeman. "Beg pardon, sir, and thank you. Good night, sir!"

With these words the functionary resumed his measured tramp, having supplied a noteworthy disproof of the caviller's assertion that the Force is no remedy. And in the exuberance of his heart, for the rest of the night he rattled windows and shook doors like a small earthquake.

Jack did not go far. The same public-house still beckoned invitingly ahead, but it had lost its attractions. That temporary irrational fit of superstitious dread which occasionally seizes on the strongest intellect was over now, and somehow the last words of J 30 had sent his thoughts into retrospective channels and raised emotions of such depth that fear was swallowed up and drowned. As quick thoughts came and went, came and stayed, poisoning his very blood and setting his veins on fire, he seemed for the first time to realise his own misery.

The scene in Parliament, which had so occupied his mind on the previous night, was again present to his fevered brain, but with increased vividness; and as that picture faded, others associated with it flashed and flamed, and burnt themselves in fiery images on the night. He staggered, and had to support himself against the railing of a house. The minutes passed, and still the pictures flashed and waned.

On the other side of the road the shrouded Park stretched away, the trees linked by darkness to fictitious unity, and the sombre leafage stirring restlessly. The firs bent solemnly towards the poplars in the opposite gardens, as if to catch the whispers of their leaves. The tall poplars drew back before them, disturbing the long gaunt shadows with which they had trellised the façades. A gay chorus, that issued from the glow of light at the end of the street, took sadness and mystery from distance, and the rustle of the wind mingled mournfully with it.

And now the visions changed. Surely this was not the panorama of his own life, these scenes of pain and disease and death? Rather were they phantoms conjured up by the words of the Socialist, these miserable interiors where human beings huddled and quarrelled till they were carted away to wider quarters. What else, in sooth, was that monotonous series of buildings, high or low, broad or narrow, where morn or eve, in sunshine or fog, by daylight or gaslight, hasting, unresting, iron wheels were turning, grinding out young lives? Was it the blood throbbing in his veins that made him hear the ceaseless whirr of the machinery, or did the notes of the distant chorus and the restless rustle of the wind shape themselves into its remorseless pulsations?

Midnight—announced by the brazen tongues of drunken women,

and trolled from the beery mouths of reeling men staggering from their lost paradise, whose gates closed behind them. They were coming his way, these fallen mortals, with clamorous laughter and ribald shouting. On they straggled, like the rout of Comus, without a leader, the enchanter being left behind, yawningly contemplating his crowded tills.

Frowsy, with dishevelled tresses streaming on the wind, two girls, quite young, but with a debauched, womanly expression, danced along before the rest, hoarsely chanting a doggrel music-hall ballad. As they came near, Jack recognised in them the stuff of which his dreams were made. He had often seen them going to work in the morning, carrying their dinners wrapped up in sheets of fiction. These, then, were the factory girls, the victims of the Juggernaut Car of the modern religion of Supply and Demand, ground beneath its wheels without the hopes that soften the anguish of the Hindoo. Was it to be expected that they should "live without opium," or seek purer sources of joy in their scanty moments of leisure?

Emotion overpowered him. The whole scene with its rowdy figures became one blur to his eyes; he raised his hands in supplication and blessing. Blinded by tears, through the surging words of unspoken prayer, he heard them calling to him with coarse, reckless laughter. And then he felt their hot, panting breaths close upon him, reeking in the heavy air, and they seemed to have recognised him, for, as he brushed the tears away from his eyes, a jeering cry broke upon his ears:

"Mad Jack!"

He turned and gazed into their flushed, dissolute faces with a look of ineffable pity.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

RUMOUR'S HUNDRED TONGUES.

THE Bobo difficulty was approaching solution. After some weeks of ceaseless telegraphing, questioning, vapouring, ranting, reasoning, and manœuvring, fluttering half the embassies of Europe, it began to leak out that the island in dispute had no material existence, and as no nation had as yet committed itself to insolent despatches, manifestoes, or ultimatums, there was at least a reasonable hope that the diplomatists would bring their negotiations to an amicable issue.

Meantime, the Reform Bill, amended as the Prime Minister had promised, had received the signature of the Sovereign. Every man or woman, not a criminal in confinement, nor a lunatic, was now seised of a vote as soon as he or she had attained the age of twenty-one; though, as an illustration of how Nature disposes what statecraft proposes, it may be pointed out that only a small minority of unmarried women laid claim to their new privilege. The triumph of Floppington in piloting into port so vast a measure, though his party was in a helpless minority, and though he had had to contend with an envenomed and splendidly-organised Opposition, raised him immensely in the eyes of the country. Moreover, the threatened disintegration of the Ministry had not taken place. The Ministers, who had temporarily wavered in their allegiance, owing to the disturbing influence of Mountchapel, were conscience-stricken when they discovered that Floppington was a rising and not a waning force. They thought almost with tears of their long attachment to that noble-minded man, and penitently resolved to have nothing more to do with the late Foreign Secretary, at least for the present. Bardolph's political fortunes were for the moment desperate. His faction had hopelessly broken down. After its defeat, one part of it had gone back to the right and the other to the left, and its leader was left stranded. The young and vigorous Conservatives, who had not very long ago looked upon him as the only man who could give new life to the cause, and upon the Premier as the

personification of incompetence, saw that they had under-estimated the subtle transforming influences of power, and recognised with joy that the new Floppington had out-Bardolphed Bardolph in audacity. The desertion of the Ex-Minister by the Old Tories was, if possible, even more complete. Though they had temporarily allied themselves with him to oppose the promised amendment, their motives were not his motives, and even at the moment of their common defeat they experienced a secret joy at the downfall of the whippersnapper, the arrogant bantling against whom they had always cherished a deadly hatred; and the recurrent attacks upon him in their evening paper marked the venting of their long-repressed rancour. Worst of all, the causes of the split in the Tory camp having ceased to exist, they were now ready to lend a loyal support to Floppington.

Thus the only results of Bardolph's political intrigues had been first to make the Cabinet, and then the party, thoroughly unanimous. To have been entrapped when he thought he was setting gins for his rival, to have taken no single step that did not contribute to the popularity, influence, and resources of that rival, these were surely the bitterest drops in his cup of humiliation. In one point alone he had beaten the Premier; but it was a success that, in his opinion, counterbalanced all his defeats. Gwendolen was to be his. The victory he had won was irrevocable, while the triumphs of his adversary were infinitely precarious, and perpetually liable to reversal. But still there was no getting over the fact that for the moment at least his star had paled before Floppington's.

The immense interest excited by the Premier in the contemporary mind was not due simply to his political career. The audacity with which he seized on the ideas which were "in the air," where their original owners had allowed them to escape; the stability of his Cabinet, despite the loss of its strongest member; the thoroughness of his reorganisation of the Conservative party, now more compact than at any previous period since the retirement of Beaconsfield; these topics, interesting as they were, were not so eagerly canvassed as the more dubious items that hovered from lip to lip.

Rumour had indeed been very busy with the name of Floppington during the last six weeks or so. Far and wide spread the news she told, for she has the largest circulation in the world as well as the greatest inaccuracy. She said he was developing various small idiosyncrasies, though she whispered the particulars of them to a select coterie only, putting off the world at large with the hint of a general diffused eccentricity. She said that his new activity in the House was paralleled by his restless participation in the life of society. She said that he was engaged to Lady Harley, that the match had been broken off, that he had never been engaged to her at all, and that the lady in question was about to wed Lord Bardolph Mountchapel. This last item, being confirmed by the silence of the parties interested, profited Bardolph not a little. A reflex of the popularity of the charming lady he was going to lead to the altar

irradiated the partially-eclipsed statesman. He had been further damaged by the good faith displayed by Floppington, which made his own vaunted unfaith in the Premier appear the result of spite, and weakened the belief of the millions in the sincerity of his advocacy of the cause of woman. But the manifest confidence of Lady Harley in his earnestness restored that of the world at large. Gwendolen's many gracious acts of kindness had endeared her to the masses, and her successful struggle for Female Suffrage lent additional piquancy to her union with its noble champion.

Thus far Rumour for the present. But the gods were busily nursing on their knees (poor henpecked Olympians! were the goddesses gadding about in fashionable spheres?) young events soon to be let loose on the world and fated to electrify it with a series of sensations, the like whereof hath been granted to no generation before or since.

From the rise of this sun to power even to the going down thereof, the political and social barometer portended lively weather, occasionally culminating in earthquake with shocks neither few nor gentle. Never before had editors such a good time! Had he remained in the zenith, the silly season would have disappeared from the journalistic almanac. For in the sale of newspapers he was a most valuable element, even before certain suspicions fell upon him. To use the language of the chemists, he was equivalent to a large number of atoms of crime and to a small number of atoms of divorce. He was even capable of displacing one molecule of indecency.

It was on the Premier's love affairs that Rumour's hundred tongues were wagging most busily, each in contradiction of the rest, and so many were the theories that it seemed as if the goddess had "taken on" a few extra tongues for the occasion.

The simple facts were interpreted as variously as if they had been parts of the life of Hamlet, and had never happened at all. The morning papers, as was their wont, preserved a discreet silence when all the world was longing for a word of comment. The Society journals allowed enough traces of their ignorance to be visible to persuade everybody that their information was complete. But at last the general journalistic reserve was rudely shaken off by *City Gossip*, which came out with an accurately false account of the whole affair, headed "Immorality in the Cabinet." It demanded the reason why the lovely E—— B—— had been dismissed from her situation at Lady G—— H——'s? The number, being instantly suppressed, had a sale equalling that of the recently-completed Revised Version, besides similarly varying in price from a shilling to a guinea; and the purchasers of the two were not so distinct as the present-day reader might imagine. The bad thought it was too good to be true, and the good that it was too bad to be false. It was felt with joy by many Liberals, with sorrow by many Conservatives, that the Premier had supplied a powerful argument for Liberalism.

But it was reserved for a later generation to know the truth, or

what is still considered such by flippant magazine writers ; for was not the notorious Mr. Postscena engaged on those posthumous memoirs which he intended to bring out as soon as he was old enough to know better ? Does not this *chronique scandaleuse* bid us eschew the crude theories of the vulgar in favour of the subtler scandal which appeals to the educated palate, and which runs that the Premier, who had lately grown fond of power, had entered into a secret arrangement by which Lady Harley was given up to Lord Bardolph, on condition of his retiring from the Cabinet, and that the latter's attack on Floppington was purely Jesuitical ?

This hypothesis has the merit of connecting several disparate events ; but as it does not readily square with the sequel, the present writer has reluctantly abandoned it as untenable, preferring the methods of the shoals of reviewers who have explained everything on purely natural grounds without the *deus ex machinâ* of a secret treaty. With the most painfully precise psychological analysis, many of these have irrefutably demonstrated that the changes in the Premier's attitude towards political problems were necessary points in the evolution of his personality, and that they might have been predicted by the philosophic observer.

With equal profundity it has been shown by others that the development of Conservatism during the latter period of the Ministry of the elder Floppington was not due to the man at all, but was the inevitable result of the antecedent state of Anglican factions, foreign relations, society, religion, ideals, and other abstractions. It was rightly pointed out by Professor Seeley that to attribute this expansion to Floppington (the mere exponent of the progress) was to mistake the shadow for the substance. All right-thinking, that is, all scientific minds would admit that had this particular Premier never been born, English Conservatism would have had a similar history. Thus the then chief of the prophets who never prophesy until they know.

But for a marvel of constructive skill the curious reader must go to the *Life of Floppington*, by M. N. Dacks. It is as ingeniously put together as any of Fanton's fictions. Wonderful as is the first volume, it is utterly eclipsed by the second, in which the writer's inventiveness, far from being exhausted by a first flight, is fresher than ever. The brilliancy of the book is at its maximum at the present point of the Premier's history, despite the entire failure of documentary evidence, except letters of the most formal description merely signed by the Premier. Hardly the smallest scrap in the Premier's handwriting during this period has been forthcoming ; the pressure of extraordinary public business would seem to have prevented familiar and unreserved epistolary intercourse of any description ; yet, for all that, the biographer has been able to give the world a highly consistent account of a period of inconsistency. Though the present historian cannot agree with even one of Mr. Dacks's conclusions, he cannot refrain from paying his humble tribute to the fine qualities of style that characterise this ever-memorable production.

CHAPTER II.

FLOPPINGTON'S APOLOGIA.

GRATITUDE is not only a lively sense of future favours, it is also frequently a dismal sense of past benefits. The more the donor of them is likely to feel the burden of ingratitude, the more the recipient feels the fardel of gratitude. Poor conscientious *protégés* and *protégées*, who have taken the cross upon your shoulders, and totter along; how many of your careers have been ruined by being made!

Should there be any one in the world who doubts that gratitude is a burden, he or she may be asked to explain why it is that people are so anxious to get rid of it? The present of to-day is redeemed by the present of to-morrow; the dinner of yesterday is balanced by the dinner to come; the butter of the proposer of the toast is repaid by the butter of the responder.

The working of this speedy compensation principle was seen in the promptness with which the Women of England endeavoured to pay off their debt to the man who had given them the Suffrage. And just as in our last instance one might in those days have got oleo-margarine as an equivalent for his best Devonshire, so Floppington, in return for his great exertions in Committee, got nothing, in the first instance at least, but a pair of magnificently-embroidered slippers (a fragment of the crewel-work having been done by the most cunning female artists of every town in the kingdom) together with a gorgeous gold-tasselled night-cap of surpassing splendour and Oriental magnificence, wrought by a like plurality of fair workers, and accompanied by sumptuously-bound copies of the works of every great woman writer of the century; the whole purchased by means of a penny subscription throughout the country, without distinction of rank or aught but sex. For of course no one who could not make out a claim to femininity was allowed to contribute, though the needy fathers of many daughters grumbled a little all the same. The total amount collected was far in excess of the cost of the gifts, and the surplus was to be devoted to founding a Floppington Scholarship for Women in the London University, which, it must be remembered, was at that period the only University that had thrown open its degrees unconditionally to women. This scholarship was to be held by the female candidate who stood highest in the honours list of the matriculation examination.

The presentation was arranged to take place in Floppington's own constituency, where the idea had originated. The occasion was expected to be memorable. A great speech was anticipated by the townsmen from their illustrious member, whom they had not seen since his re-election on taking office. His success had exceeded their wildest expectations, and they were prepared to give

him a royal welcome. Never before had Floppington met with even a tithe of the enthusiasm which now attended him.

His progress to the rendezvous was one long triumph. At every station deputations awaited him from the newly-enfranchised women of the town, and his few words of reply were cheered by closely-packed thousands. Miles upon miles of his route were lined by enthusiastic, excited throngs, who shouted themselves hoarse. Men and women risked their lives in the desire to be an inch nearer to him. From passing engines, drivers and stokers huzzahed and waved their handkerchiefs. Grimy pitmen ascended from the under-world to greet him as he flew past in his luxurious saloon carriage. Stone and iron bridges seemed in danger of collapsing under the weight of countless multitudes. Wherever there was a *locus standi*, the whole population turned out to catch a glimpse of the man whose name but a few brief months ago had been a by-word for weakness, and who appeared to have finally extinguished all the bright hopes ever entertained of him. Such are the unforeseen turns in the tide of popular opinion.

Floppington arrived at his constituency an hour behind time. No one had bargained for the unparalleled enthusiasm on the route. Despite the immense strain he had undergone, he appeared bright and smiling, and not at all fatigued. The penalties of power must have weighed lightly upon him. An exultant glow suffused his finely-moulded features. The only drawback to his happiness was the knowledge that Lady Harley would be absent on the plea of illness. The papers had commented on the cruel irony of Fate, which was keeping away from the great occasion the lady who had perhaps most to do with the creation of its *raison d'être*. The Premier agreed with the sentiment, but to him the cruel irony of fate had another signification and a wider meaning. He knew, too, that Lady Harley's absence was due to her desire to avoid him. But, happily, the contagion of the universal exhilaration temporarily banished his sadness, and the last vestiges of melancholy were removed, strange to say, by his perusal during the route of the comic papers, whenever he had the opportunity. The fact was, that the great statesman found acute enjoyment in reading Aunt Towzer's or Mr. Punch's reports of his doings, or seeing himself satirised in half-a-dozen cartoons. His delight in these things was second only to his keen pleasure and amusement in reading the equally funny caricatures of his conduct which appeared in the serious journals. He even began to resume his readings of the Church organs (to which he had, indeed, always subscribed), to see how he affected the worlds of Orthodoxy and Dissent. He was never happier than when following a grave exposition of his motives, whether in the civil or uncivil (or rather the religious) press. At such times a saturnine and mysterious smile would cross his countenance, and occasionally he would burst into a roar of laughter, hearty, but with a ring more or less bitter.

The delay in the Premier's arrival only intensified the en-

thusiasm of the expectant multitude. The town was *en fête*. As soon as the express was signalled, the band struck up "See the Conquering Hero comes." The crowd pressed forward with tumultuous billows of applause, and the Premier's carriage was drawn by horny-handed constituents to his hotel, amid a scene of indescribable excitement; beneath triumphal arches and past Venetian masts, through streets gay with flowers, and flags, and streamers, and embroidered mottoes, throbbing with the thunder of ten thousand throats and alive with the flutter of hats and handkerchiefs. All remarked the new strength and determination in the face of their Member as he passed slowly onwards, raising his hat ever and anon, and dispensing affable smiles to every quarter of the compass.

Though the day was a public holiday, and the whole populace was abroad, recruited by an inflow from the metropolis and from every town for miles around, the Premier ventured into the streets in the interval before the great event, leaving the hotel by a back door. For a few moments he wandered curiously about, examining the town as if, as Tremaine said to him, he had never seen it before in his life. But he was soon recognised and mobbed. He stood the crush till it became physically unpleasant. Then he jumped into a passing tram-car with the natural air of a man who had been accustomed to patronise that species of conveyance. Tremaine and the Mayor, who accompanied him, were horrified; but the great man only smiled grimly, and took occasion to whisper to his *fidus Achates*:

"The Democracy dodge, my boy."

As for the lucky occupants of the vehicle, they were, of course, instantly transported to the seventh heaven—a journey not often made for twopence. The conductor insisted on paying for the hero's ticket, and an old beldame, who sat at his side, surreptitiously snipped off a fragment of his coat-tails with a pair of scissors. Around the triumphal car seethed a mass of humanity impeding and alarming the astonished horses, unconscious of the honour thrust upon their haunches. But Floppington betrayed no sign of impatience. He sat listening to the roar of the multitude and surveying the gay streets, where the preparations for the evening's illuminations were in progress. He re-entered his hotel still unexhausted, still with the same bright smile on his face, and, after sitting some time on the steps in the face of an admiring crowd, he mounted to his rooms.

His reception by the great assembly of the afternoon was, if possible, even more magnificent. The vast hall in which the proceedings took place was crammed in every corner. One thousand five hundred ladies and one thousand five hundred gentlemen sat in reserved seats. For the other thousand seats no tickets had been issued. These, and standing room for a thousand more, had, at Floppington's express desire, been left open for free competition, and from early dawn, dense masses of men vibrant

with emotion had surged patiently to and fro. As the Premier drove slowly towards the door he saw that the building was surrounded as far as the eye could reach.

The audience had been in their places for hours. They had sung all their national songs twice through before the distant muffled roar of the thousands without announced the advent of the Premier. The sounds grew and grew in volume, till at last they swelled to a mighty organ-roll of sound, and Floppington entered the hall. Immediately the vast assemblage rose to their feet as one man, waving their hats and handkerchiefs, and cheering till the rafters rang again. As the great Minister, sporting a huge bunch of primroses at his button-hole, took his place on the platform, five thousand voices burst out singing "For he's a jolly good fellow." The sweet tones of the women mingled with the rumbling bass of the men, and the effect was sublime.

Floppington was visibly affected. As the homage of the multitude fell upon his ears, as he saw every eye fixed reverently upon him, it was borne in upon him that monarchy was a sham, and that republicanism was the only satisfactory form of government. He gazed around, and his heart swelled and his eyes grew moist with a rush of unselfish emotion. Vast projects of reform, vast schemes for benefiting so appreciative a humanity surged within his brain, as he took in the grandeur of the scene. On the platform, at his side and behind him, were ranged the noblest of England's titled or untitled aristocracy (many of whom, as he knew, had intrigued for the honour of appearing upon it), and the most illustrious leaders on both sides.

Knights and ladies, squires and dames of the Primrose League, wore their orders on their breasts, and the picturesque effect of the *ensemble* was intensified by the preponderance of the gentler sex, which made the platform flash with a continuous galaxy of fair women, the soft sheen of whose white dresses reposed the eye and gave a cool tone to the picture. The hall itself, aflame on all sides with perspectives of excited faces, was fragrant with floral decorations, and in niches along the walls stood statues of his most illustrious predecessors, gilded by the bright sunshine that streamed lavishly through the open windows.

The proceedings commenced with the recital of a fine nebulous ode, written by Mrs. Pfeiffer for the occasion.

This over, a beautiful, blushing school-girl advanced, bearing a magnificent bouquet, which she presented in the name of the adolescent generation of women; declaring, in the course of another poem, that the girls would endeavour to live up to their vote, and to acquire a finished political education in all its branches.

The Premier replied that he was deeply moved by the confidence of the school-girls of the nation, and that he in his turn would endeavour to live up to that confidence. (Cheers.) When in future harassed by the weighty cares of the Empire, he would think of all the dear little girls in their white pinafores (cheers) whose hearts were beating in sympathy with his, and whose heads

were throbbing with the same momentous problems; and he had no doubt he would be solaced, braced, and stimulated by the thought. (Loud and prolonged cheers, and much wiping of eyes.) He trusted that the school-girls of England would not live in contented apathy because they held the true political faith themselves; he hoped that they would not rest night or day till they had converted their mothers and fathers to their own views—(cheers)—till they had uprooted the immature fallacies of their uncles and aunts—(cheers)—till they had utterly annihilated the crude convictions of their grandfathers and grandmothers. (Immense applause.) Should they shrink from the task as difficult, as impossible, he would direct their eyes to the bright example of the Temperance tracts—(cheers)—to the illustrious models of the Sunday story books. (Cheers.) Their holy religion taught them that nothing was too miraculous to have happened (cheers), and that they would find that little children had redeemed their parents from evil (cheers), and why should they not exert the same beneficial influence on politics? (Cheers.) Indeed, he would venture to say, if the profanity were excused him, that the motto of Conservatism might in future be: "Unless ye become as little children ye shall not enter the kingdom of Toryism." (Cheers.) "For are not the articles of our creed within the comprehension of a child?" asked the Premier. "Is it not the adult mind that refines and obscures its beautiful and elementary character? Are we not all Tories at our mother's breast? (Cheers.) To adapt the phrase that the poet applied to heaven, does not Toryism lie about us in our infancy? (Cheers.) Does not Toryism lie about everything in heaven and earth? (Loud cheers.) I say that Toryism is the belief taught by Nature herself, the belief evidenced by every act of the young before the veneer of education masks the elemental instincts, the belief of all that is simple, of all that is childish, of all that is unsophisticated. (Cheers.) But, alas! the child grows up; the beautiful innocence of his soul dies away, his primeval and touching simplicity vanishes, and he becomes wise with the wisdom of the Radicals. (Loud hisses.) It is for this reason that I say unto you, school-girls of England, and I bid you make it known to the school-boys of England (cheers), that on you is laid the sacred and mighty task of forming the aging intellect of the nation, that on you rests the divine duty of implanting the seeds of truth in hearts hardened and turned away from it by the cruel experiences of adult life, that to your hands is confided the solemn function of recalling your elders to the ancient purity of their faith, of making them innocent as you are innocent, simple as you are simple, unsophisticated as you are unsophisticated." (Loud and prolonged cheering.)

The great presentation of the day now took place in the name of the Women of England, who begged him to accept some slight marks of their gratitude—for they could never hope to adequately repay his exertions in their cause—to the most noble-minded and large-hearted Minister of the century (cheers); to the statesman whom the world honoured for the comprehensiveness of his views,

the depth of his loyalty and patriotism (cheers), the thoroughness of his reforms (loud cheers), and the staunchness of his Conservatism. (Immense enthusiasm)

The night-cap, the slippers, and the books were then handed to Mr. Floppington amid the plaudits of the mighty assembly. The Premier, in reply, said :

“ Words cannot tell how deeply I am moved by this presentation to my unworthy self, of such valuable specimens of the work and the works of the women of my country (cheers), and by the kind language of the address which accompanied it. I don't know why the millions of donors have chosen me for this great honour. I am sure I have had little to do with the extension of their privileges. (No, no.) I have carried the measure it is true (cheers), but it is to the pioneers of the movement that all the honour is due. When I recall to you the labours of the noble lady whose unfortunate absence from our midst on this interesting occasion no one can regret more than I (loud and prolonged cheering), when I remind you of the herculean—as well as for a long time the Sisyphean—labours of all connected with the Female Suffrage Society (cheers), you will understand that it is not an excess of modesty that prompts my disclaimer of merit, but a right measure of appreciation of the efforts of others. (Hear, hear.) I trust I shall not be considered boastful in claiming to possess the latter quality. As a true, and, I fervently hope, a typical Tory, it is my pride that I am not indifferent to the good points in the policy even of our opponents. (Cheers.) But you have not been of my opinion in regard to the smallness of my merits, and I cannot grumble at being in a minority. (Laughter.) Far be it from me to accuse the fair sex of unfairness. (Laughter.) No doubt the ladies have delights in store for all who deserve them. When I survey the contents of this—Surprise Packet (laughter), this gorgeous night-cap, these voluptuous slippers”—holding them up—“ I am overcome with emotion ; I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels (laughter), and, consequently, in doubt as to which article goes north and which south. (Loud laughter.) But crowned with this magnificent work of art—whichever of the two it be (more laughter)—and shod with the other—whichever that other be—I may proudly claim that woman's love has armed me from head to foot, and thus accoutred I am ready for the fray. (Cheers and laughter.) And now, as my emotion subsides, and my sight begins to clear, I feel that with these slippers”—holding them up—“ I shall be able to beat my enemies (laughter)—I mean the thought of these slippers will enable me to inflict a moral thrashing on my adversaries. When I survey their wondrous workmanship—if the masculine substantive be permissible (laughter)—and when I look at these rows of intellectual volumes, I feel that this presentation of the Women of England does equal honour to their head and heart (Laughter.) And what shall I say of this gorgeous and tropical vision”—holding up the night-

cap—"which only language like Mr. Swinburne's could adequately describe; this

'Narcissus-like nimbus round my nightly nepenthe.'

Surely it was by prevision of its loveliness that Keats wrote (laughter):

'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness but still will keep
A bower quiet for us (*examining the interior*) and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing.'

Loud laughter.) I hope the prediction of the poet will be realised. (Laughter.) I shall certainly try to bring it about by wearing the thing of beauty, though, at first sight of it, I must confess I felt tempted to exclaim what the countryman exclaimed at the first sight of a cathedral: 'That! why, dang it, that's *too* magnificent to sleep in.' (Laughter.) But, while lost in the magnificence of my present, I must not forget to thank this magnificent assembly for its kind appreciation of the little I have been able to do for the removal of inequality and injustice in the past (cheers), and were it not for the fact that the bright sunshine woos you without (no, no!), I might be tempted to say a little about the future. (Hear, hear, and cheers.) Well, if you wish to expose yourself to the heat of political oratory in addition to that of the weather, I trust you will not blame me too much in the sequel, and though I may be held responsible for the former, I hope I shall not be deemed responsible for the latter. (Laughter.) I have no wish to trench upon the privileges of Her Gracious Majesty, whose use as a cloud-dispeller the most ardent Republican must admit. (Laughter.) And while I am on the subject of Her Majesty, a theme inexhaustible to all the other subjects of Her Majesty, I cannot refrain from remarking upon the monstrosity of the fact that the sex which produced the sovereign of an empire on which the sun never sets (cheers), a sovereign, than whom none, I make bold to say, has ever been dearer to the people of this great country (cheers), a sovereign who has moreover added to the wealth of English literature by works that would immortalise her did she not immortalise them, and which, I am not surprised to see, have been considered indispensable to this collection of volumes representative of the female intellect of England (loud cheers)—that the sex which counts among its members such women as this should be devoid of a vote, and that Victoria herself, had this been a country where power sprang not from birth but from intellect, would have been debarred from the slightest voice in the affairs of the nation. I say that in rejecting this barbarous Salic law of suffrage we have got rid of a national scandal. (Loud cheers, the audience rising and waving hats and handkerchiefs.) But it will be said, nay, it has been said, with what venomous rancour you all know, 'How was it that your convictions on this point were a short time ago the

exact reverse of what they are now?' I have hitherto been silent. Strong in my integrity, I have allowed the stream of indictment, not only on this but on other subjects, to flow by. But the Women of England have had confidence in me (cheers), and my silence has said to my revilers, 'a man trusted by the unerring instinct of the Women of England, a man in whom the pure and holy heart of womanhood has faith, has no need to defend himself against your infamous charges.' (Loud cheering.) But, though I was reserved with my enemies, I will be open with my friends. (Hear, hear.) They shall know the grounds on which I have based and shall continue to base my political conduct.

"And let me premise my remarks by pointing out how easy and obvious a reply I could make to my detractors, were I not more concerned to lay down general principles of political action than to undertake a personal and perhaps unnecessary defence. (Hear, hear.) I might make much of the fact that the measure of female suffrage granted by the present Government is infinitely wider than the meagre concessions of the Liberals. (Cheers.) I might accentuate the contrast generally, by a review of the centuries of tinkering Radical legislation; I might point out to the Radical party that in political arithmetic two half-measures are never equal to a whole. (Cheers.) But although I might shield myself behind the ægis of the great Conservative principle of 'Thorough,' I will never allow it to go forth to the world that I wrested the control of this great measure out of the hands of the Liberals, because, and merely because, their reforms did not go far enough. Let me tell the Women of England, that the Conservative party has been influenced by higher considerations than even the justice of their cause. It is an open secret of practical politics that the principle of a proposed reform is not the all in all that it appears to weak-minded enthusiasts—the party which achieves that reform is of equal, if not of greater importance. A Bill passed by the Liberals is quite a different thing from the same Bill passed by the Conservatives. I opposed the men, not the measures. (Cheers.) Was it well that the Liberals should be allowed to bolster up their decaying power by grudging concessions, or was it not better that the great boon of suffrage should be generously granted by the Conservative party—a party that, strong in its wealth and in the support of the Upper Chamber, can afford to maintain independence of thought; can afford to despise the solicitations of the hour; can afford to take its stand upon eternal truth, and so stamp its reforms with the signet of permanence. (Cheers.) For it is our proud boast that we never carry a measure with the raw haste of the Radicals, that we never yield to a demand for reform before we are thoroughly convinced of the necessity; so that when we do set our minds upon a thing, the world feels it is consecrated by the approbation of unprejudiced minds, and it is done at once, and once and for ever. (Cheers.) When, on the contrary, the Liberals carry reforms, all is different; and to so intelligent an audience I need not point the contrast in detail. (Hear, hear.)

Honourable gentlemen, whom I rejoice to see on the platform, and whose conscientiousness I admire though their political faith may not be mine, may be grieved to hear me talk of grudging concessions. They will ask : 'Have we not willingly enrolled ourselves under your banner?' But let me sketch briefly the history of that measure to these gentlemen, and they will see that I use no empty phrase. When did this measure first come on the tapis? Was it introduced by a Government in the flush of youth and the pride of life, or by a Ministry in the decrepitude of old age, and in the agonies of approaching dissolution? (Cheers and laughter.) Was the Cabinet prompted by the love of justice or by the fear of defeat? Were its ears open to the appeal of the downtrodden or inclined eagerly to catch the first whispers of the polling booth? Were the tears it shed over the fate of the voteless, genuine salt, or were they only a good election cry? (Laughter and cheers.) For my part I believe they were the drops that stand in the oleaginous optic of the pachydermatous crocodile. (Laughter.) I determined that I would not suffer them to go to the country with the boast of recent unselfish reforms; and though I had grown convinced of the righteousness of the cause (loud cheers and sensation), it seemed to me to be made unrighteous by being upheld by Ministers whose only chance of supporting themselves was to support it. (Laughter.) I resolved not to permit the Liberals, now that their tenure of power was well-nigh over, to mount into office again on the shoulders of a popular measure which ought to be passed indeed, but which, if passed by them, would probably lead to another septennium of Radical misrule, another season of successful incapacity for their leaders, and another period of political purgatory for ours. For these and other reasons which I need not mention, I saw that while my own heart and my perception of the wrongs of women were impelling me to vote with the Liberals, a truer instinct, and a higher duty, and a wider view of the interests of the country as a whole, demanded that I should impede, and not help on, the desirable reform.

"It behoved me to obey the higher law. It behoved me to save my country, though individual measures perished. It behoved me to put myself at the head of an Opposition. But, alas! the lower instinct of temporary and partial, rather than permanent and universal interests, was strong within me. It would not permit me to oppose a measure with which I agreed. After all I am weak and human, and the lower instincts prevailed so far as to force me to examine the objections to the measure, to penetrate myself with the conviction of its defects and to be ruthless towards my personal prejudices. It was a hard task, but I succeeded. The persistent adoption of a hostile standpoint had at last blinded me to the strength of the arguments for the measure. I had kept my eye so long on the silver shield, that I had forgotten there was a golden side to it. Well, as you all know, I organised the drooping Conservatives, most of whom have proved they viewed their conduct as I did mine, by voting for it now; the Parnellites voted with us to a man, and we were joined by just enough independent or revolted

Liberals to convert the already dwindling Liberal majority into a minority. Our success surprised no one more than myself. I felt sure the Government could have made a stronger fight. Probably they were not sorry to retire and throw on us the onus of our unpopular victory, and the responsibility of administering affairs for a few months before the General Election, and thus to give us the opportunity of obscuring their mistakes by our own. They did not foresee that they were falling into their own trap, and that they would be called upon to aid us in passing the very reform they had failed to carry. (Cheers.) When Her Majesty did me the honour to send for me to Balmoral, I was still astonished by my victory. I had no definite plans. I was unwilling to hold office at the will of the late Premier—for my faction would, of course, be disorganised by the re-gravitation of the Liberal atoms to their original sphere, and my own party would be in that hopeless minority in which it has been during the whole of this Parliament. I therefore declared my inability to form an Administration. It had not as yet occurred to me that if I now introduced a Female Suffrage measure the Liberals would, for the sake of consistency, be compelled to give it their support. You all know what happened. Various combinations were tried; a coalition Ministry was suggested, but ultimately I consented to do my best and brave the consequences. I first introduced a comprehensive measure to do away with the last injustices of male suffrage, with the idea of following it up by an equally comprehensive measure dealing with the female franchise, for I was now able to see the reverse side of the shield. Finding, however, the world and the House eager for an immediate settlement of the latter question, I made it known that the Government would bind itself to accept a clause for that purpose as an amendment in Committee, so that the Bill should receive the support of all classes of politicians. And now comes my justification of the phrase, 'grudging concessions.'

"Many of the Liberals—not all, I am happy to say, as, indeed, the presence of Liberals on the platform will testify (cheers)—the very men who had professed to be moved by the wrongs of one-half the human race, either voted against the Bill, or abstained from voting altogether. (Groans and hisses.) And what was their plea? Why, nothing but the miserable excuse put forth, I am sorry to say, by my late colleague, Lord Bardolph Mounthapel (hisses and cheers), nothing but the shuffling pretext that they were afraid I was only trying to entrap them into voting for the second reading, that it was only another case of 'Will you come into my lobby, said the spider to the fly?' (Laughter.)

"I trust that my earnest efforts in the House have given the lie to the base suspicion. (Cheers.) These gentlemen remind me of that other gentleman in a book which will be known to most of you—I mean the *New Arabian Nights*, which you should read if you haven't—the gentleman who assiduously cultivated the emotion of fear. (Laughter.) Nelson, according to the poet, was afraid of naught save fear; but the only fear of the Anti-Suffragists was lest

they should have none. (Laughter.) I can imagine Lord Mountchapel, like the great Turenne before the battle, ejaculating: 'Ah, body of mine, thou tremblest; but thou shalt tremble still more before I have done with thee.' (Loud laughter.) However, though the noble lord stole some of my old Tories who were opposed to my measure—and I hope he will return them, now that he has no further use for them (laughter)—and added them to his fearful and terror-stricken troops, yet his ranks fell off day by day, and the poor survivors had to exhort and encourage one another to keep up their fear. (Loud laughter.) Still the Mountchapel phalanx was pretty strong, despite its state of chronic panic. My Anti-Suffragist Liberals deserted me, but as their place was supplied by an almost equivalent number of Suffragists, that didn't matter. The revulsion of the Parnellites from their recent antagonism retained them in their adherence to our party, and thus we were enabled to score a decisive victory over an Opposition made up of all those who feared that I would carry Female Suffrage, and of all those who feared I wouldn't. (Cheers and laughter.) As you all know, we had a majority of thirty-nine on the second reading, and shortly afterwards the measure, amended as I had promised, became law. (Loud and continued cheering.) And now, after this historical *résumé*, let us see what other reforms have come within the range of practical politics since I took office. I have spoken at length on the past, and I hope I have not said too little on the present (laughter); but I can only say a few words on the future. The sands of the session, of Parliament itself, are fast running out, but to me the few grains that remain glisten and glitter with golden opportunities. (Loud cheers.) I thank you for those sounds, they cheer me in more senses than one. (Laughter.) I rejoice to be thus strengthened at almost the beginning of my ministerial career, for I have much to do, many battles to fight (cheers), and perhaps not even the fag-end of the session to fight them in. (No, no.) You say 'No, no!' but no one can feel more deeply than I do that it is only by the will of the late Premier that I hold office. I felt that it would be so when I accepted it. I know there is nothing that gives me the right to retain my proud position but his consent. And never in my wildest dreams had I imagined that he would ever give it in the first instance. Perhaps I wronged him in fearing that he would withdraw his support from me before the dissolution. He has not lifted up his voice against me as yet, and I hope he will not do so for some time. It may be that he has taken an oath of silence. (Laughter.) It may be that he has determined to give me rope enough to hang myself. (Laughter.) It may be that I shall use that rope to drag his reluctant party along the path of true reform. (Loud laughter.) It may be that his indignation at the sublime use to which a hempen cord may be applied will induce him to take the dangerous weapon out of my hands too soon, though I promise him some trouble if he attempts it. (Laughter.) But should I be permitted to hold my place longer than I anticipate, every extension of my term of power shall be an extension of the

privileges of the oppressed. (Cheers.) I know—none better—the tendencies of modern Conservatism, and, as it has fallen upon me to interpret them and to give them full and uninterrupted course, I look forward to a career, brief it may be, but long enough to show that chivalry and generosity are not the exclusive possession of the Radicals. The Liberals promise, but do not perform. The world shall find that the Conservatives perform without promising. (Cheers.) We do not come into office under pledge to carry reforms (cheers), we do not stir up the cupidity of the masses and secure their votes by promising to improve their condition, but if we feel that it is desirable to do so, we do it and there's an end of it. (Cheers.) The Conservative party, 'on evil days though fallen and evil tongues,' will not pause in the good work for fear of gibes, and flouts, and sneers, such as the young lions of debating rooms or the younger lions of journalism have assailed me with, but which I am sorry to tell them were wasted on me, possibly because I have not wit enough to feel their point. (Laughter.) No; the great Conservative party is not to be turned aside by the shafts of ridicule. The Laureate has denounced 'the craven fear of being great,' but there is a worse fear than that, and that is the craven fear of doing right. (Cheers)

"We have righted the wrongs of the female sex, but there is a nation that has been treated like too many unhappy women, a nation whose wrongs are yet to right—I mean Ireland. (Sensation.) Sold without her own consent, bartered for the gold of her unwelcome spouse, betrayed into a marriage of convenience, and, worst of all, after the union treated with barbarous harshness and contumely—the very cruelty she has been subjected to would alone entitle her to a judicial separation. (Immense sensation.) It is time that the scandal of an unhappy wedded life be blotted out from the sight of this pure and moral age. (Liberal cheers.) That justice which Ireland could not get from the ranting Radicals she shall get from the calm and composed Conservatives. (Loud and protracted cheering, the whole audience standing.)

"Knights and dames of the Primrose League whom I see around me, it is one of the objects of our society to preserve our holy religion from the attacks of modern thought. (Cheers.) And how can we best defend our threatened creed? Is it by rhetoric, or reasoning, or intellectual refinements? No; they are bullets that shatter themselves on the dense mail of rational scepticism, arrows that impinge and glance off. Let us not be Christians in words but in deeds. (Cheers.) Were the dogmas of our faith impotent to resist the army of infidelity, concrete Christianity would still keep it at bay. (Cheers.) It is not our creeds that ennoble our lives, it is our lives that ennoble our creeds. (Cheers.) We cannot be Christians while we suffer injustice. (Cheers.) We cannot be Christians while we would put together those whom God hath put asunder. We cannot be Christians while we retain under our yoke a nation that cries aloud for justice and for independence. (Loud and protracted cheers.) We may have

wandered from the path of righteousness, nay, I believe we did desert our principles and act after the manner of the crude Radical reformer, when we united England and Ireland instead of leaving them in *statu quo*. (Hear, hear.) But if we have wandered from the path on this and other occasions in the past, no one can say we have perversely refused to re-enter it. We may have been, perhaps, a little obstinate at first, but we can honestly claim that in the end we have always yielded to the influence of what has been eloquently termed 'the power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness.' (Cheers.) Liberals who have worked with us in reforming a great abuse, help us in reforming a greater. You have never concealed your sympathy with Ireland, you have made concessions, some of you are known to be in favour of an extension of her local privileges, but you have one and all shrunk from going to the root of the matter. You have, perhaps, mistakenly feared our opposition. But now I appeal to you to follow us in our determined attempt to rid the earth of this gigantic wrong. (Cheers.) And I call upon the women of England to aid us in our sacred cause, to let the first use they make of their new powers be a noble and generous use—to do unto others as they have been done by—to prove to mankind that the heart of woman is the seat of justice—to tell the world that, where woman has a voice, there the allurements of injustice and oppression can no longer make themselves heard; to show to the universe that the selfish excuses of dishonour shrink away ashamed before the scorn of her generous spirit, and the stainless purity of her soul. (Immense applause.) Women of England! You have said that you could never adequately repay me for my exertions in your cause. Exert yourselves in the cause which I make mine—the cause of Liberty, Justice, and Progress. Listen to the voice of Liberty, which we have heard thrilling from the snowy summits of Switzerland and the desolate plains of Poland, and which now again calls to us across the sea from the green pastures of Ireland; help me to restore its freedom and its happiness to a captive and oppressed nationality, and you will have repaid me to the full, and with interest." (Loud and prolonged cheering, during which the right honourable gentleman resumed his seat.)

The sensation caused by this speech throughout the United Kingdom of England and Ireland is indescribable. Every day, for weeks, every journal had a leader upon it, or alluding to it. Although it was nicknamed Floppington's Apologia, the discussion of it was almost confined to the promise of its impassioned close. The announcement of the Conservative desire to give "Home Rule" to Ireland, came upon the country like an unexpected bombshell. In a few days, however, it began to be discovered that the bombshell might have been foreseen; the magazines began to certify that after all it was made of inexplusive materials, and it was generally agreed that it would save England from any more dynamite. At the same time, plenty of hints were forthcoming to the effect that the Parnellites, who had obviously joined Floppington

in his Anti-Suffrage agitation out of sheer abstract opposition to the party in power, had been gained over to help the Conservative Ministry by means of a secret understanding. Surprise was no longer professed at the astounding inconsistency of the Irish party. Some were prepared to specify the time, and even the scene, of the secret treaty.

In less than a fortnight the topic of Home Rule had grown old, and a very wide-spread persuasion had grown up that Floppington might be trusted to know what was best for the country. His Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Stanley Southleigh, resigned, indeed; but everybody knew he had no spirit in him, and the other members of the Cabinet at any rate, seemed to stick to their chief. The world did not know that they had, as a body,—with infinite timidity—ventured to reproach the Premier with “springing a mine upon them;” that the Premier had asked them to hand him in writing their objections and their alternative plans for the pacification of Ireland, and that he had pigeon-holed their manuscripts very neatly for consideration in the dim and distant courses of the future.

As for the Liberals, they refused to commit themselves either to opposition or to acquiescence before they had the proposed measure before them. This extreme guardedness and reserve was not maintained by Screwnail and a few Radicals, nor by Lord Bardonph Mountchapel; but their respective policies will be indicated later on. Meantime Floppington had added to his reputation for statesmanship and Parliamentary prestige, and was now become the most popular Premier since Pitt; in short, as he had prophesied to Tremaine, he had become “The People’s Minister.”

CHAPTER III.

A FAMILY GROUP.

“If I only had one of them stalls,” observed Mrs. Dawe, casting a longing glance in an oblique direction, “I should be as ’appy as you, Jack.”

The corpulent old lady, looking little the worse for the medicine which had been poured into her during her recent illness, sat with her son on Ramsgate sands, and no one who had been asked which of the two was the convalescent would have hesitated to point to Jack. Haggard, emaciated, by reason of the terrible anxieties and burdens of the week of his mother’s illness, the poor painter was listening vacantly to her remarks, the lapping of the waves, the confused murmur of hundreds of tongues, abrupt peals of laughter, youthful shouts, the distant strains of a conic chorus, and the softened blare of a brass band. Yet the despairing, reckless look was gone out of his face; the unspeakable magic of the ocean, the calm of summer skies, the sacred splendour of sunsets had not lost their old power over his troubled spirit. Imbibing

these subtle influences, as softly as a flower absorbs the sunlight, his soul was gradually soothed to chastened resignation, and filled with a patient trust in the ultimate rectification of his petty affairs. The resolute abstinence, during the whole of his holiday, from any contact with the world through the medium of the Press, had also contributed not a little to his new placidity. He did not think the juxtaposition of Nature and the newspaper at all happy, and he feared, moreover, that acquaintance with the course of politics would make him a confirmed cynic.

"As 'appy as you," repeated Mrs. Dawe, "though old folks 'as no right to expect to be as lively as young 'uns, 'specially when they're earnin' nothing, and bein' robbed from top to bottom by landladies, and lettin' their businesses go to the dogs, and 'avin' sons that gives away sixpences to niggers and organ-grinders, and blind beggars, and performin' dogs, and Punch and Judy men, and comic singers, as if they was tax-collectors, when, exceptin' the chairs, ye can see everything for nothing. Now, a stall for 'ct peas and 'am sandwiches, just in between that ice-cream stall and that fruit-stall, would do a Saturday night trade all the week, besides improvin' the view and givin' a better smell to the air; and if I had been blessed with a dootiful son he might marry 'Lizer and open a branch business on the sands. But I suppose ye're too proud to do anything except break yer poor mother's 'art. And to think that the last time I was 'ere ye wasn't thought of! We was on our 'oneymoon, and I well remembers buryin' yer late father in the sand up to 'is neck, poor fellow. He's buried further up now. It was years and years ago; but there was just as many fools 'ere wastin' their money, and the sands looked, said yer father, like a successful fly-paper. Look out, Jack! If ye don't move up a little 'igher you'll get the sea-water over yer shoes and make 'em tight. Don't sit on that chair, Jack, they'll charge ye a penny for it; they thinks visitors is reg'lar gold minds."

Jack moved mechanically to the higher spot to which his mother had cautiously retreated, threw himself on his back plunged his hands into the sand, letting it slip through his fingers, and closed his eyes. It was a perfect day. The heat of the sun glowing ardently in an intensely blue sky was tempered by a cool breeze that fanned his weary brow. The murmurs of the crowd sounded far off and peaceful to his tired brain, that, heedless even of Mrs. Dawe, wove the dreamy web of reverie.

By his mother's desire—for she averred she could not enjoy the seaside without the local colour in dress—he was attired in a light check suit, beach shoes, and a broad-brimmed straw hat, that metamorphosed him so completely as to render the hitherto sedately-clad painter almost unrecognisable. She herself distended a simple, maidenly dress of spotted muslin, a white chip bonnet with a salmon-coloured aigrette and very broad strings, high-heeled boots of French kid, and a gorgeous red sunshade.

"That's right, Jack!" she exclaimed, "yer shoes are safe for 'arf an hour now."

"Are not those souls wiser," soliloquised Jack, "that withdraw themselves from the advancing tide of scepticism which they know will but contract their hearts as these on-coming waves one's boots, or sap the sand castles they find such pleasure in constructing?"

"Won't ye 'ave a sandwich?" asked Mrs. Dawe suddenly, producing a small paper parcel. "It wouldn't do leavin' the cold meat from yesterday in the cupboard, when I'm sure the landlady's got another key. As yer father said—though to be sure he wasn't yer father then and wouldn't be if he knew what ye were—if ye put in a fowl you find a skeleton in the cupboard."

"No," decided Jack, "wiser are they who have *not* shrunk, but have dared to survey the skeleton in the cupboard of the Universe. For a time they see the world by the unearthly light of its phosphorescence, a light worse than darkness; but at length the old sunshine comes back, if not with the freshness of yore, yet with a sacred calm in its rays. Happiness, Love, are henceforth impossible to me, but Peace may be within my grasp. Peace it was I sought, and perhaps I have at last found it. In this quiet brooding by the shore of the great sea, I possess my soul once more. Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due place, if not time, I yet strove to set the crooked straight. I will return to poetry, leaving more practical men to do the work I once thought to do. A miserable failure in action, be the form politics, painting, love-making, or sausage-selling, perhaps I shall be able to teach in song what I have learnt in suffering; though I hardly see how to find fit lyrical expression for my experience in the last particular." Smiling mournfully at the idea, he opened his eyes for a moment at a splash made by a stone which his mother had thrown into the water to illustrate some point in the long anecdote she was telling him. After a moment's survey of the beautiful glittering expanse of ocean he closed them again, sun-dazzled.

"If this divine calm only lasts!" he thought, with a strange shiver of foreboding, "but I fear that man's happiness in its highest moments hangs like yonder diamond-crested wave, ready to break and be shattered."

"'And it's just the same with yer argyments,' ses your father, 'they goes to the botton, and arter a few moments there ain't a mark left.' But the parson went on jawin' and yer father a-yawnin' till the parson ses: 'No, sir, this is all pretendin' on your part. A man as lives in a civilised country must believe in the Scriptures.' 'Reason why he just needn't,' ses yer father, 'cos there he can get blankets and rum without dealin' with your people.' Still the parson 'eld out that it was impossible as he shouldn't believe in 'em, and yer father quite got into a temper and offered to take his Bible oath on it." Mrs. Dawe paused to wipe the crumbs off her mouth, and freed thus momentarily from the sound of her own voice, she was able to detect the regular breathing of her son, blent with the slightest *soupcçon* of a snore.

"Why, bless the boy!" she exclaimed. "They'll say *I'm* a parson next."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Dawe!" cried a sweet feminine voice, the owner of which was making for the old lady with extended arms.

Perceiving her advance, Mrs. Dawe presented her red sunshade like a bayonet to keep her at bay.

"Stand there!" she cried, "and don't move for'ard as ye vally my life. Answer me truly, like a confessor, and, mind, no lies, 'cos my mem'ry's better than yourn. Is it on our side of the road?"

"No signs of it, Mrs. Dawe. There's not the least danger in living at our place, I assure you," said Eliza, with great vehemence; and extended her arms anew.

"Not yet! Is it on the other side?"

"Yes, in the garret let out over Mrs. Prodgers' shop."

Mrs. Dawe's face expanded with a smile of joy.

"Then she's shut the shop, I suppose."

"She still struggles on, though custom is bad."

"The murderess!" Mrs. Dawe cried in a burst of honest indignation. "Per'aps, though, she thinks things can't be worse than before, for I'm sure she sold pison." Then her brow darkening, "And I ain't there to take a opportunity that don't 'appen once in a lifetime."

"Don't think of it," pleaded Eliza. "You mustn't risk the danger. What would Jack do without his mother?"

"Well, it's only for 'is sake. I ain't afear'd o' the danger," said Mrs. Dawe relenting. "And it's only for 'is sake that I consented to go where there was no small-pox, and try to get back my 'ealth."

"Oh, if all mothers were like you!" murmured Eliza, manœuvring round the sunshade to embrace the unselfish matron.

"Wait a minute, 'Lizer," said Mrs. Dawe, bringing her weapon to bear on the newly-attacked quarter. "What makes ye fidget about like a 'ungry flea on a statue as can't get a bite nowhere? Is it in any of the turnin's near us?"

"It's no nearer than the courts near the Free Library."

"Are ye tellin' me the truth, 'Lizer? On yer word."

"On my honour as Jack's intended," replied Eliza earnestly.

Mrs. Dawe silently lowered her sunshade, and for the next few minutes Eliza hugged and kissed her steadily with affectionate pity. "You *do* look ill!" she cried.

"I've got enough to make me, 'Lizer," replied Mrs. Dawe self-compassionately.

"And don't Jack look the picture of health? And no wonder, while he can be at this lovely place while others have to work hard in town. Happy man, endowed by Providence with every blessing!"

"Not forgettin' you," said Mrs. Dawe, looking admiringly at her intended daughter-in-law, who did not blush, but whose face grew even more radiant with delight than before.

Never had Eliza looked more piquant; the stormy passion of her Southern beauty was softened to a charming and provoking

archness, and her stylishly-cut costume enhanced, if it did not produce, the coquettish effect. The tight-fitting dress of navy-blue serge, trimmed with white braid, brought out the exquisite curves of her figure, and the smart sailor's hat, adjusted with careless grace, invested her with the saucy charm of nautical suggestion. Happy Jack!

"Ye found us quick at the spot we agreed upon last week," observed Mrs. Dawe.

"Yes," replied Eliza, "the train has only been in about five minutes, and of course I flew straight to see your beloved forms. Poor Jack! Asleep with the sun right on his face! How he will be surprised to find me here when he wakes up."

She sat down between the two, shaded Jack's face with her parasol, and under this cover smoothed it with her gloved hand, and then suddenly stooped down and pressed his lips lightly. "My darling!" she murmured.

"My darling!" responded the sleeper, a bright smile irradiating his face.

Mrs. Dawe and Eliza looked at each other meaningly and beamingly.

"He's a-dreamin' of ye," said the former, her broad face glowering with delight. "I know he suspected ye was coming, 'cause every mornin' we goes up over there to 'ear the comic singers, and when I said I wanted to come this part o' the beach, he was as glad as can be, although he's dreadfully fond of comic singers, and once dragged me to the Foresters' when I didn't want to go. And, besides, the fust part of the week when he left ye he was as miserable as a mute, but as the time come near for ye to come, he brightened up like a saucepan when Sally's rubbin' it, and I'm lookin' on."

"He's a dear, good fellow!" exclaimed Eliza enthusiastically. "Isn't he, Mrs. Dawe?"

"Well, he could be if he liked," returned the old woman, in a tone milder than usual; "if he only made up his mind to be a little more like his father, whose taste in wives—not as I wish to flatter him 'cause he was my 'usband—was as good as mine in puddins; and I can't say more for it than that—not as I wish to flatter myself on my knowledge of cookery!"

The subtle implications of this speech bewildered Eliza, so she smiled sweetly.

"And when," continued Mrs. Dawe, smiling back to her, "Jack took up with you I ses, ses I, that's the girl for my money; and there is a decent bit o' money, as I've told ye ag'in and ag'in. And when in a little time I turns up my toes, and the sexton turns up the ground, why, there ye are in as fine a cook-shop as ye could smell for miles round."

"Oh no!" protested Eliza, putting her arm round the old woman's neck. "Dear mother (may I call you mother?), don't talk of dying. You'll live to be an old woman yet."

"Well, my father and mother did, certainly," said Mrs. Dawe,

“so, p'raps, if my son don't worry me, I may 'ave a chance too. But you shan't regret it, my dear.”

Eliza made no reply in words, but she pressed Mrs. Dawe to her side till the head of that worthy personage reposed on her lovely bosom. Then, transferring the parasol to her right hand, the affectionate creature toyed with Jack's hair with her left.

It was a beautiful family picture, fitted to stir the noblest chords of emotion in the photographic breast. Framed 'mid air of golden glow, 'twixt sleeping sea and sky, it was a poem in human characters—an idyll of Peace.

So lovely was the tableau, so harmonious the colours, so artistically distributed the light and shade, so graceful the attitudes, so well contrasted the figures, that a peripatetic photographer was riveted to the spot with admiration and reverence. And so thrilled was his soul, that he felt there could be no outlet for the waves of feeling save by transferring the high and holy vision to sensitised paper, and thus giving permanence to an otherwise fleeting dream of beauty. Treading softly, so as not to disturb the pictorial postures of natural instinct, he appeared suddenly at Mrs. Dawe's side, bending obsequiously to her lower level, and spreading out in his hand a small collection of masterpieces.

“Beautiful day, ladies, for your portraits. The weather is perfection. You'll never get such a chance again.”

Photographers, it may be pointed out, are the most contented people on earth; indeed, their content is almost saint-like. For who, even in England, has ever heard one of the fraternity give the ghost of a grumble about the weather? When has the day been other than perfect? The divine no less than the layman may well take a lesson from their infinite capability of seeing the bright side of things. If the day is cloudy, the light falls better; if cold, the sun dazzles less, and so *ad infinitum*.

Mrs. Dawe shook her head, seeing which Eliza just managed to suppress an eager cry of assent.

“I'll take the whole group for a shilling as you are, and without waking the gent,” urged the persuasive artist. “The three for a bob only, frame and all. It'll make the most beautiful domestic picture you ever saw, with your lovely young sister in the middle, and her sweetheart, I presume, on the left.”

“A shillin'!” exclaimed Mrs. Dawe. “A shillin' for what ye can see in the looking-glass for nothing! All you people down 'ere ain't satisfied with a reasonable profit, which, as a business woman, I don't mind ye getting. As my late 'usband said, ‘the natives o' the seaside are like them animals that get fat in summer, and sleep and live on their fat all through the winter.’ When ye takes our likenesses, I don't see that you do any work to be paid for, the sun does it. Now, when my son, there, draws a animal, he does it all with his own 'and.”

“Well, madam, I'll throw you in a foreground of sea, and a background of cliff without any extra charge. I can't speak any fairer.”

"Oh do, mother," whispered Eliza impulsively. "You know I haven't got a likeness of Jack. I'll pay for it."

"Lizer!" said Mrs. Dawe severely, "if I want a likeness I can pay for it myself. When me and my late 'usband was done, we was done in oil, as became keepers of a cook-shop. But ye know that Jack's never 'ad 'is likeness taken, and wouldn't allow it to be done now, and I makes it a pint allus to give in to his wishes."

"Well, ladies, I shall wish you good morning. But you don't know how it distresses me to see such a good opportunity lost. Why, you'd make more than a picture— you're an allegory, that's what you are; age, youth, and middle age entwined harmoniously in loving concord."

"Well, if I'm a allegry," said Mrs. Dawe, relenting. "ye may 'ave it done, 'Lizer, if ye like. I shan't tell Jack. But, remember, if he finds it out, you're responsible. I won't pay for it or 'ave nothing to do with it."

"Oh, thank you, dear mother!" exclaimed Eliza.

The photographer brought his camera in front of the group, perilously near the waves, and the ladies underwent the trying process with their breasts filled with a pleasing anxiety lest the recalcitrant member should awake. For an instant this crisis seemed at hand, for Jack yawned heavily. But his drowsiness was too strong, and once more he slumbered peacefully.

"As I predicted, ladies," said the artist, coming towards them with a carte in his hand, "it's simply exquisite, and I'll take another copy to show to all future parties, if you don't object."

"I don't object to all the world and his old woman seein' my allegry," replied Mrs. Dawe; "but, since we're a-doin' good to your business, you ought to pay us instead of us payin' you."

"Isn't there something wrong about Jack's expression?" observed Eliza anxiously.

The remark was not uncalled for, seeing that Jack's yawn had occurred just at the critical moment.

"Wrong?" echoed the artist. "Can the sun go wrong?"

"That's the way," said Mrs. Dawe. "Blame everything on to the sun, like the niggers do their dirty faces. There *is* something wrong for all that."

Before the artist could make a reassuring reply Jack yawned again.

"Never mind," cried Eliza hastily. "Frame it quickly."

In a minute more the portrait was mounted, and the photographer gone. For a second the ladies surveyed the stout, girlish form in muslin, the elegant womanly figure in serge, and the somewhat distorted countenance of the philosophic painter.

Then Eliza kissed the image of her lover, hurriedly concealed the photo in her breast, and, bending down, embraced the original.

Jack opened his eyes sleepily.

"Oh, my own darling!" cried Eliza. "Did you think I would let you pine here alone? *Now* you will enjoy yourself, my love; oh, how we will enjoy ourselves together, as in the olden times when we first met! I was here once, some years ago, with my brother,

and I know exactly what to do. You shall row us out in the morning, and, while I'm bathing, you can hire a bicycle, and in the afternoon we can go for a long walk over the cliffs, or on the sands, or for a drive, and at night we can go to the theatre, or promenade on the new pier where there's lots of girls and fellows courting like us, and we can go for lovely excursions to Margate and the Hall by the Sea, and we can go to Pegwell Bay and have tea with shrimps, and we can go——"

The painter listened, and his eyeballs dilated with horror.

CHAPTER IV.

A COCKNEY COURTSHIP.

THE subtly pertinacious Eliza carried out her programme almost to the letter. A proposal that he should return to look after the business, leaving his mother under the care of Eliza, brought down on Jack's head a maternal wail to the effect that her own flesh and blood was deserting her in her illness. Mrs. Dawe, with sublime self-abnegation, managed to efface herself for the most part, probably with a sympathetic remembrance of her own goings-on in the halcyon days of courtship. She often pleaded fatigue and old bones when Eliza wished to go on an excursion, and till their return remained on the sands profuse of admiration of the blackened minstrels, if sparing of money.

Jack first resisted Eliza's monopolisation of his attentions and the arrangements she proposed, then grew tired of struggling, and ended by proving himself in the wrong. Each stage of thought, unconsciously changing into the next, summed itself up by a formula which sprang like a wise Minerva out of Jack's head at the stimulus of an appropriate simile.

On the second day Eliza dragged him to Pegwell Bay, before he had time to recover from the shock of her arrival. As he had determined not to go, he went. The endearments of the route, combined with Eliza's lavish admiration of the scenery, as gushing as if Nature were a third-rate Academy picture, completely destroyed whatever beauty it might have possessed for the finer eye of the painter.

"You do what you like with me," he groaned, apostrophising Eliza and rejecting the plate of shrimps. "My will, like yon strong wave, advances white-crested, threatening, and dashes itself to pieces on the first rock."

"Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed his *fiancée*. "It's as good as anything in the *London Reader*. But do have a shrimp. Here's a nice fat one—I've picked off the beard and the tail for you. There, you must have it!" and she tried to cram it into his mouth.

"Thus have I mutilated *myself*," spluttered Jack.

It was while he was promenading on the pier with Eliza hanging

on his arm that calmness once more entered his soul. Immersed in the massive harmony of "The Lost Chord," he forgot temporarily his chattering companion. What music began, a cork completed. Floating from the moonlit water on one side of the pier across the dark masses underneath, and emerging into the sparkling waves on the other side, it encouraged him to drift passively with a similar hope of final emergence.

Henceforth, the torture of this pleasure-week grew less exquisite in proportion as he succeeded in projecting his astral spirit, if not his astral body, into space other than that which surrounded him. This feat was not difficult to one who could utilise the most ordinary remark or object as a spring-board to the empyrean.

Another escape from the apparent blind alley of Eliza's presence he found in the objective pursuit of rowing. Mrs. Dawe professed fears of drowning or, what was worse, sea-sickness. Eliza, who alone accompanied him, he taught to steer, and the novelty, combined with the perils of the occupation, kept her pretty quiet.

The lovers were blessed with the most marvellous weather, whose fairness reached its climax on the last day but one of their holiday. The azure of the sky was tenderly set off by golden-edged dots of white clouds, and the boat glided gently over small diamond-crested waves in a far-flashing track of shimmering light. The faint splash of Jack's oars as they lazily dipped into the beautiful blue water suddenly ceased, and Eliza, who was unnecessarily busy at the tiller, turning round found that he had fallen back upon his oars in meditation. Soft currents of air brought to him a message of delicious peace and wafted to his ears a vague, murmurous harmony of sweet, far-off sounds that filled him with pleasurable sadness. Once more the old weak craving for rest gently stirred his soul under the brooding tranquillity of the sleeping sky. Eliza, too, was silent. She did not feel the tender melancholy that affected Jack; to her the scene was gay and her emotion was one of pure delight, polishing her faculties to a brightness like that of Nature herself.

"Why do we examine our sorrows under a microscope," Jack asked himself, "or shrink at each prick of a rose's thorn, neglecting the flower? The girl is right. I have promised to marry her in two months. Having accepted this situation, it is just that I should take all its consequences, all its responsibilities. Do I not now enjoy a balsamic calm? If I enjoy the blessings of my position, what right have I to complain of its evils? Poor Eliza! Her fate is indeed cruel! What a travesty I have caused of the golden season of Light and Love! No wonder that the tender lambent glory, which should play in the dark eyes of one who stands with reluctant feet where the brook and river meet, occasionally changes into the masterful flash which awes me when:

Mon génie étonné tremble devant le sien."

"Look out, Jack!" screamed Eliza. "Pull away for your life."

Jack looked up quickly and smiled.

"There's no danger, my dear child!" he said kindly. "It's too far off."

For there came dashing into the shimmering light, and cutting it furiously and sending the diamond drops flying all round it, a huge steamer with a great puffing and snorting and vomiting of dark smoke. Standing out clear-cut in the transparent air, with rude, savage impulse it cleft its way through the huge, watery masses, ploughing up the lazy, soft-curling waves in fierce, barbaric splendour, and communicating to them its own fiery restlessness. The sadness of the tender calm of the azure sky was dispelled by the mighty vitality of the monster, that brought a picturesque roughness into the scene, and a suggestion of healthy life and honest work; of life that does its duty without weak questionings, and vain, querulous repinings.

Drawn by the magnetic attraction inherent in all manifestations of gigantic force, the lovers' eyes followed it till it diminished to a speck. On went the glorious vessel in a beautiful straight line, without the slightest apparent pitching. On, as with a rude, conscious life. On, rejoicing in the wild exercise of its own strength. The great wheel went round, and the white water flashed in the sun, and the delicate machinery throbbed with Titanic throes,

Eliza shuddered.

"Didn't the people look sick!" she exclaimed.

Jack made no reply; but, his heart throbbing with the hurtling of mighty thoughts, he dashed his oars into the water and rowed furiously along.

"Is not that a nobler type of life?" ran his reflections. "Why have I deserted my post? I, who once left my books, moved by the passionate impulse I now again feel to guide my country—in the old paths, by the old stars, that it be not lost in the dim ways of the unknown to which I see it hastening. Was it to loll here that I exchanged Wordsworth and Plato for Statistics and Blue Books? Shame on me to have turned aside from the holy vision of the perfect state, too soon, too weakly abandoning it as a mirage!"

He began to sketch out anew an ideal commonwealth.

A shriek of Eliza, followed by a crash that threw them both on their backs, put an end to the reverie of the imaginative painter. The incompetent hand at the helm had allowed the boat to strike heavily on a miniature reef, bordering part of the coast of Thanet. A plank was staved in and admitted the water slowly.

Eliza was the first to struggle to her feet, and, seeing that there was no danger, she exclaimed:

"Good-bye, my love. We are lost! But, thank God, we shall die together."

"Cling to me. I can swim," cried Jack, rising. "Keep nothing but your head above water, and commend yourself to God who—why, we can walk to shore!"

"Impossible!" said Eliza. "I should be sure to slip, and all my petticoats would get wet."

"Nonsense! Lift them up."

"Oh, Jack, I told you once before not to be so vulgar. Don't you see that party of tourists on the sands looking at us? I wonder where we are!"

"That queer wooden pier a long way to the right must belong to Broadstairs," replied Jack. "But how are you to get on shore, then?"

"You must carry me," said Eliza decisively. "I am as light as a feather!"

Jack looked despairingly at the long expanse of black, slimy, moss-covered, slippery rocks whose frequent clefts and interstices held pools of salt water, and whose jagged slopes required the foot of a chamois.

Then, smiling mournfully, he repeated :

"It is just that I should take all the consequences of the position."

"Well, make haste then!" cried Eliza sharply, "for the water is getting up to my ankles. My best boots are spoiled, and——"

Jack seized her manfully by the waist, lifted her up as high as he could and stepped upon the reef. With infinite patience and trouble he picked his tired way towards the shore, his tendencies to reverie being all but destroyed by the dangers of the path and the heavy weight of Eliza. Yet, when he had accomplished half the task safely, he found himself inquiring whether in politics, too, his powers, hitherto inadequately tried, might not rise to a perilous occasion, and whether marriage, with the consequent sobering weight of a wife, and the responsibility of acting for the happiness of two, might not be the best condition for a man. A sudden slip and a convulsive grasp on his throat warned him that analogies were dangerous. Recovering himself, in a very muddy condition as to his extremities and covered with black tangled seaweed, he proceeded with greater caution, planting his feet firmly, and steadying himself at each step. To add to his difficulties the wind had by this time freshened, and blew with some force against him in a horizontal direction; nor did the heat of the sun decrease his discomfort.

At last, to his delight, a young man, who had been watching them, set forwards to meet them, just about the time that Eliza's loveliness began to be visible to a naked eye on shore. With her own permission—he had white teeth and a beautiful blond mous-ache—Eliza was transferred to his fresher muscles, and in a few minutes the three were safe on the sands. The chivalrous rescuer then left them, gracefully lifting his hat to Eliza, who gave him a fascinating smile of thanks. He only moved a few feet off, however, and remained scrutinising Jack's face with a puzzled air.

Jack sat down on the shore, panting for breath and aching in all his limbs, which were covered with perspiration so profuse that his clothes stuck to him.

"The boat!" cried Eliza, "we shall have to pay for it as it is! It must be towed in!"

A sudden startled look flashed into Jack's eyes ; his brow grew dark.

"Let it drift!" he replied moodily.

"But, Jack," exclaimed Eliza in horrified admiration of a recklessness that put her lover on the level of the Life-Guardsman of feminine fiction, "it'll ruin you!"

"Ruin!" he laughed bitterly and scornfully. "Whose fault is it," he burst forth, "if I——"

"It wasn't mine," whimpered Eliza. "I'm sure I tried to turn it the other way."

"No, no ; it wasn't yours," said Jack kindly. Then he added grimly : "If I put an ignorant man at the helm, after giving him none but the slightest instruction in steering, knowing, too, that he is reckless and loves to steer amid rocks, who can wonder if destruction ensue? And whose is the fault, whose is——"

The last two words were cut off in a singular manner. The world is aware that the *Parcæ* are not above playing a prank now and again, and holding their sides as they think of the grimly fantastic results of their little joke. Waggish old maids!

It has been already remarked that Jack's clothes stuck to him. But an exception must now be made. His straw hat did not. That light and frisky article having politely waited to almost the termination of its owner's speech, now bounded off on an aerial voyage, upborne by a puff of wind that blew it in the direction of Ramsgate. For a moment Jack gazed after it in mute horror. No one of the small crowd of holiday makers, that had gathered round, stirred. An anticipatory grin spread over every face. Starting up, Jack walked after it in leisurely pursuit, for it was nearing the ground. It rested. He stooped to pick it up, and it flew from between his fingers, and the irrepressible laughter of the group reached his ears. Reddening indignantly, he quickened his pace to a run and panted along the hot sands. But the hat could have given odds to Atalanta, and, like Goldsmith's horizon, fled as he pursued.

"It is thus," he thought bitterly, "that the philosopher pursues the Ideal amid the laughter of the jeering crowd."

By this time the hat had reached a point where the cliffs stretched out, forming a small headland, and Jack hoped that here its career would be ruthlessly barred. Alas! it was not so. Skirting dexterously around the base of the cliff it was lost to view on the other side. Jack paused for breath and looked back. The group was barely visible in the distance.

"Shall I give up?" he muttered. "But what do I say? Give up on the very day when I have determined no longer to be conquered by difficulties, when I have found my long-lost resolution. And shall I not find my hat? On, man; on!"

He turned the corner.

We are often told that if we follow our noses we shall be right. Jack *did* follow his nose, which followed his hat, and the pursuit led him into one of the oddest positions imaginable, and resulted

in consequences absolutely incapable of being divined by the shrewdest reader ; in consequences at which the present historian has never ceased to be surprised. What ultimately happened to Jack from the chase of his errant head-gear never occurred to any human being before, and will, in all mathematical probability, never occur again till the universe dissolves like the baseless fabric of a vision.

CHAPTER V.

THE VAGARIES OF A HAT.

JACK toiled along the shore, his eyes bent upon a light, volant object that respectfully "kept its distance." He was as much impeded as helped by his feet, for they stuck every now and again into the viscous sand. Such little accidents passed almost unperceived by a man who was busily investigating the subtleties of the ancient puzzle of Achilles and the Tortoise in relation to Eleatic monism generally. But suddenly a negative consciousness that the quarry was invisible caused him to stop. Raising his eyes he beheld the hat descending after a lofty rise. He was still watching it as it described an irregular curve, almost grazing the side of the cliff, when hey presto ! it disappeared with spectral rapidity. The painter rubbed his eyes, but the hat did not reappear. *In nihil nihil fit*; he rushed to the vanishing point of the curve and discovered the solution. At about four feet from the ground he saw a large gap in the chalk, which turned out to be the mouth of a greenish cleft that got narrower and narrower internally till one could barely pass an arm through it, and ended externally in a perpendicular surface. Nearly two and a half feet to the left he noticed a strangely-formed cleft, smaller than the first, but ending in a similar abrasion, and at the same distance above was a rough, narrow split connecting laterally the upper extremities of the two clefts. How far the cliff was hollowed out by the action of the waves he could not determine. Peering into the cavity, he encountered thick darkness ; but this was of course explicable as the effect either of an ultimate snapping-together of the jaws of the crevice or of a bend in its formation. The recovery of his head-gear was evidently hopeless—it would lie entombed till the rare opportunity should occur of taking the tide at the flood, and rising into the daylight on the crest of mighty waves such as had originally carved out the curiously jagged mouth of its prison. Failing this, or in the event of new geological changes such as subsidence of portions of the cliff, what æons might it not remain buried ? And what revolutionary effects upon the biology of the dim future might not be produced by the discovery of its fossilised remains ?

"One more failure," sighed Jack. "Thus sinks the Ideal in the depths of modern materialism. Is this an omen that I shall fail always—that action is impossible to me ? Would Bruce have

tried again if he were in my position?" He leaned upon the cliff, which sloped at an angle of sixty, and inserted his right hand with an infinitesimal hope that he might yet find his hat wedged lower down in the rock. His progress was soon arrested by the narrowing of the cleft, his bare arm being unable to penetrate farther than an inch above the elbow on account of the bulging of his coat-sleeve at that point. While he was in despair, a sudden gust of wind that sported with his uncovered silky locks reminded him afresh of the many discomforts of the inevitable journey to Broadstairs, where he would probably find hatters existing to serve as a standard of insanity, and for other useful purposes. With a doggedness worthy of better hats he threw off his coat, as if for a bout with Fortune. Placing the stylishly-cut garment of light tweed on one side, he made another attempt. To insert his arm to its full extent, it was necessary to lie flat upon the calcareous declivity. The hand was thus just enabled to make the vermicular bend which the conformation of the tunnel rendered necessary, and the long, taper fingers groped about in the rock like so many small serpents.

It was the position of one who, with bated breath, draws the lot which means to him Life or Death.

Pause, O unconscious Jack, and desist from thy hopeless task while there is yet time! Better were it for thee to return hatless or shoeless, nay, it were even better for thee, disciple of Burke though thou beest, to return a *Sans-culotte* than to stay and face thy swift-advancing fate.

Let the reader who doubts the desirability of this last alternative remember that the present historian is a Cassandra who never prophesies unless he knows.

For suddenly a strange click was heard, followed by a mysterious rumbling. The whole cliff seemed to Jack's excited imagination to be whirling round. He grew dizzy and blind. After what appeared an age of confused consciousness, his brain grew clearer and he felt a vague, heavy pain in his right arm. He moved it, and it slipped along a rough surface, grazing the skin and drawing blood in places. An instant afterwards he found himself falling down a frightful abyss. The descent occupied about one-twentieth of a second; and much to his surprise he alighted safely on his feet with a soft splash. Looking about in a dazed fashion, he discovered rays of light streaming through two irregular, but somewhat funnel-shaped openings, the larger being on his left. Behind him the walls of the small cavern drew together, curved round to the right, and ended in total darkness. In a moment the horrible truth burst upon him. By some inexplicable convulsion of Nature, the cliff had opened and closed again upon him, and he was *buried alive till the tide should enter the cavity*. At the same instant he trod upon his hat.

"Fit emblem of human life, of the Victor conquered by Death, of the vanity of human wishes," he murmured with pale lips, which, however, did not tremble. "The only time in my life I have

been successful in Action, comes Death on my track. . . . I would have chosen a less lingering death. Yet, I shall have time for meditation before passing into eternity, and soon enough the tide will cover me." He spread his hands over his eyes.

"Is this the end of all my life of struggle—of all my search for Truth—to die in this cave? What, if from this cave I find Truth at last with Plato, after my lifelong seeing of shadows? My place on earth will soon be filled . . . soon be filled? . . ."

He smiled sadly. "May he be happier in it than I. . . . I am quite resigned. . . . No one will ever know what has become of *me*. Poor Jack Dawe! No one will grieve for me. No one ever cared for me—Gwendolen!"

As the last name issued from his lips, the painter, inconsistent to the last, made a furious rush at the rocky wall of his prison and dashed himself against it with all his might. Alas, the stony mass gave not the slightest quiver.

A sharp cry broke from the hapless man :

"I die unforgiven, I die unforgiven, the death of a coward—in dishonour!"

He fell upon his knees.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LIONS' DEN.

THE unfortunate Jack Dawe had barely assumed the humble attitude of genuflection, accompanied by closed eyelids, when he heard a repetition of the rumbling sound. Instantaneously, conflicting possibilities set his brain in a whirl. Evidently the landslip or the internal struggle of pent-up forces, or whatever geological change was taking place, had not yet ceased. He would be overwhelmed by falling masses, or wedged between contracting portions of cliff. Well, perhaps it was better to die at once than to endure the protracted agony of an Andromeda. But what if the cliff in labour gave birth, not to a mouse but to a painter, and hurled him into free space; or created a new and broad opening; or widened the existing fissure sufficiently to allow of his escape?

Before he had time to open his eyes fairly or rise to his feet, he was almost stunned by the occurrence of the first of the alternatives which, subdivided as it was into two variants, came to pass in both forms contemporaneously. He experienced simultaneously the shock of a heavy body falling upon him and the feeling of compression as in a vice between two firm masses. He fell backwards, giving himself up for lost. His head struck against the wall of the cave with that deadened concussion caused by the transmission of force through some intervening medium; which, in this case, was singularly soft.

"Cuisse ye for an awkward divil, whoever you are!" cried

the medium, which possessed a hoarse voice and a strong Irish brogue.

Jack's heart beat furiously and he opened his eyes.

The medium had risen to its feet, and Jack caught a momentary glimpse of a coarse, pock-marked, but not ill-dressed man of about fifty, with a red scarf round his throat.

"Is there a way out," cried Jack eagerly, "or are you lost too?"

The man whistled reflectively and turned pale. "What's the time?" he inquired.

"The time?" repeated Jack. "Is the tide——"

Quick as lightning the man whisked the red scarf off his throat and tied Jack's arms tightly to his sides. Before the astonished painter could remonstrate, he found himself gagged and blindfolded. He had only time to draw a few laborious breaths through the unaccustomed channel of his nose, when the mysterious sounds, already twice the herald of the unexpected, were heard a third time. With a rough turn and a growl of "Get out of the way, ye omadhaun!" his captor whirled him round and sent him staggering along for what seemed a far greater distance than the entire length or breadth of the cave. Still he retained as much calmness as was compatible with the rapid changes in his situation.

"Is it possible that I have fallen into a den of smugglers?" he thought. "It would seem that this is an artificial cave, or one with an artificial entrance. But I don't suppose I've fallen from the frying-pan into the fire. They will merely exact an oath of secrecy, I suppose. They won't murder an inoffensive stranger. Poor Southleigh, I know how the revenue worries him. Ought I to take this oath? 'Tis wrong; but it would be in self-defence. And what says the honourable Cicero, after Panætius, in his 'De Officiis'? Ah, Casuist, Casuist, thou knowest how thou wouldst dull thy moral sense to see her once more." He ceased from all definite reflection, overpowered by a rush of delirious joy that scattered reason, delicate conscientiousness, and everything else to the winds.

"Here's a go," he heard the man whisper, evidently in the ear of a new-comer. "Pat Malone—he lived before your time, a very clever fellow, executed in '48—he always used to say it would happen some time; but he never lived to see his prophecy come true." A chuckle followed these words.

"See hwat come true?" asked another voice in a hoarse whisper.

"Why, didn't oi tell ye? Some poor divil iv a tourist has dhropped in." The application of the term "poor divil" to him, seemed to Jack to indicate a fund of rough tenderness in the heart of the pock-marked smuggler. But the reply of the hoarse whisperer was not equally reassuring.

"Och, the powers! The Sassenach has fallen into our hands."

"Sure it was me that fell on the head of the Sassenach," said the first comer, with a crescendo chuckle that seemed to increase in volume till it became a regular rumble. A gust of cold air blew

into Jack's face, and he heard the men rapidly shuffling nearer to him. The next instant a clear, musical voice exclaimed:

"Which scoundrel of you all has been leaving his coat about? I never had to do with such a set; they invite discovery; they are as careless as so many detectives."

"Sure, discovery's come without being invited," laughed the first voice. "And oi was the first to dhrop on him, and in a moighty unpleasant fashion, too, knaling on the ground as pale as his shirt-sleeves, and we both tumbled over, and by St. Pathrick my spine feels as sore as your timper."

"D—n you for a fool," cried the clear voice angrily, "what are you jabbering about?"

"Begorra, and it's throe," put in the hoarse whisper. "One iv the cursed Sassenachs has fallen into our cave," interpolated the chuckling whisper.

Jack heard the rapid decisive tramp, deadened by sand, of advancing footsteps. Then an oath made him shudder, and he was rudely whirled round by the shoulders. A match was struck and brought in unpleasant proximity to his face.

"What the devil do you mean by poking your nose into other people's affairs?" inquired the voice whose musical *timbre* he could not help admiring.

Jack tried to explain, and produced an inarticulate gurgle.

"What's the use of gagging him, Murphy; why didn't you despatch him at once?" cried the voice sharply. Jack's blood ran cold. The last comer, who was evidently in authority, seemed to be the most bloodthirsty of all. He could not quite understand for what purpose they were assembled. Could they be a gang of Irish conspirators? But then the leader was certainly an Englishman.

"Sure, and hwat would oi do with the dead corpse?" replied Murphy.

"I'd know what to do with yours, you white-livered scoundrel!" was the reply.

"None iv your names, ye infernal omadhaun, or oi'll split your skull and the whole concern too, bedad oi will," growled Murphy, with sudden anger.

"Och, praise the Holy Mother, oi'm out o' this!" interjected the hoarse voice. Jack wished he was too. It is not pleasant to listen to a quarrel about the disposal of one's body; but a faint hope dawned within his breast that part of the drama of the "Babes in the Wood" would be re-enacted for his benefit. Unfortunately, however, or perhaps fortunately, the leader seemed to display the tip of the white feather, for his next remark, though delivered with the same arrogant harshness, ignored the point at issue.

"Where's Jim and Jacques? Late again, I suppose."

— "You're glad iv it, ain't you? Another opportunity to show your authority by blowing them up now the Captain's away."

"Holy Moses! don't talk iv blowing *our* men up," interposed the hoarse voice.

A loud laugh, evidently from Murphy, fell upon the horrified ears of the captive like the sound of a "brazen canstick turned on edge."

"Curse you!" hissed the leader. "Do you want to be heard outside? Take this coat, one of you, and get inside."

Seizing Jack tightly by his collar, he vented his angry feelings by pushing him forward with unnecessary vigour. Every now and again the painter felt himself splashing about in a pool of water, or getting entangled in seaweeds, while his companions skirted round such uncomfortable spots with a complacent sense of superior vision. Once he was propelled against the rocky wall, and then asked with an oath why he did not stoop. Happily, the broad, thickly-folded bandage over his eyes deadened the shock. He crawled on all-fours (if the term be applicable to one whose arms are bound to his sides) through a narrow aperture, reflecting that he had all his life been trying to get through a dead wall without success, while the men who prospered were those who crawled under it. He rose to his feet half-suffocated, the blood surging in his ears, and his head bursting. The upright position relieved him somewhat, and he was able to mount five or six rough steps without falling.

"There you are—stand there!" cried the leader, with a final propulsion that sent him staggering along. His foot tripped over something soft, and, with a thrill of horror, he fell upon a prostrate body, and shuddered in all his limbs at the contact of the ghastly thing. The recumbent form shook him off with angry vigour, and he rolled helplessly over on his back, and lay panting. Whoever it was, was not dead, but sleeping—a remark which, for several reasons, would have been more in place on his tombstone.

"What, Captain, you here?" exclaimed the musical voice. "I really beg your pardon."

"You usually overwhelm me with such politeness," said the Captain sneeringly, with the exaggerated brogue of the stage-Irishman, into or out of which he seemed to slip capriciously, "that this overwhelming me with impoliteness, in the form of some dhrunken scoundhrel, is a little relief. Let's have lights."

Jack heard the striking of more matches, and presently a dull glow penetrated vaguely through his bandage. He wondered what sort of man the Captain was, and whether he would gain by his presence, and he waited anxiously for the inevitable inspection.

"That's better," said the Captain. "Now then, what's this object?" He spurned Jack with his foot. "But stop! Don't answer me. You are dying of curiosity. So am I. Like Sir Philip Sidney at Zutphen, I allow your thirst to be satisfied first. I have seen the Old Chief; he is in ecstasies. Dreams of nothing but courts and diplomacies and the Irish flag. Rewards certain in that direction, come what may, should the present plan miscarry. Mission over, come back in time for meeting—too early, in fact. Went to sleep, and was sleeping the sleep of the just, when I

dreamed I was struggling with satyrs, like St. Patrick, and I awoke to find this miserable cratur rolling over me."

"What d'ye say, Cap'n, to a good pull o' the cratur now?" said Murphy.

Hearing this, Jack, who, on the mention of the Old Chief, had given himself up for lost, prepared for further indignities. But nothing happened except an exclamation of, "Don't mind if I do" from the Captain, followed by a gurgling sound.

"There, no one can say that *that* cratur's miserable!" exclaimed Murphy.

"How is it Jim and Jacques haven't turned up?" inquired the Captain.

"Don't know," replied the lieutenant; "unless they're nailed for some private prank."

"Hang it all! that's what I can never stand—preferring individual interest to the good of the public, and, when on a big job, getting nabbed for some trifling affair. It's not gentlemanly, it's not honourable. However, let us wait and see; undue haste is to be deprecated, so is curiosity. Let us make ourselves comfortable, and then we'll dispatch this beggar, and lastly, pleasure over, we'll come to business."

A strong odour of tobacco-smoke began to be borne to Jack's nostrils, and simultaneous or consecutive gurglings and smackings of lips to be heard in different directions.

"Now then, Patrick Donaghue O'Connor," said the Captain in a tone of enjoyment, "produce the prisoner!"

Jack was suddenly pulled to his feet with a violent tug, and jerked forwards.

"Come closer," said the Captain. "I hear you came to see me. We didn't expect you; but accidents will happen in the best-regulated caves."

His words proved true; for, as Jack was obediently advancing, he lost his balance and fell off the ledge of what seemed to be a small platform, descending with all his weight upon some hard object. The Captain uttered a cry of horror.

"Murderer!" he shrieked, apostrophising Jack. "Our blood be upon your head!"

The last words reached Jack's ears with the feebleness that comes of distance, for at the terrible cry of their chief, the men dropped their bottles, bounded down, and fled with him like hunted hares. In less than half-a-minute the last echoes died away, and Jack, divining what had happened, was left calmly recumbent on one of the two black bags which stood opposite each other on narrow ledges; waiting for the explosion that would blow the cave and himself to smithereens. So many rapid vicissitudes, each with its alternations of hope and fear, in one day, had almost exhausted his capacity for emotion. Danger had by this time lost its flavour an grown monotonous to his palate. He had been shivering too long on the brink of death, and now lay in passive expectation of the final push into the icy waters.

"After all," he thought, "what is Life but a blind groping after Truth; missing which, man stumbles upon destruction? Would those wretches were in reality chained to the cave as Plato figuratively imagined, that they might at least share my fate."

CHAPTER VII.

A CLASSICAL CONSPIRATOR.

IT is rather irritating when a man has resigned himself to dying by dynamite to find things not going off as he expected—especially when, as an honest man, he is unfamiliar with the habits of that disreputable substance. As it failed to blow Jack up at once, he wondered whether, as with some human beings, a long antecedent smouldering were necessary to an explosion. Live and learn, says the proverb, but in this case to die was to learn if this were so. In momentary anticipation of the bitter lesson, he remained for ages (to use the common hyperbole) in a state of tension that would have turned the average hero's hair gray. But, in harmony with the rest of his life, in which nothing ever turned out as he had forecast it, he was disappointed once more. The "mute, inglorious" black bag rested there, "guiltless of" the painter's "blood," nor ever woke the echoes to find itself famous. At length he grew convinced that the present sample of the deleterious compound which no conspirator should be without was like the village idiots, the purgative pills, and the martial implements of the period, "perfectly harmless." The ruffians had vanished, and for a moment he thought he was saved. But only for a moment. He had already escaped death thrice, but now the vision of its imminence a fourth time drew from him as near an approach to a groan (necessarily muffled), as he could produce under the new conditions. The method of his final exit would be similar to the first, but with all its horrors aggravated. Already he felt the cruel waters mounting higher and higher, while he, gagged, blindfolded, his arms tied to his sides, lay like the trunk of a tree, falling and rising with the ebb and flow of the slowly-mounting waves; inanimate to all appearance, but, like the trees of the enchanted forest described by Dante, alive and quivering with pain.

He made an effort to rise, with a vague hope of reaching the entrance and discovering a way out; but for a man in his situation to rise to his feet, the muscles of the calves must have gone through a preparatory course of gymnastics. The utmost exertion, together with the use of the head as a propeller, could only push him a few inches backwards. He ceased from the vain attempt. A few minutes afterwards he heard the conspirators returning. His heart leaped with hope. A drowning man catches at a straw, and similarly Jack Dawe clutched at the very chaff of society.

It is at this point that the present historian for the first time

regrets his office, and envies the more brilliant functions of the novelist, and it is only the consoling reflection that his labours are more likely to be durable that induces him to proceed with so comparatively tame a narration. Unable to choose his hero, or at least, to change him when chosen, he is compelled to see him wasting the most sensational opportunities, and he cannot stir a finger while his best chapters are spoiled by the demands of a dull veracity.

For let us make the impossible supposition that this history is a mere figment of the imagination—do but see what could be done with Jack Dawe. It would be the easiest thing in the world for him to set free his arms by wriggling or by persistent rubbing of the red scarf against the jagged wall, combined with violent bursting of the frayed texture. This done, the gag and bandage are removed with facility. Again he breathes freely, again he sees the light of day. He perceives some steps hewn in the chalk, ascending beyond the green tide-mark that half lines the walls. He mounts the platform where, like an experienced orator, he feels safe. He then winds his way through tortuous passages to the entrance of the cave, but fails to find the secret spring. However, he is sure that accident will befriend him sooner or later. Meantime he improvises a flag of distress out of the red scarf and a stick left behind by one of the men. This will be seen by some pedestrian on the sands—he will be extricated, or, this failing, he will be supplied with food. Nature will thus have furnished all the externals of that anchorite's life for which he is best fitted. Pilgrimages will be made to the cave, the palmers being laden with reverence, compassion, food, and the other essentials of existence. Through the chinks he can publish to the world the fruits of his meditations in the shape of poems and essays—and Eliza Bathbrill will be on the wrong side of the cliff. *En attendant*, the tide brings to him shell-fish, edible seaweed, and occasionally a few dainties may be introduced. Or better still, he might be cut off entirely from human aid; and the same tide could be utilised for washing into the cave whatever was wanted for his comfort—a complete *batterie de cuisine*, wooden pails floated out of the grasp of careless children, fragments of furniture, saws, and nails, and glue, waifs and strays, and flotsam and jetsam of every description. Even the great difficulty of fresh water might be solved by the entrance of a small chemical apparatus for extracting it from the seawater.

“But the conspirators will return!” cries the carping reader, “and escape is impossible all the same. I have you on the hip! Your romancing powers cannot cope with this difficulty, and so you have avoided it!”

Stay a minute, dear reader, it is just at this point that the Pegasus of the writer longs to make its highest flight. You have forgotten the second black bag. This, and not the first, contains the dynamite. Armed with it, Jack, freed from all his bonds, meets the returning scoundrels. “Let me out, or I dash this down and

we die together. Attempt to escape and to leave me here, and I do ditto." Fury of the baffled ruffians. "Promise, at least, not to betray the existence of the cave." "I promise nothing, and give you five minutes to let me out. I am reckless." What a scene for melodrama! The rugged cave, lit by weird limelight; the overturned flasks of whiskey; the platform littered with inchoate wheel-work; the picturesque, scowling band; the hero in his shirt-sleeves, his right arm, which is bare to the shoulder, and displays a long, bloody graze, waving a black bag of terrible suggestiveness; the short, fierce parley; the helpless submission of the gang, and the triumph of the right. As the rocky door swings open, and Jack steps out into the air, a free man, the ear of fancy is stunned with the roar of a many-sounding sea of applause. Curtain—treble recall!

But Jack was not the man to do anything so sensible. He had at last given in his adhesion to the principle of *laissez faire*.

"Said I not undue haste was to be deprecated?" he heard the returning Captain remark. "Had you scoundrels not upset my equanimity by the rapidity of your flight, a moment's calm reflection would have convinced me that the portraits were in that bag and the dynamite in the other."

"*Ma foi!*" laughed a new voice, evidently belonging to Jacques. "If it had been de oder vay, it was happy that I was late. De early bird catches de dynamite, *hein?*"

"Ha, here's that infernal fool again!" burst forth the lieutenant. "I'm afraid, if we don't get rid of him at once, he'll be doing some more mischief."

"Command yourself, Patrick Donaghue O'Connor, sor!" said the Captain. "It's not his fault. Hoist him up. We will pursue the investigation."

"Och, awirra, awirra!" gasped Murphy. "All the cratur's spilt."

"Remove the gag," said the Captain, when Jack stood once more before him on the platform where Murphy had rapidly heaped up in one corner the litter of half-finished mechanical contrivances. "Now, me friend," he continued affably, "your name?"

Jack hesitated. He heard the click of a revolver.

"Jack Dawe," he replied hastily.

"Your occupation?"

"I am at present a house-and-sign painter."

"Your address?"

"I live in London."

"Sor," said the Captain solemnly, "as ye value your life and me time, no prevarication. I am a man of Action and not a man of Words." In substantiation of this statement, Jack felt a cold steel barrel pressed against his cheek, and with a shrinking at heart he felt that although he had never been entitled to make the same boast, he was now more than ever restricted to words and debarred from action.

"My present address," he replied, "is in the Bethnal Green Road, at the Star Dining Rooms."

"How came ye here?" was the next question. "Are ye a Government official?"

"I assure you that I came here by pure accident. My hat blew into a gap in the cliff. I inserted my hand in the hope of——"

"Enough," interrupted the Cap'tain. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and we're in want of recruits. We don't want to kill you if we can help it: in the first place, because we shan't get paid for the job; and in the second, because we have something big on hand, and we can't afford to run unnecessary risks that might spoil what I hope to make an artistic success, and a *chef-d'œuvre* for the imitation of posterity. You see I am plain with you because you will leave this place a member of my highly-paid travelling company, or not at all. Are ye handy with your fingers?"

"N-o-o," stammered Jack wonderingly. "At least, I can't say till I try."

"Sensibly answered," said the Captain. "Know anything of clockwork, now?"

"No," replied Jack abstractedly. The question set a stanza of "The Cuckoo" buzzing in his brain:

"No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery."

A sudden vision of sunny fields and of the days that were no more, filled his eyes with tears.

"That's a pity," said the Captain. "But your fingers are cut out by Nature for the purpose, they're long and delicate. Under my tuition you'll soon be able to construct one, won't you?"

"Eh?" cried Jack with a start. "Construct what?"

"An Infe-r-r-nal Machine, ye spalpeen, of course!" growled Murphy.

"An infernal machine!" gasped Jack. "I make an Infernal Machine! Never!"

"Sor," said the Captain severely, "you're an Englishman, and if your breast is swayed by patriotic motives, believe me ye cannot serve your country better than by jining us." To clench this argument, he pressed the pistol with greater force against Jack's cheek.

"Sir," replied the painter with equal severity. "Above all, let us clear our minds of cant. *Retro me, Sathana*, with thy casuistry! Even were my sense of honour to permit me to construct an infernal machine as a legitimate instrument of warfare, my conscience would not allow me to use it in *your* service. Sir, my politics are radically opposed to those of that large and not unimportant section of mankind of which you are the temporary representative. I do not, sir, question the motives of the upholders of those opinions,

nor do I deny their right, or rather, I willingly concede their right to come to such conclusions upon imperial questions as are forced upon them by those data, not, I venture to think, uncontaminated by prejudice, which are apparent to what I cannot refrain from calling the superficial glance; but, however I may tolerate them, I desire it to be distinctly understood, sir, that I am not in harmony with opinions which, if carried to their logical extreme, would lead to the entire disruption of the empire, the fruit of so many centuries of self-sacrifice, so vast an expenditure of the treasures of industry and of the blood of heroes. Far from concurring in schemes at once so impracticable and so un-English, it is with extreme disfavour that I view the attempts of the Parnellites, and I would do anything in my power to hinder that repeal of the Union which, sir, is the aim of your own efforts. Judge, then, what assistance you can expect from one who prefers death to dishonour. Sir, I thank you for the patience with which you have listened to these few remarks. I have done. Loose your trigger, I pray you, and torture me no more." He ceased, and drawing himself up to his full height, awaited Death for the fifth time.

A moment's solemn silence followed the bold speech of Jack Dawe.

It was broken by a hoarse exclamation of "A plucky boy, by me sowl! That's the man for us."

"Hold your pace, Mick!" cried the Captain. "Jack Dawe, d'ye mane what you say?"

"Do not seek to tempt me further," said Jack. "You are already in possession of my views."

"You would do everything in your power to hinder the repeal of the Union, eh?"

"Sir, do not sneer at a fallen foe. Alas, I know too well, that my threat must remain a threat, and nothing more. If you have any chivalry in you, kill me at once."

Evidently this appeal to the Captain's delicacy touched the right chord, for Jack felt a sudden relaxation of the pressure on his cheek and a burning rush of blood to the empty capillaries.

"Sor, I admire your courage," said the Captain, "and it shall never be said that a man of the wor-r-ld like meself refused to make concessions. Ye have a conscientious objection, say ye, to constructing an infer-r-nal machine. Very well, I accede to your own terms. A conscientious objection is a thing so rarely met with that one can afford to respect it when he does come across it."

"I have not mentioned any terms," began Jack. "I altogether refuse——"

"Softly, softly; I can't afford to lose a man with the sperrit of Brian Boru, and a gift of the gab like O'Connell's. A Jack of Hearts is a useful card in a pack, eh, my boy? Ye'll listen to a little gintle persuasion; ye're open to argument, aren't ye?"

"Alas, too much so," groaned Jack, with a vivid remembrance of the afternoon when he read the fragments of the *Freethinker*

and with a vague fear that if he listened too attentively he might be converted in this case too.

"I'm glad to hear it," said the Captain eagerly. "But before I let you further into our secrets, as I must do in the course of the argument, you will at least take an oath not to betray anything you learn or have already learnt."

"I warn you, you are wasting your breath. However, your demand is reasonable, and I give you my word not to give any information; but I have an objection to swearing on such occasions. Moreover, an honest man has no need of oaths; as La Bruyère excellently said, his character swears for him."

"Are ye an Atheist, sor?"

"God forbid," cried the horrified Jack. "But I respect the third commandment."

"That is right," said the Captain warmly. "We'll have no Atheists in our society, sor. Shall we be less exclusive than the House of Commons? That's a very worthy model, sor, a very worthy model. And sure, it's not taking the Lord's name in vain," he added, baring his head reverently, "when I'll blow yer brains out if you don't take it at once. So none of your gammon. Give me the Bible, Mick. Murphy, untie your dirty scarf."

Both orders were instantly obeyed. Mick, who was the hoarse man, produced a small well-thumbed Bible, which he kissed and thrust into the cramped hand just set free by Murphy. The latter was also proceeding to divest Jack of that wide bandage covering his eyes and half his face which made him appear like an image of Justice, when the Captain repeated his favourite adage anent undue haste, adding a sarcasm to the effect that Murphy's beauty, like a magic-lantern, could be better appreciated in the dark. So Jack remained blind while he swore never to reveal the mysteries of the cave and of the wild beasts who used it.

"Before I begin," said the Captain, when the ceremony was over, "ye'll have a dhrop of stuff to wash down my persuasions, ye know. Sorry the whiskey's spilt, but I've got a flask of brandy."

"No, thank you; I'd rather not," faltered Jack, who, however, was almost fainting.

"Hang it all, me boy. I can't respect any one who won't drink with me."

Jack yielded, but the thought that he was accepting hospitality at the hands of Irish dynamiters and Anti-Unionists almost choked him. Nevertheless, truth compelling him to reply in the affirmative to the complimentary question of whether he smoked, he was forced to accept a cigar, which he found of the finest quality. He was given a seat on a projecting piece of cliff, and the puffings and gurglings recommenced all round him.

"Now that we are all comfortable," began the Captain, accentuating his cynical phrases with cool enjoyment, and pausing every now and then to smoke his regalia, "I pray ye, Jack Dawe, to lend me your ears, and the rest of you won't lose by taking a lesson in

the art of political persuasion. And I ought to have no difficulty in making ye change your occupation, if it is true, as Horace says :

'Qui fit Mæcenas ut nemo contentus vivat
Laudetque diversa sequentes?'

A buzz of admiration went round the group.

"I beg your pardon," said Jack, removing his cigar from his mouth, "you have omitted a line and a half—'Quam sibi sortem——'"

"Bravo!" cried the Captain. "We shall make something of you. A tincture of the humanities ennobles the profession. But hang it all me boy, ye can't be a house-and-sign painter. I suspect you've already gone wrong. All the better. I flatter meself, there's no conspirator like a classical scholar gone wrong. And, as ye may have already noticed, *we* are conspirators."

"We are," cried Murphy and Mick enthusiastically. "God save ould Ireland."

"But," interposed Jack, "how can I join an Irish gang? I am an Englishman."

"Have the Irish a monopoly?" asked the Captain indignantly. "No, sor. Free trade, sor, in conspiracy, as in everything else. But, bless your innocence, I am an Englishman meself, although I spake the brogue to perfection. I am an Oxford man, sor, and I compered for the Newdigate in the same year that Floppington gained it. He was a very quiet, religious chap in those days who took no interest in politics, keeping away from the debates of the Union, and I never thought his career would be what it has been. or that he and I would be situated towards each other as we are at the present moment. But business is business. My second in command is a Scotchman without my linguistic faculties, so he took the long name of Patrick Donaghue O'Connor to make up for his inability to acquire the brogue. Jacques is, of course, a Frenchman, who appreciates Victor Hugo and thinks a Parisian should be out of no intrigue that amuses him and relieves suffering humanity. Murphy is a true Irishman, because otherwise I do not think he has intelligence enough to make bulls. Mick is a more suspicious case—he is too profuse of superficial Irishisms. Jim, who hasn't turned up, is a Cornstalk. Finally, were you outside and Murphy's handkerchief off your eyes, you would perceive a man stolidly rowing up and down in a large boat, in case of the tide giving us any inconvenience. That is a Dutchman. The cause enlists free lances from all nations. Thus, you will perceive that there is only one undoubted Irish specimen among us. We have tried to get more—at Rossa's desire; but, if I had my own way, I would say to unemployed conspirators, 'No Irish need apply.' We have the *entrée* of several caves similar to this along the English coast. They belonged to the old smugglers (many of whom were thrown out of work by Free Trade). The one in which you stand is rich in tradition, and if you have anything of the

historical spirit, the *genius loci* should inspire you to deeds of heroism. Among others, it once passed into the hands of the celebrated O'Mulligan, and Cork Soles spent several days here while England was scoured from north to south and a reward of £1,000 was offered for her alive or dead. Should you ever be in a similar predicament, flying from injustice, remember this cave. It is, as you will presently perceive, lighted by the best wax candles; but it is my ambition to keep pace with all the modern improvements and to introduce the electric light here. As for the ventilation, you need have no fear, it is managed on the best scientific principle, that of the double shaft used in mines, one of the gaps being for the entrance of the fresh air, and the other for the exit of the foul. At the same time, these gaps permit one to press the ingeniously-constructed springs which have never before to-day yielded to the finger of an outsider. Without a knowledge of the exact method, no ordinary force will suffice to open the entrance—it resists the strongest waves. You will readily see how much safer this is than a house. No house, in fact, is safe for the constructor of those beautiful instruments of justice known as infernal machines; not to speak of the privacy of meeting attainable here. So much of ourselves and our marine residence. But you have allowed your cigar to go out; permit me to re-light it. Another drop of brandy? No! Well, it's true *you* haven't been talking. I'll take a mouthful myself. Your health, sor! To proceed—— Where was I?"

"I still do not understand exactly your functions," replied Jack. "Do you merely manufacture the machines, or do you——?"

"Oh, no; I go further, and others fare worse. To cut the matter short, I am the only authorised agent for England of the great O'Donovan Rossa, the sharer in all his secrets, the partner in all his anxieties. And me literary powers, I flatter myself, have done him substantial service by me leaders in the *Pilot* and other publications. He is a man of the purest and noblest character, and I can give you an instance of his heroism and self-sacrifice without parallel in ancient or modern history. It was on his suggestion that I sent out Mrs. Dudley to shoot him. I have established a branch firm in this country of which I am manager. The partners being limited to a few, though with power to add to their number, the profits are exceedingly high to make up for the liability being unlimited. These gentlemen—for as general, I, of course, like Wolseley, cannot afford to undergo any danger—are prepared to undertake, at a moment's notice, and with the utmost punctuality, explosions of all types, from the minatory stillborn explosion—if the term be allowed—that accidentally fails to take place, through all degrees up to the recent gigantic pyrotechnic display in the House of Commons, Westminster Abbey, and the Tower of London, simultaneously. When trade is slack, you will find them all here, producing a store of triumphs of manual dexterity for use when the season sets in. But at the present moment we are maturing an explosion that will shake Europe,

nay, the world to the centre, as it has not been shaken since our Russian friends thrilled it with that magnificent *coup de théâtre*, that hurled Alexander II. out of it. Our plot is still in its infancy. To-day we arrange the details: Mick and Jacques shall watch the house, and find means of discovering the disposition of the interior; Murphy and Jim shall acquaint themselves with the habits of the victim abroad; and Patrick Donaghue O'Connor shall keep an eye on them all. I shall have much to do to allay the suspicions of Parnell by adroit intrigue, and to you, sor, shall be allotted—both as an initiatory ceremony and as a special mark of honour—the final task of placing in position the infernal machine. No, sor, don't disclaim the honour, or ye are a dead man. I let you off all share in the construction of the machine, and you will simply have to put it down on a spot that will be indicated to you. There's nothing in the world simpler, 'asier, or more innocent. Don't interrupt me, sor; I'll be done in a moment. Gentlemen, I have brought for each of you a photograph as I promised, so that there shall be not the slightest difficulty in identifying the man. Jacques, bring me that black bag in the right-hand corner. There you are. Take one each. Murphy, remove the new recruit's bandage, and give him a photograph to look at.”

Jack stood for a moment dazzled by a flood of light and unable to see the portrait he held in his hand. As his vision cleared, he gazed anxiously upon it. His worst suspicions were confirmed. The face was that of the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington, Prime Minister of England. He could not refrain from uttering a slight cry of horror. At the same instant a unanimous exclamation of surprise and delight burst from the lips of the gang.

Jack turned deadly pale, overwhelmed by a rush of thronging thoughts.

“Gentlemen,” he panted, “in God's name, abandon your cruel plan of assassination! For Heaven's sake, don't make me the murderer of an innocent man!”

For the sixth time that day the painter was within a hair's breadth of death.

CHAPTER VIII.

“FOR AULD LANG SYNE.”

A DERISIVE burst of laughter greeted this petition, delivered in the most heart-rending tones. The brave Jack had become suddenly abject in supplication.

“Mercy!” he pleaded wildly. “Mercy, sir; you do not mean it—you will not kill an innocent man.”

“Och, the Holy Virgin be praised!” cried Mick, looking alternately from Jack to the portrait. “The saints have delivered the Sassenach into our hands. Let us give thanks to the Almighty.”

He knelt down, the open Bible in his hand.

"*Oui, oui, rendons grâces au Dieu des bonnes gens,*" cried Jacques, following his example with a sneer only visible to Jack, who shuddered at the man's profanity.

Instinctively, the rest fell on their knees, silently, with bared heads; and the praise of God went up from the secret places of the earth, and harmonised with the distant organ-roll of the mighty ocean. Hat in hand, the men listened devoutly while the Captain, with a solemnity that was heightened by the ruggedness and mystery around, offered up a spontaneous prayer, the effusion of a grateful heart. With expert use of Scriptural idiom—for, unfortunately, the received liturgy did not provide for occasions of this kind—he thanked God for saving him and his servants from the many perils that would have attended the performance of their duty, and for being graciously pleased to make the light of the Premier's countenance shine upon them at the present juncture.

Jack gazed curiously around him, but found that although sight had been wanting the report of his other senses had been sufficiently accurate. He stood on an artificially-formed platform surrounded by kneeling conspirators, all of gentlemanly appearance, well dressed, and not to be distinguished from a congregation at All Saints', except by their air of piety.

A commodious arm-chair, in the best Early English style, occupied the right-hand corner, its indented seat pointing to its recent evacuation by the Captain. A few stools were scattered about for the use of his inferiors. In the left-hand corner stood a heap of embryonic infernal machines together with the necessary tools. Stuck in narrow niches along the curving, dentated walls were a dozen or so wax candles of different sizes, corresponding to the conformation of the holes. The altitude of the ceiling varied considerably, but in no part did it fall below eight and one-third feet. The walls, which were covered with the incrustations of ages, amid much irregularity ran together till they formed a rude dome at the extreme summit, and Nature had cunningly carved out on their surfaces grotesque protuberances that here and there bore a rough resemblance to the quaint gargoyles of the mediæval builders.

To remove the cheerlessness and chilliness of the place, the centre of each wall bore one of those innocent little girls with which Millais used so constantly and successfully to appeal to the philoprogenitiveness and the pockets of his fellow-men. Fallen on the ground beside the arm-chair was a small red volume, the Captain's favourite vade-mecum. Had Jack looked at it he would have found it to be the popular edition of Carlyle's lectures on heroes, opening spontaneously on "The Hero as King." The exit of this furnished part of the cavern was marked by a low, dark archway.

When the service began, Jack ceased respectfully from his entreaties.

"Even in these men," he thought, "the spiritual instinct shines as these pure, white tapers in this otherwise Stygian cave. Perhaps, as they pray, God will melt their hearts."

Now or never was the time for Jack to seize the bag of dynamite ; but, far from being alive to the possibilities of the situation, he was not even conscious of its realities. Only when he heard the fervent gratitude of the Captain for the capture of the Premier, did he begin to realise the terrible mistake the conspirators were making. If they murdered him they would soon discover the inutility of the deed. To sacrifice himself by allowing them to remain under the impression that *he* was the Premier would be useless. No, he must live at any cost, live long enough to warn their intended victim. He wrestled with his scrupulosity—what he would not stoop to do to preserve his own life, must be done to save that of another. After all, were those who had put themselves outside the pale of society entitled to that maintenance of compact on which society was based? Would he not be justified, then, if no other way of escape presented itself, in acknowledging himself to be Floppington, recanting his former opinions, and promising, or even sweaiing, to give self-government to Ireland? By this pardonable ruse he might persuade the Captain to release him, and the real Premier would in all probability be saved.

Revolving feverishly the arguments *pro* and *con*, and rapidly running over the opinions of the casuists and ethical writers of all nations, with the Categorical Imperative of Kant all the while droning an uneasy under-song, he heard the conclusion of the Captain's thanksgiving and mechanically intoned a fervent Amen.

"Cheeky and ironical to the last!" laughed the Captain. "Floppington, me boy, when ye blushinglly read your prize poem of 'Sinai' to a distinguished audience *cujus magna pars fui*, at least to judge by noise, I niver thought that ye'd come to this. Why, ye've got the self-possession of—meself; and knowing ye would ultimately be discovered, you took it out in satire. Ye want to maintain the Union—eh? Your name is Jack Dawe—because ye are a jackdaw in borrowed plumes, eh? Ha! ha! ha! Be jabbers, I can hardly belave my eyes yet that I have got you. The wonderful method of your capture is enough to confute Lucretius and his atoms, and demonstrate Providence to that irrivertent rascal, Bradlaugh. I assure ye I was much affected just now by me own illoquence. Knaling in this saret underground cave, I felt like one of the early Christians, forgetting temporarily that I was a modern one. *Tempora mutantur*, Floppington. Cut out by rature as I was for canonicals, my canonicals were never cut out for me. We were both mint for archbishops; but I became a dynamiter; and you, after narrowly escaping a cardinal's hat, a Prime Minister; and I'm sure of the two you do the more harin. Saul hath slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands. That little war—"

"Sir," interrupted Jack with sudden decision. "I will make a last effort to persuade you to desist from your designs. You are, alas, an educated man—"

"Stay, sor, do not deprecate education. Remember, that you are endeavouring to give the masses free education—" Jack

was about to interrupt him again, but he waved him aside impatiently and went on. "Let me tell ye, sor, that ye are doing *my* work for me. A conspirator who can't rade, and write, and cipher, can niver take high rank in his profession, nor commind more than an eighth of the ordinary wages. Me blessings on the School Board."

"If you or your Chief, Mr. O'Donovan Rossa," resumed Jack, "have views different from the Premier's, that is to no logical mind a reason for assassination. The man dies, but his arguments you cannot kill. We fight nowadays by reason and not by force."

"Sor, reason is scarce and fighting presses. An ounce of dynamite is worth a ton of argument—*ultima ratio regum*—eh?"

Despite this dogmatic assertion, the two men, strange as were their relations, being both "argumentative cusses," went into an elaborate discussion of the question, the dynamiter and his intended victim maintaining all the amenities of debate. Verily is Truth stranger than Fiction. This logomachy, that would have been ludicrous if it were not so tragic, resembled nothing so strongly (except that it was quite different from them) as those refinements of wit uttered in moments of intensest passion by Gallican lovers, in that age of pseudo-chivalry, the period of the Fronde.

"Sor," said the Captain, after a quarter of an hour's fierce fighting, throughout which he had maintained an air of raillery, and his opponent an air of despairing doggedness, "in conclusion, I must point out to you the immense assistance we have been to the novelists, and the consequent advantage to the whole of civilised mankind. When you remember, sor, how every method of murder was played out, how weary the public was of the damnable iteration of dagger, and bowl, and gun, you will see what an immense debt is due to the dynamiter. He is to the story-teller what a new note would be to the musician, a new colour to the painter; the foundation of a new series of effects inexhaustible in a century. Tell me, sor, is there any recent novel of merit without dynamite?"

"Sir," replied Jack, "there is no recent novel of merit even with it. But surely you cannot be unconscious that your arguments, however they may take the crowd, are baseless, like those Indian conjurers who are seen suspended from nothing."

"Well, you at least will niver live to see me suspended from *something!*" cried the Captain, beginning to tire of the feline amusement of playing with his prey. And as a cat that condescended to bandy words with a mouse concerning the right of consumption would probably summarily put an end to the argument, especially if aware of the weakness of its own reasons, so the Captain now added:

"Enough, sor! As I said before, I am a man of Action and not a man of Words—having got you, I've the best of rights to kape you—possession is nine points of the law. Besides, the tide will soon turn—time and tide wait for no man, you know. You are a brave man, Floppington, ye shall have a soldier's death—gentlemen, charge your pistols. I give you five minutes to make your

pace with Heaven ; or, stay, as ye have much to answer for, I'll make it ten."

Each man produced a small revolver from an inner breast-pocket and loaded it.

"In the multitude of shots there is sureness," observed the Captain grimly. He took a heavy gold watch out of his pocket, and held it in his hand.

"Gentlemen," cried Jack, "I pray you to set me free. I have already promised to hold your secrets inviolate. You will bitterly regret my murder. You may assassinate the Premier to-day, but to-morrow you will find your work yet to do. You are making a grievous mistake. I am *not* the Premier."

This daring assertion took away the Captain's breath. A broad grin appeared on the countenances of his men.

"Not the Premier, eh?" he inquired, with good-humoured toleration of the joke. "Who the divil are ye, then?"

"That I have already told you. I am the most unfortunate man that ever lived. Fate for years has never wearied of pursuing me. Not content with the sufferings of a lover of literature in an uncongenial sphere, it created in the person of the present Premier, a man who (in all external characteristics) is an *alter ego*. If it were not for this terrible misfortune, for such I must call it when I look at its dire results, I should not be in my present plight. It is this strong resemblance that has ruined my future."

"The resemblance of total identity," said the Captain with smiling incredulity. "Ye have wasted two minutes praying to me instead of to your Maker."

"I am not the Premier," repeated Jack. "I swear to you that if I were I should ask no mercy at your hands. Consult your own common sense—is it not utterly beyond the bounds of probability that I should venture to palm off such an incredible tale upon an intelligent audience, if I were not supported by the consciousness of its truth?"

"You are a devilish clever fellow, Floppington, but ye have to deal with a cliverer. Two-and-a-half minutes. Kape a still tongue, and don't forfeit my respect before ye die. I always had a high opinion of your honourableness, even when rumour was loudest against you. I still remember that little affair at College, and I should regret to change my opinion at the last moment. I cannot bear to have all my Ideals shattered. Three minutes."

"Too late you will find I have spoken the truth. It is not from fear that I ask for Life. Death has no terrors for me—I am weary of Life, but I would wish my end to be useful to my fellow-creatures."

"There I have the advantage of you," sneered the Captain. "My end cannot but be so. But you are unreasonable, Floppington, to object to assassination. Don't ye care for fame, *non omnis moriar* and the rest? Ye are destined to be one of those men, Floppington, who are only remembered in the world by the manner of their laving it. Your late accession of energy, the lapse of a

dying flame, will be misinterpreted as the first flaring up of your rare political life. You will be pitied, sir, throughout the world; your faults will be forgotten, washed away in your blood; you will have a monument; and hospital wings will go by your name. Heritor of unfulfilled renown, you will almost be another case of *omnium consensu capax imperii, nisi imperasset.*"

"It wanted but this," said Jack in a choking voice, "that even by my death I cannot save other lives from ruin—poor mother left desolate in her old age, poor sweetheart deprived of her lover. If you must kill me, I will beg for my life no longer. But I have much to do before I die. Release me, I pray you, and I promise to return to this spot in a week's time, having betrayed none of your secrets."

A hearty burst of laughter greeted this naïve proposal. The Captain was the only serious member of the gang.

"Silence," he cried, "ye don't know the man. Have ye never heard of Regulus, ye scoundrels? That's the disadvantage of not having a classical education. I believe ye mean what ye say, Floppington, and at the present moment you fully intend to return; but as one who has followed your career with the interest inspired by the foreboding that ye would some day supply me with a job, I fear that, when ye are at home, ye will see the other sides of the question. I regret not to be able to oblige ye for the sake of auld lang syne. Nay, more, I regret I undertook the business. I never thought I'd fail it so much. I never thought I should be in at the death, ye see, nor that ye would partake of my hospitality. For the sake of old associations I would let you go. But, like Cato, I stifle my falings and give the order for your execution. What I have undertaken, my conscience as a business man will not allow me to drop. Ye are a brave man, Floppington, and honourable. I admire ye, I fail for you; I am graved at the necessity; but Rossa expects every man to do his duty. Ye have four minutes to live. Gentlemen, cock your pistols."

"For the last time I ask you to spare me," cried Jack.

"I have a mission to perform. If you remain in power, all my Chief's hopes will inevitably be blasted. You must be got rid of. You are in his way."

"And is there no mode of getting me out of his way except by murdering me?"

"There is one," said the Captain reflectively, "a way which I should prefer for various reasons. But, knowing your sense of honour, I have not ventured to put it to you. But, to satisfy myself, I will. You must take an oath to abandon your Irish policy."

"Never!" cried Jack impulsively.

"Said I not so? I repeat, Floppington, ye are a brave and honourable man. Gentlemen, take steady aim, and when I give the word, fire simultaneously."

Immediately Jack was covered by the four pistols. A terrible silence ensued, broken only by the loud tickings of the Captain's watch.

Jack tried to think, to make another review of ethical systems, but his brain was in a whirl.

"One minute," cried the Captain. Each man ran his eye carefully along the barrel and awaited the word of command. "In one minute, gentlemen," said the Captain, "our task will be over and you will receive your fifties, never before earned so easily. As for Jim, I shall see. Good-bye, Floppington. I won't ask you to shake hands with me. The Lord have mercy on your sowl."

For the seventh time that day the truly unfortunate painter had given up all hope of life, and, if there be any truth in the Pythagorean instincts of popular philosophy, escape was at length impossible.

The Captain closed his watch with a snap.

"Stay!" cried Jack frantically. "Supposing for the moment I am the Premier, what is it you want me to do for Ireland?"

"Do for Ireland! I don't want you to do anything for Ireland. I want you to let it alone, of course."

"Let it alone—give it autonomy, you mean?"

"How a man in your situation can quibble with words is surprising," said the Captain sternly. "To put the thing in a nutshell, you must give up all your new-fangled plans and return to the sound policy of Beaconsfield, and every other English Minister. No cursed English statesman shall take the bread out of the mouths of honest men with impunity. My Chief, O'Donovan Rossa, is determined to blow to smithereens every statesman that shall dare to try to restore Ireland to Independence. And you, sor, have been the first English politician to throw yourself into the lion's mouth. Recant instantly, sor, or I give the word; and every villain that ventures to follow you, in your attempts to repale the Union, shall share your fate. Three cheers, gentlemen, for Ireland, the Union, and our glorious leader."

"God save Ireland! Hoorah for the Union! Long live O'Donovan Rossa!" cried the men, waving their hats with their left hands, and covering Jack with the revolvers they held in their right.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PAINTER TAKES A REMARKABLE OATH.

"SIR," said Jack, passing his hand feebly over his forehead, "I am afraid I do not quite understand—will you please explain yourself further?"

"Oh, you know very well what I mean," replied the Captain testily. "You have lived two minutes beyond your appointed time already. Am I to understand that you are willing to accept the conditions?"

"I am—open to argument," said Jack, still dazed.

“ Lower your pistols, gentlemen ; but keep them ready for use. I will try my persuasive powers once more. Know then, sor, that by your racent departure from the healthy instincts of English statesmanship, ye have imperilled the fortunes of a great organisation, and more particularly of its directors. When the first news of your great spache at Chester reached America, the Chief telegraphed to me at once to prepare to blow ye up in case ye were in earnest. Ye repated your intentions of making Ireland independent only yesterday. I have the *Standard* in my pocket. Three months ago, sor, we should have had no fear of your passing such a Bill. But now ye seem to have changed from a political Hamlet to a fiery Cthello that carries everything with a rush ; ye have a great following, and your expressed intentions spread dismay through the length and breadth of the States. Think, sor, of the thousands of men—editors, lecturers, orators, journalists, publishers, compositors, spies, standard-bearers, dynamiters, leaders, poets, directors, agents, clerks, treasurers, and *employés* of every description, whose existence depends on the Cause, and whom ye would throw out of work marelly for the gratification of your own sinse of what is right. (Shame.) Ye take the bread out of the mouths of honest men, from O’Donovan Rossa himself down to the poorest printer’s divil. (Applause.) What mercy had you on these men, sor ; and what mercy can you expect at their hands ? (Loud applause.) That you should want to give the Irish what they ask for was to be expected from a Utopian dreamer such as you. Had you known the wor-r-ld, sor, as I know it ; had you known human nature as you know books, you would have seen that you were taking measures to destroy the happiness and prosperity of Erin. Learn, sor, that a nation loves to be oppressed. Oppression is the finest national cement ; oppression develops patriotism, self-sacrifice, bravery, the love of song, and all the noblest instincts of humanity. It even conquers the passion which is the strongest in the human breast—*auri sacra fames* ; the poorest Irishman sends in his subscription to the fund wi’h the cheerfulest alacrity. And you, sor, would remorselessly crush these beautiful traits—benevolence, self-sacrifice, the martial spirit, the love of country, the passion for heroic poetry, under your administrative heel ! (Hear, hear.) Do you not understand that the two chief ingredients of human nature are the love of grumbling and hope ? Your melancholy Jacques grumbled at having to share the privations of the banished Duke ; but would he return to Court when the opportunity came ? (*Pas si bête*, from Jacques.) Faith, sor, the fact is that Englishmen who have the weather cannot understand the feelings of a nation that has no such theme of complaint. ‘ But Nature,’ says Goldsmith, the pride of Erin, ‘ is a mother kind alike to all,’ and so she gave Irishmen the Union. You, who are in no danger of ever losing the weather, cannot sympathise with those whom you would calmly rob of all that makes life best worth living for. Monster ! would ye give the Irish what they want, and thus at one fell blow destroy their hopes for ever ? Ye want to reform all abuses, and so, cruel as hell, ye in-

scribe as your political motto, *Lasciate ogni speranza*. And hope, sor, is the telescope by means of which we see beyond the horizon, narrow or distant, of our every-day life; take away that, and we are poor indeed. The perfect man will hope to return to monkeyhood. Man prefers the indefinite to the definite; he would rather hope for two birds in the bush than have one in the hand. Now, sor, what Irishmen want, is not the Repeal but the Hope of it. The demand creates the supply, and the Society to which I have the honour to belong (applause from Murphy and Mick) has undertaken to supply *that hope*. It sustains it by the repeated concessions it forces; but to succeed entirely would be to fail miserably. We shall never reach our professed object—we are asymptotical to it, eh, Floppington? How's that for high? An asymptote, ye ignorant scoundrels, is a line that gets nearer and nearer to a curve, but never touches it. I will not insist on the reflected lustre cast by England's prestige on the Sister Isle—a lustre that it would lose by the severance of governments—nor on that greater loss to England itself which would ensue from the beginning of the breaking up of her mighty empire. In giving Ireland independence, sor, you are a traitor to your country. Now, sor, have I convinced you or not of the folly, the cruelty, the treachery, the brutality, the asininity, and the impossibility of your obstinate desire to repeal the glorious Union of 1800? (Immense applause.) Make your final choice, Floppington. We have fought you as you desired, by the fair weapons of illoquent argument; so be persuaded or die. I prefer that ye should yield, not only because it will be a tribute to me powers, but also, because although we shall have had the triumph of killing you our motives will be impugned, even if the deed is put down to our credit. Yet it is something that you at last know our real motives. I have done."

Jack had listened to this long address with ever-increasing bewilderment. But amid the farrago of pseudo-philosophic axiom, raillery, and cynical candour, curiously blent with self-deceptive apologetics, one thing was clear. He could honestly recant opinions that he had never professed, and he thanked God that he would now be enabled to save the life of the threatened Premier. At last he had something to live for.

So when the Captain concluded, he replied eagerly :

"Enough, sir, you need say no more to convince me of the dangers of Repeal. I will take the oath you require, and you may rely on my not divulging any of your secrets."

A bright smile illuminated the handsome but dissipated countenance of the Captain.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "Gentlemen, ye have earned your money even more 'asily than ye expected. Put up your shooting irons. Great is the power of iloquence! Floppington, I rejoice that ye have spared me the pain of not sparing ye. I always liked ye, from College upwards; but our paths in life diverged, and our acquaintanceship, which was always of the slightest, flickered out. So I am glad to have had this opportunity of renewing it in a

manner fraught with good consequences to yourself, who are saved from folly and unwarned assassination; to meself, who am saved from trouble and expinse; to England, which is saved from destruction; to Ireland, which is saved from unhappiness; and last, but not laste, to me Chief, O'Donovan Rossa, who is saved from total ruin. Mick, your Bible!"

Jack received the Bible a second time.

"What do you wish me to swear?"

"Repeat these words after me: *'I hereby swear to abandon for ever all measures for giving self-government to Ireland, and to use all my personal and family influence to oppose any such measures proposed by statesmen during my lifetime. I also swear to advocate on all occasions, and to the utmost of my power, the opposite policy, maintaining the Castle and all the old traditions of English rule intact, and leaving it to others to obtain such slight concessions as must be made at long intervals. And I will never use my knowledge of O'Donovan Rossa's Society, or of this Cave, for any purpose whatever, so help me God.'*"

"Now business is over," said the Captain, when Jack had unhesitatingly repeated this oath, "I should like a little pleasant chat. Murphy, ye rogue, fork out your whisky; I'm sure you've got another bottle. There, I thought so. Ye won't dhrink, begorra! Well, let me help ye on with your coat. What a state your right arm is in; ye've scratched it in a dozen places; and I see at one spot the blood is trickling slowly. Ha, ha! Excuse me laughing; a curious idea has just struck me. I will write down the oath, and you shall sign it in your blood. It will be something to show to the Chief in corroboration, something to treasure among the archives of the Society."

Hastily scribbling off the words, he wiped the pen carefully, dipped it into the wound, and handed it to Jack, who stood perplexed.

"What name must I put?" he asked.

"Floppington alone will do," answered the Captain.

"Very well," replied Jack Dawe, "if you wish me to sign in that fashion, I will do so."

No sooner had Jack's pen formed the final flourish, after producing a not inaccurate imitation of the Premier's well-known autograph, than the Captain snatched the paper out of his hand and examined it with fiendish glee.

"Ye have sold your sowl!" he exclaimed. "'Tis fitly signed in blood. Ye have bartered your honour, and tampered with your conscience. Right Honourable Floppington, prize-poet, author of 'Sinai' and other sacred poems, nineteenth-century Bayard, exemplary church-goer and reader of lessons, ye are no better than meself." He laughed a sneering, devilish laugh, in which the gang joined with much conscious superiority.

"There is one point about which I am still not clear," observed Jack. "If the Premier gives Ireland its independence, you threaten to blow him up?"

"That is so."

"And if he does not do so, you equally threaten to blow him up?"

"Quite so. You have it to a T."

"Now, sir, let me ask you if that is not illogical?"

"Illogical! Not a bit of it. Bless ye, the second blowing-up is only a threat—the assassination of a Premier is one of those commodities of Hope, which, I told you, are the speciality of our firm. It is the first blowing-up that would be genuine; and we are glad, as I said before, to avoid the necessity, from the danger of our motives being misunderstood."

"Thank you," said Jack, "for your polite explanation, and now I should like to terminate the interview."

"Ye seem in a hurry to go," replied the Captain. "Well, I will not detain you. Drop in here any time you feel inclined—whistle 'Auld lang syne,' and you shall be admitted. Sorry I haven't a card about me, but it reads 'Frederick Langley St. Clair, M.A., Practical Mechanician.' Charming our knowledge of each other, isn't it, recalls the days of Jonathan Wild, doesn't it? You don't invite me in return, I see. Delicacy that fears a refusal, I suppose. Of course, ye are aware that should you break the oath (though, I believe, as gentlemen, we can rely on each other without fear) it is impossible to escape our Organisation, whose networks ramify through England. Sooner or later ye will be hoist with the Irish petard." He touched a spring—a rocky door flew open, above the archway through which Jack had crawled.

The painter gave a last look around the cave—he saw the platform, the two black bags, the pile of wheelwork, the candles, the innocent little girls, the quaint dome-like roof, and the grotesque natural carvings on the walls, the damp floor, with here and there a glossy brown strip of seaweed, the Captain's arm-chair, and the gentlemanly-dressed figures of the gang, some seated on stools and some on projecting bits of cliff; all their faces radiant, but the pock-marked countenance of Murphy, who was vulgarised by his red scarf, beaming with especial complacency. He waved a polite adieu to his hosts, and the door closed behind him and the Captain, shutting out what he was to see how often in fevered visions of the night.

The dynamiter and his whilom intended victim wound their way along narrow passages till they reached the spot which Jack remembered to have knelt in years ago. Here he observed his once smart straw hat, now muddy, trampled upon, and battered. He picked it up ruefully, reflecting on all he had gone through for its sake and asking why, since he was to brave peril like a knight of old, it was not given to him to do so for a more glorious object, say, for the sake of a fair lady; and also whether when the Ideal was finally, after infinite suffering, rescued from the depths of materialism, it would bear equally indelible traces of its fall.

The Captain whistled. Two answering notes were heard. He

pressed another spring, a whirring sound followed and the cliff shot open. He touched a third spring and it remained yawning. Jack stepped out into the bright, fresh air—the last sight he saw was the Captain waving the bloody document with malicious glee, and, as the rock closed, he heard the mocking ring of his sardonic laughter.

But the laughter did not last long. Scarcely had Jack, conscious of being curiously scrutinised by a stout gentleman who was resting on his oars near the shore, turned the bend in the cliff, intending to walk to Broadstairs, when a slim, elegant young man with white teeth and a beautiful blond moustache burst into the cave. He was astonished to hear the passages echoing with joyful exclamations, snatches of song and bursts of Homeric laughter.

“What, Jim!” was the unanimous cry as the door above the archway swung open.

“You’re devilish late, Jim!” cried the Captain. “But I haven’t the heart to scold ye, or to keep ye out of your salary. Here’s your fifty. We’re off to fresh woods and explosions new.”

Jim with a bewildered air took the money, which he buttoned up in an inner breast-pocket beside his revolver. Then he exclaimed: “I’ve had such an adventure, boys. such a lovely creature too. Her boat smashed on that reef to the left, and a middle-aged gent, who was with her, had to carry her over the rocks. Quiet chap he was, looking half-asleep, and the very picture of misery. When I saw what a splendid cargo he was carrying—none of your d—d creamy babies, but a dark-eyed *brunette* full of fire and passion—thinks I, ‘I can do the chivalrous with profit here.’ In a word I went to meet her and relieved the gent. As I was carrying her, as slowly as I could, for it was a ticklish situation, ha! ha! ha! half my pleasure was spoilt by my brain worrying about her companion. I was sure I knew his phiz well, and he looked a bit like a hunted conspirator. He sat down on the sands, and I kept looking at him, but for the life of me I couldn’t remember. All at once his hat blew off, and he ran after it, and then I knew him by this week’s caricature in *Punch* of Floppington running away from his old opinions. Captain, if you had seen him you’d have sworn, as I did, that he was the Premier.”

The gang broke into a roar of enjoyment, and winked suggestively at one another.

“Well,” proceeded Jim, “I waited for him to return, but a quarter of an hour passed without sight of him. I saw the girl ready to cry, and, anxious to find out the truth, I spoke to her. She called her lover—for such she said he was—a brute, and said he’d run away on purpose. I offered to see her back to Ramsgate where she was staying. She consented. I went, and returned as quickly as I could; but I’ve got her London address which I mean to keep to myself, unless the Captain——”

“Well, and the lover?” interposed the Captain with a knowing grin

“Oh, I made a mistake, that was all. The girl’s name is Eliza Bathbrill, and his name is Jack Dawe. He is a house-and-sign painter, and the girl told me, proudly, that he was said to resemble the Premier. I saw the old woman—his mother—a fat, old widow lady, full of queer sayings, who keeps a cook-shop in the Bethnal Green Road, London; and left her, mad with anxiety, as to what had become of her only son. Fancy a Premier living in a cook-shop! Ha! ha! ha! But what’s the matter with you all?”

For the Captain had turned livid, and his speech was momentarily paralysed, while a look of dismay spread over the faces of all the gang.

“What in the — do you mean, d— you?” he cried as soon as he could speak. “It *was* the Premier!”

“Hullo, what’s up, Captain? How could it be the Premier?” The young man took out his watch, “Don’t you know—I’d forgotten it myself for the moment, of course—that at the present moment the Premier is laying the foundation-stone of the Eno Hospital for dyspeptics, a hundred miles off?”

The gang broke into a roar of disappointment. It was too true.

“Scoundhrels, divils, rogues!” cried the Captain, mad with rage. “Give me back that money!”

A low, fierce cry of determined dissent warned him not to arouse any further the wild-beast instincts of his men. It was a dangerous topic.

The Captain flung himself into his arm-chair with a crash.

“Duped by a house-painter!” he shrieked, convulsively crumpling up the bloody document. “With my own help—tricked, baffled, betrayed!”

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

A MAN'S HEART.

THE Dog Days were come, and without the permission of the almanacs. Before them, loosed (unmuzzled) from the kennels of the Year, what mortal could stand? Now set in the glacial epoch of culinary chronology; now the City gentleman fanned his brow with the penny Japanese fan, and dreamed of hammocks and houris; now the prosperous bourgeois pored o'er his Bradshaw and consulted with the wife of his bosom.

The sun was too much with and for the emasculated men of that age, and they might have been excused for echoing an old complaint of Mrs. Dawe's, that it would have been better for him to reserve his energies for the winter, when they were more needed. It was not merely the discomfort occasioned by the warmth of his attentions that the old lady grumbled at. Her great grievance was the impossibility of getting the due quantum of work out of the machinery which constituted herself and Sally. Work, indeed! Nature would have none of it but her own. She invited you to lounge in the shadow of sun-glinted leafage, to part the glassy wave, to watch in delicious drowsiness the white cliffs and clouds sailing past you as in a dream, to land the leaping salmon, to organise the laughing picnic. She offered you rich largess of sunny air, and golden sky, and cool, clear water, and verdurous arcade. At your peril reject the offerings of the gods!

Work! Sturdy Scotsmen lay prostrate 'neath Apollo's glittering shafts, unable to move hand or foot, though their banking accounts depended on it; German *Gelehrten* snored in their library chairs; French philosophers moderated the warmth of their rhetoric; and Irish insurgents drank more and said less. Even the British Pavior occasionally paused in his task.

But amid the universal supineness there was left one body of men, whom nor heat nor cold could daunt ; one corps of the army of humanity to show to the world that the ancient traditions of England were not a dream ; one house of Hellenic heroes, blind to the witching splendours of sea and sky, and to all but the page of Duty, and deaf save to the call of Glory. Spartans, fighting under the shadow of their own speeches, heavy, sun-darkening, they alone trembled not before the mighty Sovereign of the Orient. In their ancestral parks the deer drank in the ambrosial air with proud swelling nostrils, and tossed their antlers skywards ; the butterflies flitted lazily ; the fish leaped in the sunny streams ; the flowers and birds filled the air with perfume and song, and all the young world rejoiced in its strength. But they, "the masters of things," impelled by motives understood not of the baser creation, under the sway of ethical imperatives unknown to the animal world, sat on benches and made articulate and inarticulate noises.

Noble Six Hundred !

At their head, the great Floppington worked like a modern Herakles. Ever at his post in the House when his presence was necessary, he showed himself as cunning in debate as in pure oratory. Triumph trod on the heels of triumph ! The masterly vigour of his rhetoric, the largeness of his views, the clearness of his expositions, the trenchancy of his sarcasm, which disdained not the idioms of the people, enshrined every speech, as soon as made, among the classics of oratory. Almost entirely abandoning the jejune and puerile pseudo-poeticism of his earlier efforts, the Minister seemed at last to have found his right manner ; vague splendour of metaphor was exchanged for lucidity, and barren spiritual and emotional appeals gave place to facts and figures.

It was not surprising, then, that the Premier's popularity showed no signs of falling from the height to which it had so unexpectedly attained. On the contrary, it went on steadily rising, every by-election going steadily in his favour. The gratitude of the masses for what he had already done, and their lively expectation of future favours, sowed the seeds of quite a novel affection for him which was fostered by the pertinacious activity with which he kept his promises before their eyes.

The philosophical historian, however, must needs direct attention to another cause, whose action upon himself no one would, probably, have confessed. The paradoxical world loves equally to find its heroes divine or human ; with the proviso, in the latter case, that the humanity is not glaringly obtruded, but remains in shadow, lending a delicious vagueness to the picture. The alleged *galanterie* of the Premier interested the people ; and between notoriety and popularity, as between genius and insanity, the partition is slight. Only the pen of a Tacitus could do adequate justice to this part of the subject.

But whatever the reason of the fact, it is certain that never had Prime Minister been more popular in the House or out of it : and

consequently never had Prime Minister been more despotic in the management of his party and his Cabinet. It is not too much to say that, from the date of his address to the Women of England, if not from even an earlier period, his career was watched with bated breath by the whole civilised world. The marvellous manner in which he performed the dual functions of Premier and of Foreign Secretary (to set aside the Treasury as a sinecure), the vast and complicated reforms he was projecting in every branch of Government, and the way he found time under all the pressure of these gigantic tasks to take part in social gaieties which he brightened by the lightning of his wit, excited the respectful or enthusiastic admiration of the human race.

Yet this man, the beheld of all beholders, the autocrat and spoiled child of England, the hope and darling of Ireland, the admiration of the world, was as unhappy as the least among the millions whose destinies he swayed. For often, when the air resounded with the clamour of applause, the memory of a voice full of sweetest music filled his eyes with tears. A sensation of void and emptiness traversed his heart. He would have given the world's praise for one word of approbation in those tender tones. Wistfully, yet hopelessly, his eyes wandered round in search of a divine face, for ever flashing before him yet for ever vanished and lost. That beloved form, the flower of womanhood, the delicate essence of all beauty, of all tenderness, of all subtle emotion, which had swayed his soul like some new planet, had gone out of his life, and had become naught but a refining memory and an aching regret.

The indiscretions of earlier years had borne bitter, too bitter, fruit. But for them he knew that he might still have felt the pressure of her hand, and looked into the tremulous brightness of her eyes.

He sought for her in the salons she was wont to illumine. He was indefatigable in attending wherever there was a shadow of a chance of seeing her. He was among the first-comers at the Lyceum *première*, where he was recognised and enthusiastically received, but where she he came to see was not to be found. In vain from his place in the fourth row of the stalls he swept the frescoed horizon with the opera-glasses of the Duchess in the next *fautueil*: lovely faces there were in plenty, but not the lovelier one he sought. He was prominent at the Browning performance, and at the Greek play, but in the rows of spectacled eyes he caught no glimpse of *hers*, shining in mute, eloquent contrast.

Disappointment followed disappointment. Lady Harley appeared no more in public, and only a few chosen friends dared intrude upon her seclusion. Yet, after each failure, his conversation was only more brilliant, his wit more mordant than before. Society congratulated itself on his final disclosure of his real cynical self, always so carefully veiled before his disappointment in love. His *bons mots* were quoted on every hand, and a goodly share of the floating capital of jest was assigned to him, and he was

enrolled among the noble society of wits, among whom the humble author divides his best jokes. It was only by this bitter flow of satire, and by the enormous tasks which he set himself, that he was able to relieve the intensity of emotion, the ardency of longing, the gnawing dissatisfaction. For he *was* dissatisfied.

What was it all worth to him, this power, this fame, this restless luxury, this constant companionship of beauty and intellect, this free interchange of thought, and gladiatorial display of wit? How old all this had grown to him, how stale, how everyday! Oh for the holiday romance and glamour of the land of dream!

CHAPTER II.

A NOVEL DILEMMA.

MRS. DAWE'S voice sank to a solemn whisper.

"Can ye keep a secret, 'Lizer, and bear a blow till I give yer leave?"

"Oh! do not keep me in suspense. Tell me at once what is the matter with my dear, dear Jack, that I may fly to him. I can bear anything, even a secret."

Mrs. Dawe borrowed Eliza's ear, without asking leave, and adjusting it into close relations with her own mouth breathed into it one terrible dissyllable.

Eliza's body recoiled from it with such horror, that her ear was removed to the furthest corner of the shop. At the same time the roses and raptures of Ramsgate fled from her cheek, and were replaced by the lilies and languors of Bethnal Green.

"It can't be!" she gasped. "You are mistaken!"

Mrs. Dawe frowned.

"How dare ye contradict, you ungrateful hussy!" she cried. "To everybody else it's brain-fever, *but to you, as a special favour, it's small-pox.* And that's what I get by my kind---"

Mrs. Dawe ceased suddenly, darted a warning look at Eliza, and weighed out some smoked beef.

"Yes," she resumed, when they were once more alone. "To my customers it's brain-fever, but to you, as a friend, it's small-pox. I know'd 'ow it 'ud be. 'Jack,' ses I, 'if ye *will* drag yer poor aillin' mother away from these 'ere lovely sands, as is doin' her a power o' good; though landladies is as greedy as pigs, and every blessed thing rises out o' respect to the visitors, and ye can run through a small fortune on the backs of donkeys as don't want to go; and want to go back to Bethnal Green, and throw chloriddy lime into your sinks, Jack,' ses I, 'yer poor old mother won't be 'ere much longer.' But what did he care for *my* 'ealth? He

knowed the papers said they were dyin' off all around 'ere more and more every day, yet for all that he ses he must go back, and we might stay there ourselves, two unpurTECTED females, for all he cared. And I could no more stop 'im than I could stop the express we travelled in ; and by a mistake he took fust-class tickets, and they wouldn't change 'em. But I would 'a made 'em, only the bell was a-goin' ; and we 'ad to sit on sofas and lookin'-glasses all the way, which made me that miserable that I 'ad no 'eart to look at the cows. And now, sure enough, every word as I sed to 'im 'as come true, and he's down with the small-pox, though vaccinated by Dr. Thomas (old Dr. Thomas, not the young 'un), and the matter given to all the babies, and the marks on 'is arm is there to prove it to this day. You was lucky, 'Lizer, that when we was comin' 'ome from the station yesterday, you *could* get out o' the bus at the top o' this dreadful road, where there's papers in every window warnin' you to muzzle yerself up as if ye was a mad dog ; though, to be sure, I did think ye was comin' 'ome with us instead of boltin' off at once to see yer brother, not as you could be expected to chance it, after what that woman in the bus was a-tellin' us about everybody running to be vaccinated as if they was babies in arms, and catchin' it afore they could get there."

"My poor, dear Jack!" sobbed Eliza. "Give me that vinegar."

"You ain't a 'ot pea," snapped Mrs. Dawe. "There's no call to be frightened. If yer conscience is clear, and you've got 'oles in your arm, ye won't get 'em in your face. 'Tain't them as makes cruet-starsds of themselves as escapes. Sally wouldn't drink vinegar if she was paid a pound a pint—she's too fond of sugar, the extravagant minx—but she ain't the least bit afraid, and just like 'er imprence, for she never was vaccinated in all her borned days. She sits patiently by the bedside, coverin' 'im up, and givin' 'im 'is medicine like a dog."

"What!" exclaimed Eliza. "You let Sally nurse him!"

"She wanted a 'oliday, poor thing," Mrs. Dawe responded compassionately. "Ye see she'd really been workin' 'ard while I was at Ramsgate, and done a tidy stroke of business, except two 'apennies with Pears' soap marked on 'em, which no one 'ud take back. When she begged me to let 'er nuss 'im I 'adn't the 'art to refuse, 'specially as I couldn't trust 'er without my eye on her. It's 'ard to be parted from my Jack ; but I mustn't think o' meself, when my only boy is in danger, and can be best nussed by them as ain't too anxious to do it properly, nor ain't got the shop layin' on their 'eads. Oh, my poor boy, to think that arter all the schoolin' ye've 'ad, ye should 'a made your old mother miserable like this!"

A tear stood in the good woman's eye as she concluded. Then, presumably tired of standing, it fell and buried itself in a basin of soup.

"How is he now?" sobbed Eliza, whom faintness had driven to the door in search of fresh air.

"He's unconscionable," returned Mrs. Dawe, mournfully watching the widening circles in the soup-basin, "he don't know nothin', he don't—he's talkin' politics all the while."

"Then, I could do no good by seeing him, unhappy girl that I am!"

"Not a bit. When a man's delirious—he looks at everybody as if they was poor relations, my late 'usband used to say, not that poor relations 'as any right to be sich. He'd only make yer flesh creep by cryin' out about a lot of devils murderin' 'im, not as I believe it's anythin' but blue ones. Sometimes, he shrieks out that he won't sign the pledge not to touch Irish whisky, no, not if he dies for it."

Eliza shuddered. "If you think I ought to command myself for his sake, I will obey and will *not* go near him. For his sake, Mrs. Dawe. Good-bye; if I can I will come soon. Good-bye."

Eliza stepped out into the street, but turning back somewhat shamefacedly, she bent her head over Mrs. Dawe's face and, rapidly interposing her gloved hand, she administered a loud kiss to the top of her thumb, which rested lightly on the oily membrane that served the old lady for skin. Then she glided gracefully through the open portal—gracefully, although her heart was almost broken.

Her poet lover, her painter hero, attacked by the small-pox! What ruder shattering for a maiden's day-dream! Their long-delayed marriage was at last at hand; and lo! death, or, worse still, distortion awaited him. Love may survive the death of the object of its flame, but when that object becomes an object in another sense, a pity which is akin to hate swells the tender bosom.

The weather was glorious. Even the squalid road seemed to breathe a quiet, restful air, and to lie in a holy calm, under the lovingly o'er-arching blue of heaven. But Eliza had not the Wordsworthian eye of her lover, and, instead of musing on the beneficence of Nature, she hurried along, her brain whirling under dread possibilities. The sanitary instructions displayed in many of the windows seemed to blaze with ominous meaning, and the passage of a ghastly-looking small-pox conveyance chilled her blood. The face of her lover swam before her, scarred, and seamed, and pitted! And what if she were attacked herself, and all that exquisite texture of skin, which had been the care of years, destroyed in a moment? Perhaps, even now, she was bearing with her the germs of disease. The thought was too horrible to contemplate. She had kissed Mrs. Dawe on her entry, she had touched her on her exit. With a trembling hand she drew off the suspected glove and hurled it away.

"I accept the challenge, Miss Bathbrill," cried a musical voice, the owner of which immediately precipitated himself into the road, picked up the glove, and stuck it jauntily into his breast.

Eliza looked up. A tall, handsome young man, with a blond moustache and very white teeth, stood before her, hat in hand, bowing in a most elegant fashion. Eliza gave vent to an exclamation of pleased surprise.

"Mr. Mowbray!" she cried with a delicious smile of welcome. Then suddenly the smile gave place to a look of horror, as she caught sight of the glove dangling in his vest.

"For Heaven's sake, beware!" she cried impulsively.

"Of what?" queried the stranger, devouring her with his eyes.

"Of the glove! Throw it down instantly as you value your life!"

Mr. Mowbray's face lit up with an amused interest. "By St. Patrick," he said, "this is an unexpected adventure. Sweet Miss Bathbrill, I will beware of nothing that comes from thee. Come what may, this glove shall be mine for ever."

With these gallant words he drew out the glove and pressed it to his lips.

Who can paint the tumult in Eliza's breast? Horror, perplexity, pleasure, shame, and a certain impersonal delight in the sensational and unexpected manner in which Fate had twice, within a few days, intertwined her life with that of the stranger, agitated her bosom. Their first meeting had been on the shore of the mighty sea, and lo!—coincidence of coincidences—they came together again in the heart of the great city. Was their third meeting to be within a hospital ward? Yet full of solicitude as she was for the fate of the daring stranger, she could not bring herself to degrade the poetry of the situation by the introduction of the horrible word "small-pox." In a confused manner there flitted through her mind the rencontres of recent fiction—the mad bull, the fierce dog, the runaway horse episodes of salvation, the genus of accidental meetings in woodland recesses, the lost traveller variety, and the other natural and unnatural classes known to every reader—but nowhere could she find a precedent to guide her. Here was emphatically a new and original situation with quite a novel series of effects. Here were all the elements of the illustrations on novelette covers—gallant youth, beauty in distress, fear for the life of the hero, avowed admiration of the heroine, lips, glove, and all the necessary properties—yet the kaleidoscope of life had arranged them in permutations hitherto undreamed of by the novelist.

But Eliza rose to the occasion, and cut through all the complications of the situation with one clean sweep. With an instinctive *savoir faire*, that amounted to dramatic genius, she exclaimed: "You saved my life! Shall I destroy yours?"

Then as his face grew serious and perplexed under her earnestness, she added: "You are nursing a viper in your bosom." A startled look of comprehension flashed into the young man's eyes. He plucked forth the viper, which in a moment had sucked the blood out of his cheek, and hurled it down a side-street. Readers interested in its fate may be told that it led a single life ever after, having been picked up by a young girl who wore it on state occasions, no one suspecting that this innocent-looking article had already been divorced, and that its whilom partner was not to be found in its owner's pocket.

The fatal glove gone, an embarrassing pause ensued. Eliza resumed her walk and the stranger walked beside her. The latter was the first to break the silence. "I trust that after I left you, you found Mr. Dawe safe," he remarked.

This dexterous and delicate change of subject, showing as it did that the stranger comprehended the subtlest emotions of the inner life, moved Eliza to the quick. She thanked him with a look.

"Safe enough, thank you," she said. "But he had evidently hurt himself among the slippery rocks, for his arm was wounded in several places."

"Indeed," observed Mr. Mowbray, much interested, "I am sorry to hear that. And how is he now?"

Eliza shuddered. Must the word be spoken after all?

"He has been attacked by the—the epidemic which is raging in the neighbourhood. I have just come from him."

The stranger edged imperceptibly away from his lovely companion.

"Did you find him very bad?" he inquired.

"Very ill indeed, I was told. I did not see him myself, as the sight of me would only have distracted him."

"No wonder. It would distract a dying saint." Eliza acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

"Much less a living sinner like myself," continued the chivalrous stranger, imperceptibly edging nearer to his lovely companion, who had now grown calm enough to remember to open her dainty parasol. "I hope it will not prove serious, and that he may soon be restored to health and you."

Eliza cast down her eyes. "I hope so," she murmured. There was she knew not what of irritation in the tone in which he uttered the last two words, something of calm looking down as from a height upon her and her poor affairs that made her add: "For his mother's sake."

The stranger's eyes kindled, and his mouth twitched with suppressed enjoyment. "Poor old lady!" he said. "She has much to suffer. I remember the state she was in at Ramsgate only because he was away a couple of hours. She must have been a good deal frightened when he returned wounded, and told her what had happened."

"She had no time to be frightened," Eliza replied simply. "Because the moment he entered he astounded her by telling her he was going back to London by the next train, and that he dared not stay a moment longer in the place."

The stranger looked thoughtful. "And he did not tell her why?" he asked.

"He told her not a word about anything, but she could see that the accident had frightened him and disgusted him with the place."

"Poor old lady!" repeated the stranger. "To think of the torture this mysterious silence must have cost her, palpitating with anxiety as she was. I wonder she did not make him speak."

"She tried," remarked Eliza with a faint smile. "But she had to give it up—he's very obstinate, as she knows by old experience; and if he determines to do anything, or keep a secret, nothing in the world can make him break his resolution."

"A very admirable trait!" cried the stranger heartily. "For as a friend of mine is in the habit of saying, 'A man that can keep a secret is as rare as a detective that can discover one.' Not that, of course, it can be a secret of any real importance. I suppose he was more communicative to you than to her."

Eliza looked vexed. "Hardly," she replied. "But, if you ask me, there was no secret to communicate. The plain truth of the matter is that he *wanted* to go, so, having no reasonable excuse for going, he remained silent. What, I should like to know, *could* have happened to make him want to go? It's absurd on the face of it."

"On the face of it!" echoed the stranger. "When he went off in pursuit of his hat, he had no intention of returning to London that day. When he came back to Ramsgate, he was mad, you tell me, to catch the next train. Now does he expect you to believe that melodramatic incidents occur in the light of day between Broadstairs and Ramsgate? It's ridiculous. It was a mere whim of his, as you say. Stay!" he continued thoughtfully, "can *my* presence have had anything to do with his resolution?"

"*Your* presence," exclaimed Eliza. "What do you mean, Mr. Mowbray?"

Mr. Mowbray appeared embarrassed. He looked down at the ground and looked up timidly at Eliza.

"Never mind!" he said in evident confusion. "Just an idea that flashed across my mind. Of course it would have been absurd of him to think anything of the kind."

"Anything of what kind?" murmured Eliza, blushing beneath her parasol.

"Still it's natural," soliloquised Mr. Mowbray absently. "When a man, no longer young, has a precious jewel to guard—but no, it could not have been that."

At this point he gazed up thoughtfully and met the down-dropping glances of his fair companion, and, for a moment, they looked into each other's eyes. Then Eliza turned away with a petulant gesture, blushing more deeply than before.

"You are not angry with me, I hope, for answering your question," Mr. Mowbray said tenderly.

"Why should I be angry with you?" murmured Eliza.

They walked on together.

"The Captain was right," reflected the young man, stealing admiring glances at the charming brunette at his side. "He fled, fearing our vengeance should we discover his trickery. And he is a man who can keep a secret! And, to prevent any immediate danger, he is down with the small-pox! And perhaps he may die! Is Providence playing into our hands?"

CHAPTER III.

SALLY WRITES A TELEGRAM.

SALLY'S tears rained down on the white, helpless face of her master. Suddenly, hearing the voice of her mistress, she snatched up a soup-ladle that stood in the corner of the room, and ran out on to the landing. Descending a few stairs, she stretched the ladle downwards in the direction of the parlour.

"Asleep agen," a voice exclaimed. "Allus a-spillin' the ice 'cos it don't come out of *your* pocket—though why water in lumps should be dearer than water in pumps, and as expensive as if ye could get drunk upon it, I never *could* understand. Ain't I told ye as this cook-shop melts the coldest ice in a minute, not to speak of the sun, and it's a wonder 'ow *I've* stood it so long. Lift the ladle steady now, or ye'll slop the stairs and pay for the ice out o' yer next 'oliday; though it's only 'cos doctors is fools and their patients idiots that they swallows all the doctors tells 'em and gives 'em; and what good ice on 'is bald 'ead can do a boy who's got the small-pox is a riddle-me-riddle-me-ree."

Mrs. Dawe's medical scepticism was grounded on the assumption that the feverish symptoms of the invalid were those of the first stage of small-pox.

"D'yer think I'm a baby," she said to the doctor when he informed her of the nature of her son's illness, "as is afraid to 'ear the truth? What's the use o' yer tellin' me lies as if ye was paid for it like a lawyer? If ye'd charge me less for brain-fever, I should be glad if 'e 'ad it; but the odds are ye'll send me in a bill as long as yer face 'ud be if I didn't pay it. When the whole of Bethnal Green is laid up with small-pox, d'ye think it likely that just my boy has been and gone and got the brain-fever? We ain't that sort of people. No one in my family ever 'ad anything o' the kind, and we ain't used to 'avin' our 'air cut off as if we was sentenced to 'ard labour; and a 'ard labour enough it is to live nowadays, without 'avin to pay for dyin', besides bein' charged for brain-fever instead o' small-pox, when I'm sure it's nothing o' the kind. And 'ow can you know better than me as knowed 'im when you and 'im was as small as that 'ere big saucepan?" But even when a week had passed without the eruption of a rash, the obstinate old lady would not utterly abandon her thesis, and she still held out for a latent element of small-pox compounded with the brain-fever.

As Mrs. Dawe repeated herself as much as she repeated her late husband, the doctor soon got to know the gist of her criticisms by heart, and they fell on his ears with as little effect as the stereotyped phrases of a liturgy. In Sally he found an embryonic nurse, who rapidly developed under his instructions and the intensity of her interest in the issue.

Mrs. Dawe, though she soon got over her dread of infection, considered herself indispensable to the business; and, as she shrank from hiring a professional attendant, Sally was allowed almost to monopolise the ancillary functions.

She sat at Jack's bedside, listening to his ravings with the terror of semi-comprehension. What always darted a superstitious thrill through her whole being was to hear him address an imaginary third person, and expostulate with him on what he had been doing; especially when, identifying himself with that third person, he seemed to be justifying himself and triumphantly demolishing the arguments he had used in his own character. Then the first self would say: "Your logic is unassailable. *Mea culpa!*"

Sometimes he became more insistent, with alternations of entreaty. At others, he seemed to be haranguing a man whom he contemptuously called Mr. Speaker, and then he would talk for hours in a polysyllabic jargon of which Sally could only understand a word here and there.

Of other scenes which he enacted the girl could make still less; they seemed to refer to passages of his life which lay utterly beyond her ken. The doctor was none the less puzzled by the delirious utterances of his patient, on the few occasions when they took place in his presence. He murmured something about overwork, and, learning that Jack had been very active as a propagandist of Radical doctrines, he warned his mother against allowing him to mingle in political strife; which was, to her, so striking a proof of the doctor's sapience, that she began to think that the proportion of small-pox must be very small indeed. Once, he pried into Jack's books, and after that he wondered no more. For, being an exception to the proverbial induction anent doctors, and retaining a belief in Providence, despite the nastiness of his own medicines, he made the following note on the case: Overheated imagination brought on by drink and irreligious fanaticism.

Nursing was not the only field in which Sally gave signs of latent talent. The rapidity of her progress in reading and writing would have gladdened a Board School teacher as much as it would have depressed some Inspectors of Schools. All Jack had been able to do for her before leaving town was to make her a copy of the letters of the alphabet, and to teach her to call them all by their names.

Sally had likewise purchased a little halfpenny reading book with pink covers, full of monosyllabic and unmethodical statements about domestic quadrupeds, and when the rest of the household was disporting itself at the seaside, Sally was content if, after a tremendous day's work, when she had shut up the shop late at night, she could exchange some of her hours of sleep for the knowledge of alphabetical formations, or the rudiments of reading. When she could no longer hold the pen, or peruse the puerile sentences, she retired to bed; treading very softly from an irrational fear that Mrs. Dawe would wake up and want to know what she meant by burning the gas till that hour of the night. A beautiful picture she

made, stalking noiselessly upstairs, her hair falling wildly over her shoulders, her dress loosened on account of the oppressive heat, and all of her body that was visible one mass of ink—the result of her midnight studies in the black art. It was a pitiful waste of energy, the poor girl's patient striving to imitate every whirl and convulsion, every flourish and blot of her master's copy. But Sally's eyes were unused to accurate perception of form, and so, failing to produce a thorough imitation, she acquired a much better chirography than she would have obtained by achieving what she considered perfection. And therein lies a moral which the transcendentalist is at liberty to discover and patent.

What times Jack lay in a heavy sleep and nothing could be done for him, Sally would take the pen and ink off the mantelpiece and smear herself industriously, making two marks on her person to one on her paper. But she did not mind bedaubing herself so long as she could keep her manuscript fairly clean, a task for which her kitchen education had unfitted her.

It was while she was thus engaged that Jack awoke one day from his long, delirious dream.

Suddenly, with the curious feeling that somebody's eyes were fixed upon her, she looked up and found the patient staring at her with a new light in his eyes.

Uttering a cry of joy she threw down the pen and bent over him.

He looked up into her face with an expression of piteous inquiry. His lips opened tremulously as if to speak, and closed again with a quiver. Then his eyelids shut, too, and he remained quite still. After a little he fell into a quiet sleep. This calm slumber lasted a long time, but all the while Sally never ceased to watch his face.

Despite her gladness she felt a lump rising in her throat at the thought of the change that had come over it. The lines of melancholy humour round his mouth were more deeply graven, and transformed into lines of pain. The thin, worn, bloodless countenance still retained its nobility of aspect, or rather, its spirituality was intensified, as if the high endeavour of the soul and not the harpy of fever had been struggling with the hues and traits of health.

At last he stirred, and awoke once more. His perplexed eyes wandered about the room, hither and thither, resting for an instant on the bookstand, or the pipe-rack, or the pot of mignonette, but seemed to recognise nothing. All at once they kindled like a flash of lightning.

"I'll look at it now," he said gently.

"Thank Gord!" Sally ejaculated. "E knows me!"

He was stretching out his poor, wasted hand. "Bring it over, please, Sally," he said.

"Yes, master; yes, master," cried Sally, sobbing and laughing. "But you needn't look at it now."

"Needn't look at it now!" he repeated slowly, taking the

alphabetic MS. from her. "Why, Sally, you've lost enough time already while I was away. Now that I have returned we must work hard. *Mirum est!* This is a wonderful improvement! You have a positive genius, child. *Dominum superasti*, thou hast excelled thy master. Will you teach me in return, Sally?"

Sally smiled in tolerance of this nonsense, and whispered gleefully to herself: "'E don't not know nothing no more! 'E don't not know nothing no more!"

"And you have found time to do all this in a week?" he said, turning over the copy-book with smiling incredulity. "I am afraid you must have got some of the pixies to do it for you while you were asleep."

Sally turned an indignant scarlet, and tears of outraged womanliness came into her eyes. "May I never move," she cried earnestly, "if I arxed one on 'em to do it for me. D'yer think. I'd tell yer a whopper to make yer think I could write as well as 'Lizer? I leaves that to 'Lizer! Why, there wasn't 'ardly a day that I didn't do 'em twice over when you was away, and three times night or day when you was ill. Seven twos is fourteen, one and tuppence; and three tens is thirty, is 'arf-a-crown; is three and eight. No, I mean is—is——"

Here Sally lost herself entirely, and gazed in head-splitting, dumbfounded bewilderment at the copy-book, feeling, with bitter shame, that she had failed to make good her case. But in Jack's face, the obverse expression of triumphant conviction was not to be found. He was staring at Sally in a painful perplexity. He put his hand to his brow, and, feeling the ice there, a gleam of light began to pierce through the clouds of dubiety. He struggled to sit up.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed; "I'm in bed!"

"In course ye are," said Sally, somewhat sullenly. "I knows that, even if I can't write without pixies."

"In bed!" repeated Jack, looking round the room afresh. "I was half-conscious of it; but it never struck me as strange. It is thus perhaps that the new-born infant wakes into a universe which it takes as a matter of course, and when it grows up lives among mysteries, mistaking the Everyday for the Absolute. What's the time, Sally?"

"Don' know."

"Look at my watch on the mantelpiece."

"Don' go."

"Don't go!" echoed Jack. "Nonsense! Bring it here. There is no effect without a cause, Sally."

Sally brought the watch with a half-suppressed, revengeful grin, and held it to his ear. A suspicion of a sad smile played round the patient's mouth.

"I am always wrong," he said. "It has indeed stopped, as the Universe, to which Paley compared it, may fall some day into eternal stagnation. Half-past ten, eh, Sally? Is that right, by any chance?"

"What rot!" retorted Sally. "'Ow can it be right if it's wrong?"

"A crude question that, my child," replied her master, "and unworthy of the philosopher I thought I had discovered in you. Is it not half-past ten twice a-day? Why, Sally, you are denying the principle of the old Conservatism. A watch that stands still is more often right than one that goes too fast. But all this does not explain the change in the habits of this usually precise mechanism. I remember winding it yesterday morning in the train. Have you been playing with it?"

Sally, whose mouth had been wide open from astonishment, kept it open from speechless indignation. The series of dagger-thrusts she had been receiving—and at such a moment, too—would have made her black in the face, had not the coating of ink been first in the field. She felt that the delusion under which her master was labouring did not warrant his suspicions of frivolity on her part. Sally's world was very real to her—she had a hard grasp of the facts of life, and playfulness and lightness of touch she apprehended but dimly. So, when she did recover her breath, she somewhat paradoxically burst forth: "Well, I'm blowed! D'yer expect a watch to work for ten days, when there's nobody to look arter it? 'Ow could I wind it? I never 'ad no watch in all my borned days. I should a' made it go wrong in its inside. I know I should, and a jolly good job if I 'ad. There!"

This last adverb seemed to have little connection with space, but to be the jerky prelude to an outburst of sobbing and a storm of rainy tears falling through the drudge's face-clasping, extended fingers.

"Ten days!" breathed Jack, and then there was nothing heard in the room but the crying of Sally.

Presently the girl felt a hot hand smoothing her tangled hair and passing gently over her dewy countenance. She did not move, but a thrill ran through her.

"Forgive me, Sally," pleaded a low, tremulous voice. "I did not mean to hurt you."

Sally pressed her hands convulsively to her face, as if endeavouring to keep down her sobs which subsided into a spasmodic panting.

"God knows I should be the last to cause you pain," continued the trembling tones. "I understand what has happened. I have been sick unto death, with no one in all the world to care for me but you—no one in all the world."

Sally raised her head for the first time, and for an instant her grimy face was close to his. Then, covering it again with her hands, she burst into another fit of sobbing, so violent that it racked her whole frame.

Jack uttered a low cry of pain. "Must I indeed bring sorrow wherever I go?" he murmured.

But now words began to be interjected in the middle of the girl's wild sobbing. "What—rot! There's—lots of other gals—as cares

for you—and thinks—ye cares for—them—and send boys—with red caps—to know 'ow ye was—when they ought to 'a come—themselves—and a jolly good job too !”

Here Sally raised her head defiantly and found the tears running down Jack's cheeks. He brushed them away quickly.

“Illness has left me weak,” he said, gazing with quivering lips into empty air.

“Master !” exclaimed Sally. “Don't cry ! She ain't worth it ! Don't cry, or I shall burst ! If she cared two 'ot peas for yer, she wouldn't 'a let yer lay 'ere, dyin' alone !”

“She did not know,” murmured Jack. “She did not know. But, indeed, I did not deserve that she should come. Oh, my lost love—my lost friend—with whom I spoke as soul to soul.” His eyes filled with tender light. “You did not know or you would have come to forgive me—after all—you did not know.” He extended his arms as if to grasp some unseen form and fell back, his hands still groping.

Sally gave vent to a sardonic, semi-hysterical laugh, and placed her arms akimbo.

“Right ye are, Mr. Dawe ! She didn't know ! In course not ! She don't know nothin', she don't ! Then we're plums o' the same pudden. I don't know nothin', I don't neither, ye know, and if yer don't know yer ought to for ye said it. Oh, crikey ! ain't she a warm member ! and ain't you a flat ! Why, the fust day as ye was taken bad she come 'ere”—Jack looked up—“and missis was quite mad 'cause she wouldn't believe you 'ad the small-pox.” Jack put his hand to his head. “And missis ses to me, ‘Lizer fancies she knows everything.’” Here Jack flushed violently. “‘If there's one person more than another, 'ses missis, 'as I can't abear, it's a disbelievin' one.’ But 'Lizer did believe 'er, 'cause she never come since, and only sent boys, and said she couldn't wait for letters, and must 'ave 'em run back to save missis the stamps.”

“But I did not have the small-pox, did I ?” said Jack, perplexed.

“No,” snapped Sally. “I didn't know at fust, 'cos missis said ye did, and the doctor said it was brain-fever. There was rows. I didn't know, so I could only nuss yer.”

Jack smiled sadly.

“'Tis a picture of life, Sally,” he said. “Proud Science puts its finger on the pulse of humanity and says : This ails you. Proud Ignorance says : This ails you. So they wrangle. Meanwhile Love says nothing, but cools the burning forehead, and moistens the parched tongue. And did the doctor convince missis, or *vice-versâ* ?”

“Yes, missis sed ice were worsen than anythink for small-pox, and that if ye died, it was along of 'im.”

Jack smiled faintly.

“Was she grieved about me ?” he inquired gently.

"Oh, Jemima! warn't she!" responded Sally, softened, in spite of herself, by his pathetic accents. "Why, the fust two days she went about like a mad thing. She was so miserable that she didn't know what she was about. I 'eard all the customers grumblin' as they was a-gettin' short measure. She used to cry a good deal the fust two days to think that you'd caught the small-pox, and that she daren't go nigh ye 'cause you'd got it very bad, and if she was to catch it and die there 'ud be no one to look arter yer. But arterwards she used to come and nuss ye a little instead o' me; and when ye shrieked at 'er she used to cry a lot more, and blow me up 'cause I couldn't get through the washin', and she 'ad to wring the tears out o' the 'ankerchers and let 'em dry 'erself."

The sudden silence that ensued upon the termination of this speech aroused Jack from a reverie into which he had fallen.

"And no one else called?" he inquired, with a strange, mocking expression.

"Only the customers. At fust they was frighten', but missis got old Boler to write a bill in large letters (she didn't know as I could a done it, if it was spelled), and she got the doctor to sign it, and she put it in the winder: BRAIN-FEVER WITHIN. But she was that worried by higgerant, huneddicated gals and chaps a-wantin' places, that she sed she wished there was a devil for 'em to go to, instead o' comin' to 'er."

"Only the customers," repeated Jack, still with the same strange smile. "No bulletins—no theatrical dying in the sight of the public—with the lights low—no anxious inquiries from all lands—only one from a housemaid—were it not better so? One half of the world does not know how the other half dies. Nor does it matter aught, for, whether in solitude or amid crowds, we must all die alone."

"What rot!" Sally interrupted roughly. "Ye make my flesh creep. If ye was dead ye might talk like that, but ye ain't. You're a-gettin' better, and you'll soon be up and doin', and ye can go away to Margate agen as ye was invited."

"Invited!"

"Yes. I forgot to tell yer there *was* another caller arter all, so ye needn't a-bin so down in the mouth. Three days ago it was, and 'e axed to see ye 'cos 'e 'ad met ye at Margate, and when missis sed ye 'ad the brain-fever, 'e pulled a long face and was very sorry to 'ear about the devils as was a-killin' yer, and sed as we was to give ye a invitation from Captain somethink, to 'is willer near Widestairs or somethink—— Master, master, what is it?"

For Jack's face had become ghastly, he was trembling in all his limbs, and his eyes gleamed with a wild light. He tried to speak, but no sound came from his lips. His head drooped helplessly on the pillow, and beads of perspiration covered his brow. Sally, trembling little less, lifted up his head and put a glass to his lips. He clenched his teeth and turned feebly away. Then his lips began to move and he muttered: "Oh, my God! am I his

murderer? I dread to know." He closed his eyes and lay so still that Sally thought he had fainted. She ran to the window and opened it more widely, admitting larger draughts of the rich summer air. Afar off a barrel-organ was jingling through the airs of the *Mikado*, a popular comic opera, and distance lent a drowsy enchantment to its metallic tones. Along the road an omnibus was rumbling; the alluring cry of "Strawberry Ice" resounded at intervals; the flies buzzed round the window panes; a dog barked now and then, and all the low hum of a sunny afternoon was wafted in through the window. The dread intensity of Jack's thought seemed suddenly to have lost its definiteness. It became a mere tortured whirl of vague tumult; baseless, shifting, and with a nightmare-like unconsciousness of the reason of its existence. Then this, too, subsided, and his overwrought brain fell into a strange, meaningless peacefulness, and he found himself listening dreamily to the sounds of the quiet sultry afternoon, and floating along the musical current of

"The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra la,
Have nothing to do with the case."

A vigorous shake aroused him from his trance. With a feeling of vague irritation he opened his eyes and found that Sally was bending over him in agitation. The sight of the girl reknit the snapped thread of thought, and the old look of horror flashed into his eyes.

"You are right, Sally," he cried. "I am mad to shirk the question. Every moment is precious. Tell me, have they murdered him?"

Sally stared at him in speechless astonishment. His wild, appealing gaze froze her blood. It was plain that his reason was once more tottering.

"Why are you silent?" he cried, seizing her arm with a convulsive grasp. "Speak!" he commanded almost fiercely, "speak and spare me not."

"Oh, master," gasped Sally, "don't excite yerself. It'll only make ye ill again."

"My God!" he cried in piercing tones. His jaw relaxed, his eyes took a glazed look. "Too late!" he moaned. "Too late! Better to have died than have waked to hear this." He broke into a torrent of wild exclamations. Sally wrung her hands in despair. The moment was terrible for both.

"For I'm going to marry, Yum Yum,
Yum Yum,"

rattled the barrel-organ; the bluebottles droned in the curtains; and the cry of "Strawberry Ice" still resounded at intervals, like the note of a cuckoo.

"Ye didn't, master, ye didn't!" Sally cried frantically. "What rot ye *does* talk. Ye didn't murder nobody; ye wouldn't do no such

thing; ye wouldn't murder a fly, except ye was in yer temper, which ye ain't bin since ye thrown me downstairs, and I jolly well deserved it." She thrust him gently from his half-sitting posture, and laid her hand lightly, but firmly, on his head. "Lay down," she said in a tone between coaxing and command, "lay down, that's a good boy, and 'ave a jolly good snooze. It's all my fault. The doctor's orders was that if ye wanted to talk when ye was gettin' better, I wasn't to let ye, and 'ere I've been a-jabberin' away like one o'clock. Go to sleep and forget all about that rot."

"Forget!" murmured Jack bitterly. "To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub."

"Yes," said Sally, stroking his face as one humours a fretful child. "It'll rub off all the rubbidge." He shook off her arm and covered his face with his hands. "Ye're beginnin' agen!" cried Sally, with the petulance of an amateur nurse. "Go to sleep. Ye can dream about it, can't ye, if ye *must* think about it. Dream that yer caught and get hung for it, and then ye can wake up a new man."

"Leave me, Sally. You don't understand," moaned Jack.

"Oh, no, in course not! It's only 'Lizer as can understand, ain't it? When you talks nonsense and I talks sense, ye allus makes out that I'm in the wrong. Ain't ye got sense enough to know ye're mad? You've bin 'avin' bad dreams for days and days, and now ye fancy it's all true. Why, if I was to believe all I dreamed, I should be ten times as much a lady as 'Lizer, and know everything in the world, and 'ave a carriage like the Lord Mare, and millions o' pounds, and a gal of my own to 'elp me in the 'ousework, and marry—somebody; but I wakes up and finds it all rot, like the poor man as ye once read about to missis, five years ago come Christmas Eve, which was changed for a lark to a Sultana, and 'ad everythink o' the best, and ordered everybody about, and woke up at last like a fool, and that's what's a matter with you."

As Sally paused to take breath, she found Jack gazing at her with new hope in his eyes.

"Would to God you were right," he said. "Can I, indeed, have dreamed all this? Has it all been a fevered vision?"

"In course it is," replied Sally cheerfully. "Shut up now and go to sleep."

"If it be a dream," continued Jack, evidently struck by the new view, "I wonder if the dream dates back even further, as in Abou Hassan's case. Perhaps I am dreaming even now."

"In course y' are," again assented Sally. "Yer like Abey Hassan, I didn't remember the name afore. Go to sleep and wake up yer own self again."

For an instant the ecstasy of the idea overpowered Jack. The dull curtain of misery was rolled away for a moment and he felt an indescribable sensation of joyous freedom. The terrible scenes that haunted him were phantasies, product of the dream-imagination; he had not pledged himself to Eliza Bathbrill, the great

possibilities of life were still before him. His eyes filled with tears. But the illusion could not long continue. The pictures of memory were too vivid. He sat up.

"Why do you deceive me?" he cried. "It is not a dream. He is dead."

"So is Queen Anne," snapped Sally. "There's nobody else dead of your acquaintance 'Ow can I deceive yer if I don't know what yer talking about?"

Again Jack's eyes lit up with a gleam of hope.

"Sally," he said piteously "tell me the truth. Is the Premier yet alive?"

"The what?"

"The Prime Minister!"

"Who?"

"Floppington! The Right Honourable Arnold Floppington."

Sally looked puzzled. The gleam of hope in Jack's eyes became a steady glow. He must have jumped to a too hasty conclusion. Surely had the Premier been assassinated, his name would have been dinned in every one's ears. But he had been too often deceived to trust the voice of hope.

"You *must* have heard of Floppington," he repeated anxiously.

Then with a burst of inspiration he added, "The man that they say looks like me."

Sally's face expanded and her mouth opened in relief. "D'yer mean Floppy?"

"Yes," said Jack eagerly. "Is he alive?"

"Oh, 'im!" replied Sally contemptuously. "The man that gives away French cheese to women and spiles all the English trade. I s'pose 'e is. I 'eerd Pat Murphy argyfin' about 'im as if 'e was alive the other day in the shop, and singin' 'For 'e's a jolly good feller,' but 'e was drunk."

"Then he has not been murdered?" he panted.

"Not as I knows on," responded Sally. The revulsion was too great. He sank back exhausted.

"Thank God," he exclaimed. Then suddenly sitting up again: "But you have been secluded from the world; perhaps the news has not yet reached you. Is there a newspaper in the house?"

"Not as I knows on."

"Then get one! Any one will do."

Sally looked dubious. "I shall have to bolt through the shop-oth ways, or else——"

"Then I'll go for one myself," he said. Sally quickly drew the coverings over him.

"Lay down," she said. Then adding tenderly, "I don't mind boltin' for you," she darted out of the room and into the streets before the shrill cry of "Sally" was borne to the sick man's ears. For some minutes Jack lay tossing in uneasy suspense, though the keenness of his mental anguish had largely subsided.

"Even if they have not murdered him yet," he muttered sud-

denly, "the sword is suspended over his head, and may fall at any instant. I must go to him and tell him all."

He endeavoured to rise, but his brain was dizzy and a mist swam before his eyes and he fell back. He lay quite still with closed eyes. Presently a shock traversed his frame. "My God!" he murmured. "I've sworn not to divulge their secrets."

At this moment, Jack heard a click in the street beneath. His terrible situation in the Cave, when the Captain gave the order to cock pistols, was instantly recalled to him, and he lived again through those long moments in the few seconds which elapsed between the click of the barrel-organ and the bursting forth of a popular waltz. Immediately afterwards the music ceased, and he heard his mother's voice exclaiming: "Ye miserable furriner, not as I believe you're a native-furriner, what d'yer mean by turnin' up 'ere? Just read that 'ere Bill, will yer?"

"I don't care for your Bills," a sullen voice exclaimed. "I don't see why I shouldn't earn a honest penny 'cause you write in your window 'Brain-Fever Within, the best in Bethnal Green.'"

'Ye won't get anythin' by mixing up the brain-fever and the soup. Ye won't earn a 'onest penny or turn a 'onest penny 'ere. Don't grin, ye aggrawatin' monkey! You're a monkey, that's what ye are, and ye ought to sit on yer own organ. Clear off d'yer, or I'll lock yer up for pretendin' to be a furriner when ye can read English as well as—Sally! What's that ye're 'idin'?—as well as the Queen. You're no more Italian than a ice——"

Three bounds on the stairs, and Sally was once more in the room, leaving Mrs. Dawe still wrangling with the unfortunate musician. Jack clutched the paper with tremulous hand, but the letters swam before him. After a while they steadied a little. He ran his eye rapidly along the columns, and, luckily, soon lighted on the following words: "The Press Association understands that at yesterday's Cabinet Council the details of Mr. Floppington's——"—he uttered a cry of joy—"measure for giving Home Rule to Ireland——" The paper fell from his hand.

"The madman persists!" he groaned. He made another effort to rise, but a horrible sensation of faintness warned him that he had already overtaxed himself, and that if he would not lose the chance of rescuing the threatened Premier, he must husband his strength. "A telegraph form—quick!" he cried.

"Got none," said Sally, staring at him.

"A piece of paper, then; the clerk shall re-write it."

Sally tore a leaf out of the copy-book and gave it to him. Then she dipped the pen in the ink and made a blot on her dress. Jack took the pen, and sitting up, supported by Sally, put it to the paper. But his hand shook, and after he had made a trembling, amorphous stroke, the quill dropped from between his fingers.

"I knowed it," cried Sally, half weeping with compassion. "Ye're worryin' yerself for nothin'."

"Give me the pen again," said Jack.

"I won't!" said Sally, snatching it away. "Ye ain't fit to write."

"God forgive you, Sally," said Jack solemnly, "for the mischief you are doing. Give me the pen."

"It'll kill yer!" said Sally, bursting into tears. "There, take it.

But this time Jack's sight failed entirely, and the pen groped piteously in the air.

"What shall I do?" he cried in agonised tones. Tears born of weakness coursed down his cheeks.

"Master!" Sally exclaimed wildly; "can't I write it?"

"You? Heaven be thanked! Yes, you can write now. How lucky I taught you! There is a Providence that shapes our ends. But you only know the letters! Alas! my joy was premature—my last hope is gone!"

"What rot, master! Can't ye spell all the words to me?"

Jack's face lit up with joy and admiration.

"You are my good angel—my active impulse. You are a Wellington, a Napoleon; while I am——"

"Look sharp!" interrupted Sally. "I'm ready. Thought ye was in a hurry."

"Said I not you were a Napoleon? But I must think." He lay back and shut his eyes.

"What for?" queried Sally.

"I can't write without thinking," Jack explained.

"But writin' is like talkin', ain't it?" expostulated Sally. "Nobody thinks when they talks, and I don't see why they should when they writes."

"They do in a few instances, nevertheless," said Jack almost lightly, so comparatively buoyant were his spirits now. "Capital A-s y-o-u v-a-l-u-e y-o-u-r l-i-f-e—stop a minute, I mustn't telegraph that, it will raise suspicion in the office. Tear that up. I beg your pardon for troubling you so much. Now, capital R-i-g-h-t H-o-n. F-l-o-p-p-i-n-g-t-o-n, D-o-w-n-i-n-g S-t. Capital A-b-a-n-d-o-n Capital I-r-i-s-h p-o-l-i-c-y a-t o-n-c-e. Capital B-e-w-a-r-n-e-d i-n t-i-m-e. D-o n-o-t s-t-i-r a s-t-e-p t-i-l-l I w-r-i-t-e m-o-r-e f-u-l-l-y. There! Run at once! You will find some money in my waistcoat pocket."

"There's no capital J.D.," protested the amanuensis. "There ought to be a capital J. D., 'cause it's on your 'ankerchers."

"He will know whom it is from by the name of the office," he said wearily. "I am parched. Have you anything to drink?"

Sally hastily squeezed a few drops of lemon into a glass of water, and gave it to him. He drank it eagerly.

"I'll go to sleep," he murmured, "and try to find strength to write. Run now, my dear child."

Sally covered over his hand that was lying bare, touched the superimposed blanket with her lips, and fled downstairs ashamed, and blushing through her ink.

"Who sends this?" said the clerk, staring at the caligraphy.

"I does, in course," said Sally, with a grin of complacency.

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped the clerk. He called the post-office *employés*, and they gathered round it and perused and reperused it, and looked from the message to Sally and from Sally to the message.

"Perhaps ye'll know me when ye sees me," cried Sally. "I've got summat to do, young man, if you ain't."

"Do you mean to say that you are sending this to Floppington: 'As you value your life, abandon Irish policy at once. Do not stir a step till I write more fully.' Did you make this up yourself?"

"In course not, ye fool!" Sally replied composedly. "I've got nothing to do with Floppy, and a jolly good job too. I'm a respectable gal, and can choose my company, and I wouldn't be 'ere neither, if master 'adn't sent me."

"Who's master?"

"Mr. Dawe!" said Sally proudly. "Mr. Jack Dawe."

The *employés* looked at one another, and winked and smiled suggestively.

"So that's how the wind blows," said the telegraph clerk. "We have heard of your master, my dear."

CHAPTER IV.

CALM CONVALESCENCE.

"HOORAY, master!" cried Sally, rushing into the parlour with a letter. "I can read all the envelope and write a jolly sight better, too. Look at that capital J puffin' out its belly like a crinoline, and *there's* a capital D—Oh, lor!" and Sally laughed with good-natured superiority.

"At last!" exclaimed Jack. He broke open the seal, read the words in an instant, looked bewildered, read them again, looked alarmed, and let the paper flutter to the ground.

Sally, looking anxious, picked it up and inquired: "Will ye want me to copy the answer?"

"No, thank you, I do not think I can say anything in answer to this." He heaved a sigh, and the sympathetic slavey took up the burden and sighed even more deeply.

"Drat that girl!" exclaimed a voice. "It takes 'er 'ours to walk from the shop to the parlour like a funeral. Oh, 'ere y'are, my lady! Peel them taters, will yer, and do it as if the skin was yer own—don't take more off than necessary."

"Perhaps he has other information," Jack soliloquised. Then he looked doubtful and read the letter again. It ran thus:

"DEAR SIR,

"In reply to a telegram and to a communication marked 'private,' I am instructed to inform you that Mr. Floppington has had them under his careful consideration. So far as he can understand your meaning from your cunningly-worded and intentionally vague statements, he regrets to be unable to give any credence to them. He has on the contrary reason to believe, and is of the firm opinion that this is but another ruse. Mr. Floppington begs that you will not favour him with any more such communications.

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient Servant,

"JOHN TREMAINE."

"*He has reason to believe that this is but another ruse!*" repeated Jack. "Can it be a ruse after all? Perhaps he knows more than I do of the matter. *He has reason to believe*—what can that refer to? *Another* ruse, he says. Evidently he has been experimented upon by others. He must have special knowledge. I understand now the fearless calmness with which he has gone on preaching his revolutionary doctrines, just as though I had not warned him, while I have been sitting on thorns dreading that he might not have received the letter, unable to go to him and forced to think deeply at the risk of the recurrence of the fever, in order to avert the pangs of suspense which were certain to bring it back. A ruse! The view never struck me. But a ruse with what object? They certainly seemed in earnest with me. Merciful Heavens! what if misled by fancied knowledge, scorning their threats, he is going recklessly to his doom!"

It was only metaphorically that Jack had been sitting on thorns during the fortnight that elapsed between his dictating the letter to Sally—for that, too, he was unable to write—and the arrival of the response. In reality he had not been sitting at all for almost a week of it, and the rest of the time his seat had been the comfortable arm-chair whose silent eloquence had been denounced by the socialist. He was sitting there now, surrounded by all the sensual and intellectual luxuries of the bloated capitalist—a bottle of iced lemonade, copies of the *Times*, the *Standard*, and the *Daily News*, a box of cigars, and a number of the *Nineteenth Century*.

Enthroned in this curule chair the master daily sat during the sweet season of convalescence, dreaming away the hours in high speculation as his slothful soul loved, and only now and then awaking to the cruel realities of the situation; and Sally or his mother darted in occasionally to supply his wants, or to suggest those he did not feel.

Mrs. Dawe had by this time silently abandoned her small-pox theory. Perhaps having so long maintained to her customers the delusion that her son was guilty of brain-fever only, she began at last to believe in her own doctrines. Ecclesiastical history would supply

many a parallel to her psychological condition. But, however conditioned, it was certain that she had undergone a change of faith; for if, as some metaphysicians have maintained, action is the test of belief, how otherwise can we explain her quibbling refusal when the doctor triumphantly told her, after Jack had left his bed, that, to be consistent, she ought to burn the bedding?

For one moment she stared aghast—to Mrs. Dawe, good orthodox economist, property was sacred, and the thought of incendiary attacks on it filled her soul with horror. Then she burst forth:

“Burn the bedding! ye Irish assassin! What for?”

“G-g-erms!” gasped the poor doctor, retreating before an uplifted frying-pan.

“Who cares for yer germs!” Mrs. Dawe shrieked contemptuously, “or yer worms either? Don’t come yer tricks over me. I shouldn’t wonder if ye was uncle to a blanket shop, or fust cousin to a bed business. What’s it done to be burnt? Don’t it go to church?”

The doctor winced at this unexpected attack on his theological principles, and bitterly regretted his mad endeavour to tie Mrs. Dawe’s genius down to the reasonings of formal logic. “I don’t want to burn it, madam,” he explained deprecatingly. “I only say that if you really believe that Mr. Dawe was suffering from small-pox you *ought* to burn it. Small-pox is catching.”

“Sense ain’t, or ye wouldn’t talk like that before the picter o’ my late ’usband. Who’s to catch it, I should like to know? Nobody sleeps in his bed but hîself, and everybody, except a doctor, knows that no one can get the small-pox twice.”

“Indeed! And will the bedding never be washed?”

“How dare ye,” Mrs. Dawe interrupted wrathfully, “how dare ye hask such a question to the cleanest cook-shop in Bethnal Green? Why, I— But I’m busy. I can’t send in a long bill for lookin’ at a long tongue. Besides, even if somebody else could catch it they couldn’t from such a slight attack as my son’ were!”

“A slight attack, indeed! How do you know it was a slight attack?”

“’Cause you cured ’im,” retorted the old lady. And the doctor collapsed.

With her son Mrs. Dawe was less fiery. The danger in which he had been had thrown a sacred halo round him. She wa heartily rejoiced to see him down again in the old, cosy parlour. After all he was the only child she had ever had, and the beautiful instinct of maternity reasserted itself with tenfold power after its brief dormancy during the early dubious stages of his illness. I Mrs. Dawe had little self-sacrifice in her nature, she had plenty of affection—and she shed tears profusely over her boy, calling him her darling and her favourite child, and offering him pancakes. At first, indeed, she ventured to condemn his reading so many morning and evening newspapers. One day, however, the doctor, finding

Jack engaged in their perusal, protested against her permitting him this indulgence.

"My dear madam," the doctor said, "reading is hurtful."

"The Bible, too?" said Mrs. Dawe slyly.

The doctor did not perceive the implied sarcasm. "Not so much as other literature," he said hesitatingly; "and, if he must read, that (although I doubt whether he will care for it) is most fitting for his condition."

"Would it do him good to sleep durin' the day?" was the next innocent question.

"By all means. Let him have as much sleep as possible."

Mrs. Dawe could contain herself no longer. Her fat sides shook and her plump shoulders quivered with enjoyment. The doctor looked at her.

"D'yer know what I should do if I saw 'im readin' the Bible? I wouldn't pay ye a penny."

"Why not?" gasped the startled doctor.

"'Cause I should say ye 'adn't cured him o' the brain-fever!"

After this, Jack was allowed to read his papers in peace. He was even detected writing, without undergoing a verbal shower-bath.

The painter read the letter of the Premier a third time. His agitation diminished.

"He seems so dogmatic, so positive," he murmured. "He must have good reason, as he says, for refusing to be alarmed by my letter. His cold dogmatism is reassuring. Perhaps I am troubling about a trifle. But then, where is the ruse? . . . Can they be merely trying whether his Irish policy is disinterested before giving him their cordial support? . . . Perhaps they would not have murdered me after all. Threatened men live long."

The painter lit a cigar and smoked it reflectively. When he had got half through it he murmured: "He has not attended to the rest of my letter. Unless it be a reply to say: 'Mr. Floppington begs that you will not favour him with any more such communications.' The snub is deserved." He laughed bitterly. "The snub is deserved," he repeated.

He took up a newspaper at random, and soon became immersed in its contents. Ever and anon exclamations burst from him; of surprise, of bitterness, of sarcasm, of pure rhetoric, of scorn, or of humility and self-reproach. Gradually the last species began to predominate. "The people wish it," he cried. "*Le roi le veut.*" He threw down the paper. "What profits it to read more? I was wiser at first in eschewing the newspapers. To immerse myself again in politics would be to destroy what *raison d'être* there was in my unhappy resolve. If the fear did not still haunt me that every hour may bring terrible tidings, I would withdraw from the contemplation of a world in which I have no part. That fear is happily growing less—the lapse of time, the absence of any fresh incident, the security and confidence of the Premier himself, all have contributed to render the once vivid images of danger shadowy and

dim. There is yet time to carry out my intention of cutting myself temporarily, if not entirely, aloof from the logomachy of politics, and retiring into philosophic meditation. I am afraid the subjects of my meditation have been very often far from philosophic." The smile that verges on tears hovered pathetically around his mouth. The panorama of his recent life shifted before him. He closed his eyes and let the scenes flit along, and his mobile face changed as often as they.

"Enough," he cried suddenly, as though the representation of the tragi-comedy was due to another's volition. "I cannot bear it."

He turned his chair to the table, took up a sheet of paper half-covered with sprawling sentences, and, thanking God that this was yet left to him, began to read :

"The indubitable living impulse of Faith it is that I demand attention for, and the argument is one which agnostics, despite their elaborate display of analysis, have rather turned away from than met. The Christian talks of the spiritual man, the biologist retorts by dissecting a spider. This as a *caveat* to my scientific antagonists. By the living impulse of Faith, I mean that influx of moral strength accompanied by an inspired clearness of perception, wherein the petty miseries of life——" He paused suddenly, affrighted by a wild uncontrollable burst of laughter that issued from his lips.

He threw down the pen, and leaned his head on the table.

"The illusion of manhood succeeds to the dreams of youth. What is life but a worthless bauble encased in manifold wrappings of illusion? Slip one off, and lo ! another is found in its stead. Why do I deceive myself? A failure in Action, a failure in Thought, bringing misery to all I love or pity, there is naught left for me—naught."

He lay there muttering brokenly, and the dusk closed in around him.

The shop was full of the first batch of supping customers, but the bustle and clatter sounded far off, as if belonging to some world of dream. The faint, cool breath of evening stole through the window, but could bring no calm to his throbbing brain.

"Naught . . . Except to marry Eliza."

He burst into hysterical laughter.

"Poor, patient girl. . . I pity thee. Thy fate is dark as my own."

Meanwhile the darkness of the room grew deeper, and the veil of night hid the secret of his pain from mortal eyes. Only a thin line of moonlight rested upon the bent form.

When the last rays of day were quite dead, the gas in the kitchen was lit ; and the light falling through the glass of the parlour, a dreamy semi-obscurity reigned in the room, and there was a strange division of light and shadow. The half-light fell upon the bowed head of the painter, but within his soul there was the same terrible darkness.

Suddenly he felt the light caressing touch of a gloved hand upon his feverish cheek. He started up with a wild throbbing of the heart. A woman's face, sad and sweet as the summer night, looked into his through the gloom.

CHAPTER V.

TOUT PASSE, TOUT CASSE, TOUT LASSE.

THE air was thrilled with the music of tender tones.

"Are you better, Jack?"

The painter started back before the beauteous apparition.

"I am better, thank you," he said wearily.

Then there was silence in the room. The woman stood there like a spirit, her loveliness breaking the dark to beauty. But the man's eyes were cast down, and he watched the shadows on the floor. Presently, seeing that he remained motionless, she murmured in reproachful accents:

"You do not ask me to sit down."

Her words seemed at last to affect him, for he raised his head quickly.

"A thousand pardons," he said in pained tones. "Will you take my seat? You will find it very comfortable." He was rising, but she stopped him.

"No, thank you. I do not want to be comfortable. I will sit on the sofa."

There was a world of pathos in the simple words, that moved the hearer more than the most passionate rhetoric. He tried to speak, but knew not what to say. He bent his head once more and fell into a mournful reverie whose bitterness was intensified by the consciousness of the sad, still face beside him.

So they sat side by side, and between them yawned the gulf of silence. Constrained silence was between these two, once linked by the golden bridge of loving speech. Was the old love gone so utterly that no remembrance of what had been could come to soften the cold rigidity of their meeting? Did no picture of what the silver moonlight had oft looked upon frame itself anew in the dreary dusk of the chamber? Did no memories of sweet kisses, or woodland walks, or summer mornings in the Park, at the side of the lake, or on its glassy bosom, shed some dying fragrance over the hearts they had once gladdened?

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked away the seconds—the seconds they had so often passed in delicious converse—but the man and woman sat, each in mute loneliness. It was as though

the ghost of their old love hovered between them and froze their once warm lips to silence.

In the shop the nightly bustle was at its height—the clatter of plates, the bursts of laughter, the exclamations of all kinds and of all pitches brought to their ears the busy life of unromantic humanity. No, not utterly unromantic; for was it not the omnipresent, omnipotent element of Love that gave occasion to those very guffaws, prompted as they were by rough, playful sarcasm on somebody's young man. And in the road itself, where the stars throbbled in the unclouded sky, and where the lamps shone like the glowworms of some voluptuous tropical clime, were there not couples on couples promenading in ecstatic silence? Truly are there silences and silences, and to the couple in the little back parlour the silence was oppressive beyond the sharpest speech. The woman was the first to speak.

"Shall I light the gas?" she asked, in tones of ineffable sadness.

"As you like." She listened eagerly to catch the slightest tremor in his voice, but there was no lingering trace of emotion, naught but a cruel, hard indifference. She made a movement towards the mantelpiece and groped for the matches. Her companion did not follow her with his eyes—a pang traversed her heart—the graces of sinuous movement and of statuesque posture thrilled him no more, for him the old feminine charm had evidently died with his love. He seemed carved in stone. She found the matches and struck one. It flared up for a moment and went out. She made no attempt to strike another. She reseated herself listlessly. Perhaps she thought that the dreariness of the room was more in harmony with the weariness of their spirits.

The momentary flare-up of the match had illumined the bowed head of her whilom lover. It seemed to her that he had never looked so old. Surely the worn, bent figure was not that of a man in his prime, rather of one whose thoughts are no longer of love because they are no longer of life.

And still no words came from his lips—and he never knew how she was longing for him to begin, never understood that she whose syllables were once his sweetest music feared to break the silence.

Ah! happy lovers that arm-in-arm saunter in the road, it is well that your bright eyes look not in upon this spectacle. For to this complexion must Love come at last. Now your love glows like some planet new-create, but soon—ah, soon!—it will grow cold; its birds dumb, its verdure dead, its living fountains frozen into eternal silence. Gather the roses while ye may, for not Time but Love is flying, and soon there shall be no harvest to reap but ashes and Dead Sea fruit.

Presently the woman spoke again, and in her voice was the concentrated anguish of a lifetime.

"Have you nothing to say to me?"

"Nothing." The word seemed to resume all the flatness and

deadness of the situation, all the dull aching blank of lives whence Love had flown. Some consciousness of this was borne in even upon the coarser perception of the man, for he shuddered drearily. All the delicate quintessence of passion that saturates with subtle perfume the commonplace details of everyday life was evaporated. Even the soft ray of moonlight that streamed in from the backyard fell garishly upon the horsehair of the sofa.

The silence was intolerable to the woman.

"Mowbray warned me to be cautious," she thought. "But it seems that two can play at that game."

She began nervously picking at the rose she wore in her bosom. She was not unaware of the picturesqueness of the action, and the fragrant petals, as they fluttered to the ground, might well seem emblems of a wasted youth. Amid all her embarrassment from the difficulty and delicacy of the situation, there was in her at the commencement of the interview a delicious over-consciousness of its pathetic dreariness, that made her not averse from prolonging it. But at length the charm paled. It would not do at all that Jack should have nothing to say to her. His neutrality would leave the position *in statu quo*. And the *status quo* was eminently unsatisfactory. So she made a plunge. It is the peculiarity of conversation that a subject may be led up to from any commencement whatever, and Eliza's first words were random, though not purposeless.

"Jack dear," she said sweetly, "do you remember the night when we went to see 'The Private Secretary'?"

"I beg pardon," he said, starting up. "You want to see my private secretary?"

She bit her lips. He might have had the decency to refrain from stupid jokes. It was evident he could not rise to the sentiment of the occasion. A moment afterwards he was even smiling, which made the dereliction from the code of romance graver still.

"Good, faithful Sally," he muttered. The sweetness of Eliza's tones grew intensified.

"Don't be absurd," she pleaded. "You do remember that night." She bent her beautiful face close to his, and in her eyes was the light of tender memories.

"What night?" he asked coldly.

"The night we saw 'The Private Secretary,' and came home in a cab because it was raining cats and— Oh! such a fearful storm—don't you remember?"

"No!" At the brutal reply the lovelight died out of her eyes. She turned her head away. All the woman in her revolted against this forgetfulness, whether it were feigned or real. Then suddenly she broke into a smile of triumph.

"You are very cruel to me," she murmured sadly.

Jack flushed deeply. "My dear child!" he exclaimed in much agitation. "Cruel! God forbid! But you are right. I have

been cruel, through my terrible want of forethought. Thoughtless, Eliza, I have been, but not intentionally cruel."

"Oh, you have, Jack, you have!" she said in a choking voice.

His tones took a sympathetic tremor. "God knows I have tried to do my best. You do not know all, Eliza, or you would pity me."

She looked at him with a strange, hard glitter in her eyes.

"I do pity you, indeed I do. When you were ill I could not rest. The shock prostrated me. I kept my bed, though I did not add to your mother's anxieties by letting her know my condition! But you have no pity for me."

"You wrong me, Eliza," he said in a pained voice. "Have I been unkind to you in aught?"

"Unkind?" Eliza repeated with bitter scorn. "I do not ask for kindness. I would rather die than take kindness from the hands which have once tendered me love."

The passionate outburst moved Jack even as it had moved Eliza herself in that week's *London Journal*. His eyes filled with tears of compassion.

"Poor child!" he said. "You loved me so much then?"

"Never heart beat truer than mine, Jack. To think that but a few short months ago we were happy in our mutual love—and now I am so wretched—oh! so wretched." She burst into tears.

Overpowered by emotion, Jack rose from his seat and began to pace the narrow room.

"Don't cry," he said in fierce entreaty. "You madden me. Great God! am I responsible for this misery, too?"

"Responsible!" she cried in heartrending tones. "Why, oh why did you ever come into my life? Would I had never seen you."

Jack groaned. "We cannot recall the past," he said bitterly.

"Oh! that we could! I should still be a happy light-hearted girl. Now I feel so old—so old and weary. What had I done to you that you should rob me of my innocent happiness?" Emotion checked her utterance. She buried her face in her dainty cambric handkerchief, and sobbed convulsively.

The painter clenched his fist in agitation.

"At first," sobbed Eliza, recovering herself with an effort, "I was so happy because I believed in you and looked up to you, oh! so much. You were so good to me, so tender and true. Now you are another man altogether."

The painter stood still suddenly. "Another man!" he said.

"You are so cold, your very kindnesses stab me to the heart. Oh! I cannot bear it. You have made my life a burden to me. I cannot, cannot bear it. Why prolong my torture by feigned gentleness? Complete your work at once. Say you *hate* me." Exhausted by this wild appeal, the woman broke down once more.

"Hate you!" the unhappy painter exclaimed desperately "You are not logical, my poor child. If you believe that

wrought you misery, it is you that should hate *me*. Say you do hate me, and I confess I deserve your hatred. But why should I hate *you*?"

Eliza drew a deep breath and clenched her teeth, and could her companion have looked beneath the delicate cambric, he would have seen a face distorted, not by weeping, but by an expression of angry resolution alternating with one of anxious cunning.

"Hate *you*!" she cried, accentuating the pronoun with inexpressible tenderness. "Do you think I could hate *you*? Ah! you little know the heart of a woman. Why should I be ashamed to own it? It is our nature. But you are a man and cannot understand. With us, love never dies but with life. Strike me dead at your feet, and with my last breath I will confess I love you, and I would rather die by your hand than live without you."

The intensity of Eliza's emotion bewildered the painter. He put his hand to his brow.

"Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of woman," he murmured dubiously. "Surely not, if this be woman's love. . . . I am a man and cannot understand; yet, oh! my lost love, it would seem that I have sounded greater depths than you. Alas, for the man and woman whom Fate has once dis severed. Always it would seem the love of one—God help that one—remains unchanged, undestroyed even by cruelty, while the other turns lightly to fresh woods and pastures new."

Out of the corners of her eyes Eliza watched the painter, though she could not catch his mutterings. The absence of any direct response to her last tragic outburst emboldened her to make the supreme experiment. It was a critical moment. She turned pale at the thought of how much depended upon what would happen in it. Never did mortal stand with clearer consciousness at the parting of the ways. She rose wildly from the sofa and stood before him with arms extended.

"Jack!" she cried in tones of piercing pathos, "do not desert me! You will not leave me for ever? Come back to me, come to my arms again and be my old lover once more."

The painter gazed at the lovely face wet with tears, and felt himself trembling.

Meanwhile within the shop the hubbub of gorging humanity went on as though no tragedy was being lived through a few feet off, and the mistress and her handmaid darted about unconscious of how strangely their lives were to be affected by the issue.

The painter made a gesture of determination. "Why should I deceive you?" he cried. His tones grew solemn. "My poor girl, you have cost me more thought than you imagine. Your old lover will, I fear, never return to you again."

"Oh, my heart!" gasped the poor girl. She fell back on the sofa with her hands on her bosom. After a moment she raised herself feebly on her elbow, and in the faint light Jack could see that her teeth were set and her face was rigid. She did not burst

into wild hysterical exclamations as he expected ; now that the blow had fallen, she seemed to be summoning all her strength to bear it. "Is this your boasted sense of honour?" she asked in a low tone of scorn that made her hearer wince. "Is this the fulfilment of even your recent promise to marry me in three months?"

"I did promise, but it was unthinkingly," he pleaded humbly. "I had no right to make the promise, indeed I had not. I might have foreseen how circumstances would kill love. It was human." Then in a burst of uncontrollable emotion, he exclaimed: "I have ruined two lives by my folly."

Eliza started up, her eyes darting fire. "How dare you tell me that the love you once bore me has ruined your life? You were never worthy of me, you miserable sign-painter!" She stopped suddenly and bit her lip. "Forgive me, my own," she said. "Misery has driven me mad. Oh, this is some awful dream! It is not true, my darling. Tell me that your heart is still mine."

"I pity you from the bottom of my heart. If I can promote your happiness in aught, you will find me a sure friend. Turn your love elsewhere, my dear child, for, as you say, I was never worthy of it. Forget me and be happy."

"Forget!" Eliza exclaimed bitterly. She leaned against the mantelpiece, pale and statuesque. "Heaven forgive you. Do you know what you are asking?"

The sadness of his face grew deeper. He bowed his head. "Heaven help me," he cried. "I do!"

Something in the tones made her pale face flush violently. She stretched out her hand and caught hold of his arm. "Oh, why do you desert me thus?" she exclaimed. "There is some strange reason—some secret you are hiding from me."

He struggled to free his arm, but she clung to him. "I will know," she cried.

"Be silent," he said sternly. "You must bear your pain even as I bear mine."

Eliza uttered a shriek. "You love another!"

He did not answer, but she read the admission in his eyes. For a moment Eliza's breast was the arena of contending passions—jealousy, indignation, scorn, joy, loathing of her past love, were uppermost by turns; but it was jealousy that recurred oftenest in the lightning play of impulse. She could not trust herself to speak. She gave him one glance of ineffable disdain, and swept towards the door. The painter was moving to open it, but she waved him back and threw it open with a superb gesture of wounded pride. She stopped suddenly on the threshold, arrested by a singular sight. Sally, black as the devil with ink and soot, was dancing an Irish jig in a corner of the kitchen. In one hand she balanced a heavy saucepan, while the other waved a greasy ladle. Pit patter, pit patter, pit pat, pit pat, went her feet on the floor in a Bacchantesque ecstasy of furious motion, and she accompanied her-

self by hoarse whispers of "he loves me, he loves me, he loves me true."

Eliza passed through the kitchen, bestowing a vindictive glance upon the light-hearted and light-footed drudge, who halted on one leg on perceiving herself observed, and brought the other gradually to the ground with the air of one who is performing an ordinary series of motions. Then she stuck out her tongue and grinned in saucy triumph.

But Eliza's breast was in too great a tumult to be much moved by these insults. To one who had just gone through a tense scene of passion, they were infantile. So, carefully avoiding any contact with the girl, or her appurtenances, she glided into the shop.

"Two twos is four, three 'aypence change. Going already, 'Lizer?" exclaimed Mrs. Dawe.

"Yes," answered Eliza loudly. "Never more will my foot cross this threshold."

"Good gracious, 'Lizer! No I 'aven't got to give ye twopence change, 'cos ye owes me 'aypenny. If yer memory's short, I don't see why my till should be. What's a-matter with you, 'Lizer? Got the sulks?"

By this time the customers were interested in what seemed the tit-bit of a family quarrel. They even ceased masticating the material morsels for a moment.

"Ask your son," the injured girl replied. Then, with quivering lips (for what it cost her to sacrifice her pride, no one knew but herself), she said in a lower tone, though still distinctly: "We have parted for ever. He loves another."

Mrs. Dawe staggered, and all but dropped a plate. When she recovered herself, Eliza was gone. Murmurs of "Shame!" arose from the assembly, most of whom knew how long the two had kept company. Mrs. Dawe rushed into the parlour to expostulate with her son, leaving the customers to discuss the romantic story with ever-growing interest, as new perspectives unrolled themselves, and new points of view appeared. It was universally agreed that nothing else was to have been expected from such a man, and that, indeed, they had all said so on various occasions to other people who were not present on this. By the next afternoon all Bethnal Green Road knew that Jack was involved in a low intrigue with some girl, who had insisted on his getting rid of the clog of Eliza, and that by a blackguardly course of treatment he had at last succeeded in doing so.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HALL OF FLIRTATION.

ELIZA walked quickly to the bottom of the road, and entered the Bethnal Green Museum, where a mechanical contrivance ticked her off as one of the East End toilers, whose leisure was ennobled by its treasures of Art and Science. Here she found a young man impatiently walking up and down amid the cases on the ground-floor. The vast hall was almost deserted. A little flirtation was going on in corners, and the spectacle of a couple in earnest colloquy attracted no attention.

"Well!" exclaimed the young man. "Is it over?"

She gave him one pathetic glance, then averted her eyes and sank down into a seat behind an exquisite Indian vase.

Mowbray hovered over her uneasily.

"What is it, my darling?" he whispered.

The girl looked up with piteous reproachful gaze.

"You are overcome," he said anxiously. "Compose yourself, Bess. You shall tell me at your leisure."

The composing took a long time, during which Mowbray, surrounded as he was by masterpieces of art, had eyes for nothing but the beauties of nature. His companion sat as silent as a statue, and might have been taken for one, did not the members of that apathetic race habitually appear wholly in white, or in an exaggerated evening-dress for ladies. She wore gloves, too—a barbarous custom adopted by no self-respecting statue. Of one of these gloves—with its contents—Mowbray managed to possess himself, and he caressed it as though it were his own moustache.

"I am better now, Lionel," the girl says at last. "Oh! it was cruel to make me suffer so."

"Suffer so!" he repeats with an indignant gesture.

She smiles sadly.

"You do not understand," she says in a low tone. "I loved him once."

As she makes the confession her thick, voluptuous eyelashes fall over her dark eyes. His grasp tightens convulsively.

"But you love him no longer?" he asks in passionate tones. Her head droops. She is silent. "My own Bess," he cries, "what change is this? Would you had never met again!"

His grasp hurts her now, but no sound of pain escapes from her lips.

"I went to him—you know with what purpose——"

"Don't say you have repented, Bess!" he interrupts pleadingly.

"You carried it out, did you not?"

But she continues, as though she has not heard: "I found him

sitting in the twilight on a low chair, looking so pale and feeble, that the love I had thought killed by a new affection revived. My heart grew full of pity and self-reproach. It seemed to me that I was about to blast his life. He was buried in reverie, and for a little time I stood still, overpowered by emotion. At last I put my hand to his feverish cheek—he turned, and, at the look of joy that lit up his eyes, mine filled with tears. He caught me in his arms and kissed away my courage.”

The listener makes a passionate movement, but she goes on: “‘My love,’ he cried, ‘I thought you had left me for ever! In the gloaming, oh, my darling, I have been thinking of you.’ At these words all the tender memories of the Past overwhelmed me. I thought of all our happy hours together, and I felt myself yielding.”

“But you did not yield,” he bursts forth.

For the first time she raises her eyes to his, and in them is the light of love which banishes all his alarm.

“No, darling,” she says, “I did not yield.”

He bends down suddenly, and presses a kiss on the warm lips. Only the quaint figures on the Indian vase saw the action; but the rajahs, and the Begums, and the nabobs, and the Nautch girls were used to the sight.

“Among the recollections which flooded my soul were the delicious days we spent at Ramsgate. But unfortunately for Jack, with the thought of them came the thought of *you*.”

He pats the gloved hand affectionately.

“Yes, dearest,” he murmurs. “Shall I ever forget the day I took you back to Ramsgate? And you had not forgotten.”

“No,” she answers simply, “I had not forgotten. The thought of you made me strong again. I felt that though I loved him well, I loved you better.”

He would have folded her in his arms, but the passing of a policeman prevented the ecstatic movement. There was a pause till the functionary had vanished.

“And have you entirely broken off with him yet?” he asks more calmly. “I do not want you to meet him again.”

“I shall never meet him again.”

“But you didn’t manage to make *him* back out of it?” he says, with a recurrence of anxiety. “After that welcome he gave you I don’t see how you could. And, to tell you the truth, I did not expect that you would. It isn’t so easy to change an ardent lover into an enemy in a few moments.”

The girl breaks into a low laugh of triumph. “I did, though!”

“You little Machiavelli!” he cries. “I must tell the Captain.”

He stops suddenly.

“Who is the Captain?” she inquires curiously.

“An old friend of mine. And I hope he’ll be my best man,” he adds. “When he sees you, and hears of this, he will confess that you are an acquisition. And you will be!”

"Is he in the army, or in the navy?"

"A military man, Bess, who has often smelt gunpowder."

"He must be a brave man!" she exclaims enthusiastically, her dark eyes flashing. "I think if I were a man I should love danger."

"Bravo!" he cries. "You shall be our Queen—our good Queen Bess. I am a man, but I confess I love you better than I love danger."

"But you *are* brave," she remonstrates. "You do not shirk danger. Do I not remember that day? Jack, Mr. Dawe, had none of that devil-may-care heroism. He painted signs from morning to night, and never fell from the ladder in his life."

"You will be happier without him," he says sympathetically. "But tell me how you managed to make him cut the knot."

"The plan was simple."

"Or *he* was," he interrupts. "From the way he played his cards, I should have expected him to see through it," he thought. "Suppose I *am* the Premier."

His face broadened with a smile of admiration.

"And it was you that suggested it."

"I? The only plan I could think of was to commence a quarrel somehow, and then keep cool and let him make all the running."

"I mean the *thought* of you," she says with a smile. "And of our first meeting. After some loving conversation I turned the talk on the events of that day. As I have always told you, he is a most passionate and obstinate man, and he cannot bear to be crossed. When I recalled the way he had deserted me, and said in an injured tone that he owed me an explanation, he grew dumb of a sudden."

Mowbray hangs eagerly upon her words. "Did you make him tell you anything?" he asked.

"If he had, I should not have known what to do. Remembering his reluctance to be questioned, I hoped to irritate him, and I did."

Mowbray nods his head in approval. "You had only one card, but that was trumps."

"Seeing that he did not answer, I gently but firmly insisted on knowing. He was silent for a long time, but all at once he started up with a face whose horrible expression I shall never forget. 'Woman,' he cried savagely, 'why do you torture me thus?' 'Torture you, my darling,' I said reproachfully. 'You must have a good deal to be ashamed of, if a simple question tortures you. It is your conscience that tortures you, not my question.' 'Hold your tongue,' he shouted, 'mind your own business.' 'It is my business,' I answered indignantly. 'As your future wife, I demand to know this dread secret.' I could not have made a better remark; for, as he did not know what to reply, he lost his head completely. 'My wife shall only know what I choose to tell her,' he

screamed, hoarse with passion. "And if that doesn't suit you, find a husband who will tell you all the girls he's flirted with in his life."

"By St. Patrick, he's a trump to keep a secret!" mutters the listener. "If he were only a little less virtuous, what a good fellow he would be."

"His last words stung me in spite of myself," continues Eliza. "'All the girls he has flirted with,' I exclaimed bitterly. 'And have you, pray, flirted with anybody else?' 'What if I have!' he shouted. 'Perhaps you still flirt,' I said coldly. 'Perhaps I do,' he answered, which I knew was a deliberate lie. I uttered a shriek. 'You love another,' I cried, and stayed to hear no more. On my way out I took care to let Mrs. Dawe know that her son loved somebody else. All the customers heard the statement and saw me leave the shop with an injured mien, so that there will be no lack of witnesses."

The delighted admiration of Mowbray can no longer be restrained. He clasps her passionately to his breast.

"You little Machiavelli!" he repeats. "And you say he is well off?"

"When we were first betrothed, two years and five months ago, he had a couple of hundred in the Moorfields Bank, I know," she says.

He kisses her again. "Two years and five months ago!" she says with a twinkle in his eye. "He has treated you shamefully."

An expression of revengeful hatred flits across her face. "That's the trick," he cries, smiling. "That will fetch the jury." Eliza looks up, half indignant, but meeting the silken monstache, the bright eyes, and the white teeth of her smiling lover, the cloud on her brow gradually dissipates. "'Pon my word, Bess!" says Mowbray, "one would think you loved him still."

"Not after what he said to-day!" she cries with sudden intensity. "I hate him!" She stamps her dainty foot.

"That's right!" he says. "He shall pay dearly for his whistle."

"I should like to ruin the scoundrel," she hisses through her clenched teeth.

"May I be hanged," he mutters, "if the copybooks aren't right after all. Honesty *is* the best policy, for you can steal more *by* law than *against* it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE PAINTER IS DISOWNED.

JACK was up early the next day, and never did day open with brighter auguries. He awoke with an indescribable sensation of exhilaration. The sun was shining through the slightly-opened window of his bedroom in the intense silence of early morn, and there was a suggestion of freshness and purity in the yet cool atmosphere. Moreover he had gone to bed early and had slept soundly. But this exhilaration was not entirely due to the effects of physical causes upon a sensitive organisation. A mental load had been lifted from his oppressed soul. Eliza, his mother had reproachfully told him, would in all probability come to see him no more.

He got up and dressed, feeling almost young again. Then he walked buoyantly to the window and threw it open to its fullest extent. He stood there, looking up dreamily at the long perspective of red chimney-pots, and the terraces of sunny tiles.

" Dear God, the very houses seem asleep,
And all that mighty heart is lying still."

As he said the words, a delicious calm stole upon him. The evils of life vanished in the contemplation of the eternal silence. His querulousness of the day before recurred to his memory as a disordered dream, or as the fretfulness of a feverish child. "I have found peace at last," he cried. "Henceforth, I will repine no more. In man's life, too, there should be a central calm subsisting at the heart of endless agitation."

He leant on the window-sill, and abandoned himself to the ecstasy of speculation, till the air began to be obscured by the smoke of a hundred chimneys.

"No, it is not a fiction," he cried suddenly, "this living impulse of faith, this influx of moral strength accompanied by an inspired clearness of perception, as it has been defined by ——?" he paused to search his memory. Suddenly he struck his brow with his hand. "It's my own definition," he cried. "I should have used the morning for writing."

He hurried downstairs into the parlour and took up his MS. His mother and Sally were up, but they were busy in the kitchen and did not disturb him. After reading what he had already done, and making only a few verbal alterations in it, he continued his paper. For more than an hour he wrote steadily, his hand firm, his brain clear, and his heart full of satisfaction.

The voice of the drudge recalled him from his intellectual excursion.

"'Ere's another one!" it cried. "With all the letters pointy like Mother Shipton's nose."

"Put it down, Sally," he said, without looking up. "Was not evolution known to St. Paul?"

"Dunno," said Sally. "I'll arx missis."

"There! I have lost the thread and must re-read it. Is not Hegel's intuitive idea of evolution nobler——?"

"Shall I fry ye some eggs, master?"

Jack groaned and threw down the pen. "Do what you will with me," he cried with humorous resignation. Even the loss of the thread could not depress his mercurial spirits. He took up the letter, looked curiously at the envelope and opened it. Sally, who watched his face, saw a smile appear upon it, but a moment afterwards he turned deadly pale. The epistle, which was from Eliza, ran as follows:

"DEAR JACK,

"I write you these few lines, hoping to find you in good health, as, thank God, it leaves me at present. You heartless scoundrel! You shall not, with impunity, play with a girl's heart. For almost two and a half years you have been destroying my youth. Again and again you have postponed the ceremony at the hymeneal altar, and only lately I left an excellent place in order to prepare for our union. You have ruined my career in every respect. All the bright hopes of my life are faded and gone. I sit mid the ashes and mourn. In my desolation I solace myself by reading your letters. Oh! how they glow with the fire of Love for your supple Sacharissa, your voluptuous Venus, your clinging Cleopatra. And the poetry is so beautiful—I cry over it. Do you remember that serenade?

' Everything sleeps but the stars, love,
The white moon and me.
Waken thou, too, my beloved,
Moon of Love's sea.'

"I remain,

"Ever your Loving Lass,

"ELIZA.

"P.S.—I shall claim £2,000 damages."

The painter ate no breakfast that morning. The theological article lay untouched by its author. The delightful sensation of exhilaration died away. He stretched himself on the sofa in a state of utter prostration and tried to think. He did not as yet realise all the horror of his position. He simply felt that his peace of mind had fled once more, and that innumerable anxieties and embarrassments loomed vaguely in the fog. In this condition he was found by his mother, with the fatal missive crumpled up in his hand.

"What's a-matter, Jack?" she cried. "Y'ain't took bad again I hope. It's all yer own fault, readin' and writin' all day long, as if ye was a Board School."

For answer he opened his hand and displayed the letter.

"The vagabond!" she ejaculated. "I should like to know what 'e means by sendin' in 'is bill already, what with ir come taxes and Queen's taxes a-worritin' me into the grave, not as I could ever understand why we should pay the Queen's taxes for 'er. Just you see that 'e ain't been puttin' it on and——"

"It is from Eliza," he interrupted feebly.

"From 'Lizer! I thought she'd be lettin' ye have a piece of her mind, and ye deserve it, for the way ye've treated that sweet, good girl, is enough to make her turn in her grave, and so lovely too. Ye've been 'umbugging 'er about for years, poor thing. When she came into the shop last night, she was as white as the best flour, it made my 'art bleed to see 'er. Take my word, Jack, you will be sorry for this."

"I am sorry I ever had anything to do with her. She is bringing an action against me for breach of promise of marriage. She claims £2,000 damages."

Mrs. Dawe staggered. Her breath forsook her. She turned "as white as the best flour." There was a moment of dread silence in which the beating of the old woman's heart was the only sound to be heard.

"£2,000 damages!" she shrieked. "The hungrateful thief, the highway robber, the hextravagant hussy. So that's how ye gets yer gloves, and parasols, and fallals, ye howdacious pick-pocket! Did yer think I didn't know yer character all along, settin' up for a lady? As if yer could deceive the old woman, ye sly, ugly, little cat."

"My dear Mrs. Dawe," said Jack, rising up in excitement, and striving to stem the torrent; "you don't do her justice, indeed you don't."

"I wish I could—she'd be breakin' stones at Portland in a week's time. She's no better than a common thief."

"Nonsense!" cried Jack sharply. "She is a highly respectable girl."

Mrs. Dawe burst into tears. "Sally!" she shrieked in agonised accents: "Is there no one in the world to stand by me? 'Ere's my own son turnin' agen me—and takin' the part of a 'ighway robber—as I nussed in the small-pox and the brain-fever. Oh my dear late 'usband, why did ye leave yer poor lone widder?"

Jack sprang from the sofa in bewilderment. The vagaries of his mother irritated even the usually mild painter. Despite his late experiences, she was still to him *une femme incomprise*. "For Heaven's sake be logical," he cried. "If she thinks herself injured, as I confess she has reason to do, she has every right to seek compensation."

Mrs. Dawe uttered a groan, and seizing the lid of a saucepan,

she hurled it at the unfortunate Sally who had come at her call. "Madman!" she cried, "why ye'd 'ang yerself if ye 'ad the chance. Perhaps ye'll go into Court and tell a bushel of lies to ruin me. Yes, that's it. Ye're in a plot with her to rob me, that's what ye're after, ye good-for-nothing vagabond, and then ye'll fly to America and enjoy the damages together. But I'll stop yer little game. I'll let the jury know the truth. 'E never was engaged to 'er at all, yer 'ighness. 'E never was a-courtin' 'er at all, yer ludship. It was 'er as was a-courtin' him the 'ole time, yer wusship, and ye ought to make her pay the damages for desertin' 'im, yer honours. 'E never injured 'er at all, yer 'ighness, and even if 'e did, 'e didn't do more than twopennorth of damages. Why even if 'e broke 'er 'art, is any woman's 'art, yer ludship, worth £2,000? Is it a 'art of gold, my luds and gentlemen; is it a 'art that can't be replaced under £2,000? The Salvation Army'll give 'er a new 'art for nothin'; and, besides, she never had none to break. And if ye mend 'ers, yer wusships, ye breaks mine, so where's the justice, my luds, where's the justice?"

"There does seem to be something in Galton's doctrine of hereditary genius," murmured Jack, overcome by this long harangue. "But while the son has the gift of Parliamentary eloquence, the mother has forensic ability of a still higher order. That defence of hers is surely an epitome of much special pleading. Whatever you may tell the jury," he said aloud, "you will gain nothing by defaming an innocent girl, you will only make the damages heavier."

"An innocent girl! Why she ain't fit to come into a decent 'ouse," she interrupted. "Ye must marry 'er, Jack," she cried, whilst the big round tears ran down her smutty face.

"That is impossible!"

"'Ow can it be impossible? There's you, ain't ye? There's 'Lizer, ain't there? There's a Register to marry ye, ain't there? Then what are ye talkin' about? And where ye could get a 'andsomer gal, or a sweet-tempereder, I'm sure I don't know. Don't tell me ye loves another. No man ever loves another! Did I ever marry again? Though I'm sure I could 'a had offers as thick as pea-soup. Ye know ye was dead nuts on 'er, and ready to kiss the boot she walked on."

"I will never marry her," he said.

There was the old obstinacy in his tone that Mrs. Dawe knew so well. In her own phraseology you might just as well knock your head against a brick wall, unless it was in a new villa, as try to make him say yes when he had said no, or no when he had said yes.

"Then I'm done for!" she cried distractedly. "I can't go bankrupt (I never 'ad no 'ead for figures), and I'll be ruined. What's to be done! Oh, what's to be done!"

She wrung her hands. Jack made a gesture of helplessness.

"How should I know! I have never been summoned before," he said.

"Don't tell lies, Jack!" she observed reproachfully. "If ye've forgotten the five bob ye 'ad to pay for overturnin' the old apple-woman's stall with yer bicycle, I 'aven't, and I never shall. It's lucky I didn't get a lawyer, for, as my late 'usband said, a woman should beware of a lawyer, except 'is intentions is 'onourable, and then he's a good match; and if that's what they charge for a dozen apples as skinny as 'erself, I can understand them chargin' two thousand quid for a woman's 'art."

"You have suggested the right course. I must have a lawyer. Everybody does, and the common customs of mankind point on the principle of utilitarianism to a long-tested usefulness."

"Jack," said Mrs. Dawe sternly, "ye may talk big words to the public, but pray remember as I knowed ye from a baby. With that tongue o' yourn, I don't see why ye shouldn't be yer own lawyer, and save a little from the wreck, any'ow. Ye oughtn't to care a rap for the law, and never be locked up, like a M.P."

"Even an M.P. may be summoned before the dread majesty of the law," he observed grimly.

"Ye're a-contradictin' yerself! Why didn't ye allus use to say, 'M.P.'s 'ave to make the laws, not to keep 'em.' I should like to see myself orderin' myself about. But y'ain't goin' to get out of it by talkin' about M.P.'s. 'A lawyer is a luxury,' yer late father used to say, and honest folk can't afford it. The worse yer conscience is, the better lawyer ye want."

"And as my conscience is very bad——" he murmured feebly.

"Ye've got no chance, and it 'ud only be throwin' good money arter bad," she retorted.

He made a gesture of weariness, and threw himself on the sofa again.

"Wait," he said. "Perhaps it is only a threat. The worst evils of life are those that never come."

"Those that never come!" she repeated, staring at him. "Ye mean those that never go. You make no mistake, my son. 'Lizer is a girl as obstinate as yerself. If 'Lizer says she'll damage ye for breach o' promise, damaged ye is; and if 'Lizer says she'll marry ye, consider it done."

Flushed with indignation, as well as the heat of argument, she flustered out of the room to attend to a customer, leaving Jack to meditate upon the latter hypothetical case.

The customer in question was not of the type that affected the dingy eating-house, being a dapper little swell in a light tweed suit. Nor was the time of day—too early for dinner, and too late for breakfast—that selected by the devotees. Still it was possible that the stranger had come for a snack between meals. Mrs. Dawe, feeling very upset and hysterical, furtively wiped her eyes with the corner of her greasy apron, and looked inquiringly at the stranger, with that air, peculiar to shopkeepers, of holding in with difficulty an ardent desire to fly all over the establishment.

"Good-morning, ma'am," said the swell politely. "Have I the honour of speaking to Mrs. Dawe?"

"Ye 'ave," said Mrs. Dawe. "What can I serve ye with?"

"It is mine to serve," returned the swell, smiling. "I am your slave, madam."

At these enigmatic words Mrs. Dawe's heart began to flutter. It could not be a declaration of love, she felt that her affection for her late husband precluded that possibility. But then, what meant those gallant words?

"Will you kindly ask your son to step in here?" he continued.

"What d'yer want of him? Ye can talk to me, can't yer? I don't allow 'im to interfere in my private affairs."

"Quite right!" said the swell cheerfully. "But this isn't private. Your son is in, isn't he?"

"Well, you've got a lot of sense, ain't ye?" cried Mrs. Dawe angrily. "D'yer suppose a man as 'as just come out of small-pox and brain-fever by the skin of 'is teeth can walk about like you, as never 'ad a face worth sp'ilin', nor a brain worth feverin'? Y'ought to be ashamed o' yerself arxing sich questions!"

"Then I wish to speak to Mr. Dawe," said the swell, raising his voice.

"I *ham* Mr. Dawe," she cried. "And worth two of 'im any day."

At this moment, Jack, who had overheard the conversation, appeared at the kitchen door. He darted an anxious look at the stranger, but, failing to recognise him, his face resumed its expression of vague worry. The swell quickly drew a document from an inner breast pocket, and made a dash towards the painter. But Mrs. Dawe, rushing round the edge of the counter, intercepted him, and interposed her bulky form between the intruder and his prey.

"No, yer don't," she cried, panting heavily, with her hand to her heart. "Y'ain't goin' to break into a honest woman's 'ouse like that. My son ain't in——"

"Nonsense! That is your son. You said he couldn't go out through illness."

"Nothing o' the sort. I arxed ye if ye thought he could walk about like you? Ye wouldn't think it but 'e *can*. D'yer expect a man as 'as 'is bread to earn can afford to lay up like you? Y'ought to know better."

"I know better than to believe you," he muttered. "I speak to Mr. Dawe, do I not?" he said, craning his head over the old lady's shoulder. The painter hesitated.

"Don't y' answer, Jack," she cried magisterially, rising on tip-toe to intercept the stranger's view of her son.

With a smile of triumph, the stranger slipped the paper through the arch of Mrs. Dawe's right arm. Jack, overcome by the rush with which the swell carried the position, accepted it passively; and, before his mother could turn round, the document was in his hand and the deliverer thereof gone.

"Ye unnatural villain!" she shrieked, staggering against the counter. "Ye're no son o' mine. I disowns yer. Get out o' my 'ouse or I'll brain yer!"

She seized a frying-pan and flourished it frantically. The painter took his hat meekly and tottered into the street.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COOL TWO THOUSAND.

PEOPLE stared at the strange figure walking feebly along the Bethnal Green Road, absorbed in the perusal of a double sheet of paper, folio size, the outside of which, carelessly displayed by the unconscious reader, bore the insignia,

QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION.

BATHBRILL

—v—

DAWE.

Writ of Summons.

and the inside of which informed him that VICTORIA, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith, commanded him to cause an Appearance to be entered for him in an Action at the suit of Elizabeth Bathbrill. within eight days after the service of the Writ upon him. He was also bidden take notice that in default of his so doing, the Plaintiff might proceed therein, and judgment might be given in his absence.

Such of the passers-by as knew him of old hardly recognised him. To them, as to Eliza, he seemed the shadow of his former self. His head was almost bald, and his light sombrero sank down over his eyes. His eyes alone retained their brightness, offering a startling contrast to the deadness of the rest of his countenance. He wore his white work-a-day coat, smeared with red and blue stains, and his feet were clad in gaily-embroidered slippers. His

acquaintances turned aside from him as from a being of another world ; some, who were willing to forgive the cut direct with which he had lately treated them, would have spoken, but an unaccountable repulsion from this ghastly, muttering form froze the words on their lips.

Half-way up the road he came to a standstill, at the corner of a street. "How can I engage a lawyer," he cried, "when the girl is right? Surely I ought rather to engage one for the plaintiff." This revolting heresy, which if it were to spread would soon cause Justice to disappear from the earth, was no whimsical play of fancy, and he paused to consider it.

Opposite to him was a waistcoatless man leaning against a post, with his hands in his pockets and an extinguished clay pipe in his mouth. The unconscious force of example induced Jack to adopt a similar posture, and the two men stood at their posts like sentries guarding the entrance to the dingy defile.

For some time each was silent, immersed in his own reflections. At last the bare-chested idler looked up and perceived the slippered lounge. The affinity of vagabondage drew their eyes together.

"Got a light, mate?" inquired the man.

Jack thanked him with a glance for the sympathetic remark. "Only a feeble glimmer," he replied. "And, like the dying Goethe, I crave for more. Unfortunately, you cannot tell me what to do."

"Can't I?" replied the man with a stare.

"You do not know the circumstances," he continued sadly, "so you certainly can't tell me what I ought to do."

"I don't want to know the circumstances," answered the man, with good-humoured tolerance, "but the fust thing ye've got to do is to chuck over the bloomin' match."

It was now Jack's turn to stare. He left his post and went over to his fellow-fainéani.

"Who are you?" he said. "How do you know my affairs?"

The man winked mysteriously to himself, as if to apprise himself that he was going to have some fun.

"Arx no questions, and ye'll hear no lies," he responded with a chuckle.

There was a sense of power in the quiet chuckle that made Jack uneasy. The man with his hairy breast seemed to have grown strange in the sunlight, and his smokeless pipe to be charged with the secret things of destiny.

"I have already taken your advice," said the painter. "I have thrown over the match—not blooming now, as you metaphorically express it, but withered and leafless—and now my perplexities have only increased."

"Off his chump!" muttered the man. "Ye must 'umour them beggars."

"Never mind, mate!" he said cheerfully. "A pint o' bitter'll put ye right."

Jack made a gesture of disgust. "*Retro Horati!*" he cried, and walked on quickly.

"Could he have known?" he reflected. "Was it not rather a deduction from my manifest trouble, that I was involved in some distressing affair, and not improbably one connected with love? Yet there was an air of sincerity in the man, and it is regrettable that he has embraced the principles of Horace. To whom can I now look for light? My own conscience is the only oracle, and it tells me that the responsibility for all this suffering is mine, and mine only. And as far as possible I ought to remedy it without calling on anybody else. And if one of the victims can be solaced by money, I ought to be grateful for the opportunity of plastering her wounds with bank-notes. Would to God all the other wounds could be healed as easily. But do I say easily? I foresee some difficulty in getting the £2,000, but I shall manage it if she will only wait a little, and I sincerely trust it will bring her more happiness than it would have brought me." Arriving at this determination and the post office simultaneously, he turned into the latter to carry out the former.

He took a telegraph form and began to write upon it with an unsteady pen.

Miss Eliza Bath Brill,

11, Beech Street, Old Ford.

"Stop proceedings at once——"

He paused. "Man is at once the cunningest of knaves and the most credulous of fools," he cried. "He perpetually deceives himself, yet never learns to distrust himself. Did I not persuade myself a moment ago that I was acting from a pure sense of justice, though my real motive now reveals itself as an invincible repugnance to publicity?" A shudder traversed his frame, and he went on writing.

"You shall receive the £2,000 when Parliament dissolves, at latest. Jack Dawe." He handed it to the clerk, who read it, looked curiously at the sender, and whispered something to one of his fellows, who passed the whisper on till the eyes of all the *employés* were bent upon the painter with amused pity.

"He's got Parliament and Politics on the brain," whispered one.

"He's always ordering things in a hurry," smilingly replied another. "Abandon Irish Policy at once—stop proceedings at once—I wonder what the next message will be."

"How long has he been like that?" inquired the first.

"You *are* a Rip Van Winkle, Johnny. I thought all the world knew all about it. He used to be a decent sort of chap till lately, full of life and fun—a sort of pal of my brother Tom; they used to bike together, don't you know? but the first thing that ruined him was getting engaged to this Eliza Bath Brill (and it's as plain as

a pikestaff that there's a breach of promise on—didn't you see the writ in his hand?) At first he was clean gone on her (you could see with half an eye it was too good to last), and then he cooled a bit and tried to back out and he couldn't, and he went in for politics ten times worse than before, but it was no go. He was as miserable as ever, and at last he took to drink, and it gained upon him so much that after a bit he chucked up work altogether—ain't you jealous, Johnny?—and boozed all day long. He's lost all his old customers—lucky for him the old woman don't know it or there'd be the devil to pay. The scamp used to go out with his paint-pots in the morning, leave 'em somewhere all day, go on the spree, or moon about; and I wasn't a bit surprised the other day that he had been laid up with D.T. And now the girl is bringing an action against him and serve him right, though it's a dam cheek of her to ask for £2,000. And mind you the vagabond offers her it, though if he's got £200 I'm a Dutchman. And what the devil the money can have to do with the Dissolution of Parliament—”

“Confound it, sir! Am I to wait all day for that post office order?” growled a choleric old gentleman who had written a pamphlet on Liberal Organisation in Bethnal Green. “The incapacity and imbecility of these Government officials is something astounding. That's what comes of having a Tory like Floppington in power!”

CHAPTER IX.

THE ADVENTURES OF A HOMELESS PAINTER.

WITH a lighter heart the notorious loungeur in the embroidered slippers began to retrace his steps. Temporarily free from the incubus of the lawsuit, his thoughts turned again to his almost finished article. He remembered with pleasure the progress he had made that morning and he promised himself that he would work steadily for the rest of the day, and the prospect filled his soul with a calm delight. He even began to feel hungry, which reminded him that he had eaten no breakfast. In this internal condition, the fleshless cheeks and trembling palm of an unpicturesque beggar-woman who held up three boxes of “lucifers,” appealed more intensely to him.

“Four a penny,” she chanted in hoarse, cracked tones.

“Your stock is very small,” he observed, fumbling in his pocket.

“Oh, sir,” pleaded the woman, “I ain't 'ad a bit o' bread for three days, and five famishing little 'uns, and a widow.”

“Well, I will purchase all your stock.”

The woman looked up affrighted. "For the love of God, sir," she cried, "don't rob me!"

"Rob you!" he said, startled. "Why, here's half-a-crown for them."

"God bless you, sir, and your children, and may you never come to want. But, please, sir, only take two, 'cos the bobby 'll drag me afore the magistrate for beggin'! and my 'usband's doin' two months already."

"Oh!" exclaimed the astonished painter. "Then these matches are only for show! Do you know, my good woman, you strongly remind me of those sceptical philosophers who, under cover of arguments, cunningly beg the question? And you are asking me to help you to evade the law."

The woman clutched hold of his sleeve. "Don't, sir!" she gasped. "Don't give me in charge! Oh, my poor, starvin' children! 'ouseless and 'omeless 'cos I can't pay the rent."

Jack shook her off gently. "Have no fear," he said, taking one box. "There is no law to prevent me paying more than the market price." And he left her croaking frantic expressions of gratitude.

But no sooner had he done so than his conscience smote him. "Despite my quibble," he thought, "have I not made myself the accomplice of dishonesty? And even if I had given the half-crown in charity, of what avail the pecuniary gift? Do I not know the theories of philanthropists as to how real help should be given? And what of real help have I ever given in Bethnal Green? Spasm in benevolence is of no more value than spasm in poetry; and when has my interference been other than spasmodic? I thought to play Providence, but Providence has played with me. Wherever I wished to help, there have I brought misery; and what opportunities of non-injurious beneficence I have had, I have dreamed away. Great God! why didst Thou not show all this ignoble suffering to one whom it would have inspired to noble action?" He turned back with the determination of interesting himself thoroughly in the case of the poor widow and her five famishing children, and just caught a glimpse of her ragged, stooping back, vanishing through the swinging-doors of a public-house. He made a gesture of horror and despair, took a few hesitating steps forwards and came to a standstill. After a moment he walked up to the public-house and pushed the door open; then giving one glance at the half-filled bar with its frowsy denizens and its sloppy counter, he let the door fall to.

"I cannot, oh, I cannot!" he murmured, shrinking in physical and mental disgust. "Honour to the men and women who work amid such grossness. Why do we not ennoble these men whom their deeds ennoble? In vain I would emulate their zeal, I, who can never be more than a philanthropist in kid gloves. I could help honest poverty, but with poverty that is vicious and cunning how could I deal? 'Houseless and homeless' she said she was

and yet she spends her money on drink. Houseless, and homeless!"

The repetition of the words suddenly diverted his thoughts from the recent incident and from the prospective exposition of the spiritual principle in man, and resuscitated the vision of a globular face full of passion and perspiration set with angry black beads, the swishing of a wildly-working frying-pan, and the vociferations of a woman's lungs disowning her only kith and kin.

"It is I that am houseless and homeless!" he thought. "I am forbidden the house, and I was thoughtlessly returning to the lion's den. Well, there's an end of it. I am done with my mother (and bride too) rather sooner than I expected, and from no attempt of mine. Whither shall I go now? Anywhere, sooner than to that dreadful shop. I could sooner bear the jeers of the Parnellites, the scorn of the Reviews, the anger of a riotous mob than the excoriating criticisms of her cutting tongue which I wince under and—cruel paradox—feel to be equally merited and unmerited. But I am a free man once more, and fate can have little further in store for me. She must have emptied her quiver."

He drew a sigh of relief and looked up at the blue sky in that transitory ecstasy to which he was peculiarly susceptible. In the midst of this exaltation of spirit the remembrance of the beggar-woman obtruded itself upon his consciousness, and he felt a strong rush of active impulse conquering the aversion of his delicate sensitiveness. He threw open the public-house door and entered boldly.

"Yer right, old man," the cracked voice of the chanting match-seller was saying to a slim potman in his shirt-sleeves. "I am in luck's way for I met a cracked painter chap—leastwise, he looked sich—and he giv' me 'arf-a-crown for a box o' lights."

"She makes *me* the personification of luck," he thought bitterly.

The female—as her biographers used to call her—was raising the half-emptied tumbler of Irish cold to her withered lips with the easy enjoyment of the connoisseur, when a curious expression on the potman's face made her turn her head in the direction of the new comer. At the sight of Jack's benevolently-beaming countenance she uttered a cry, and the whisky fell from her hand and mingled with the heterogeneous beverage that moistened the counter. He had followed her, the spy, the detective in plain clothes who lured poor women on to their ruin. Before he could say a word, she brushed past him and darted into the street. At the same moment a man, who had been imbibing the ale recommended by the lounging disciple of Horace—probably on the homœopathic principle of combating bitter with bitter—set down his unexhausted tankard hastily, and, drawing his hat over his eyes and mopping his fiery-blushing countenance with a moral pocket-handkerchief, endeavoured to shuffle out on the traces of the female. Nor were these the only effects of the painter's entry—

which seemed to be almost as wonder-working as the passing of Pippa—for the venerable vicar, who was walking by at that instant, leaned on his staff and shook his head sadly. "'Tis as I heard," he muttered; "he goes from bad to worse. So early in the day too! Once, at least neat and sober, he is become the very type of the slipshod sensualist, who flits from bar to bar sipping the sweets of each. God have mercy upon him!"

Unconscious of the prayer on his behalf, Jack turned towards the door as if to pursue the woman, but immediately recognising the inutility of such a proceeding he stood still, rendering it impossible for the man to make his exit unperceived. While the latter was hesitating in much confusion, Jack put his hand on the door and the man began to breathe freely and edged into a corner. But he was not destined to escape thus, for the publican, doubtless pitying the unquenched condition of the painter's thirst, called out: "Did you say bitter, Guv'nor?" and made Jack turn his head in the direction of the voice. He at once espied the man, and his face lit up with joy. The man perceived the expression and turned deadly pale. He gathered himself up for a rush; but before he could carry out his intention Jack was at his side, holding out his hand. In a stupefied fashion he extended his own, and the painter shook it heartily.

"I thought I should never meet you again," he cried. "Yet you promised to come to see me. How is it you have not done so?"

The man looked at him suspiciously. "I—I have been so busy," he stammered. "But I intended calling on you soon."

"Do, there's a good fellow," replied Jack. "And let me have the pleasure of looking forward to another delightful evening." There was no mistaking the genuineness of the invitation, and the man wiped his brow with restored composure.

"That pleasure will be mine," he said, bowing gracefully.

"We will not quarrel," responded the painter smiling. "On your own principle *meum* is *tuum*." The Socialist acknowledged the *mot* with another bow, hiding thereby the renewed blush. He was little changed. His garments and his countenance had grown more worn, as if the process of fraying away with enthusiasm had been continuing steadily in both—and that was all.

"What do you drink?" he inquired dubiously.

"Nothing, thank you."

"Oh, do have something, old fellow, or I shall be offended. You were going to have a drink, you know you were, and it's so confoundedly hot that a man gets thirsty before he walks a quarter of a mile. At least I did, so I dropped into the first pub. Besides, old Jones expects it." So saying he called for a glass of bitter, which was accordingly set before the feebly-protesting painter. He could not help reflecting on the tangled web of Fate, and on the strange route by which this glass of bitter had travelled to him despite the indignant "*Retro Horati*" of a few minutes ago.

"There is a Providence that shapes our ends," he muttered, taking a bird-like sip of the liquid.

"Say rather an improvidence," said the Socialist, casting a meaning glance in the direction of two half-tipsy women who were treating each other alternately.

Jack shuddered at the aspect of their bloated, besotted countenances. He turned away hastily; and crying, "Come into the fresh air," hurried into the street. His companion stared and followed him.

"Which is your way?" the man inquired. "Going home?"

The painter stopped. "Home!" he cried. "I have no home—and I have invited you to it!"

"No home!" echoed the Socialist, surveying his friend from sombrero to slippers. "What do you mean?"

"Circumstances have compelled me to leave the cook-shop, and I have not yet found another residence."

"You are not out of work—or money?" he asked anxiously.

"I have money, but not all I require," Jack said smiling. "However, I have quite enough to live on for the present."

"Then come and share my humble apartment and make me happy," he cried. "I will take no refusal. Or as the accommodation is scanty, come and take the first floor and make Mrs. Jenkins happy, and we will take our meals together."

Jack hesitated. "Did I grudge to receive your hospitality?" the Socialist said reproachfully.

"Where do you live?" queried Jack.

"In Hoxton."

"Where's that?"

"You don't know Hoxton! Not a quarter of an hour's walk."

"That will do then. I prefer this neighbourhood."

"I can't say I do. The cries of famished humanity ring in my ears."

"I must have imbibed the genius loci, for I am terribly hungry. I have been too busy to breakfast."

"How lucky! Then we shall be able to breakfast together. I know a very decent restaurant in Bishopsgate."

The painter needed little pressing, and his companion led him to a well-appointed establishment, apologising on his entry for the whiteness of the napery and the servility of the waiters, as concessions to Jack's want of socialistic principles. The servility of the waiters was not so apparent; for they stared at the shabby couple, the painter in his piebald coat and flowery slippers, and the Socialist in his threadbare, rusty black. The proprietor eyed them suspiciously, thinking that the respectability of the house was at stake. However, it was an hour in which custom was infrequent, and there was such a look of terrific hauteur about the less picturesque man of the two, and such an expression of easy dignity in the countenance of his companion, that the man began to fancy he saw before him some disguised Prince and his faithful vizier, or at least two gents on a spree—a possibility that was turned into certainty when

Jack, in paying the bill, gave the waiter a florin. Nevertheless, he was glad when they went off, unseen by any of the *habitués*. The supposed vizier now bundled his master into a tram-car, and the painter sank into a corner seat with a feeling of gratitude at having fallen into such good hands and being spared the unpleasant necessity of spontaneous action. But the emotions of the vizier, as he, too, dropped into his modicum of dingy, crimson velvet were not equally agreeable. He had all the air of having fallen into a wasps' nest; the wasps consisting of half-a-dozen girls in poke bonnets, who were hymning the delights of heaven, and expressing in soprano and contralto tones their ardent desire to suffer for the sins of their neighbours (perhaps in the hope of profiting by the exchange). For the moment they were causing suffering rather than bearing it, for the vizier seemed as uncomfortable under their glances of recognition and surprise as a mediæval man in the stocks. In vain he sought distraction in silent, exciting, though melancholy reminiscences of recent gambling transactions; he could not divert his thoughts into forgetfulness of the presence of the altruistic crew. The leader of the party, a rather pretty girl, sharp-cut of features and oldish in expression, was particularly indefatigable in producing almost imperceptible winks, especially when she was singing a high note with the transcendent ecstasy of a saint. Jack, however, did not notice this by-play, being filled with reverence for the fervent aspirations of these vestal virgins, and he was quite shocked when the conductor in clipping his ticket observed confidentially, "Jolly girls, ain't they? 'Livens up the journey, don't it, sir?"

When one rollicking tune was finished, the singers started on another with the mechanical regularity of so many musical-boxes, but without even the momentary pause and preliminary tick of those ingenious contrivances, and their répertoire was not yet exhausted when they arrived at a pretentious structure of red brick placarded with announcements of an approaching assault against the devil and his imps. Here the tram-car and the concert stopped. The girls got down, several of them shaking hands with the vizier (as if they had only just become conscious of mundane relations) and addressing him as Captain. The Princess Ida, if the leader of the female brigade may thus be denominated, furthermore inquired "Whether he had put his togs up the spout?"

"What did she mean by that expression?" exclaimed Jack curiously.

"It's only her jokes," returned the Socialist, blowing his nose violently.

"She looked very serious, though. Why do they all call you Captain?"

"Because they love truth. They are my sisters, in a spiritual sense I mean, and I am a Captain in the great army of Ormuzd."

"You surprise me! By Ormuzd you mean General Booth, I presume."

"I do. He seems to me one of the few earnest men that

preserve the country from corruption. I will introduce you to him."

"Thank you," was the cold reply. "I have not yet settled my opinion of him. It is not enough for a man to be earnest. The Premier is in earnest, yet he is doing deadly mischief."

"By his reported Home Rule project, you mean?"

"Yes, that is the worst. But the whole period of his tenure of office has been a Saturnalia, turbulent with wild license, and he a veritable Lord of Misrule."

The painter became animated, his voice took an indignant ring.

"But he only interprets the wishes of the country."

"That is the only consideration that consoles me."

"Consoles you! For what?" The painter hesitated.

"I could not bear to think that one man should have the power of ruining his country."

"But if the country wishes to be ruined as you call it——"

"That is the result of your miserable ballot-box principle. As 100 is to 99, so is Wisdom to Folly. When I think of the effects of indiscriminate suffrage, even when limited to males, I cannot help regretting that I should have been led by specious logic into supporting it. But how the Premier with such principles has been able to retain office for a month in sober England, is to me a mystery. Were there any of the old spirit left among the old Conservatives——Oh that I could lead the Opposition and prick this empty windbag, and denounce with prophetic fire the iniquity of his measures!"

The Salvationist suppressed a smile.

"Were your ambitious wish gratified, I doubt whether you would be as successful as you imagine. To me all forms of Government are equally futile that do not concern themselves with a reconstruction of Society. But if Floppington has not reconstructed Society, I must admit that he has reconstructed the Conservative Party."

"If by reconstructing you mean rebuilding, so that not a trace of the original architecture is left, I agree with you," replied the painter bitterly.

"No one expects honour among politicians. He saw that Toryism was played out, and that if he did not carry Radical measures he would have to give place to those who would. Would not the task of repealing the Union have inevitably fallen to Screw-nail, if Floppington had not suddenly changed his whole policy? Would not his Ministry have gone to pieces in a week? The progress of reform is not to be resisted. The individual who heads it is of little importance."

"The individual withers, and the world is more and more," mused Jack, brightening up under the influence of these considerations. He sat silent for some time, and then observed: "This movement that you have joined—does it not interfere with your propagation of Socialism?"

“Not at all. I have always been a *Christian* Socialist. As a Salvationist, I would rescue the soul; as a Socialist, the body. But we get down here!”

Socialism, that bugbear of the era under consideration, that bogey whose harmless nature becomes daily more apparent, could, in the painter's lifetime, count some of the noblest of mankind among its adherents, exponents, or sympathisers. But these were only amateurs. There were men who made a profession of Socialism in more senses than one.

The philosophic painter was fully aware of both these facts in the abstract. But the concrete Socialist with whom he was now brought into contact seemed to him to be animated by the disinterested ardour of an apostle. That he had joined the ranks of the much-abused Salvationists was only another sign that he was willing to undergo martyrdom for his principles. So when Jack had paid Mrs. Jenkins a week's rent in advance, and the door closed behind her spare form, and he was left in possession of his sitting-room and his bed-room, his heart swelled with gratitude to Providence for its kindness in removing him from the uncongenial atmosphere of the Star Dining Rooms, and putting him down master of his words and actions in the society of an intellectual and noble-minded man. The latter had retired to don his regimentals, so that the painter now found himself alone. Mingling with his new feeling of independence was a certain mournful consciousness of absolute severance from the common ties of humanity, that feeling of solitude in the midst of roaring crowds, whose tragedy has only in our own century found in the great romance of Martney that triumphant expression in literature which the cruder tragedy of physical loneliness had long ago found in the immortal work of Deioe. He could not help thinking with how little fuss he might slip out of existence.

But away with all despondent thoughts. Was not a new life about to dawn upon him? Had he not at last found rest? And as he had been voluntarily dismissed from his filial duties, would he not be able to enjoy it with a clear conscience?

CHAPTER X.

AT THE LATIN PLAY.

WHEN the Chartreuse schoolboys resuscitated Terence's *Andria*, long buried in the cemetery of the dead languages, Floppington took his seat before the curtain with feelings of liveliest anticipation. It was not so much that he looked forward to the pleasurable

revival of youthful impressions. His emotions were more stirred by the knowledge that at last there was a reasonable hope of seeing the woman he had simultaneously loved and lost. For a brother of hers was going to clad his boyish innocence in the skin of that Davus of many wrinkles, who is the chief personage of those olden comedies where, so to speak, the valets are heroes to their masters. He had little doubt but that her combined interest in the slave and in his modern representative would induce her to be present. As visitor after visitor arrived, and the hall filled, Floppington's anxiety grew intense. If to see her would give him a pang, not to see her would be torture. The feverish excitement, half pain, half pleasure, seemed, now that there was little chance of her arrival, to have been wholly one of joyful expectation, and for the moment the awful gulf between them seemed to be bridged over, and they were lovers again. Lovers again, as when amid the moon-silvered greenery on that May night, she had charmed him with sweet and earnest converse. Allured and softened by the magic of memory he let the troubled emotion of the present melt into the calm rapture of the past. He saw her again under the shadows of the luxuriant ferns, a living and breathing shape, fairer than all the fair shapes that gleamed in stone around them. He lived over again those few brief moments, even more delicious in retrospect than in reality. What mattered it to him, absorbed in the consciousness of that divine vision, that, outside the world of shadows, the prologue was commencing, and that his less learned neighbours were eagerly watching his face? For who has not heard of the fun and wit, so perfect both in quality and quantity, that marked the Chartreuse political *résumé* of the year? * And, just as the new comer in the *terra incognita* of society watches the old inhabitants to see when to use his fork, so did the people who were old enough to have forgotten their classics, or ignorant enough to quote them, watch the Premier and a few other savants to know when to use their risible muscles.

But no smile appeared on the Minister's countenance. Point after point was made, but still Floppington sat in silence, immersed in other scenes than that around him. And his face grew full of a saintly sadness, born of the tender regret whose unsuspected presence gives sweetness to our most precious memories. The cheers and laughter of the audience fell upon his heedless ears as the swirl of the wintry storm without falls on one reading olden pictures in the glowing grate. Again and again hundreds of curious eyes turned involuntarily towards him, but fell back abashed before that impassive demeanour, that pensive calm.

And now the play commenced, and Simo and Sosia began their duologue. But not even the charm of hearing Latin as she was never spoke could woo the Premier from the cool conservatory. Why could not the *tête-à-tête* have lasted for ever? Or, at least,

* The Chartreuse schoolboys did *not* save their satire for the Epilogue (as Cocketon, confounding them with the Westminster boys, asserts).

why should he not now prolong the delicious dream at will? But, alas, the remorseless train of association whirled him away, and hurried him through tunnels of politics where no light of day ever penetrated. The interview with Bardolph, the Cabinet Council, the precipitate resignation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, all these were passed over. His face broadened into a smile, a low laugh of triumph broke from his lips; and a loud shout of merriment arose from those in his vicinity. The first act was triumphantly tending to its affecting close.

"Memor essem? O Mysis, Mysis. . . ."

Poor Pamphilus paused in his pathetic reminiscences and turned as red as fire. Those trembling, earnest tones, those eloquent gestures, the task of so many months, were they only to expose him to mockery and shame? And then, worst sting of all, there was the prompter loudly supplying the words he had so often spoken even in sleep. He faltered through the rest of the scene, and retired indignant and almost heartbroken; and nothing but the authoritative persuasions of the Principal could induce him to go on in the next act. But a fair proportion of the audience was now convinced that his was a comic part, and they received all his attempts at pathos with the suppressed enjoyment with which one listens to burlesque declamation.

Meanwhile, Floppington, soothed by the soft summer's night in which his imagination had been roving, gradually reconciled himself to the disappointment of Lady Harley's absence. He followed the play with some curiosity, but it took little hold of his thoughts, for in a little time they were wandering again.

He was in Gwendolen's study. The rays of sunlight streamed upon the cheerful shelves, and artistically gilded the backs of the books. And a face brighter than sunshine smiled upon him. The memory of that smile thrilled him now, as it had not thrilled him when, only half-conscious of its subtle effects, he had answered it by gay cynicism or almost brutal epigram. Why, oh why, had he not profited by the opportunity and given vent to the more tender emotion which was agitating his breast? His unavailing remorse was not checked by any suspicion that the tender emotion in question had *not* been agitating his breast, at least not with its present intensity. Knowing that he loved her *now*, he could not believe that he had not loved her from the first. He thought that love had merely come to him by a route new to his experience, and in the shape of what seemed a purely intellectual attraction. But he did not know that it was only at the sudden juxtaposition of Eliza, with its irritating recall of the vanity of earlier and earthlier sentiment, its sharp contrast of ignoble and noble charm, that the latent passion had risen into higher life and into full consciousness of itself.

The Minister knit his brows and frowned. The sense of wasted opportunities made him angry with himself. But this phase of emotion was evanescent—he could not long remain the object of his

own indignation. After all, how was he to know that that d—d Eliza would turn up, by a sort of dramatic injustice, to wither his hopes in the bud? Was it his fault that the vain little minx had caused such cruel and unmerited suspicions to fall upon him? To think that he must, by her silly sentimentality, for ever be banished from the presence of the woman without whom life, however momentarily intoxicating, was at bottom hollow and vain!

He clenched his fists and drove his nails into the flesh. It was well for Eliza that she had not been tempted to witness the Comedy of Terence. Had she encountered the Premier at this instant, there would have been enacted a comedy far more piquant, and not likely to be less classical; one that the world would "not willingly let die."

But Eliza was not there any more than Lady Harley, and so his wrath wasted itself on the empty air. After diffusing itself among the People, of whom in their general commonness and "cussedness" she seemed to his distorted thinking to be the type, it gradually died away.

There was nothing for it now but to look at the play. "The play," says an old dramatist, whose works every one edits and no one reads, "the play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king;" and that it had such an effect on the uncrowned king of England was shown by copious yawns, which may be taken to be a sign of a conscience-stricken condition from their constant appearance during sermons, when the conscience may be supposed to be most fully aroused.

Yawning is the most contagious of facial contortions, and Friar Tuck, the eminent Scotch dramatic critic, yawned even more widely than the Premier as the fourth act came to a close. He took out his note-book and glanced through the criticism in which he had just been filling up the gaps—all that his careful preparation the day before rendered necessary. "Schiller," he muttered, "Schiller, with his usual æsthetic insight, has remarked that the higher emotional arts have their origin in the play impulse. Remembering, too, that Lessing. . . . H'm, I think all that part will keep. . . . As for Terence's obligations to Menander, we are confronted by the old question of what constitutes originality. Is there not, in short, an esemplastic as well as an energising originality? . . . So far so good. It goes without saying that all the actors have been thoroughly trained; and there was in some instances something visible over and above what training can bestow. First of all must be mentioned Mr. Greville, whose Davus is as fine a creation of genuine comedy as one could wish to see. The cunning but humorous shiftiness of the old slave, his alternations of fidelity and self-seeking, were depicted by a hundred subtle touches. A hypercritical student might perhaps object to some of his gestures as too modern; but we for our part are content and thankful to the gods (and surely one may address the deities in dealing with a classical play). Mr. Balden made an earnest and manly Pam-

philus. . . . Hum! . . . another proof if any were wanted, that the old Roman drama, if only represented with conscientious care for accessories, can still please a nineteenth-century audience."

Mr. Tuck shook his head in compassionate remonstrance with himself, and drew his pencil through many of these passages and altered others. The second edition of the last, for instance, contradicted the first just as if it had been an evening paper. "Another proof," it ran, "if any were wanted, that the old Roman drama, even when presented with the most conscientious care for accessories, cannot please a nineteenth-century audience. The connoisseurs, notoriously the Premier, were visibly bored. The whole thing was flat, dead, and heavy. Nor is this to be wondered at. The sentiment of Terence's day is opposed to the modern spirit—not in that nobler sense in which, as Hegel puts it, opposition fuses into larger agreement; we still enjoy the Epic of Dante, for instance—the sexual and servile relations with the emotions generated by them are twenty centuries ahead. . . . Mr. Greville did his best with the ungrateful part of Davus; but there is little to praise except his really comic gestures, which were too few and far between to redeem his wooden delivery. To tell the truth, Mr. Balden could make little of the more promising Pamphilus. . . . Of course we are fully prepared for a deluge of uncritical praise and insincere admiration, but let the reader refuse to be misled by it. No honest man who witnessed the performance can pretend to have been edified thereby, and perhaps the archæological ghouls who have temporarily galvanised Terence, will now allow him to rest in peace in the shadow of his royal Aldines, and in the tomb of his precious Elzevirs."

Hurriedly scribbling off these remarks, the critic made his way to the Premier, carrying with him a bland expression of deprecation which was much noticed and admired.

"I hope I am not over-creetical," he remarked after the first greeting, "but I certainly find this verra depressing."

"Sickening!" said Floppington, with a gesture of weariness. "Who the devil can understand it?"

"You are right. *Tempora mutantur*. What does the nineteenth-century man know of the Romans as they really lived, of the Romans in the flesh?"

"True. He knows them only in the dry Bohns," Floppington interrupted.

"The verra metaphor I intended."

"I thought so," said the Minister, with a diplomatic smile. "As for the actors, I've seen better ones at the Brit——"

"At the Brit?" gasped Mr. Tuck.

"——ish Museum," concluded Floppington calmly. "The Mummies, you know. There isn't that superabundance of gesture."

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed the critic. "You've heet the verra flaw that distressed me. Perhaps one might make an exception in favour

of Davus?" he continued cautiously, hoping to profit by the Premier's well-known powers of delicate psychological analysis.

"Not at all," replied the Premier. "One must expect that character to be the worst represented, for, as a matter of fact, no Englishman *can* represent it."

This dictum the critic received with a respect as profound as he thought it was itself. He shook his head sagely, but before he could elicit the grounds of the opinion, the curtain drew up on the fifth act, and he picked his way to his place with pondering, corrugated brow. The result of his meditations appeared next day somewhat as follows:

"And if Mr. Greville errs by defect of fun, he errs none the less by excess of gesture. So lavish is he in this respect that we are convinced that if he had to enact the part of a mummy, he would wink at least three times. Perhaps, however, he has attempted the impossible. As Coleridge remarked (and who but the subtle analyst of Othello and Leontes could rise to such accurate and unflinching visualisation?), the character of Davus is intrinsically unactable by an Englishman. The more one ponders this dictum, the more one confesses its truth. For is not the personage absolutely *unrealisable* by the Anglican mind? The lighter spirit, the less stringent moral relations of the Frenchman might, haply, overcome this initial difficulty, but for the thorough perception of the canny and quaint humour of Davus, his shrewd worldliness, and his mingling of self-reliant and servile impulses, one must turn to America. The ideal Davus would be a liberated American slave of the better sort. But a black Davus is, as Lamb would say, not a man to *like*; and so, we fear, the ideal Davus must remain, like so many other ideals, but the dream of the visionary."

"I don't believe he saw the joke," soliloquised the Premier when the critic left him. "Not that it was a very good one for me. Still I don't suppose *Punch* will find anything better to say than that Britons *can't* be slaves. And, by the way, good Mr. Thomson with your Rule Britannias, it seems that I can turn your Britons round my finger pretty much as I choose."

The Premier's behaviour at the play was, during the next few days, the theme of universal comment. He knew it, and gloried in his notoriety. As an example of how the critic was criticised, we make the following extract from an article in the *World*, entitled "Ministers in the Pillory:"

"It was said of a certain Government that its members had every virtue under the sun except resignation, and in another sense this saying might, with one conspicuous exception, be applied to the Ministers of the present Cabinet. Instead of emulating the serene dignity of the mastiff of Landseer's picture, they have always winced before the yelping of any puppy, however insignificant, and have not hesitated to wield tooth and claw in reply. It is to be hoped, however, that the quiet contempt with which the Premier treated the savage, if wily attacks of the Chartreuse wags, will have

some effect in restraining the ebullitions of temper of those who serve under his banner. Whether it was good taste on the part of the youthful politicians to let fly their keen-tipped arrows at the actually present form of the Minister (and some of the lines might well have been omitted for other considerations), is questionable ; but there can be no question as to the polished propriety of the Premier's bearing under fire. Where the Irish Secretary would have visibly quivered with suppressed passion, the keenest observer could see nothing but a saintly smile on the face of Mr. Floppington. Nor will those who were present soon forget the exquisite because silent causticity of the Premier's reply. Mr. Floppington's true vocation is the stage. Cynics will probably exclaim that everybody admits he is a great actor, so we venture to forestall the ribe of Diogenes by informing them that we refer to his greatness in facial expression. Lord Thespis, whose attention was early directed to the remarkable by-play off the stage, remained fascinated. He asserts that as the play proceeded, the Premier (than whom no one has enjoyed Terence more in previous years) managed to mould his features to every nuance of non-enjoyment ; running through the whole gamut with the most delicate half, and even quarter notes. Indifference, ennui, boredom, sleepiness, annoyance, disgust, sense of the ridiculous, sneering contempt, flitted with subt'e transitions over the countenance of the pantomimic critic. Mephistopheles himself could no more. Perhaps the old gentlemen who grumble that Floppington has gone to the devil, are right. But if so, it has been for the innocent purpose of taking lessons in the dramatic art."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

THE painter trudged silently at his mother's side through the sleeping streets, and wished himself deaf. Yes, Mrs. Dawe had regained possession of her truant and recreant son, and the method of re-capture was characteristic of her. She had stolen him from under the very guns of the enemy, and this is how she did it. The perpetual interrogatories and reproachful accusations of the keeper of the cook-shop having apprised her numerous circle of her son's desertion of her, their curiosity caused unofficial inquiries to be set on foot in all the quarters of London in which any of them had friends or acquaintances. No surprise was expressed that the peripatetic painter should have flown off at a tangent from his usual orbit ; the quidnuncs even essayed to console Mrs. Dawe by the reflection that it was lucky she wasn't his wife, for it wouldn't

have weighed a pin with the heartless runaway. At last Mrs. Dawe learnt from one person that a gentleman resembling her son had been seen at an open window in Hoxton, and from another, that a speaker named "The Converted Painter" was advertised to appear the same night at a midnight meeting at a Salvation Hall in the same district.* Obeying the impulse of instinct, the horrified dame repaired to the place of assembly as soon as the stress of business would permit, and sure enough found her backsliding son exhuming the lesson of his spiritual experiences for the benefit of a motley crowd. The presence of the painter on the platform needs no explanation beyond the fact that he had never had any intention of appearing there. Captain Bertram, "The Reformed Rake," as his friend was called, had inveigled him into his somewhat ambiguous position by enticing him to witness one of his battalion's pitched fights with the devil, and, relying upon his weakness, had taken upon himself the responsibility of announcing him with flourish of trumpet. The painter had already refused the tempting offer of a Lieutenancy with the privilege of adding to his income by a percentage on the sale of copies of the *War Cry*, *The Little Soldier*, and other publications of the Army, and he felt that it would be ungracious as well as unworthy of a student of life to refuse the simple invitation to be present at a prospective destruction of the citadel of the Fiend of Darkness. This last phrase was the very language of the heralding placard, for the most illiterate private was strongly impressed with the idea of preserving consistency of metaphor, and proudly spoke of such things as "volleys," "knee-drills," "cannonades," "fusillades," and "colours;" though, in curious confusion with these blood-and-thunder figures of speech, there ran through all the literature and oratory of the Salvationists threads of Scriptural tropes and of every-day popular and even vulgar idiom; the various filaments blending into a tissue of equal profanity and absurdity. Indeed, the audacious blasphemy of the writings of the members of this commercial, musical, and religious association transcended even the hob-nobbing familiarity with the supernatural displayed in all civilised ages by a concrete-loving peasantry. That sermonette of Jack Dawe's, which his mother peremptorily cut short, was far from orthodox in its vocabulary; as was painfully felt by washerwomen fresh from the inspiring addresses of Black Pudding Lucy and the Redeemed Knife Grinder, and from the sensuous images of the latest hymn. It would probably have moved few to weeping, and howling, and gnashing of teeth, and still fewer to frenzied prostration at the penitent-form; so that when the Converted Painter was interrupted by the slapdash entrance of a red-shawled personage, who must have seemed

* For a good historical and descriptive account of the picturesque movement headed by General Booth, see a German monograph on the Salvation Army, of which a faithful, though unidiomatic, translation has just been brought out by the State Press, and which is responsible for the statements here reproduced.

a very avatar of the Spirit of Evil, few of the auditors regretted that he had not been allowed to finish his subtle illustration of regeneration by reference to the political career of Floppington. They enjoyed more the eerie humour of the farce which followed the arrival of Mrs. Dawe--the assemblage thrown into inextinguishable laughter and hopeless confusion by the relaxing sight of the imperious old lady fighting her way sternly to the platform, recalling her errant son to his duties in her own grotesque fashion, lecturing him publicly on his sins of omission and commission, and marching him off home after a dignified rebuke to the body-stealers present, and a sternly contemptuous denunciation of their theological teachings and the immoral tendencies of their nocturnal gatherings.

The night was divinely beautiful; and, as Jack Dawe walked along, he endeavoured to lose himself in the celestial splendours. He tried to look up at the far-sparkling heavens and concentrate his thoughts on the calmness of the planetary system that had assembled in its millions for a midnight meeting in the firmament, where all the stars sat together in mute communion, wrapt in golden silence like the Quakers of Elia. But the attempt was vain. The discordant voice of Mrs. Dawe broke the music of the spheres. The infinite Universe was at rest, but this woman was a central agitation subsisting at the heart of endless calm. Her invective flowed along in one everlasting flood, not weak and washy, but strong and fiery. It was like Sheridan's impeachment of Warren Hastings for length and passion, and every now and then it was emphasised by the irresponsible whirl of the huge umbrella which she carried as a protection against burglars, gallants, mad dogs, and rain. The painter shivered under the amused glances of the policemen and the few belated pedestrians; but he was becoming hardened. By his public humiliation he had sounded the bitterest depths of degradation. Nevertheless, he was not sorry when the well-known Liliputian cook-shop, like a sunken valley in the heart of its Brobdingnagian neighbours, hove in sight. The door was open, and Sally stood outside it, slipshod and unkempt as ever. She was looking anxiously the other way, but hearing the sound of footsteps, she turned round, uttered a cry of joy, and ran to meet the wayfarers.

"Ye've found him!" Sally ejaculated.

"Yes, I've found him!" Mrs. Dawe replied in hysterical tones, viciously pushing the unresisting painter before her, and bundling him into the shop. "I little thought a son o' mine would ever grow up to be a foundlin'!"

This new view of the case so overcame the highly-wrought mind of the old lady that she sat down on the counter and burst into tears. Her son made no attempt to kiss them away. Shuddering at the contrast between his old home and the comfortable apartments he had just quitted, he dragged his faltering limbs into the parlour and threw himself on the sofa in blank, apathetic

despair. A moment afterwards a hand was placed timidly on his shoulder.

"What is it, Sally?" he asked, looking up.

"Never mind, master," said the girl. "Sit up and 'ave yer supper."

The sympathy of the drudge was to his spirit as a fresh well in a desert of dreary misery.

"No, thank you," he said, much moved. "I have no appetite."

Sally began to whimper:

"Arter I've gone and fried the loveliest sausages ye ever smelt in 'onour o' yer comin' 'ome."

"If the prodigal son has no appetite he cannot eat the fatted calf."

"But it ain't calf," protested Sally.

"Y'hextravagant hussy!" interrupted the dreaded voice of the mistress. "So I've caught yer givin' a party, and a ball, and a swarry, when the cat's away, 'ave I? All the two gases a-blazin', and the table laid for supper. And where's all the company bolted to? Or was it a case of two's company and three's none—a young man or a bobby to keep off other thieves?"

She was glancing suspiciously around, lifting up the covers, and peering into the sugar-basin and the milk-jug.

"Ye're a liar!" screamed Sally, stirred to her depths by the last insinuation. "The company is on the sofa."

"What, that vagabond company? He's no company o' mine."

"What rot! Ain't you 'is mother?"

"Don't you try to bamboozle me, 'cos ye might as well try to catch a bullock on that 'ere fly-paper. When that supper was laid out, 'ow did ye know that Jack 'ud be a foundlin'?"

"Summat inside 'ere told me," said Sally earnestly, laying her hand on her breast.

"Oh, indeed! I didn't know as ye nourished a parrot in yer bosom. P'raps that's where all the sugar goes!"

"P'raps it is," Sally cried defiantly.

"No wonder ye've got a sweetheart then," retorted Mrs. Dawe.

Tears of vexation came into Sally's eyes.

"I ain't got no sweet'art," she protested, "and ain't going to get married never!"

"Goin' to be a old maid, eh?"

"If I lives so long!"

"Ye don't expect me to swallow that!" said Mrs. Dawe disdainfully.

"No, it's for Jack," replied Sally innocently.

"Don't twist my words, or I'll twist yer nose for ye. No woman 'ud be a old maid if she could help it. I've been married myself, and, though I'm a widder now, do I regret it? Not at all. But a old maid is a widder afore 'er time. But, old maid or no old

maid, yer don't catch the old woman goin' to Salvation meetin's any more, leavin' ye to lay suppers for strange gents."

"Is Master Jack a strange gent? Can't I lay supper for 'im?"

"Lay supper for 'im!" repeated Mrs. Dawe scornfully. "Teach yer grandmother to lay eggs."

At this point, there being a failure of repartee on the part of Sally, the prodigal son was able to interpose. "The supper was prepared for me, but I have no appetite."

"That's you all over!" replied Mrs. Dawe, turning upon him. "When people goes to the trouble of fryin' the best sausages for ye, ye've got no stomach for 'em. All you've got a appetite for is 'owlin' 'ims all night as if ye 'ad the nightmare, and draggin' yer poor old mother out o' bed to run about like a fire-engine, and if ye ain't goin' to eat 'em I will."

So saying, Mrs. Dawe sat down and devoured the succulent viands, Sally watching her with ill-concealed indignation.

"Just you get up to bed," her mistress exclaimed, pausing with uplifted fork. "Ye'll be fit for nothin' in the mornin'." Sally obeyed sulkily, and mother and son were left alone.

Mrs. Dawe finished her meal leisurely. Then she went to a drawer and took therefrom a letter. "Anger is short madness," says the great classical author, Delectus; and on this occasion Mrs. Dawe's anger conformed to definition, for its fury was now giving place to the soothing influences of the sausages.

"'Ere's a letter from 'Lizer," she observed more gently. "Yer a nice son to run away, and leave me all the trouble of this 'ere lawsuit as if it was me that breach o' promised instead o' you. I've arxed all about it for ye."

Jack sat up immediately much interested, and took the letter. He had almost forgotten Eliza during those three days he was living in the philosophic calm of the gods of Epicurus; but now some of the old anxiety revived. "And what was the result of your inquiries?" he asked.

"Things ain't so black as 'Lizer painted 'em. I don't think there'll be any need for ye to appear at all."

"Thank God! How is that?"

"'Cos I think we'll be able to settle it. She ain't the fust gal as arxed for 2,000 and got a farden. I've been to 'Lizer's brother, for I couldn't talk to 'Lizer without flyin' in her face, and let 'em know that the jury ain't such fools as they look for. And 'e promised to 'ave a talk with 'er and let us know what she said, and I think she'll be glad to square it without the bother and the disgrace of going into Court; and yesterday this letter came for ye, so I want ye to read it to me, and I'll warrant she won't talk so big now."

The painter took the letter and read aloud as follows:

"DEAR JACK,

"I write you these few lines, hoping it will find you quite well as thank God it leaves me at present. Your cunning attempt to

overreach me shall not succeed. Thinking that I had been persuaded by you to stop proceedings, you then sent your mother to endeavour to compromise for a paltry sum. But you will find you have only overreached *yourself*. The telegram you sent me is worth its weight in diamonds. When the jury see that you have actually offered the two thousand pounds, they will know that I am entitled to them *at least*; so, by the advice of my Solicitor, I shall demand three thousand."

Mrs. Dawe was struggling to speak—black in the face with the effort.

"You offered her 2,000!" she burst out.

"Yes," said Jack, trembling with apprehension of the coming storm, and feeling that he had really made a fool of himself, and put himself at the mercy of an unscrupulous girl.

"Then ye've brought me to the workus'!" exclaimed Mrs. Dawe, wringing her hands. And she unchained upon him a leash of biting epithets. His character for intelligence was torn to pieces. He had no more brains than an apple-dumpling, he was as destitute of common sense as Mrs. Prodgers' pork-pies of pork; she would rather have had an elephant for a son in a lawsuit. Further aggravated by Jack's silence, she discovered that he was as black-hearted as an old frying-pan, and had no scruple in smashing up an old-established business, for the sake of enriching a good-for-nothing girl, who had hooked him by her pretty face, despite his mother's warnings, and whom he loved still. Did he think that the old woman hadn't all along known that disgraceful plot to get up a sham breach of promise case, and pay the damages out of her hard-earned savings and elope to America, and leave her to lay her weary bones in a pauper's grave?

"You are talking very absurdly," said Jack, with some dignity. "And in any case I do not see that the money would come out of your pocket."

"It's all one, y' idiot! This is Dawe and Son, ain't it? Ye don't forget to arx for yer arf profits! The business is the business."

"We will waive that point," said Jack, taken somewhat aback by this reasoning. "I can only repeat that in offering Eliza what she demanded I was guided principally by a strong objection to appearing in Court."

"Then see what ye've done for yerself. If ye 'ad left it to me, I would a' got ye out o' that pickle. But in course ye don't arx nobody's advice but yer own. Now ye're in for it. Ye'll have to appear and be the laughin' stock of the country."

"But I will not appear, come what may," replied the painter firmly.

Mrs. Dawe grew white with alarm. Was her son once more enunciating one of those olden resolutions from which he never departed? Her tone became more conciliatory.

"Now just you listen to reason, Jack. Let me tell ye what I've found out about the law. If ye don't take any notice of the writ, the case will go by the fault, and it'll be tried afore the Sheriff's Court, and there'll be nobody there to speak for ye, and 'Lizer'll 'ave it all 'er own way, and set up a carriage out of our blood and sweat; and if ye do take notice and send up a lawyer, the jury will think ye dare not stand cross-examination, and you are a devil and 'Lizer a angel, and they'll damage ye according."

"Cross-examination!" As the horrible potentialities of the process flashed upon him, a cold tremor ran through all his members. "They may think me devil as much as they like," he said, "I will not appear."

"And yet they say, talk o' the devil and he's *sure* to appear!" groaned Mrs. Dawe. "I allus knowed ye'd be the ruin o' me; but that's the way of children: they makes ye ill the day they're born, and worrits ye till the day ye're dead. Oh, why did ye interfere! If ye 'adn't put yer finger in the pie, 'Lizer wouldn't 'a got such a big plum!"

"You mistake in supposing you could have settled it," said Jack, who had been glancing over the rest of the broken-hearted girl's letter. "She says that she might have been willing to compromise had I not had the cruel audacity to tell her that I loved another. The spirit of revenge burns in her breast, and she says that no earthly consideration shall prevent her dragging me into Court. I believe she means it. She always appeared a passionate girl, and the poets have taught us how far the *spretæ injuria formæ* can lead one. If Virgil could exclaim, '*Tantane ira cœlestibus animis,*' is it surprising that a woman of volcanic temperament should determine to avenge herself by any means in her power?"

"I've already told ye to keep yer fine words for them as didn't know ye from a baby, when ye could only say 'Mummy.' I don't know what ye told 'Lizer a lie for; as yer late father said, 'lyin' is never so bad as when it's no good.' If ye loved another gal, ye could no more 'ide it from me than ye could your brain-fever, and I've seen no marks of it. And I don't see that 'Lizer is a volcanic woman—she don't smoke, does she? If ye called 'er a earthquaky woman, upsettin' the oldest cook-shop in Bethnal Green, ye'd be about right. And if she says ye must go to Court, to Court ye must go."

"Only one woman can command that," said the painter, with a melancholy smile.

"Then I am that woman," exclaimed Mrs. Dawe, rising in regal majesty. "To Court ye shall go if I 'ave to drag ye there in a wheelbarrow, and ye shall say exactly what I tells ye."

"An end to this!" said Jack, also rising. "The judgment must go by default, and I will pay the damages."

"And let 'Lizer 'ave all the lies to 'erself," hissed Mrs. Dawe fiercely.

"Well, at most, I shall send up a lawyer to represent me," he

said good-humouredly, glad to find he was not giving way. "Perhaps there should be no taxation without representation. But you will never get me to appear in person." He was not prepared for the reception of this effusion of independence. The old woman lost her head entirely. After the wild revel of maternal power she had been enjoying that night, to be defied at all was unspeakably galling. But to be defied in a matter of such vital importance was to lose more than authority. The timid barn-fowl will fight for its young ones, and Mrs. Dawe, who was by no means timid, abandoned herself to a seizure of verbal pugnacity, shrinking at nothing to defend her solitary young one against himself; to say nothing of her own interests.

Drawing herself up with the prophetic fury of a Cassandra, she launched into rhapsodical oburgations and demoniac denunciations of the evils to be. The painter's hair stood on end as he listened in awe-struck silence to the tale of the intolerable days he would be made to endure before the trial. Shaking her gray hair, quivering with electric passion, unresting and maniacal of gesture, and lavish of rough metaphor and uncouth simile, the old sibyl declared that she would not fail to be present, and that if he did not accompany her, he was no longer to look for peace till the sexton's spade batted down the clods over his early grave. It was a weird and unholy scene—and the clock of the church of St. John, mournfully striking two, intensified the nocturnal stillness which was being so impiously disturbed.

CHAPTER XII.

A NOCTURNAL VISITOR.

AT last his mother was gone to bed. The striking of two had warned her that only a few hours of sleep remained, and she presently departed with a final burst of invective that would have done credit to the author of the epistle against the Ibis. Jack sat for some time rigid and silent, his hands pressed to his aching brow. After a while, muttering "There is no help for it," he rose, opened the drawer of the table, and, after some search, discovered a sheet of letter-paper and an envelope. Then, re-seating himself, he began to write.

So deep a stillness now reigned within and without, that had he not been engrossed in his task, the silence would, by contrast, have been almost oppressive. The scampering of a mouse across the floor gave him a little startled thrill. His nerves were unstrung, for hardly had he resumed his momentarily-interrupted writing when he felt himself falling under the spell of a strange, eerie sensation

—the consciousness of another presence in the room. He tried to shake off the feeling and concentrate himself on his letter; but, as he was under the temporary sway of an unconquerable aversion from looking round, his whole soul became more and more impregnated with the perception of an alien existence. He seemed even to catch the rhythmic sounds of light breathing. Agitated by a confusion of shifting ideas, he made an effort and turned his head, and immediately his heart almost stopped beating, while his brain began to whirl under a rush of conflicting hypotheses and emotions. At his side stood a female figure draped in black. The face was quite strange to him. It was young, but there was a sad, grave look in the brown eyes; and it wore a fatigued, oldish expression. Nevertheless, the features were well formed, and the whole countenance full of a pensive, melancholy charm. The hair was arranged in bands with Grecian simplicity.

The apparition stood surveying him in silence, and in its extended hand it held a roll of manuscript, covered with hieroglyphics and cabbalistic inscriptions. As it seemed to be tendering this to him, he put out his hand boldly and took it. At the first glance the apparent hieroglyphics resolved themselves into his own crabbed caligraphy. It was his neglected essay "On the Spiritual in Man," and, in a flash, a wild half-explanatory theory took possession of his mind, and his eyes lit up with sacred, awed rapture.

"Speak!" he cried solemnly. "Reveal to me the mystery of thy being, and of man's."

The apparition put its finger on its lips.

"Say not thy lips are sealed. Whence and wherefore comest thou?"

The figure opened its mouth for the first time, and breathed the strange words:

"Hush! Ye'll wake missis!"

"Wake missis!" gasped the painter, in tones of acute disappointment mingled with surprise. "Why, who are you?"

The sad face of the apparition was irradiated by a beautiful blush, the melancholy eyes sparkled with joy, and a low laugh of triumph broke from its lips.

"E don't know me!" it muttered to itself ecstatically.

And it began to prance about in silent irrepressible joy, with light, graceful twirlings. As the painter watched the sinuous undulations and frolicsome movements of the grave Grecian ghost, his irritation began to give way, though his perplexity remained undiminished.

"Surely you are not Sally?" he exclaimed.

"Ain't I?" inquired the apparition, grinning with fresh delight. "Who d'yer suppose I've been and swopped with? Ye don't know me, then, but only my clothes."

"But how is it I have never seen you dressed thus before?"

"Ye 'ave, master! It's my goin' out dress. I wears it on my day out every Chris'mus, not Chris'mus Day ye know, 'cause we're

busy, but the week arter when everybodys spent their money. But ye never used to look at me *then*," she added with arch reproach.

"And why have you put it on now?"

The drudge was silent, but her cheeks were eloquent. The painter could not read the message written in letters of fire, and he continued good-humouredly :

"Did you dream it was Christmas and your day out, and get up and array yourself in your splendours, and come down to find it the middle of the night?"

"No, master!" said the girl, instinctively seizing on the last question. "I come down to give ye yer mess."

"Perhaps you are right," said the painter ruefully.

"Ye see," she added in a mysterious whisper, "I 'ad to 'ide it for fear missis should wrap up pies in it."

"It is in vain to struggle against Fate. Perhaps it were better to let it fulfil its destiny at once. But you were wrong to disturb your rest. Could you not have given it to me by day?"

"There was no chance to give it yer while missis was in 'ere with ye," replied Sally glibly. "And I thought if ye didn't 'ave it to-night, ye might worry over it, 'cause I see ye takin' so much trouble over it, and I thought ye might 'a thought ye'd lost it, and while I was waitin' for missis to go to bed, I thought I might as well 'ave a jolly good wash, and when I was clean it seemed a pity to waste all that clean on my old clothes, so I ups and puts on my grand dress, and just as I were a-doin' up the last 'ook, missis took hers, and so I took the hoptportunity."

"Thank you for your trouble," said Jack, who had been sceptically skimming a page of the essay while this explanation was going on, and who appeared shaken by the force of his own reasonings at the close. "And now, as it's so late, you had better go to bed, and for the same reason I had better remain up and finish this article."

Sally's face fell.

"I ain't a bit sleepy," she urged. "Can't I stay up and wait upon ye while ye writes?"

"You are very obliging, Sally," he said. "But really I have no need of your services. Go to rest, there's a good girl."

"I can't rest!" Sally cried in a sudden burst of anguish; then she stopped, affrighted by the sound of her own words.

Jack, catching her anxiety, listened for any signs of activity overhead; and there was a pause, in which they could hear the beating of each other's hearts.

"Can't I make you a cup of cawfy?" persisted Sally in low tones. "You're sure to want some cawfy."

"No, thank you," he replied. "Now, Sally, go to bed, and leave me to my work. I must finish this letter; and, by-the-by, you had better copy it to-morrow. I shall leave it for you in its envelope on the mantelpiece. Good-night, Sally."

The girl gulped down a lump which had formed in her throat.

"Good-night, master!" she whispered. Then suddenly turning back with plaintively-brimming eyes: "Y'ain't angry with me for puttin' on my new togs?" she asked.

"Angry, my child? On the contrary, I am pleased to see that you are not so black as you generally paint yourself. Henceforth the picture of you which I shall carry with me will be one pleasanter to the material eye."

A burst of sunshine dispelled the shadows on the drudge's brow.

"E's going to draw a picter o' me," she told herself rapturously, "and carry it in 'is buzzom."

"Then ye like me better clean!" she exclaimed.

"Decidedly," he responded, looking at the eager little drudge with an amused but sympathetic smile. "You have convinced me that plainness is but dirt-deep, for, under the influence of a clean skin and a neat dress, you have improved vastly. Upon my word, you are really good-looking, and if you don't take the greatest care of your person after that, you are no true woman. But I am falling into the platitudes of shallow cynics; the true woman knows well that 'The soul is form, and doth the body make.'"

Sally was attitudinising before the glass, her face wreathed in smiles.

"And 'ow do ye like my dress?" she said, turning towards him with a new feminine expression in her countenance, that look which, after so many years of dormancy, was at last awakened.

"Very nice," said Jack abstractedly, his fancy wandering amid the deserts and enchantments drear of the "Faërie Queene."

The girl could restrain herself no longer. The long-repressed thought burst forth into passionate speech:

"Ain't I a lady now?" she demanded. "It's only 'cause 'Lizer could afford it, that she used to look so nice. Ain't I as good as 'er now?" She was touching his coat timidly, and looking up into his face with her large, pathetic eyes.

"God forbid, Sally! I hope you are an honest girl. But perhaps I wrong her," he added musingly. "She admits she has acted by the advice of her lawyer, and I ought to forgive her, for she loved much."

"Much what?" queried Sally in a hoarse whisper. "Rhino? Oh, she's a sly old cat is 'Lizer. And she's been and gone and summonsed ye as if ye was a murderer, is she? I'd like to murder 'er!" She clenched her fists viciously.

"You should not harbour such desires, Sally; the girl is right from her point of view. She is honestly entitled to damages."

"And I'd like to give 'em 'er, blowed if I wouldn't! I'd spile 'er beauty for 'er."

"Hush, Sally!"

"Ye've allus taken 'er part," grumbled the girl. "Even arter she's summonsed ye."

"Sally," said Jack solemnly, "you have yet to learn the duty of a Christian."

"What's that?" snapped Sally.

"If you are smitten on one cheek——"

"Ye smack 'em on the other."

"You must turn the other."

"What for? To see who's up to larks?"

"To be smitten."

Sally laughed contemptuously. "What rot! I never see anybody do that except Judy when Punch whacks 'er. And yet this is a Christen country, ain't it?"

"Well?" said the painter dubiously.

"Well, what's the bobbies for then?" asked Sally triumphantly.

"Perhaps you are taking the maxim too literally. I had better give you the more abstract precept. 'Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you.'"

"There's more sense in that," she muttered, "and I wish I 'ad 'er 'ere to claw," she whispered ferociously.

"You don't understand."

"Oh yes, I does. If I summonsed ye, I couldn't rest till I was clawed all over for I'd know I deserved it."

This singular *argumentum ad feminam* was uttered with such earnestness that the painter scarcely knew what to say. He could not but be touched by the faithful servant's attachment to his cause and by her unselfish, if mistaken, zeal.

"You would *not* deserve it," he said, evading the point at issue, "if you had been deserted as she has been."

"S'pose she were deserted! She oughter consider 'erself lucky to 'ave been loved at all."

The painter looked at her in amaze. "What would Tennyson say to this?" he thought. "Is originality but the appropriation of the common sentiment? This girl is, undoubtedly, full of latent genius, and if I did nothing else of good it ought to be my task to educe it. I have long recognised this. Yet what have I *done*? Almost nothing!"

"Is I a-goin' to be a witness in the trial?" inquired Sally musingly.

"Why do you ask?"

"'Cos I should swear blind that it ain't your fault, don't ye see?" she said with a movement of cajolery.

"What do you mean? How could you show that?"

"I ain't found out yet, but I'd think."

"Surely, you don't mean you would swear untruths?"

"Oh no, in course not!" said Sally, imitating his tone of pious horror and bestowing a wink on the canvas countenance of Mrs. Dawe's late husband. "I wouldn't tell a lie to save my life."

"My dear child!" exclaimed Jack, much relieved. "I rejoice in the soundness of your moral intuitions, and that they should be present when moral instruction has been absent is a strong proof

of their inattentiveness. Your master never did give you any moral instruction, did he?"

"Ye give me instruction in copy-books, don't ye remember? Is that moral?"

"Well, copy-books are usually moral," replied Jack with some embarrassment. "And speaking of copy-books, how have you been getting on in my absence?"

"I couldn't do nothin'," answered Sally with a pathetic glance. "I was so miserable. I would a-runn'd away if ye 'adn't come back."

"Poor child!" he said. "It must have indeed been terrible to be left alone with that angry old woman," he thought. The compassionate remark raised Sally's self-pity to a higher pitch and the tears came into her eyes.

"If ye was to go away agen, I should take pison," she cried desperately.

"Hush! You must not talk like that," he said, alarmed by the thought that the first part of the hypothesis was not unlikely to occur.

"Why not? Yer said just now I must tell the truth, didn't yer? And I feeled like pisonin' myself last time."

"But you must not feel like that."

"'Ow can I help what I feels?"

"Sally," said the painter sternly, "guard your spirit against the necessitarian doctrines. They are paralyzing."

"I wish I *was* paralyzed," Sally exclaimed recklessly. "May I never move if I don't."

"Calm yourself," said her master gently. "The suicidal state of mind is sinful."

"Can't I do what I like with myself?" said she sullenly.

"Decidedly not! Man may mend, but not end himself. Go on cultivating yourself, my child, and you will have no wish to root yourself out, to continue the metaphor. You have been neglected, but it's never too late to mend."

"It's never too early to end!" she retorted. "I wish I was borned dead!"

"You grieve me, Sally. It is sinful, I tell you, to entertain such thoughts."

"D'yer mean to say that I mustn't kill myself?"

"I do. No man liveth to himself alone. We are all bound by infinite ties to the rest of humanity."

"But nobody wants me!" Sally burst forth; "and I don't want myself neither!" She burst into tears.

"Your condition is morbid, my dear child," said Jack, greatly distressed. She sobbed silently for some time, and every sob was a stab in the painter's sympathetic heart. At last he went to her and took her hand gently to calm her, and her fingers closed convulsively upon his.

"Speak no more of death," he said. "More life and fuller—*that* you want. You must get wider interests. Live in the world of books—that pure, substantial, and good world of which Wordsworth speaks, and you will never be alone any more."

"Books is rot," Sally said, wiping her eyes with her disengaged knuckles. "What's a good of readin' that a dog sat on a log, or a fat cat is not a 'at. I never see a dog on a log, and I never supposed a fat cat were a 'at."

"Poor child!" said the painter, his eyes growing humid. "Is then Literature—divine Literature—nothing to you, but a congeries of propositions concerning cats and dogs? Be it my task to reveal to you a new heaven and a new earth."

"I ai'nt 'ad a old 'eaven yet," murmured Sally.

"Indeed you have not," he said compassionately. "But the future is before you."

"That ain't much consolation. It can't be be'ind me, can it?"

"No, Mistress Critic; but I mean a bright future."

"That's better. But as for books, I don't see 'ow books 'll make me less alone," she continued slyly. "I'd rather keep company with you than with a million books."

"You may think so now; but you will soon, I trust, know better."

She shook her head archly and pressed his hand. "Is that rheumatic old man 'appy that keeps the bookstall over the way?" she asked.

"Certainly, if he sips his own sweets. Believe me, there are people who would rather have a dead book talk to them than a living man!"

Sally would believe anything that came from his lips. She only wanted to sit there, holding his hand.

"That's nothin'," she said. "Some kids is fond o' playin' in simmitries. Is *you* one of them people that likes to talk to dead books better than to living men?"

"To a large extent. I love my books beyond almost everything on earth."

"Ye *loves* 'em!" echoed Sally. "Well, I've yerd o' kissin' the book; but I'd rather kiss the livin'—"
She left the sentence incomplete, as expecting the sense to be taken up, and turned her head away in modest anticipation.

"Your absurdities are delightful," said the painter smiling. "You have mistaken the exception for the rule. I do not think the greatest book-lovers and bibliophiles—they are not the same thing, Sally, though you might think so from the etymology—ever *kiss* t'heir books. But, bless my soul! Is that the church clock striking three? You will get no sleep at all."

"I don't want no sleep," pleaded Sally, with fluttering heart. "I wants to 'ear about the books." The painter's face filled with

triumph. "Didn't I say you would soon grow interested? But it is really too late now."

"Didn't yer say it's never too late to mend?" she urged. "And I wants to begin to mend now. If yer tells me what to read, I will read 'em all as soon as I can, and be a lady more than ever."

"That is a good idea." "And when I am gone," he thought, "my spirit will supervise her culture."

"I will draw up a list of twenty at once," he said. "It won't take long."

"Oh, do make a longer one," she cried. He smiled at the enthusiasm of the young disciple, and consented to make a selection of the best hundred books. How the drudge was to obtain them neither thought of for the moment.

Sally rose with alacrity, found a sheet of paper, and the painter, laying it upon his half-finished letter, began to write. Sally stood behind his chair watching him, with one hand resting lightly upon his shoulder.

"Let us be systematic," he said, "and begin with the Ancients."

"Who are they?"

"The Greeks and Romans who lived some thousands of years ago."

Sally opened her eyes. "What! Could they write? I thought there wasn't no School Boards then. And does anybody read 'em now?"

"Only a few read them; but a good many parse the verbs. But of course you must procure the English translations. Of Plato's works, the *Republic* will be best for our purposes. Aristotle's metaphysics—no, it's too dry."

"I ain't afeared o' *dry* physic," said Sally.

"Then you shall have Hegel, too. That will make three; then, Epictetus, Æschylus, Sophocles, some of Euripides—but I am forgetting my limited field. The *Georgics*—that's all in Latin; Marcus Antoninus—and, by the way, I mustn't forget the Vedas. For English, first and foremost, Wordsworth; then Shakespeare, and a curious, almost-forgotten novel, called, *The Mould of Form*, containing the truest touches. The Bible of course—"

"But what'll missis say?" interrupted Sally in awe-struck tones. Their voices had grown loud and unrestrained, and her arm had gradually all but coiled round her master's neck. A pained look came into his eyes.

"We must not mind what missis says," he replied. "She knows nothing."

"I *didn't!* you pair o' wipers!" shrieked a terrible voice behind them. "But thank Gord I've found it out afore it's too late!"

The guilty couple started violently, and the inkbottle was overturned on the table-cloth. There on the last step of the stairs stood Mrs. Dawe, wild-eyed, like an avenging fury. Her bosom heaved convulsively under her dirty-white nightgown, and beneath her dingy night-cap her gray hair bristled with horror.

"So this is the gal ye've damaged me for, is it?" she cried. "But thank Gord! I've stopped the elopement!"

The "gal's" tongue clove to the roof of hermouth. She could say nothing, but clung affrighted to her lover.

CHAPTER XIII.

AVE ATQUE VALE.

THE eventful day, on which the Premier was to ask leave to introduce a Bill for regulating the Government of Ireland, dawned bright and fresh, and London awoke with the feeling that it would not sleep another night without learning the authentic details of the measure, the prognostication of which had agitated the civilised world.

The excitement throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland, was almost unprecedented. Never had the struggle for seats in the House been keener, both among the members and the outside world. Intellect, wealth, beauty, rank, intrigued for a few inches of room, and the new Chancellor of the Exchequer was on the point of moving that the House should be farmed to the highest bidder, when he recollected that the suggestion would give more *éclat* to his forthcoming Budget. The Irish Members held an anticipatory wake all night in the House over the defunct Act of Union, and the morning found them carousing on the Tory benches. Presently the rows became covered with hats (as empty-headed as some of their owners) which kept watch, some like battered old guards, and others like spruce young sentinels. After breakfast the members, the knowing old stagers in smoking-caps, and the green ones in their own hair or want of hair, repaired to the terrace, where a gymnastic entertainment was in progress. Cunning casuists departed in cabs, to return at eve. Those whose consciences were less profound amused themselves as best they could; some in filling the hats with Gospel propaganda, others in round games, and others still in negro theatricals.

Around the House was gathered from an early hour a dense crowd of working-men mingled with sightseers, waiting to cheer the Floppington they idolised. The morning papers were filled with Parliamentary reports, and as people read the exciting details, their excitement multiplied itself on seeing itself in print. Meantime, the Premier, like a prudent general, kept himself as retired in person as he was reserved in speech. Pressure of business would not yet permit relaxation. All the world wondered at and applauded this herculean perseverance. And what made him an even more

impressive figure at this critical juncture was the many-sidedness of the man. In the midst of a session, the like of which for external activity and internal intrigue had never been known within the memory of the generation; when the Premier had rarely, if ever, failed to be in his place in the House; when he had delivered great speeches by the score; when he had passed one great measure and prepared another; that he should yet find time to meet the scientists on their own ground and demolish their flimsy materialism—this raised the world's admiration to its highest pitch. The current number of the *Nineteenth Century*, containing the article which had extorted the eulogies of theologians of all sects, and which had already set at work the pens of eminent physiologists and physicists, sold by tens of thousands. Nor did the Premier's modest disclaimer of originality, his naïve confession that not one of the ideas was his own, detract from the fame of this admirable piece of work.

While the Premier was preparing for the great effort of the evening, Jack Dawe was trying to avert his bitter thoughts by the perusal of the morning papers, but the attempt only intensified their bitterness. A wave of custom had borne off his mother on its foaming crest, and he was left in the little parlour in momentary freedom.

There are periods of anguish which the most circumstantial of biographers is compelled to pass by in respectful silence, and only a literary vivisectionist would venture to lay bare the quivering nerves of the sensitive painter, or calmly anatomise his sufferings since the nocturnal intrusion of Mrs. Dawe. Suffice it to say that his every action was regulated with the most ruthless tyranny. He was never allowed to exchange a word with the poor drudge, grown more unkempt, slipshod, and smutty than ever, who occasionally sent him an appealing look of utter misery that cut him to the heart; and the persistent invective with which he was deluged, both on account of his presumed relations to Sally and of the lawsuit now at hand, prostrated him physically and mentally, so that he had not yet been able to resume his painting (thus affording not the least among the many minor subjects of his mother's unjust reproach).

What wonder if the idea of flight had been gradually growing more and more definite; with the under-thought of an after-rescue of his fellow-sufferer. He who runs away may live to run away another day, and the partial success of his first escape, though that was rather an expulsion, emboldened the poor painter to meditate a higher flight.

This time he should not be recaptured so easily; he would quit the metropolis altogether, and bury himself in some obscure village on the coast. The prospect if he remained at home was indeed horrible to contemplate. For to say nothing of the worry and sick hopelessness of this Golgotha in other respects, the bone of contention of the breach of promise suit was forced down his throat till he almost choked. Never was man impaled on the horns of

a more fearful dilemma. To appear at the trial was impossible. Cold shivers ran through him when he thought of the privacies, of which every life is full, laid bare before the world in that fierce light which beats upon a breach of promise suit; of the inevitable sneering recital of his own erotic verses and all the endearing inanities of passion; while he stood quivering under the cruel laughter of the audience. But then, if he did not appear, he felt that his reason would give way under the old woman's nagging, now at least sometimes tempered by persuasive cajolery. After the damages were assessed it would be impossible to live under the same roof with his mother, and to delay his escape was only to protract his torture. He must allow the case to go by default, and send the damages to Eliza after the trial. For some days he had been coming down in his best clothes with the idea of going away in them, but he had not as yet wrought up his activity to the required tension. The mute appeal in Sally's eyes and the remembrance of her wild threats had always detained him. But that recollection was growing dim; in like manner as the threatened assassination of the Premier had long grown shadowy and dreamlike in his imagination. It was impossible to seriously connect the super-vital Minister or the active little drudge with the idea of mortality. Moreover, a letter received the day before had somehow doubled the strength of his determination. As the painter read of the mad enthusiasm of the country for the disestablisher of the empire, and incidentally for the *disestablishment*, he clenched his fists in despair. But as he read on, he felt himself seized by the feverish excitement which burned in the common breast. That longing to be present on the great occasion, and to hear the great orator, which had agitated the mind of royalty itself, and which had so possessed him on the memorable night of the Second Reading, again kindled his spirit in a passion of hopeless desire. It was with a bitter smile that he began to re-peruse the above-mentioned letter which he now took from his pocket.

"Mr. Floppington has even asked the Speaker to allow him to place you under the grating of the House; but this could not be conceded. He begs that in future you will make earlier application"—he read. "O gratitude of men!" he cried, "art thou then, in very truth, nothing but a lively sense of future favours!" And, in very truth, he might have expected more courtesy and consideration from a man whose life he had endeavoured to save. He must have repeated his warnings, indeed, to judge by another passage of the letter; and it was to be expected that the occasion of his demand for a seat would remind him of his olden fears. "Mr. Floppington," ran the passage in question, "again begs that you will cease to trouble him with such communications. He is of opinion that the case you now put is yet another ruse, and he absolutely refuses to take the steps you advise."

But, for the present, Jack's attention was engrossed by the first-quoted fragment. "He begs that in future you will make earlier

application," he repeated bitterly. "In future! No, Right Honourable Floppington, I will make no more applications!" He thrust the letter into his pocket, and, ignoring his mother's exclamation of inquiry, strode into the street to cool his aching forehead, and dashed against a young man whom he had not met since the Sunday when he encountered him outside the church. The young man looked at him with a curious pity, and put out his hand.

"What's the hurry, old man?" he said.

The painter muttered a few inaudible words and was passing on, but his acquaintance stopped him.

"If you've got nothing to do you may as well come my way. I see you've got your best togs on. Perhaps you are going to see the show."

"What show?"

"Down Westminster way, you know. I'm taking a half-holiday to see all the big pots going to Parliament, don't you know? They say the Prince of Wales'll be there. I expect it *will* be a swell affair. Come along, old chap, and give Floppy a cheer on his way." The young man linked the painter's arm in his, but it was withdrawn with violence.

"Cheer Floppington!" gasped Jack.

"Why not?"

"Cheer the man that for his own vain-glory would ruin the country!"

"Oh, come! I ain't quite sure that I agree with his policy myself. But you can't help admiring the man."

"I can help it, and I do!" he said furiously. The young man struck his brow with his palm.

"What a fool I am!" he cried. "Of course, Floppy is your red rag. Now look here, Jack. Let me give you a bit of friendly advice. Don't you worry your head so much about Floppington. It's unhealthy, and it'll lead to no good. You got yourself turned out of the Foresters' for hissing him, and then you were satisfied. You're only knocking your head against a brick wall. There's no other Radical so down on him as you. He's a great man; there's no gainsaying that."

The calm superiority of this lecture irritated the usually composed painter to the pitch of madness. He seemed to lose his balance completely. With a frenzied laugh he bent down and hissed in the lecturer's ears:

"He a great man! He is a vile impostor."

"I dare say," replied the young man with good-humoured tolerance. "Well, ta-ta, if you will be pig-headed."

"But his career will be over sooner than the world imagines," the infuriated painter exclaimed.

"The wish is father to the thought, old chap!" said the young man, laughing. "Ta-ta!"

He had not taken twenty steps when the painter made a gesture

of despair, tottered back into the parlour, and buried his face in his hands.

"Is all this torture driving me mad?" he moaned. "I dare not stay here another day, or I shall lose my reason altogether. . . . Miserable creature of impulse that I am, shall I never guide myself by intellectual principles? Shame on me to have reviled a great and noble man, any one of whose days is a fiery reproach to my whole life of *far niente*. . . . My God, I repent. The harmonies of the universe are immeasurably delicate. Change the place of any two notes and discord enters into the music of the spheres."

* * * * *

The Premier ceased. For three and a half hours the flower of English life and the *élite* of foreign residents and visitors had been under the spell of the magician as he expounded, in immortal words, his magnificent scheme. It was a wonderful effort of constructive statesmanship, and, as the great Minister sat down, a wild delirium of applause shook the building to its centre. For the Premier, used as he was to being the focus of enthusiasm, the moment was one which concentrated the rapture of a lifetime. Beyond this he felt that life had now nothing to offer.

* * * * *

The same evening the painter, his cadaverous countenance proving him quite unfit for his enterprise, glided furtively out of the "Star Dining Rooms," and, turning backwards for a moment, he raised his hands towards the peaceful evening sky.

"*Ave atque vale,*" he said in low, earnest tones. "*Ave atque vale.*"

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

A NATIONAL TRAGEDY.

IF the Irish Members had kept their anticipatory wake over the Union on the night before its condemnation, their constituents waited a day longer before abandoning themselves to the performance of the funeral rites. But when the telegraph offices sent out the news that "the darlint Floppy" had given the lie to rumour by exaggerating its wildest exaggerations; when they found that they were to be separated from the United Kingdom as cleanly as the members of their national quadruped were cloven asunder by the mechanical contrivances of Porkopolis; the crowds that seethed around the offices boiled over. And as a child takes hold of a wooden or cardboard man, and, acting upon the mobile anatomy, now moves its legs, now extends its arms, and now opens its mouth; so did the spirit of joy take hold of Paddy, and cause his legs to leap in triumph, his arms to elevate themselves in blessing, and his mouth to open for the emission of eloquence or the reception of whisky. All night long the streets of the secessionist towns resounded with the music of "Erin-go-bragh" and other national airs, and with the tramp of promenading citizens. Effigies of the people's Floppy were carried through the streets, wreathed with laurel and shamrock, and wrapped in green and American flags, and, if an occasional affray diversified the proceedings, this was only what was to be expected in a wake. Morpheus (locally known as Murphy) fled in affright and sought refuge in the lecture halls and churches of the Antipodes.

Nor was the excitement in the Sister Isle of England much less intense. Preparations were made by the Conservative and a few of the Liberal associations throughout the country to congratulate the Premier on his gigantic and daring scheme; pens were busy in

every newspaper office in Great Britain, describing or evolving the scene in the House, and writing criticisms, more or less worthless, upon the reforms projected; and so overcome was the English Philistine by the consciousness of his own magnanimity that he could do nothing but compare notes about it with his fellow-feelers.

All this upwelling and ebullition of enthusiasm was delightful. Politics is the poetry of the average man; it gives him a wider outlook and lifts him above the sordid cares of every day; it makes him feel that he is an important unit in a great party in a glorious nationality. And if the Politics *à la mode* were sometimes devoid of rhyme or reason, they only offered a more striking parallel to much of the poetry on which the æsthetic mind was nourished.

On this occasion the promise of coming excitement was even more enchanting than the actual first-fruits. The Separation Bill would, of course, be carried, but not without the struggle which was the sauce to the titbit. It was, perhaps, even to be regretted that the contest should be such a walk-over for Floppington. The fact was that the Minister had thrown a glamour over his countrymen. His influence in the country was, in short, equal to his charm in society; and that is not saying a little. Just as on his coming out of his mistaken reserve and shyness, the magnetism of his presence attracted to him a host of new friends, and linked his old ones closer to his soul by electric chains; so the parallel transformation of his political personality, the new vigour of his dialectic, the unaffected directness of his rhetoric, and the democratic tendency of his measures, fascinated the universal heart and created for him an army of disciples that would have followed him to the ends of the earth and the boundaries of common sense.

Lord Bardolph bade fair to ruin his popularity by his bitter antagonism to the Bill. The last thread that held him to his party was now snapped; for not even the most Liberal of the old Tories, not even the Conservative least reverential of the Past, could find anything but approbation for this great measure, undoing, as it did, the ill-advised reforms of 1800, and restoring the good old *status quo ante*. Nothing had been left to him but to cast in his lot with that hopeless minority which Screwnail was leading, and whose watchword was the integrity of the Empire.

It was remarkable, as showing the singular unanimity of the House, that even these few hide-bound Liberals admitted the justice of the main principle of the Bill, and only contended that a clause should be inserted, providing for the immediate construction of a Channel Tunnel to prevent the total severance of the two islands. Bardolph, though he agreed with them in their opposition, did not agree with its *raison d'être*. Like a solitary star, he wandered across the political firmament—erratic as a comet, but without the slightest vestige of a tail. And as the dire comets of the Mantuan poet foretold the horrors of civil war, so did this fiery meteor thrill the hearts of spectators with dread presages of internecine conflict.

As soon as the first rumours of the coming changes began to circulate, observers noted the popular ex-Minister revolving in his eccentric path. He was first seen in Ireland calling on the men of Ulster to strike a blow, the echoes of which should reverberate to the uttermost corners of the Universe; and, wherever he went, he exhorted them with equal vehemence to destroy the Constitution for the sake of preserving the Empire.

Lord Bardolph was by no means unaware of the danger to his popularity, but a man who plays to break the bank cannot afford to be scrupulous about halfpence. The moment a reaction took place—and a reaction the philosophical Bardolph felt was inevitable—Bardolph would stand alone, the only man who had not committed himself more or less to Home Rule, the one far-sighted and lofty-minded statesman in whom the country could have confidence.

A reaction did, indeed, come; but not in the way Bardolph had imagined. On the morning after Floppington's great speech in the House, the placards of the papers were of course occupied by staring capitals, all connected with the historical proceedings of the evening before. But when the second editions appeared, as on account of the enormous demand they very soon did, the lower portion of the bills was devoted to such titles as "Mysterious Explosion at 5.30 A.M. in Westminster," "Fatal Explosion in Westminster," etc. The third editions followed almost immediately with "Dynamiters in Westminster—blowing up of a stable—a man killed." By this time the evening papers were out with equally sensational headings. But this startling piece of news, which would have been a godsend to proprietors and newsboys at another period, fell flat. What the Press throughout the country was saying of the Premier's measure; how Ireland received it; what was the state of feeling in America and on the Continent—these were the topics that alone had any interest. Not even the addition to the bills of the fifth editions of "Strange Rumours," or "Startling Rumours," or "Terrible Rumours," had any appreciable effect in increasing the sufficiently extraordinary sales. But when the public of the fifth edition had read what these rumours were, a fearful shock of horror and incredulity traversed its mind. The sixth editions sold at twopence, and were exhausted in five minutes. At the seventh the price had gone up to sixpence, and the bills announced "Rumoured Assassination of the Premier"! At the tenth, announcing "Assassination of the Premier," and edged with black, the reign of fancy prices began.

Yet even then there were people who, with pale lips that belied their assurance, asserted that the report was nothing but a *canard*. When with the fifteenth edition of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "Escape of the Murderer" was bawled out, it seemed as if London had gone mad. People fought for the journals in the streets, and the thoroughfares were crowded with loitering masses discussing the terrible tragedy with bated breath, or clamorous in invoking vengeance on the dastardly assassin, a hitherto unknown Mr. Jack

Dawe, who was nowhere to be found, and about whom nothing was even now known but the fact that a reward of £2,000 was already offered for his arrest.

And now the feverish and breathless excitement of suspense and doubt, tempered by incredulity, began to give way to a settled horror and a hopeless lamentation. Yet there remained that feeling of unreality which so often recurs in the blankness of bereavement. And what added to the dreamlike and phantasmagoric effect was the strange and uneasy mental undercurrent of insecurity, as if an earthquake had shaken the city.

Beauty had fled from the deep, brooding blue of Heaven. The wing of the Angel of Death had passed visibly over the city, obscuring the golden sunlight, and shadowing the mighty, surging sea of panic-stricken faces. The Angel of Death had passed, leaving an empire shuddering with the sense of national disaster, its cities stirring in a fever of restlessness and echoing with delirious cries, its heart thick-pulsing with horror; leaving a people thrilling with the consciousness of a national tragedy and sublimated by pity and terror, a people awakened to a new perception of national solidarity transcending the petty differences of sect and creed. The narrowest mental horizons were illumined by a dawn of unselfish emotion, the dullest of egoists stirred by the vibrations of the common sentiment. It was as though a new pledge of brotherhood had been signed with the blood of a nation's hero, and sanctified by a nation's tears.

Sunset came—a rich July sunset—but it seemed to flame in the heavens like some unholy stain of blood. And still the same stir, the same agitation, the same hurrying to and fro, the same excited groups and dense masses, the same thirst for vengeance, the same frenzied exclamations, the same eager inquiries, the same ignorance of aught but the name of the murderer and the name of his victim.

And so the day closed—flags everywhere half-mast; every house and shop with blinds lowered or shutters up; bits of crape already worn on millions of arms as symbols of national mourning; the very street boys sobered; the omnibus drivers subdued and forgetting their mutual sarcasms; the theatres deserted; two grand society balls postponed; the Houses adjourned in respect and moved to tears by the solemn eloquence of Southleigh and Mountchapel; the Conservatives haggard and despairing; the Liberals horrified and sympathetic; the War Office and the Treasury Chambers environed by a shifting but compact crowd; Little Snale Street, Westminster—the scene of the explosion—utterly impassable; and Bethnal Green Road alive with human swarms condensed to impenetrability in and around the “Star Dining Rooms;” Scotland Yard, with the eyes of the world upon it, harassed and palpitating with feverish activity; the telegraph offices besieged by the crowd and the officials breaking down under the influx and efflux of messages from and to all parts of the world; the Stock Exchange troubled by the fall of Consols; the journalists toiling at touching up the long-prepared obituaries and working up graphic accounts and sensa-

tional details; every stranger suspected of every other and furtively compared with the photographs and descriptions already scattered broadcast through London and the provinces; railway stations, ports, and vessels searched, and *employés* questioned to weariness and cautioned to distraction:—and amid all this excitement and emotion a ceaseless buzz of interrogation, hypothesis, conjecture, and comment on the motives that prompted the deed and on the inexplicable presence of the Premier in Westminster at so mysterious an hour, and the ceaseless dread and mournful tolling of the bells lending sombreness to the falling shadows and dusky splendour of the summer night.

CHAPTER II.

UNE CAUSE CÉLÈBRE.

THE inquest on the murdered Premier seemed to bring the greatest sensation of the century to its apogee. Had the victim been the humblest peasant, the extraordinary revelations made thereat would have wrought the public interest and curiosity to fever heat; but the lofty position of the great Commoner, the pitiful tragedy of a splendid career cut short, intensified the excitement of the world and stirred up the least susceptible minds to indignation and compassion. The Separatist Bill was forgotten. A mighty wave of emotion swept before it all thoughts but those of vengeance and lamentation.

The room in which the inquest was held was as crowded as that other chamber where so few days ago the lips now dumb had enthralled the attention of the noblest and the wisest. The streets around were black with people watching the entrance of the celebrities and the witnesses, and eagerly discussing the probabilities of the capture of Jack Dawe. For that Jack Dawe was guilty, the public mind, with its usual instinctive judgment, was fully persuaded. The evidence before it, when it leapt to this conclusion, was of the most meagre description; but it was of a character appealing to the popular imagination and satisfying its rude logical ideals. What more damning proof, indeed, of a man's guilt than that, when everybody was looking for him, he should have retired into invisibility? True, the motive of the murder was yet to find. But there was no doubt that motives would be forthcoming with the plentifulness of blackberries—a prevision justified by the sequel—and in any case there was always the fanatic theory to fall back upon. Moreover, it was understood that the police had been doing very well indeed, and that revelations of a highly sensational character were to be expected—all of which was not calculated to retard the feverish rate of the public pulse. The newspapers, of course, while fully sympathising with the popular

sentiment with regard to the murderer, maintained an attitude of judicial calm with regard to the suspected person, and refrained from imparting any details of the new information obtained by Scotland Yard, for fear of further biasing the minds of their readers.

For a complete account of perhaps the most remarkable inquest ever held, by reason of its joint psychological, pathological, dramatic, and political interest, the student must be referred to the journals of the period. The investigation, which occupied three days, is too lengthy to be fully reported here ; but we can promise any one who undertakes the task of perusing the contemporary records that, though he will have to read a score or so of closely-printed columns, he will find no *longueurs* in them. Every thing is sharp and poignant. So skilfully was the questioning conducted that hardly a superfluous item of evidence is to be found, although, of course, there is some iteration—in this case more damnatory than damnable ; almost every answer fits in with every other like the toothed wheels of some inexorable machine of vengeance ; each reply weaves the woof or warp of the web of criminal story till the terrible tale stands out woven as in some ghastly Bayeux tapestry. Even the few flashes of the Comedy that will always mingle with the Tragedy of life seem only like the lurid play of lightning that makes the darkness more horrible, or like the gibbering laughter on a maniac's face.

But for the average reader, who has neither time nor inclination for diving into the musty records of the past, enough must be reproduced to explain the verdict of the exceptionally intelligent jury. Such parts of the inquiry as seem worthy of further narration shall be transferred from the *Times'* report, which appears on the whole to be the most accurate, though the editorials on the entire subject, except, indeed, the dignified rebuke of the occasional levity with which so solemn an investigation was carried on, seem somewhat unworthy of the traditions of the leading journal.

After the somewhat distorted remains of the deceased had been viewed, the inquiry commenced with the formal identification of the body.

The first witness called for this purpose was Mr. Border of Westminster. He deposed that for the last ten years he had let out traps, bicycles, etc., on hire at 24a, Little Snale Street, Westminster. A few months ago, a gentleman came to him who desired to hire a bicycle for two hours very early every morning. He was not in the habit of commencing business so early ; but as the gentleman paid munificently, he used to open his stable specially for him. (By a Jurymen).—He did not know who the gentleman was at the time. He was not much interested in politics himself, thinking that a man had enough to do to mind his own business, without minding that of his neighbours. (A laugh.) But his stable-boy was a red-hot Radical (laughter), though he was an honest lad enough (more laughter, the recurrence of which from trifling causes was perhaps due more to the intense excitement and silence which

prevailed than to any real levity), and some weeks after the boy directed his attention to the strong resemblance between the mysterious cyclist and the caricatures of Floppy—he meant the Honourable Mr. Floppington—and further observations had convinced him of the identity of his customer ; but, perceiving that the Premier wished to remain incognito, he had held his tongue, and cautioned the boy to do the same.

THE CORONER.—“Then no one but your two selves was aware of the supposed Premier’s visits to your stables?”

MR. BORDER.—“The boy confessed to me that he had dropped mysterious hints as to his political connection with the Prime Minister.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“But you made him drop them?”

MR. BORDER.—“No ; I made him drop dropping them. He was dumb then.”

THE CORONER.—“On political subjects too?”

MR. BORDER.—“No ; he talked more than ever, though I think he went over to the Conservatives.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“He is now in the hospital, I believe?”

MR. BORDER.—“I regret to say he is.”

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY.—“Were the gentleman’s visits regular?”

MR. BORDER.—“Pretty regular.”

THE FOREMAN.—“But there were gaps?”

MR. BORDER.—“Oh, yes.”

THE FOREMAN.—“Have you kept a record of the dates of his visits?”

MR. BORDER.—“Well, I can get at them.”

THE CORONER (interposing).—“A very good point. Have you your books here?”

MR. BORDER.—“I keep a note-book in my pocket.”

THE CORONER.—“On the 22nd of last month the House sat till seven in the morning and the Premier was present till the close : did the gentleman hire a bicycle on that morning?”

MR. BORDER.—“He did not.”

A JURYMEN.—“The Premier went down to Devonshire on the occasion of the celebration in honour of Sir Stanley Southleigh, and stayed there two days.”

The dates having been ascertained, it was found that no bicycle had been hired on either of those days.

A JURYMEN (who was a Dissenter and a Deacon).—“Did the gentleman ride on Sundays?”

MR. BORDER.—“He rode frequently on that day.”

Continuing his evidence, the witness stated that being in the stable on the morning of the 13th instant, he heard footsteps approaching a little before the usual time. He threw open the stable-door, but perceived no one. At the time, he thought it was a policeman, though he now suspected it must have been that cowardly dastard, Dawe, setting the infernal machine. Interrupted and told to confine himself to facts, he said that about three

minutes after, he having gone into the yard to give an order to the stable-boy who was washing himself under the tap, a terrific explosion took place. The stable was partially blown up, and all the contents destroyed, and the boy was severely injured. He himself escaped with a few scratches. On making his way into the street he perceived the mangled and mutilated body of the deceased lying across the pavement. All the neighbourhood was of course awakened by the explosion, and the police were soon on the spot. He could not positively swear that the deceased was the gentleman who hired his bicycles; still, he considered the face sufficiently recognisable, and the clothing resembled in texture and colour the gentleman's ordinary attire. The build of the body was similar, and the explosion took place at the exact moment of his usual arrival. At first he had refrained from giving vent to his terrible suspicion, merely saying that he believed the victim was one of his customers, but the improbability that a private person had been assassinated in this dreadful fashion, grew upon him, and later in the day he imparted his dread to the Superintendent, who immediately appeared convinced.

The next items of the evidence related to the finding of the body, upon which nothing could be discovered that might serve to identify the deceased except two latch-keys, which were picked up on the pavement.

THE CORONER.—“What do these fit?”

THE WITNESS.—“One of them opens the door in Downing Street (sensation), the use of the other we have been unable to discover.”

THE CORONER.—“Have you tried the back doors?”

THE WITNESS.—“Yes, and we have tried all sorts of doors in the Premier's country-houses; but all our efforts have as yet been unsuccessful.”

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—“Are there no other houses to which the Premier had the right of *entrée* at all hours?” (Sensation.)

THE WITNESS.—“I do not know.”

THE JUROR.—“Perhaps you should have pursued your search in the houses of some of the witnesses——”

MR. CORNELIUS DRAT, Q.C., who watched the case on behalf of Mr. Floppington's family, interrupting, protested against the insinuations of this gentleman of the jury.

THE CORONER.—“The point is unimportant. It is enough that one key fits the door in Downing Street. Perhaps the other was dropped by one of the crowd.”

THE JUROR (muttering).—“Very likely.”

Some of the Premier's servants, who appeared much affected, then gave evidence as to their master's recently acquired habit of early rising, and taking early walks, his failure to return at the usual hour, and other such details. The groom was then called. His evidence was remarkable as being the first to veer from the uniformity of that previously given. He stated that to the best of his knowledge his master had never ridden on a bicycle in his life.

Every one knew that it was no easy task to ride such a machine, and it required much practice. His master had, however, been a thorough horseman, and, indeed, rode a spirited animal.

THE CORONER.—“Did he ride frequently?”

THE GROOM.—“He never rode in the Row more than once a week (though when at home in Chauncey Park he rode daily); but during the last few months he seemed to have given up riding entirely.”

THE CORONER.—“Do you mean that he never rode on horse-back once?”

THE GROOM.—“He said he would do so once and I got the 'oss ready. But he seemed unwell, and had some difficulty in mounting; and then the animal began to rear a little and he scrambled off, saying that he felt out of sorts and would walk instead, and he has never looked at the Colonel (that's the 'oss) since.”

A JUROR.—“How did the Premier mount on the occasion referred to?”

THE GROOM could not explain verbally, and was allowed to give a description in pantomime.

THE JUROR (triumphantly).—“Was not that the natural attempt of a man who had for some time been neglecting a horse for a bicycle?”

THE GROOM (with dignity).—“I know nothing about bicycles. My master would never have condescended to a bicycle.” (Laughter.)

MR. BORDER, being recalled, testified that the gentleman had, from the first, ridden down the street “like a shot,” and must have been an adept in the art.

THE GROOM, on re-examination, asserted his belief in his master's total ignorance of the machine in question.

These directly contradictory statements excited immense interest.

THE CORONER.—“Still, is it not possible that Mr. Floppington had acquired a knowledge of bicycle-riding unknown to you—practising in obscure neighbourhoods at early hours, from some anticipation of ridicule and loss of dignity?”

THE GROOM.—“A man with a 'oss like the Colonel don't want all at once to ride on a lump of old iron.”

THE CORONER.—“But you have yourself stated that your master ceased to use the Colonel. Did not the change in his habits surprise you?”

THE GROOM (after considerable hesitation).—“No.”

THE CORONER (sharply).—“What do you mean? Why not?”

THE GROOM.—“He was so changed all round.” (Sensation.)

“All of us found him different.”

THE CORONER.—“In what respect?”

THE GROOM.—“In almost everything.”

THE CORONER.—“Was it a change of habits, or of his manner of treating you?”

THE GROOM.—“Half and half. He was more jolly in one way and more severe in another.”

THE DISSENTING JUROR (consulting a note-book).—"When did this change commence?"

THE GROOM.—"Some months ago. I think it was after a slight illness."

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—"Was it anywhere about the middle of May?"

THE CORONER.—"You need not answer the question. It will be necessary to go into that part of the evidence more fully later on. At present we are concerned with the bicycle question, and I believe that Sir William Lancet and Lady Harley can throw a little additional light upon that."

SIR WILLIAM LANCET deposed that a few months ago, he could give the exact date if necessary, he was called in to attend the Premier, whom he found suffering from a general vital depression, brought on by excessive work and too sedentary a life. On his second visit he had warned him that if he did not take more exercise his system would break down.

"I told him I did not consider a hebdomadal, or even rarer ride in the Row sufficient to preserve him in health. I also gave him certain general instructions with regard to mental tone, and warned him against morbidity."

THE CORONER.—"Did you, as his doctor, consider him of a morbid disposition?"

SIR W. LANCET.—"Perhaps morbid is hardly the word. His psychosis was too subjective, his central ganglia concentrated their currents of energy centripetally instead of diffusing them centrifugally through the neurotic framework."

THE CORONER.—"In plain English, he was too fond of thinking about his own thoughts."

SIR W. LANCET.—"Well, that will do for a rough description. I warned him of the danger of such mental processes to a man who habitually overworked himself."

THE CORONER.—"Did you mean that you feared his mental system would break down, too?"

SIR W. LANCET.—"Well, it is difficult to answer categorically."

THE CORONER.—"The point will no doubt occupy the jury at a later period. Pray continue your testimony."

SIR W. LANCET.—"There is not much to add. I advised him, therefore, to be a little less introspective, and to take things a little less seriously. He promised to follow my advice in all respects."

THE FOREMAN.—"Perhaps this would explain the change in the Premier's manner."

THE CORONER.—"Perhaps so. (To Sir W. Lancet.) And did he take any additional exercise?"

SIR W. LANCET.—"On the contrary, I found that he had stopped his usual ride. I ventured to remonstrate with him, but he asserted, in a joking fashion, that he rode a good deal; though at the time I thought that the assertion was altogether a jest to turn the edge of my reproach. That is all I have to say."

A JUROR.—“Can you remember the exact words he used?”

SIR W. LANCET.—“I can; but I would prefer not to repeat them.”

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—“Do you mean to say that they will not bear repetition?”

THE CORONER.—“I think that as the point is important they should be repeated if possible.”

SIR W. LANCET.—“He said, ‘Oh don’t flurry yourself, doctor. I assure you I ride my steed quite as hard as you do your medical hobbies.’” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“Perhaps he meant that you do not ride any hobbies at all?”

SIR W. LANCET.—“I do not think he meant that.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“It seems to me that the law-books have neglected to discuss the value of repatee as evidence. I do not think I need detain you any longer.”

MR. JOHN TREMAINE, the private secretary, was next examined. But he had little to add on the point in question, although it was understood that he was subsequently to give evidence of the most important description.

An irrepressible buzz of interest now arose on all sides, and for a moment there was a most disgraceful confusion, occasioned by the Coroner’s calling on Lady Gwendolen Harley. Her ladyship was dressed in deep mourning, and wore a thick crape veil over her face, whose deadly paleness was only made more apparent by it. Her evidence, delivered in faltering tones, proved the Premier’s habit of taking bicycle rides in obscure districts in the early morning; he having confessed the fact to her as a secret. The Coroner seeing her agitated condition did not press her with questions.

The last witness called for the identification was Policeman X 35.

He deposed that on the morning of the 13th instant, while making his rounds about 5.15 a.m., he saw the Premier leave his residence in Downing Street. (Replying to a juryman, he said that the Premier could, at the rate he was walking, have arrived at Little Snale Street at about the time of the explosion; and the clothes of the deceased resembled those worn by the Premier.) He had on many occasions seen the Premier go out at that hour and return at about 7.30 a.m., and let himself in with a latch-key. He had noticed that these occasions never came after very late sittings of the House, or after the Minister had been indulging in social gaieties till an early hour, and he had naturally come to the conclusion that Mr. Floppington preferred taking his walks before the gaping populace was abroad.

THE CORONER.—“On the morning of the 13th instant, did the Premier appear at all gloomy?”

X 35.—“Oh no! He seemed in the best of spirits, whistling ‘Wait till the clouds roll by, Jenny,’ and he said ‘Mornin’!’ to me

very affable, and no wonder, considerin' the wonderful speech he'd made the night before, and the——"

THE CORONER.—"Never mind all that. Was he always in good spirits?"

X 35.—"Not always. Sometimes he looked in a devil of a temper; but whenever I saw him coming back he was in a good temper, and he used to grin to himself like."

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—"Do you think a bicycle ride would produce such symptoms of satisfaction?"

X 35.—"I shouldn't think so. Sometimes he glowered all over with delight, and laughed low to himself, as if thinking of something very enjoyable."

THE CORONER.—"Then you would not think him on the whole given to morbid thought?"

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—"Did you ever see another latch-key in his hand, besides the one of his own door?"

THE CORONER.—"I would beg Gentlemen of the Jury not to interrupt witnesses."

X 35.—"No, I only saw his own latch-key."

THE CORONER.—"Have the goodness to answer the questions put to you. You saw no, or at most few signs of gloom in the Premier?"

X 35.—"Only now and then."

THE CORONER.—"That will do."

The inquest was then adjourned till the next day.

CHAPTER III.

SENSATIONAL REVELATIONS.

THE strangeness of the revelations made on the first day of the inquest—the personal details elicited concerning the Premier, the evident anxiety of the Counsel to keep the questioning off certain lines—the curious explanation of the mystery of the Minister's presence in Westminster at so early an hour—put the last touch to the feverish interest and morbid curiosity of the public. The contradictory assertions as to the cycling powers of the deceased (assuming the identity of the victim to have been sufficiently demonstrated) caused a not inconsiderable number of people to openly declare their disbelief in his alleged riding, and to hint that Mr. Border had obtained indemnity for his losses in compensation for the value of his evidence. The discussion of the whole topic became a temporary factor of social existence. It was served up at every meal—sauce to every goose and gander in the kingdom.

The crowding on the second day of the inquest was, if possible, greater than on the first, and there was a still larger attendance of

ladies—the fainting of several of whom interrupted and diversified the proceedings from time to time. Outside, the streets were still blocked; to the great disgust of the reporters, who were thereby impeded in their task of sending on their accounts by detachments to supply the quick succession of the editions of their respective papers. The usually peaceful neighbourhood was further invaded by peripatetic vendors of fruit, sherbet, ice-cream, newspapers, doggerel ballads and pamphlets. Lives of Jack Dawe, the notorious painter, with portrait, and a coloured wrapper embellished with an illustration depicting the “Star Dining Rooms” in Bethnal Green Road, could be obtained in six rival forms for the small sum of one penny each.

Biographies of the Premier were on sale in similar shapes, and the latest, just got up under tremendous pressure, represented him dashing along in gaudy colours, and in the full glory of his cycling career.

The ballads (specimens of which were collected at the time by would-be Macaulays) were for the moment chiefly devoted to a plain, unvarnished, and coldly realistic account of the assassination, and being hoarsely chanted throughout the country by singers promenading along streets, or at rest like nuclei of centripetally-attracted masses, they extorted considerable admiration and halfpence. They all began with the majestic simplicity of a Greek drama somewhat as follows :

“ Oh ! listen for a fearful tale unto your ears I bring,
It is about a murder dread, that I have to sing.
Poor Floppington by wicked hands has been sent up aloft,
But England will see that the assassin will pay the cost.”

The poets to whose genius these effusions were due had not yet dismissed their afflatuses, but were waiting to be delivered of other verses in proportion as new matter arose. And on the second day new matter enough arose to inspire a laureate, much less a ballad-monger.

The first witness called was Mr. John Tremaine, the private secretary.

He stated that on hearing the terrible rumour of the Premier's assassination, his mind instantly reverted to certain communications which had passed between his revered master and a Mr. Jack Dawe, and he thought it right to make certain representations to the police, which induced them to issue a warrant for the arrest of the said Mr. Dawe. The sequel was known to the world. It was found that the bird had flown, and this additional suspicious circumstance had caused a large reward to be offered for his apprehension. He then proceeded to relate the history of the Dawe correspondence. He first became acquainted with the name of Jack Dawe by learning through an inquiry which he had caused to be made at the Bethnal Green Post Office, that the man who bore it was the sender of an extraordinary anonymous telegram addressed to the Premier, which he, as his confidential secretary, had opened.

THE CORONER.—“Do you remember the words of the telegram?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“They were unforgettable. ‘Abandon Irish policy at once. Be warned in time. Do not stir a step till I write more fully.’” (Sensation.)

THE CORONER.—“Did you show this to Mr. Floppington?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“After some hesitation I did.”

THE CORONER.—“Why did you hesitate?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“I was in the habit of receiving three or four letters a day which, in the exercise of my discretion, I tore up, and I hesitated whether to do the same with this. But the tone was so audaciously imperious, that I thought it best to show it to Mr Floppington.”

THE CORONER.—“How did he take it?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“He was terribly annoyed, and did not conceal his anger.”

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—“What were his exact words?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“I do not remember, but I think he said ‘Confound the fellow! That’s the coolest piece of cheek I ever heard of in my life.’”

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—“Are you sure he said ‘Confound’?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“I said I *think* he said ‘confound.’ I asked him whether I should put the matter into the hands of the police? But he thought it was not worth while, though he remarked that such fellows ought to be taught their places. Then he walked up and down for some time fuming, with the telegram in his hand, and at last tore it up with much indignation. It was the first threatening letter he had ever received, and no doubt agitated him the more on that account. When he grew calm, he asked me to inform no one of the strange message—a rather unnecessary request; though I thought it within my duty to ascertain the name of the sender, and to communicate my discovery to Mr. Floppington, though, when I did so, he seemed to resent being reminded of so apparently trivial an affair. The next communication from Mr. Dawe was in the form of a letter marked ‘private.’”

THE CORONER.—“Did you open that too?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“Yes; the Premier trusted his correspondence entirely to me.”

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—“Did you open every letter marked ‘private’?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“Yes; but, after the recent telegram from Mr. Dawe, he seemed to be uneasy lest he should receive other communications from him. As far as I could make out, he felt, though wrongly, that it was a loss to his dignity that I should read such humiliating messages as threatening letters. He even had the idea of reading all his own correspondence himself; but, as this was impossible, he exacted from me a promise that I would bring to him all letters, signed Jack Dawe, unread. In consequence of this, I handed him altogether two letters signed in that way, both of which he kept.”

THE CORONER.—“Did he take any steps with reference to these?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“No; I could tell from the replies that he had been threatened again; but he laughed at the fears which I ventured to respectfully express, and said that he had been upset at first, but that he was now sure the man was a harmless lunatic, and might be humoured.”

THE CORONER.—“Did you write the replies you allude to?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“At the Premier’s dictation.”

THE CORONER.—“*Cela va sans dire.*”

MR. TREMAINE.—“I beg your pardon. It was only a very few letters whose replies were dictated. Many were indicated in outline; but most were answered at my private discretion. The less important letters were written by an assistant private secretary. It was only to his own friends or to great personages that Mr. Floppington despatched autograph letters.”

THE CORONER.—“You did not, I understand, see the contents of the two letters. You merely inferred their character?”

MR. TREMAINE.—“Quite so. But that my inference was correct was proved by the lucky discovery of the letters in one of the late Premier’s coats. (Sensation.) They are now in the hands of the police.”

The letters being produced, the Coroner read them aloud.

“The Right Hon. Arnold Floppington.

“(Extremely Private and Confidential.)

“SIR,

“In telegraphing to you to abandon your Irish policy—a policy which I confess seems to me as unpatriotic as it is absurd—I was not giving an idle command. As you value your life you will obey it. *Retract publicly* your promises if you do not wish to make me your murderer. I can say no more; but can only pray that obstinacy will not cause you to turn a deaf ear to my warning.

“Believe me, Sir,

“Ever your earnest well-wisher,

“JACK DAWE.”

The reading of this letter produced an intense excitement. The audience felt as if assisting at the first and only representation of some stirring drama. To the imaginative eye the heated room appeared a cauldron in which History was visibly making. But the first letter was almost thrown into the shade by the second, which bade fair to make History of the kind not affected by Civil Service Examiners (perhaps because it is too easily remembered).

“Whether you are right,” ran this extraordinary epistle, “to disregard my previous communications, time will show. You have certainly remained safe so far; but it is, to say the least, very unwise of you to encounter the risk of being blown up for the mere pleasure of shattering the greatness of your country. But I do not

write this to repeat my warnings. Another matter of a very pressing nature causes me to thrust myself again into your busy life, and I assure you that I would not have felt myself justified in doing so were it not forced upon me. A difficulty has arisen about the girl Eliza Bathbrill (sensation), whom I have but lately discovered to be devoid of honour and principle." The Counsel for the family of the deceased interrupting, asked the Coroner whether it was necessary to publish any more of the contents of a private letter than that threatening portion which had already been read. It was evident that the rest of the letter had no bearing on the present case.

MR. MIDDLETOP, Q.C., who had gratuitously undertaken to watch the case in the interests of Jack Dawe (probably for the sake of the splendid advertisement), protested against this assertion, and urged that for various reasons it was necessary that the relations between his client and the late Premier should be exposed as much as possible.

THE FOREMAN said that the jury thought the reading should be continued.

THE CORONER ruled that the whole of the letter was evidence, and evidence of an important character, giving a somewhat new complexion to the case.

The audience breathed freely once more. There was at this critical moment hardly one of them who would have bartered his seat for a five-pound note. Should there by any chance have been a croaking, pessimistic philosopher among them, and had he chosen the moment for propounding his witless conundrum: "Is Life worth living?" he might have been for ever silenced by the one word: "*Circumspice.*" "It is a happy world," he would have said with Paley, "it is a happy world after all." Let us hope, however, that there was not, for the discovery would have made him unhappy for life. The reading of the letter was then continued as follows: "I have had to refuse to marry her for reasons which you will easily understand. It was not till too late that I discovered your relations with her. On this point I was completely uninformed. Bitterly as I have the right to reproach you for the trouble you have thereby brought into my life (and what I have suffered through your ancient love for Eliza Bathbrill is known to myself alone), I have hitherto, as you know, kept silence on the point, nor shall I now waste words of reproach. But she is bringing an action for breach of promise against me, and claims £3,000 damages, a demand which I have not at present the resources to meet, even if she would consent to compromise the matter. She has already refused £2,000, and indeed insists on dragging me into Court. If the case comes on, you will of course understand that you will have to appear. There is no need for me to enlarge on the inevitableness of that step. If you shrink from the unpleasantness of the position, you had better try what *you* can do to conciliate the Plaintiff. You might succeed where I have failed. Perhaps you might induce

her to take £2,500. Of course, I leave you to obtain the money, which you will doubtless be able to do without difficulty.

"I am, Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"JACK DAWE."

P.S.—"I give you *carte blanche* to expend what you will in averting the scandal.

P.P.S.—"Unless you are afraid of my presence in the House, please send me a ticket for the Speaker's Gallery, for the night when you are to expound your 'Home Rule Bill.'"

MR. CORNELIUS DRAT begged to express his approval of the overruling of the Coroner. A more shameless and cynical attempt at extortion had probably never been made than the above, with its audaciously naïve postscripts. But he was happy to say that this base attempt to trade on the chance that there was a grain of truth in certain incredible rumours, had met with the success it deserved, as would be evident from the replies preserved by Mr. Tremaine.

MR. MIDDLETOP protested warmly against this defamation of his client's character. If Mr. Dawe thought that the girl in question was unfit to be an honest man's wife, and if he at the same time realised how difficult and delicate a task it would be to prove to a jury the justice of his rejection of her, it was not to be expected that he should tamely submit to the pecuniary loss brought upon him by the fault of another. "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum,*" cried the Counsel. "With all my heart! But *de vivis nil nisi verum,* and the latter surely takes precedence of the former. *Fiat justitia ruat nomen,* let justice be done though reputations fall."

The opposition Counsel remarked that there was no danger of the fall of any but legal reputations. (Laughter.) His learned brother, disregarding the interruption, went on to urge that no attempt had been made to show that the letters in question were really sent by Jack Dawe. He wished to know whether the handwriting had been compared with that of his client?

THE CORONER replied that that had been done by Mr. Undercliff, the Expert. If necessary, that gentleman could be called.

MR. DRAT, Q.C., said that he could prove that Jack Dawe sent the telegram to which both the letters referred.

THE FOREMAN thought that the evidence would be incomplete without the testimony of the Expert.

MR. UNDERCLIFF was then called, and deposed that he had compared the two letters with a letter written by Jack Dawe, kindly furnished him by Miss Bath Brill. He began by alluding to the remarkable resemblance of the chirography of this last letter to that of the Premier, the likeness being doubtless due to that strange similarity of physical and presumably of manual conformation which was said to have existed between the two men. Passing from this

curious but irrelevant fact to the actual question, he found that the writing of the letters of the Premier bore in all essential respects a great resemblance to that of the letter to Miss Bathbrill, though superficially there was a good deal of difference. He considered there had been some attempt at disguising the hand, but the disguise was clumsy. Thus did the poor man swear away his reputation ; for, as it presently transpired that Sally had written the letters, the *Daily Telegraph* came out next day with a scathing article on the pretensions of him and his class. But the reader, who remembers that Sally's chirography was as near a copy of Jack's as she could attain to, will no doubt feel that this is a very complicated world, and that to get at the rights of things is a task beyond the powers of anybody but the present historian.

THE TELEGRAPH CLERK stated that the telegram had been brought to him by a girl, who, he believed, was the maid-of-all-work in the "Star Dining Rooms." He was, of course, struck by the audacity of the message and showed it to his fellow-clerks.

THE CORONER said he would not call the servant-girl at this stage of the proceedings unless the learned Counsel wished it.

The learned Counsel replied that he did not intend to dispute the authorship of the letters.

The Private Secretary having handed the Coroner the replies, they were next read aloud.

These the reader is already partially acquainted with, but that he may have all the evidence under his eye, they shall now be reproduced in full. This was the first :

"MR. JACK DAWE.

"SIR,

"In reply to a telegram and a communication marked 'private,' I am instructed to inform you that Mr. Floppington has had them under his careful consideration. So far as he can understand your meaning from your cunningly-worded and intentionally vague statements, he regrets to be unable to give any credence to them. He has, on the contrary, reasons to believe and is of the firm opinion that this is but another ruse. Mr. Floppington begs that you will not favour him with any more such communications.

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient Servant,

"JOHN TREMAINE."

The second answer ran as follows :

"MR. JACK DAWE.

"SIR,

"Mr. Floppington has given your letter all the attention it deserves. He regrets that you should have still thought it necessary to allude to the topic of your first letter. He is of opinion that the case you now put is still another ruse, and he absolutely refuses to

take the steps you advise. Mr. Floppington again begs that you will cease to trouble him with such communications. With regard to your demand for an order for the Strangers' Gallery, for July 12th, Mr. Floppington regrets that despite all his efforts he has been unable to obtain one for you. Mr. Floppington has even asked the Speaker to allow him to place you under the grating of the House, but this could not be conceded. He begs that in future you will make earlier application.

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient Servant,

"JOHN TREMAINE."

MR. CORNELIUS DRAT called attention to the contemptuous snub given by the icy politeness of the latter reply to the clumsy attempt at extortion. That the Premier suspected collusion between the parties to the threatened suit was evidenced from his characterising the demand as a ruse, and he ventured to say that this was the view that would be taken by any unprejudiced mind. The Premier, though probably not unconscious of the lengths to which a woman would go in self-accusation, was not the man to be frightened into paying hush-money by the threat of damaging revelations.

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—"Do you not think it strange that the Premier did not at once put such letters as these into the hands of the police?"

MR. TREMAINE.—"Not at all. With regard to the second, he no doubt considered it extremely inadvisable to aid in giving publicity to even the absurdest of rumours concerning himself. A well-known recent case ought to have made it clear that there are prurient people with whom to be suspected is to be guilty. As for the first, it seems to me (though I confess I do not quite see how the theory explains all its phrases) that he had read the letter as a warning and not as a threat—a misreading which probably cost him his life."

MR. MIDDLETOP protested against the assumption that it was a misreading. The witness had said that the Premier's misreading had probably cost him his life. He would ask the jury to remember that a misreading of it on their part would probably cost another life. To assume that the letter was meant as a threat was to beg the whole question. Moreover, it would be observed that the reply to the second letter did not by any means deny the justice of the claim in the event of a breach of promise case, but refused to believe in the reality of the suit; a disbelief altogether mistaken.

The strange link of connection between the Premier and his supposed murderer afforded by their respective relations to Eliza Bathbrill, supplied a new element of dramatic interest, surcharging what had, at first, seemed a purely political tragedy with a romantic poetry, and lending it that touch of universal human nature which brought it home to hearts incapable of appreciating the sombre *motif* of political fanaticism. In this tense condition of the

emotions of the audience, the examination of Mrs. Dawe came as a relief. The old lady was naturally the object of much commiseration, despite the gorgeousness and marine character of her get-up, and the complaints which she began to make as she waddled towards the witness-box.

MRS. DAWE.—“I axes all you ladies and gentlemen whether it is right to drag a poor, lone widder and ’er gal from ’er bizness when the shop is crammed with new customers as tight as all o’ you from mornin’ to night, and pr’aps thieves among ’em as’ll bamboozle Mrs. Rogers’ gal like lawyers?”

THE CORONER.—“You must not complain to the audience.”

MRS. DAWE.—“I don’t complain, yer wuship. I wishes to thank all the gentlemen for puttin’ picters of me and the shop in the papers as if we was Pears’ soap, but I thinks it very ’ard that Jack, who’s as hinnocent as a unborn lamb, should be stuck up on walls and shop-windows as was never stuck up in his life . . . Eh? Take a oath on that book! Not if I knows it, young man.”

THE CORONER.—“You must do so, madam.”

MRS. DAWE.—“Who ses so? Ye can take a ’orse to the water but ye can’t make him swear.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“You must not speak like that. Do I understand that you refuse to take an oath?”

MRS. DAWE.—“By the memory of my late ’usband, I dces! ’E used to say: ‘Truth lays at the bottom of a well, and a oath is a bucket with its bottom knocked out.’” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“Is the memory of your husband the only objection?” (Laughter.)

MRS. DAWE.—“It’s my own memory that’s the objection. (Laughter.) ’E used to say, ‘Darlin’, when I am gone, forget the old man if ye likes, but remember ’is principles.’”

THE CORONER.—“And what were his principles?”

MRS. DAWE.—“He was a Free Thinker and so am I. I don’t believe in nothing, thank Gord, I don’t!” (Loud and continued laughter, which was checked by the Ushers with difficulty.)

THE CORONER.—“Surely you were brought up as a Christian?”

MRS. DAWE (indignantly).—“I wasn’t brought up as a savage.”

THE CORONER.—“Do you mean to say that you don’t keep anything now?”

MRS. DAWE.—“Nothin’ except a cook-shop.” (Laughter.)

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—“She means that she worships the great God Pan.” (Loud laughter.)

MRS. DAWE (angrily).—“I didn’t come ’ere to be made fun of by a man with more ’air than brains! (Laughter.) I claims to affirm.”

The Coroner, to put an end to the unseemly levity of the audience, allowed the imperious old lady to have her way, and the investigation proceeded.

MRS. DAWE then deposed (with much irrelevancy, much independence, much confusion of metaphor, and much grotesque-

ness of simile) that her son was a house-and-sign painter, and a bachelor, living with her and having a share in the business, and that she had never seen or heard of him since the evening of the 12th instant.

THE CORONER.—“When did you first miss him?”

MRS. DAWE.—“The next mornin’ when ’is bacon got spiled, not as ’e cared much lately for my best dishes and titbits like a Irish Priest as reduces ’is flesh for the race ’Eavenwards, as my late ’usband said.”

THE CORONER.—“He might have come home late without your knowing it, and gone out early again, might he not?”

MRS. DAWE.—“If he was a liar he might, not without.”

THE CORONER.—“Have the goodness to explain yourself.”

MRS. DAWE.—“’E told me some time ago ’e’d lost ’is latch-key, and ’e couldn’t get in through the key’ole like a mouse, could ’e?”

THE CORONER.—“You evidently don’t believe in the loss.”

MRS. DAWE.—“I wish it was true, it ’ud be a profit.”

THE FOREMAN.—“Has the mysterious latch-key been tried on the door of the witness?”

The question being put to the police was answered in the negative. It had not occurred to any one to do so.

THE CORONER.—“Would you know the key if you saw it?”

MRS. DAWE.—“I should ’ope so. Why I never forgets a face.”
(Laughter.)

The key was then handed to the witness who recognised it as her son’s. (Sensation.)

THE CORONER remarked that the possibility of its having been dropped by the suspected person ought to have suggested itself to somebody.

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—“I suggested, yesterday, that the doors of some of the witnesses should be tried.”

THE CORONER (coldly).—“Your ingenuity does you credit.”

MRS. DAWE.—“I know’d that latch-key ’ud be the ruin of ’im.”

THE CORONER.—“Was he often out late?”

MRS. DAWE (glancing uneasily around).—“Dunno.”

THE CORONER.—“What do you mean?”

MRS. DAWE.—“Dunno, I tells ye.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“Why don’t you know?”

MRS. DAWE.—“’Cos I was often abed and asleep long afore ’e come in.”

THE CORONER.—“What time do you go to bed?”

MRS. DAWE.—“We shuts up at eleven and afore I gets a little supper—I can’t find time to eat it afore, ’cos I’m as busy as a bull in a chiney shop—”

THE CORONER.—“What kept him out so late?”

MRS. DAWE.—“Politics mostly.”

THE CORONER.—“What; was he an M.P.?”

MRS. DAWE.—“I wish ’e was. the vagabond! (Laughter.) ’E used to waste ’ours and ’ours jabberin’ away like one o’clock.”
(Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“*Till* one o'clock you mean.”

MRS. DAWE.—“No, I don't. Ye don't pump me like that.”
(Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“He was a red-hot Radical, I believe?”

MRS. DAWE.—“Was 'e?” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“You must answer the question.”

MRS. DAWE.—“I wants to know what a red-hot Radical is afore I commits myself.”

THE CORONER.—“Oh, a man who wants a lot of changes, you know.”

MRS. DAWE.—“Well, 'e *was* very particklar about 'is underlinen (great laughter), and lately more so than ever. 'E wanted a clean shirt a day, only I stood out that it 'ud ruin me.”

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—“She wished to live dirt-cheap.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“Come, come, Mrs. Dawe, don't pretend to misunderstand. You say that he took great interest in polit.cs. You must have heard him talk on the subject at home.”

MRS. DAWE.—“I ain't deaf.”

THE CORONER.—“Did you ever hear him violently denounce the late Premier?”

MRS. DAWE.—“No.”

THE CORONER.—“On your oath, Mrs. Dawe?”

MRS. DAWE.—“I ain't taken no oath.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“Well on your word of honour as a lady, have you ever heard your son denounce Mr. Floppington?”

MRS. DAWE.—“Well, if ye puts it in that way, I 'aven't. (Great laughter.) 'E's always been down on Floppy's politics, but 'e'd no more think o' layin' a finger on 'im than I would o' pullin' off them 'ere lovely wigs.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“He was engaged to a Miss Eliza Bathbrill, was he not?”

MRS. DAWE.—“I didn't come 'ere to 'ave salt put on my wounds while a lot of vagabonds might be socialisting the cook-shop.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“You must not talk like that. You must answer my questions.”

MRS. DAWE.—“If ye'd only put proper questions I'd answer ye without a word. (Laughter.) 'E *was* engaged to 'er, but 'e chucked 'er up, and now she's been—leastways she wouldn't 'ave 'im, 'cos she wanted to get up a case and damage 'im for life.”

THE CORONER.—“Let us have the truth. Who gave whom up?”

MRS. DAWE.—“I couldn't tell yer if I tried for a year. They was all mixed like.”

THE CORONER.—“When was the match broken off?”

MRS. DAWE.—“I can't remember.”

THE CORONER.—“I thought you had a good memory!”

MRS. DAWE.—“D'ye mean to say I'm a liar?” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“It is evidently impossible to get anything definite out of this witness. Happily there are plenty of witnesses

to the facts. When the match was broken off, did your son tell you why he gave her up?"

MRS. DAWE (after consideration).—"I gives it up."

THE CORONER—"And so do I. You may stand down."

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"I should like to ask the witness a few questions."

THE CORONER—"I wish you success." (Laughter.)

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Miss Bathbrill summoned your son for breach of promise. Yet you say you can't tell which gave the other up. Now what is your private opinion of the case? Don't you think it was got up between them?"

MRS. DAWE—"D'y'e mean for the sake o' the lawyers?"

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"No; for their own. Supposing—only supposing, Mrs. Dawe—they thought they might get the money from some other person—?"

MRS. DAWE—"The vagabonds! I guessed as much."

MR. DRAT, Q.C. (triumphantly).—"We will leave that now Mrs. Dawe. Your son, I gather, did not always treat you with the respect due to your age and position. He declined to follow your advice, for instance?"

MRS. DAWE—"He were certainly as obstinate as a customer with a bad 'aypenny. If 'he said 'e'd do a thing, 'e'd do it if I stood on my 'ead and begged 'im not to, and he always 'ad 'is own way, like a tram." (Laughter.)

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Indeed! If he said he'd do a thing, he'd do it! What things for instance has he done?"

MRS. DAWE—"Ye wouldn't understand." (Laughter.)

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Yes, I would."

MRS. DAWE—"Ye're very inquisitive. (Laughter.) If my son and me ain't lived like Darby and Joan, what's it got to do with you? I might as well ask when ye give yer old woman a black eye last?" (Loud laughter, which was instantly suppressed, the Coroner threatening to clear the Court.)

THE CORONER—"You must bridle your tongue, my good woman, and answer the questions that are put to you."

MRS. DAWE—"Ow can I answer the questions if I've bridled my tongue." (Laughter.)

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Attend to me if you please. Your son is said to resemble the Premier. Did he ever refer to this resemblance?"

MRS. DAWE—"Several times, but mostly in joke."

THE FOREMAN asked whether the photograph on the bills was authentic; because, if so, he failed to see any great resemblance.

THE CORONER—"That photograph is, I understand, an enlarged copy of a single figure in a family group belonging to Miss Bathbrill, and now in the hands of the police. This portrait of Mr. Dawe, which was taken at Ramsgate, is the only one in existence. The jury may see the original if they lik."

THE FOREMAN (after the portrait had been handed round).—"The jury do not think that any one would see the resemblance in

the face if they did not know it existed. The figure is certainly similar."

THE CORONER.—"A slight resemblance to so celebrated a personage would naturally be exaggerated. But we shall presently have the evidence of eye-witnesses on the point."

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Now, Mrs. Dawe, can you remember any of the jokes your son made on the subject?"

MRS. DAWE.—"'E said they was as like as two peas, only 'e 'oped 'e wasn't as green as the other." (Laughter.)

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"There's many a serious word spoken in jest. Mr. Dawe evidently thought himself more capable than the Premier."

MRS. DAWE.—"In course 'e did. 'E said once, 'e wouldn't be Floppy for £100,000, and I know 'e meant it, 'cos 'e smashed a plate with 'is fist."

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Then he *did* get excited about the Premier?"

MRS. DAWE.—"'E was a good deal cut up over 'im (laughter); but 'e despised 'im too much to be excited about 'im, and so did I. If *my* pea 'ad been born in a gold plate instead of a chiney one, it 'ud a-made a better Pry Minister than the other by long chalks.' (Laughter.)

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"How long ago is it (as nearly as you can remember) since your son began to abuse Mr. Floppington so violently?"

MRS. DAWE.—"'Ow long ago is it (as nearly as ye can remember) since I told ye that my son never abused Mr. Floppington violently at all? (Laughter.) Lawyers should 'ave good memories." (Great laughter.)

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Well, carry your good memory back to the day when your son left home. Had he been talking about the Premier at all?"

MRS. DAWE.—"Who was there to talk to? I've got too much sense to talk politics, and I'm sure 'e didn't have no conversation with Sally."

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"How could you be sure of that?"

MRS. DAWE.—"'Cos I didn't allow 'im to say a word to 'er."

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Why not?"

MRS. DAWE.—"'Cos she was goin' to be a witness in the breach o' promise case, and I didn't want 'im to prejudice 'er."

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"What was he doing during that day? Didn't he go to work?"

MRS. DAWE.—"No, he sat nearly the 'ole day reading every blessed paper."

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"He certainly took great interest, then, in public events, if he neglected his work and did nothing but read all the papers. Did you say nothing to him about his idleness?"

MRS. DAWE.—"'E wasn't fit to go out, 'cos 'e'd 'ad the brain-fever, haggrieved by grief, 'cos the whole time 'Lizer didn't come to see 'im once, not to speak of a touch o' small-pox."

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Who is 'Lizer?"

MRS. DAWE.—“The gal as wants to damage 'im.”

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—“I see. But if he was in a state of convalescence, as you describe, his disappearance must have frightened you a good deal.”

MRS. DAWE.—“No, it didn't, 'cos 'e disappeared a few days afore that, only I dragged 'im back by the 'air of 'is 'ead.”

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—“Where did you find him?”

MRS. DAWE.—“At 'Oxton, at a midnight meeting.” (Sensation.)

MR. MIDDLETOP.—“Of Orangemen?” (Sensation.)

MRS. DAWE.—“No; nor applewomen neither. It was Salvation chaps and their gals a 'avin' a little fun.”

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—“And what was your son doing there?”

MRS. DAWE.—“Preachifyin', the wagabond, fit to make 'is late father's 'air stand on end in 'is grave. What's the good of eddication if it only makes children think they know better than their elders? I don't believe in nothing, thank Gord, I don't; but them School Boards is unsettlin' everything.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“According to you, he was ill and in a state of religious fanaticism combined with an intense interest in politics. Did you suspect he wasn't quite right in his head?”

MRS. DAWE.—“D' ye mean 'cos 'e was religious? (Laughter.) If 'e gets into a scrape it'll be Gord's punishment on 'im for desertin' the faith of 'is fathers and mothers.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“I think you had better stand down.”

MRS. DAWE.—“I 'opes the Queen will pay me for my two days wasted.”

THE CORONER.—“You must settle that with Her Majesty.” (Laughter.)

MRS. DAWE (angrily).—“All right, I'll take it out of the Queen's taxes. (Laughter.) As for Jack, 'e's as innocent as a sheep, and though ye've lost 'im and don't know where to find 'im, let 'im alone and 'e'll come 'ome with all 'is tail be'ind 'im.” (Laughter.)

Mrs. Dawe then withdrew in considerable indignation, and the Court adjourned for lunch. On the resumption of the sitting, Sally appeared, attired in her Christmas costume, but red-eyed and pale. She repeated the oath with fervour, making only one slip by substituting “S'elp me, Bob!” for the customary formula, and in the intensity of her earnestness, throwing in an additional “May I never move, if I don't,” at the finish.

She began her answers by an irrelevant and indignant protest against the shameful accusations made against her master, who, she declared with tears, was dead. This last sentence, being at once subjected to severe criticism, turned out to be merely inferential. She had last seen her master on the evening of the 12th instant. Her account of how he had spent the day tallied with that of her mistress, except that the latter had not referred to a short walk in the afternoon. He had not spoken to her during the day because her mistress had forbidden it; she did not know why. (Master Jack was frightened of “missus,” she thought, though till

lately it used to be "the other way on." That was probably because Master Jack had been ill a good deal, though to be sure "missus" had been ill too.) "But just when it was beginning to get dark," proceeded the girl, "he come into the kitchen dressed to go out, and ses to me, 'Remember what I ses to ye the other night. Keep up yer courage.' 'Oh master,' ses I, 'don't worry about me; it's only you that I'm troubled about.' He smiled so sad and soft, it almost made me cry. 'I shall soon be out o' all my troubles, Sally!' 'e ses. With that he went out quick, and I never see 'im no more, and I knows 'e's been and drowned 'issself." A burst of sobbing concluded this sentence. "It's all 'Lizer's fault," Sally moaned, "it's all on account o' 'Lizer." Interrogated as to her meaning, she stated that 'Lizer Bathbrill was the cause of her master's wretchedness. He did not love her a bit—she wouldn't say he hadn't once loved her—but now he hated her like pizon, because he had found out what sort of a girl she was. (The witness had to be stopped in her enumeration of epithets.) Though she knew his feelings, Eliza was always coming and worrying him, and at last he told her plain out that he loved another. (The witness had overheard some of the final interview.) And then she brought an action against him for £2,000, and "missus" worried him about it so much that he went and drowned himself, after leaving the witness in the way already described.

THE CORONER.—"What was it he told you to remember the other night?"

SALLY.—"I told 'im I was miserable and I wanted to kill myself, so 'e give me a piece of advice."

THE CORONER.—"What was the advice?"

SALLY.—"'E told me, whenever I wanted to kill myself to go and read a book (laughter); so 'e made a list of a hundred books for me, 'cos he was learnin' me to read like a lady."

THE CORONER.—"That was certainly very kind. Have you the list?"

SALLY.—"Missus burnt it; but I remember some on it. One on 'em was 'Arry Stottel's 'Physics,' and then, when 'e see I could swallow that, he chucked in 'Eagle.' 'E was very good to me 'e was. And then there was the Bible and 'Bunch of Keys.'" (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—"Who?"

MR. DRAT, Q.C.—"Perhaps she means Sophocles?"

SALLY.—"Yes, that was the gentleman. And there was some widows as well."

MR. MIDDLETOP.—"The Vedas, perhaps?" (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—"No wonder your master gave you that advice. (Laughter.) I should think that the mere presumption on the part of any man that he could draw up a list of a hundred books to constitute the bulk of the reading of any one else would be proof positive of insanity. (Laughter.) Did he teach you to write too?"

SALLY.—"Yes, and I wrote two letters for 'im."

THE CORONER.—"To whom?"

SALLY.—“To Floppy.” (Sensation.)

The two letters being handed to witness, she recognised them as those she had written.

THE CORONER.—“Mr. Dawe’s tuition was not as disinterested as it appeared.”

Continuing his examination, the Coroner elicited further details of the highest importance. She had written the first letter from his dictation, the second she had copied.

The witness then related with as much precision as she could command, the details of Jack Dawe’s illness, his delirious outcries that devils were murdering him, and his rambling monologues commencing with Mr. Speaker ; his return of consciousness followed by wild inquiries as to whether the Premier was alive, and by the despatch of the telegram. This evidence excited immense interest ; and, as the drama unfolded, so the extraordinary complexity of *motif* and incident began to reveal itself to the obtusest spectators. In addition to the usual display of conventional character produced by juridical analysis, to the laying bare of stock emotions and time-honoured passions, in addition to the antediluvian *motif* already apparent, there began to loom in the distance the shadow of a *motif* of a kind unknown alike to fiction and to history.

“Did Mr. Dawe refer to Ireland?” the Coroner asked, a moment before the inquest was adjourned.

And Sally answered in those remarkable words which formed a fitting close to the second act of the great Tragi-Comedy : “E used often to say when ’e was mad, ‘Ireland shall not have Home-Rule though I die for it.’”

CHAPTER IV.

A PIECE OF SYNTHESIS.

SLOWLY but surely light had been growing, and now a steady glare illumined the depths and abysses of the tenebrous tragedy. But by the end of the investigation every nook and cranny was flooded by the shadow-dispelling rays, and the eye of the world looked long and lingeringly on strange, psychical secrets.

That the interest of the inquest would be maintained at the same high level till the finish was hardly to be expected ; the first two acts had been so full of sensations and surprises that one felt that the Fates must have exhausted themselves, and, like imprudent authors, had so injudiciously distributed their fat as to leave little or nothing for the finish. But whoever expected a collapse was agreeably disappointed ; if the dialogue was less pungent, and the setting more sombre, the action was more bustling and the points more frequent ; and with not an instant’s flagging, the unrehearsed drama went on to its triumphant conclusion. The

guilt of Jack Dawe was, it will be remembered, patent to an immense majority from the very first; but by the time this stage of the proceedings was reached, the minority had been reduced to a handful of paradoxical people; one of whom rushed into print. In the number of the *Times*, from which the contents of the last chapter have been taken, there is a curious letter signed "Fair Play."* A copy of it may not be uninteresting:

"Verily there is nothing so benumbing to calm common sense as the irresponsible chatter of the multitude. Let them once get a theory into their stupid heads, and it is as difficult to dislodge it as it is to convince critics that their own petty experiences of life are not a sufficient test of the possibility of incidents or of characters. When I hear the silly clamour of the crowd, on this and other subjects, I am tempted to exclaim (to misapply the already proverbial words which will appear in your issue of to-morrow, and which to me, at least, seem to hit off the spirit of modern materialism and positivism to a T), 'I don't believe in nothing, thank God, I don't.' I venture to say, sir, that the questions put by the Coroner to-day showed an utter misconception of the real bearing of the evidence. There was only one man who seemed to have any glimmering of correct apprehension, and even with him the glimmer died away as soon as it appeared. The question of Mr. Dawe's Counsel, 'Of Orangemen?' combined with his contention that the messages were intended as warnings, and not as threats, shows that his theory is substantially one with that I am about to indicate. But, as he has not thought fit to put his two utterances together, I venture to assure him that his unfortunate hypothesis is not so wild as to have suggested itself to no one but the professional champion of a losing cause. On the contrary, only by a prejudiced misreading can the letters of the suspected man be regarded as threats. They are warnings, and warnings alone. Who, that listened to the girl Sally's account of her master's agonised inquiry on awaking from his long fever, of his immediate despatch of a telegram, and then of a letter, can doubt of the fact? Note the irony of fate. The poor house-painter has somehow discovered a project against the Premier's life; he is bound over, by oath, to keep the secret on peril of his life. The horror of the situation prostrates him with brain-fever, and he babbles of the devils who were about to kill him. He wakes, and his first thought is of the threatened man; he telegraphs; he writes in veiled oracular phraseology, almost grazing the breaking of his oath. Mark the expression, 'You will make me your murderer,' *i.e.* by not changing your Irish policy. Now, who are interested in the abandonment of his policy? The Ulsterites; and the plot in question has been hatched by a few desperadoes among them. 'Absurd,' I hear the sapient *vox populi* cry. No, my friends, it is

* From a little-known, miscellaneous volume in the British Museum, in which the letter is reproduced with a commentary by the author, it would seem that "Fair Play" was the pseudonym of a popular novelist of the period.

you that are absurd. Have you, then, heard nothing of the feeling in Ulster, of the revolution already threatening?

"Charmed by the magic eloquence of the great statesman whom Providence has taken from us, have you no ears for the growing murmurs of discontent—a discontent that might lead misguided men to fancy that in murdering the Premier they were putting into action the unexpressed sentiment of the community? Lingers there in no one's memory—it is fresh in mine—the spirit-stirring address of a young politician, who may learn from this unexpected result the danger of rash and indiscriminate rhetoric, 'A blow will have to be struck; a blow will be struck, the sound of which,' etc.

"Well, sir, a blow *has* been struck, the sound of which *has*, etc.

"To conclude, I assert that the above is the only theory that will fit all the facts. On any other hypothesis how can you explain the words frequently uttered in delirium, 'Ireland shall not have Home Rule though I die for it'? What, in Heaven's name, could have made an Englishman willing to die for the sake of Ireland? The sentence is evidently a repetition of one made use of by a conspirator, which engraved itself on the memory of the unhappy house-painter.

"But I know well I am crying in the wilderness. The force of public opinion has made the verdict a foregone conclusion. The cry for vengeance is natural, but in the nineteenth century we cannot allow justice to be as blind as those who invoke her.

"P.S.—A medical friend of mine, who has read over this letter, tells me that it has partially converted him. He suggests, however, an alternative theory. Rejecting the idea of Jack Dawe's having discovered a plot against the Premier as being utterly improbable (and I admit that I cannot even imagine the circumstances of the discovery), he thinks that the man may have been under the delusion that he had done so, conceiving the idea in that excited state of his brain which led to his attack of cerebral fever. Such cases are not rare in Mental Pathology. Hence the telegram, etc. However this may be, it is satisfactory to find that on the question of the *intention* of the messages, he is at one with me."

That this letter attracted some attention is obvious from the Coroner's reference thereto; but the general opinion of the despised public was that the new theory was rather too ingenious to be true. And the public had very soon occasion to pride itself on its discernment, and to pay back flout for flout. For not only did the vaunted hypothesis of "Fair Play" fail altogether to cover the nakedness of the broad, bare facts elicited on the last day, but the popular theory—very much modified, but still claimed by the public—was able to cover every atom of them, and, in fact, every particle of the whole body of evidence, twofold, and even threefold.

It would appear that on the evening of the second day there was a widely-disseminated report that Jack Dawe had been captured. The savage joy that was loudly expressed in all quarters was no slight indication of the state of public feeling, and acute dis-

appointment was felt when it was discovered that the report was a hoax, and that, in spite of the most determined vigilance on the part of the police, no traces had yet been obtained of any one resembling the portrait of the fugitive. The telegraph offices were kept busy with inquiries from all parts of the kingdom and the Continent. Much excitement prevailed till a late hour.

The first witness called on the last day of the investigation was Eliza Bathbrill. As the elegant form of the quondam housemaid advanced gracefully into the witness-box, the dense, variegated mass of human beings stirred as with the passing of some mighty breeze. The marvellous loveliness of the girl seems to have thrilled every heart. Even in that material age the worship of beauty was not dead; the audience rose in reverence and stood on the benches in awe. An impromptu service took place after the fashion of the period. Opera-glasses, which had long superseded psalters for the expression of adoration, were devoutly produced on all sides. It was some time before the overcharged emotions of the crowd could allow the purely secular business to proceed.

But, alas! never did the true historical spirit (carefully brought with them by the audience) — never did the ardent desire To Know (dominating the breasts of the gloved Eves and eye-glassed Paracelsuses) meet with a severer check. Not only did Eliza swear that she had never seen the Premier in her life, but she swore it so positively, that the gladness which people might have felt at the redemption of the Minister's reputation, was neutralised by the dread lest the girl should be perjuring her soul and perilling her salvation.

Outside, indeed, by the rude millions who were cut off from the higher emotions, the exculpation of their idolised and martyred Floppington was received with no such modified joy. In Ireland, where he had already been canonised, the news only sharpened the deadly desire for vengeance. The rest of Eliza's evidence would have little novelty; and even at the risk of violating the good old literary canon that history repeats itself, we must content ourselves with assuring the reader that Eliza gave as true a version of the facts as was possible to so romantic an artist; excepting, perhaps, her assertion that uninterrupted tenderness had reigned between her and her lover till the day of the mysterious and peremptory return from Ramsgate.

Some amusement was created by the surprise manifested by the witness on first hearing that Mr. Dawe had not suffered from small-pox after all. Was it the memory of a wasted glove that touched her eyes with dreamy softness?

But not even the charm of Eliza's artless *genre* picture — not the interest of her ingenuous and realistic story could dissipate the clouds of disappointment. It was true that in one particular, public expectation had been more than fulfilled. But what if Eliza *was* beautiful as a Hourii! Beauty is but skin-deep —! Then, again, it was painful to the refined moral intuition to discover that the Coroner had not the interests of Justice at heart, and that the dis-

senting juror was rudely suppressed, and the cross-examination of the witness conducted on lines important only to the real question at issue. The result of this jar to delicate susceptibilities was to make not a few of those who had taken part in the late impromptu service orthodox enough to disbelieve in the object of their adoration. Eliza's denial was looked upon as the result of a false modesty; and they loftily refused to permit the Indignity of History to suffer by the mistaken humility of a housemaid.

"*Non omnis moriar*," Eliza might have proudly sung as she left the scene of her latest triumph. "I, too, shall join the choir invisible, whose scandal is the gladness of the world." And more than a place in the choir invisible awaited her, for has not every reader seen her niched amid the very visible choir at Madame Tussaud's, blooming in waxen immortal beauty not far from the cerated countenance, sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, of the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington? Well, indeed, had she merited the immediately-granted distinction of a pedestal in our national pantheon (a pantheon where the gods are the positivist deity of humanity, vermicular in his power of being chopped up into fragments, each a god in itself). Who, forsooth, could claim admittance into our Catholic Academy, if it were denied to the *fiancée* of a murderer and the alleged mistress of a Premier? The management knew better than to discourage budding talent in that fashion.

A motley procession of figures unknown to fame brought up the rear of the irregular army of witnesses.

MR. LEGGE, a retired barrister and an *habitué* of the Cogers' Hall, deposed that he had known Jack Dawe for some time. The man was one of the most uncompromising Radicals whose tirades the walls of the ancient hall had ever echoed. He was also an atheist, and very fond of his joke. He (the witness) had always found him a very nice fellow, well-informed, and looked up to by a little clique at the Cogers over which, being naturally of a domineering temper, he had acquired a certain authority. Indeed, on account of a somewhat striking resemblance to the late Premier, he was familiarly called "Floppy," by which nickname only, many of the frequenters knew him.

THE CORONER.—"Did you ever see the late Premier?"

MR. LEGGE.—"Once or twice."

THE CORONER.—"What were your own impressions as to the resemblance?"

MR. LEGGE.—"It was a general resemblance so to speak. I don't suppose it held in detail. Then again the difference of costume gave the two men quite a different air."

THE CORONER.—"Do you think his own and the general consciousness of this resemblance had some subtle effect in inflating Mr. Dawe and making him sometimes pose as if he were the Premier?"

MR. LEGGE.—"I scarcely think that. He had too much sense for that."

THE CORONER.—“You see, a feeling of that kind influences a man unknown to him. Might it not have contributed to strengthen his natural desire to rule, if even only a small clique?”

MR. LEGGE.—“I should say there is something in that view of the case. It is likely enough.”

THE CORONER.—“You say he had much sense. But for all that, was there any feeling in your debating society that he was not altogether right in his head?”

MR. LEGGE.—“It never struck me that he wasn't.”

THE CORONER.—“I don't doubt for a moment that he was sane in one sense. But in all his brilliant wit, all his fiery eloquence, wasn't there something feverish, something unhealthy? Was there any feeling, anyhow, that the man was to be humoured somewhat?”

MR. LEGGE.—“Well, there was. The very fact that he was ‘Floppy’ caused us to pay him a certain half-mock deference, not after all much unlike that which one pays to a man slightly weak in the upper storey. And I do think that casual debaters who knew not ‘Floppy’ used to get this view of him.”

THE CORONER.—“Did not the contrast between the politics of the two ‘Floppingtons’ attract attention?”

MR. LEGGE.—“Of course. It was even said that Jack Dawe consciously aimed at being as much unlike Mr. Floppington in the spirit as he was like him in body. And really it seemed as if a measure had only to be introduced or advocated by the latter to be instantly violently denounced by the former. We used to reproach him with allowing the Premier to make up his mind for him.” (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—“Then he seems to have regarded the Premier as a kind of *bête noire*?”

MR. LEGGE.—“I don't say that, though I admit he seemed to feel a sort of personal antagonism to Mr. Floppington and a sort of personal triumph in demolishing him, especially since he came into office last year. But he seemed sincerely to be of opinion that Mr. Floppington was the worst type of Minister, *fainéant*, devoid of principle, and inheriting all the worst principles of Toryism, religion among them. I need not add I do not share these opinions.”

THE CORONER.—“The peculiarity of his always attacking Mr. Floppington must have added to the feeling that he was a little off his mental balance.”

MR. LEGGE.—“Perhaps it did.”

THE CORONER.—“I suppose he was convinced he could govern the country better himself?”

MR. LEGGE.—“Who is not in his secret heart?”

THE CORONER.—“Well, but perhaps he wore his heart upon his sleeve?”

MR. LEGGE.—“For other Dawes to peck at? (Laughter.) Well, all I know is this, it got to be a favourite bit of chaff to interrupt him in the middle of a diatribe by calling out ‘Hooray

for the Premier,' and then he would bow gracefully; or 'You could do it better,' and then he used to draw himself up and say, 'I should think so;' but whether it was chaff for chaff I couldn't say, for it was often hard to tell whether he was in earnest or not."

THE CORONER.—"Your debates would seem to be rather free-and-easy?"

MR. LEGGE.—"Yes; we ape the House a good deal."
(Laughter)

THE CORONER.—"When did you last see Mr. Dawe?"

MR. LEGGE.—"On the evening of the second reading of the Reform Bill. He had been absent for some time, and his re-appearance was welcomed."

THE CORONER.—"Did he speak?"

MR. LEGGE.—"Yes; and I shall never forget it. Naturally, the subject of debate was the Reform Bill. (I must premise that my previous answers were based on my general experience of Mr. Dawe, and that his behaviour on this evening was quite exceptional.) He came in flushed and evidently labouring under great excitement. There was a man on his legs, and Mr. Dawe could hardly restrain himself from jumping up. The audience, seeing his impatience, cried 'Time!' (our method of *clôture*) and then Mr. Dawe got up, trembling with concentrated emotion. As usual, he received an ovation, and we were all prepared for a magnificent oratorical effort. What was our surprise to find that he made not a single sarcastic reference to the last speaker; that he said not a word for or against the Bill which he had always been advocating; but that he exhausted invective in a purely personal abuse of the Premier. It almost seemed as if the conversion of the Premier to his own views, by removing the *raison d'être* of the attacks which were the delight of his existence, had driven him mad. He was like a tiger robbed of its young. He said, *inter alia*, that the Premier had not a scrap of principle, that he was the very soul of jealousy and meanness, that he stole their glory from those to whom it was due by appropriating at the last stage the reforms due to their labour, that he had all the cunning of insanity, etc., etc. Even his friends cried 'Shame!' and hisses ran round the room. At the unexpected sounds he stopped short, and dashing his fist violently on the table he exclaimed furiously: 'Yes; shame on the cruel trickster. Mark my words, if he persists in remaining at the head of affairs, I will hound him from the House.' An uproarious burst of laughter followed this bombastic threat. He glared round madly and then strode out of the hall with an air of passionate contempt; and he has never shown his face there since."

THE CORONER.—"Do you think he was drunk?"

MR. LEGGE.—"I can't say. He was such a moderate drinker usually."

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—"Is it possible that he had just become acquainted with his intended's intrigue?"

THE CORONER.—"With the alleged intrigue! That is hardly likely, considering that the engaged couple took a seaside holiday

together after that date. The affair strikes me as an exaggerated phase of his usual antagonism."

The sitting was temporarily suspended at this point. On the resumption of the investigation, MR. WILL COMBE, manager of the Foresters' Music Hall, deposed that one evening about the middle of May, he had been forced to give orders to his "chucker-out" to eject a person (who appeared to be half drunk, and whose name he learnt was Mr. Dawe), who disturbed the performance, and almost caused a commotion among the audience by persistently hissing references to the late Premier, in opposition to the sense of the house.

MR. WILLIAM BROWN (a man who attracted attention by the deformity of a full-grown rat on his cheek), said that he was a frequent customer at the "Star Dining Rooms." Mr. Dawe had always been down on the Premier, but never so much as lately. One day, he remembered, the painter was particularly bitter; there was an argument in the shop, in which the witness took Mr. Floppington's part. (Laughter.) He would swear that Mr. Dawe had made use of the words: "Whatever Floppington does is wrong." This witness thought Mr. Dawe bumptious, conceited, and feeble-witted, and not a bit like the Premier. He was a drunken vagabond, and almost broke his poor mother's heart.

MR. THOMAS WILKINS deposed that he had known Mr. Dawe for some years, he (the witness) having been Foreign Secretary in his Cabinet at a local Parliament, and had been rather intimate with him till a few months ago; when he, in common with the rest of the neighbourhood, had found a marked change for the worse in the man. The house-painter had grown reserved and moody, and rarely deigned to take any notice of his numerous acquaintances. He used to walk the streets with an air of gloomy meditation; and in fact he had obtained the nickname of "Mad Jack."

THE CORONER.—"Mad Jack! Then the impression he produced on observers *was* that he was insane."

MR. WILKINS.—"Not quite on me. I always thought the reason was he had something on his mind. I remember, for instance, a day when he was serving in the shop because his mother was ill. Well, by the way he served, it was as plain as a pikestaff that he was only awake by fits and starts. He gave me sixpenn'orth of peas for a penny." (Laughter.)

THE CORONER.—"At that rate he would have attracted more customers than any shop in the kingdom."

MR. WILKINS.—"Yes, and ruined himself quicker."

THE CORONER.—"Did he ever deliver invectives against Mr. Floppington in your presence?"

MR. WILKINS.—"Oh, yes; I remember telling him as I was eating those very peas, that he'd have a good opportunity of slinging into—of attacking Mr. Floppington, if he'd only come up to the Cogers' as he used to do. He took my advice, and came up the same night; but I never bargained for the terrible onslaught he made."

THE CORONER.—“Do you remember when this was?”

MR. WILKINS.—“Very well, because it was the evening of the second reading of the Reform Bill.”

THE CORONER.—“That onslaught, then, has already been described to us. Do you remember any other?”

MR. WILKINS.—“Yes, I do; but before I tell the Court about it, I should like the jury to know that I had irritated him by waving, so to speak, a red rag before him. Meeting him in the Bethnal Green Road on the day of the Premier’s exposition of his Irish policy, I asked him whether he would come and cheer him on his way to the House. Of course I ought not to have said it, after that scene at the Cogers’, but as I was on the way myself, it was natural to unthinkingly ask him to accompany me. When he indignantly refused, I further irritated him by lecturing him on his foolish antagonism to a great man. ‘He a great man!’ he hissed in my ear. ‘He is a vile impostor!’ I said something, I don’t remember what, and then in furious tones he added these words: ‘But his career will be over sooner than the world imagines.’” (Sensation.)

A few further questions bearing reference to the alleged resemblance between the Premier and the painter added nothing to the evidence already elicited.

POLICE CONSTABLE J 9, who was next called, gave it as his opinion that Mr. Dawe was a bit cracked. He particularly remembered an occasion when, his mother being ill, the painter was serving in the shop. He (the witness) caught a boy with eight saveloys in his pocket, stolen from the cook-shop. Mr. Dawe had not only ordered the vagabond to be released, but given him some cold potatoes; talking like a madman to explain why he did so.

A BROTHER CERULEAN deposed that when going on his beat about 11.30 p.m. on the 25th of May (he remembered the date because it was the first time he had gone on that beat), he noticed a suspicious-looking individual, whose identity he discovered by accident afterwards, sauntering along in the neighbourhood of Victoria Park. Shortly afterwards, hearing cries of distress, he ran in the direction of the sounds. The witness then proceeded to relate apologetically the Una episode already known to the reader.

The chief force of the evidence lay in its revelation of the never-slumbering antagonism to the Premier, evinced by the man’s being unable to bear even at a moment of personal danger the slightest casual tribute to his enemy. “Floppington had little to do with the Acts you refer to. Because he happened to be Prime Minister you must not suppose that all the good was done by him. As for all the evil, that, of course, is his work.” Almost equally remarkable was the tone taken by the man throughout, especially in his promise of promotion to the credulous policeman.

THE VICAR of Bethnal Green, a venerable-looking old man, stated that he had known Mr. Dawe by sight and hearsay for many years, though he had never spoken to him till recently. Like his father before him, the painter was the evil genius of the parish,

being at the head of the Atheistic clique. The witness then described the sudden appearance of the Atheist at church, and the sermon with which he had attempted to move him; the man's apparent emotion, and his congratulation at the finish.

THE CORONER.—“From your manner you seem to disbelieve in the genuineness of the conversion.”

THE VICAR.—“Alas, yes! For he ended his congratulations by promising me a deanery.” (Sensation.)

THE CORONER.—“I do not admit the soundness of your inference. Surely he would never take the trouble to go to church merely to annoy you in that way.”

THE VICAR.—“I believe he entered the church by accident, having given his arm to an old lady who had fallen down. But, once there, he thought he might as well get some fun out of it, though I must say I brought the infliction down on myself by asking him to remain. It seems that he was very fond of practical jokes, and that nothing was sacred to him. Mr. White, an undertaker and a most estimable man, has assured me that he hoaxed him into a belief that Mrs. Dawe, his own mother, was dead, merely to enjoy the poor man's discomfiture. Moreover, I have other grounds for disbelief. To carry the joke further, the painter attended church on the next Sunday, and even several other Sundays; till, finding that I was not to be caught, he dropped the bad habit. (Laughter.) On the second Sunday, in the renewed hope of effecting some good, I made up my mind to pay him a domiciliary visit. I found Miss Bathbrill had preceded me, and I inadvertently intruded upon a scene of tenderness.” (Laughter.)

THE DISSENTING JUROR.—“Do you mind explaining what is your idea of a scene of tenderness?” (Laughter.)

THE VICAR.—“I am not good at explanations of that sort, the vivid imagination of the Juror will probably supply the deficiency. (Laughter.) After some conversation, in the course of which Mrs. Dawe blurted out some libellous accusations against the Premier, which her son disingenuously declared he had no remembrance of making, Miss Bathbrill took an affectionate leave of her betrothed.”

THE CORONER.—“What were the accusations you speak of?”

THE VICAR.—“Oh, *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*. I recollect in particular that he charged him with being the cause of all the Irish murders, and with changing his politics as frequently as his shirts. (Laughter.) After Miss Bathbrill had gone, I had a long talk with Mr. Dawe, who told me that he had been at last led to doubt the faith, or rather the unfaith, of his childhood, and acknowledged himself grateful to have my help at such a crisis. All the while I had an undercurrent of suspicion that I was being hoaxed. Certain barbed phrases ought to have convinced me of that, not to speak of an audacious claim on the part of Mr. Dawe to an intimate acquaintance with mediæval theology, and Patristic literature. (Laughter.) I can understand the laughter of the audience, but even this risky statement I swallowed, doubtless

much to the delight and much to the surprise of the joker, whose heart, I fear, is wholly perverted."

THE CORONER.—"But surely a layman may read the Fathers. Mr. Dawe is, I believe, a well-read man; but even supposing he was exaggerating (as we all naturally do) a little knowledge he may have possessed, a knowledge perhaps acquired on purpose to refute defenders of the faith, you have still not satisfied me that the man's conversion was not genuine."

The disbelief of the Coroner in the disbelief of the painter caused some sensation, but the drift of his scepticism was not as yet apparent.

THE VICAR.—"Well, to put the matter briefly, I made the discovery that the man was in the habit of contributing blasphemous articles to the *Freethinker*."

THE CORONER.—"But the point was, had he written any since he had come to church?"

THE VICAR (after a long pause).—"God forgive me if I have wronged him and turned away a soul seeking light! (Sensation.) Indignation overmastered me, I hurried away without thinking of anything but my hurt dignity."

The Vicar appeared much affected. Was he indeed responsible for all the evil that had followed? After he had somewhat recovered, he continued his statement in a sad, subdued voice.

But the rest of his evidence the reader has in great part already heard at first hand from the lips of inhabitants of Bethnal Green, such as those whom the Vicar confessed he had drawn his information from. The Vicar of course came into contact with almost all shades of public opinion, and had, without active inquiry on his own part, gathered from mutually-corroborative witnesses that Mr. Dawe had given up work altogether, unknown to his mother, as he went out with his paint-pots every day, depositing them at a shop all day, and that he spent the day in aimless mooning about the neighbourhood. The Vicar's own observation tallied with these reports. He had several times seen him wandering about with a pale, dissipated look, though he did not appear to be intoxicated. On one occasion, however, he had seen him enter a public-house at a very early hour in the day, when he should have been going to work. The painter had lately been prostrated by an attack of brain-fever, which was currently believed to be due to drink.

MR. DREW, publican, deposed to the strange painting of the legless lion, the very last piece of work done by the painter.

MR. WILLIAM BERTRAM deposed that he was a Captain in the Salvation Army. He had belonged to the Army for about a month. His first acquaintance with Mr. Dawe dated from about two months ago, when his conversation seemed to have interested the house-painter, and he was invited to sup with him. He soon discovered that his host was a very educated man and a kindred soul. He agreed with the witness in taking a highly spiritual view of the universe and of the nature of man, delivering a long monologue on the education of the soul by suffering.

THE CORONER.—“Did he appear sincere in his views?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“I don't think I ever met a more earnest man in my life excepting General Booth. He spoke as one inspired.” (Sensation.)

THE CORONER.—“Was there a note of repentance in what he said?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“Well, yes, there was. He seemed as if he was just realising for the first time the life in Christ.”

THE CORONER.—“Did you observe anything strange about him—any signs of a hysterical, perfervid condition!”

MR. BERTRAM.—“To say the truth, I did think he was just a little off his balance. When I afterwards learnt that he had once been first in the ranks of the godless, I thought the shock of the change had temporarily unsettled him somewhat.”

THE CORONER.—“Was your impression gained from his whole conduct or from anything in particular?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“Both. He startled me by asking me, I don't think in joke, to take a glass of some Johannisberg, presented to him by his friend Prince Bismarck.” (Sensation.)

THE CORONER.—“Did you notice his alleged resemblance to the Premier?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“I saw some resemblance.”

THE CORONER.—“Did it not strike you that he was, consciously or not, aping the Premier?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“It did not then, but it does now. I remember his speaking of the Short Hours' Bill as though he had done more than advocate it in debating rooms, almost as if he had carried it through Parliament.”

THE CORONER.—“Did he ever speak against the Premier in your presence?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“Oh yes! Once when I was in a tram with him.”

THE CORONER.—“When was that?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“Less than a fortnight ago. I had lost sight of him for some time, and we met by accident. He told me that circumstances compelled him to leave home, and so I asked him to share mine. He accepted the offer and we took the tram to my place.”

THE CORONER.—“What do you think caused him to leave home?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“I don't know. I could only elicit that his home life was intolerable.”

THE CORONER.—“Does it not seem then that religious differences were at the bottom of it? Mrs. Dawe would seem to be beyond the reach of grace, while he had become an ardent Christian.”

MR. BERTRAM.—“Your supposition is extremely probable, and doubtless the fact that I had enlisted in the Army of the righteous helped to influence him to share my home.”

THE CORONER.—“May I ask what had induced you to enlist in that Army?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“I had always been of a religious turn, and Mr. Dawe’s inspired eloquence worked upon me a good deal. I believe it was through him that the thought of joining the Army suggested itself to me, and I bless Providence that——”

THE CORONER.—“Was this denunciation in the tram-car at all violent?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“Extremely so. He said the Premier was doing deadly mischief, that he was a Lord of Misrule, and so on. And he wished to God he could lead the Opposition and hurl him from his place. ‘Prick this empty windbag,’ I think he said.”

THE CORONER.—“How long did he live with you?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“Three days.”

THE CORONER.—“How came he to leave you?”

MR. BERTRAM.—“He was taken back by his mother. He seemed helpless in her hands.”

The witness then described, amid much amusement, the scene at the Midnight Meeting, and the events that led to it; not forgetting, too, the ingenious and contemptuous allusions to Floppington which were dragged in with, said the witness, the constancy if not with the total irrelevance of King Charles’ Head into Mr. Dick’s manuscript.

DOCTOR THOMAS deposed that he had been called in to attend Mr. Dawe in an attack of brain-fever which his mother, equally at fault in religion and medicine, had at first contended to be small-pox. The doctor corroborated Sally’s testimony as to the delirious utterances of the patient, though he had heard only a few of them. On looking over his notes on the case, he found that he had commented thus: Cerebral fever induced by drink and irreligious fanaticism. Sharply interrogated as to the latter phrase, he confessed that he had been guided by the contents of the patient’s book-case, but he saved his credit by asserting that his experience told him that it was fanaticism *connected* with religion. Discovering, however, the patient’s infidelity, it had struck him that irreligious fanaticism had not been adequately recognised as a force of aberration. He was willing to admit that the fanaticism might have been religious.

The last witness called in this never-to-be-forgotten investigation was DR. MAUDSLEY, a writer of some mark in physio-psychology and an authority on lunacy. He was asked what, in face of the whole body of evidence, was his view of the man’s sanity? In the course of a lengthy reply, the witness said that the case was the most extraordinary he had ever met with, and as pregnant of meaning to the mental pathologist as it was bewildering and inexplicable to the idealist-psychologist, and that he intended to incorporate a minute study of it into the next edition of his “Pathology of Mind.” There was nothing wonderful in the sudden change of belief; the boxing of the intellectual compass. There was a class of mind, which he had thoroughly analysed, which lived in a pendulous swing from extreme to extreme. (The learned doctor then went on to expound some abstruse theory

concerning polar opposites which the reporters seem to have muddled, for the present writer can make nothing of it.) The further dissection, being reproduced by the Coroner in his summing up, will be best read in that connection.

In answer to the counsel for Jack Dawe, the doctor said that it was an absurd and a far-fetched hypothesis to suppose that a man would blow himself up to avoid the appearance of suicide, and that the suggested causes of suicide, viz. : the turning of the Premier's brain through the great success of the previous night, or over-work, or grief at the alleged rupture between him and his old love, Lady Gwendolen, or worry caused by the reports circulated concerning him, or all these causes combined—were almost cut off even from the need of consideration by the manner of his death ; that such indomitable mental and physical energy as that displayed by the Minister on the day before his death was not usually associated with suicidal mania ; and that a man engaged in the exhilarating work of carrying a **Bill** was of all men least likely to hand over the task to his rivals.

THE CORONER, in the course of a most remarkable and lucid summing-up which is here of necessity much condensed, said : "Passing from the question of the identity of the deceased to the question of how he came by his death, I find that the date on which this strange story, whose latest chapter a whole nation deplores, began its tragic course, seems to be Sunday the 3rd of May. On that day, by the inexplicable decree of destiny, the first link in the fatal chain of circumstance was forged by the apparently trivial incident of the fall of an old woman upon the pavement. Jack Dawe, a man of blameless character, but an Atheist and an advanced Radical, eloquent, and by all accounts intellectual and well-informed above his station, a moderate drinker, a steady workman, prosperous, and intending to make a marriage of love in three months' time, Jack Dawe passes by ; and, yielding to a natural impulse of generosity, picks up the old woman and furthermore conducts her into church. He is about to retire, but unfortunately—as the lamentable results proved—the Vicar, to whom it is superfluous to say not the slightest blame attaches for the mischief wrought through his zeal, begs him to remain. The reverend gentleman then brings to bear all his eloquence upon the impressionable and intelligent Freethinker with the result of convincing alike his reason and his heart. Be it remembered that the man had probably never entered a church in his life, that all the subtle influences of public worship were felt for the first time by a chivalrous and lofty soul, brought up in an absolutely godless fashion, and habituated from infancy to despise the doctrines of our holy religion. The solemn roll of the organ, the sweet voices of the choir, add their effect to the impassioned address of the preacher, and the Freethinker leaves the sacred edifice a changed man. But, strange to say, the very man who has wrought this wonderful conversion refuses to believe in it, because the convert

tells him that he shall have the next vacant deanery at his disposal. Now let us see whether this scepticism was justified, and the question leads on to a new fact of unprecedented interest. Jack Dawe, strange to say, resembled the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington. However slight the resemblance may have been (and on this point witnesses differ), it was certainly great enough to cause him to be familiarly dubbed 'Floppy.' That resemblances of this sort do exist, is shown by the numberless cases of mistaken identity; while from an abstract point of view, it would seem that partial resemblances, at least, *must* occur. A friend of mine, who was Senior Wrangler of his year, has even calculated that the possible combinations of appreciably different human physical characteristics are less than the total number of human beings in the world; and that, therefore, there must be some cases of *absolute identity*. The consciousness of the resemblance seems, as soon as the political prominence of Mr. Floppington evoked attention to it, to have given, in some degree at least, a desire to emulate the influence of that eminent man. Mr. Dawe had even been the Premier in a local parliament, and the feeling that man for man he was as good as his quasi-rival naturally caused him to mix a certain amount of personal antagonism with that antagonism to his principles which was, perhaps, equally natural to a working man and a Freethinker. Whether ultimately, in an already unhealthy state of mind, the brooding on this physical resemblance produced the remarkable illusion that he *was* the Premier, is a question which has naturally suggested itself to the minds of all who heard the evidence. But Dr. Maudsley has replied to it by a decisive negative, and I certainly do not venture to disagree with so great an authority. But there is a question of detail on which I may, perhaps, be allowed to hold an opinion even against him. Dr. Maudsley has explained the items of evidence relating to the promised promotions, the offer of the Johannisberg, and the occasional authoritative tone of the man, on the theory of a humorous reference implied by it to his resemblance to the Premier; a momentary makebelieve that he was the Premier, which the observer was supposed to be mystified by or to enjoy, according as he was in possession of the key or not. But, while this satisfactorily accounts for the other cases, it seems to me that, taken alone, it is inadequate to explain why Mr. Dawe, who on Dr. Maudsley's own theory was really converted, should at such a solemn epoch resort to his well-worn jocular method. The explanation lies deeper. Mr. Dawe has been visibly overcome by emotion during the sermon. But when the service is over and the audience begins to leave the church, the charm fades and he awakes to find that he, the self-appointed leader of free thought, the man who has set the table on a roar with jests aimed at the delusion of the Christian and the hypocrisy of the clergy, has been seen shedding tears in the very citadel of the enemy. A momentary revulsion overpowers him. Ashamed of his weakness, he thinks to pass off the affair as a satirical joke. After loudly complimenting the preacher, he

ironically exclaims: 'I promise you the next vacant deanery at my disposal!' that is to say, 'I promise you what you deserve, viz., nothing.' But this is a minor detail. It is at any rate clear that the conversion was genuine. The effects of the churchgoing remain, despite his endeavours to laugh them off. The whole week he thinks of it. He endeavours to paint, but he cannot concentrate his thoughts on the painting. For the first time in his life he botches his work and produces a shapeless lion. The same evening, still under the burden of deep thoughts and saddled with the consciousness that, unless he settles his doubts, he cannot even do his work, he accompanies his mother to the 'Foresters' Music Hall,' having, perhaps, taken an extra glass to drown his new cares. The constant eulogiums of Mr. Floppington bring vividly before his mind the contrast between the gratified ambition and fancied perfect happiness of the Premier and the unhappy and restless condition of one not unlike him in form. The thought is one that henceforth often recurs to the hitherto contented sign-painter, and each time with additional intensity, till at last a jealousy amounting to mania fires his soul. Anyhow, on the night in question, his disapprobation of the Premier's policy, combined with the nascent jealousy which was ultimately to master him, caused him to hiss the singer and to be ejected from the hall. The expulsion no doubt rankled in his breast and increased his resentment against the unfortunate Premier. He refuses all work, and walks about the streets meditating upon the doctrines of Christianity and his own blindness. Sunday comes round and he goes to church once more, penitent and believing, and thus courageously confesses his changed views. The Vicar goes to see him; but, from a lamentable misapprehension, quits his house in disgust, leaving the poor man to wrestle with his own soul, abandoned even by his own clergyman. As Dr. Maudsley has told us, his was one of those minds which know no half-beliefs; passionate alike in love and hate, in faith and unfaith. He thinks this spiritual solitude a fit punishment for his years of incredulity, and horror seizes him at the thought of the life he has lived and of the life his mother still lives. He abandons his work, roams about, struggling with the sense of sin, brooding over the idea of his and her and his father's damnation. Domestic dissension naturally ensues; his mother cannot understand him, and there are quarrels. Mark the pathetic statement of the servant: 'Master was afraid of missus, though it used to be the other way on.' The spiritual influence of Christianity makes him more subservient to his mother, though her coarse Atheism wounds him to the quick by the vivid suggestion of his former unregenerate state. Full of the fanatical ideas of the ardent convert, he even attempts some penances; eating little, and rejecting his mother's dainties. In this hysterical condition, says Dr. Maudsley, cut off by his new consciousness from his old friends, and by his old faith from any new ones, the poor man naturally takes to drink; and what wonder if his animosity to the Premier mingles imperceptibly with his whole consciousness, and colours the very current of his thought, so that

the mere name drives him to furious invective. It is easy to understand the impression made by this great and sudden change on all who knew him; nor is it at all surprising that he should soon come to be known as 'Mad Jack.'

"Occasionally, of course, he has what may fairly be called intervals of sanity, and in one of these he impresses one of the witnesses as a most earnest man; and so far is his conversion from being a joke that he edifies the stranger with a spiritual discourse so inspiring that the hearer is ultimately led to join the Salvation Army. He has abandoned all his former pursuits, has given up politics; but a notorious change of policy on the part of the Premier affording him an opportunity, he takes the suggestion of a former friend and re-appears at 'The Cogers' for the last time, and excels all his previous efforts in the line of denunciation. At this stage he goes out of town, and the change seems to do him good. He spends a happy week with his sweetheart, and there is some chance that his mental equilibrium will be restored, when, lo! a fresh shock of tenfold power prostrates him once more, and hastens on the tragedy to its terrible conclusion. What this shock was is unknown; but there are strong grounds for believing that it was in Ramsgate, while accidentally separated from Miss Bathbrill, that the report (true or false) of her *liaison* with the Premier first reached his ears.

"It is not necessary for the purposes of the present inquiry to know whether there was any truth in the rumour which it were prudish to pretend ignorance of. I may, perhaps, be allowed to declare my own belief in the absolute innocence of the Premier; the positive statement of a witness on oath must take precedence of the vague reports of ignorance, and it is not to be regretted that the base scandal was brought to so sharp a test. Would all false reports were as easily, so to speak, corroded and detected by the acid of an oath! Miss Bathbrill is living, and has sworn that she never saw the Premier in her life. The Premier is, alas! dead, but his whole life swears for him. Although, therefore, the report was absolutely without foundation, unfortunately its effects were as great as if it had been Gospel truth. Imputed evil finds a readier ear than imputed goodness; and Mr. Dawe seems, for one, to have thoroughly believed it. The blowing-off of his hat at the seaside assumes the proportions of a tragic event when we consider its consequences. The pursuit leading him beyond Miss Bathbrill's ken, he fell in with somebody from whom, in some way or other, he first learnt the report. He was probably taunted with it, and the horror of the news, combined with the natural irascibility of his temper, caused incredulous excitement and indignation which vented themselves in a fisticuff encounter; as was evidenced by the existence of slight wounds on his arm, caused, doubtless, in a struggle in the neighbourhood of cliffs, and showing that his coat had been off. But he seems to have been convinced, despite himself; for, on re-appearing at his lodgings, he behaves in an insane fashion, declaring he must return to London at once, and brutally

exclaiming, when met by the reluctance of his mother and his sweetheart, that they may stay by themselves for all he cares. He utters no word of reproach to Miss Bathbrill ; he is wounded to the soul ; his grief is too great for vulgar quarrels. With the fierce determination which was at the root of his character, this fiery, wayward, emotional being rushes back to London by the next train, madly projecting an instant revenge on the fancied destroyer of his happiness. That the Premier, whose form was almost his own, but whose fortunes were so different, who had the world at his feet, who lived in the gratification of every ambition, blissful, self-satisfied, smugly religious, not torn to his vitals by feverish alternations of faith and scepticism ; that this man, of all men in the world, should have robbed him of his one ewe-lamb, this reflection, says Dr. Maudsley, must have filled his heart with added bitterness and heated his brain to delirium. Already, though they had never met, their lines of life had crossed, and unpleasantly for the poor, ambitious house-painter ; already they seemed to his dissatisfied spirit to be almost rivals, and now the pampered minion of fortune had by the cruel favouritism of destiny stolen the only treasure which made the poor man's life worth living. Surely never were two men in stranger relations. To the humbler of the twain it must have seemed as if the other were his evil genius.

“He returns to London thirsting for vengeance. It is a significant fact that he indulges in the unwonted luxury of a first-class compartment. He has done with life now, and all the small economies of his position. He will kill this man, though his own life pay the forfeit. As he sits brooding in the train on these dark thoughts, his companions endeavour to extract the reasons of his return ; but he maintains a gloomy silence. He will say nothing that may warn them of his deadly intentions, and perhaps thwart his vengeance. They arrive home, but overtaxed Nature postpones the deed. He is attacked by brain-fever, brought on, according to medical authority, by drink and religious fanaticism. How, indeed, was Dr. Thomas to divine the third factor, perhaps more potent for the moment than the other two together? And now a new element is found to have mingled with the malarious current of his thoughts. The pages of fiction offer us no more terrible figure than this living and breathing Jack Dawe, this ‘Mad Jack,’ tossing and raving in the little bedroom in the Bethnal Green Road. Once a steady and unusually intelligent workman, a moderate drinker, a happy lover, with heaps of friends, he has, in a few short weeks, become a lounging, slipshod idler, drinking from early morn to late eve, to drive away the thoughts of his damnation ; alone with his own tortured soul, suffering from his unhappy imagination in some such fashion, says Dr. Maudsley, as Bunyan and many others have suffered, believing himself wounded in devilish sport by his evil genius, and thirsting for his blood. But though all these elements manifest their existence in his delirious outcries, there are some which are not explicable by any of them, nor by any facts of his past life known

to us. To understand these, we must remember that just before Jack Dawe went to the seaside, the Premier had promised the Parnellites a thorough measure of reform, which rumour (for once correct) instantly pronounced to be nothing less than total separation. It is almost certain that Jack Dawe would, under any circumstances, have been violent in opposition to this scheme of his quasi-rival. But now that the Protestants of Ulster began to complain in their alarm that they would be left at the mercy of a Catholic majority, the painter, with all the ardour of a convert, was convinced that his enemy was insidiously aiming a blow at the true religion; and the conviction added one more drop to the already overflowing cup of bitterness: It was the thought of this that was most present with him before the shock, and that mingled most indis severably with the image of the Minister; and in his delirium, to quote the subtle analysis of Dr. Maudsley, 'amid the cries of the victim of drink, that devils wanted to murder him, agonised cries for his lost love, and the living over again of his oratorical and other experiences, the frequent recurrence of such exclamations as "Ireland shall not have Home Rule, though I die for it!" finds its explanation in the well-known psychological fact that the deeper-grounded, because older, cause of animosity predominated in his feverish remembrance, and transferring to itself all the new force of hatred, it presented itself to his delirious consciousness as the sole motive of his confusedly-remembered intention of assassinating the Premier.' So far Dr. Maudsley; though I may perhaps remark in answer to an assertion in a notorious letter that the phrase is inexplicable, that it might even be explained as a grim exclamation of triumph, in the fact that his enemy's reforms, too, and the fame to be got by them, would be put an end to with his life; though I do not pretend that this would explain the sequel as it has been explained in the masterly fashion of the great authority just quoted.

"One day the patient wakes, and his first thought is of the Premier. Has he assassinated the Minister? What has happened? These are the questions he puts to his nurse. Finding that his foe is still alive, he endeavours to rise; but, weakness overpowering him, he dictates a threatening and imperious telegram, forgetting in the imbecility of his yet feeble brain that he is betraying himself, and, in accordance with Dr. Maudsley's theory, forgetting, too, everything but the fancied and much-magnified danger of the Protestants of Ulster, and his own deadly enmity.

"A few days after, he dictated a letter to the same effect. It is to be observed that in both these messages the tone is one of impotence. The prostrate man resigns himself to stopping, if possible, the Irish measure by threats, though determined to carry them out when he can, if they are unheeded. With convalescence, however, comes a temporary return of the mental balance and a reaction against his fit of dementia; and though he, of course, remembers the terrible news that drove him back to London, he remains quiescent, contenting himself with abusing the unfortunate

Miss Bathbrill to the girl Sally, and throwing off the poor innocent creature, when she comes to see him, by the terribly ironical avowal that he, too, loves another. He has received in the meantime an enigmatic answer from the Premier, evidently the result of misconception ; but, though still nursing his many grievances in the calm hours and the enforced temperance of the period of convalescence, his better reason and his new religious consciousness tell him that he has fortunately escaped a terrible temptation. He passes his days peacefully in reading and writing, and it seems as if the much-tried mental system of the man has, by a temporary breakdown, been saved from overthrow. But, lo ! when all is going well, Miss Bathbrill, justly enough, summons him for breach of promise. The hypothesis of a got-up case cannot for a moment be entertained. Mrs. Dawe did not understand her son—she was evidently trying to shuffle out of the fact that he had given up Miss Bathbrill, just as she tried to shuffle out of the admission that she did not get on well with him. The demand for damages seems to the defendant to be adding insult to injury, but on reflection he rejoices thereat. Still in the ironical mood which prompted the confession of love, he offers £2,000, a sum he did not possess, but which she, angered by that confession, refuses. Directly, then, the summons seems to have had no ill-effect. But indirectly it has led to dissension with his mother which, combined doubtless with religious differences, renders his home intolerable. The poor convalescent flees, no doubt putting this misfortune, too, to the score of Mr. Floppington, whom he denounces to Mr. Bertram, and whom he attacks even in a discourse which his fanaticism has prompted him to give at a midnight meeting of the Salvation Army.

“Taken home by his mother, ‘The Converted Painter,’ as he was styled on the bill, writes a cold and sneering letter to his enemy, full of studied politeness, icily informing him that he, the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington, will be subpoenaed in a vulgar breach-of-promise suit, gloating in anticipation over the writhings of the hypocritical Minister, ironically suggesting that he should buy off the girl, and giving him *carte blanche* to do so. Feeling that he has the Premier under his thumb, he even imperiously demands an order for the Strangers’ Gallery.

“With these voluptuous expectations of a more refined and a crueller revenge than that suggested in a moment of passion, what must have been his disappointment and frenzy to receive a letter no less icy and scornful than his own ! No prospect of cross-examination terrifies the blameless Premier ; but to Jack Dawe it seems as if he is powerless before the defiant hauteur and impenetrable armour of the great Minister before whom Law itself will bend in respect. There is no revenge but that in his own hands.

“The old, long-buried torrent of animosity bursts forth once more in tenfold strength. So overpowered is he by angry emotion that he cannot refrain from openly predicting that the Premier’s career

will be over sooner than the world imagines. To add fuel to the flame, the very day of the receipt of the letter happens to be that of the declaration of the long-threatened Home Rule policy. The detested libertine Minister is the focus of a nation's enthusiasm; and, when he sits down after his great speech, princes applaud his mighty eloquence and wondrous statesmanship.

"During the day Jack Dawe feeds his determination on the eulogies and enthusiasm of the newspapers, leaves home at night, after a few significant words to the servant, and has not been heard of since. The discovery of his latch-key on the pavement of Little Snale Street, however, marks one point of his course, and leads to the suspicion that he had hung about Downing Street during part of the night, and followed the Premier in the morning. No evidence has indeed been forthcoming to show by what means he obtained the dynamite, nor was such evidence to have been expected; but there was an interval long enough to enable him to do so between his leaving home and the assassination of the illustrious victim, which has caused the strangest and saddest investigation that it ever was my lot to undertake."

At the conclusion of this wonderful piece of synthesis, as the *Telegraph* called it, the jury retired; and, after an absence of six minutes, returned a verdict to the effect that the deceased was the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington, and that he had been assassinated by Jack Dawe.

CHAPTER V.

DEAD MEN'S SHOES.

LORD BARDOLPH MOUNTCHAPEL was angry with the editor of the *Times*.

"How, in Heaven's name," he asked him, "did you come to insert that fool's letter this morning? I've no doubt it has set some people seriously wondering what I really meant by telling the Orangemen to strike a blow, and fancying my words have influenced this miserable Jack Dawe's mind. Especially when everybody thinks that I owed the unfortunate Premier a grudge, and when everybody knows that sooner or later I must step into his shoes. The Ministry will inevitably go to pieces. It has every element of disunion, and but for Floppington would not have held together a day. He really seemed to have bewitched the Party. Goodness knows how this may damage me in the country. But I have every hope in the coming election. The principles of the Fourth Party will triumph!"

The Fourth Party was Mowntchapel, and Mowntchapel alone. But though its organisation was far from perfect, disagreement and internal dissension being not unfrequent, it counted a not incon-

siderable following in the country, and Bardolph's pleasurable expectations were not entirely without foundation.

His Lordship had dropped into the Thunderer's sanctum on his way home from the inquest just concluded. After a few minutes' conversation with the harassed editor, dealing with the extremely delicate question of the precise tone to be used in any references to him at this critical juncture, and the frequency of such references, he jumped into a hansom and ordered the man to drive to Harley House.

Gwendolen had not found the prospect of her approaching union by any means so delightful as it appeared to Bardolph, nor, although it was indefinitely postponed, did even distance lend enchantment to the view.

Impulse is as good a guide as Reason, for there is as much chance of going wrong by obedience to one as to the other. Gwen could not regret her dismissal of the Premier, but she could not altogether suppress a doubt as to whether she had acted wisely in linking her life with that of his rival. Lord Bardolph indeed played the part of lover to perfection. He insisted on no privileges, made no attempt to regulate her life by ante-nuptial advice, and never insinuated the smallest reproach on her avoidance of Society. So far in fact from rebuking her avoidance of Society in general, he even bore patiently her neglect of his own in particular, and her preference of that of Miss Octavia Hill and the other noble women at whose disposal she had put her purse and almost all her time; and he refrained from parading his scepticism upon the subject of philanthropy, or, indeed, of any other supposed virtue. In short, he displayed in the *pays de l'amour* all those good qualities of humility and patience, politeness and tolerance, which he could find no market for in the world of politics. Bardolph might, had he reflected thereupon (which he didn't), have come to the orthodox belief that virtue is its own reward, so happy and confident did he now feel.

Gwendolen was duly grateful. She appreciated the delicacy and the tender reserve of his conduct, and she felt that her intuition on the terrace was justified—that in his case more intimate knowledge revealed his better aspects and showed the true nature that underlay his superficial cynicism, as it had done the opposite in the case of his rival. Yet, strange to say, neither perception gave her an unmixed emotion. She did not love Bardolph nor hate the Premier as much as intellectual reasons demanded. In the ocean a surface-current may rush with much velocity northwards, while all the while the great stream is calmly gliding to the south. Gwendolen would not look below the surface of her mind's ocean; if she occasionally hazarded a peep she instantly drew her eyes away incredulous and horror-struck. It was not till a great storm arose and the waves were tossed heavenwards and the sea was sundered to its depths that she awoke to a full consciousness of the direction of its current.

For the phantom of the Ideal refused to be laid. Not without

a struggle could she resign herself to lose touch for ever of the aspirations and the unworldlinesses of youth and to settle down into the spiritual limitations of average matronhood. The one man with whom she had hoped to live

Twin-halves of a perfect heart made fast,
Soul to soul as the years flew past ;

this man was, on his own confession, a cynical hypocrite and a degraded sensualist. Yet, despite his unblushing avowals, there were moments when a curious feeling of unreality and hallucination came over her ; she sometimes awoke with a start and angry with herself from a reverie in which the delicious Past lived over again ; and, in dreams, she wandered with him in dewy gardens where his face shone, transfigured with a spiritual light. Visions and reveries left their traces on her waking life, gleams of muffled splendour, dim echoes of buried music that by contrast provoked an ever-present sense of blankness : the same gnawing emptiness that fed on the Premier's heart and which she endeavoured to forget in the bustle of philanthropy, he in the bustle of politics. But if he had completely lost sight of the woman he loved, his doings were not equally hidden from her. With a strange fascination she followed every detail of his marvellous career, pleading to herself that there was no reason why she should shut her eyes to modern history. Floppington was only a name to her—the name of a public man who would leave his mark on the age, and in whom a contemporary could not but be interested. She had a half-feeling that he would at some time or other betray himself to the deluded world, but, in the eminently respectable newspapers that she read, no breath of scandal ever touched his honoured name. At first the statesman's success seemed to her to stamp with truth the cynical maxims she had learnt from Mountchapel, but after a time it went on intensifying her vague, unconfessed dissatisfaction. Between her and Bardolph his name had never been mentioned but once ; when the Ex-Minister had with culpable carelessness allowed it to slip in, in the course of an unrestrained conversation. He had been telling her of his prospects and she was trying to identify herself with his ambitions, when he grumbled that the Premier was trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds by giving away the pickings of office to the Liberals and dispensing ecclesiastical and other patronage on the unfair principle of impartial justice. To her surprise, Gwendolen felt indignant at the imputation of Machiavellian motives to the Minister, but she managed to restrain herself. The Press had, indeed, been eulogizing his purity and impartiality ; but she, who had special knowledge, ought not to have been carried away by the enthusiasm of outsiders. Yet, on the other hand, did not her special knowledge force her to interpret even more favourably than the outside public certain dubious episodes in the Premier's career? When she read his "Apologia" for instance, with its earnest proclamation of the political maxim that the righteousness and the utility of a reform depended largely upon the party which proposed

it, the nobility of its apophthegms, and the cry for a practical Christianity and a reign of justice, made her doubts of his sincerity waver. Perhaps he had been consistent right through. His opposition to Female Suffrage had really been induced by his belief in the principle he had enunciated, together with another cause hinted at in his speech, but unintelligible to anybody but herself, namely, the dread of having been too much influenced by his love for her. What else, indeed, meant the words, "My own heart and the perception of the wrongs of women were impelling me to vote with the Liberals," and had she not been wrong to suspect that he was going to revenge himself on her by backing out of the promise of a Female Suffrage Clause? Had he not on the contrary exerted all his strength to carry that particular clause?

So the fateful days went by with their burden of perplexities and duties. Her old gaiety was gone, the old rippling laugh and the old brightness had vanished, but sorrow, and the sweet sad pleasure of bringing light and laughter into the eyes of her stricken sisters, had left behind a saintly tenderness that had, perhaps, no less charm.

She never went to the House now. Ardently as she would have desired to be present on the historic "Home Rule" night, she did not dare trust herself to see his flashing countenance or to listen to his ringing eloquence. But she could safely read the speech next morning and study the masterly project as it unfolded itself in all its marvellous lucidity, from the few pregnant words of introduction to the sublime proclamation of eternal justice that rounded off the dry details with a burst of organ-music.

It was from the lips of the housemaid, who had replaced Eliza Bathrill, that Gwendolen learned the fatal news. The girl had been out for something, and she looked so white and agitated that Gwendolen, who saw her passing through the hall, sympathetically inquired what was the matter.

"Oh, your ladyship," gasped the girl, "the man that was blown up—early this morning—in Westminster—near the bicycle stables—turns out—" excitement stopped her breath.

"Poor thing!" thought Gwen. "Her lover, perhaps!"

"They say it's—Mr. Floppington!"

Though the hall, and the tall tropical ferns, and the broad oak staircase surged and rocked as with an earthquake, Gwendolen did not immediately lose consciousness. The "abysmal depths of personality" were laid open under a flash of lightning. In that one instant of terrible introspection, she understood that for her the world was for ever changed; that from evanescent glimmerings of brightness, it had grown dark again with the darkness of the day on which she had mourned for his dead honour; that the calm, passionless future to which she had been striving to reconcile herself was impossible.

She was put to bed, but she refused to obey her doctor's directions. She insisted on seeing all the evening papers and reading every line of the terrible tragedy herself. She never for a

moment felt the glimmer of hope that some of the editors professed to entertain. She, if no one else, knew what had taken the murdered Premier to Westminster. An unreasoning passion of love and regret that she need hide from herself no longer, a rush of tender recollections, and a great pity stirred her soul before that sudden and awful close of a great career almost at its apogee, that consecrated the man's imperfections and purified his memory with a baptism of blood.

The fiery cry for revenge, that succeeded the first shock of horror and that found its immediate echo in the Press, thrilled the pulses of the invalid. Oh that she might play some part in the discovery of the perpetrators of the foul deed! But when, in a later edition she read the name of the suspected murderer, the doctor's warnings seemed to be justified, for she fainted again. What dreadful mystery was this? Who was this Jack Dawe, whose fatal name had been burnt into her brain, searing and withering the happiness of her life? Was she to be so cruelly reminded of the drear past at the very moment when death had softened it to her memory? Was it only the merciless irony of Fate that the name under which he had chosen to masquerade should be that of his future assassin, or was some terrible secret involved in the fact?

Still in spite of medical prohibition, she insisted on going in person to give her evidence at the inquest. Full of a feverish restlessness, she would not have her evidence taken down at home. On her return she refused to succumb; and sat in her study, receiving no one, not even Bardolph, and engaged in studying every item of the evidence and devouring every morsel of news and every scrap of rumour.

The relationship between Jack Dawe and her late housemaid, which the proceedings of the second day revealed, coming as it did with the fact of the resemblance between the assassin and his victim, was a fresh shock that set her tortured brain whirling with new possibilities. The motive of the murderer was now becoming plain. Apparently the world had long known the disgraceful story she had thought locked in her own breast. Yet the dark story was not growing so luminous to her as to the journalists. Jack Dawe—a real independent entity with a physical resemblance to the Premier, the Premier as Jack Dawe carrying on an intrigue with Eliza Bathbrill, Eliza Bathbrill bringing an action for breach of promise against the real Jack Dawe, the false Jack Dawe murdered in jealousy by his real namesake after a strange correspondence between the two men. What, merciful Heaven, did it all mean?

Definite thought failed her as she struggled with these complications, one factor of which, unknown as yet to the world, would doubtless be elicited in the approaching examination of the girl in question. In sleepless anxiety she awaited the next morning. At one moment she was on the point of ordering her carriage and going off to the scene of action; but, her own evidence given, she could not bear to meet the scrutiny of the world again. Luckily Eliza Bathbrill was to be called first,

and poor Lady Gwen tried to wait in patience till the first batch of evidence could reach her. Eliza's evidence was in print almost as soon as it was delivered, and editions of the rival evening papers were sent post haste to her ladyship, as ordered, within a few minutes of one another. In an instant her eager eyes had skimmed the report, and had fastened upon the critical question put by the dissenting juror: "When did you first become acquainted with Mr. Floppington?" A mist swam before her, but with frantic impatience she brought the wet sheet close to her aching eyes and made out the vaguely looming words. "Mr. Floppington! I never saw Mr. Floppington in my life except on pictures, and then he did look something like Mr. Dawe." A dreadful feeling of sickness came over her, and she thought she was going to faint once more, but she did not. She remained only too conscious of a dull physical anguish and of the sharper thrusts of mental pain. Eliza's denial seemed to pierce and run through her like a stream of electricity, and at the first flash the conviction of the murdered man's innocence filled her soul, not with joy—that might come later—but with an awful despair.

She laid her head upon her desk in a very agony of remorse and hopeless longing. "Arnold! May God forgive me. My poor murdered Arnold!" she moaned, in a woe too deep for tears.

But soon memory brought a touch of barren consolation, if, indeed, the bitter reflections it induced could be deemed consoling. No, she had not made so tragic and irremediable a mistake. Fate could not be so cruel. The girl might have meant to tell the truth, for it was certainly possible that she had mistaken the Premier for her lover; but then had not the Premier admitted his guilt and begged her to keep the secret? But, again, was there no further mystery, nothing but a coincidence in the concordance of the two names? She tried to recall the past in precise detail. She saw the Premier shrinking back before the threatened embrace of the housemaid; but was this horror simulated as she had thought at the time, or had he really been unconscious of her own presence; or even if the disgust had been real, had it been due to innocence or to weariness of an old and forgotten amour? And if he had known nothing of Eliza, what could he have known of Jack Dawe? How else explain the exclamation of "Good God, you know!" when she mentioned that ominous name? How else understand the series of confessions or the shameless apologies that followed? Perhaps some other and subtler link connected him with Jack Dawe than their common relationship to Eliza Bathbrill? But, no! That was impossible! The more vividly her excited brain recalled that tragic scene, the more she grew convinced that the actors had not been playing at cross-purposes. Surely it had not been a ghastly farce? There were misunderstandings in farces, in comedies, in novels, resting

on the double meaning of a word, or on some slight mistake—flimsy and improbable misunderstandings that argued a want of common sense in those who fell into them, and that could not have stood the test of five minutes natural and unforced conversation. But that in real life two intelligent persons could have been at cross purposes for much longer than that—the one accusing in detail, and the other confessing and excusing himself with equal detail, and both looking at the subject from all points of view, individual or national—this appeared absurd and utterly incredible.

Yet there, on the other hand, staring her in the face, was the emphatic denial of the person most implicated; couched in language which, if feigned, was of an ingenuousness almost beyond the invention of a housemaid.

Once more the cry burst from her lips: "Merciful Heavens? What does it all mean?"

She began to pace the room restlessly, with hurried, aimless movements that symbolised the heaving chaos of her thoughts. And now the intellectual puzzle was giving way to the emotional problem of her future life. For her, in all the freshness of youth and beauty, there was nothing now but the gray horizon of renunciation. Well, she could renounce! Nay, was it even renunciation—this exchange of worldly and selfish happiness, this soul-narrowing *égoïsme à deux*, for the ecstasy of noble action that would not rest till every wrong of her sisters was washed away. A union, even with the most spiritually-minded of men, would inevitably have for ever brought separation from the larger objects of life. The thought steeled her to endurance. She sat down again at her desk and dashed off page after page of feverish eloquence. How long she wrote she never knew, but gradually the pen began to falter and move slowly over the paper, till at last it fell from between her fingers, and she burst quite suddenly into hysterical sobbing. She could not understand why she was crying, she only felt a drear burden of numb and raw misery, and a vague consciousness of irrational self-pity.

A reverberating ring at the bell roused her. Something told her who the visitor was, and the verification of her instinct gave her no surprise. She could not think of seeing Lord Bardolph in the state in which she was. But, after she had instructed the servant to say that she was too unwell to receive anybody, she suddenly recalled him and told him to ask his lordship to wait in the drawing-room.

No sooner had the servant left the room than he was again recalled. Gwendolen was, indeed, in a pitiable condition. The reflection that Bardolph had a right to see her; the knowledge that, except for a few moments at the inquest, he had not spoken to her for many days, made her feel humble as a child before his long-suffering gentleness. The refusal of the interview had come to her lips as a matter of course, and when it was uttered a pang of self-reproach shot through her, and she conquered her reluctance.

But immediately afterwards the old shrinking from the meeting seized upon her, and she stood now in tremulous hesitation pressing her hands nervously together. After an instant of concentrated thought, which was, however, more a rapid play of emotion than an intellectual balancing of motives, she made a gesture at once of resolution and of abandonment to impulse.

Few human beings behave in the analysable fashion of historical personages, and Gwendolen, when she finally determined to receive her lover as she was, and in the old study where he had first declared his love, could of all persons least have given a clear and definite statement of her motives.

He came in, quiet and subdued, and saw the traces of tears she made no effort to conceal. She was dressed in black, without a single ornament, and her white face glimmered ghostlike. Gloom and pallor were alike out of harmony with the rich sunlight that flashed without the darkened chamber. To Mountchapel, fresh from the bustle of outside life, it seemed a pale, cloistered, but beautiful saint that held out her hand and flashed a pathetic welcome from her sweet, sad eyes, and essayed to mould her quivering lips to a smile of tenderness.

He took her soft, white hand, burning with inward fever, put it gently to his lips, and held it there for a moment.

"You are ill, Gwendolen," he said tenderly.

"No, indeed, I am not," she said trembling. "Is the inquest over?"

He had pretended not to notice the mourning she wore. Kindred nobility of soul had taught him both to understand and be silent. She was deeply touched by his delicate reserve and strangely affected in a different way by the slight caress. A prey to contending emotions, she regretted too late that she had exposed herself to the anguish of this meeting. She felt that she ought to ask after his own health, but the trite phrase died upon her lips, and, half to her own surprise, she found that the ever-present subject of silent thought had risen into speech.

"I have just come from it," Bardolph replied, with a faint accent of dissatisfaction. He understood well enough the mute confession of that simple black dress, the meaning of those swollen lids; but prudence, no less than generosity, demanded generosity. Gwen, he thought, was too high-spirited to brook the smallest remark on her unconventional behaviour. He had not enough insight to feel that she would have taken even bitter reproach with childlike humility. But he knew that he could afford to be generous.

He had long seen traces of the coming reaction towards her old love (and they had made him uneasy), and when Floppington was assassinated it was natural that the reaction should reach its zenith. But it was equally natural that his uneasiness should fall to its nadir. Nor did the visible intensity of Gwendolen's grief cause him any alarm, as the consciousness of it was borne in upon him at the first glance. He himself had felt greatly shocked at the tragic end of the man; his own recollection of their old rivalry, political and amorous, had

been strangely softened by it, and he could dimly divine how one who had once loved him would be affected. Moreover, her affliction would only give him the chance of wooing her tenderly back to him. But as he felt the feverish throbbing of the blood in her veins, and the trembling of her hand in his, a genuine alarm seized upon him. She did not take enough care of herself. Her transient grief must not be allowed to leave permanent effects upon her health. She was his own—this pale, fragile, grief-worn creature who stood before him in all her delicate loveliness—nothing could come between them any more. Sooner or later she would share his hearth and home. He knew this, and yet the eager demand which at once turned the talk so abruptly away from their two selves jarred upon him. He would disburden himself of his news as quickly as possible.

"The coroner summed up wonderfully," he continued. "It was as interesting as a novel."

"And the verdict?" she broke in breathlessly, too excited to resent the doubtful taste of the comparison.

"Oh, that was a foregone conclusion. Even yesterday, Jack Dawe's guilt was as plain as a pikestaff. But after to-day's evidence, it was as plain as—well, as a mountain. Poor Floppington!"

Gwen covered her face with her hands. "No traces of the murderer yet, I suppose?" she said, in a low tone.

"No; and yet he must be in London. No such man seems to have left the metropolis on or after the 13th. He must be a clever fellow. It bears out Maudsley's opinion that he wasn't really insane; at least, not to the point of irresponsibility. By Jove, it requires a cool head to baffle a nation of detectives. If he can only lie perdu a little longer, he may escape altogether. The public voice is clamorous for vengeance; the public eye is on the alert; but you know how soon enthusiasm grows cold. After a bit things will begin to go on as usual."

Gwendolen uncovered her face and he could see that her eyes flashed fire. "Oh no, God will not let him go unpunished!" she cried with clenched hands.

Bardolph scarcely noted her words. How beautiful she was in her indignation, her pale cheek flushed with passionate crimson!

"I cannot believe that he will escape," she cried. "Shall a great nation leave unavenged the dastardly murder of its First Minister? Bellingham was executed within a week of the assassination of Perceval."

"Yes; but Bellingham shot the Premier in the lobby of the House—a very different matter from dynamiting him in Westminster. By-the-by, none of the papers seems to have noticed the curious coincidence that the foreign secretaries of both Cabinets resigned shortly before the assassination of their chiefs. Marquess Wellesley then, and I now. I wonder," he continued reflectively, "whether the coincidence is going to hold further. All the Ministers resigned and a new administration was formed."

But Gwendolen was no longer listening. She had gone to her

desk and taken from it the illustrated handbill that Scotland Yard had issued in tens of thousands. She was scanning the wretched painter's features, although the face had haunted her since she had first seen it, and she wondered that amid so much of difference it should still dimly suggest a resemblance to the countenance of the victim.

"With that in every house in the kingdom," she said, "is it possible that he can lurk long undetected? And if, as you fear, the public heart should cease to beat with sympathetic wrath, I will appeal to its mercenary instincts."

"The Government has done that sufficiently," replied Bardolph. "But if you think it will do any good I will offer another thousand myself."

"Oh no!" she cried impulsively. "Why should you do more than any other private person? It is very generous of you; but, while I have a penny of my own, there is no need for a stranger to interfere."

"Oh, Gwendolen," he said reproachfully, "I honour you for your unconcealed devotion to the dead, indeed I do. But surely you must know that whatever interests you, interests me. And, moreover, is not my fortune yours?"

He tried to take her hand, but she moved away slightly and replaced the handbill in her desk. Her face was hidden from him, but it had grown white once more. She stood thus a moment, drawing breath painfully. Then she turned to him again with compressed lips and palpitating heart. In the turn the conversation had been taking, her nervousness had vanished, and her access of indignation, the expression of which gave in reality an outlet to the pent-up fervour of her love and longing, seemed to have given her firmness and courage. But now her strength began to leave her once more.

"No, Lord Bardolph," she managed to say, "do not think any more of it." She made an effort at lightness. "I won't let you rob the election fund at the Carlton."

"It would serve the Club right," he said bitterly, "if I treated it as shabbily as its members have treated me; but a day of reckoning will come."

"When they will groan at the smallness of the total, do you mean?" she asked, with a miserable attempt at a smile.

Bardolph laughed softly, and, encouraged by this new gaiety—a clear symptom, by the way, of the transitory and superficial nature of her grief—he bent tenderly towards her, and laying his two hands upon her shoulders, he looked lovingly into her eyes, murmuring: "That is how I like to hear you talk. You looked so unwell before, I was really frightened, darling. I am afraid you have been worrying too much. I know how terrible the shock must have been, but you must not give in to it. I'm so glad you're trying to rally. You must get it out of your mind, darling, for your own sake—and mine."

She had half turned away her head, but she now met his glance with sorrowful, unflinching gaze.

"I shall never get it out of my mind," she said slowly.

"Oh yes you will," returned Bardolph cheerfully, "if only you don't brood over it so much."

"I have no wish to forget it," she whispered, lowering her eyes once more.

"The wish is not always father to the thought," he replied reassuringly. "Time will cure you of the remembrance. Time is the great anodyne that you must take. It is the illusion of mourning to think itself immortal. *Moriendum est omnibus*. Your grief will die like everything else under the sun."

Gwendolen raised her eyes to his in mute, pathetic appeal. Would he never understand?

"Except love!" she breathed. Then with a sudden access of strength, she shook herself free from his touch, and faced him with flashing eyes and quivering lips. "Oh, Lord Bardolph," she cried, "it is unfair to you to hide from you the change that has come over me."

"I know, I know," he replied soothingly. "Of course such a tragedy has moved you. But it will pass, and I will do my best to make you happy, my darling."

Gwendolen shook her head. "It is of no use deceiving myself or you. We have both made a mistake. Oh, why did you not leave me in my misery?"

"I have made no mistake, Gwendolen. I love you. I shall never regret that I have asked you to be mine. The mistake is yours; you are misreading your own heart. It is full of a vast pity at the blighting of a great career, and pity is akin to love."

The impressive tone in which Bardolph analysed her from a standpoint of calm confidence had a momentary effect, which was intensified when he added earnestly:

"My affection is too deep to be disturbed by any surface changes on your part. I have more trust in your inmost soul than you have yourself. I have strength for both. Have I not been content to wait in patience? And I am content to wait in patience still."

Gwendolen's eyes filled with tears. How hard his chivalrous faith in her was making her painful task.

"Would to God you read my heart aright," she exclaimed, and her tremulous accents fell upon Bardolph's ears like a strain of music. "For there is no man to whom I would more willingly trust it, were it my own to give. Dear Bardolph, you have taught me the true nobility of nature that underlies your superficial cynicism; you have taught me to honour and to look up to you. Your wife should never have one thought for another, one regret for the past. And I——" her voice was choked with suppressed sobs. The tears fell freely from her eyes. She was distractingly lovely.

"You are an angel, Gwendolen!" he cried. "Do you think my love is to be daunted by these delicate scruples? You exaggerate your own fears. You know well that you are the only

woman in the world to me." He took her hand, and she let it rest in his. She was moved beyond expression.

"My darling!" he went on passionately, thrilled again by the touch of her burning palm, "do not sacrifice my happiness to a delusion."

It wounded her to the quick to hear her affianced husband plead thus humbly, as though she had never consented to be his. His generosity added an extra sting to her self-reproach for all the misery her weakness had wrought.

"You would not be happy," she faltered, "I should only make you as wretched as myself. I have made you unhappy enough by my folly."

"If that is your only fear, dismiss it. It is only when I am with you that life seems worth the living. It is you that have called into being whatever good qualities you may now recognise in me. Will you cast me back into my dreary scepticism? No, no, Gwendolen. You will have pity on me. You will not undo your work, or unmake your promise."

A great wave of pity overwhelmed Gwendolen, overwhelmed the consciousness flashed upon her in that terrible moment in the hall, overwhelmed all but the remorseful sense of her own cruelty and the sublime promptings of self-abnegation.

"It is true," she breathed, "I have promised to be your wife—and I will do my duty."

Bardolph's eyes glittered with triumph. He bent down to take her in his arms; but suddenly, as if moved by an inspiration, he dropped her hand instead and drew himself up to his full height.

"No, Lady Gwendolen," he cried in passionate accents. "Because I love you so much I will not accept the sacrifice. I was wrong to press you. I did not think your regret—your love—was so deep as to make your marriage only a sacrifice to duty. Forgive me! I will no longer intrude my presence upon your grief. Till you can tell me with your own lips that it is no longer a sacrifice, let us be strangers."

Gwendolen looked up to him humbly, with a grateful admiration that made him long to clasp her in his arms and kiss away her tears, but he restrained himself.

"Forgive me!" she cried in her turn, "I was wrong to offer you a heart without love, and you acted nobly in rejecting it. Your intuition is clearer than mine. May God give you strength to conquer your unhappy love for me. But let us not be strangers, dear Bardolph. There is no danger of our forgetting ourselves again. We have sounded the depths. We know there can be no true union between us—none that could satisfy our better selves—except that of friendship."

"No, Gwendolen," he said with confident tenderness. "I dare not trust my better self. I should, perhaps, worry you again by my importunities. Let us remain apart till—till all this has vanished like a bad dream, and I can hope to make you love me a little."

He saw fresh tears upwelling in her softly flashing eyes, and felt that that time would not be long in coming.

"Perhaps you are right," she said gently, "it will be best to try neither to meet nor to avoid each other. And should—should I change," she caught her breath, "I will be as candid as to-day. Believe me, oh believe me, I am no coquette to play with your happiness. No false shame shall keep me silent. But oh, do not hope too much. I will try—yes, I will try to forget, for your sake, my dear, dear friend."

A strange feeling of admiration of his own highmindedness, and a delicious rapture in the suppliant and apologetic humbleness of this beautiful creature, sent the blood coursing ecstatically through his veins.

"Whether you change or not," he said, in tones vibrating with emotion, "you will find me unchanged—ever longing for your love—ever waiting patiently. And so—good-bye."

He put his hand into hers, and, abandoning herself to a sudden impulse of gratitude, she touched it softly with her lips. Stirred by an equally irresistible impulse he folded her in his arms and kissed her on the mouth twice. She made no resistance, but he put her down immediately and hurried from the room, trembling with the conviction that their love had been sealed beyond all severance.

CHAPTER VI.

NON OMNIS MORIAR.

THE preparations for the funeral of the Premier, which was to take place in Westminster Abbey, had been rapidly pushed forwards, and all was in readiness by the time the inquest was over. The day broke dull and windy, but about nine o'clock the sky cleared, the sun leapt out in triumphant glory, and one of the loveliest of summer days clad itself in all its bright vesture to welcome the melancholy but majestic procession that was soon to defile through the black-draped streets of the great city. For obvious reasons there had been no lying-in-state. The murdered Minister lay in his magnificent coffin at his own official residence at Downing Street, where a few of his distant relatives (for his sister's yacht was at the other side of the globe) had helped Tremaine in superintending the last sad arrangements. The oak of the coffin was invisible under a mass of fragrant flowers—wreaths from the Queen and other European sovereigns, from Ministers of every nation, from the noblest families, from every party of politicians, from schools and institutions, from the working men of England, from the women of England, and a huge floral structure from the whole Irish nation, with artistic and emblematic interweaving of sprays of yew

with roses and shamrocks. Poor Floppington, cut off after so short a time from the triumphs of ambition and the selfishly unselfish delights of historic action, what matter to thee the honours heaped over thy unconscious form! Alas! not in life wast thou surrounded with the sweetness and loveliness which encompass thee now. If thou hadst some moments of perfect happiness, how poor, and mean, and bounded must thine earlier life have been to thy restless spirit, pluming for the eagle-flight it was only permitted to begin? After all, was it worth while to live, bereft of the love of her whose face haunted thee in dreams of the night—a vision of angelic purity and high thought—impalpable as a mirage, unattainable as the distant heavens, alternately darkening thy soul with hopeless longing and stirring it to lofty endeavour? Nay, were there not moments when, looking down the barren stretch of the future, it seemed better to thee to die and be saved from the fever and fret of existence? Well, wished for or not, *Pallida Mors* has knocked at thy door to point anew the olden lesson that the mighty of this world are as shadows on the stream and the glories of their lives as transient as the hues of a soap-bubble.

Outside, in the sunlight that would never more gladden those poor, blind eyes, the procession was forming. Ever since early dawn the great city had been pouring out from its reeking courts and lanes, from streets and roads and squares, dreary or pleasant, from its million haunts of luxury or squalor, from the great termini of its railway lines, a restlessly-surgng crowd that pressed into every available nook and cranny of the streets along the route. The continent and the provinces, Wales, and Scotland, and, above all, Ireland, had sent contingents to swell the closely-wedged throngs—over and above the official delegates. London, aflame with the splendour of the morning sunlight, alert and astir with an eager and feverish life, was in curious contrast with the darkness and the calm that reigned within the narrow house of the poor dead Premier.

And now the vast procession set out on its slow and solemn journey—through streets, lined with human beings along the footpaths, swarming with heads at windows, black with forms on roofs and galleries and scaffoldings, tier upon tier, and gloomy despite the sunbeams with vistas of crape; past clubs and mansions; along busy thoroughfares whence death had banished their wonted traffic; till the great Abbey came in sight and the great river where the flags were lowered on the myriad masts and where from afar boomed sullenly in the sultry air the cannon which the gray old Tower was firing off from its weather-beaten ramparts. It was an unforgettable spectacle—this funeral pomp, relieved from vulgarity by the sincerity of the emotions which found expression in it, and by the awed silence of the dense multitudes; this procession which took an hour and a half defiling past any given point, with its magnificent bodies of troops, its glittering cavalcade of officials, its hundreds of deputations, its long files of working men, its waving banners, its almost endless array of mourning coaches filled with the *élite* of society.

The steady, mournful tramp of thousands of feet, mingling with the wail of the music and the tolling of the bells from twenty neighbouring spires, was indescribably affecting. As the colossal car approached, containing the coffin under its mountain of flowers, every whisper was hushed. Amid a profound silence, every one that could get his hand to his hat removed it, and there was a moment of intense sublimity while the body was slowly passing onwards. But there were grander moments when the corpse reached the venerable Abbey that offered it the inviolate shelter of its sanctuary and the companionship of the noble dead who had preceded it, and the body of clergymen in their snowy surplices met it with solemn, simultaneous chanting; or when the vast congregation audibly joined in the Lord's Prayer, while the liberal sunshine streamed through the painted glass and dappled nave and choir and transept, or fell in lines of gold through the glazed glories of the marygold window; or when the great organ trembled with dirge-like moaning or swelled high in triumphant rapture, till groin and vault and pillar re-echoed the sacred ecstasy and the whole mighty Abbey throbbed with the passionate proclamation of immortality, and every cheek was wet with tears.

The service was almost over—the choir was singing the last hymn—when an incident occurred outside that attracted little attention. The entrance to the Abbey had been kept comparatively free from the crowd by the police. All of a sudden a man was seen struggling through the press, and making his way towards the building. Those who saw his face never forgot its ghastliness to their dying day. His hat had fallen off in the struggle, and his scanty, rough, unkempt hair intensified the grim uncouthness and the corpse-like pallor of his appearance. For the rest, he was respectably dressed, and he had a wild expression which did not seem to be the result of ordinary intoxication. He was evidently labouring under strong excitement of some kind. A jovial-looking policeman laid his hand good-naturedly on his shoulder.

"It's no use, my man," said the genial functionary. "All full inside."

The man shook the arm off roughly, and dashed forwards, but the policeman caught him with his outstretched hand. "Let me go!" gasped the man. "I must go in—I must see him—to beg his pardon and kneel to him—before he is buried. For God's sake, do not stop me."

"Oh, come!" said the policeman irreverently, "you've had a drop too much. You had better go home and get to bed."

"Bed!" cried the man wildly. "If I had stopped in bed when I heard it this morning—I have been riding all day, though I have been ill—all day flying to his corpse on the wings of steam—and would you stop me now? Oh, God forgive you for your cruelty!"

The policeman shook his head pityingly. "You ain't the sort of chap to be let go inside," he soliloquised. "Look 'ere," he said, "there's something queer about you. I shouldn't wonder if you've escaped from Colney Hatch. What's your name and address?"

"Ah! you will let me go in when I tell you who I am." He bent down and whispered, "I am the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington."

The policeman's brain whirled, but he retained his hold on the man, who had drawn himself up in momentary dignity. An idea flashed upon him that made his breath come thick and fast, and called up a dim perspective of wonderful visions. He collected himself with an effort, and peered into the face of the stranger. Trembling with agitation he tightened his grasp.

"Come round the other way," he said in a low tone; "I'll let you in through a private entrance."

He led the man through the crowd, retaining composure enough to wink meaningly at those of his fellows whom he passed, and conducted him quickly into a deserted back street.

Then he turned upon him suddenly.

"Jack Dawe," he said sternly.

The man shuddered and his cheeks flushed with crimson.

"He was mad, after all, and he's more like Floppy than like his own picture," reflected the policeman, with gleaming eyes, and, slipping the handcuffs on his wrists, he cried triumphantly:

"Jack Dawe, I arrest you for the murder of the Right Honourable Arnold Floppington."

The man burst into hysterical laughter so wild and ghastly that his captor shuddered.

"Yes, yes," he cried, "I read that this morning. But, you see, it's all a mistake. I am the Premier, I tell you. Where is the private entrance? I *must* go in. Unloose me at once, for the love of God."

He made a dart in the direction whence they had come, his handcuffs clanking dismally. The policeman gave instant chase, and re-captured him at the very corner of the street where a moment's more running would have brought them full in view of the dense multitude that seethed around the Abbey and all about the trailing array of coaches.

With an imperious hand he dragged him peremptorily back a few yards, and held him tightly by the collar. Captor and prisoner stood for an instant glaring at each other and panting for breath.

"You're lucky," gasped the policeman, "that I caught you before you had turned that corner. You'd have been a dead man by now, very likely."

"What do you mean?" gasped the man, evidently sobered by the violent treatment he had received, and impressed by the alarmed accents of his captor.

"Mean? Why you'd have been torn to pieces, and all the corps in London couldn't save you. Why, they think boiling oil ain't good enough for you! No, my man, if you've got the least bit of sense left in you, you'll come along o' me like a lamb, and take care not to let out who you are. We'll get a growler in a minute, if you'll be quiet, and I'll do my best to get you safe into Newgate without any riot."

"Into Newgate?" cried the murderer, his face lighting up with horror and indignation. "I go into Newgate!"

"It's no use crying over spilt milk, my beauty," said the policeman grimly, "you should have thought of that before."

"Good God!" the prisoner exclaimed hoarsely, "this is beyond a joke. There, do you hear those sounds? The funeral is over. He is buried—buried, and you have stopped me from going in. On you lies the responsibility. It is too late now." He groaned aloud.

"Stow that," said the policeman impatiently, but not brutally, for his heart was light, and something sang within his brain, and he was thinking of his wife and children. He had been dragging his limp and helpless victim along, and they had reached a thoroughfare out of the route of the procession, but still crowded with loiterers.

"Now then, Jack Dawe, keep a still tongue if you value your life," he whispered. He hailed a cab, and bundled his prisoner into it.

"Where to?" asked the driver, flicking his whip at the little crowd that had gathered round.

"Downing Street," cried the prisoner. The policeman clapped his hand over his mouth. "Anywhere," he shouted, in an agony of anxiety. "Drive out of this—keep clear of the crowd." The vehicle started off. When they were rolling rapidly along, the policeman withdrew his hand, pulled up the windows, and drew down the blinds.

"For God's sake," gasped the almost choking prisoner, "don't direct him to Newgate. I could not bear it! Listen to me. Am I not speaking calmly? I tell you I am Floppington, yes, the Premier himself. Look at me. You have eyes; in Heaven's name, look at me. I have not been murdered. You laugh at me. Great God, you laugh at me! 'Tis thus that Truth is always received—with ridicule and scepticism. I tell you again I am the Prime Minister."

"Then you're dead and buried, so shut up," said the policeman grinning. "Why, don't you see I'm in mourning for you?"

He put his hand to the checkstring to summon the driver, but something in the agony of the prisoner's countenance, down which the cold sweat was trickling, made him pause a moment in pity. The murderer caught the changed expression.

"In the name of your wife and children," he entreated, "I beg and pray you to believe me. I have not been murdered."

"I can see that," muttered the policeman, beginning to smile afresh.

"Do not mock at me. I am Mr. Floppington—Mr. Floppington, do you understand? I am alive. It was Jack Dawe that was murdered, not I. Oh! my God, not I. Do you suppose if I had been Jack Dawe I should have come to the funeral? Drive to Downing Street at once. I must see Tremaine—Tremaine, my secretary. He will soon tell you the mistake you are making."

"Well, this is a rum start," soliloquised his captor uneasily.

"He will reward you for your kindness—Tremaine. I honour your obedience to duty, but it is all a mistake; I know there is a large reward offered for Jack Dawe—I saw it in the train; but you shall not suffer. I am the Premier. I will see that your zeal is rewarded. I pledge you my word."

The policeman shook his head compassionately. "The nearest police-station! Full speed!" he cried to the Jehu.

"Right!" The driver whipped up his horse, and the cab rattled along with extra rapidity.

The murderer had sunk back on his seat, and was staring at his *vis-à-vis* in stony resignation. "Policeman," he said in cold, proud accents, "I will no longer deign to beg. If you are determined to subject me to this further indignity I can do nothing but submit. But when it is known—as within half-an-hour it will be known—that you have brought the head of Her Majesty's Government to a police-court in manacles——" He relapsed into gloomy silence which was unbroken for some minutes.

"Look here," cried the policeman suddenly, "what is it you want me to do? It's no use asking me to let you go, you know?"

"My demands are of the simplest. Drive to Downing Street. Let Mr. Tremaine know I wish to see him. Bring him down to me—and you will discover your mistake in a moment."

"Well, there's no harm in that," grumbled the policeman. "I dare say Mr. Tremaine will be glad enough to see you. But I warn you the longer you are in getting safely within strong stone walls, the more risks you run and I with you. But I don't mind doin' it if it'll ease your mind, on condition that you keep dumb when there's any stranger to hear you."

"Thank you," said the prisoner, much affected. "You are a good and noble man. It is thus that Truth makes its way even through the mists of prejudice."

"Not the police-station!" cried the policeman, "Downing Street." The cabby growled an inaudible reply, and lashed his horse savagely.

"I suppose I've made a fool of myself," the policeman grumbled as he seated himself anew. For some moments the two sat silent, jolted and bumped by the comfortless vehicle, and dazed by its rattle and din. Both were rapt from the land of reality and absorbed in dreams, and the prisoner's visions were not the pleasanter of the two. Ever and anon his lips moved, and his mobile face flashed and darkened with emotion.

"Well, Jack Dawe," said the policeman, starting up and peeping under a raised corner of the blind, "in another few minutes you will have an interview with your secretary; and when he has assured you that you are dead and buried, perhaps you will be satisfied."

"My secretary!" cried the prisoner. "Are you driving to Downing Street?"

"Well, that's good!" the policeman burst out with a laugh.

"Was it to Downing Street I told you to drive? No, no; I did not mean Downing Street. Tremaine knows nothing. He knows no more than you. He will laugh at me, like you, and refuse to believe me. How can I explain? How can I make him understand? Perhaps they will think I am mad. My God! No, you must drive to Lady Harley's, in Piccadilly. She will undeceive you. Take me to her. She will not refuse to see me for this once—the only person in the world who *knows*. Trust me a-little longer. Drive to Harley House."

The wretched man's hands shook with emotion. His handcuffs clanked in mournful cadence.

"It strikes me you're making a fool of me," said the policeman sternly. "A nice thing, to go and frighten Lady Harley with the sight of a object like you."

"I shall not frighten her. I tell you she will not be surprised to see me."

"I dare say not, but I've only your word for it. Her ladyship won't thank me for bringing the scum of the earth to see her, and upsetting her in return for all her kindness to my little Poll. Why, she came every day for a fortnight to nuss that gall, and now she's sent her to the seaside, with heaps of others."

"God bless her!" cried the murderer, his eyes filling with tears. "She's an angel."

"Piccadilly, Harley House—quicker!" shouted the policeman desperately. "Blowed if this ain't the rummest go I ever heard of." A vague alarm was beginning to fill his breast. The man was not Floppington, that was unquestionable. But what if he were nnt Jack Dawe after all? The thought was too horrible to contemplate. It must be put to the test at once. Had his fare been other than one of the force in charge of a prisoner, the driver would have suspected his sanity. As it was, he merely rapped out an oath, and whipped his animal to an increased velocity. A few minutes more, and the vehicle came to a standstill behind a carriage which stood in front of the house. The policeman jumped out at the door, and called to the driver to dismount and keep guard for a moment. He had caught sight of Lady Harley, just about to pass through the open door of the mansion. He dashed up the steps. "Lady Harley!" he said breathlessly.

Gwendolen turned her head, and through the thick black veil he could see the traces of tears. His own eyes filled with sympathetic moisture.

"Ah, Parker!" she exclaimed, with a gracious smile. Then her face grew anxious. "I hope there's no bad news from Polly?"

"No, thank God, your ladyship; it's not that."

"Well, what can I do for you, then?"

He glanced round uneasily. "Might I have a word with you in private?"

"Certainly, Parker. Come inside."

"Oh, your ladyship," he faltered, "I dare not leave that cab. It's only two words I have to say."

"Brown, Saunders," said Gwendolen, "you need not wait." The domestics retired in disgust. Gwendolen stepped into the hall, and Parker followed her, darting furtive glances in the direction of the vehicle.

"Well, to put it in a nutshell, in that cab I've got—Jack Dawe!"

Gwendolen turned white. Her eyes flashed with excitement, and she glanced towards the vehicle. Somehow she could not feel very exultant. Since she had read the summing-up, her eager desire for revenge had died away. She had begun to feel that life was a hopeless jumble, and that fate was stronger than volition. "Poor creature!" she murmured involuntarily. "Miserable sport of destiny!"

"Well," she said aloud, "and why have you brought him to me?"

"Because he begged of me so to bring him here before taking him to prison, that I hadn't the heart to refuse."

"To bring him here?" repeated Gwendolen, her heart beating quickly under the thought of coming revelations, possible solutions to the terrible enigmas that had been harassing her night and day. "Did he say why?"

"Well, you see, he's madder than the coroner thought. He's been trying to persuade me that *he* is Mr. Floppington, that he never was murdered at all, that it was Jack Dawe that was murdered and a lot of stuff like that."

"Well?" Gwendolen was trembling as with ague. She caught hold of the door to support herself.

"And he insisted that your ladyship could prove it—that you knew he wasn't dead. My God, I have killed her." The faithful policeman caught her in his arms as she swayed forward.

But it was not the policeman's words that had wrought this effect—it was a ghastly face, that suddenly appeared behind the glass of the vehicle on which her eyes had been fixed.

"No, it is nothing, Parker," said Gwendolen, recovering herself with a piteous smile. She looked again towards the window of the cab. The face had vanished. "Your words conjured up a vision to my heated fancy, and for a moment I thought it was real. Go on."

"That's all, your ladyship. I knew the scoundrel would frighten you." He clenched his fist. "But I'll say this for him, it's no wonder he drove himself mad, for when you look at him close, he's really like poor Mr. Floppington, though I shouldn't advise your ladyship to look at him. He's got a look on him that 'ud frighten a delicate person out of their wits."

Gwendolen's tremblings had recommenced. Her whole frame was agitated. Her lips twitched nervously and her eyes shone with unhealthy light.

"I am not afraid. I will see him if he desires it. There can be no danger."

"No, except he may frighten you," admitted the policeman.

"He's handcuffed, and it's a tight fit too. Not that any one would wish to harm a angel!"

Gwendolen made an immense effort of will. She ceased to tremble. Her voice was almost calm.

"Does any one know of your capture?"

"No, your ladyship, I——"

"Very well. Don't say anything till I have spoken to him. I shall be in here—alone." She opened a door on the right of the hall. "You will send him in and wait outside. Perhaps he may really have something to tell me. You will do this for me, I know." She gave him a pathetic smile, and, without allowing him time to reply, entered the room indicated. A moment afterwards the bare-headed prisoner, with a strange flush of excitement lighting up his wan features, knocked at the half-opened door with his forcibly-linked hands, and, receiving an invitation to enter, he walked softly forwards with bowed, contrite head, and trembling in all his limbs.

For half-an-hour the policeman walked up and down in intense excitement, ready to dart in at the slightest cry of alarm, ruthlessly repressing the curiosity of the impatient cabby, but his own heart a prey to a very fever of anxiety. Now and then he saw a footman or a housemaid come into the hall and look about, but at the mute rebuke of his stern glance they walked away uneasily. Up and down, to and fro he paced, chafing. What did it all mean? Had he not, then, made himself a name in history by effecting the capture of the assassin for whom England had been scoured in vain? But if it was not Jack Dawe, who in Heaven's name was it? The suspense almost drove him mad. At last, the door of the room opened and Gwendolen appeared on the threshold. There was a new and indescribable expression in her face—a strange blending of wonder and pity, and ecstasy and bewilderment.

"Parker," she said, with her beautiful smile, "will you trust me with the key of your handcuffs? And will you take this message to Mr. Tremaine, at No. 10, Downing Street, and bring him back immediately in your cab? And I know I can rely upon your discretion to breathe not a word till I give you leave."

Parker groaned. His bright visions paled and vanished. He pulled out the key like a man in a dream, and jumped into the cab. It mattered little now what was the meaning of all this incoherent nightmare. Yet there was one delicious episode in it which made it impossible to him to regret his strange adventure. In some mysterious way or other he was helping Lady Harley. Not for worlds would he infringe her slightest command. As the cab jolted along, its whirr shaped itself into the prattling of Polly. The poor policeman held her wasted hand, and looked into her large brown eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

A SLEEPLESS CITY.

IT was the evening of the day after the funeral, and the House of Commons was again crowded from roof to floor. Not an inch of space was to be had in or under any of the galleries. The distinguished strangers who had come over to assist at the state ceremonial were with difficulty accommodated. The Heir Apparent occupied his usual place over the clock, and his sons sat on either side, looking curiously down on the sombre scene with the penetrating glance of the literary artist.

It was curiosity that was responsible for the great gathering. "What will the Ministry do?" was the question canvassed at every dinner-table, after the great topics of the inquest and the funeral had been drained to the dregs. In the smoking-room at the National or at the Reform, the talk savoured of discontent with their old apathy. A spirit of opposition was creeping up. It was argued that the Liberals had committed themselves to very little on the Separation Question. A few of their prominent members had, indeed, while reserving their opinion till Floppington's measure was before them, not cared to disavow their sympathy with the proposed reforms in the abstract. Had the Bill been permitted to advance to a later stage, it was even possible that they might have been definitely entangled in the bonds of acquiescence; but as it was, they were at perfect liberty to unite with that section of extreme Radicals under Screwnail which had from the first refused to lend itself to such revolutionary measures as the administrative disjuncture of England and Ireland, without the proviso of a physical tunnel of connection. It was chiefly the very old and the very young members of the party who were uneasy. The former grumbled, the latter chafed at their political annihilation. Both felt that the deceased Premier had been an incubus that had prevented them from breathing freely.

The astute Screwnail had perceived his opportunity. He had that very day called a meeting *à huis clos*, in one of the Committee Rooms, inviting every section of Liberalism to a purely friendly discussion of the situation. There had been a large attendance, and it was whispered that a programme of common opposition had been drawn up with a view to precipitate the dissolution. At the Carlton the talk was depressed and anxious. Apart from the personal gloom into which the loss of their leader had plunged them, the members seemed to be weighed down by the intuition of the coming defeat of the party. Although the Conservatives were, by the adhesion of the Parnellites, stronger in numbers than ever, it was felt, and tacitly admitted, that their fortunes were almost as low an ebb as they had been in the period immediately following the first reading of the Reform Bill. Floppington, by an unex-

pected development of volitional power, had galvanised a moribund party. The magnetism of his imperious personality had subdued the Opposition to infantile impotence. But now the spell was broken. Like the mesmerised corpse in Poe's weird story, it would crumble into dust as soon as the will of the operator was removed. There was no master-mind to take his place; no great Parliamentary leader, with or without insight, to breathe life into its failing members. Mountchapel, had he even done anything less than endeavour to incite the Ulsterites to rebellion, would have been invaluable at this juncture. He would have reigned without a rival.

But Mountchapel had become a party to himself, doing that which was right in his own eyes. He had not been able to foresee the early disappearance of Floppington. He could predict the fate of nations, but that of individuals was beyond his ken. Moreover, he had staked his all, as has already been explained, on the reaction against Home Rule. That reaction was at hand; but, lo and behold! by an unfortunate conjunction of events, here was Screwnail wresting the agitation out of his leadership that very day, and by all accounts, already at the head of a large force of adherents. Bardolph, in his character of Fourth Party, had not attended the meeting. The announcement of it had blanched his cheek, and when he heard its rumoured results a deadly sickness overcame him, as he realised that his political career was all but crushed for ever.

The course of events seems often enough erratic and arbitrary, but occasionally the philosophic historian is able to trace the unerring action of some guiding finger; perhaps no stronger instance of this exists in our national history than the career of Mountchapel. The great opportunist appears never to have made a move on the Parliamentary chess-board that did not promise victory, speedy or remote; yet Fate always had some subtle and unforeseen reply which upset all his strategic calculations. It almost seemed as if, had there been only a single pawn left to the enemy, he would have been mated with that.

He sat now in his new place below the gangway, gnawing his moustache savagely and glaring at the impassive Screwnail, and, despite his mercurial disposition, unable to rally from the shock. Only the consciousness of Gwendolen's love sustained him at this crisis and saved him from utter collapse. Not the least part of the curiosity of the vast audience hovered about the attitude of the Fourth Party. A ruthless and scathing speech was expected from it, and its moustache was the focus of a thousand eyes.

Ministers looked worn and haggard. Anxious consultations had taken place among them. They endeavoured to disguise from themselves the feeling that it was only the superhuman energy of their late chief that would have enabled them to pass the Bill at all, and that Floppington, and he alone, would have dazzled the country into accepting its principle; but the resolution they finally arrived at was based upon that unspoken conviction. The

perspective was the more deplorable from the feverish visions of blessedness which it had displaced. They had sailed the seas of office six months. At first the weather had been rough; but soon their bark had righted itself, and everything promised a glorious voyage. There would be a disembarkation in the autumn (when a general election was due), but immediately afterwards they would resume their triumphant progress. It was very hard. The Liberals had ruled the waves for all the septennium except those meagre six months, and now the poor Conservatives were condemned to see their admiral fall and all their hopes perish with him.

To the eager assembly it seemed an age before the Chancellor of the Exchequer rose to make the Ministerial statement. But at length the usual preliminaries were got through, the last question was answered, and amid breathless silence the statesman who had succeeded Sir Stanley Southleigh rose to address the House, and every face turned to his. The House at this moment presented a thrilling but, withal, a gloomy spectacle. The scene was very different from that of a few nights ago, when the great Minister had unfolded the details of his Irish measure. Then, all was pleasurable exhilaration and excitement. The galleries were gay with bright colours and sparkled with jewels, and buttonholes and corsages were adorned with flowers. Now, monotonous rows of black fatigued the aching vision. Gloom sat upon every countenance. The whole scene was sombre to the last degree.

The Chancellor commenced by some remarks on the funeral of the day before. He spoke eloquently of the admirable behaviour of the multitude, and the sublime effect of the ceremony on the heart of the nation. Touching next on the other political aspects of the ceremony, he spoke of the sympathy of the Continent as manifested by the sending of representatives. It was a consolation in their suffering to see that the hostile tone of a part of the English Press during the recent Bobo difficulty had not disturbed the good feeling of Germany. After a brief reference to the great assembly, which had met that morning at the Mansion House to determine on the form of the national commemoration of the late Premier, he proceeded in a voice broken with emotion to explain that, owing to the unsettling of the public mind by the tragedy deplored by the world, and also in view of the lateness of the season, it had been thought advisable to shelve the Separation Bill for that session (Irish groans), and the question would thus be left for the consideration of an entirely new Parliament. Following the only precedent—happily only one existed—the Ministry would have resigned; but, as a dissolution was already at hand, they had resolved to remain in office, and to wind up the affairs of the session as rapidly as possible, so that members might recruit themselves for the arduous period of the general election.

The right honourable gentleman resumed his seat amid a feeble rumble of hear, hears. The programme was exactly what everybody had expected. The audience breathed deeply after

the effort of attention. There was an instant's pause before the buzz of conversation would break out. The Speaker looked round. None of the members had risen immediately. At this moment he felt a Presence passing behind him, he saw a fearful change come over the faces about him, and a second afterwards something caught his eye that caused it to dilate with superstitious horror. In another instant the electric thrill had travelled to the furthest extremities of the Chamber. An awful and mysterious shudder traversed the House. Men grasped each other convulsively. Some of the ladies in the foremost row fainted. For one terrible and unforgettable moment, an awe-struck silence reigned—dead, unearthly silence, in which the universal heart had ceased to beat. There, just emerged from behind the Speaker's chair, stood the murdered Premier, ghastly in death, his cheek pale with the sickly hue of the grave. Every brain throbbled with tumultuous thought. Every eye was glazed and fascinated by the weird and unholy sight, as, bowing to the Speaker, the Minister seated himself upon the Treasury Bench, addressing a smile of infinite sadness to his colleagues, who fell away from before his advancing form.

The next instant a cry burst from a thousand throats, mingled with shrill shrieks from above. The House started to its feet as one man. A scene of wild and indescribable confusion arose. The Sergeant-at-Arms rushed forward, followed by his men. The Speaker in his flowing robes darted from his chair, to find himself inextricably wedged amid a solid block of members who fought their way steadily to the Treasury Bench; and from all parts of the House members were bounding frantically over the seats, and struggling in the same direction. The immense physical strength of the member for Queeropolis (who had an awful foreboding that it was a real apparition, and that his influence with the masses would be gone) stood him in good stead, and those who had prudently followed in his wake were among the first to ascertain that the form was solid flesh and blood. In the galleries the excitement was, if possible, more intense from the difficulty of getting to the spot. The Prince of Wales was hanging over the balcony, just saved from falling by the exertions of the young princes. The reporters had mounted on one another's shoulders. The peers were invading the ground-floor itself. The foreign diplomatists were shrieking with vivid gestures in a very Babel of languages. The strong-minded ladies stared through the bars and left their feeble neighbours to themselves. The people in the back rows had poured out into the lobbies, and were pressing irresistibly in the direction of the forbidden Chamber. It seems marvellous that no serious accident should have occurred. To add to the din and consternation, the division bells had somehow been set ringing, and a few members who had slipped out to write letters just before the end of the Chancellor's speech, ran from the library or the reading room, and combated desperately with the crowd; alarmed, and unable to divine what possible division could have been called.

A stately old Tory, who was almost suffocated and well-nigh mangled to a jelly, called out: "I spy strangers," but his voice was drowned in the roar and jangle of voices. The poor Speaker who was near, panting for breath, heard him, and cast him a pathetic glance. The Sergeant-at-Arms from afar looked at the Speaker in wild appeal, as though imploring to be allowed to put the House under arrest. He saw the mace trodden under foot and the sacred sand-glass shivered to atoms, and he felt that the end of the world was come. Meanwhile, the miraculous report had spread that it was really the Premier come back to life—and bewildered interjections and interrogations flew about over the heads of the dense assembly. The throng around the Premier shouted it to distant members, and these shrieked it to the galleries, and the front rows passed it on to those behind, and amazement and incredulity reigned supreme. Energetic reporters flew into the streets, and, silent as the grave, dashed to their offices. And now the Irish members, fighting shoulder to shoulder, had at last arrived at the Treasury Bench where the Premier, his hand shaken violently by every one who could seize upon it, his body felt and handled by the rest, sat dumb amid a storm of questions.

O'Rorke was the first to touch the Minister, and he burst into tears of joy. The exultant clamour of the Anti-Unionists doubled the hubbub and din. An instant after, there was a momentary lull; but, when the Speaker called for Order, a derisive roar broke from the Parnellites, and there was confusion worse confounded—a chaos of inarticulate cries interspersed with bursts of tremendous cheering. The House had gone mad. Never before or since have our parliamentary records been disgraced by such a scene. Happily it is improbable that a similar episode will ever occur again.

At this juncture—it was only a few minutes after the re-appearance of the Premier—the member for Queeropolis jumped upon a bench, and exerting all the herculean force of those stentorian lungs which had done such service in great outdoor demonstrations, called out: "Gentlemen, the ladies are in danger." His high-pitched tones dominated even the roar of the frantic assembly. A wild round of cheering followed. Then the House grew suddenly silent. Many of the members shamefacedly sat down wherever they found themselves—others rushed into the lobby and aided in restoring order. The peers and the strangers, distinguished and undistinguished, were violently repelled, and hastened back to their respective galleries to secure places. A third contingent of members hurried to the door of the ladies' gallery, where by this time those who had fainted had been conveyed. Five minutes afterwards a semblance of order had been obtained. The Speaker, smoothing his crumpled robes, had got into his chair, the mace had been picked up, and the members heaped promiscuously—friends and foes, political parties blent

into a delightful medley—were amid all their excitement ruefully conscious of their shapeless or hopelessly strayed hats.

Then all at once the Premier was seen to rise. A breathless hush fell upon the restless assembly, to be broken immediately by a shrill cry from Sacristan of "Long live Mr. Floppington." An almost hysterical roar of laughter followed, and then the whole audience, moved by a simultaneous impulse, rose to their feet and cheered and cheered till they were hoarse. Tears streamed down many a cheek. The enthusiasm was sublime.

The Premier opened his lips to speak, and immediately a dead calm prevailed once more. "Sir," began the Minister in low tones which, however, in the almost painful silence could be heard in the farthest corners, "in rising to move that the House do now adjourn, I have to apologise to you and to the House ('No, no,' in a vast shout, and the Irish members began to sing, 'For he's a jolly good fellow,' but were roared down by the indignant cries of the expectant audience. Never probably since language had been given to politicians had a speech been listened to with such an agony of curiosity)—I have to apologise for the shock which I have given the House. (Cries of 'No, no! You were quite right,' and cheers.) Had I foreseen the intensity of that shock I would not have chosen that way of demonstrating my existence. (Laughter, followed by tremendous and protracted cheering.) I returned to life, so to speak, yesterday, a little before my funeral. (Cheers and laughter, which the orator did not appear to share, for his countenance retained a look of intense melancholy.) My condition was known only to a few friends, and on consultation with them it was decided that to avoid any danger of being suspected of lunacy, and to spare the world the infliction of another Tichborne trial (laughter), it was best to boldly take my rightful place in the abrupt and decisive fashion you have witnessed. (Cheers. A voice: 'God bless you,' and more cheers.) I did not think, sir, that I should have the same effect on honourable members as on the officials of the House, who fled on all sides at my approach. (Loud laughter.) I am sorry to have disappointed gentlemen who may be members of the Psychical Society. (Immense laughter.) I regret the good old law of metaphysics which makes it impossible for me to doubt my own existence. (Laughter.) Although it is open to any one else to assure me that my consciousness is mistaken." (Much laughter.)

The Premier made a slight pause. The old smile of melancholy humour played about his mouth, in place of the cold and saturnine sneer alternating with irritating and mysterious smiles, or with haughty superiority and conscious power, which had of late been the dominant expressions on his countenance. At instants there had even been visible traces of weakness, a wavering, uncertain gleam in the eyes, a faltering in the silvery tones, and a rapid passing of waves of emotion over the face as cheers on cheers rose

and swelled in majestic volume ; but now, as soon as the first sentences were over, the orator had got into touch with his audience. His tones began to grow louder and firmer, his eyes to light up with resolution, and his haggard face to lose its marble paleness. And now, when the laughter was dying away, he drew himself up with a sudden gesture of confident strength, and faced the House with a strange, solemn expression which awed the audience to rapt silence. "God knows whether it would have been better had I indeed been, as the world imagined, hurled into eternity, and that I were now lying at rest under the slab of the great Abbey whose ancient aisles are sleeping in the sacred stillness of the summer afternoon. Perhaps it were to be wished that my life had not contradicted the mournful lines of the Roman poet :

Soles occidere et redire possunt ;
Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,
Nox est perpetuo una dormienda."

A shiver ran through the House at the ineffable melancholy of the Premier's intonation. The resumption of his habit of Latin quotation did not appear strange. All surprise was swallowed up in the feeling that he had fallen again into his old vein of stately eloquence, under the stimulus of the great opportunity. Parliamentary veterans held their breaths in a spasm of curiosity and expectation.

"Perhaps it were better that my light had gone out for ever. I have returned, however, and my reappearance among men is no miracle, there is nothing in it but what is capable of the simplest explanation. But that explanation I cannot give, and I throw myself on the indulgence of the House."

There was a moment of dead silence. The vast audience looked blankly at one another. Then suddenly a tremendous thunder of cheering rose from the Irish members, who, being dispersed throughout the House, communicated the infection to their neighbours, and the cheering was taken up by the other parties and flew to the galleries, and was echoed and re-echoed on all sides, dying away, and ever renewed, sinking and springing up again till everybody was hoarse and black in the face. At last the Premier made a gesture and the sounds subsided and ceased. But, as the interior of the House grew silent, a dull and inarticulate murmur, like the roar of a distant ocean, became audible from without. It was the People in their tens of thousands come to cheer their idolised Minister, and, as the perception of the fact dawned upon the audience, enthusiasm seized them anew, and the din of the multitude within answered the tumult without. As the Premier's ear caught the distant roar, a shade of sadness, almost of bitterness, was observed to pass over his face ; but, when order was at length restored, he went on in tones quivering with suppressed emotion :

"From the bottom of my heart I thank the House for its loyal trust. But I shall not put its generosity to the severe test of unqualified reticence. (Cheers.)

"On one fundamental point, indeed, my lips are sealed. I have taken an oath never to divulge what has led to my absence from my place in your midst. (Immense sensation.) I have, indeed, inadvertently revealed the cause to one person, but my conscience acquits me of intentional violation of my oath, and I have every reason to believe that the secret will for ever remain locked in her breast. But this I am permitted to tell the House, that the mystery is very transparent and cannot long baffle the trained intellects of a nation. I do not expect that it will long remain undiscovered; though the world will, of course, never know from me that its conjectures are just. It is true that experts have hitherto been thrown off the scent. But that was owing to the pre-supposition of my death, and, when I have revealed all I can, there will remain little that is not patent. To-day, for the first time, I was enabled to study all the evidence that had been forthcoming at the inquest over my supposed remains. I discovered that it was an inquest not only over my destroyed physical organisation, but over my shattered moral character. I thank God that both are equally unharmed. (Tremendous cheering.) But there is another reputation which has been attacked—that of a man who is, alas, dead, who cannot refute the calumny that makes his name loathsome in the annals of the human race, but whose fame I will defend with my last breath, whose memory I will hold in reverence till my dying day, whose unhappy fate will torture my soul with the pangs of remorse till my spirit joins his in the awful realms of the unknown. I mean the murdered painter—Jack Dawe. (Immense sensation).

"I do not know whether he will forgive me; I cannot forgive myself, for being the cause, though, God knows, the innocent cause of his death. Some malevolent demon must have forged that unhappy resemblance to me which led to his assassination in my stead by mercenary wretches, brutal and debased as the ancient troglodyte races whom they are forced to imi—"

The Premier paused and looked alarmed, and the House broke into half-amused cheering, while a look of relief and intelligence began to spread over hundreds of puzzled faces. Rapid remarks and knowing glances were cast on all sides, followed by a general stir of amazement and excitement; and the roar of the myriads without made itself heard again like the booming of distant cannon. The Premier resumed: "I regret the more that my oath should necessitate silence because it precludes me from paying that tribute to his great qualities which must now remain for ever unspoken. But it is my consolation to foresee the not distant homage and admiration of the world, when the last veil of secrecy shall be rent asunder by the impatient hands of a million investigators. As for me, Heaven knows how willingly and humbly I would bare my inmost soul before this mighty assembly. But I would ask it, as I would ask all that shall hereafter find me not altogether guiltless of the death of a noble-minded man, to remember what I, too, have suffered—exiled from the sight of the dear faces of my friends, and from all

the luxuries of existence, and buried in a human hell where crime and pain wandered in lurid darkness and the undying worm of drink gnawed at the bestial heart, where the material instincts of humanity clogged the grovelling soul, where religion had little power and the spiritual had vanished from man."

The Premier's eyes were filled with the old dreamy reverie and fixed on an inward vision. The fascinated assembly hung upon his lips. There was an instant's profound silence. Then the great orator, with a wild gesture that thrilled the House, and with a sublime audacity that only he could command, burst forth: "O God, fathomless ruler of the fathomless universe, when wilt Thou suffer all this evil to vanish as the morning mist and bare to us the unclouded splendour of the firmament? We cry, but is it not ourselves that suffer these abominations? Is it not ourselves that we arraign at the bar of divine justice? We cry, and crying see our sands of life run out and nothing done. When from the long travail of centuries a Christlike soul is born, it drifts back into the eternal silence whence it came, defeated by the world's disbelief in its mission—or by its own. Let every man who cares to make the world brighter and better learn the lesson taught by the failure of so many noble spirits, living and dead. Not by debates nor by empty words, not by windy projects nor by unrealisable visions, shall we banish misery and vice from the earth. There are doctrinaires among us, spirits pure and lofty, but blinded by the light of their own ideal, who, in the pursuit of justice and happiness, would defy the inviolable laws of Nature, and set at nought the deepest instincts of humanity. To these men and to all men whose lives are sanctified by the dream and inspiration of a Perfect State, I would say: Keep your aspiration and your dream, but abandon your wild and for ever impotent attempt to cut your fragment of Time asunder from the centuries before it; from that Past which is linked to us by electric bonds, by the thrill of ancient heroic deed and purpose, and by the noble treasures, material and spiritual, that it has bequeathed to us. Abandon your attempt, I say, and do not suffer the energies of unselfishness, the water of life, to be spilt and wasted. Abandon it, and unite with us who would seek our inspiration not in idealised prospect, but in idealised retrospect, not in a godless Future but in a believing Past! Again I see order, subservience, control—the world knit by a million golden bands of mutual gratitude, the affection of master for man, of man for master, the great social machine whose motor shall be love, weaving, with its myriad dovetailed complexities of detail, with its myriad differing powers and the delicate adjustment of its myriad wheels and pins and pulleys and bars—one web of happiness. So shall be heard in the universe the rich harmony of varying chords, not the one dull note of the infinite paroquet to which Xenophanes compared Nature. I see Peace on earth to all men of goodwill that once more listen to the message of the Church bells, and of the grassy sun-lit graves of their forefathers. I see a world, wherein Art is again the hand-maid of Religion. I see thousands of peaceful firesides ennobled

by Music and Poetry and Painting ; with the old household gods, and the wife at the hearth, emblem of the purity and delicacy of home, pleasanter to see than the fire in winter. This is the dream wherewith I would replace the sombre reality ; this is the spiritual and material blessedness with which I would replace the spiritual and material poverty of the people. This is the imperishable aspiration that I cherish ; this is the only vision that is not a mirage ; this is the only ideal which is not beyond our grasp."

The Premier stretched out his hands as if to grasp that ideal ; a convulsive shudder of emotion agitated his frame. He resumed his seat without another word. Not till the solemn tones ceased to vibrate in their ears did the pent-up feeling of the audience find vent in a delirium of applause, amid which, a member catching the Speaker's suggestive glance, got up and seconded the adjournment, which was carried *nem. con.* amid an irrepressible buzz of excitement. Then O'Gormandy called for three cheers for Floppington, which were given by the whole audience, standing and waving hats and handkerchiefs. Then three more cheers were given, and then three more, the members by this time mounted on the seats and in a state of indescribable excitement.

The hurried exit of the Minister to escape the attentions of his friends caused the break-up of the most memorable scene in our Parliamentary annals. Floppington made his way with difficulty to the door of the ladies' gallery, where he found Gwendolen, pale, with tears in her eyes, but wonderfully changed and with almost the old brightness now and then flashing into her face. No one ever knew—not even herself—how narrowly she had saved the Premier from mental and physical collapse ; by what unwearied exertions, and what exhaustless courage she had though almost prostrated by the shock herself, soothed his remorse, conquered his scruples, and nerved him to encounter the House. But what would not her mere presence, her acknowledged love, have done ? Audacity had carried the day, but the heat of the struggle was not over yet. The deluge of criticism was yet to come. For the moment, however, the difficulty was how to get the exhausted Premier away. The lovers went out on the terrace to think it over, and lo, the river was thronged with steamers, and boats, and barges, all black with people gazing eagerly in the direction of the House, and apparently excited by the monotonous task. They hurried down through passages and courtyards, and met the Prince of Wales, who was hearty in his congratulations and who complained that he, too, couldn't get out. Hardly any of the members had yet left the building—they were scribbling letters or telegrams, or gathered in animated groups. Lord Bardolph Mountchapel was one of the first to go—and his face was livid.

It was impossible to tire out the waiting multitudes. They were determined to see the resuscitated Premier with their own eyes, and nothing would baulk them of the sight. So the Premier submitted at last, and was greeted with a royal welcome, with a far-reaching and crashing and pealing thunder which was sublime by

its volume; and he said a few words while the toiling millions pressed to touch his garment; and he was cheered again and again; and then, still amid cheers, the horses were taken out, and he was drawn home through streets whence every sign of mourning had vanished; through streets echoing with cheers, and thronged at door and roof, and window and balcony, on pavement, on vehicles and stands, gay with the flutter of hastily-adjusted bunting and the streaming of improvised flags, and restless with the delirious clangour of joy-bells.

And how the placards flamed with "Resurrection of the Premier," long looked back upon with a voluptuous sigh by editors as the Ultima Thule of attractive headings and the *ne plus ultra* of Catchhalfpennyism; and how the evening papers reached their hundredth editions; and how the whole journalistic world, writers, compositors, and devils, was almost thrown out of gear by an epidemic of illness due to overwork; and how scores of *Star* newsboys retired and set up public-houses; and how Ariel's girdle, flashing the news over head and under sea, awoke answering flashes of congratulation from nations and sovereigns; and how the financial world was agitated by the immediate rise in Consols; and how the two hemispheres could talk of nothing else for a week and two days; and how through the length and breadth of merry England and of merrier Ireland the night of the Premier's resurrection resounded with music, and blazed with bonfires that flashed their yellow glare up to the golden stars; and how the great metropolis could not sleep for joy and excitement; and how soon afterwards there was a national holiday; and how the *Te Deum* was sung in St. Paul's Cathedral—is it not written in the Chronicles of the Angli?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

THE Premier was right. So simple a mystery could not long baffle the trained intellect of England. The strange, powerful oration of the Minister was made to yield up all its latent secrets. The Press teemed with hypotheses. Analysts trained in the school of Wilkie Collins, amateur Lecoqs of every age, grade, and occupation, professional detectives, and omniscient journalists—all tried their hands.

But with all their efforts, no substantial addition was made to the solution discovered at an early stage by "Fair Play" and published in the *Times*. "Fair Play" began his letter by a pardonable display of exultation. There is no keener pleasure than to hear the world confess that it was *not* wiser than any single man, provided that single man be oneself. *Magna est veritas et præ-*

valebit. Ought not the world to go down on its knees to the outraged *manes* of the martyred painter?

After this preliminary skirmishing the distinguished novelist came to the point. It was evident from the Premier's speech that the bookish Minister had come more directly into contact with the horrible realities of life, with crime and brutality and degraded manhood, than ever before, and they had moved him to impassioned invective. Kidnapped by a gang of Ulsterites (and that Ulsterites were at the bottom of the business he had maintained all along, for who but they had any interest in his removal from the scene of legislation?), he had been imprisoned in a cave (*vide* his inadvertent allusion to debased troglodytes), which he had so graphically and poetically described, "a human hell where crime and pain wandered in lurid darkness." Here in the company of "mercenary wretches" he had spent some days of incarceration, loathing his fellow troglodytes and gathering from their talk, or guessing, what the world was thinking of his disappearance. "We must now turn from the denizen of Belgravia to the denizen of Bethnal Green. Here lived a man named Jack Dawe, whose moral character presents a curious mixture of diverse attributes. But, now that he is cleared of the imputation of murder, we are not concerned with any deep analysis of his character. He played a remarkable but still a subordinate part in the tragi-comedy, and the questions of his exact feelings towards Mr. Floppington and of his resemblance to him, however interesting, are of little import.

"Dr. Maudsley was probably right in holding that he had been converted; but there has no doubt been a good deal of exaggeration both of his fanaticism and of his antagonism to the Premier. Though it was absurd to believe that his ardent Protestantism had had all the effects attributed to it, it might and probably did cause him to neglect his work, but hardly to cherish homicidal intentions; and as for the personal hostility, how deep that was, was shown by the generous warnings he gave to his enemy, though suffering, as he thought, the greatest wrongs at his hands. It was doubtless the Premier's consciousness of the painter's nobility, combined with the feeling that had he not treated him as a maniac and scornfully rejected the man's warning he might still have been alive, together with his evident knowledge that he had met his death through endeavouring to save him, that was responsible for that emotional outbreak in the House, that eulogy of the man, and that unconcealed and bitter remorse. That the letters were meant as warnings no one *now* denies. Jack Dawe had fallen into the hands of the conspirators, somewhere between Ramsgate and Broadstairs (where it strikes me they possess a cave in which the Premier was kept, and for which diligent search ought to be made).

"The scuffle to which Jack Dawe's wounded arm testified was a scuffle, not with a candid friend, but with some of the gang. It is almost certain that he had been mistaken for the Premier and that he had been let go when the mistake was discovered. But first a terrible oath of secrecy had doubtless been extracted from him—

similar to the oath afterwards taken by the Premier. Something of this I divined from the first; though as the facts of the mysterious return from Ramsgate only came out after my letter was in print, I could not connect it with my original theory; and the apparently overwhelming weight of evidence on the other side temporarily crushed my conviction of the man's innocence. The gloomy reticence of the painter, as he hurried back to London distracted by the necessity of making some effort to save the Minister without violating his oath (which would be so binding to a recent convert to religion), the brain-fever induced by the awful scenes he had gone through—all find a perfect explanation from this view. How puerile and forced now appear the motives formerly assigned for his obstinate silence on the homeward route and his failure to reproach Miss Bathbrill. There is no need to follow the story in detail.

“The dullest reader can now understand the feverish exclamations, the waking, the agonised inquiries, the despatch of the cautiously-worded telegram and letters (in the last epistle the writer for the first time referring with infinite pathos and touching resignation to the Premier's supposed intrigue, and not unjustly demanding that he should endeavour to free him from the presumably audacious attack of his discarded betrothed, of whose misconduct he had probably read during his convalescence—when as witnesses have told us he hardly did anything but read). The Premier rejected warnings and suggestions alike, and the painter, having done all he could, was compelled to wait the course of events. Unfortunately the conspirators had got to know of his attempts. It was natural that they should keep some watch on his movements. In yesterday's *Pall Mall Gazette*, in the account of the interview with Mrs. Dawe and Sally—amid much irrelevant matter, amusing enough in its way though—occurs a proof of this.

“The emissary no doubt called at the Telegraph Office—we know how amused and excited the clerks were about the extraordinary telegram—and by keeping his ears open learnt enough to make him suspect they were being betrayed. They determined to take their revenge. And now mark the diabolical ingenuity and audacity of the conspirators' conception. They had already arranged to assassinate the Premier, but his resemblance to their other intended victim, the painter, led to the adoption of a subtler scheme. To capture the Premier, to hold him unharmed, yet to make the world believe he had been murdered, was a master-stroke which would demonstrate their immense power and strike terror into every heart. The Minister could be graphically shown what awaited him if he persisted in carrying his Home Rule Bill; he could be bound over to reveal none of their secrets under threats of actual assassination, and then, convinced he was a mouse in the paws of a cat, he could be let go. At the same time there was a grim and grotesque humour in the idea which must have appealed irresistibly to the minds of its originators; and when I reflect on the sensation caused by the death of a house-painter, the eloquence

wasted thereon, and the magnificence of his obsequies, I for one cannot help being tickled, though, God knows, not oblivious of the tragic side of the affair. That this aspect was not unimportant is shown by the ghastly joke of releasing their captive just in time to go to his own funeral. How the wretches must have enjoyed, too, the additional sport of their poor, dead victim being hunted all over England for his own murder. The conception was a flash of genius, and, like all great ideas, it was carried out by the simplest means.

"The *modus operandi* was probably as follows: On the morning of the 13th of July Mr. Floppington was captured on his way to the stables in Westminster. Jack Dawe had been seized the day before. The Premier was taken into a house in the neighbourhood of the stables, where he found the painter. No stranger and weirder *rencontre* is to be found in fiction than the first and last meeting of these two men—so like each other in form, so different in all else, connected by such curious relations, both unconscious of what was to be done with them, the one about to die, the other about to vanish into the bowels of the earth. With what remorseful thoughts must the Premier have beheld the painter he had despised! With what blended emotions must the painter have gazed upon the Premier who had robbed him of love and liberty, if not of life! The two men were made to change clothes—an exchange which, on my hypothesis, would be absolutely necessary; and the fact that it did take place is, *a posteriori*, an almost convincing proof of the truth of that hypothesis. For we know that the clothing worn by the deceased belonged to the Premier; and it has just leaked out that when Mr. Floppington reappeared on the scene he was habited in the Sunday garments of the defunct house-painter. After the exchange, Jack Dawe was drugged and then driven in a closed conveyance to the corner of Little Snale Street. Here he was taken out and noiselessly conducted towards the stable, supported between two of the conspirators as though he were drunk. At the stable-door he was dropped, the train of the explosion was laid, and the scoundrels took to their heels. The Premier's latch-key had, of course, been transferred to the painter in the change of clothes, and the latter seems to have managed to retain his own in addition. I don't give the assassins credit for putting their victim's latch-key near the body on purpose, although that is a possible supposition, considering how thick-spun the farcical tissue was already. Such, it seems to me, is the only possible explanation of the most sensational incident of modern history, and the wildest inventions of fiction pale before the bare facts (as facts they must be) elicited by this impartial survey of all the evidence at our disposal."

The accuracy of this solution may be gauged from the fact that it has been incorporated into English history; while the original verdict has become a stock argument against circumstantial evidence. For some years, indeed, no jury dared convict a murderer. The stronger the apparent case, the more probable

appeared the existence of improbable circumstances which would give an entirely different complexion to the facts.

The reaction in favour of Jack Dawe led to a subscription list being opened in every newspaper for the benefit of his poor mother, who was stated to be almost penniless. Several thousands were immediately collected, Lady Harley and the Premier heading the list with independent contributions of £500. The remains of the painter were also removed from the Abbey and buried privately in the churchyard of St. John's, where the monument erected by the Premier to commemorate his virtues may be seen to this day.

After his death his works rose immediately in value. The famous lion, in particular, was acquired by a local show at the price of twenty pounds.

The setting up of the memorial was not the only graceful act of the Premier, for he managed to obtain a deanery and a sergeantship respectively for the Vicar and policeman who had been promised promotion by Jack Dawe, and the world approved the happy thought.

Lady Harley went down to soothe Mrs. Dawe as best she could. At the same time she purchased Sally (for the old lady made a sort of claim to the possession of her, and utterly bewildered Gwen by her arguments) and took charge of her future. She was educated privately, and she took to study—Mrs. Dawe used to tell her neighbours—like a fish to oil. No one knew that her unconquerable ardour was due to the cherished words of her dead master. She soon displayed remarkable powers of intellect, and at last, though late in life, she matriculated at the London University, coming fourth in honours, and was only disqualified by age from taking the Floppington Scholarship for Women. She did not graduate, but, obtaining a situation as head mistress, she displayed great interest in philosophy, in which she was a staunch admirer of the common-sense English school, and she wrote many contemptuous articles in various minor periodicals to refute the bastard theology of Floppington. Altogether a dreadfully materialistic person, shrewd and business-like, but with a vein of tenderness at the bottom. She never married, though she had many offers, but for years used to go down on Sundays to St. John's Churchyard, to the grave of Jack Dawe, in which her heart lay buried. The monument and the grass around were kept in good order at her expense. This was the only sacrifice of political economy that Sally made to sentiment.

With regard to her former rival, the *Pall Mall* interviewer, on calling upon her, found her brother almost disconsolate. Eliza Bathbrill had eloped to America with a young Australian on the day after the resurrection of the Premier, leaving a letter stating that her resolution had been come to suddenly the evening before, as her lover had to start immediately to claim an inheritance which fell to him by the death of a relative, of which he had just heard. He, John Bathbrill, believed the story was true, for the young man had come in on that evening with a very white face. His sister said in her letter that since there was now no chance of getting any

damages from the defunct Jack Dawe, there was nothing to lose by going abroad. The honest fellow added that he sometimes felt half glad of her departure, because since the inquest had made her generally known, and her portrait had been exhibited in the shops, he had had great difficulty in keeping off the swells, old and young, who haunted the neighbourhood.

As for the Premier himself, he was compelled to acquiesce in the shelving of the Home Rule Bill, or at least he made no effort to proceed with it during the remainder of the session. Very soon the light on the pinnacle of the Clock Tower went out, and with it the star of Conservatism. The shock which the Premier had undergone (if not indeed, as some hinted, physical fear), made him singularly apathetic on the subject of Ireland during the electoral campaign. Indeed, he seemed to be almost a shadow of his late self. Moreover, after the first gush of joy, there was an undefined feeling that the Premier should be contented with mere existence. This was probably why many of his quondam friends, such as Sir Hugh Erlyon, Mr. Dagon, and Mr. Alderney Lightfoot, had no scruple in working against him when the crisis came. Mr. Dallox, however, who now denounced him in a private letter to a friend which only accidentally saw the light through the recipient's sending it to the Press, was probably actuated by a little rancour against the minister for coming to life again, and so spoiling the already fulfilled prediction of the superstition anent thirteen at table. But, all the same, the reaction would have come; and, whatever his intentions were, he never more had the opportunity of carrying them out. For Screwnail brought in the reactionary Radicals and Liberals with an immense majority after a somewhat unexciting election. relieved only by the amusing inconsistency and foaming incoherence of Lord Bardolph's electoral address—a mass of ruthless vindictiveness explicable only as the work of a man robbed alike of the woman he loved and of the place he coveted, conscious of his ruin, and abandoning himself to the recklessness of despair. It characterised the Separation Bill as a monstrous mixture of imbecility, extravagance, and political hysterics, a striking tissue of absurdities such as the united and concentrated genius of Bedlam and Colney Hatch could not excel, the work of a middle-aged man in a hurry to get married, who based all his hopes on the suffrages of that giddy-headed and brainless sex which he had added to the electorate. Yes, the Fourth Party was smashed, pulverised, and destroyed. The only drop of joy in its cup was the defeat of Floppington, who resigned forthwith, and shortly afterwards accepted a peerage on his marriage with Lady Harley. For some time he was great on philanthropy and the Slums Question. But he had no practical suggestions to offer beyond the conversion of the masses to their nominal religion. And gradually his enthusiasm waned, his magic eloquence flashed out at intervals fewer and farther between, and he settled down again into the study of musty Coleridgean metaphysics.

In his later years he was much interested in Lotze and in James Hinton. He occasionally wrote a poem which achieved a *succès d'estime*, but he was painfully aware of the truth of the literary critiques which had appeared in the *Academy* and *Athenæum* at his supposed death. He had no originality, and was always the weak echo of greater minds. His unhappy habit of reflection, too, induced too much self-scepticism to enable him to attempt any great work. But he and Lady Harley were happy in their children; and when, in the course of years, he died in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection, his former assassination and his one short display of administrative capacity almost forgotten, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his eldest son was a power in the nation.

A few years after his death there was a great storm, followed by a fall of cliff between Broadstairs and Ramsgate, and there was revealed to the world a cavern full of winding and intricate passages leading to an inner domed chamber, whose rocky walls were strangely adorned with a series of illustrations depicting a number of little girls bearing a strong family likeness to one another. An Oxford professor, who happened, strangely enough, to be familiar with recent history, recalled to the public mind the unique incident in the life of the Elder Floppington, and, for once, a new discovery was seen to corroborate olden records. And from that time to this no one has ever doubted the traditional version of the great events, the narration of which has engaged the pens of our most illustrious historians and biographers, and which the present writer, trembling a little at his own audacity, has endeavoured to recount afresh.

THE END

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