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HOCKEN AND HUNKEN

A Tale of Troy

by

Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch ('Q')

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BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN CAI HAULS ASHORE.

"Well, *that's* over!"

Captain Caius Hocken, from the stern-sheets of the boat bearing him shoreward, slewed himself half-about for a look back at his vessel, the *Hannah Hoo* barquentine. This was a ticklish operation, because he wore a tall silk hat and had allowed his hair to grow during the passage home—St. Michael's to Liverpool with a cargo of oranges, and from Liverpool around to Troy in charge of a tug.

"I'm wonderin' what 'twill feel like when it comes to my turn," mused his mate Mr Tregaskis, likewise pensively contemplating the *Hannah Hoo*. "Not to be sure, sir, as I'd compare the two cases; me bein' a married man, and you—as they say—with the ship for wife all these years, and children too."

"I never liked the life, notwithstandin'," confessed the Captain.
"And I'll be fifty come Michaelmas. Isn' that enough?"

"Nobody likes it, sir; not at our age. But all the same I reckon there be compensations." Mr Tregaskis, shading his eyes (for the day was sunny), let his gaze travel up the spars and rigging of the Barquentine—up to the truck of her maintopmast, where a gull had perched itself and stood with tail pointing like a vane. "If the truth were known, maybe your landsman on an average don't do as he chooses any more than we mariners."

"Tut, man!" The Captain, who held the tiller, had ceased to look aft. His eyes were on the quay and the small town climbing the hillside above it in tier upon tier of huddled grey houses. "Why, damme! Your landsman chooses to live ashore, to begin with. What's more, he can walk where he has a mind to, no matter where the wind sits."

Mr Tregaskis shook his head. Having no hat, he was able to do this, and it gave him some dialectical advantage over his skipper.

"In practice, sir, you'd find it depend on who's left to mind the shop."

"Home's home, all the same," said Captain Cai positively, thrusting over the tiller to round in for the landing-stairs. "I was born and reared in Troy, d'ye see? and as the sayin' goes—Steady on!"

A small schooner, the *Pure Gem* of Padstow, had warped out from the quay overnight after discharging her ballast with the usual disregard of the Harbour Commissioners' bye-laws; and a number of ponderable stones, now barely covered by the tide, encumbered the foot of the landing. On one of these the boat caught her heel, with a jerk that flung the two oarsmen sprawling and toppled Captain Hocken's tall hat over his nose. Mr Tregaskis thrust out a hand to catch it, but in too great a haste. The impact of his finger-tips on the edge of the crown sent the hat spinning forward over the thwart whereon sprawled Ben Price, the stroke oar, and into the lap of Nathaniel Berry, bowman.

Nathaniel Berry, recovering his balance, rescued the headgear from the grip of his knees, gave it a polite brush the wrong way of the nap, and passed it aft to Ben Price. Ben—a bald-headed but able seaman—eyed it a moment, rubbed it the right way dubiously with his elbow, and handed it on to the mate; who in turn smoothed it with the palm of his hand, which—being an alert obliging man—he had dexterously wetted overside before the Captain could stop him.

"That's no method to improve a hat," said Captain Hocken shortly, snatching it and wiping it with his handkerchief. He peered into it and pushed out a dent with his thumb. "The way this harbour's allowed to shoal is nothing short of a national disgrace!"

He improved on this condemnation as, having pushed clear and brought his boat safely alongside, he climbed the steps and met the Quaymaster, who advanced to greet him with an ingratiating smile.

"—A scandal to the civilised world! *There's* a way to stack ballast, now! Look at it, sproiled about the quay-edge like a skittle-alley in a cyclone! But that has been your fashion, Peter Bussa, ever since I knowed 'ee, and 'Nigh enough' your motto."

"You've no idea, Cap'n Cai, the hard I work to keep this blessed quay tidy."

"Work? Ay—like a pig's tail, I believe: goin' all day, and still in a twist come night."

"Chide away—chide away, now! But you're welcome home for all that,
Cap'n Cai,—welcome as a man's heart to his body."

Captain Cai relaxed his frown. After all, 'twas good to return and find the little town running on just as he left it, even down to Quaymaster Bussa and his dandering ways. Yes, there stood the ancient crane with its broken-cogged winch—his own initials, carved with his first clasp-knife, would be somewhere on the beam; and the heap of sand beside it differed nothing from the heap on which he and his fellows had pelted one another forty years ago. Certainly the two bollards—the one broken, the other leaning aslant—were the same over which he and they had played leap-frog. Yes, and yonder, in the arcade supporting the front of the "King of Prussia," was Long Mitchell leaning against his usual pillar; and there, on the bench before the Working Men's Institute, sat the trio of septuagenarians—Un' Barnicoat, Roper Vine, Old Cap'n Tom—and sunned themselves; inseparables, who seldom exchanged a remark, and never but in terms and tones of inveterate contempt. Facing them in his doorway lounged

the town barber, under his striped pole and sign-board—"*Simeon Toy, Hairdresser*," with the s's still twiddling the wrong way; and beyond, outside the corner-shop, Mr Rogers, ship-broker and ship-chandler—half paralytic but cunning yet,—sat hunched in his invalid chair, blinking; for all the world like a wicked old spider on the watch for flies.

"Ahoy, there!" Captain Cai hailed, and made across at once for the invalid chair: for Mr Rogers was his man of business. "Lost no time in reportin' myself, you see."

Mr Rogers managed to lift his hand a little way to meet Captain Cai's grasp. "Eh? Eh? I've been moored here since breakfast on the look-out for 'ee." He spoke indistinctly by reason of his paralysis. "They brought word early that the *Hannah Hoo* was in, and I gave orders straight away for a biled leg o' mutton—*with* capers—*an'* spring cabbage. Twelve-thirty we sit down to it, it that suits?"

"Thank 'ee, I should just say it *did* suit! . . . You got my last letter, posted from the Azores?"

"To be sure I did. I've taken the two houses for 'ee, what's more, an' the leases be drawn ready to sign. . . . But where's your friend? He'll be welcome too—that is, if you don't hold three too many for a leg o' mutton?"

"'Bias Hunken? . . . You didn't reckon I was bringing him along with me, did you?"

"I reckoned nothin' at all, not knowin' the man."

"Well, he's at West Indy Docks, London,—or was, a week ago. I saw it on 'The Shipping Gazette' two days before we left the Mersey: the *I'll Away*, from New Orleans; barquentine, and for shape in tonnage might be own sister to the *Hannah Hoo*; but soft wood and Salcombe built. I was half fearing 'Bias might get down to Troy ahead of me."

"He hasn't reported himself to *me*, anyway. . . . But we'll talk about him and other things later on."

Mr Rogers dismissed the subject as the Quaymaster came sidling up to join them. Mild gossip was a passion with the Quaymaster, and eavesdropping his infirmity.

"Well, Cap'n Cai, and so you've hauled ashore—and for good, if I hear true?"

"For good it is, please God," answered Captain Cai, lifting his hat at the word. He was a simple man and a pious.

"And a householder you've become already, by all accounts. I don't set much store by Town Quay talk as a rule—"

"That's right," interrupted Mr Rogers. "There's no man ought to know its worth better than you, that sets most of it goin'."

"They *do* say as you've started by leasin' the two cottages in Harbour Terrace."

"Do they?" Captain Cai glanced at the ship-chandler for confirmation. "Well, then, I hope it is true."

"'Tis nothing of the sort," snapped Mr Rogers. Seeing how Captain Cai's face fell, he added, "I may be wrong, o' course, but I reckon there was *two* tenants, and they wanted a cottage apiece."

"Ah, to be sure!" agreed the honest captain, visibly relieved.

But the Quaymaster persisted. "Yes, yes; there was talk of a friend o' yours, an' that you two were for settin' up house alongside one another. Hunken was the name, if I remember?"

Again Captain Cai glanced at the ship-chandler. He was plainly puzzled, as the ship-chandler was plainly nettled. But he answered simply—

"That's it—'Bias Hunken."

"Have I met the man, by any chance?"

"No," said Captain Cai firmly, "you haven't, or you wouldn't ask the question. He's the best man ever wore shoe-leather, and you can trust him to the end o' the earth."

"I can't say as I know a Hunken answerin' that description," Mr Bussa confessed dubiously.

"You've heard the description, anyway," suggested Mr Rogers, losing patience. "And now, Peter

Bussa, what d'ye say to running off and annoying somebody else?"

The Quaymaster fawned, and was backing away. But at this point up came Barber Toy, who for some minutes had been fretting to attract Captain Cai's notice, and could wait no longer.

"Hulloa, there! Is it Cap'n Cai?—an' still carryin' his gaff-tops'l, I see" (this in pleasant allusion to the tall hat). "Well, home you be, it seems, an' welcome as flowers in May!"

"Thank 'ee, Toy." Captain Cai shook hands.

"We was talkin' business," said the ship-chandler pointedly.

"Then you might ha' waited for a better occasion," Mr Toy retorted. "Twasn' mannerly of ye, to say the least."

"Better be unmannerly than troublesome, I've heard."

"Better be both than unfeelin'. What! Leave Cap'n Cai, here, pass my door, an' never a home-comin' word?"

"I was meanin' to pay you a visit straight away; indeed I was," said Captain Cai contritely. "Troy streets be narrow and full o' friends; and when a man's accustomed to sea-room—" He broke off and drew a long breath. "But O, friends, if you knew the good it is!"

"Ay, Cap'n: East or West, home is best."

"And too far East is West, as every sailor man knows. . . . There, now, take me along and think' that out while you're giving me a clip; for the longer you stand scratching your head the longer my hair's growing." He turned to Mr Rogers. "So long, soce! I'll be punctual at twelve-thirty—what's left of me."

CHAPTER II.

THE BARBER'S CHAIR.

"This *is* home!" Captain Cai settled himself down in the barber's chair with a sigh of luxurious content. "I've heard married men call it better," said Mr Toy, fetching forth a clean wrapper.

"Very likely." The Captain sighed again contentedly. "I take no truck in marriage, for my part. A friend's company enough for me."

"What's his name, Cap'n? The whole town's dyin' to know."

"He's called Hunken—Tobias Hunken."

The barber paused, snapping his scissors and nodding. "Bussa was right then, or Bussa and Philp between 'em."

"Hey?"

"'Tis wonderful how news gets abroad in Troy. . . . 'Hunken,' now? And where might he be one of? I don't seem to fit the name in my mem'ry at all."

"You wouldn't. He comes from t'other side of the Duchy—a Padstow-born man, and he've never set eyes on Troy in his life."

"Yet he takes a house an' settles here? That's queer, as you might say."

"I see nothing queer about it. He's my friend—that's why. And what's more, the Lord never put bowels into a better man."

"He'll be a pleasure to shave, then," opined Mr Toy.

"No, he won't; he wears his hair all over his face. Talkin' of that reminds me—when you've done croppin' me I want a clean shave."

"Chin-beard an' all, Cap'n?"

"Take it off—take it off! 'Twas recommended to me against sore throat; but I never liked the thing nor

the look of it."

"Then there's one point, it seems, on which you an' your friend don't agree, sir?"

The barber meant this facetiously, but Captain Cai considered it in all seriousness.

"You're mistaken," he answered. "Between friends there's a give-an'-take, and until you understand that you don't understand friendship. 'Bias Hunken likes me to do as I choose, and I like 'Bias to do as *he* chooses: by consekence o' which the more we goes our own ways the more we goes one another's. That clear, I hope."

"Moderately," the barber assented.

"I'll put it t'other way—about an' make it still clearer. Most married folks, as I notice, start t'other way about. For argyment's sake we'll call 'em Jack an' Joan. Jack starts by thinkin' Joan pretty near perfection; but he wants her quite perfect and all to his mind—*his* mind, d'ye see? Now if you follow that up, as you followed it between 'Bias and me—"

"I don't want my missus to wear a beard, if that's what you mean."

"'Twasn't a good illustration, I admit. But the p'int is, I like 'Bias because he's 'Bias, an' 'Bias likes me because I'm Cai Hocken. That bein' so, don't it follow we're goin' to be better friends than ever, now we've hauled ashore to do as likes us?"

The barber shook his head. "You're determined to have off your chin-beard?"

"*To* be sure. I'm ashore now, aren't I?—and free to wear what face I choose."

"You won't find it so, Cap'n."

"T'ch't! You landsmen be so fed with liberty you don't know your privileges. If you don't like your habits, what hinders you from changin' 'em? But *do* you? Here I come back: here's th' old Town Quay same as ever it was; and here likewise you all be, runnin' on as I left 'ee, like a clockwork—a bit slower with age maybe—that's all. Whereby I conclude your ways content ye."

"You're wrong, Cap'n Cai—you're wrong. We bide by our habits—an', more by token, here comes Mr Philp. 'Morning, Mr Philp." The barber, without turning, nodded towards the newcomer as he entered—a short man, aged about sixty, with a square-cut grey beard, sanguine complexion, and blue eyes that twinkled with a deceptive appearance of humour. "Here's Cap'n Cai Hocken, home from sea."

"Eh? I am very glad to see you, Cap'n Hocken," said Mr Philp politely.
"There's a post-card waitin' for you, up at the Office."

Captain Cai sat bolt upright of a sudden, narrowly missing a wound from the scissors. "That will be from 'Bias! To think I hadn' sense enough to go straight to the Post Office and inquire!"

"'Tis from your friend, sure enough," announced Mr Philp. "He paid off his crew last Toosday, an' took his discharge an' the train down to Plymouth. He've bought a wardrobe there—real wornut—an' 'tis comin' round by sea. There's a plate-chest, too, he thinks you may fancy— price thirty-five shillin secondhand: an' he hopes to reach Troy the day after next, which by the post-mark is to-morra."

"Mr Philp," explained the barber, "calls in at the Office every mornin' to read all the post-cards. 'Tis one of his habits."

"Recent bereavement?" asked Mr Philp, before Captain Cai could well digest this.

"Eh?"

"Recent bereavement?" Mr Philp was examining the tall hat, which he had picked up to make room for his own person on the customers' bench.

"That's another of his aptitoods," the barber interpolated.
"He attends all the funerals in the parish."

"In the midst o' life we are in death," observed Mr Philp. "That's a cert, Cap'n Hocken, an' your hat put me in mind of it."

"Oh, 'tis my hat you're meanin'? What's wrong with it?"

"Did I say there was anything wrong? No, I didn't—God forbid! An' no doubt," concluded Mr Philp cheerfully, "the fashions'll work round to it again."

"I'll change it for another."

"You won't find that too easy, will you?" The barber paused in his snipping, and turned about for a thoughtful look at the hat.

"I mean I'll buy another, of a different shape. First the beard, then the headgear—as I was tellin' Toy, a man ashore can reggilate his ways as he chooses, an here's to prove it."

"They *do* say a clean shave is worth two virtuous resolutions," answered the barber, shaking his head Again. "And you're makin' a brave start, I don't deny. But wait till you pick up with a few real habits."

"What sort o' habits?"

"The sort that come to man first-along in the shape o' duties—like church-goin'. Look here, Cap'n, I'll lay a wager with 'ee. . . . Soon as you begin to walk about this town a bit, you'll notice a terrible lot o' things that want improvin'—"

"I don't need to walk off the Town Quay for *that*."

"Ah, an' I daresay it came into your head that if you had the orderin' of Bussa you wouldn' be long about it? The town'll think it, anyway. We're a small popilation in Troy, all tied up in neighbourly feelin's an' hangin' together till—as the sayin' is—you can't touch a cobweb without hurtin' a rafter. What the town's cryin' out for is a new broom—a man with ideas, eh, Mr Philp?—above all, a man who's independent. So first of all they'll flatter ye up into standin' for the Parish Council, and put ye head o' the poll—"

"Tut, man!" interrupted Captain Cai, flushing a little. "What do I know about such things? Not o' course that I shan't take an interest—as a ratepayer—"

"*To* be sure. I heard a man say, only last Saturday, sittin' in that very chair, as there was never a ship's captain hauled ashore but in three weeks he'd be ready to teach the Chancellor of th' Exchequer his business an' inclined to wonder how soon he'd be offered the job."

"A ship's captain needn't be altogether a born fool."

"No: an' next you'll be bent on larnin' to speak in public; and takin' occasions to practise, secondin' votes o' thanks an' such like. After that you'll be marryin' a wife—"

"I don't want to marry a wife, I tell 'ee!"

"Who said you did? Well, then, you'll get married—they dotes on a public man as a rule; and for tanglin' a man up in habits there's no snare like wedlock, not in the whole world. I've known scores o' men get married o' purpose to break clear o' their habits an' take a fresh start; but ne'er a man that didn't tie himself up thereby in twenty new habits for e'er a one he'd let drop."

"Go on with your folly, if it amuses you."

"Then, again, you've taken a house."

"So Rogers tells me. I don't even know the rent, at this moment."

"Twenty-five pound p'r annum," put in Mr Philp. Captain Cai—released just then from his wrapper—turned and stared at him.

"I had it from the Postmistress," Mr Philp's tone was matter-of-fact, his gaze unabashed. "Bein' paralytic, Rogers did your business with the widow by letter; he keeps a type-writin' machine an' pays Tabb's girl three shillin' a-week to work it. The paper's thin, as I've had a mind to warn 'er more than once."

"'Twould be a Christian act," suggested Mr Toy. "If there's truth in half what folks say, some of old Johnny Rogers' correspondence 'd make pretty readin' for the devil."

"But look here," interposed Captain Cai, "what's this about doin' business with a widow? *Whose* widow?"

"Why, your landlady, to be sure—the Widow Bosenna, up to Rilla Farm."

"No—stop a minute—take that blessed latherin'-brush out o' my mouth!
You don't tell me old Bosenna's dead, up there?"

"It didn' altogether surprise most of us when it happened," said the barber philosophically. "A man

risin' sixty-five, with *his* habits! . . . But it all came about by the County Council's widenin' the road up at Four Turnin's. . . . You see, o' late years th' old man 'd ride home on Saturdays so full he *had* to drop off somewhere 'pon the road; an' his mare gettin' to find this out, as dumb animals do, had picked up a comfortable way of canterin' hard by Four Turnin's and stoppin' short, slap in the middle of her stride, close by th' hedge, so 's her master 'd roll over it into the plantation there, where the ditch is full of oak-leaves. There he'd lie, peaceful as a suckin' child; and there, every Sabbath mornin' in the small hours, one o' the farm hands 'd be sent to gather 'em in wi' the new-laid eggs. So it went on till one day the County Council, busy as usual, takes a notion to widen th' road just there; an' not only pulls down th' hedge, but piles up a great heap o' stones, ready to build a new one. Whereby either the mare hadn' noticed the improvement or it escaped her memory. Anyway—the night bein' dark—she shoots old Bosenna neck-an'-crop 'pon the stones. It caused a lot o' feelin' at the time, an' the coroner's jury spoke their minds pretty free about it. They brought it in that he'd met his death by the visitation o' God brought about by a mistake o' the mare's an' helped on by the over-zealous behaviour of the County Surveyor. Leastways that's how they put it at first; but on the Coroner's advice they struck out the County Surveyor an' altered him to a certain party or parties unknown."

"I mind Mrs Bosenna well," said Captain Cai, rising as the barber unwrapped him; "a smallish well-featured body, with eyes like bullace plums."

"Ay, an' young enough to ha' been old Bosenna's daughter—a penniless maid from Holsworthy in Devon, as I've heard; an' now she's left there, up to Rilla, happy as a mouse in cheese. Come to think, Cap'n Cai, you might do worse than cock your hat in that quarter."

But Captain Cai did not hear for the moment. He was peering into the looking-glass and thinking less of Mrs Bosenna than of his shaven-altered appearance.

"'Twould be a nice change for her, too," pursued Mr Toy in a rallying tone; "an adaptable man like you, Cap'n."

"Eh? What's that you were sayin' about my hat?" asked Captain Cai; and just then, letting his gaze wander to the depths of the glass, he was aware of Mr Philp shamelessly trying on that same hat before another mirror at the back of the shop.

"Hullo, there!"

Mr Philp faced about solidly, composedly.

"I was thinkin'," said he, "as I'd bid you three-an'-six for this, if you've done with it. I've long been wantin' something o' the sort, for interments."

"Done with you!" said Captain Cai, reaching for it and clapping it on his head. "Only you must send round for it to-morrow, when I've found myself something more up-to-date." Again he contemplated his shaven image in the mirror. "Lord! A man do look younger without a chin-beard!"

"Ay, Cap'n." Barber Toy, knuckles on hips, regarded and approved his handiwork. "The world's afore 'ee. Go in and win!"

As he stepped out upon the Quay, Captain Cai lifted his gaze towards the tower of the Parish Church, visible above an alley-way that led between a gable-end of the Town Hall and the bulging plank of the "King of Prussia." Aloft there the clock began to chime out the eight notes it had chimed, at noon and at midnight, through his boyhood, and had been chiming faithfully ever since.

Yes, it was good to be home! Captain Cai would have been astonished to learn that his thirty-five years at sea had left any corner for sentiment. Yet a sudden mist gathered between him and the face of the old clock. Nor had it cleared when, almost punctually on the last stroke, a throng of children came pouring from school through the narrow alley-ways. They ran by him with no more than a glance, not interrupting their shouts. In a moment the Quay was theirs; they were at leap-frog over the bollards; they were storming the sand-heap, pelting a king of the castle, who pelted back with handfuls. Captain Cai felt an absurd sense of being left out in the cold. Not a child had recognised him.

All very well . . . but to think that these thirty-odd years had made not a scrap of difference—that the Quay lay as it had lain, neglected, untidy as ever! Thirty-odd years ago it had been bad enough. But what conscience was there in standing still and making no effort to move with the times? As Barber Toy said, it was scandalous.

CHAPTER III.

"Three hundred pounds a-year . . ." mused Captain Cai between two puffs of tobacco smoke. He repeated the words, rolling them in his mouth, as though they tasted well. "You're pretty sure 'twill come to that?"

"Sure," answered Mr Rogers. The pair had dined, and were now promoting digestion with pipes and grog in Mr Rogers' bow-window overlooking the harbour. "You might put your money to an annuity, o' course, an' live like a lord: but I'm reckonin' it in safe ord'nary investments, averagin' (let's say) four per cent. An' that's leavin' out your thirty-odd shares in the *Hannah Hoo*, when she's for sale. Ship-auctions be chancey things in these days, an' private purchasers hard to find."

"I never knew 'em when they weren't," said Captain Cai.

"When d'ye pay off, by the way?"

"Not till Saturday. There's no hurry. When a man drops hook on his last cruise I allow 'tis his duty to tidy up an' leave all ship-shape; in justice to hisself, you understand. There's Tregaskis an' the crew, too,—old shipmates every one—"

The chandler nodded.

"Ay, you're to be envied, Cap'n. There's others—masters of oil-tanks, f'r instance—as makes their pile faster; some of em' in ways that needn't be mentioned atween you an' me. But slow an' honest has been your motto; an' here you be—What's your age? Fifty? Say fifty at the outside.—Here you be at fifty with a tidy little income and a clean conscience to sit with in your pew o' Sundays; nothing to do o' week-days but look after a few steady-goin' investments an' draw your little dividends."

"That'd be more business than I've a mind for, Rogers," answered Captain Cai; "at any rate, while you live. I've a-left my affairs to you these twelve year, an' mean to continue, please God—you knowin' my ways."

The chandler blinked. "That's very han'some o' ye, Cap'n," he said after a long pause. "But—"

"There's no 'but' about it," interrupted Captain Cai shortly, looking away and resting his gaze on the *Hannah Hoo* out in the harbour, where she lay on the edge of the deep-water channel among a small crowd of wind-bounders. Her crew had already made some progress in unbending sails, and her stripped spars shone as gold against the westering sunlight. "No 'but' about it, Rogers—unless o' course you're unwillin'."

"What's willin' or unwillin' to a man broken in health as I be?
That's the p'int, Cap'n—here, set opposite to 'ee, staring 'ee in the
face—a hulk, shall we say?—rudder gone, ridin' to a thread o' life—"
"You'll ride to it a many years yet, please God again."

"I take 'e to witness this is not my askin'."

Captain Cai stared. "'Tis my askin', Rogers. I put it as a favour."

"What about your friend? I was thinkin' as maybe *he'd* take over the job."

"'Bias?" Captain Cai shook his head. "He've no gift in money matters; let be that I don't believe in mixin' friendship in business."

Mr Rogers pondered this for some while in silence. Then he struck a hand-bell beside him, and his summons was answered by a small short-skirted handmaiden who had waited table.

"Pipe's out, my dear," he announced. "An' while you're about it you may mix us another glassful apiece."

"Not for me, thank 'ee," said Captain Cai.

"An' not for him, neither," said the girl. She was but a child, yet she spoke positively, and yet again without disrespect in her manner. "'Tis poison for 'ee," she added, knocking out the ash from her master's churchwarden pipe and refilling it from the tobacco-jar. "You know what the doctor said?"

"Ugh!—a pair o' tyrants, you an' the doctor! Just a thimbleful now—if the Cap'n here will join me."

"You heard him? He don't want another glass."

Her solemn eyes rested on Captain Cai, and he repeated that he would take no more grog.

She struck a match and held it to the pipe while the chandler drew a few puffs. Then she was gone as noiselessly as she had entered.

"That's a question now," observed Captain Cai after a pause.

"What's a question?"

"Servants. I've talked it over with 'Bias, and he allows we should advertise for a single housekeeper; a staid honest woman to look after the pair of us—with maybe a trifle of extra help. That gel, for instance, as waited table—"

"Tabb's child?"

"Is that her name?"

"She was christened Fancy—Fancy Tabb—her parents being a brace o' fools. Ay, she's a nonesuch, is Tabb's child."

"With a manageable woman to give her orders—What's amiss with ye, Rogers?"

Captain Cai put the question in some alarm, for the heaving of the ship-chandler's waistcoat and a strangling noise in his throat together suggested a sudden gastric disturbance.

But it appeared they were but symptoms of mirth. Mr Rogers lifted his practicable hand, and with a red bandanna handkerchief wiped the rheum from his eyes.

"Ho, dear!—you'll excuse me, Cap'n; but 'with a manageable woman,' you said? I'd pity her startin' to manage the like of Fancy Tabb."

"Why, what's wrong wi' the child?"

"Nothin'—let be I can't keep a grown woman in the house unless she's a half-wit. I have to get 'em from Tregarrick, out o' the Home for the Feeble-Minded. But it don't work so badly. They're cheap, you understand; an' Fancy teaches 'em to cook. If they don't show no promise after a fortni't's trial, she sends 'em back. I hope," added the chandler, perceiving Captain Cai to frown, "you're not feelin' no afterthoughts about that leg o' mutton. Maybe I ought to have warned 'ee that 'twas cooked by a person of weak intellect."

"Don't mention it," said Captain Cai politely. "What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve, as they say; an' the jint was boiled to a turn. . . . I was only wonderin' how you picked up such a maid!"

The chandler struck again upon the small hand-bell. "I got her from a bad debt."

"Seems an odd way—" began Captain Cai, after pondering for a moment, but broke off, for the hand-maiden stood already on the threshold.

"Fancy Tabb," commanded the chandler, "step fore, here, into the light."

The child obeyed.

"You see this gentleman?"

"Yes, master." Her eyes, as she turned them upon Captain Cai, were frank enough, or frank as eyes could be that guarded a soul behind glooms of reserve. They were straight, at any rate, and unflinching, and very serious.

"You know his business?"

"I think so, master. . . . Has he come to sign the lease? I'll fetch it from your desk, if you'll give me the keys."

"Bide a bit, missy," said Captain Cai. "That'd be buying a pig in a poke, when I ha'n't even seen the house yet—not," he added, with a glance at Mr Rogers, "that I make any doubt of its suiting. But business is business."

The child turned to her master, as much as to ask, "What, then, is your need of me?"

"Cap'n Hocken wants a servant," said Mr Rogers, answering the look.

She appeared to ponder this. "Before seein' the house?" she asked, after a moment or two.

"She had us there, Rogers!" chuckled Captain Cai; but the child was perfectly serious.

"You would like me to show you the house? Master has the key."

"That's an idea, now!" He was still amused.

"When?"

"This moment—that's to say, if your master'll spare you?" He glanced at Mr Rogers, who nodded.

"Couldn't do better," he agreed. "You've a good two hours afore dusk, an' she's a proper dictionary on taps an' drainage."

"Please you to come along, sir." The child waited respectfully while Captain Cai arose, picked up his hat, and bade his host "So long!" He followed her downstairs.

Their way to the street lay through the shop, and by the rearward door of it she paused to reach down her hat and small jacket. The shop was long, dark, intricate; its main window overshadowed by the bulk of the Town Hall, across the narrow alley-way; its end window, which gave on the Quay, blocked high with cheeses, biscuit-tins, boxes of soap, and dried Newfoundland cod. Into this gloom the child flung her voice, and Captain Cai was aware of the upper half of a man's body dimly silhouetted there against the panes.

"Daddy, I'm going out."

"Yes, dear," answered the man's voice dully. "For an hour, very likely. This gentleman wants to see his new house, and I'm to show it to him."

"Yes, dear."

"You'll be careful, won't you now? Mrs M—fus'll be coming round, certain, for half-a-pound of bacon; And that P—fus girl for candles, if not for sugar. You've to serve neither, mind, until you see their money."

"Yes, dear. What excuse shall I make?" The man's voice was weary but patient. The tone of it set a chord humming faintly somewhere in Captain Cai's memory: but his mind worked slowly and (as he would have put it) wanted sea-room, to come about.

They had taken but a few steps, however, when in the narrow street, known as Dolphin Row, he pulled up with all sail shaking.

"That there party as we passed in the shop—"

"He's my father," said the child quickly.

"And you're Tabb's child. . . . You don't tell me that was Lijah Tabb, as used to be master o' the *Uncle an' Aunt?*"

"I don't tell you anything," said the child, and added, "he's a different man altogether."

"That's curious now." Captain Cai walked on a pace or two and halted again. "But you're Tabb's child," he insisted. "And, by the trick of his voice, if that wasn't Lijah—"

"His name *is* Elijah."

"Eh?" queried Captain Cai, rubbing his ear. "But I heard tell," he went on in a puzzled way, searching his memory, "as Lijah Tabb an' Rogers had quarrelled desp'rate an' burnt the papers, so to speak."

"'Twas worse than that." She did not answer his look, but kept her eyes fixed ahead.

"Yet here I find the man keepin' shop for Rogers: and as for you—if you're his daughter—"

"I'm in service with Mr Rogers," said Fancy, who as if in a moment had recovered her composure. "If you want to know why, sir, and won't chat about it, I don't mind tellin' you."

"You make me curious, little maid: that I'll own."

"'Tis simple enough, too," said she. "He's had a stroke, an' he's goin to hell."

"Eh? . . . I don't see—"

"He's goin' to hell," she repeated with a nod as over a matter that admitted no dispute.

"Well, but dang it all!" protested Captain Cai after a pause, "we'll allow as he's goin' there, for the sake of argyment. Is that why you're tendin' on him so careful?"

"You mustn't think," answered the child, "that I'm doin' it out o' pity altogether. There's something terrible fascinatin' about a man in that position."

CHAPTER IV.

VOICES IN THE TWILIGHT.

"I don't see anything immodest in it," said Mrs Bosenna looking up. She was on her knees and had just finished pressing the earth about the roots of a small rose-bush. "The house is mine, and naturally I am curious to know something about my tenant."

Dinah, her middle-aged maid, who had been holding the bush upright and steady, answered this challenge with a short sniff. "He don't seem over curious, for his part, about *you*." She, too, glanced upward and toward the house, the upper storey alone of which, from where they stood, was visible above the spikes of a green palisade. A roadway divided the house from the garden, which descended to the harbour-cliff in a series of tiny terraces. "They've been pokin' around indoors this hour and more."

"You don't suppose he caught sight of us?"

"Maybe not; but Tabb's child did. That girl 've a-got eyes like niddles. If he don't come down to pay his respects, you may bet 'tis because he don't want to." Dinah, being vexed, spoke viciously. Her speech implied that her mistress's conduct had been not only indelicate but clumsy.

"You are a horrid woman," Mrs Bosenna accused her; "and I can't think what put such nasty-minded thoughts into your head."

"No more can I, unless you suggested 'em," Dinah retorted.

"You were willing enough to come, when—when—"

"When you proposed it," Dinah relentlessly concluded the sentence.
"Of course. Why not?"

"And you were excited enough—you can't deny it"—her mistress insisted, "when you brought the news this morning, that his ship had arrived. But now, and only because you happen to be put out—"

"Who said I was put out?"

"As if I couldn't tell by your tone! Now, just because you happen to be put out, I'm indelicate all of a sudden."

"I never said so," Dinah protested sullenly.

"*Said* so?" Mrs Bosenna, rising, faced her with withering scorn. "I hope you've a better sense of your position than to *say* such a thing. Oh, you content yourself with hinting! . . . But who owns this house and garden, I should like to know?"

Dinah, though remorseful, showed fight yet. "Then why couldn' ye take the bull by the horns an' march in by the front door?"

"Why? Because you agreed with me that to plant a two or three roses for him would be a nice attention! . . . You can't start planting roses in the dusk, at the end of an afternoon call; and, as it is, we've only just finished before twilight."

Dinah was minded to retort that, as it was, the planting had taken a long time. But she contented herself with glancing again at the house and saying evasively that the new tenant appeared to take more interest in fixtures than in flowers.

"I own," sighed Mrs Bosenna, "I thought he'd have been eager to take stock of the garden before it grew dark. Such a beautiful garden, as it is, in a small way!"

"When a man has passed his whole life at sea—"

"True," her mistress agreed. "Yet how it must enlarge the mind!
So different from farming!"

"It must be ekally dependent on the weather," Dinah opined. "At least. More so, takin' one thing with another. Oh, decidedly. It stands to reason."

"I'm romantic perhaps," confessed Mrs Bosenna; "but I can never think of any ship's captain as being quite an ordinary man. The dangers he must go through—and the foreign countries he visits—and up night after night in all weathers, staring into the darkness in an oilskin suit!"

"'Tisn' the sort o' man I should ever choose for a husband, if I wanted one," maintained Dinah.

"Who was talking of husbands, you silly woman?"

"I don't see how else the men-folk consarn us, mistress."

"You're coarse, Dinah."

"I'm practical, anyway. If they choose to toss up an' down 'pon the sea
they're welcome, for me. But, for my part, when I lay me down at night,
I like to be sure o' gettin' up in the same position next mornin'; and
I'd to feel the same about a husband, supposin' I cared for the man."

"I often think," mused Mrs Bosenna, "that we're not half grateful enough to sailors, considering the risks they run and the things they bring us home: tea and coffee, raisins, currants, with all kinds of spices and cordial drinks."

"Oranges an' lemons, say the bells o' St Clemen's. Oranges—"

"I wasn't thinking of this Captain Hocken in particular," interrupted the widow hastily. "Take a Christmas pudding, for instance. Flour and suet, and there's an end if you depend on the farmer; just an ordinary dumpling. Whereas the sailor brings the figs, the currants, the candied peel, the chopped almonds, the brandy—all the ingredients that make it Christmassy."

"And then the farmer takes an' eats it. Aw, believe me, mistress,
Stay-at-home fares best in this world!"

"I don't know, Dinah," sighed Mrs Bosenna. "Haven't you ever in your life wished for a pair o' wings?"

"To wear in my hat? Why, o' course I have."

"No, no; I mean, for the wings of a dove, to fly away and be—well, not at rest exactly—"

"No, I haven't, mistress. But 'tis the way with you discontented rich folks. Like Hocken's ducks, all of 'ee—never happy unless you be where you baint. . . . I wonder if that Hocken was any relation—S-sh! now! Talk of the devil!"

Captain Cai and Fancy had spent a good hour-and-a-half in overhauling the two cottages. Their accommodation was narrow enough, but Captain Cai, after half a lifetime on shipboard, found them little short of palatial. The child could scarcely drag him away from the tiny bath-rooms with their hot and cold water taps.

"Lord," said he, gazing down into the newly painted bath in No.1.
"To think of 'Bias in the likes o' this!"

"You may, if you care to," said Fancy.

"'Tis a knack of mine," he apologised. "We'll suppose him safely out of it, an' what happens next? Why, he'll step across to the linen-cupboard here, wi' the hot pipes behind it, an' there's a clean shirt dried an' warmed to his skin. He gets into that—the day bein' Sunday, as we'll suppose—an' finishes his dressin', danderin' forth an' back from one room to t'other; breakfast gettin' ready downstairs an' no hurry for it—all his time his own, clean away to sundown. Up above the lower window-sash here with the Prodigal Son in stained glass, and very thoughtful of the architect, too—"

"It isn't stained glass," the child corrected; "it's what they call a transparency."

"I hope you're mistaken. . . . I must try it from the outside before I let 'Bias undress here. As I was sayin', through the upper pane he'll see his cabbages comin' on at the back; an' in the front, under his

window, there's the bread-cart—"

"But you said 'twas Sunday."

"So I did. . . . Well, there's the milk-cart anyway, an' a boy janglin' the cans. You can't think how pretty these shore-noises be to a sailor-man. An' down in the town the church bell goin' for early Communion, but he'll attend mornin' service later on. An', across the road, there's the garden, full o' flowers, an' smellin'—an' a blessed sense as he can pick an' choose an' take his time with it all." Captain Cai had wandered to the front window. He let fall these last words slowly, in a kind of reverie, as he gazed out on the garden over which the twilight was fast gathering.

"With all this time on your hands, I reckon you won't be takin' a look round the garden?" hazarded Fancy.

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Well, 'tis drawin' in dusk. But there! I wouldn' disappoint Mrs
Bosenna, if I was you."

"Eh?"

"She's been down in the garden this hour and more, waitin' for you to take her by surprise."

"Oh—come now, I say!"

Fancy nodded her head. "I don't know as I blame her," she said judicially. "She's curious to know what you look like, that's all; or else she's curious for you to know what she looks like. Anyway, she's down there, if you've a mind to be polite."

Seeing that he hesitated, the child led the way. Captain Cai followed her in something of a tremor. Across the road they went and through the garden-gate; and the sound of their footsteps on the flagged pathway gave Mrs Bosenna warning. By the time they reached the second terrace she was down on her knees again, packing the soil about the rose-bush, which Dinah obediently held upright for her.

"Losh, here's visitors!" exclaimed Dinah.

Mrs Bosenna turned with the prettiest start of surprise, and sprang to her feet. If there was a suspicion—a shade—of overacting, the twilight concealed it. She had a charming figure, very supple and maidenly: she bought her corsets in London. The kneeling posture and the swift rise from it were alike noticeably graceful, even in the dusk.

"Visitors?" she echoed. "And me in this state to receive 'em, earthed up to the wrists!" She plucked off her gardening-gloves, handed them to Dinah, and stooped to snatch up one of a pair of white cuffs—badges of her widowhood—that she had laid aside on the turf before starting to work. While slipping it over her wrist she found time to glance up at Captain Cai, who fumbled confusedly with the rim of his tall hat.

"Excuse me, madam—no wish to intrude. We'll take ourselves off this minute, eh?" He turned to the child, who, however, did not budge.

"Please, don't go. You are—?"

"Caius Hocken, ma'am—of the *Hannah Hoo*—at your service."

"Dear me, what a very pleasant surprise!" (Oh, Mrs Bosenna!) She held out a hand. "I am glad to make your acquaintance, Captain Hocken."

"I hope I see you well, ma'am?" Captain Cai took the hand and dropped it nervously.

"Quite well, I thank God. . . . They told me your ship had arrived, sir; but I could not count—could I?—on your coming to inspect the house so soon."

"If I've been over hasty, ma'am—"

"Not at all," she interrupted. "There now! I put things so clumsily at times! I meant to excuse *myself*; for, you see, the house has been yours since Lady-day—that's to say, if you sign the lease,—and Lady-day's more than a week past. So 'tis *I* that am the intruder. . . .But passing the garden yesterday, I'd a notion that half a dozen dwarf roses would improve it, without your knowledge. You're not offended, I hope, now that you've caught me? I dote on roses, for my part."

"I—I take it very kindly, ma'am."

"'Tis a funny time o' the year to be plantin' roses, isn't it?" asked Fancy.

"Eh?" In the dusk Mrs Bosenna treated her to a disapproving stare. "Is that Elijah Tabb's child? . . . You've grown such a lot lately, I hardly recognised you."

"I noticed that," said the child with composure, "though I didn't guess the reason. But 'tis a funny time to be plantin' roses, all the same."

"And pray, child, what do you know about roses?"

"Nothing," answered Fancy, "'cept that 'tis a funny time to be plantin' 'em."

"When you grow a little older," said Mrs Bosenna icily, "you'll know that anything can be done with roses in these days—with proper precautions. Why"—she turned to Captain Cai—"I've planted out roses in July month—in pots, of course. You break the pots in the October following. But there must be precautions."

"Meanin' manure?"

"Cow," interposed Dinah tersely, "it's the best. Pig comes next, for various reasons."

"We need not go into details," said Mrs Bosenna. "I sent down a cartload this morning and had it well dug in. Provided you dig it deep enough, and don't let it touch the young roots—"

"I thank you kindly, ma'am," said Captain Cai, "and so will my friend 'Bias Hunken when he hears of it."

"Ah, my other tenant?—or tenant in prospect, I ought to say. He has not arrived yet, I understand."

"He's due to-morrow, ma'am, by th' afternoon train."

"You must bring him over to Rilla Farm, to call on me," said Mrs Bosenna graciously.

Captain Cai rubbed his chin. He was taken at unawares; and not finding the familiar beard under his fingers, grew strangely helpless. "As for that, ma'am," he stammered, "I ought to warn you that 'Bias isn' easily caught."

"God defend me!" answered the widow, who had a free way of speaking at times. "Who wants to catch him?"

"You don't take my meanin', ma'am, if you'll excuse me," floundered Captain Cai in a sweat. "I ought to ha' said that 'Bias, though one in a thousand, is terrible shy with females—or ladies, as I should say."

"He'll be all the more welcome for that," said Mrs Bosenna relentlessly. "You must certainly bring him, Captain Hocken."

Before he could protest further, she had shaken hands, gathered up trowel and kneeling-pad, given them into Dinah's keeping, unpinned and shaken down the skirt of her black gown, and was gone—gone up the twilit path, her handmaiden following,—gone with a fleeting smile that, while ignoring Fancy Tabb, left Captain Cai strangely perturbed, so nicely it struck a balance between understanding and aloofness.

He rubbed his chin, then his ear, then the back of his neck.

"Lord!" he groaned suddenly, "where was my manners?"

"Eh?"

"I never said a word about her affliction."

"What might *that* be, in your opinion?"

"Her first husband, o' course—or, as I *should* say, the loss of him. Shockin' thing to forget. . . . I've almost a mind now to follow her an' make my excuses."

"Do," said Fancy; "I'd like to hear you start 'pon 'em."

"Well, you can if you will. Come over with me to Rilla to-morrow forenoon. I'll get leave for you."

"That'd spoil the fun," said Fancy, not one risible muscle twitching; "but go you'll have to. Mrs Bosenna has left one of her cuffs behind."

She pointed to a white object on the turf. Captain Cai stooped, picked it up, and held it gingerly in his hand.

"She didn' seem a careless sort, neither," he mused.

"Not altogether," the child agreed with him.

"Dinah," said Mrs Bosenna, halting suddenly as they walked homeward in the dusk, "I've left one of my cuffs behind!"

"Yes, mistress."

"'Yes, mistress,'" Mrs Bosenna mimicked her. "If 'twas anything belonging to you, you'd be upset enough."

"I'd have more reason," said Dinah stolidly. "Do 'ee want me to run back an' fetch it?"

"No—o." Her mistress seemed to hesitate. "'Tisn't worth while; and ten chances to one somebody will find it."

"That's what I was thinkin'," agreed Dinah.

CHAPTER V.

A TESTIMONIAL.

Captain Cai's sea-chest had been conveyed to the Ship Inn, Trafalgar Square (so called—as the landlord, Mr Oke, will inform you—after the famous battle of that name), and there he designed to lodge while his friend and he furnished their new quarters.

His bed, a four-poster, was luxurious indeed after his old bunk in the *Hannah Hoo*, and he betook himself to it early. Yet he did not sleep well. For some while sleep was forbidden by a confusion of voices in the bar-parlour downstairs; then, after a brief lull, the same voices started exchanging good-nights in the square without; and finally, when the rest had dispersed, two belated townsmen lingered in private conversation, now walking a few paces to and fro on the cobbles, but ever returning to anchorage under a street lamp beneath his window. By-and-by the town lamplighter came along, turned off the gas-jet and wished the two gossips good-night, adding that the weather was extraordinary for the time of year; but still they lingered. Captain Cai, worried by the murmur of their voices, climbed out of bed to close the window. His hand was outstretched to do so when, through the open sash, he caught a few articulate words—a fragment of a sentence.

Said one—speaking low but earnestly—"If I should survive my wife, *as I hope to do*—"

Unwilling to play the eavesdropper, or to startle them by shutting the window, Captain Cai very delicately withdrew, climbed back into bed, and drew the edge of the bedclothes over his ear. Soon he was asleep; but, even as he dropped off, the absurd phrase wove itself into the midnight chime from the church tower and passed on to weave itself into his dreams and vex them. "If I should survive my wife —" In his dreams he was back in Troy, indeed, and yet among foreigners. They spoke in English, too; but they conversed with one another, not with him, as though he might overhear but could not be expected to understand. One dream—merely ludicrous when he awoke and recalled it—gave him real distress while it lasted. In it he saw half a dozen townsmen—Barber Toy, Landlord Oke, the Quaymaster, and Mr Philp among them—gathered around the mound of sand on the Quay, solemnly playing a child's game with his tall hat. Mr Philp took it from the Quaymaster's head, transferred it to his own, and, lifting it by the brim, said reverently, "If I should survive my wife," &c., to pass it on to the barber, who recited the same formula to the same ritual. In the middle of the sandheap was a pit, which appeared to be somebody's grave; and somewhere in the background, on the far side of the pit, stood Mrs Bosenna and Tabb's girl together, the one watching with a queer smile, while the other kept repeating, "He's going to hell. He couldn't change his habits, and it's high time the Quay was improved."

From this dream Captain Cai awoke in a sweat, and though the rest of the night yielded none so

terrifying, his sleep was fitful and unrefreshing. The return of day brought with it a sense of oppression, of a load on his mind, of a task to be performed.

Ah, yes!—he must pay a call on Mrs Bosenna. She had as good as engaged him by a promise, and, moreover, there was her cuff to be returned. . . . Well, the visit must be paid this morning. 'Bias would be arriving by the afternoon train; and, apart from that, when you've a daunting job that cannot be escaped, the wise course is to play the man and get it over.

Still, he could not well present himself at Rilla Farm before eleven o'clock—say half-past eleven—or noon even. No, that would be too late; might suggest a hint of staying to dinner—which God forbid! He resolved upon eleven.

He grudged to lose the latter half of the morning; for the gardens—his and Hunken's—had yet to be explored, and the rainwater cisterns in rear of the houses, and the back premises generally, and the patches where the cabbages grew. Also (confound the woman!) he could well have spent an hour or two about the streets and the Quay, renewing old acquaintance. The whole town had heard of his return, and there were scores of folk to remember him and bid him welcome. They would chase away this feeling of forlornness, of being an alien. . . . Strange that, wide awake though he was, it should continue to haunt him!

But Troy, on all save market mornings, is a slug-a-bed town; and even at nine o'clock, when he issued forth after an impatient breakfast, the streets wore an unkempt, unready, unsociable air. Housewives were still beating mats, shopboys washing down windows; ash-buckets stood in the gutter-ways, by door and ope, awaiting the scavenger.

"These people want a Daylight Saving Bill," thought Captain Cai, and somewhat disconsolately wheeled about, setting his face for the Rope Walk. Here his spirits sensibly revived. There had been rain in the night, but the wind had flown to the northward, and the sun was already scattering the clouds with promise of a fine day. Cleansing airs played between the houses, the line of ash-buckets grew sparser, and the buckets—for he had encountered the scavenger's cart on the slope of the hill—were empty now, albeit their owners showed no hurry to fetch them indoors.

A row of houses—all erected since his young days—still blocked the view of the harbour. But just beyond them, where a roadway led down to the ferry, the exquisite scene broke upon him—the harbour entrance, with the antique castles pretending to guard it; the vessels (his own amongst them) in the land-locked anchorage; the open sea beyond, violet blue to the morning under a steady off-shore breeze; white gulls flashing aloft, and, in the offing, a pair of gannets hunting above the waters.

Captain Cai took no truck (as he would have said) in the beauties of nature; but here was a scene he understood, and he began to feel at home again. He halted, rested his elbows on a low wall and watched the gannets at their evolutions—the poise, the terrific dive, the splash clearly visible at more than a mile's distance. The wall on which he leaned overhung a trim garden, gay with scentless flowers such as tulips and late daffodils, and yet odorous—for early April has a few days during which the uncurling leaf has all the fragrance of blossom: and this was such a day, lustrous from a bath of rain. To our uninstructed seaman the scent seemed to exhale from the tulips; it recalled his attention from the gannets, and he drew in deep breaths of it, pondering the parterres of Kaiserskroon and Duchesse de Parme—bold scarlet splashed with yellow—of golden Chrysoloras, of rosy white Cottage Maids. Unknowing it, he had a sense of beauty, and he decided that horticulture, for a leisured man, was well worth a trial.

"That's the best of living ashore," he told himself. "A man can choose what hobby he will and, if he don't like it, pick up another."

He climbed the hill briskly, to view his own garden and take stock of its possibilities. . . . The roses planted by Mrs Bosenna had scarcely flagged at all, thanks to the night's rain. Around them and to right and left along the border under the walls of the two first terraces, green shoots were pushing up from the soil—sword-like spikes of iris, red noses of peonies, green fingers of lupins. Into what flowers these various shootlets would expand Captain Cai knew no more than Adam, first of gardeners. He would consult some knowledgeable person—no, not Mrs Bosenna—and label them 'as per instructions': or, stay! 'Bias Hunken had a weakness for small wagers. Here was material for a long summer game, more deliberate even than draughts; to buy a botanical book and with its help back one's fancy, flower or colour. A capital game: no doubt (thought Captain Cai) quite commonly played among landsmen possessing gardens.

At this point he made a discovery he had missed in the dusk overnight. His eyes fell on a flat-topped felt-covered roof, almost level with his feet and half-hidden between two bushes (the one a myrtle, the other a mock-orange; but he knew no such distinctions). There was yet a third terrace, then; and on

this third terrace—yes, by the Lord, a summer-house fit for a king! Glass-fronted, with sliding sashes; match-boarded within, fitted with racks and shelves for garden tools; with ample room for chairs and a table at which two could sup and square their elbows. Such a view, moreover! It swept the whole harbour. . . .

Captain Cai's first impulse was to search around for a rack whereon to stow a telescope: his next, to run to the party-wall and hoist himself high enough to scan his friend's garden.

Yes! 'Bias, too, had a summer-house; not precisely similar in shape, however. Its roof was a lean-to, and its frontage narrower; but of this Captain Cai could not be sure. He was short of stature, and with toes digging into the crevices of the wall and hands clutching at its coping he could take no very accurate survey. He dropped back upon *terra firma* and hurried up the flights of steps to the roadway, in haste to descend from it into 'Bias's garden and resolve his doubts.

For you must understand that the two cottages comprised by the name of Harbour Terrace were (according to Mr Rogers) "as like as two peas, even down to their water-taps," and even by name distinguished only as Number 1 and Number 2: and that, taking this similarity on trust, Captain Cai had chosen Number 2, Because—well, simply because it *was* Number 2. If inadvertently he, being first in the field, had collared the better summer-house!—The very thought of it set him perspiring.

At the head of the garden, to his annoyance, he found Mr Philp leaning over the gate.

"Ah, Good morning!" said Mr Philp. "You was expectin' me, o' course."

"Good morning," returned Captain Cai. "Expectin' you? No, I wasn't.
Why?"

"About that hat. I've brought you the three-an'-six." He held out the coins in his palm.

"You can't have it just now. I'm in a hurry."

"So I see," said Mr Philp deliberately, not budging from the gate.
"It don't improve a hat as a rule."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Perspiration works through the linin'. I've seen hats ruined that way."

"Very well, then: we'll call the bargain off. The fact is, I'd forgot about it; and you can't very well have the hat now. 'Tis my only one, an'—well the fact is, I'm due to pay a call."

"Where?"

"I don't see as 'tis any business o' yours," answered Captain Cai with vexation; "but, if you want to know, I've to call on my landlady, Mrs Bosenna."

"Is that where you're hurryin' just now?"

"Well, no: not at this moment," Captain Cai had to confess.

"Where, then?"

"Oh, look here—"

"You needn't tell, if you don't want to. But *I'm* goin' to a funeral at eleven o'clock," said Mr Philp. "Eleven A.M.," he added pointedly. "Not that I hold with mornin' funerals in a general way: but the corpse is old Mrs Wedlake, and I wasn't consulted."

"Relative?" asked Captain Cai.

"No relation at all; though I don't see as it matters." Mr Philp was cheerful but obdurate. "A bargain's a bargain, as I take it."

"That fact is—"

"*And* a man's word ought to be good as his bond. Leastways that's how I look at it."

"Here, take the darned thing!" exclaimed Captain Cai. His action, however, was less impulsive than his speech: he removed the hat carefully, lowering his head and clutching the brim between both hands. A small parcel lay inside.

"What's that?" asked Mr Philp.

"It's—it's a cuff," Captain Cai admitted.

"Belongs to the Widow Bosenna, I shouldn't wonder?" Mr Philp hazarded with massive gravity. "It's the sort o' thing a woman wears now-a-days when she've lost her husband. I follows the fashions in my distant way." He paused and corrected himself carefully—"*Them sort.*"

"I thought—it occurred to me—as it might be the handiest way of returnin' the thing."

"It seems early days to be carryin' that sort of article around in the crown o' your hat. Dangerous, too, if you use hair-oil. But you don't. I took notice that you said 'no' yesterday when Toy offered to rub something into your hair. Now that's always a temptation with me, there bein' no extra charge. . . . Did she give it to you?"

"Who? . . . Mrs Bosenna? No, she left it behind here."

"When?"

"Yesterday evening."

"What was she doin' here, yesterday evenin', to want to take off her cuffs?"

"If you must know, she was planting roses."

"What? In April? . . . You mustn't think I'm curious."

"Not at all," Captain Cai agreed grimly.

"Nice little place you've pitched on here, I must say." Mr Philp changed his tone to one of extreme affability. "There's not a prettier little nest in all Troy than these two cottages. And which of the pair might be *your* choice?"

"It's not quite decided."

"Well, you can't do wrong with either. But"—Mr Philp glanced back across the roadway and lowered his voice—"I'd like to warn you o' one thing. I don't know no unhandier houses for gettin' out a corpse. There's a turn at the foot o' the stairs; most awk'ard."

"I reckon," said Captain Cai cheerfully, "'Bias an' me'll leave that to them as it concerns. But, man! what a turn you've a-got for funerals!"

"They be the breath o' life to me," Mr Philp confessed, and paused for a moment's thought. "Tell 'ee what we'll do: you shall come with me down to Fore Street an' buy yourself a new hat at Shake Benny's: 'tis on your way to Rilla Farm. There in the shop you can hand me over the one you're wearin', and Shake can send mine home in a bandbox." He twinkled cunningly. "I shall be wantin' a bandbox, an' that gets me one cost-free."

The man was inexorable. Captain Cai gave up resistance, and the pair descended the hill together towards Mr Benny's shop.

Young Mr Benny, "S. Benny, Gents' Outfitter," had suffered the misfortune to be christened Shakespeare without inheriting any of the literary aspirations to which that name bore witness. It was, in any event, a difficult name to live up to, and so incongruous with this youth in particular that, as he grew up, his acquaintances abbreviated it by consent to Shake; and, again, when, after serving an apprenticeship with a pushing firm in Exeter, he returned to open a haberdashery shop in his native town, it had been reduced, for business purposes, to a bare initial.

But it is hard to escape heredity. Albeit to young Mr Benny pure literature made no appeal, and had even been summarised by him as "footle," in the business of advertising he developed a curious literary twist. He could not exhibit a new line of goods without inventing an arresting set of labels for it; and upon these labels (executed with his own hands in water-colour upon cardboard) he let play a fancy almost Asiatic. Not content with mere description, such as "*Neck-wear in Up-to-date Helios*" or "*Braces, Indispensable*," he assailed the coy purchaser with appeals frankly personal, such as "*You passed us Yesterday, but We Hit you this time*," or (of pyjamas) "*What! You don't Tell us You Go to Bed like your Grandfather*," or (of a collar) "*If you Admire Lord Rosebery, Now is Your Time*."

Captain Cai wanted a hat. "I be just returned from foreign," he explained; "and this here head-gear o' mine—"

Young Mr Benny smiled with a smile that deprecated his being drawn into criticism. "We keep ahead of the Germans yet, sir,—in some respects. Is it Captain Hocken I have the pleasure of addressin'?"

"Now, how did he know that?" Captain Cai murmured.

"Why, by your hat," answered Mr Philp with readiness.

"You'll be wanting something more nautical, Captain? Something yachty, if I may suggest. . . . I've a neat thing here in yachting caps." Mr Benny selected and displayed one, turning it briskly in his hands. "The *Commodore*. There's a something about that cap, sir,—a what shall I say?—a distinction. Or, if you prefer a straight up-and-down peak, what about the *Squadron* here? A little fuller in the crown, you'll observe; but that"—with a flattering glance—"would suit you. You'd carry it off."

"Better have it full in the crown," suggested Mr Philp; "by reason it's handier to carry things."

"None of your seafarin' gear, I'll thank you," said Captain Cai hastily.
"I've hauled ashore."

"And mean to settle among us, I hope, sir? . . . Well, then, with the summer already upon us—so to speak—what do we say to a real Panama straw? The *Boulter's Lock* here, f'r instance,—extra brim—at five and sixpence? How these foreigners do it for the money is a mystery to me."

"I see they puts 'Smith Brothers, Birmingham,' in the lining," said
Captain Cai.

"Importers' mark, sir,—to insure genuineness. . . . Let me see, what size were you saying? H'm, six-seven-eighths, as I should judge." Young Mr Benny pulled out a drawer with briskness, ran his hand through a number of genuine Panamas of identical pattern, selected one, and poised it on the tips of his fingers, giving it the while a seductive twist. "If you will stand *so*, Captain, while I tilt the glass a trifle?"

Captain Cai gazed hardily at his reflection in the mirror. "It don't seem altogether too happy wi' the rest of the togs," he hazarded, and consulted Mr Philp. "What do *you* think?"

"I ain't makin' no bid for your tail-coat, if that's what you mean," answered Mr Philp with sudden moroseness, pulling out his watch. "I got one."

"Our leading townsmen, sir," said young Mr Benny, "favour an alpaca lounge coat with this particular line. We stock them in all sizes. Alpacas are seldom made to measure,—'free-and-easy' being their motto, if I may so express it."

"It's mine, anyway."

"And useful for gardening, too. In an alpaca you can—" Young Mr Benny, without finishing the sentence, indued one and went through brisk motions indicative of digging, hoeing, taking cuttings and transplanting them.

The end of it was that Captain Cai purchased an alpaca coat as well as a Panama hat, and having bidden "so long" to Mr Philp, and pocketed his three-and-sixpence, steered up the street in the direction of Rilla Farm, nervously stealing glimpses of himself in the shop windows as he went. As he hove in sight of the Custom House, however, this bashfulness gave way of a sudden to bewilderment. For there, at the foot of the steps leading up to its old-fashioned doorway lounged his mate, Mr Tregaskis, sucking a pipe.

"Hullo! What are you doin' here?" asked Captain Cai.

"What the devil's that to you?" retorted Mr Tregaskis. But a moment later he gasped and all but dropped the pipe from his mouth. "Good Lord!"

"Took me for a stranger, hey?"

The mate stared, slowly passing a hand across his chin as though to make sure of his own beard. "What indooced 'ee?"

"When you're in Rome," said Captain Cai, with a somewhat forced nonchalance, "you do as the Romans do."

"Do they?" asked Mr Tregaskis vaguely. "Besides, we ain't," he objected after a moment.

"Crew all right?"

"Upstairs,"—this with a jerk of the thumb.

"Hey? . . . But why? We don't pay off till Saturday, as you ought to know, for I told 'ee plain enough, an' also that the men could have any money advanced, in reason."

"Come along and see," said the mate mysteriously. "I've been waitin' here on the look-out for 'ee." He led the way up the steps, along a twisting corridor and into the Collector's office, where, sure enough, the crew of the *Hannah Hoo* were gathered.

"Here's the Cap'n, boys!" he announced. "An' don't call me a liar, but take your time."

The men—they were standing uneasily, with doffed hats, around a table in the centre of the room—gazed and drew a long breath. They continued to breathe hard while the Collector bustled forward from his desk and congratulated Captain Cai on a prosperous passage.

"There's one thing about it," said Ben Price the bald-headed, at length breaking through the mortuary silence that reigned around the table; "it *do* make partin' easier."

"But what's here?" demanded Captain Cai, as his gaze fell upon a curious object that occupied the centre of the table. It was oblong: it was covered with a large red handkerchief: and, with the men grouped respectfully around, it suggested a miniature coffin draped and ready for committal to the deep.

"Well, sir," answered Nat Berry, who was generally reckoned the wag of the ship, "it might pass, by its look, for a concealment o' birth. But it ain't. It's a testimonial."

"A what?"

But here the mate—who had been standing for some moments on one leg— suddenly cleared his throat.

"Cap'n Hocken," said he in a strained unnatural voice, "we the undersigned, bein' mate and crew of the *Hannah Hoo* barquentine—"

"Be this an affidavit?"

"No it isn': 'tis a Musical Box. . . . As I was sayin', We the undersigned, bein' mate an' crew of the *Hannah Hoo* barquentine, which we hear that you're givin' up command of the same, Do hereby beg leave to express our mingled feelin's at the same in the shape of this here accompanyin' Musical Box. And our united hope as you may have live long to enjoy the noise it kicks up, which"—here Mr Tregaskis dropped to a confidential tone—"it plays 'Home, Sweet Home,' with other fashionable tunes, an' can be turned off at any time by means of a back-handed switch marked 'Stop' in plain letters. IT IS therefore—" here the speaker resumed his oratorical manner—"our united wish, sir, as you will accept the forthcoming Musical Box from the above-mentioned undersigned as a mark of respect in all weathers, and that you may live to marry an' pass it down to your offspring—"

"Hear, hear!" interjected Mr Nat Berry, and was told to shut his head.

"—to your offspring, or, in other words, progenitors," perorated Mr Tregaskis. "And if you don't like it, the man at the shop'll change it for something of equal value." Here with a sweep of the hand he withdrew the handkerchief and disclosed the gift. "I forget the chap's name for the moment, but he's a watchmaker, and lives off the Town Quay as you turn up west-an'-by-north to the Post Office. The round mark on the lid—as p'r'aps I ought to mention—was caused by a Challenge Cup of some sort standin' upon it all last summer in the eye of the sun, which don't affect the music, an' might be covered over with a brass plate in case of emergency; but time didn't permit." Thus Mr Tregaskis concluded, and stood wiping his brow.

Captain Cai stared at the gift and around at the men's faces mistily. "Friends"—he managed to say. "Friends," he began again after a painful pause, and then, "It's all very well, William Tregaskis, but you might ha' given a man warnin'—after all these years!"

"It don't want no acknowledgment: but take your time," said the mate handsomely, conscious, for his part, of having performed with credit.

At this suggestion Captain Cai with a vague gesture pulled out his watch, and amid the whirl of his brain was aware of the hour—10.45.

"I've—I've an appointment, friends, as it happens," he stammered. "And I thank you kindly, but—" On a sudden happy inspiration he fixed an eye upon the mate. "All sails unbent aboard?" he asked sternly.

"There's the mizzen, sir—"

"I thought so. We'll have discipline, lads, to the end—if you please.
We'll meet here on Saturday: and when you've done your unbendin' maybe
I'll start doin' mine."

He took up the musical box, tucked it under his arm, and marched out.

CHAPTER VI.

RILLA FARM.

The way was long, the sun was hot, the minstrel (as surely he may be called who carries a musical box) was more than once in two minds about turning back. He perspired under his absurdly superfluous burden.

To be sure he might—for Troy is always neighbourly—have knocked in at some cottage on his way through the tail-end of the town and deposited the box, promising to return for it. But he was flurried, pressed for time, disgracefully behind time, in fact; and, moreover, thanks to his attire and changed appearance, no friendly face had smiled recognition though he had recognised some half a dozen. There was no time to stop, renew old acquaintance, ask a small favour with explanations. . . . All this was natural enough: yet he felt an increasing sense of human selfishness, human ingratitude—he, toiling along with this token of human gratitude under his arm!

At the extreme end of the town his way led him through the entrance of a wooded valley, or coombe, down which a highroad, a rushing stream, and a railway line descend into Troy Harbour, more or less in parallels, from the outside world. A creek runs some little way up the vale. In old days—in Captain Cai's young days—it ran up for half a mile or more to an embanked mill-pool and a mill-wheel lazily turning: and Rilla Farm had in those days been Rilla Mill, with a farmstead attached as the miller's *parergon*.

But the railway had swept away mill-pool and wheel: and Rilla was now Rilla Farm. The railway, too, cutting sheer through the slope over which the farmstead stood, had transformed shelving turf to rocky cliff and farmstead to eyrie. You approached Rilla now by a footbridge crossing the line, and thereafter by a winding pathway climbing the cliff, with here and there a few steps hewn in the living rock. Nature in some twenty odd years had draped the cliff with fern—the *Polypodium vulgare*—and Mrs Bosenna in her early married days had planted the crevices with arabis, alyssum, and aubrietia, which had taken root and spread, and now, overflowing their ledges, ran down in cascades of bloom—white, yellow, and purple. The ascent, in short, was very pretty and romantic, and you might easily imagine it the approach to some foreign hill-castle or monastery: for the farmhouse on the summit hid itself behind out-buildings the walls of which crowned the escarpment and presented a blank face, fortress-like, overlooking the vale. The path (as you have gathered) was for pedestrians only. Mrs Bosenna's farm-carts and milk-carts—her dairy trade was considerable—had to fetch a circuit by the road-bridge, half a mile inland.

The air in the valley was heavy, even on this April day. Captain Cai reached the footpath-gate in a bath of perspiration, despite his alpaca coat and notwithstanding that the last half mile of his way had lain under the light shade of budding trees. He gazed up at the ascent, and bethought him that the musical box was an intolerable burden for such a climb. It would involve him in explanations, too, being so unusual an accessory to a morning call. He searched about, therefore, for a hiding-place in which to bestow it, and found one at length in a clump of alder intermixed with brambles, that overhung the stream a few paces beyond the gate, almost within the shadow of the footbridge.

Having made sure that the bed on which it rested was firm and moderately dry, he covered the box with a strewing of last year's leaves, cunningly trailed a bramble or two over it, and pursued his way more lightsomely, albeit still under some oppression: for the house stood formidably high, and he feared all converse with women. For lack of practice he had no presence of mind in their company, Moreover, his recent fiasco in speech-making had dashed his spirits.

He reached the last turn of the path. It brought him in sight of a garden-gate some ten yards ahead, on his left hand. The gate was white, and some one inside was even at this moment engaged in repainting it; for as he halted to draw breath he caught sight of a paint-brush—or rather the point of one—briskly waggling between the rails.

The gate opened and Mrs Bosenna peeped out. "Ah, I *thought* I heard footsteps!" said she. She wore a

widow's cap—a very small and natty one; and a large white apron covered the front of her widow's gown from bosom to ankles.

"I—I'm sorry to call so late, ma'am."

"Late? Why, it can't be past noon, scarcely. . . . We don't have dinner till one o'clock. You'll excuse my not shaking hands, but I never *could* paint without messing my fingers."

"But I hadn't an idea, ma'am—"

"Eh?"

"Nothing was farther from my thoughts than—than—"

"Staying to dinner? Oh, but it's understood! There's roast sucking-pig," said Mrs Bosenna tranquilly, as if this disposed of all argument. She added, "I didn't recognise you for the moment. You're wearing a different hat."

"Actin' under advice, ma'am."

"I don't know that it's an improvement." Her eyes rested on him in cool scrutiny, and he flinched under it. "There's always a—a sort of distinction about a top hat. Of course, it was very thoughtful of you to change it for something more free-and-easy. But different styles suit different persons, and—as I'm always telling Dinah—the secret of dressing is to find out the style that suits you, and stick to it."

"Bein' free-an'-easy, ma'am, was the last thing in my mind," stammered
Captain Cai.

"There, didn't I guess? . . . Well, you shall wear your top hat next time, and I'll take back my first impressions if I find 'em wrong."

"But, ma'am, the—the fact is—"

"Of course it was in the dusk," continued Mrs Bosenna; "but I certainly thought it suited you. One meets with so little of the real old-fashioned politeness among men in these days! Now "—she let her voice trail off reflectively as her eyes wandered past Captain Cai and rested on the tree-tops in the valley—"if I was asked to name my *bo ideal* of an English gentleman—and the foreigners can't come near it, you needn't tell me—'twould be Sir Brampton Goldsworthy, Bart., of Halberton Court, Devon."

"Ma'am?"

"That's close to Holsworthy, where I was brought up. 'Goldsworthy of Holsworthy' he liked to be known as, dropping the 'Sir': and *he* always wore a top hat, rather flat in the brim. But he'd off with it to anything in woman's shape. . . . And that's what women value. Respect. . . . It isn't a man's *age*—" She broke off and half closed her eyes in reverie. "And so particular, too, about his body-linen! Always a high stock collar . . . and his cuffs!"

"Talkin' about cuffs, now—" Captain Cai dived a hand into a hip-pocket and drew forth a circlet of white lawn, much flattened. "I found this in the garden last night—by the rose-bushes."

"Thank you—yes, it is mine, of course. I missed it on the way home." Mrs Bosenna reached out her hand for it. "You must have set me down for a very careless person? But with all my responsibilities just now—" She concluded the sentence with a sigh, and held open the gate, warning him to beware of the wet paint. "You see, there is so much to be looked after on a farm. One can never trust to servants—or at any rate not to the men kind. Dinah is different; but even with Dinah—" Mrs Bosenna let fall another, slightly fainter, sigh.

"That reminds me," said Captain Cai hardily entering, and for all his lack of observation falling at once under the spell of the little front garden—so scrupulously tidy it was, so trim and kempt, with a pathway of white pebbles leading up between clumps of daffodils and tulips to a neatly thatched porch: so homely too, with but a low fence of euonymus shutting off all that could offend in the court before the cow-byres; so fragrant already with scent of the just sprouting lemon verbena; so obviously the abode of cleanly health, with every window along the white-washed house front open to the April air. "That reminds me, I never mentioned the—the deceased—your late husband, I mean, ma'am—nor how sorry I was to hear of it."

"Did you know him?" asked Mrs Bosenna, scarcely glancing up as she pinched the fragrance out of an infant bud of the lemon verbena.

"Very slightly, ma'am. Indeed, I don't remember meetin' him but once, and that was at Summercourt

Fair, of all places; me bein' home just then from a trip, an' takin' a day off, as you might say, just to see how things was gettin' on ashore. As fate would have it I happened into a boxin' booth, which was twopence, and there, as I was watchin' a bout, some one says at my elbow, '"Tis a noble art, deny it who can!' An' that was your late husband. We'd never met afore to my knowledge, an' we never met again; but his words have come back to me more'n once, an' the free manly way he spoke 'em."

"I feel sure," said Mrs Bosenna, "you and he would have found many things in common, had he been spared. . . Now, I dare say, you'd like to look around the place a bit before dinner. Where shall we begin? With the live stock?"

"As you please, ma'am."

"Well, as we're to eat sucking-pig, we'll go and have a look at the litter he was one of; and then we'll take the cows; and then you'll have to excuse me for a few minutes while I attend to the apple-sauce, about which I'm very particular."

They visited the sow and her farrows—a family group which Captain Cai pronounced to be "very comfortable-lookin'."

"But how stupid of me!" exclaimed Mrs Bosenna. "To forget that you sailors are tired to death with pork!"

"Not with this variety, ma'am," Captain Cai assured her.

They passed on to the cow-houses, which were empty just then, but nevertheless worth visiting, being brick-floored, well-ventilated, and roomy, with straw generously spread in the stalls, fresh and ready for the cattle's return. There were two houses, one for Jerseys (as Mrs Bosenna explained), the other for Devons; and she drew his attention to their drainage system. "If I had my way, every cow in the land should be as cleanly lodged as a cottager. None of your infected milk for me!"

From the cow-houses she conducted him through the mowhay, where the number and amplitude of the ricks fairly took his breath away. "Oh, we call Rilla quite a small farm!" said Mrs Bosenna carelessly. "But I could never endure to be short of straw. Clean bedding is a craze with me." She halted and invited him to admire some details in the thatching—the work of an old man past seventy, she told him, and sighed. "Thatching's a lost art, almost. Too much education nowadays, and everybody in a hurry—that's what's the matter. . . . In a few years we shall all be thatching with corrugated iron."

"An' by that time every one will be in steam."

"Eh?"

"Shipping, ma'am."

"Ah, yes—to be sure. And everybody making butter with a County Council separator. 'All very scientific,' I tell them, 'so long as you don't ask me to eat it!' Why, look at this!" Captain Cai looked. She was holding out her hand palm uppermost, and a very pretty, plump hand it was to be sure.

"I should be sorry to say how many hundredweights of butter I've made wi' that very hand—or how many hundreds of persons have eaten it."

Captain Cai dived his own hands into the hip-pockets of his new coat, aimlessly searching for pipe and tobacco-pouch; not that he would have ventured to smoke in her presence!—but it gave his hands something to do.

"'Glad,' I think you must mean, ma'am," said he slowly.

She laughed. "If you're going to make pretty speeches, it's time for me to run indoors," and she left him with a warning that dinner would be ready in ten minutes, or at one o'clock to the tick.

This was by the gate of a broad-acred field ("Parc Veor" she had called it) in which her Jerseys browsed. Captain Cai counted them—they were five—while still half-consciously searching for pipe and pouch, which, in fact, he had left behind in the shop, in the pockets of his old coat. By-and-by he realised this, and with a curious sense of helplessness—of having lost his bearings. . . .

Ten minutes later Dinah, coming across the mowhay to invite Captain Cai into the house, found him leaning against the gate, sunk in a brown study, contemplating the kine.

The smell of roasted sucking-pig dissipated this transient cloud upon his spirits. Mrs Bosenna (who had discarded her apron, and looked mighty genteel with a gold locket dependent from her throat)

avowed, appealing to his sympathy, that it mightn't be sentimental, but she, for her part, adored the savour of crackling.

"And as for Robert—my late husband—he doted on it."

Captain Cai came within an ace of saying fatuously it was a pity the late Mr Bosenna couldn't be present to partake of this; but checked himself.

"To think that you should have met him! Well, it's a small world."

"There's a lot of folks attend Summercourt Fair—or used to," said Captain Cai, and added that the world was not so noticeably small, if you tried sailing up and down it a bit.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs Bosenna, dropping knife and fork and clasping her hands. "Yes, to be sure, the vastness of it—the great distances! . . . And so you met my late husband in a boxing tent? Sport of all kinds appealed to him. But isn't boxing a-er—more or less degrading exhibition?"

"Nothing of the sort, ma'am. I never went in for it myself—worse luck; never had the time. But my friend 'Bias, now! He's past his prime, o' course; but if only you'd seen him strip—in the old time—"

"Er—you're surely not referring to your friend Captain Hunken?"

"But I am, ma'am. . . . He had a way o' stepping back an' usin' his reach . . . a trifle slow with the left, always . . . that was his failin'. But the length of his arms would delight you—and he had a hug, too, of his own—if you happened to take an interest in such things."

"But I don't," protested Mrs Bosenna. "And you frighten me! If I'd guessed that my other tenant was a prize-fighter—"

"Prize-fighter, ma'am? What, 'Bias? . . . He's the gentlest you ever knew, and the easiest-goin': and for ladies' company—well, I don't know," confessed Captain Cai, "as he ever found himself in such, least-ways not to my knowledge. But I'll be bound he wouldn't be able to open his mouth."

"—Unless in defence of a friend," suggested Mrs Bosenna, laughing.
"You must bring him to call on me."

Captain Cai shook his head.

"Oh"—she nodded confidently—"I'll make him talk, never fear!
If he's half so true a friend to you as you are to him—"

"He's a truer."

"Then, as a last resource, I have only to run *you* down. So it's easy."

The sucking-pig was followed by a delectable junket with Cornish cream; and the junket—when Dinah had removed the cloth—by a plate of home-made biscuits, flanked by decanters of port and sherry.

"Widow's port is the best, they say." Mrs Bosenna invited him to fill his glass without waiting for ceremony. "You smoke?" she asked.

He confessed that he was without pipe or tobacco. Dinah was summoned again, left the room after a whispered consultation, and returned with a small sheaf of clean churchwarden pipes and a cake of tobacco, dark in hue, somewhat dry but (as a quick inspection assured Captain Cai) quite smokeable.

"Now you're to make yourself at ease," said Mrs Bosenna, rising and moving to the door. Captain Cai, remembering his manners, rose and held it open for her. "The wine is at your elbow and (oh, believe me, I understand men!) when you've finished your smoke you will find me in the rose-garden. That's my *real* garden, though nothing to boast of at this time of the year. But April's the month for pruning tea-roses, and this weather in April is not to be missed. I want to hear more of your friend; and when you are ready—you are not to hurry—Dinah will show you the way."

Captain Cai, left alone, carved a pipeful of tobacco with his pocket-knife; chose a clay; filled, lit it, and smoked. Two glasses of wine had sufficed him, for he was an abstemious man: but, for all his hard life, he could enjoy comfort. He found it here; in the good food, the generous liquor, the twinkle on the glass and decanter, the ill-executed but solid portraits on the walls, the hearthrug soft beneath his sole, the April combination of sunshine slanting through the window and a brisk but not oppressive coal fire on the hearth.

He smoked. The tobacco (smuggled and purchased at low cost by the late Mr Bosenna) had been excellent in its time, and was palatable yet.

It stuck in Captain Cai's conscience, however, and pricked it while he smoked, that he had given Mrs Bosenna a wrong impression of his friend.

`Bias a mere prize-fighter! `Bias of all people! But that is what comes of laying stress on one particular accomplishment of an Admirable Crichton.

He ruminated on this: finished his pipe: and having knocked out the ashes thoughtfully on the bars of the grate, sought the back garden without the help of Dinah.

The rose-garden to the uninstructed eye was—now in April—but a wilderness of scrubby stunted thorns. In the midst of it he found Mrs Bosenna, gloved, armed with a pair of secateurs, and engaged in cutting the thorns back to a few ugly inches.

She smiled as he approached. "You don't understand roses?" she asked. "If you don't, you'll be surprised at my hard pruning. If there's real strength in the root, you can trust for June, no matter what a stick you leave. The secret's under the ground; or, as you may say, under the surface, as it is with folks."

"That helps me, ma'am," said Captain Cai, "to tell you it's like that with my friend 'Bias—"

A whistle sounded up the valley. "The three-thirty coming!" said Mrs Bosenna. "It's at the signal-box outside the tunnel."

"The three-thirty?" Captain Cai gasped and pulled out his watch. "But that's 'Bias's train—and I was to meet him!"

"You *might* just do it," hazarded Mrs Bosenna. "We count it half a mile to the station, and by the time they have the luggage out—"

"I *must* do it, ma'am! To think that—" Captain Cai held out a hand. "I'd no notion—the time has flown so!"

"Dinah! Dinah!" called Mrs Bosenna, and as Dinah appeared at the back door with a promptitude almost suspicious,—"Run and fetch Captain Hocken's hat, girl! He has to catch a train."

Dinah vanished, and in the twinkling of an eye came running with the hat; with a clothes-brush, too. "Confound her!" Captain Cai swore inwardly as she insisted on brushing his coat, paying special attention to a dry spot of mud on the right hip-pocket. Feminine attentions may be overdone, and Mrs Bosenna showed more tactfulness than her maid.

"Have finished, you silly woman! Cannot you see that Captain Hocken is dying to leave us? . . . But you are to bring your friend, sir, at the first opportunity!"

She repeated this, calling it after him as he raced down the path. At the footbridge he remembered the musical box in the bushes. But it was too late. Mrs Bosenna had followed him to the head of the slope, and stood watching, waving her handkerchief.

As he glanced back and up at her over his shoulder, his ear caught the rumble of a train, not far up the valley. He must run! . . .

He ran, sticking his elbow to his sides. But soon the rumble of the train grew to a roar. It was upon him. . . . It overtook him some three hundred yards from the station, and the carriage windows, as he staggered down the high road, went past him in a blur.

CHAPTER VII.

BIAS ARRIVES.

Captain Tobias Hunken sat patiently and ponderously upon a wooden sea-chest, alone on the platform, but stacked about by such a miscellany of luggage as gave him no slight resemblance to Crusoe on his raft. Besides parcels, boxes, carpet-bags, canvas-bags, tarpaulin-bags, it included a pile of furniture swathed in straw, a parrot-cage covered with baize, and a stone jar calculated to hold nine gallons of liquor.

He was a dark-bearded man, heavy shouldered, of great bulk, and by temperament apparently

phlegmatic; for when Captain Cai arrived, panting, red in the face, stammering contrition, he betrayed neither emotion nor surprise.

"'Twas all my thoughtlessness!" cried Captain Cai.

"What's the matter?" asked Captain Tobias. "No hurry, is there?
We've retired."

"If I'd known I was so late!"

"Five minutes." Captain Tobias gazed across at the station clock, then at his friend's face, as if comparing the two. "You've altered your appearance recently. Which some might say 'twas for the better."

"Glad you think so," said Captain Cai, modestly pleased.

"Others, again, mightn't. But, there!" added Captain Tobias with sudden intensity. "Who cares what folks say? If you chose to go about like a Red Indian, 'twouldn' be no affair o' *theirs*, I should hope?"

"Why, o' course not," Captain Cai agreed, albeit a trifle dashed.
"As you say, we've retired, an' can do as we like."

"Ah!" Captain Tobias eyed him and drew a long breath. "Got such a thing as a match about ye?" he asked, pulling forth a short clay pipe.

"No—yes!" Captain Cai, clapping a hand to either hip, was about to admit that he had come without pipe, tobacco, or matches, when he felt something hard and angular within the left pocket, and (to his confusion) produced—a silver matchbox. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed stupidly.

"That's a pretty trifle," said Captain Tobias, possessing himself of the box and extracting a match from it. "Where did ye pick it up, now!"

"From a—a lady—a Mrs Bosenna." Captain Cai recovered the box, pocketed it, and desperately changed the subject. "What's become of all the porters hereabouts?" he demanded. "Leavin' us alone an' all this luggage, like a wreck ashore!"

"I sent 'em away," Captain Tobias explained with composure, "knowin' as you'd turn up sooner or later. Who's Mrs Bosenna?"

"She's our landlady; a widow-woman. She lives up the valley yonder." Captain Cai jerked a thumb in that direction, and with renewed anxiety looked about for a porter. "Hadn't we better whistle one across?"

"Sells matches, does she?"

"No,"—he knew his friend's persistence, and faced about to make a clean breast. "I was callin' there to-day. There's the leases to be fixed up, you see—" He paused.

Captain Tobias assented with a slow nod. "Premises all satisfactory?"

"*And* shipshape. That's one load off my mind, anyway," sighed Captain Cai. "You're bound to like 'em—that is, if you like Troy at all. There's hot and cold water laid on, so's you can have a bath at a moment's notice."

"I don't *see* myself, exactly," said Captain Tobias. "But never mind."

"Well, as I was sayin', I called there to-day—to break the ice, so to speak—"

"You didn't mention ice; or, if you did, I missed hearin' it."

"'Tis a way of speakin'. Well, the widow pressed me to stay to dinner, and there was a suckin' pig; and afterwards—"

"Hold hard." Captain Tobias removed the pipe from his mouth and stared earnestly at his friend. "Say that agen," he commanded.

"There was roast suckin' pig, I tell you. It melted in y'r mouth. Well, after dinner she left me alone with pipes an' tobacco; an' 'twas then, I suppose, that in my forgetful way I must have slipped the box into my pocket."

"'Twasn' very nice treatment, was it?—after the length she'd gone to put herself out."

"But 'twas absence o' mind, you understand."

"I seem to remember," mused Captain Tobias, "there was a Lord Somebody-or-other suffered from the same complaint. I read about it in the papers, an' only wish I'd cut it out. Any little valu'bles lyin' about he'd slip into his pocket. But I never heard of your bein' afflicted in that way."

"Of course I'm not!" Captain Cai protested warmly.

"Then I don't see what excuse you'll put up. . . . But wait till we get all this cargo stowed. Ahoy, there!" Captain Tobias called up the porters, and after consultation it was decided to convert the goods-shed into a cloak-room for housing the bulk of his luggage, but to send on his sea-chest and the birdcage by wheelbarrow to his lodgings.

"What's the address?" he asked, turning to Captain Cai.

"Ship Inn."

"What?" Captain Tobias paused in the act of picking up the nine-gallon jar. "Drinks on the premises?"

"Lashin's."

"What a world o' fuss that arrangement do save! Here!—" to the porter who stood checking the articles deposited—"this goes into hold wi' the rest. Contents, rum, an' don't you forget it, my son; leastways, pr'aps I'd better say, don't you remember it."

"I'm a total abstainer, sir," said the porter proudly.

"You don't tell me? . . . One meets with such cases, about. . . . Well,"—Captain Tobias turned to Captain Cai again, as one averting his face from a sorrow to which no help can be proffered—"what's the distance?"

"To the Ship? About half a mile—a nice easy walk, an' the barrow can follow us."

They were no sooner outside the station premises, however, than Captain Tobias called halt to the driver of the wheelbarrow, paid him, and instructed him to proceed ahead.

"And you may tell the landlord," he added, "to expect us when he sees us."

He watched the man out of sight before explaining this manoeuvre. "'Twas clever of you to mistake me, in front of those fellows; but I *meant*, what distance to this here widow's?"

"Eh? You don't mean to say—after your journey, too—"

"We'll get it over," said Captain Tobias firmly.

Captain Cai could not but approve. Here was prompt occasion not only to repair and apologise for his small blunder, but to make Mrs Bosenna acquainted with his paragon. She would soon correct that unfortunate image of him as a coarse prize-fighting fellow.

To tell the truth, while reproaching himself for having evoked that image by his clumsy praise, he had doubted it might be difficult to efface: knowing his friend's shyness of womankind. He had doubted that 'Bias, who (to use his own words) "shunned the fair sex in all its branches," might decline even to make the lady's acquaintance. Lo! here was that admirable man setting his face and—sternly, for friendship's sake—marching upon an introduction. What a friend!

They took their way up the valley, walking side by side. For a long while both kept silence.

"Pretty country!" by-and-by observed Captain Tobias. He paused as if to take stock of it, but his gaze was meditative rather than observant. "Suckin' pigs, too, . . ." he added after a while, and resumed his way.

"What about 'em?"

"Why, to drop in on a lone woman unexpected, an' find her sittin' down to roast suckin' pig . . . it's—it's like Solomon an' the lilies."

Captain Cai flushed half-guiltily. "I didn't say I called quite unexpectedly, did I?"

"To break the ice, was your words."

"You see, I'd happened to meet Mrs Bosenna the evenin' before, an'—hullo!"

They had come to the bend of the road beneath Rilla Farm, and either his eyesight had played him a trick or Captain Cai had caught a glimpse— just a glimpse and no more—of a print gown some fifty yards ahead, where the hedge made an angle about a clump of trees. The small entrance gate and the footbridge lay just beyond this angle.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Captain Cai.

"What's up?"

"Nothin'"—for the light apparition had vanished. "Besides, she'd be wearin' black, o' course."

"I wish you'd talk more coherent," said Captain Tobias, stopping short again and eyeing him. "I put it to you, now. Here I be, tumbled out 'pon a terminus platform in a country I've never set eyes on. As if that wasn' enough, straightaway things start to happen so that I want to hold my head. And as if *that* wasn' enough, you work loose on the jawin' tacks till steerage way there's none. I put it to you."

"I'm sorry, 'Bias," Cai assured him contritely as they moved on. "Maybe I'm upset by the pleasure o' seein' ye here. Many a time I've picter'd it, an'—I don't know if you've noticed, but these little things never *do* fall out just like a man expects."

"I've noticed it to-day, right enough," said Tobias with some emphasis. But he was mollified, and indeed seemed on the point of adding a word when of a sudden he came to yet another halt and eyed his friend more reproachfully than ever—no, not reproachfully save by implication: with bewilderment rather, and helpless surmise.

"*What?*" gasped Captain Tobias. "*Which?*"—and, with that, speech failed him.

The pair had come to the footbridge and were in the act of crossing it, when they became aware that the stream beneath them differed from all streams in their experience. It was not rippling like other streams; it was not murmuring; it was tinkling out a gay little operatic tune!

To be more precise, it was rendering the waltz-tune in "Faust," an opera by the late M. Gounod. Captain Hocken and Captain Hunken knew nothing of "Faust" or of its composer. But they could recognise a tune.

"*Which?*" repeated Tobias gasping, holding by the handrail of the bridge. "You or me? Or both, perhaps?"

"Two glasses o' port wine only, 'Bias . . . and you *saw* me at the station. I'd run all the way too. . . . Besides, *you* hear it." Relief, of a sudden, broke over Captain Cai's face. "It's the box!" he cried.

With that he was aware of the sound of a merry laugh behind him—a feminine laugh, too, not less musical than the melody still tinkling at his feet. He turned about and confronted Mrs Bosenna as she stepped forth from her hiding in the bushes, her maid Dinah in attendance close behind her.

"Good afternoon again, Captain Hocken! And is this Captain Hunken?
. . . It was polite of you—polite indeed—to bring him so soon."

She held out a hand to Tobias, who, to take it, was forced to relinquish for a moment his clutch on the rail.

"Servant, ma'am," said he in a gruff unnatural voice, and fell back on his support.

She laughed again merrily. "And you'll forgive me for making you welcome with musical honours? That was a sudden notion of Dinah's. She spied you coming up the road, and—Dinah, can you manage to stop that silly tune?"

"I'll try, mistress." Dinah stooped, groped amid the grasses, and produced the musical box from its lair.

"You can," stammered Captain Cai, as if repeating a formula, "turn it off—at any time—by means of a back-handed switch."

"It's yours, then!" Mrs Bosenna clapped her hands together as she turned on him.

"It's mine," confessed Captain Cai. "The question might occur to you, ma'am—"

"It has. Oh, it *has!*" She rippled with laughter. "You should have seen Dinah's face when she came upon it!"

"Caius," said Captain Hunken, interrupting her mirth as with a stroke tolled on a bell, "would ye mind pinching me?"

"Not at all, 'Bias—if you'll tell me where."

"Anywheres. Only rememberin' we're in the presence o' ladies."

"It's *perfectly* simple," said Captain Cai, "if you'll only let me explain! You see, the thing's what you might call a testimonial. I picked it up, comin' through the town to-day."

"A testimonial? How interesting!" murmured Mrs Bosenna.

"From my late crew, ma'am. As I was sayin', on my way through the town to call on you, ma'am, I was taken on the hop, so to speak, an' made the recipient—"

"What for?" demanded 'Bias. He was breathing hard.

"It don't become me," said Captain Cai, and, speaking under stress of desperation, he found himself of a sudden wondering at his own fluency. "It don't become me to repeat all the—sentiments which, er, emanated."

"Give me some," growled Captain Tobias, and was heard to add, under stertorous breath —"Testimonial? I'd like to ha' seen *my* lot try it on *me!*"

"They said," confessed Captain Cai, "as how it was their united wish—" Here he recalled Mr Tregaskis' allusion to possible offspring, and blushed painfully.

"Well?"

"That was the words: as how it was their united wish—adding 'in all weathers.'"

"And, the next news, it's playin' tunes in a ditch," pursued Captain Tobias.

"I think I can explain," put in Mrs Bosenna sweetly, hastening to close up the little breach which, for some reason or other, had suddenly opened between these two good friends. "Captain Hocken, being cumbered with the box on his way to pay me a visit, hid it in the bushes here for a time, meaning to recover it on his way back to the station."

"That's so, ma'am," Captain Cai corroborated her.

"But having misjudged the time, and in his hurry to meet you—good friend that he is—Oh, Captain Hunken, if you could have heard the way he spoke of you! What he led me to expect—not," she added prettily, "that I admit to being disappointed."

"Go on, ma'am," said Captain Tobias sturdily. But in truth it had come to his turn to look ashamed.

"Well, you see, in his haste he forgot it. And now he brings you back to fetch it—am I not right?"

"Not exactly, ma'am," confessed Captain Cai. "The truth is—"

"Well, you shall hear how meantime we happened on it. . . . We are very particular about our cream, here at Rilla: and with this warm weather coming on, Dinah has been telling me it's time we stood the pans out in running water. Haven't you, Dinah?"

Dinah smoothed her print gown. It was not for her to admit here that early in the day from an upper window she had been watching for Captain Hocken's approach, had witnessed it, had witnessed also the act of concealment, and had faithfully reported it to her mistress.

"So," continued Mrs Bosenna hardily, "reckoning that the bed of the stream may have been choked by what the winter rains carry down, and this being our favourite place for the pans, under the cool of the bridge, down happens Dinah—"

"Excuse me, ma'am; but ain't it rather near the high road?"

"It *is*, Captain Hunken: and I have often thought of it at nights. But the folks are honest in these parts—extraordinarily honest."

She broke off, perceiving that Captain Tobias was looking with sudden earnestness at Captain Cai, and that Captain Cai was somewhat awkwardly evading the look.

"Be a man, Caius!" Tobias exhorted his friend.

"It's—it's this way, ma'am," said Captain Cai sheepishly, after a long pause, diving in his pocket. "We wasn't exactly bound to fetch the—the musical box—which, Lord forgive me! I'd forgot for the moment—but to return *this*. How it came to find its way to my pocket I don't know."

"And I don't know, either," mused Mrs Bosenna, as Dinah helped her to undress that night. (This undressing was, in fact, but a well-worn excuse for mistress and maid to chat and—due difference of position observed—exchange confidences before bedtime). "Captain Hocken is simple-minded, as any one can tell; but not absent-minded by nature. At least, I hope not. I hate absent-minded men."

She glanced at her glass, and turned about sharply.

"Dinah, you designing woman! I believe you slipped that box into his pocket? Yes, when you pretended that his coat wanted brushing,—I saw you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

'BIAS APPROVES.

As they departed and went their way down the coombe, a constrained silence fell between the two friends. Nor did either break it until they came again in sight of the railway station.

"I don't altogether like the air in this valley," announced 'Bias.

"It *is* a trifle close, now you mention it," Cai agreed.

"Nor I don't altogether cotton to the valley, neither. Pretty enough, you may say; but it gives you a *feelin'*—like as if you didn't know what was goin' to happen next."

"Places do have that effect with some," Cai assented again, but more dejectedly. Horrid apprehension—if 'Bias should extend his dislike to Troy itself!

"I'm feeling better already," 'Bias continued, answering and allaying this unspoken fear. "Is that the gasworks yonder?"

"Yes. The *real* scenery's at the other end o' the town."

"The smell's healthy, they tell me." 'Bias halted in the roadway, and casting back his head took a long stare up at the gasometer. "You mustn' hurry me," he said, "I've got to enjoy *everything*."

"No hurry at all," said Cai, from whose heart the words lifted a burden at least as heavy as the musical box under his arm. "Hullo! here's Bill Tregaskis with his missus! . . . Evenin', William—good evenin', ma'am!" Captain Cai pulled off his hat. "I hope you find your husband none the worse for the voyage?—though, to be sure, 'tisn' fair on him nor on any seamen, the way some folks reproaches us when we get back home."

Mrs Tregaskis dropped a curtsey. "But be sure, sir—what reproaches?"

"Your looks, ma'am—your looks, if I may say so! . . . William married you soon as he could, I'll wager; but, to be fair, that should ha' been ten years afore *you* married *him*."

"La, sir!" answered Mrs Tregaskis blushing. "I wonder you never married, yourself—you talk such nonsense! But you're in spirits to-day, as any one can see." She glanced at the broad back of Captain Tobias, who stood a few paces away, with legs planted wide and gaze still wrapped in contemplation of the gasometer. "Makin' so bold, sir, is that your friend we've heard tell so much about?"

"It is, ma'am," Captain Cai turned about to call up 'Bias to be introduced, when Mr Tregaskis gently checked him, laying a hand on the musical box.

"I didn' think it worth mentionin' at the time, sir; but these instruments aren't intended for carryin' about."

"No, no," Captain Cai agreed hastily. "Here, 'Bias! Look around an' see who's the first to welcome ye! Tregaskis, of all men! And this here's his missus."

"How d'e do, Mr Tregaskis," said Captain Tobias, shaking hands. He knew the mate of the *Hannah*

Hoo, and respected him for a capable seaman. "I hope I see you well, ma'am?"

"Nicely, sir, thank you!" Mrs Tregaskis curtseyed and beamed.

But Captain Tobias, though with her, too, he shook hands politely enough, was plainly preoccupied. "'Tis a wonderful invention," said he. "You just let the gas run in, an' then it is ready for use at any time. I hadn't a notion you was so up-to-date here."

Mr Tregaskis looked puzzled. "It don't work by *gas*. You wind it up with a cog arrangement, which acts on a spring coil, I'm told—just like the inside of a watch. But we can see by liftin' up the lid."

"Eh?" Captain Tobias glanced back over his shoulder.

"But as I was tellin' the boss, 'twas never *intended* for a country walk. You sets it down at home and calls for a tune—as it might be drinks," continued Mr Tregaskis lucidly.

Captain Cai touched his friend's elbow. "You're talkin' o' different things, you two," he explained in a nervous haste, anxious to get off delicate ground. "Tregaskis was alludin' to—er—this here; which" he concluded, "nobody could have been more taken aback than I was this mornin' . . . when it happened."

"You don't say that's the musical box!" cried Mrs Tregaskis. "Now, don't you agree, sir"—she appealed to Captain Tobias—"with what I said to William at dinner-time, when he told me about the presentation and the speeches? [Here Captain Cai shot a look at his mate, who flushed but kept his eyes averted, pretending carelessness.] I said that for a lot of ignorant seamen 'twas quite a happy thought, an' nobody could say as Captain Hocken didn' deserve it; but, the thing bein' bought in such a hurry—an' knowin' William as I do—ten to one he'd been taken in an' the thing wouldn't work when it came to be tried."

"I told you," put in her spouse, "as the salesman had shown us how to work it, an' it played the most life-like tunes, 'Home Sweet Home' inclooded."

"The salesman!" said Mrs Tregaskis scornfully. "A long way you'll go in the world if you trust a salesman! Why, there was a young man once in Harris's Drapery showed me a bonnet—with humming-birds—perfectly outrageous; I wouldn' ha' been seen in it; and inside o' five minutes he had me there with the tears in my eyes to think I couldn' afford it."

"It works all right indeed, ma'am," Captain Cai assured her.

"Ah, maybe you're cleverer with machinery than William? I don't know how you find him at sea, but *I* can't trust him to wind the clock."

"I didn' set it goin' myself, ma'am; not personally."

"Well," sighed Mrs Tregaskis, "I wish William had consulted me, anyway, before buying the thing in such a hurry. It's shop-soiled, he has to admit; which I only hope you'll overlook."

"I've told you, my dear," put in Mr Tregaskis patiently, "that the mark was done by a Challenge Cup. The fellow was quite honest about it."

"A more thoughtful man," the lady insisted, "would have consulted his wife—would have brought the thing home, maybe, for a trial, to have her opinion on it. The others wouldn't have raised any objection, I'm sure. And," she concluded with another sigh, "he knows that I fairly dote on music!"

"If that's so, ma'am," began Captain Cai, and hesitated, overtaken by sudden caution, "I might let you have the loan of it, some time."

"You got out o' that very well," said Tobias, as they moved on. "I like this place—" He paused, to scan a bill hoarding. "I likes it the more the further I gets. But the women hereabouts seem more than usual forward. Which an unprejoodiced man might call it a drawback."

"I'm sorry, 'Bias, she would keep talkin' about the darned box. . . . I couldn' prevent the lads, d'ye see—not knowin' they'd any such thing in their minds."

"She as good as invited herself to call an' listen to it," Tobias pursued stolidly. "You headed her off very well. 'Tis possible, o' course, we may get tired o' the tunes in time; an' then she may be welcome to it for a spell. We'll see. Plenty o' time for that when we've done listenin' to it together."

Captain Cai halted and gazed at his friend with an emotion too deep for words. But Tobias did not

see: he was staring up at a wire which crossed the street overhead.

"Telephone! What next? . . . You never told me, neither—or not to my recollection—as you went in for speech-makin'."

"But I don't. I—er—the fact is, I had thoughts of takin' a lesson or two. Private lessons, you understand."

"You don't need to, so far as I can see. What was it I heard you tellin' that widow-woman?—'You was made the recipient—of sentiments— which emanated'—that's the way to talk to 'em in public life. I can reckernise the lingo, though I couldn' manage it for worlds, an' don't know as I want to try."

"Troy is my native town, you see," explained Cai, drinking encouragement.

"An' a rattlin' fine one, too!" Tobias halted in front of a wall letter-box. "Look at that, now! 'Hours of Collection' so-an'-so. It *do* make a difference—fancy a thing o' that sort at sea! . . . D'ye know, although you never expressed yourself that way, I'd always a thought at the back o' my head that you'd end by takin' up with public life in one form or another."

"It *has* been hinted to me," confessed Cai, colouring. "As one might say, it has been—er—"

"Emanated," his friend suggested.

"It has been emanated, then—that there was a thing or two wanted puttin' to rights."

"We'll make notes as we go along."

"But I don't want you to start by lookin' out our little weaknesses!" cried Cai, suddenly fearful for his beloved town.

Nevertheless he was in the seventh heaven, divining that his friend (so chary of speech as a rule) had been trying to make amends, to sweep away the little cloud that for a moment—no more—had crossed their perfect understanding. 'Bias was here, determined to like Troy: and 'Bias was succeeding. What else mattered?

"Tidy little trade here," commented 'Bias, as they reached the Passage Slip and conned the business reach of the river, the vessels alongside the jetties, the cranes at work, the shipping moored off at the buoys— vessels of all nations, but mostly Danes and Russians, awaiting their turn.

"Twenty thousand tons a-month, my boy! See that two-funnelled craft 'longside the second jetty? Six thousand—not a fraction under. We're things o' the past, you an' me, an' 'twas high time we hauled out o' the competition."

"China clay?"

"All of it."

"I don't know much about china clay," said 'Bias reflectively. "But I never met twenty thousand tons of anything where it wasn' time for somebody to protect the public."

"There's a Harbour Commission here, o' course—bye-laws an' all that sort o' thing."

"Ay; there's one openin' for ye. We'll find others."

They resumed their way. The street—Troy has but one street, but makes up for this by calling various lengths of it by various names—was in places so narrow that to avoid passing vehicles they were forced to take refuge in handy doorways. In three out of four the door stood open, and Captain Cai, popping his head in at kitchen or small parlour, would beg pardon for intruding, pass the time of day with the mistress of the house, inquire for her husband's health—"Do I remember him, I wonder?" —and how many children there were, and what might be their ages? He always wound up by introducing his friend. Nobody resented these salutations, these questions. Indeed how was it possible to be morose with Captain Cai?—he bubbled such transparent gaiety, kindliness, innocence.

"'Tis our way in Troy, you see," he told 'Bias as they dived into a cobbler's shop to escape the omnibus. "You have to be neighbourly if you don't want to be run over. . . . In London, now, you'd waste a lot o' time explainin' that you didn' want your boots mended."

"It's like what I've heard about canvassin' for Parlyment," said 'Bias.
"And that's another suggestion fur ye."

Of the most important shops in the length of thoroughfare known as Fore Street and in Church Square (which is the same street with a corkscrew twist in it) 'Bias showed much appreciation. He was especially allured by the rainbow-tinted goods in Mr Shake Benny's window, and by the cards recommending them for sale. *If you admire Lord Rosebery, Now is Your Time*—He studied this for some moments.

"Time for what?" he asked, rubbing his ear softly.

"Drinks," suggested Cai, and laughed in pure pleasure of heart. "Come along, man—or you'll be makin' me Prime Minister before we get to the Ship. . . Yes, yon's the church—Established. You can tell by the four spikes an' the weathercock; like-wise by the tombstones. But they bury folks up the hill nowadays." He paused—"That reminds me"—he paused again.

"What of?"

"Oh—er—nothing; nothing particular. . . . Well, if you must know, I was thinkin' about that old hat o' mine."

"You don't tell me you've buried it?"

"No."

"It *is* time for drinks," said 'Bias with decision. They called at the Ship Inn, where they ascertained that Captain Hunken's chest and parrot-cage had been duly delivered.

"Very decent beer," pronounced 'Bias as they shared a quart.

"When a man has a job to tackle—" began Cai, and glanced at his friend. "You're sure we hadn' better wait till you've had a meal?—till to-morrow mornin' if you like."

'Bias drained his tankard and arose—a giant visibly refreshed.
"I'm a-goin' to see the house, instanter."

"Things," said Cai, "strike different parties from different points o' view. That's notorious. One man's born an' bred in a place, and another isn't. . . . Now if the latter—as we'll call him for argyment's sake —"

But 'Bias, cutting short this parley, had gained the door and was marching forth.

To be sure (and Captain Cai might with better command on his nerves have hailed the omen) Nature could hardly have dressed shore and harbour of Troy in weather more auspicious. The smoke of chimneys arose straight on the "cessile air," making a soft dun-coloured haze through which the light of the declining day was filtered in streams of yellow—pale lemon-yellow, golden-yellow, orange, orange-tawny. On the far shore of the harbour, windows blazed as if cottage after cottage held the core of a furnace intense and steady. The green hillside above them lay bathed in this aureate flush, which permeated too the whole of the southern sky, up to its faint blue zenith.

"Pretty weather," grunted 'Bias, "I see the glass is steady too; leastways if you can trust the one they keep in the Inn parlour."

Cai did not respond: the crucial moment was drawing too near.

"Pretty li'l view, too. . . . A man with a box o' paints, now, might be tempted to have a slap at it."

Well-meant but artless simulation! Captain Hunken had once in his life purchased a picture; it represented Vesuvius by night, in eruption, and he had yielded to the importunity of the Neapolitan artist—or, rather, had excused himself for yielding—on the ground that after all you couldn't mistake the dam thing for anything else.

They came abreast of Harbour Terrace. They were passing by the green front door of Number Two. Still Captain Cai made no sign.

"There's a house, f'r instance—supposin' a man could afford the rental—" 'Bias halted and regarded it. "Hullo, 'tis unoccupied!" He turned about slowly. "You don't—mean—to tell me—as that's *of* it?"

"That's *of* it," Cai admitted tremulously. After a long pause,
'"Bias," he stammered, "break it gently."

"I'm tryin' to," said 'Bias, breathing and backing to the railings for a better view. He removed his hat

and wiped the top of his head several times around. Then of a sudden—

"Hooray!" he exploded.

"'Bias!" Cai stared, as well he might, for his friend's face was totally impassive.

"Hoo—" began 'Bias again. "Who the devil's this?" he demanded, as the door opened and Tabb's child appeared in the entry.

"I been expectin' you this hour an' more," announced Tabb's child.
"Stoppin' for drinks on the road, I reckon?"

"We did take a drink, now you mention it," stammered Captain Cai, caught aback: "though, as it happens that don't account for our bein' late. But what brings *you*, here, missy?"

She laid a finger on her lip. "Sh! I've got 'em."

"Got what?"

"Servants for 'ee. They're inside." She pointed back in to the passage mysteriously.

"Who's this child?" demanded Captain 'Bias.

"She's—er—a young friend o' mine—" began Captain Cai. But Fancy interrupted him, dropping a slight curtsey, and addressing his friend straight.

"My name's Fancy Tabb, sir. Which I hope you'll like Troy, and Cap'n Hocken ast me to make myself useful an' find you a pair of servants— woman an' boy."

"Oh, but hold hard!" protested Captain Cai. "We haven't started furnishin' yet."

She nodded. "That's all right. No hurry with either of 'em—not for some weeks, or so long as it suits you. But you'll be safer to bespeak 'em: an' Mrs Bowldler is the chance of a lifetime."

She led the way through to the unfurnished and somewhat dingy kitchen. It had a low window-seat, from the extreme ends of which, as the two skippers entered, two figures—a middle-aged woman and a gawky lad— arose and saluted them; the one with a highly genteel curtsey, the other with an awkward half-pull at his forelock, and much scraping with his feet.

"This is Mrs Bowldler," Fancy nodded towards the middle-aged woman.

"Your servant, sirs," Mrs Bowldler curtseyed again and coughed. "With a
W if you don't object."

"She's quite a good plain cook; and well connected, though reduced in circumstances. Mr Rogers, sir, is often glad to employ her at a pinch."

"At a what?" asked Captain Tobias, breathing hard.

"Which," said Mrs Bowldler with a trembling cough, "the bare thought of taking service again with two strange gentlemen in my state of health is a nordeal, and as such I put it to you." Here she smoothed the front of her gown and turned upon Tobias with unexpected spirit. "You can say to me what you like, sir, and you can do to me what you like, but if you'd been laying awake all night with geese walking over your grave, I'd put myself in your place and say, 'Well, if he don't spit blood 'tis a mercy!'"

"Plain cookin', did you say?" asked Captain Tobias, turning stonily upon the girl.

"And knick-knacks. You mustn't mind her talk, sir; she was brought up to better things and 'tis only her tricks. . . . Now the boy here—his name's Pam, which is short for Palmerston: and I can't conscientiously say more for him, except that he's willin' and tells me he can carry coals."

She might not be able to say more for him, and yet her voice had a wistfulness it had lacked while she commended Mrs Bowldler. Certainly the lad's looks did not take the casual glance. He was coltish and angular, with timid, hare-like eyes. He wore curduroy trousers (very short in the leg), a coat which had patently been made for a grown man, and in place of waistcoat a crimson guernsey which as patently was a piece of feminine apparel. The sleeves of his coat were folded back above his wrists, and in his hand he dangled, by a string of elastic, a girl's sailor hat.

"Healthy?" asked Captain Tobias.

As if at a military command, the boy put out his tongue.

"La!" exclaimed Mrs Bowldler, "look at that for manners!"

"Where does he come from?"

The boy glanced at Fancy in a helpless way. Fancy was prompt. "'Twould save time—wouldn't it?—now that you've seen Mrs Bowldler, if she went round an' had a look at the house?"

"Which I trust," said Mrs Bowldler, "it would not be required of me to sleep in a nattic. It's not that I'm peculiar, but as I said to my sister Martha at breakfast only this morning, 'Attics I was never accustomed to, and if 'tis to be attics at my age, with the roof on your head all the time and not a wink in consequence, Martha,' I said, 'you wouldn't ask it of me, no, not to oblige all the retired gentlemen in Christendom.'"

"You'd better trot along upstairs, then, an' make sure," said Fancy. As soon as the woman was gone she jerked a nod towards the door. "Now we can talk. I didn't want *her* to know, but Pam comes from the work'ouse. His father was mate of a vessel and drowned at sea, and his mother couldn't manage alone."

"What vessel?" asked Captain Cai. Both skippers were regarding the boy with interest.

"The *Tartar Girl*—one of Mr Rogers's—with coal from South Shields, but a Troy crew. It happened five years ago; an' last night when you said you wanted a boy it came into my head that one of the Burts would be just about the age. [Pam's other name is Burt, but I didn't tell it just now, not wanting Mrs Bowldler to guess who he was.] So this morning I got Mr Rogers to let me telephone to Tregarrick Work'ouse—an' here he is."

"Do they dress 'em like that in there?" asked

Captain Cai.

"Better fit they did!" said the girl angrily. "They sent him over in a clean corduroy suit with 'Work-'ouse' written all over it: and a nice job I had to rig him up so's Mrs Bowldler shouldn' guess."

At this moment a piercing scream interrupted Fancy's explanation. It came from one of the front rooms, and was followed by another shorter scream—the voice unmistakably Mrs Bowldler's.

Running to the lady's rescue, they found her in the empty parlour— alone, clutching at the mantelshelf with both hands, and preparing to emit another cry for succour.

"What in the world's happened?" demanded Fancy the first to arrive.

"There was a man!" Mrs Bowldler ran her eyes over her protectors and turned them, with a slow shudder, towards the window. "I seen him distinctly. It sent my blood all of a cream."

"A man? What was he doing?" they asked.

"He was a-looking in boldly through the window . . ." Mrs Bowldler covered her face with her hands.

"Well?" Fancy prompted her impatiently, while Captain Cai stepped out to the front door in quest of the apparition.

"He had on a great black hat. I thought 'twas Death itself come after me!"

While Mrs Bowldler paused to take breath and record her further emotions, Captain Cai, reaching the front door, threw it open, looked out into the roadway, and recoiled with a start. Close on his right a man in black stood peering, as Mrs Bowldler had described, but now into the drawing-room window; shielding, for a better view, the brim of a tall hat which Captain Cai recognised with an exclamation—

"Mr Philp!"

Mr Philp withdrew his gaze, turned about and nodded without embarrassment.

"Good evenin', Cap'n. Friend arrived?"

"Funny way to behave, isn't it?" asked Captain Cai with sternness.
"Pokin' an' pryin' in at somebody else's windows—what makes ye do it?"

"I was curious to know what might be goin' on inside."

There was a finality about this which held Captain Cai gravelled for a moment. It hardly seemed to admit of a reply. At length he said—

"Well, you've frightened a woman into hysterics by it, if that's any consolation."

"There, now! Mrs Bosenna?"

"No, it was not Mrs Bosenna. . . . By the way, that reminds me.
I've changed my mind over that hat."

"Hey?"

"I find I've a use for it, after all."

But at this moment 'Bias appeared in the doorway behind him.

"Seen anything?" demanded 'Bias.

"Interduce me," said Mr Philp with majestic calm.

Captain Cai, caught in this act of secret traffic, blushed in his confusion, but obeyed.

"'Bias," said he, "this is the gentleman that caused the mischief inside. His name's Philp, and he'd like to make your acquaintance."

BOOK II.

CHAPTER IX.

FIRST SUSPICIONS.

It was August, and the weather for weeks had been superb. It was also the week of Troy's annual regatta, and a whole fleet of yachts lay anchored in the little harbour, getting ready their riding lights. Two or three belated ones—like large white moths in the grey offing— had yet to make the rendezvous, and were creeping towards it with all canvas piled: for the wind—light and variable all day—had now at sunset dropped almost to a flat calm.

"A few pounds to be picked up out yonder," commented Captain Cai, "if the tugs had any enterprise."

Captain 'Bias reached out a hand for the telescope. "That yawl—the big fellow—'d do better to take in her jib-tops'le. The faster it's pullin' her through the water the more it's pullin' her to leeward. She'd set two p'ints nigher with it down."

"The fella can't make up his mind about it, either: keeps it shakin' half the time."

The two friends sat in 'Bias's summerhouse, the scent of their tobacco mingling, while they discoursed, with the fragrance of late roses, nicotianas, lemon verbenas. "Discoursed," did I say? Well, let the word pass: for their talk was discursive enough. But when at intervals one or the other opened his mouth, his utterance, though it took the form of a comment upon men and affairs, was in truth but the breathing of a deep inward content. On the table between them Captain Cai's musical box tinkled the waltz from "Faust."

They had become house-occupiers early in May, and at first with a few bare sticks of furniture a-piece. But by dint of steady attendance at the midsummer auctions they had since done wonders. Captain Cai had acquired, among other things, a refrigerator, a linen-press, and a set of 'The Encyclopaedia Britannica' (edition of 1881); Captain 'Bias a poultry run (in sections) and a framed engraving of "The Waterloo Banquet,"—of which, strange to say, he found himself possessor directly through his indifference to art; for, oppressed by the heat of the saleroom, he had yielded to brief slumber (on his legs) while the pictures were being disposed of, and awaking at the sound of his own name was aware that he had secured this bargain by an untimely and unpremeditated nod.

Such small accidents, however, are a part of the fun of house-furnishing. On the whole our two friends had bought judiciously, and now looking around them, could say that their experiment had hitherto prospered; that, so far, the world was kind.

Especially were they fortunate (thanks to Fancy Tabb) precisely where bachelor householders are apt to miss good fortune—in the matter of domestic service. The boy Palmerston, to be sure, suffered from a trick—acquired (Fancy assured them) under workhouse treatment and eradicable by time and gentle handling—of bursting into tears upon small provocation or none. But Mrs Bowldler was a treasure. Of this there could be no manner of doubt; and in nothing so patently as in relation with the boy Palmerston did the gold in Mrs Bowldler's nature— the refined gold—reveal itself.

It was suspected that she had once been a kitchen-maid in the West End of London: but a discreet veil hung over this past, and she never lifted it save by whatever of confession might be read into the words, "When we were in residence in Eaton Square,"—with which she preluded all reminiscences (and they were frequent) of the great metropolis. Her true test as a good woman she passed when—although she must have known the truth, being a confirmed innocent gossip—she chose to extend the same veil, or a corner of it, over the antecedents of Palmerston. She said—

"The past is often enveloped. In the best families it is notoriously so. We know what we are, an' may speckilate on what we was; but what we're to be, who can possibly tell? It might give us the creeps."

She said again: "Every man carries a button in his knapsack, by which he may rise sooner or later to higher things. It was said by a Frenchman, and a politer nation you would not find."

Again: "Blood will tell, always supposin' you 'ave it, and will excuse the expression."

Thus did Mrs Bowldler "turn her necessity to glorious gain," colouring and enlarging her sphere of service under the prismatic lens of romance. In her conversation either cottage became a "residence," and its small garden "the grounds," thus:—

"Palmerston, inform Captain Hunken that dinner is served. You will find him in the grounds."

Or, "Where's that boy?" Captain Cai might ask.

"Palmerston, sir? He is at present in the adjacent, cleaning the knives and forks."

She had indeed set this high standard of expression in the very act of taking service; when, being asked what wages she demanded, she answered, "If acceptable to you, sir, I would intimate eighteen guineas—and my viands."

"That's two shilling short o' nineteen pound," said Captain Hunken.

"I thank you, sir"—Mrs Bowldler made obeisance—"but I have an attachment to guineas."

She identified herself with her employers by speaking of them in the first person plural: "No, we do not dress for dinner. Our rule is to dine in the middle of the day, as more agreeable to health." [A sigh.] "Sometimes I wish we could persuade ourselves that vegetables look better on the side-table."

Such was Mrs Bowldler: and her housekeeping, no less vigilant than romantic, protected our two friends from a thousand small domestic cares.

"Committee-meeting, to-night?" asked 'Bias.

"Eight o'clock: to settle up details—mark-boats, handicap, and the like. . . . It's a wonder to me," said Cai reflectively, "how this regatta has run on, year after year. With Bussa for secretary, if you can understand such madness."

"They'll be runnin' you for the next Parish Council, sure as fate."

Cai ignored this. "There's the fireworks, too. Nobody chosen yet to superintend 'em, an' who's to do it I don't know, unless I take over that little job in addition."

"I thought the firm always sent a couple o' hands to fix an let 'em off."

"So it does. They arrived a couple of hours ago—both drunk as Chloe."

"Plenty o' time to sleep it off between this an' then," opined 'Bias comfortably.

"But they're still *on* the drink. Likely as not we shall find 'em to-morrow in Highway lock-up, which is four miles from here. . . . It happened once before," said Cai with a face of gloom, "and Bussa did the

whole display by himself."

"Good Lord! How did it go off?"

"He can't remember, except that it *did* go off. *He* was drunk, too— drunk o' purpose: for, as he says very reas'nably, 'twas the only way he could find the courage. The fellow isn' without public spirit, if he'd only apply it the right way. Toy tells me that he, for his part, saw it from his bedroom window—the Town Quay wasn't safe, wi' the rocket-sticks fairly rainin'—an' the show wasn' a bad show, *if you looked at it horizontal*; but the gentry on the yachts derived next to no enjoyment from it, bein' occupied in gettin' up their anchors."

Before 'Bias could comment on this, a footstep—light, yet audible between the tinkling notes of the musical box—drew the gaze of the pair to a small window on the right, outside of which lay the gravelled approach to their bower.

"May I come in?" asked a voice—a woman's—with a pretty hesitation in its note: and Mrs Bosenna stood in the doorway.

"*Please* keep your seats," she entreated as both arose awkwardly. She added with a mirthful little laugh, "I heard the musical box playing away, and so I took French leave. Now, don't tell me that I'm an intruder! It is only for a few minutes; and—strictly speaking, you know—the lease says I may enter at any reasonable time. Is this a reasonable time?"

They assured her, but still awkwardly, that she was welcome at any time.
Captain Cai found her a chair.

"So this," she said, looking around, "is where you sit together and talk disparagingly of our sex. At least, that's what Dinah assures me, though I don't see how she can possibly know."

"Ma'am!" said Cai, "we were talkin', this very moment, o' fireworks: nothing more an' nothing less."

"Well, and you couldn't have been talking of anything more to the point," said Mrs Bosenna; "for, as it happens, it's fireworks that brought me here."

'Bias looked vaguely skyward, while "You don't tell me, ma'am, those fellows are making trouble down in the town?" cried Cai.

"Eh? I don't understand. . . . Oh, no," she laughed when he explained his alarm, "I am afraid my errand is much more selfish. You see, I positively dote on fireworks."

She paused.

"Well," said 'Bias, "that's womanlike."

"Hallo!" said Cai. "How do you know what's womanlike?"

"I am afraid it is womanlike," confessed Mrs Bosenna hastily. "And from Rilla Farm you get no view at all on Regatta night. So I was wondering—if you won't think it dreadfully forward of me—"

"You're welcome to watch 'em from here, ma'am, if that's what you mean," said 'Bias.

"Or from my garden, ma'am, if you prefer it," said Cai.

"Why should she?" asked 'Bias.

"Well, 'tis a yard or two nearer, for one thing."

"Anything else?"

"Yes: the other summer-house fronts a bit more up the harbour; t'wards the fireworks, that's to say."

"You ought to know: *you* chose it. . . . But anyway I asked her first."

"Thank you—thank you both!" interposed Mrs Bosenna, leaving the question open. "And may I bring Dinah too? She's almost as silly about fireworks as I am, poor woman! and life on a farm *can* be dull." She sighed, and added, "Besides, 'twould be more proper. We mustn't set people talking—eh, Captain Hocken?" She appealed to him with a laugh.

"Cai won't be here," announced 'Bias heavily.

"Who said so?" demanded Cai.

"'Said so yourself, not twenty minutes ago. . . . 'Said you didn' know how the fireworks was ever goin' off without you, or words to that effect. I didn' make no comment at the time. All I say now is, if Mrs Bosenna comes here to see fireworks, she'll expect 'em to go off: an' I leave it at that."

"They'll go off, all right," said Cai cheerfully, putting a curb on his temper. [But what ailed 'Bias to-night?] "I'll get a small Sub-committee appointed this very evening. But about takin' a hand myself, I've changed my mind."

"Indeed, Captain Hocken, I hope you'll not desert the party," said Mrs Bosenna prettily, and laughed again. "Do you know that, having made so bold I've a mind to make bolder yet, and pretend I am entertaining *you* to-morrow. It's the only chance you give me, you two."

She said this with her eyes on 'Bias, who started as if stung and glanced first at her, then at Cai. But Cai observed nothing, being occupied at the moment in winding up the musical box, which had run down.

Mrs Bosenna smiled a demure smile. She had discovered what she had come to learn; and having discovered it, she presently took her leave, with a promise to be punctual on the morrow.

When she was gone the pair sat for some time in silence. *Tink, tink-tink-a-tink, tink*, went the musical box on the table. . . . At length Cai stood up.

"Time to be gettin' along to Committee," he said, and stepped to the doorway; but there he turned and faced about. "'Bias—"

"Eh?"

"You don't really think as I chose th' other summer-house because it had a better view?"

"*Has* it a better view?" asked 'Bias.

"For fireworks, it seems," said Cai sadly. "But I reckoned—though I hate to talk about it—as this one looked straighter out to sea an' by consequence 'd please ye better. That's why. . . . You're welcome to change gardens to-morrow."

"Mrs Bosenna's comin' to-morrow," grunted 'Bias, and then, after a second's pause, swore under his breath, yet audibly.

"What's the matter with ye, 'Bias?"

"I don't know. . . . Maybe 'tis that box o' tunes gets on my temper. No, don't take it away. I didn' mean it like that, an' the music used to be pretty enough, first-along."

"We'll give it a spell," said Cai, stooping and switching off the tune. "I'm not musical myself; I'd as lief hear thunder, most days. But the thing was well meant."

"Ay, an' no doubt we'll pick up a taste for it again—indoors of an evenin', when the winter comes 'round."

"Tell ye what," suggested Cai. "To-morrow, I'll take it off to John Peter and ask him to put a brass plate on the lid, with an inscription. He's clever at such things, an' terrible dilatory. . . . An' to-night Mrs Bowldler can have it in the kitchen. She dotes on it—'*I dreamt that I dwelt*' in particular."

"Which," said Mrs Bowldler to Palmerston later on, as they sat drinking in that ditty, one on either side of the kitchen table, "it can't sing, but the words is that I dreamt I dwelt in Marble Halls with Princes and Peers by my si-i-ide—just like that. Princes!" She leaned back in the cheap chair and closed her eyes. "It goes through me to this day. I used to sing it frequent in my 'teens, along with another popular favourite which was quite at the other end of the social scale, but artless—'My Mother said that I never should Play with the gypsies in the wood. If I did, She would say, Tum tiddle, tum tiddle, tum-ti-tay' —my memory is not what it was." Mrs Bowldler wiped her eyes.

"And did you?" asked Palmerston. "Tell me what happened."

Next morning, while the Church bells were ringing in Regatta Day, Captain Cai tucked the musical box under his arm and called, on his way to the Committee Ship, upon Mr John Peter Nanjulian (commonly "John

Peter" for short).

John Peter, an elderly man, dwelt with a yet more elderly sister, in an old roomy house set eminently on the cliff-side above the roofs of the Lower Town, approachable only by a pathway broken by flights of steps, and known by the singular name of On the Wall.

The house had been a family mansion, and still preserved traces of ancient dignity, albeit jostled by cottages which had climbed the slope and encroached nearer and nearer as the Nanjulians under stress of poverty had parted with parcel after parcel of their terraced garden. Of the last generation—five sons and three daughters, not one of whom had married—John Peter and his sister "Miss Susan" were now the only survivors, and lived, each on a small annuity, under the old roof, meeting only at dinner on Sundays, and for the rest of the week dwelling apart in their separate halves of the roomy building, up and down the wide staircase of which they had once raced as children at hide-and-seek with six playmates.

John Peter was eccentric, as all these later Nanjulians had been: a lean, stooping man, with a touch of breeding in his face, a weak mouth, and a chin dotted with tufts of gray hair which looked as if they had been affixed with gum and absent-mindedly. He was reputed to be a great reader, and could quote the poetical works of Pope by the yard. He had some skill with the pencil and the water-colour brush. He understood and could teach the theory of navigation; dabbled in chess problems; and had once constructed an astronomical timepiece. His not-too-clean hands were habitually stained with acids: for he practised etching, too, although his plates invariably went wrong. He had considerable skill in engraving upon brass and copper, and was not above eking out his income by inscribing coffin-plates. But the undertaker was shy of employing him because he could never be hurried.

John Peter received Captain Cai in his workshop—a room ample enough for a studio and lit by a large window that faced north, but darkened by cobwebs, dirty, and incredibly littered with odds and ends of futile apparatus. He put a watchmaker's glass to his eye and peered long into the bowels of the musical box.

"The works are clogged with dust," he announced. "Fairly caked with oil and dirt. No wonder it won't go."

"But it *does* go," objected Captain Cai.

"You don't tell me! . . . Well, you'd best let me take out the works, any way, and give them a bath of paraffin."

"Is it so serious as all that? . . . What I came about now, was to ask you to make a brass plate for the lid—with an inscription." Captain Cai pulled out a scrap of paper. "Something like this, 'Presented to Caius Hocken, Master of the *Hannah Hoo*, on the Occasion of his Retirement. By his affectionate undersigned': then the names, with maybe a motto or a verse o' poetry if space permits."

"What sort of poetry?"

"Eh? . . . 'Tell ye the truth, I didn' know till this moment that there *were* different sorts. Well, we'll have the best."

"Why not go to Benny, and get him to fix you up something appropriate?" suggested John Peter. "Old Benny, I mean, that writes the letters for seamen. He's a dab at verses. People go to him regular for the In-Memoriams they put in the newspaper."

"That's an idea, too," said Captain Cai. "I'll consult him to-morrow.
But that won't hinder your getting ahead wi' the plate?" he added; for
John Peter's ways were notorious.

"How would you like it?" John Peter looked purblindly about him, rubbing his spectacles with a thread-bare coat-tail.

"Well, I don't mind," said Cai with promptitude—"Though 'tis rather early in the morning."

"Old English?"

"Perhaps I don't know it by that name."

"Or there's Plain."

"Not for me, thank ye."

"—Or again, there's Italic; to my mind the best of all. It lends itself to little twiddles and flourishes, according to your taste." Old John Peter led him to the wall and pointed with a dirty finger; and Cai gasped, finding his attention directed to a line of engraved coffin-plates.

"That's Italic," said John Peter, selecting an inscription and tracing over the flourishes with his thumb-nail. "'*William Penwarne, b. 1837—*' that's the year the Queen came to the throne. It's easier to read, you see, than old English, and far easier than what we call Gothic, or Ecclesiastical—which is another variety—though, of course, not so easy as Plain. Here you have Plain—" He indicated an inscription—'*Samuel Bosenna, of Rilla, b. 1830, d. 1895*."

"Would that be th' old fellow up the valley, as was?—Mrs Bosenna's husband?" asked Cai, somewhat awed.

"That's the man."

"But what's it doing here?"

"'Tis my unfortunate propensity," confessed John Peter with simple frankness. "You see, by the nature of things these plates must be engraved in a hurry—I *quite* see it from the undertaker's point of view. But, on the other hand, if you're an artist, it isn't always you feel in the mood; you wait for what they call inspiration, and then the undertaker gets annoyed and throws the thing back on your hands." With a pathetic, patient smile John Peter rubbed his spectacles again, and again adjusted them. "Perhaps you'd like Plain, after all?" he suggested. "It usually doesn't take me so long."

"No," decided Cai somewhat hurriedly; "it might remind—I mean, there isn't the same kind of hurry with a musical box."

"It would be much the better for a bath of paraffin," muttered John Peter, prying into the works. But Cai continued to stare at the plate on the wall, and was staring at it when a voice at the door called "Good mornin'!" and Mr Philp entered.

"Ho!" said Mr Philp, "I didn' know as you two were acquainted. And what might *you* be doin' here, cap'n?"

"A triflin' matter of business, that's all," answered Cai, who chafed under Mr Philp's inquisitiveness; but chafed, like everybody else, in vain.

"Orderin' your breastplate? . . . It's well to be in good time when you're dealin' with John Peter," said Mr Philp with dreadful jocularity. "As I came along the head o' the town," he explained, "I heard that Snell's wife had passed away in the night. A happy release. I dropped in to see if they'd given you the job."

John Peter shook his head.

"And I don't suppose you'll get it, neither," said Mr Philp; "but I wanted to make sure. Push,—that's what you want. That's the only thing nowadays. Push. . . . You're lookin' at John Peter's misfits, I see," he went on, turning to Cai. "Now, *there's* a man whose place, as you might say, won't go unfilled much longer—hey?" Mr Philp pointed his walking-stick at the name of the late owner of Rilla, and achieved a sort of watery wink.

"I daresay you mean something by that, Mr Philp," said Cai, staring at him, half angry and completely puzzled. "But be dashed if I know what you *do* mean."

"There now! And I reck'ned as you an' Cap'n Hunken had ne'er a secret you didn't share!"

'"Bias?" asked Cai slowly. "Who was talkin' of 'Bias?"

"It takes 'em that way sometimes," said Mr Philp, wiping a rheumy eye. "An' the longer they puts it off the more you can't never tell which way it will take 'em. O' course, if Cap'n Hunken didn't tell you he'd been visitin' Rilla lately, he must have had his reasons, an' I'm sorry I spoke."

Cai was breathing hard. "Bias? . . . When?"

"The last time I spied him was two days ago . . . in the late afternoon. Now you come to mention it, I'd a notion at the time he wasn't anxious to be seen. For he came over the fields at the back—across the ten-acre field that Mrs Bosenna carried last week—and a very tidy crop, I'm told, though but moderate long in the stalk. . . . Well, there he was comin' across the stubble—at a fine pace, too, with his coat 'pon his arm—when as I guess he spied me down in the road below and stopped short, danderin' about

an' pretendin' to poke up weeds with his stick. 'Some new-fashioned farmin',' thought I; 'weedin' stubble, and in August month too! I wonder who taught the Widow that trick'—for I won't be sure I reckernised your friend, not slap-off. But Cap'n Hunken it was: for to make certain I called and had a drink o' cider with Farmer Middlecoat, t'other side of the hill, an' *he'd* seen your friend frequent these last few weeks. . . . There now, you don't seem pleased about it!—an' yet 'twould be a very good match for him, if it came off."

Cai's head was whirling. He steadied himself to say, "You seem to take a lot of interest, Mr Philp, in other people's affairs."

"Heaps," said Mr Philp. "I couldn' live without it."

CHAPTER X.

REGATTA NIGHT.

It must be admitted, though with sorrow, that on the Committee Ship that day Captain Cai did not shine. He bungled two "flying starts" by nervously playing with his stop-watch and throwing it out of gear; he fired off winning guns for several hopelessly belated competitors; he made at least three mistakes in distributing the prize-money (and nobody who has not committed the indiscretion of paying out a first prize to a crew which has actually come in third can conceive the difficulty of enforcing its surrender); finally, he provoked something like a free fight on deck by inadvertently crediting two boats each with the other's time on a close handicap. It was the more vexatious, because he had in committee meetings taken so many duties upon himself, virtually cashiering many old hands, whose enforced idleness left them upon the ship with a run of the drinks, and whose resentment (as the day wore on) made itself felt in galling comments while, with no offer to help, they stood by and watched each painful development. The worst moment arrived when Captain Cai, who had replaced the old treasurer by a new and pushing man, and had, further, carried a resolution that prizes for all the major events should be paid by cheque, discovered his *protege* to be too tipsy to sign his name. This truly terrible emergency Captain Cai met by boldly subscribing his own name to the cheques. They would be drawn, of course, upon his private account, and he trusted the Committee to recoup him, while reading in the eyes of one or two that they had grasped this opportunity of revenge. But Regatta Day happens on a Wednesday, when the banks in Troy close early; and these cheques were accepted with an unflattering show of suspicion.

The longest day, however, has its end. All these vexations served at least to distract our friend's mind from the morning's discovery; and when at length, the last gun fired, he dropped into a boat to be pulled for shore, he was too far exhausted physically—having found scarcely a moment for bite or sup—to load his mind any more than did Walton's milk-maid "with any fears of many things that will never be."

He reached home, washed off the cares of the day and the reek of black gunpowder together in a warm bath, dressed himself with more than ordinary spruceness, and was descending the stair on his way to Bias's garden, when at the foot of them he was amazed to find Mrs Bowldler, seated and rocking herself to and fro with her apron cast over her head. Nay, in the dusk of the staircase he but just missed turning a somersault over her.

"Hullo! Why, what's the matter, missus?"

"Oh—oh!" sobbed Mrs Bowldler. "Bitter is the bread of poverty, deny it who can! And me, that have gone about Troy streets in my time with one pound fifteen's worth of feathers on my hat! Ostrich. And now to be laying a table for the likes of *her*, that before our reverses I wouldn't have seen in the street when I passed her!"

Captain Cai, already severely shaken by the events of the day, put a hand to his head.

"For goodness' sake, woman, talk sense to me! *Who* is it you're meanin'?—Mrs Bosenna? And what's this talk about layin' table?"

"Mrs Bosenna?" echoed Mrs Bowldler, who had by this time arisen from the stair. She drew her skirts close with a gesture of dignity. "It is not for me to drag Mrs Bosenna into our conversation, sir—far from it,—and I hope I know my place better. For aught I know, Captain Hocken—if, as a *menial*, I may use the term—"

"Not at all," said Captain Cai vaguely, as she paused with elaborate humility.

"For aught that I know, sir, Mrs Bosenna may be a Duchess fresh dropped from heaven. I *have* heard it mentioned in a casual way that she came from Holsworthy in Devon, and (unless my memory deceives me, sir) nothing relative to Duchesses was dropped—or not at the time, at least. But I pass no remarks on Mrs Bosenna. If she chose to marry an old man with her eyes open, it's not for me to cast it up, beyond saying that some folks know on which side their bread's buttered. *I* never dragged in Mrs Bosenna. You will do me that justice, I hope?"

"Then who the dickens is it you're talkin' about?"

"Which to mention any names, sir, it is not my desire; and the best of us can't help how we was born nor in what position. But farm service is farm service, call it what you please; and if a party as shall be nameless starts sitting down with her betters, perhaps you will tell me when and where we are going to end? That, sir, is the very question I put to Captain Hunken; and with all respect, sir, 'dammit' doesn't meet the case."

"Perhaps not," agreed Captain Cai, but not with entire conviction.

"It was all the answer Captain Hunken gave me, sir. 'Dammit,' he says,
'Mrs Bowldler, go and lay supper as I tell you, and we'll talk later.'"

"Supper? Where?"

"In the summer-house, sir: which it's not for me to talk about taking freaks into your head, and the spiders about, or the size o' them at this time o' the year. Captain Hunken and the lady and the other party are at present in your portion of the grounds, hoping that you'll join them in time for the fireworks; which it all depends if you like mixed company. And afterwards the guests"—Mrs Bowldler threw withering scorn into the word—"the guests is to adjourn to Captain Hunken's summer-house or what not, there to partake of supper. And if I'm asked to wait, sir," she concluded, "I must beg to give notice on the grounds that I'm only flesh and blood."

"O—oh!" said Captain Cai reflectively. It occurred to him that 'Bias had hit on a compromise with some tact. For the moment he was not thinking of Mrs Bowldler, and did not grasp the full meaning of her ultimatum.

She repeated it.

"Tut—tut," said he. "Who wants you to wait table against your will?
The boy'll do well enough."

"Which," said Mrs Bowldler, "I have took the opportunity of sounding
Palmerston, and he offers no objection."

"Very well, then."

Mrs Bowldler was visibly relieved. She heaved a sigh and fired a parting shot.

"I can only trust," she said, "if Palmerston waits as he'll catch up with no low tricks. Boys are so receptive!"

Cai descended to his garden, and at the foot of it found a trio of dark figures by the low fence of the edge of the cliff—'Bias and Mrs Bosenna in talk together, Dinah standing a little apart. "But that," thought he, "is only her place, as I've just been hearing." He had a just mind and was slow to suspect. Even now he could not assimilate the poison of Mr Philp's story. Everybody knew Mr Philp and his propensities. As Mr Toy the barber was wont to say, "Philp don't mean any harm: he just makes mischief like a bee makes honey."

So Cai said, "Cheer-o, 'Bias!"—his usual greeting—hoped he saw Mrs Bosenna well, and fell in on the other side of her by the breast-rail. The sky by this time was almost pitch dark, with a star or two shining between somewhat heavy masses of clouds. He begged Mrs Bosenna to be sure that she was comfortably anchored, as he put it. The rail was stout and secure; she might lean her weight against it without fear. He went on to apologise for his late arrival. The Committee Ship had been at sixes and sevens all day.

"Nobody could have guessed it, from the shore," said Mrs Bosenna graciously, and appealed to 'Bias. "Coming through the town I heard it on all hands."

"Not so bad," agreed 'Bias, and this, from him, was real praise.

"'Not a hitch from first to last—the most successful Regatta we've had for years.' Those were the very

expressions that reached me."

"We'll do better next time," Cai assured her, swallowing down the flattery. "Believe it or not, I had trouble enough to keep things straight; and being one to fret when they're not ship-shape—"

"*I* know!" murmured Mrs Bosenna sympathetically. "You could not bear to come away until you'd seen everything through. Well, as it happens, there are people in Troy who recognise this; and it does me good to hear you talk about 'next time.' Though, to be sure, one can't count next time on such perfect weather."

"There'll be rain in half an hour or less," grunted 'Bias.

"Oh, not before the fireworks, surely?" she exclaimed in pretty dismay.
"Do say, now, Captain Hocken!"

She turned to Cai, and then—

"Oh—oh!" she cried as, far away up the harbour, the signal rocket shot hissing aloft and exploded with a tremendous detonation. The roar of it filled their ears; but Cai scarcely heeded the roar. It reverberated from shore to shore, and the winding creeks took it up, to re-echo it; but Cai did not hear the echoes.

For (it was no fancy!) a small hand had clutched at his arm out of the darkness and was clinging to it, trembling, for protection. . . . Yes, it trembled there yet! . . . He put a hand over it, to reassure it and at the same time to detain it.

He could not see her face. The rocket was of the kind known as "fog detonator," and scattered no light with its explosion. He greatly desired to know whether her gaze was turned towards him or up at the dark sky, and this he could not tell. But the hand lay under cover of his arm, and, as moments went by was not withdrawn. . . .

Half a minute passed thus, and then (oh, drat the fireworks after all!) a salvo of rockets climbed the sky—luminous ones, this time. As they shot up with a *wroo—oo—sh!* the hand was snatched away, gently, swiftly. . . .

They burst in balls of fire—blue, green, yellow, crimson. They lit up the garden so vividly that each separate leaf on the laurustinus bushes cast its own sharp shadow. "O—oh!" breathed Mrs Bosenna, but now on a very different note, and as though her whole spirit drank deep, quenching a celestial desire. Cai, stealing a look, saw her profile irradiated, her gaze uplifted to the zenith.

The fiery shower died out, was extinct. Across the party hedge the boy Palmerston was heard inquiring if that was the way the angels behaved in heaven.

"Moderately so," responded the polite, high-pitched voice of Mrs Bowldler (who never could resist fireworks). "Moderately so, but without the accompanyin' igsplosion. That is, so far as we are permitted to guess. . . . And highly creditable to *them*," it wound up, with sudden asperity, "considering the things they sometimes have to look down on!"

"I'd *love*," aspired the romantic boy, "to go up—an' up—an' up, just like that, an' then bust—bust in red and yellow blazes."

"You will, one o' these days; that is, if you behave yourself. We have that assurance within us."

"I wouldn' mind the dyin' out," ingeminated Palmerston, "so's I could have one jolly good bust."

"In the land of marrow an' fatness we shall be doing of it permanent," Mrs Bowldler assured him for his comfort. "That's to say if we ever get there. But you just wait till they let off the set pieces. There's one of Queen Victoria, you can see the very eyelids. Sixty years Queen of England, come next June: with *God Bless Her* underneath in squibs like Belshazzar's Feast. And He *will*, too, from what I know of 'im."

As it turned out, at the distance from which our company viewed them, these set pieces laid some tax on the imagination. They were duly applauded to be sure; and when Mrs Bosenna exclaimed "How lovely!" and 'Bias allowed "Not so bad," their tribute scarcely differed, albeit paid in different coin. The rockets, however, won the highest commendation, and a blaze of coloured fires on the surrounding hills ran the rockets a close second.

Towards the close of the display a few drops of rain began to fall from the overcharged clouds: large premonitory drops, protesting against this disturbance of the upper air.

"That's the fine-alley!" announced 'Bias, as another detonator banged aloft, while a volcano of "fiery serpents" hissed and screamed behind it. "Let's run for shelter!"

He offered his arm. Cai did the same. But Mrs Bosenna—she had not clung to any one this time—very nimbly slipped between them and took Dinah for protector. She was in the gayest of moods, as they all scrambled up the wet steps to the roadway, and so down other flights of wet steps under the pattering rain to the shelter of 'Bias's summer-house.

"Just in time!" she panted, shaking the drops from her cloak. "And I can't remember whenever I've enjoyed myself so much. But—" as she looked about her and over the table—"what a feast!"

It was a noble feast. If Cai had been busy all day, no less had 'Bias been busy. There were lobsters; there were chickens, with a boiled ham; there was a cold sirloin of beef, for grosser tastes; there were jellies, tartlets, a trifle, a cherry pie. There was beer in a nine-gallon jar, and cider in another. There were bottles of fizzy lemonade, with a dash of which Mrs Bosenna insisted on diluting her cider. Her mirth was infectious as they feasted, while the rain, now descending in a torrent, drummed on the summer-house roof.

"How on earth we're ever to get home, Dinah, I'm sure I don't know!
And what's more, I don't seem to care, just yet."

Captain Cai and Captain 'Bias protested in unison that, when the time came, they would escort her home against all perils.

"You can trust me, ma'am, I hope?" blurted 'Bias.

"I can trust both of you, I hope." Mrs Bosenna glanced towards Cai, or so Cai thought.

"The jokes they keep makin'!" Palmerston reported to Mrs Bowldler. (With the utmost cheerfulness he continued running to and fro between summer-house and residence under the downpour.) "When Mrs Bosenna said that about a merrythought I almost split myself."

"There's a medium in all things," Mrs Bowldler advised him. "Stand-offish should be your expression when waiting at table; like as if you'd heard it all before several times, no matter how funny they talk. As for splitting, I shiver at the bare thought."

"Well, I didn't do it, really. I just got my hand over my mouth in time."

"And what did that other woman happen to be doing?" asked Mrs Bowldler.

"I partic'l'ly noticed," said Palmerston. "She was sittin' quiet and toyin' with her 'am."

The rain continuing, 'Bias at the close of supper sensationally produced two packs of cards and proposed that, as soon as Palmerston had removed the cloth, they should play what he called "a rubber to whist." He and Mrs Bosenna cut together; Cai with Dinah. Now the two captains could, as a rule, play a good hand at whist. On this occasion they played so abominably as to surprise themselves and each other. Dinah did not profess to be an expert, and Cai's blunders were mostly lost on her. But 'Bias disgraced himself before his partner, who neither reproached him nor once missed a trick.

"I can't tell what's come over me to-night," he confessed at the end of the second rubber.

"Regatta-day!" laughed Mrs Bosenna, and pushed the cards away. The wedding-ring on her third finger glanced under the light of the hanging lamp. "Dinah shall tell our fortunes," she suggested.

Dinah took the pack and proceeded very gravely to tell their fortunes. She began with Captain Hunken, and found that, a dark lady happening in the "second house," he would certainly marry one of that hue, with plenty of money, and live happy ever after.

She next attempted Captain Hocken's. "Well, that's funny, now!" she exclaimed, after dealing out the cards face uppermost.

"What's funny?" asked Cai.

"Why," said Dinah, after a long scrutiny, during which she pursed and unpursed her lips half a dozen times at least, "the cards are different, o' course, but they say the same thing—dark lady and all—and I can't make it other."

"No need," said Cai cheerfully, drawing at his pipe (for Mrs Bosenna had given the pair permission to

smoke). "So long as you let 'Bias and me run on the same lines, I'm satisfied. Eh, 'Bias?"

"But 'tis the *same* lady!"

"Oh! That would alter matters, nat'ch'rally."

Dinah swept the cards together again and shuffled them. "Shall I tell *your* fortune, mistress?" she asked mischievously.

"No," said Mrs Bosenna, rising. "The rain has stopped, and it's time we were getting home, between the showers."

Again Captain Cai and Captain 'Bias offered gallantly to accompany her to the gate of Rilla Farm; but she would have none of their escort.

"No one is going to insult me on the road," she assured them. "And besides, if they did, Dinah would do the screaming. That's why I brought her."

She had enjoyed her evening amazingly. She took her departure with a few happily chosen words which left no doubt of it.

After divesting himself of his coat that night, Captain Cai laid a hand on his upper arm and felt it timidly. Unless he mistook, the flesh beneath the shirt-sleeve yet kept some faint vibration of Mrs Bosenna's hand, resting upon it, thrilling it.

"The point is," said Cai to himself, "it can't be 'Bias, anyway. I felt pretty sure at the time that Philp was lyin'. But what a brazen fellow it is!"

Strangely enough, in his bedroom on the other side of the party wall Captain 'Bias stood at that moment deep in meditation. He, too, was rubbing his arm, just below the biceps.

Yet the explanation is simple. You have only to bethink you that Mrs Bosenna, like any other woman, *had two hands*.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS BOSENNA PLAYS A PARLOUR GAME.

"We have runned out simultaneous," announced Mrs Bowldler next morning, as the two friends sat at breakfast in Captain Cai's parlour, each immersed (or pretending to be immersed) in his own newspaper. They had slept but indifferently, and on meeting at table had avoided, as if by tacit consent, allusions to last night's entertainment. Each of the newspapers contained a full-column report of the Regatta, with its festivities, which gave excuse for silence. With a thrill of innocent pleasure Cai saw his own name in print. He harked back to it several times in the course of his perusal, and confessed to himself that it looked very well.

But Mrs Bowldler, too, had slept indifferently, if her eyes—which were red and tear-swollen—might be taken as evidence. Her air, as she brought in the dishes, spoke of sorrow rather than of anger. Finding that it attracted no attention, she sighed many times aloud, and at each separate entrance let fall some gloomy domestic news, dropping it as who should say, "I tell you, not expecting to be believed or even heeded, still less applauded for any vigilant care of your interests, but rather that I may not hereafter reproach myself."

"We have runned out simultaneous," she repeated as Captain Cai glanced up from the newspaper. "Which I refer to coals. Palmerston tells me there's not above two-and-a-half scuttlefuls in either cellar, search them how you will." (The search at any rate could not be extensive, since the cellars measured 8 feet by 4 feet apiece.)

"Which," resumed Mrs Bowldler, after a pause and a sigh, "it may be un-Christian to say so of a man that goes about in a bath-chair with one foot in the grave, but in my belief Mr Rogers sends us short weight."

"I'll order some more this very morning, eh, 'Bias?"

'Bias grunted approval.

"And while we're about it, we may as well order in a quantity,—as much as the sheds will hold. We've pretty well reached the end o' summer, an' prices will be risin' before long. . . . If I were you, Mrs Bowldler," added Cai with a severity beyond his wont, "I shouldn't call people dishonest on mere suspicion."

"If you were me, sir—makin' so bold,—you'd ha' seen more of the world with its Rogerses and Dodgerses. There now!" Mrs Bowldler set down a dish of fried potatoes and stood resigned. "Dismiss me you may, Captain Hocken, and this instant. I ask no less. It was bound to come. As my sister warned me, 'You was always high in the instep, from a child, and,' says she, 'high insteps are out of place in the Reduced.'"

"God bless the woman!" Cai laid down the paper and stared. "Who ever talked of dismissin' you?"

"I have rode in my time in a side-saddle: and that, sir, is not easily forgotten. But if you will overlook it, gentlemen," said Mrs Bowldler tearfully, "I might go on to mention that Palmerston have had a misfortune with a tumbler last night."

Cai continued to stare. "I *saw* a couple performin' in the street yesterday. How did the boy get mixed up in it?"

"He broke it clearin' up the *debree* in the summer-house after the visitors had gone," Mrs Bowldler explained. "Which being a new departure, I hope you will allow me to pass it by in his case with a caution."

In the course of the forenoon Cai paid a call at Mr Rogers's harbour-side store, where he found Mr Rogers himself superintending, from his invalid-chair, the weighing out of coal. Fancy Tabb was in attendance.

"Hullo!" Mr Rogers greeted him. "Well, the show went very well yesterday, and I see your name in the papers this morning."

Cai confessed that he, too, had seen it.

"And it won't be the last time either, not by a long way. I was wantin' a word with you. Cap'n Hunken,—eh, but that's the sort of friend to have—a man in a thousand—Cap'n Hunken was tellin' me, a few days back, as he'd a mind to see ye in public life."

"Thank'ee," said Cai. "'Bias has been nursin' that notion about me, I know. But I hope I can make up my own mind."

"He said 'twould be a distraction for ye."

"Very likely." Cai was nettled without knowing why. "But supposin' I don't need bein' distracted, not at this present?"

"Not at this present," Mr Rogers agreed. "Your friend allowed that; but he said as, all human life bein' uncertain, he was worried in mind what was goin' to become o' you in the years to come."

"Meanin' after his death?" asked Cai, with a touch of asperity.

"He didn' specify. It might ha' been death he had in mind, or it might ha' been anything you like. What he said was, 'I'd like to see old Cai fixed up wi' summat to while away his latter years.' That's how he said it, in those exact words, an' nothing could have been more kindly put."

"We're the same age, to a hair. I don't see why 'Bias should be in all this hurry, unless between ourselves . . . But you wanted a word with me."

"Yes, on that very question. I'm on the School Board, as it happens, and I'm thinkin'—between you an' me—to send in my resignation, which will create a vacancy."

"Oh?" said Cai, alert; "I didn' know you took an interest in education."

"I don't," Mr Rogers responded frankly. "I hate the damned thing. If it rested with me, I'd have no such freaks in the land. But there's always the rates to be kept down. And likewise there's the coal contract to be considered. Added to which," he wound up, "it gives you a pull in several little ways."

"I see," said Cai after a pause. "But, if that's so, why resign?"

"Because I'm broken in health, an' can't attend the meetings. I'd have resigned six months ago if it

hadn't been for Philp."

"Did Mr Philp persuade you to hold on?"

"You bet he didn't!" Mr Rogers grinned. "Philp wants the vacancy, and—well, I don't like Philp. I don't know how he strikes you?"

"To tell the truth," confessed Cai, "I can't say that I like him. He's too—inquisitive, shall we put it?—though I daresay he means it for the best."

"He's suspicious," said Mr Rogers. "You'd scarcely believe it now, but he came down to this very store, one day, and hinted that I gave short weight in coal. 'That's all right,' said I; 'are you come to lay an information?' 'No,' says he; 'I know the cost o' the law, an' I'm here as a friend, to give a fresh order. But,' says he, 'as between friends I'm goin' to see it weighed out.' 'Right again!' says I—'how much?' 'Twelve sacks will meet my requirements for the present,' says he; 'but I'd like 'em full this time, if you don't mind.' I'm givin' you the exact words as they occurred. 'Very well,' says I, 'you shall see 'em weighed an' put into the cart for ye, here an' now.' So I ordered Bill round wi' the cart; an' George, here, I told to pick out twelve o' the best sacks, lay 'em in a row 'long-side o' me, an' start weighin' very careful. When the scales turned the hundred-weight, I said, 'Now put in two great lumps for overplush and sack it up.' So he did, an' Bill took the bag out to the cart. 'Now for the next,' says I. Philp's a greedy fellow: he stuck there lookin' so hard at the weighin'-scoop, wonderin' how much overplush he'd get this go, he didn' see me twitch the tailmost sack out o' the line wi' th' end o' my crutch, nor Bill pick it up casual as he came along an' toss it away into the corner. When George had weighed out the eleven, I says to Philp, 'Well, now, I hope you're satisfied this time?' says I. He turns about, sees that all the sacks have gone, an' says he, 'That's the end, is it?' 'You're a treat, an' no mistake,' says I jokin'. 'We don't sell by the baker's dozen at this store:' for I could see he hadn' counted. 'Well,' says he, 'I must say there's no cause o' complaint this time,' and off drives Bill wi' the load. 'No cause o' complaint'!" Mr Rogers chuckled till the tears gathered in his eyes. He controlled his mirth and resumed, "I believe, though, the poor fool suspected something; for he was back at home before Bill had time to deliver more'n four sacks. But Bill, you see, always carries an empty sack or two to sit upon; so there was no countin' to be done at that end, d'ye see?"

"I see," said Cai gravely. It crossed his mind that he had been over-hasty in rebuking Mrs Bowldler.

"I wonder," put in the child Fancy, "how you can sit there an' tell such a story! That's just the sort o' thing people get put in hell for, as I've warned you again and again. It fairly gives me the creeps to hear you boastin' about it."

"Nothin' o' the sort," said her master cheerfully. He could not resent her free speaking, for she was necessary to him. Besides, it amused him. "You leave old Satan and Johnny Rogers to settle scores between themselves. If he takes me as he finds me I'll do the same by him—*an' he knows I'll count the sacks*. Cap'n Cai here'll tell you I'd never have put such a trick on Philp if he hadn' shown himself so suspicious. I hate a suspicious man. . . . An' that's one reason, Cap'n, why I want you to decide on takin' my place on the School Board. You see, I can choose my own time for resignin'; the Board itself fills up any vacancy that occurs between Elections: an' I can work the Board for you before Philp or any one else gets wind of it. That is, if I have your consent?"

"It's uncommonly good of you," said Cai. "I'll think it over, an' take advice, maybe."

"You know what advice your friend'll give you, anyway. For, I don't mind tellin' you, when he talked about your enterin' public life I dropped a hint to him."

"'Bias Hunken isn' the only friend I have in the world," answered Cai, with a sudden flush.

"I hope not," said Mr Rogers. "There's me, f'r instance: an' you've heard my opinion. That ought to be good enough for him—eh, child?" he turned to Fancy, who had been watching Cai's face with interest.

"If the Captain wants feminine advice," said Fancy, in a mocking grown-up tone, "we all love public men. It's our well-known weakness."

Cai wished them good-day, and took his leave in some confusion.

That mischievous child had divined his intent, almost as soon as he himself had divined it. Nay, now—or, to be accurate, three minutes later—it is odds that she knew it more surely than he: for he walked towards the Railway Station—that is, in the direction of Rilla Farm— telling himself at first that a stroll was, anyhow, a good recipe for clearing the brain; that Rogers's offer called on him to make, at short notice, an important decision.

He paused twice or thrice on his way, to commune with himself: the first time by the Passage Slip, where 'Bias and he had halted to view the traffic by the jetties. He conned it now again, but with unreceptive eyes. . . . "Rogers talks to me about takin' advice," soliloquised Cai. "It seems to me this is just one of those steps on which a man must make up his own mind. . . ."

He paused again beneath the shadow of the gasometer, possibly through association of ideas, because it suggested thoughts of 'Bias who had so much admired it—"'Bias means well, o' course. But I don't go about, for my part, schemin' how 'Bias is to amuse his latter days. Besides, 'Bias may be mistaken in more ways than one."

He had passed the Railway Station without being aware of it, and arrived in sight of Rilla gate, when he halted the third time. "A man must decide for himself, o' course, when it comes to the point. Still, in certain cases there's others to be considered. . . . If I knew how far she meant it! . . . She must ha' meant something." Yes, he felt the clutch on his biceps again and the small hand trembling under his large enfolding one. "She *must* ha' meant something. Not, to be sure, that it would seriously influence his decisions! But it seemed hardly fair not to consult her. . . . He would get her opinion, for what it was worth, not betraying himself. In advising him she might go—well, either a little further or a little backward. . . . Yet, once again, she *must* have meant something; and it wasn't fair, if she meant anything at all, to let old 'Bias go on dwelling in a fool's Paradise. Yes, certainly—for 'Bias's sake—there ought to be some clear understanding, and the sooner the better. . . ."

By the time Cai pressed the hasp of the gate, he had arrived at viewing himself as a man launched by his own strong will on a necessary errand, and carrying it through against inclination, for the sake of a friend.

"I hope it won't be a blow to him, whichever way it turns out," was the thought in Cai's mind as he knocked on the front door.

Dinah answered his knock: and, as she opened, Dinah could not repress a small start, which she hid, almost on the instant, under a demure smile of welcome.

"Captain Hocken? . . . Oh, yes! the mistress was within at this moment and entertaining a visitor. . . . Oh, indeed, no! there was no reason at all"—she turned, quick about, and he found himself following her and found himself, before he could protest, at the parlour door, which she flung open, announcing—

"Captain Hocken to see you, ma'am!"

Mrs Bosenna, seated at the head of her polished mahogany table and engaged upon a game of "spillikins"—which is a solitary trial of skill, and consists in lifting, one by one, with a delicate ivory hook a mass of small ivory pieces tangled as intricately as the bones in a kingfisher's nest—showed no more than a pretty surprise at the intrusion. She had, in fact, seen Captain Hocken pass the window some moments before; and it had not caused her to joggle the tiny ivory hook for a moment or to miss a moment's precision. What native quickness did for her, native stolidity did almost as well for Captain Hunken, who sat in an arm-chair by the fireplace smoking and watching her—and had been sitting and watching her for a good half an hour admiringly, without converse. "Spillikins" is a game during which, though it enjoins silence on the looker-on, a real expert can playfully challenge a remark or tolerate one, now and again. Also, you can make astonishing play with it if you happen to possess a pretty wrist and hand.

I throw in this explanation of "spillikins" to fill up a somewhat long and painful pause during which Cai and 'Bias without speech slowly questioned one another. Neither heeded the pretty tactful clatter with which Mrs Bosenna, after sweeping her ivory toys in a heap and starting up with a little cry of pleasure, held out her hand to the intruder. Cai took it as one in a dream. His eyes were fixed on 'Bias, as 'Bias, who had withdrawn the pipe from his mouth and replaced it, withdrew it again, and asked—

"Well, an' what brings *you* here?"

For a moment Cai seemed to be chewing down a cud in his throat. He ought to have been quicker, he felt. It is always a mistake to let your adversary (Good Lord! had it come to this?) set up an interrogatory.

"I might ask you the same question," he responded.

"But you didn'," said 'Bias solidly, crossing his legs and reaching for a box of matches from the shelf to relight his pipe. "Well?"

"Well, if you must know, I've called to consult Mrs Bosenna on a private matter of business."

This was a neat enough hint; yet strange to say it missed fire.
'Bias sucked at his pipe without budging, and answered—

"Same here."

"Please be seated, Captain Hocken," said Mrs Bosenna, covering inward merriment with the demurest of smiles. "You shall tell me your business later on—that's to say, if there's no pressing hurry about it?"

"There's no *pressin* hurry," admitted Cai. "It's important, though, in a way—important to *me*; and any ways more important than smokin' a pipe an' watchin' you play parlour games."

"That," said 'Bias sententiously, withdrawing his pipe from his lips, "isn' business, but pleasure."

"You may not believe it, Captain Hocken," protested Mrs Bosenna, "but 'spillikins' helps me to fix my thoughts. And you ought to feel flattered, really you ought—"

She laughed now, and archly—"Because, as a fact, I was fixing them on you at the very moment Dinah showed you in!" She threw him a look which might mean little or much. Cai took it to mean much.

"Ma'am,—" he began, but she had turned and was appealing to 'Bias.

"Captain Hunken and I were at that moment agreeing that a man of your abilities—a native of Troy, too—and, so to speak, at the height of his powers—ought not to be rusting or allowed to rust in a little place where so much wants to be done. For my part,"—her eyes still interrogated 'Bias,—"I could never live with a man, and look up to him, unless he put his heart into some work, be it farming, or public affairs, or what else you like. I put that as an illustration, of course: just to show you how it appeals to us women; and we *do* make up half the world, however much you bachelor gentlemen may pretend to despise us."

"That settles poor old 'Bias, anyhow," thought Cai, and at the same moment was conscious of a returning gush of affection for his old friend, and of some self-reproach mingling in the warm flow.

"Why, as for that, ma'am," said he, "though you put it a deal too kindly—'twas about something o' that natur' I came to consult you."

"School Board?" suggested 'Bias.

"That's right. I knew Rogers had dropped a hint to you about it: but o' course, seein' you here, I never guessed—"

Mrs Bosenna clapped her hands together. "And on that hint away comes Captain Hunken to ask my advice: knowing that I should be interested too. Ah, if only we women understood friendship as men do! . . . But you come and consult us, you see. . . . And now you must both stop for dinner and talk it over."

CHAPTER XII.

AMANTIUM IRAE.

"What I feel about it," said Cai modestly at dinner, "is that I mightn't be equal to the position, not havin' studied education."

"Education!" echoed Mrs Bosenna in a high tone of contempt and with a half vicious dig of her carving-fork into the breast of a goose that Dinah had browned to a turn. (Both Cai and 'Bias had offered to carve for her, but she had declined their services, being anxious to provoke no further jealousy. Also be it said that the operation lends itself, even better than does the game of spillikins, to a pretty display of hands and wrists). "Education! You know enough, I hope, to tell the Board to get rid of their latest craze. You'll hardly believe it," she went on, turning to 'Bias, "but I happened to pass the Girls' School the other day, and if there wasn't a piano going!—yes, actually a piano! When you come to think that the parents of some of those children don't earn sixteen shillings a-week!"

"Mons'rous," 'Bias agreed.

"But I don't understand, ma'am," said Cai, "that the children themselves play the piano. I made inquiries about that, it being a new thing since my day: and I'm told it's for the teachers to use in singin' lessson, an' to help the children to keep time at drill an' what-not."

"The teachers? And who are the teachers, I'd like to know?—Nasty stuck-up things, if they want the children to keep time, what's to prevent their calling out 'One, two—right, left' like ordinary people? But—oh, dear me, no! We're quite above *that!* So it's tinkle-tum, tinkle-tum, and all out of the rates."

"But 'one, two—right, left' wouldn' carry ye far in a singin' lesson," urged Cai.

"And who *wants* all this singin'? There's William Skin, my waggoner, for instance—five children, and a three-roomed cottage—all the children attending school, and regular, too. Pleasant life it would be for William, with all five coming home with 'The Sea, the Open Sea' in their mouths and all about the house when he gets home from work! Leastways it would be, if he wasn't providentially deaf."

"Is the woman deaf, too?" asked 'Bias.

"No. She believes in Education," said Mrs Bosenna. "She's *bound* to believe in anything that takes the children off her hands five days in the week."

Cai puckered his brow. "But," said he, harking back, "I made inquiries, too, who paid for the piano, and was told the teachers had collected the money by goin' round with a subscription-list an gettin' up little entertainments. So it doesn't come out of the rates."

"You appear to have had your eye on this openin' for some time," retorted Mrs Bosenna, with a faint flush of annoyance. She very much disliked being proved in the wrong. "And it's not very polite of you to contradict me!"

Cai was crestfallen at once. "I didn' mean it in that light, ma'am," he stammered; "and I only made inquiries, d'ye see? Bein' ignorant of so many things ashore. You'd be astonished how ignorant 'Bias an' me found ourselves, first-goin' off."

"Speak for yourself," put in 'Bias.

"You should have come to me," said Mrs Bosenna. "I could have told you all about Education, especially the sort that ought to be given to labourers' children; and it's astonishin' to me the way some people will talk on matters they know nothing about. My late husband made a study of the question, having been fined five shillin' and costs, the year before he married me, just for withdrawing a dozen children from school to pick his apples for him. As luck would have it, one of them fell off a tree and broke his leg, and that gave the Board an excuse to take the matter up. My husband argued it out with the Bench. 'The children like it,' he said, 'for it keeps 'em out of doors, and provides 'em with healthy exercise. If Education sets a boy against climbing for apples, why then,' says he, speaking up boldly, 'with your Worships' leave, Education must be something clean against Nature, as I always thought it was. And the parents like it, for the coppers it brings in. And the farmer gets his apples saved. If that's so,' says he, 'here's a transaction that benefits everybody concerned, instead of which the Board goes out of its way to harass me for it.' The chairman, Sir Felix, owned he was right, too. 'Bosenna,' says he, 'I can't answer you if I would. Nothing grieves me more, sitting here, than having to administer the law as I find it. But, as things are, I can't let you off with less.'"

This anecdote, and the close arguments used by Mr Bosenna, plunged Cai in thought; and for the remainder of the meal he sat abstracted, joining by fits and starts in the conversation, now and then raising his eyes to a portrait of the deceased farmer, an enlarged and highly-tinted photograph, which gazed down on him from the opposite wall. The gaze was obstinate, brow-beating, as though it challenged Cai to find a flaw in the defence: and Cai, although dimly aware of a fallacy somewhere, could not meet the challenge. He lowered his eyes again to his plate. He found himself wondering if, in any future circumstances, Mrs Bosenna would consent to hang the portrait in another apartment. . . .

Into so deep an abstraction it cast him, indeed, that when Mrs Bosenna arose to leave them to their wine and tobacco, he scrambled to his feet a good three seconds too late. . . . 'Bias (usually lethargic in his movements) was already at the door, holding it open for her.

What was worse—'Bias having closed the door upon her, returned to his seat with a slight but insufferable air of patronage, and—passed the decanter of wine to him!

"You'll find it pretty good," said 'Bias, dropping into his chair and heavily crossing his legs.

Cai swallowed down a sudden tide of rage. "After you!" said he with affected carelessness. "I've tasted it afore."

"Well—if you *won't*—" 'Bias stretched out a slow arm, filled his glass, and set down the decanter beside his own dessert plate. "You'll find those apples pretty good," he went on, sipping the wine, "though not up to the Cox's Orange Pippins or the Blenheim Oranges that come along later." He

smacked his lips. "You'd better try this port wine. Maybe 'tis a different quality to what you tasted when here by yourself."

"Thank 'ee," answered Cai. "I said 'after you.'"

"Oh?" 'Bias pushed the decanter. "You weren't very tactful just now, were you?" he asked after a pause. "*Is* it the same wine?"

"O' course it is. . . . *When* wasn't I tactful?"

"Why, when you upped an' contradicted her like that." 'Bias started to fill his pipe. "Women are—what's the word?—sensitive; 'specially at their own table."

"I *didn't* contradict her," maintained Cai. "Leastways—"

"There's no reason to lose your temper about it, is there? . . . You gave me that impression, an' if you didn' give her the same, I'm mistaken."

"I'm not losin' my temper."

"No? . . . Well, whatever you did, 'tis done, an' no use to fret. Only I want you and Mrs Bosenna to be friends—she bein' our landlady, so to speak."

"Thank 'ee," said Cai again, holding a match to his pipe with an agitated hand. "If you remember, I ought to know it, havin' had all the early dealin's with her."

"She's very well disposed to you, too," said 'Bias. "Nothing could have been kinder than the way she spoke when I mentioned this School-Board business: nothing. We'd be glad, both of us, to see you fixed up in that job."

"I wonder you didn't think of takin' it on yourself."

"I did," confessed 'Bias imperturbably.

"*You?* . . . Well, what next?"

"I thought of it. . . . Only for a moment, though. First place, I didn' want to stand in your way; an' next, as you was sayin' just now, 'tis a ticklish matter when a man starts 'pon a business he knows nothing about. But you'll soon pick it up, bein' able to give your whole time to it."

"That might apply to you."

To this 'Bias made no reply. He smoked on, pressing down the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe. The two friends sat in a constrained silence, now and again pushing the wine politely.

"When you are ready?" suggested 'Bias at length—as Cai helped himself to a final half-glassful, measuring it out with exactitude and leaving as much or may be a trifle more at the bottom of the decanter. "Ladies don't like to be kept waitin' too long."

Cai swallowed the wine and stood up, swallowing down also an inward mirth to which his anger had given way. During the last minute or two he had been recalling many things,—his first meeting with Mrs Bosenna; his first call at Rilla; her remarks on that occasion, upon the grace of a cultivated manner in men; some subsequent glances, intimate almost; above all, the clutch upon his protective arm. . . . He felt sorry for 'Bias. Under the rosy influence of Mrs Bosenna's wine he felt genuinely sorry for 'Bias, while enjoying the humorous aspect of 'Bias's delusion. 'Bias—for whose lack of polish he had from the first made Excuse—'Bias laying down the law on what ladies liked and disliked!

They arose heavily and strolled forth to view the livestock. It was wonderful with what ease these two retired seamen, without instruction, dropped into the farm-master's routine. So (if in other words) Dinah remarked, glancing out of the mullioned window of the kitchen as she fetched a fresh faggot for the hearth on which her mistress had already begun to set out the heavy-cake and potato-cake in preparation for tea-time.

"—the *afternoon* habits, I mean," explained Dinah. "Just glimpsy out o' window, mistress, an' see the pair o' men down there—along studyin' the pigs. Wouldn' know a pig's starn from his stem, I b'lieve, if th' Almighty hadn' clapped on a twiddling tail, same as they put in books to show where a question ends. When they come to that, they're safe. . . . But from their backs, mistress—do 'ee but take a look now, do—you wouldn' guess they weren't just as knowledgeable as th' old master himself, as used to judge pigs for the Royal Cornwall—the poor old angel! I can see him now, after the best part of a bottle o' sherry, strollin' out to the styes."

"Don't, Dinah!" entreated Mrs Bosenna, stealing a glance nevertheless: which Dinah demurely noted. "It's—it's all so *recent!*"

"Ay," agreed Dinah, and mused, standing boldly before the window, knuckles on hips. "You couldn' say now, takin' 'em separate, what it is that puts me more in mind of th' old master."

"Go about your work, you foolish woman."

"I suppose," said Dinah, withdrawing her gaze reluctantly and obeying, "there's always a *something* about a man!"

Mrs Bosenna stood by the kitchen-table, patting up another barm-cake. She had a hand even lighter than Dinah's with flour and pastry. . . . The two captains had moved on to the gate of Home Parc, and she could still espy them past the edge of the window. She saw Captain Hunken draw his hand horizontally with a slow explanatory gesture and then drop it abruptly at a right angle.

'Bias was, in fact, at that moment expounding to Cai, point by point and in a condescending way, the right outline of a prize Devon shorthorn. Mrs Bosenna (who had taught him the little he knew) guessed as she watched the exposition, pursing her lips.

"A trifle o' bluffness in the entry don't matter, if you understand me," said 'Bias, retrieving his lesson. "Aft o' that, no sheer at all; a straight line till you come to the rump,—or, as we'll say, for argyment's sake, the counter—an' then a plumb drop, plumb as a quay-punt."

"Where did you pick up all this?" asked Cai.

"I don't make any secret about it," 'Bias owned. "Mrs Bosenna taught me. Though, when you come to think it out, 'tis as straightforward as sizing up a vessel. You begin by askin' yourself what the objec' in question—call it a cow, or call it a brigantine—was designed for. Now what's a cow *designed* for?"

"Milk, I suppose," hazarded Cai.

"Very well, then, I take you at that: the squarer the cow the more she holds. It stands to reason."

"I don't know." Cai made some show of obstinacy, but, it is feared, rather to test his friend than to arrive at the truth. "A round cow,— supposing there was such a thing—"

"But there isn't. It's out of the question."

"I speak under correction," said Cai thoughtfully; "but looking at what cows I've seen,—end on. And anyway, you can't call a cow's udder square; not in any sense o' the word."

"What beats me, I'll confess," said 'Bias, shifting the argument, "is how these butchers and farmers at market can cast their eye over a bullock an' judge his weight to a pound or two. 'Tis a trick, I suppose; but I'd like to know how it's worked."

"Why?"

"If 'twas a vessel, now, an' tons burden in place o' pounds' weight, you an' me might guess pretty right. But when it comes to a bullock!"

"I don't see," objected Cai, "how it consarns either of us."

"You don't?" asked 'Bias with a look which, for him, was quick and keen.

"To be sure I don't," answered Cai. "If it happened as I wanted to buy a bullock to eat, all at one time —and if so be as I found myself at market in search o' one,—I should be anxious about the weight. That goes without sayin'. An' the odds are I should ask the honestest-lookin' fellow handy to give a guess for me. But with you an' me 'tis a question o' two pounds o' rump steak. I know by the look if 'tis tender, and I can tell by a look at the scales if 'tis fair weight. I don't ask to be shown the whole ox."

"I daresay you're right," said 'Bias, apparently much 'relieved. "It'll save a lot of trouble, anyhow, if you're goin' in for public life. A man in public life can't afford time for details such as weighin' bullocks. But, for my part, I'm beginnin' to take an interest in agriculture."

"And why not?" agreed Cai. "There's no prettier occupation than farmin', so long as a man contents himself with lookin' on an' don't start practising it. Actual farmin' needs capital, o' course."

To this 'Bias made no response, but continued to stare thoughtfully at

Mrs Bosenna's kine.

"After all," pursued Cai cheerfully, "these little interests are the salt of a leisurable man's life. I dare say, f'r instance, as Philp gets quite an amount o' fun out o' funerals, though to me it seems a queer taste. Every man to his hobby; and yours, now, I can understand. When you've finished potterin' around the garden, weedin' an' plantin', —an', by the way, the season for plantin' isn't far off. It's about time we looked up those autumn catalogues we talked so much about back in the spring."

"True," said 'Bias. "It has slipped my mind of late. An' you not mentionin' either—"

"Somehow it had slipped mine too. . . . All that Regatta business, I suppose. . . . And now, if I am to take up with this School Board there'll be more calls on my time. But there! If I turn over both the gardens to you, I reckon you won't object. 'Twill be so much the more occupation,—not o' course," added Cai, "that I want to shirk doin' my share. But, as I was sayin', when you've done your day's job at the garden, an' taken your stroll down to the quay to pick up the evenin' gossip, what healthier wind-up can there be than to stretch your legs on a walk to one of the two-three farms in the parish, an' note how the crops are comin' on, an' the beef an' mutton, so to speak, an' how the cows are in milk; an' maybe drop in for tea an' a chat?—here at Rilla, f'r instance, where you'll always be sure of a welcome."

"You're sure o' that?" asked 'Bias. The words came slowly, heavily charged with meaning.

"Why, o' course you will! . . . 'Twas your own suggestion, mind you. 'Takin' an' interest in agriculture' was your words. I don't promise, o' course, that you'll make much of it, first along. Learnin's half the fun—"

But here Mrs Bosenna's voice called to them, and they turned together almost guiltily to see her climbing the slope above the mow-hay, with springy gait and cheeks charmingly flushed by recent caresses of the kitchen-fire.

"If you care for it," she greeted them, "there's just time for a stroll to Higher Parc and back while Dinah lays tea. A breath of fresh air will do me all the good in the world"—little she looked to be in need of it—"and I don't suppose either of you knows what a glorious view you'll get up there? All the harbour and shipping at your feet, and miles of open Channel beyond! My poor dear Robert used to say there wasn't its equal in Cornwall."

Cai could assure her in all innocence that he had never heard tell of Higher Parc and its famous view; nor did it occur to him to turn and interrogate his friend, who was flushing guiltily.

If Mrs Bosenna saw the flush, she ignored it. She led the way to a stile; clambered over it, declining their help, agile as a maid of seventeen; and struck a footpath slanting up and across a turnip-field at the back of the farmstead. The climb, though not steep, was continuous, and the chimneys of Rilla lay some twenty or thirty feet below them, when they reached a second stile and, overing it, stood on the edge of a mighty field, the extent of which could not be guessed, for it domed itself against the sky, cutting off all view of hedge or limit beyond.

"This is Higher Parc," announced Mrs Bosenna. "Ten acres."

"Oh?" exclaimed Cai with a sudden flash of memory. "And stubble!"

He glanced at 'Bias. But 'Bias, who, if he heard the innuendo, read nothing in it, was gazing up the slope as though he had never set eyes on Higher Parc before in all his life.

They made their way up across the stubble, Mrs Bosenna picking her steps daintily among the sharp stalks that shone like a carpet stiff with gold against the level sunset. The shadows of the three walked ahead of them, stretching longer and longer, vanishing at length over the ridge. . . . And the view from the ridge was magnificent, as Mrs Bosenna had promised. The slope at their feet hid the jetties—or all save the tops of the loading-cranes: but out in midstream lay the sailing vessels and steamships moored to the great buoys, in two separate tiers, awaiting their cargoes. Of the sailing vessels there were Russians, with no yards to their masts, British coasters of varying rig, Norwegians, and one solitary Dutch galliot. But the majority flew the Danish flag—your Dane is fond of flying his flag, and small blame to him!—and these exhibited round bluff bows and square-cut counters with white or varnished top-strakes and stern-davits of timber. To the right and seaward, the eye travelled past yet another tier, where a stumpy Swedish tramp lay cheek-by-jowl with two stately Italian barques—now Italian-owned, but originally built in Glasgow for traffic around the Horn—and so followed the curve of the harbour out to the Channel, where sea and sky met in a yellow flood of potable gold. To the left the river-gorge wound inland, hiding its waters, around overlapping bluffs studded with farmsteads and (as the eye threaded its way into details) peopled here and there with small colonies of farm-folk working hard, like so many groups of ants,—some cutting, others saving, the yellow corn, all busy forestalling night, when

no man can work.

Uplands, where the harvesters
Pause in the swathe, shading their eyes, to watch
Or barge or schooner stealing up from sea:
Themselves in twilight, she a twilit ghost
Parting the twilit woods.

. . . While Cai and 'Bias stood at gaze, drinking it all in, Mrs Bosenna—whose senses were always quick—turned, looked behind her, and uttered a little scream.

"Steers! . . . That Middlecoat's steers—they've broken fence again!
Oh—oh! and whatever shall I do?"

Cai and 'Bias, wheeling about simultaneously, were aware of a small troop of horned cattle advancing towards them leisurably, breasting the golden rays on the stubble-field, and spreading as they advanced.

"Do, ma'am?" echoed 'Bias, taking in the situation at a glance.
"Why, turn 'em back, to be sure!" He started off to meet the herd.

"—While you run for the stile," added Cai, preparing to follow as bravely. But Mrs Bosenna caught his arm.

"I'm—I'm so silly," she confessed in a tremulous whisper, "about horned beasts—when they don't belong to me."

"Dangerous, are they?" asked Cai. He lingered, although 'Bias had advanced some twenty paces to meet the herd, three or four of which had already come to a halt, astonished at being thus interrupted in an innocent ramble. "We'll head 'em off while you run."

"No, no!" pleaded Mrs Bosenna; and Cai hung irresolute, for the pressure on his arm was delicious. It crossed his mind for a moment that a lady so timid with cattle had no business to be dwelling alone at Rilla Farm.

"It's different—with my own cows," gasped Mrs Bosenna, as if interpreting and answering this thought in one breath. "I'm used to them—but Mr Middlecoat will insist on keeping these wild beasts!—though he knows I'm a lone woman and they're not to be held by any fences—"

"I'd like to give that Middlecoat a piece of my mind," growled Cai, and swore. His arm by this time was about Mrs Bosenna's waist, and she was yielding to it. But he saw 'Bias still steadily confronting the herd— saw him lift an arm, a hand grasping a hat, and wave it violently—saw thereupon the steers swing about and head back for the gate, heads down, sterns heaving and plunging. Cai swore again and reluctantly loosened his embrace.

"Run, *dear!*" The word drummed in his ears as he pelted to 'Bias's rescue. 'Bias, as a matter of fact, needed neither rescue nor support. The steers after spreading and scattering before his first onset, were converging again in a rush back upon the open gateway. They charged through it in a panic, jostling, crushing through the narrow way: and 'Bias, still frantically waving his hat, had charged through it after them before Cai, assured now that his friend had the mastery, halted and drew breath, holding a hand to his side.

'Bias had disappeared. Cai heard his voice, at some little distance, still chivvying the steers down the lane beyond the gate. . . . Then, as it seemed, another voice challenged 'Bias's, and the two were meeting in angry altercation.

"Mr Middlecoat!" gasped a voice close behind him. Cai swung about, and to his amazement confronted Mrs Bosenna. Instead of retreating she had followed up the pursuit.

"But I told you—" he began, in a tone of indignant command.

"You don't know Mr Middlecoat's temper. I'm afraid—if they meet—"
She hurried by him, towards the gate.

Cai took fresh breath and dashed after her. They passed the gateway neck and neck. At a turning some fifty yards down the lane—Cai leading now by a stride or two—they pulled up, panting.

'Bias, his back blocking the way, stood there confronting a young farmer: and the young farmer's face was red with a bull-fury.

"You damned trespasser!"

"Trespasser?" echoed 'Bias, squaring up. "What about your damned trespassing cattle?"

Mrs Bosenna stepped past Cai and flung herself between the combatants. Strange to say she ignored 'Bias, and faced the enemy, to plead with him.

"Mr Middlecoat, how can you be so foolish? He's as good as a prize-fighter!"

The young farmer stared and lowered his guard slowly.

"Your servant, ma'am! . . . A prize-fighter? Why couldn't he have told me so, at first?"

CHAPTER XIII.

FAIR CHALLENGE.

Again the two friends traversed back the valley road in silence: but this time they made no attempt to deceive themselves or to deceive one another by charging their constraint upon the atmosphere or the scenery. Each was aware that their friendship had a crisis to be overcome; each sincerely pitied the other, with some twinge of compunction for his own good fortune; each longed to make a clean breast —"a straight quarrel is soonest mended," says the proverb,—and each, as they kept step on the macadam, came separately to the same decision, that the occasion must be taken that very evening, when pipes were lit after supper. The reader will note that even yet, on the very verge of the crisis, Cai and 'Bias owned:

> "Two souls with but a single thought,
> Two hearts that beat as one."

Now, in accordance with routine, supper should have been served that evening at 'Bias's table. But Cai—on his way upstairs to titivate— perceived that the lamp was lit and the cloth spread in his own parlour; and, as he noted this with a vague surprise, encountered Mrs Bowldler.

"Which, if it is agreeable, we are at home to Captain Hunken this evening," Mrs Bowldler began, in a panting hurry, and continued with a catch of the breath, "Which if you see it in a different light, I must request of you, sir, to allow Palmerston to carry down my box, and you may search it if you wish."

"Oh! Conf—" began Cai in his turn, and checked himself. "I beg your pardon, ma'am; but it really does seem as if I never reach home nowadays without you meet me at the foot of the stairs, givin' notice. What's wrong this time?"

"If you drive me to it, sir," said Mrs Bowldler in an aggrieved tone, "it's Captain Hunken's parrot."

"Captain Hunken's parrot?" echoed Cai, genuinely surprised; for, in his experience, this bird was remarkable, if at all, for an obese lethargy. It could talk, to be sure. Now and again it would ejaculate "Scratch Polly," or "Polly wants a kiss," in a perfunctory way; but on the whole he had never known a more comfortable or a less loquacious bird.

"He—he made a communication to me this afternoon," said Mrs Bowldler delicately; "or, as you might prefer to put it, he passed a remark."

"What was it?"

Mrs Bowldler cast a glance behind her at the gas jet. "I really couldn't, sir! Not even if you were to put out the light; and as a gentleman you won't press it."

"Certainly not," Cai assured her. He mused. "It's odd now; but I've always regarded that parrot as rather a dull bird: though of course I've never hinted that to 'Bias—to Captain Hunken."

"He wasn't dull this afternoon," asseverated Mrs Bowldler. "Oh, not by any manner of means!"

"Has he ever—er—annoyed you in this way before?"

"Never, sir."

"Has the boy ever heard him use—er—this kind o' language?"

"Which if you understand me, sir," explained Mrs Bowldler still more delicately, "the remark in

question would not apply to a male party: not by any stretch. You may answer me, sir, that—the feathered tribes not being Christians—they don't calculate who's listening, but behave as the spirit moves them, like Quakers. To which I answer *you*, sir, that makes it all the worse. As it transpired, Palmerston was at the moment brushing down these very stairs, here, in the adjoining: which some might call it luck and others again Providence. But put it we'd happened to be cleaning out the room together, I must have sunk through the floor, and what would have happened to the boy's morals I leave you to guess."

Cai had to allow the cogency of this.

"As a matter of fact, sir," Mrs Bowldler continued, "I sounded Palmerston later. He declares to me he has never heard the creature use any bad language; and I believe him, for he went on to say that if he *had*, he'd have mentioned it to me. But you see my position, sir? It might even have happened with you two single gentlemen in the room. . . . Stay another twenty-four hours in the house I will not, with the chance of it staring me in the face."

Cai rubbed his chin. "I see," said he after a moment. "Well, it's awkward, but I'll speak to Captain Hunken."

He did so, almost as soon as he and 'Bias had gloomily finished their supper—a repast which largely consisted of odds-and-ends (the *debree*, in Mrs Bowldler's language) of yester-night's banquet. Each, as he ate, unconsciously compared it—such is our frail humanity—less with the good cheer of which it should have been a reminder than with the fresh abundance of Mrs Bosenna's larder. A bachelor table and bachelor habits are all very well—until you have tasted the other thing.

To talk of the parrot, for which 'Bias had an inexplicable affection, might be awkward, as Cai had promised. But it was less ticklish anyhow than to broach the subject uppermost in the minds of both; and Cai opened on it with a sense of respite, if not of relief.

"By the way," said he, lighting his pipe and crossing his legs, "I had a chat with Mrs Bowldler before supper. She came to me complainin' about"—(puff)—"about your parrot. It seems she has taken a dislike to the bird."

"Finds his talk monotonous?" suggested 'Bias after a pause, during which he, too, puffed. Strange to say, he showed no vexation. His tone was complacent even.

"I wouldn' say that azackly. . . ."

"I'll admit 'tis monotonous," 'Bias went on, between puffs. "Call it nothing at all if you like: I don't take no truck in birds'-talk, for my part—don't mind how same it is. If that's the woman's complaint, she was free to teach it new words any time."

"But it isn't."

"Then I don't see what grievance she can have," said 'Bias with entire composure. "The bird's shapely and well-grown beyond the usual. . . . Perhaps her objection is to parrots in general—eh?" 'Bias withdrew the pipe-stem from his lips and stared hardily along it. "There's no need to trouble, anyway," he added, "for, as it happens, I'm givin' the bird away."

"Eh?" The interrogation sounded like a faint echo.

"To-morrow. To Mrs Bosenna. Why shouldn't I?"

Cai felt his body stiffen as he sat. For the moment he made no answer: then—

"Well, 'tis your affair—in a sense," he said; "but I shouldn't, if I was you."

"I promised it to her this very day. She was confidin' to me that she finds it lonely up at Rilla, and I don't wonder."

"She've confided the same thing to me several times, off and on," said Cai.

"Ah?" . . . 'Bias was unmoved. "Then maybe it'll help ye to guess how the land lies."

"It do, more or less," Cai agreed: and then, as a bright thought struck him. "Why shouldn't we lend her the musical box? It's—it's more reliable, any way."

"'Twouldn't be much account as a pet, would it?" retorted 'Bias. "Now look here, Cai!" he swung about in his chair, and for the first time since the conversation started the pair looked one another

straight in the eyes. "You an' me'd best come to an understandin' and get it over. I don't mind tellin' you, as man to man, that I've been thinkin' things out; and the upshot is—I don't say 'tis certain, but 'tis probable—that in the near futur' I shall be spendin' a heap o' my time at Rilla."

"You'll be welcome. I can almost answer for it," Cai assured him heartily.

"You've noticed it, eh? . . . Well, that saves a lot o' trouble." With a grunt of relief 'Bias turned his gaze again upon the empty grate and sat smoking for a while. "I'd a sort o' fear it might come on ye sudden . . . eh? What's the matter?" He turned about again, for Cai had emitted an audible groan.

"I'm sorry for ye, 'Bias—you can't think—"

"Oh, you can stow that bachelor chaff," interrupted 'Bias with entire cheerfulness. "I used to feel that way myself, or pretend to. It's different when a man *knows*."

"I can't let ye go on like this!" Cai groaned again. "Stop it, 'Bias— do!"

"Stop it?" 'Bias stared. He was plainly amazed.

"I mean, stop talkin' about it! I do, indeed."

Still 'Bias stared. Of a sudden a partial light broke in upon him. "Good Lord!" he muttered. He arose, knocked the ashes from his pipe, laid it carefully on the chimney-shelf, slid his hands under his coat-tails, and very solemnly faced about.

"I'd an inklin' o' this, once or twice, and I don't mind confessin' it," said he, looking down with a compassionate air which Cai found insupportable. "Tho' 'twas no more than an inklin', and I put it aside, seein' as how no man with eyes could mistake the one she favoured."

"Meanin' me, o' course," interjected Cai, jabbing the tobacco down in his pipe.

"*You?*" 'Bias opened his eyes wide: then he smiled an indulgent smile. "Ho—you must excuse me—but if that isn' too rich!"

"You needn't start grinnin' like that, or you may end by grinnin' on the wrong side of your face." Cai, instead of pitying his friend's infatuation, was fast losing his temper. "What'd you say if I told you I had proofs?"

"I'd say you was a plumb liar," answered 'Bias with equal promptness, candour, and aplomb. "Proofs? *What* proofs?"

Cai hesitated a moment. . . . After all, what proof had he to cite?
A gentle pressure of the arm, for example, is not producible evidence.
"Never you mind," said he sullenly. "You'll have proof enough when the
time comes."

'Bias received this with a dry smile. "I thought as much. You haven't any, my sonny—not so much as would cover a threepenny-bit."

"You have, I suppose?" sneered Cai.

"Heaps."

"Very well; let's have a sample. . . . You won't find it on the mantelpiece," for 'Bias had turned about and was picking up his pipe again with great deliberation.

"I've no wish to hurt your feelin's undooly," said he, eyeing the bowl for a moment and tapping out the ashes into his palm.

"Don't mind *me!*"

"But I *do* mind ye. . . . See here now, Cai," he resumed after a short pause, "we've known one another —let me see—how long?"

"Seventeen years, come the twenty-first of November next," quickly responded Cai, fumbling at the tobacco-jar. "In Rotterdam, if you'll remember—our vessels lyin' alongside. 'Hullo!' says you."

"Far as I remember, you asked me aboard."

"Yes. 'Hullo!' says you; 'that's a pretty-lookin' craft o' your'n.' 'She'll work in' an' out o' most places,' says I. 'Speedy too, I reckon,' says you, 'for a hard-wood ship; though a bit fine forra'd. A wet boat, I

doubt?' 'Not a bit,' says I; 'that's a mistake strangers are apt to make about the *Hannah Hoo*. Like to step aboard an' cast a look over her fittin's? I can show ye something in the way of teak panels,' says I: and you came. That's how it began," wound up Cai, staring hard at the tobacco-jar, for—to tell the truth —a faint mist obscured his vision.

'Bias, too, was staring hard, down upon the hearth-rug between his feet.

"Ay; an' from that day to this never a question atween us we couldn' settle by the toss of a coin." He continued to stare down gloomily. "Tossin' won't help us, not in this case," he added.

"It wouldn't be respectful."

"It wouldn't be fair, neither. . . . You may talk as you please, Cai, but the widow favours me."

"I asked ye for proofs just now, if you remember."

"So you did. And if you remember I asked you for the same, not two minutes afore. We can't give 'em, neither of us: and, if we could, why—as you said a moment since—'twouldn't be respectful. Let's play fair then, damn it!"

"Certainly," agreed Cai, striking a match and holding it to his pipe.
(But his hand shook.) "That's if you'll suggest how."

'Bias mused for a space. "Very well," said he at length; "then I'll suggest that we both sit down and write her a letter; post the letters together, and let the best man win."

"Couldn't be fairer," agreed Cai, after a moment's reflection.

"When I said the best man," 'Bias corrected himself, "I meant no more than to say the man she fancies. No reflection intended on you."

"Nor on yourself, maybe?" hinted Cai, with a last faint touch of exasperation. It faded, and—on an impulse of generosity following on a bright inspiration which had on the instant occurred to him— he suggested, "If you like, we'll show one another the letters before we post 'em?"

"That's as you choose," answered 'Bias. "Or afterwards, if you like—
I shall keep a rough copy."

Now this was said with suspicious alacrity: for Cai was admittedly the better scholar and, as a rule, revised 'Bias's infrequent business letters and corrected their faults of spelling. But—dazzled as he was by his own sudden and brilliant idea—no suspicion occurred to him.

"It's a bargain, then?"

"It's a bargain."

They did not shake hands upon it. Their friendship had always been sincere enough to dispense with all formalities of friendship; they would not have shaken hands on meeting (say) after a twenty years' separation. They looked one another in the eyes, just for an instant, and they both nodded.

"Cribbage to-night?" asked 'Bias.

"If 'tisn't too late," answered Cai.

He pulled out his watch, whilst 'Bias turned about to the mantel-shelf and the clock his bulk had been hiding.

"Nine-thirty," announced Cai.

"Almost to a tick," agreed 'Bias. "'Stonishing what good time we've kept ever since we set this clock."

"'Stonishing," Cai assented.

They played two games of cribbage and retired to bed. As he undressed Cai remembered his omission to warn 'Bias explicitly of what—according to Mrs Bowldler—the parrot was capable. The warning had been once or twice on the tip of his tongue during the early part of the conversation: but always (as he remembered) he had been interrupted.

"I'll warn him after breakfast to-morrow," said Cai to himself magnanimously, as he arose from his prayers. "Poor old 'Bias—what a good fellow it is, after all!"

He slept soundly, and was awakened next morning by Palmerston with the information, "Breakfast in the adjoining to-day, sir!"—this and "We are at home for breakfast" being the alternative formulae invented by Mrs Bowldler.

"And Captain Hunken requests of you not to wait," added Palmerston, again repeating what Mrs Bowldler had imparted.

"Is he lying late to-day?" asked Cai.

"He have a-gone out for an early ramble," answered Palmerston stolidly.

"Ah! to clear his brain—poor old 'Bias!" said Cai to himself, and thought no more about it. Nor did it occur to his mind that, overnight, Mrs Bowldler had point-blank refused to lay another meal in the room inhabited by the parrot, until, descending to 'Bias's parlour and becoming aware, as he lifted the teapot, that the room was brighter and sunnier than usual, he cast a glance toward the window. The parrot-cage no longer darkened it. Parrot and cage, in fact, were gone.

He turned sternly upon Mrs Bowldler. But Mrs Bowldler, setting down a dish of poached eggs, had noted his glance and anticipated his question.

"Which," said she, "I am obliged to you, sir, and prompter Captain Hunken could not have behaved. A nod, as they say, is as good as a wink to a blind horse; but Captain Hunken, being neither blind nor a horse, and anything so vulgar as winking out of the question, it may not altogether apply, though the result is the same."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LETTERS.

Having breakfasted, read his newspaper, and smoked his pipe (and still no sign of the missing 'Bias), Cai brushed his hat and set forth to pay a call on Mr Peter Benny.

This Mr Peter Benny—father of Mr Shake Benny, whose acquaintance we have already made—was a white-haired little man who had known many cares in life, but had preserved through them all a passionate devotion to literature and an entirely simple heart: and these two had made life romantic for him, albeit his cares had been the very ordinary ones of a poor clerk with a long family of boys and girls, all of whom—his wife aiding—he had brought up to fear the Lord and seen fairly started in life. Towards the close of the struggle Fortune had chosen to smile, rewarding him with the stewardship of Damelioc, an estate lying beside the river some miles above Troy. This was a fine exchange against a beggarly clerkship, even for a man so honest as Peter Benny. But he did not hold it long. On the death of his wife, which happened in the fifth year of their prosperity, he had chosen to retire on a small pension, to inhabit again (but alone) the waterside cottage which in old days the children had filled to overflowing, and to potter at literary composition in the wooden outhouse where he had been used, after office hours, to eke out his 52 pounds salary by composing letters for seamen.

He retained his methodical habits, and Cai found him already at work in the outhouse, and thoroughly enjoying a task which might have daunted one of less boyish confidence. He was, in fact, recasting the 'Fasti' of Ovid into English verse, using for that purpose a spirited, if literal, prose translation (published by Mr Bohn) in default of the original, from which his ignorance of the Latin language precluded him. For a taste:—

> "What sea, what land, knows not Arion's fame!
> The rivers by his song were turned as stiff as glass:
> The hungry wolf stood still, the lamb did much the same—
> Pursuing and pursued, producing an *impasse*—"

But while delighting in this labour, Mr Benny was at any time ready, nay eager, for a chat. At Cai's entrance he pushed up his spectacles and beamed.

"Ah, good morning, Captain Hocken!—Good morning! I take this as really friendly. . . . You find me wooing the Muses as usual; up and early. Some authors, sir,—not that I dare claim that title,—have found their best inspirations by the midnight oil, even in the small hours. Edgar Allan Poe—an irregular genius—you are acquainted with his 'Raven,' sir?—"

"His what?"

"His 'Raven'; a poem about a bird that perched itself upon a bust and kept saying 'Nevermore,' like a parrot."

Cai winced. "On a bust, did you say? Whose bust?"

"A bust of Pallas, sir, in the alleged possession of Mr Poe himself: Pallas being otherwise Minerva, the goddess of Wisdom, usually represented with an Owl."

"I don't know much about birds," confessed Cai, reduced to helplessness by this erudition. "And I don't know anything about poetry, more's the pity—having been caught young and apprenticed to the sea."

"And nothing to be ashamed of in that, Captain Hocken!"

'The sea, the sea, the open sea—
The blue, the fresh, the ever free.'

"I daresay you've often felt like that about it, as did the late Barry Cornwall, otherwise Bryan Waller Procter, whose daughter, the gifted Adelaide Anne Procter, prior to her premature decease, composed 'The Lost Chord,' everywhere so popular as a cornet solo. It is one of the curiosities of literature," went on Mr Benny confidentially, "that the author of that breezy (not to say briny) outburst could not even cross from Dover to Calais without being prostrated by *mal de mer*; insomuch that his good lady (who happened, by the way, to survive him for a number of years, and, in fact, died quite recently), being of a satirical humour, and herself immune from that distressing complaint, used—as I once read in a magazine article—to walk up and down the deck before him on these occasions, mischievously quoting his own verses,—"

'I'm on the sea, I'm on the sea!
I am where I would ever be:
I love (O, *how* I love!) to ride
On the fierce, foaming, bursting tide,'

"*et coetera*. You'll excuse my rattling on in this fashion. So few people in Troy take an interest in literature: and it has so many by-ways!"

"I'm afraid," confessed Cai, more and more bewildered, "that my education was pretty badly neglected, 'specially in literature, though for some reason or another I'm not bad at spellin'. But, puttin' spellin' aside, that's just why I've come to you. I want you to help me with a letter, if you will."

"Why, of course I will," instantly responded Mr Benny, pushing his translations of the 'Fasti' aside and producing from a drawer some sheets of fresh paper.

"As a matter of business, you understand?"

"If you insist; though it will be a pleasure, Captain Hocken, I assure you."

"It's—it's a bit difficult," stammered Cai gratefully. "In fact, it's not an ordinary sort of letter at all."

Mr Benny, patting his paper into a neat pad, smiled professionally. The letter might not be an ordinary sort of letter; but he had in old days listened some hundreds of times to this exordium.

"It's—well, it's a proposal of marriage," said Cai desperately; and in despite of himself he started as he uttered the word.

Mr Benny, having patted up the pad to his satisfaction, answered with a nod only, and dipped his pen in the inkpot.

"I don't think you heard me," ventured Cai. "It's a proposal of marriage."

"Fire away!" said Mr Benny. "Just dictate, of give me the main bearings, and I'll fix it up."

"But look here—it's a proposal of marriage, I tell you!"

"I've written scores and scores. . . . For yourself, is it?"

This simple and indeed apparently necessary question hit Cai between wind and water.

"I want it written in the first person, of course—if that's what you mean?"

Again Mr Benny nodded, "I see," said he. "You're here on behalf of a friend, who is too bashful to come on his own account."

"You may put it at that," agreed Cai, greatly relieved. "I told you the case was a bit out o' the common!"

Mr Benny's smile was still strictly professional. "It's not outside of my experience, sir; so far, at any rate. May I take your friend to be of your own age, more or less?"

Cai nodded. "You're pretty quick at guessin', I must say."

"A trifle rusty, I fear, for want of practice. . . . But it will come back. . . Now for the lady. Spinster or widow?"

"Does that matter?"

"It helps, in a letter."

"We'll put it, then, as she's a widow."

"Age? . . . There, there! I'm not asking you to be definite, of course: but to give me a little general guidance. For instance, would she be about your friend's age? Or younger, shall we say?"

"Younger."

"Considerably?"

"I don't see as you need lay stress on that."

"You may be sure I shall not," said Mr Benny, jotting down "Younger, considerably" on his writing pad. "Moreover we can tone down or remove anything that strikes you as unhappily worded in our first draft. Trade, profession, or occupation, if any?" Seeing that Cai hesitated, "The more candid your friend is, between these four walls," added Mr Benny, extracting a hair from his pen, "the more persuasive we are likely to be."

"You may set down that she keeps a farm."

"Independent means?"

"Well, yes, as it happens. Not that—"

"To be sure—to be sure! When the affections are engaged, that doesn't weigh. Not, at any rate, with your friend. Still it may influence what I will call, Captain Hocken, the style of the approach. Style, sir, has been defined by my brother, Mr Joshua Benny—You may have heard of him, by the way, as being prominently connected with the London press. . . . No? A man of remarkable talent, though *I* say it. They tell me that for lightness of touch in a Descriptive Middle, it would be hard to find his match in Fleet Street. . . . As I was saying, sir, my brother Joshua has defined style as the art of speaking or writing with propriety, whatever the subject. By propriety, sir, he means what is ordinarily termed appropriateness. Impropriety, in the sense of indelicacy, is out of the question in—a—a communication of this kind. Strict appropriateness, on the other hand, is not always easy to capture. May I take it that your friend has—er—enjoyed a seafaring past?"

Cai gazed blankly at him for a short while, and broke into a simple hearty laugh.

"Why, of course," said he, "you're thinking of my friend 'Bias Hunken!
I almost took ye for a conjuror, first-along—upon my word I did!
But once I get the drift o' your cunning, 'tis easy as easy."
He gazed at Mr Benny and winked knowingly.

"You may tell me, if you please," replied Mr Benny, himself somewhat mystified, but playing for safety. "You may tell me, of course, that 'tis not Captain Hunken but another man altogether: as different from Captain Hunken as you might be, for instance."

Cai started. He was not good at duplicity, but managed to parry the suggestion. "We'll suppose it *is* my friend, 'Bias," said he; "though 'Bias would be amused if he heard it."

"Very well—very well indeed!" Mr Benny laid down his pen, rubbed his hands softly, and picked up the pen again. "Now we can get to work. . . . '*Honoured Madam*'—Shall we begin with 'Honoured Madam'? Or would you prefer something a trifle more—er—impassioned? Perhaps we had better open —er—warily—if I may advise, and (so to speak) warm to our subject. . . . There is an art, Captain Hocken, even in composing and inditing a proposal of marriage. . . . 'Honoured Madam—You will doubtless be surprised by the purport of this letter—' Will she be surprised, by the way?"

"Cert'nly," Cai answered. "We agreed this is from 'Bias, remember."

"Yes, yes. . . . She will like it to be supposed that she's surprised, any way. All ladies do. '*—as by the communication I find myself impelled to make to you.*' I word it thus to suggest that you—that Captain Hunken, rather—cannot help himself: that the lady has made, in the most literal sense, a conquest. A feeling of triumph, sir, is in the female breast, whether of maiden or widow, inseparably connected with the receipt of such a communication. Without asking Captain Hunken's leave—eh?—we will flatter that feeling a little—and portray him as the victim of this particular lady's bow and spear. A figurative expression."

"Oh!" said Cai, who had begun to stare. "Well, go on."

"'*Surprised, I say; yet not (I hope) affronted; in any event not unwilling to pardon, recognising that these words flow from the dictates of an emotion which, while in itself honourable, is in another sense notoriously no respecter of persons. Love, Honoured Madam, has its votaries as well as its victims. I have never accounted myself, nor have I been accounted, in the former category*—'"

"What's a category?" asked Cai.

Mr Benny scratched out the word. "We will substitute 'case,'" said he, "and save Captain Hunken the trouble of an explanation. '*I am no longer—you will have detected it, so why should I pretend?—in the first flush of youth: no passionate boy*'—We are talking of Captain Hunken, remember."

Cai nodded. "It's true as gospel, Mr Benny. But you have a wonderful way o' putting things."

In this way—Mr Benny scribbling, erasing, purring over a phrase and anon declaiming it—Cai venturing a question here and there, but always apologetically, with a sense of being carried off his feet and swept into deep waters—in half an hour the letter was composed. It was not at all the letter Cai had expected. It threw up his suit into a high romantic light in which he scarcely recognised it or himself. But he felt it to be extremely effective. His conscience pricked him a little, as in imagination he saw 'Bias with head aslant and elbows sprawling, inking himself to the wrists in literary effort. Poor 'Bias! But "all's fair in love and war."

To his mild astonishment Mr Benny declined a fee. "If, sir, you will be good enough to accept it, as between friends?" the little man suggested timidly. "You have helped me to pass a very pleasant morning: and it will be—shall I say?—something of a bond between us if, in the event, our joint composition should prove to have been instrumental in forwarding—er—Captain Hunken's suit."

Cai hesitated. At that moment he would have preferred conferring a benefit to receiving one. His conscience wanted a small salve. Yet to refuse would hurt Mr Benny's feelings.

"I'll tell you what!" he suggested: "We'll throw it in with another favour I meant to ask of you, and for which you shall name your terms. It has been suggested—by several, so there's no need to mention names— that I ought to go in for public life, in a small way, of course."

"Indeed, Captain Hocken?" Mr Benny smiled to himself; he began to understand, or thought that he did. "A very laudable ambition, too!"

"The mischief is," confessed Cai, "that I have had no practice in speakin'. I couldn't, as they say, make a public speech for nuts."

"It is an art, Captain Hocken," said Mr Benny reassuringly, "and can be acquired. An ambition to acquire it sir,—though in your mind you viewed it but as a means to an end,—would in my humble view be an ambition even more laudable than that of shining on the administrative side of public life. For it is not only an art, sir, and a great one. It is well-nigh a lost art. Where, nowadays, are your Burkes, your Foxes, your Sheridans—not to mention your Demostheneses?"

"You'll understand," hesitated Cai, "that nothing beyond the School Board is in question at present. I mention this strictly between ourselves."

Mr Benny swung about upon his stool. "Listen to this, Captain Hocken— 'Observe, sir, that, besides the desire which all men have naturally of supporting the honour of their own government, that sense of dignity and that security to property which ever attends freedom, has'—or, as I should prefer to say, *have*—'a tendency to increase the stock of the free community. Much may be taken where most is accumulated. And what is the soil or climate where experience has not uniformly proved that the voluntary flow of heaped-up plenty, bursting from the weight of heaped-up luxuriance, has ever run with a more copious stream of revenue, than could be squeezed from the dry husks of oppressed indigence by the straining of all the machinery in the world?' That is Burke, sir—Burke: who, by the

fribbles of his own day, was lightly termed the dinner-bell of the House of Commons, yet compelled the attention of all serious political thinkers—"

'Th' applause of listening Senates to command.'

"I divine your ambition. Captain Hocken, and I honour it,"

"So long as you don't mistake me," urged Cai nervously. "It don't go beyond a seat on the School Board at present. . . . But there was a hint dropped that you used, back-along, to give lessons in—I forget the word."

"Elocution," Mr Benny supplied it. "A guinea the course of six lessons was my old charge. Shall we say to-morrow, at eleven sharp?"

"So be it," Cai agreed. "The sooner the better—I've to catch up the lee-way of three-quarters of a lifetime."

When Cai had folded the draft of his letter, bestowed it in his breast-pocket, and taken his departure, Mr Benny drew out his watch. It yet wanted a full hour of dinner-time. He rearranged the papers on his desk and resumed work upon the 'Fasti':—

"The hound beside the hare held consort in the shade,
The hind, the lioness, upon the self-same rock,
The too loquacious crow—"

Here some one knocked at the door.

"Come in!" called Mr Benny.

The door opened. The visitor was Captain Hunken.

"Good mornin'."

"Ah! Good morning, sir!"

"Busy?"

"Dallying, sir,—dallying with the Muses. That is all my business nowadays."

"I looked in," said 'Bias, laying down his hat, "to ask if you would do me a small favour."

"You may be sure of it, Captain Hunken: that is, if it should lie in my power."

'Bias nodded, somewhat mysteriously. "You bet it does: though, as one might say, it don't lie azackly inside the common. I want a letter written."

"Yes?"

"It ain't, as you might put it, an ordinary letter either. It's,—well, in fact, it's a proposal of marriage!"

Mr Benny rubbed the back of his head gently. "I have written quite a number in my time, Captain Hunken. . . . Is it—if I may put it delicately—in the first person, sir?"

"She's the first person—" began 'Bias, and came to a halt. "Does that matter," he asked, "so long as I describe the parties pretty accurate?"

"Not a bit," Mr Benny assured him. "A friend, shall we say?"

"That's right," 'Bias nodded solemnly.

"And the lady?—spinster or widow?"

"Widow."

"Oh!"

"Eh?"

"Nothing. . . . I was considering. One has to collect a few data, you understand,—in strict confidence, of course. . . . Trade, profession, or occupation?"

"Whose?"

"Well, your friend's, to start with."

"Is that necessary?"

"It will help us to be persuasive." Seeing that 'Bias still hesitated, Mr Benny went on. "May I take it, for instance, that one may credit him, as a friend of yours, with a seafaring past?"

"I do believe," responded 'Bias with a slow smile after regarding Mr Benny for some seconds, "as you're thinkin' of Cai Hocken?"

Mr Benny laughed. "And yet it would not be so tremendous a guess,— hey?—seeing what friends you two are."

"It won't do no harm," allowed 'Bias after pondering a while, "if you took it to be Cai Hocken; though, mind you, I don't say as you're right."

"That's understood. . . . Now for the lady's occupation?"

"Well . . . you might make it farmin'—for the sake of argument."

"Now I wonder," thought Mr Benny to himself, "*which* of these two is lying." Aloud he began, setting pen to paper and repeating as he wrote, "'*Honoured Madam,*'—you don't think that too cold?"

"Why, are you able to start already?" exclaimed 'Bias in unfeigned amazement.

"I like to catch an inspiration as it springs to my brain," Mr Benny assured him. "We'll correct as we go on."

CHAPTER XV.

PALMERSTON'S GENIUS.

"You're welcome as blossom, my dear," said Mrs Bowldler to Fancy Tabb, who had dropped in, as she put it, for a look around. The child was allowed a couple of hours off duty in the afternoon to take a walk and blow away the cobwebs of the Chandler's gloomy house: her poor shop-drudge of a father having found courage to wring this concession from Mr Rogers for her health's sake. "You're welcome as blossom, but you must work for your welcome. Come and help me to cut bread-and-butter. . . . Palmerston! You bring the kettle and pour a little water into the teapots, just to get 'em heated."

"Company, is it?" asked Fancy, laying aside her cloak.

"Company?" Mrs Bowldler sniffed. "We've had enough of company to last us this side of the grave. Ho, I trust the name of company will not be breathed in *my* hearing for some time to come!"

"What is it, then?"

"Freaks, I hope; maggots, as my poor dear tender mother used to say; and all casting double work on the establishment. We must dine separate, all of a sudden; and now we must have our tea served separate; and from dinner to tea-time sitting in writing, the pair of us, till I wonder it haven't brought on a rush of blood to our poor heads."

"Writing?" echoed Fancy. She desisted from spreading the butter and eyed Mrs Bowldler doubtfully, pursing up her lips. "I don't like the look of that. What are they writing, do you suppose?"

"It don't become me to guess," answered Mrs Bowldler. "Belike they're making their wills and leaving one another the whole of their property."

"I hope not. They'd make a dreadful mess of it without a lawyer to help."

"They're making a dreadful mess on the tablecloth—or, as I *should* say, on the tablecloths, respectively, as the case may be. Blots. There's one or two you couldn't cover with a threepenny bit. Captain Hunken especially; and it cost four-and-ninepence only last July, which makes the heart bleed."

"They haven't quarrelled, have they?" asked Fancy.

"Quarrelled? No, of course they haven't quarrelled. What put such a thing into your head, child?"

"I don't know. . . . But I don't like this writin'; it's unnatural. And they're livin' apart, you say?"

"They didn't even breakfast together. But that was an accident, Captain Hunken having walked out early and taken the parrot."

"Funny thing to take for a walk."

"Which," explained Mrs Bowldler with a glance at Palmerston, "I had to lodge a complaint with Captain Hocken yesterday relative to its conversation, and he must have spoken about it; for Captain Hunken went out at eight o'clock taking the bird with him, cage and all, and when he came back they were *minus*."

Fancy pondered. "What did the parrot say?" she asked.

"You mustn't ask, my dear. I couldn't tell it to anything less than a married woman."

"That's a pity; because I wanted to know, quick. I suppose, now, you haven't a notion what he did with the bird?"

"Not a notion."

"I thought not. Well, I have. He's been an' gone an' given it away to Mrs Bosenna, up at Rilla."

Mrs Bowldler turned pale and gripped the edge of the table.

"I'll bet you any money," Fancy nodded slowly.

"Ho! catch me ere I faint!" panted Mrs Bowldler.

"Why, what's the matter? She's a married woman, or has been."

"If only you'd heard—"

"Yes, it's a pity," agreed Fancy, and turned about. "Pam!"

"Yes, Miss," answered Palmerston.

"Call me 'Fancy.'"

"Yes, Miss Fancy."

She stamped her small foot. "There's no 'Miss' about it. How stupid you are—when you see I'm in a hurry, too! Call me 'Fancy.'"

"Y-yes—Fancy," stammered Palmerston, blushing furiously, shutting his eyes and dropping his voice to a whisper.

"That's better. . . . What does it feel like? Pleasant?"

"V-very pleasant, miss—Fancy, I mean. It—it'll come in time," pleaded Palmerston, still red to the eyes.

"That's right, again. Because I want you to marry me, Pammy dear."

"Well! the owdacious!" exclaimed Mrs Bowldler in a kind of hysterical titter, snatching at her bodice somewhere over the region of her heart. Fancy paid no heed to her.

"Only we must make a runaway match of it," she went on, "for there's no time to lose, it seems."

For answer Palmerston burst into a flood of tears.

"There now!" Mrs Bowldler of a sudden became serious. "You might have known he's too soft to be teased. . . . Oh, be quiet, do, Palmerston! Think of your namesake!"

A bell jangled overhead.

"Captain Hocken's bell!—and the child's face all blubbered, which he hates to see, while as for Captain Hunken—there! it that isn't his bell going too in the adjoining! Palmerston, pull yourself together and be a man."

"I c-can't, missus," sobbed Palmerston. "He—he said yesterday as he'd g-give me the sack the next time he saw my eyes red."

"Well, I must take 'em their tea myself, I suppose," said Mrs Bowldler, who had a kind heart. "No, Palmerston, your eyes are not fit. But you see how I'm situated?" she appealed to Fancy.

"Do you usually let them ring for tea?" Fancy asked.

"No, child. There must be something wrong with them both, or else with my clock," answered Mrs Bowldler with a glance up at the timepiece. "But twenty-five past four, I take you to witness! and I keep it five minutes fast on principle."

"There *is* something wrong," Fancy assured her. "If you'll take my advice, you'll go in and look injured."

"I couldn't keep 'em waiting, though injured I will look," promised Mrs Bowldler, catching up one of the two tea-trays. "Palmerston had better withdraw into the grounds and control himself. I will igsplain that I have sent him on an errand connected with the establishment."

She bustled forth. Fancy closed the door after her; then turned and addressed Palmerston.

"Dry your eyes, you silly boy," she commanded. Palmerston obeyed and stood blinking at her—alternately at her and at his handkerchief which he held tightly crumpled into a pad; whereupon she demanded, somewhat cruelly:

"Now, what have you to say for yourself?" He was endeavouring to answer when Mrs Bowldler came running in and caught up the other tea-tray.

"Which it appears," she panted, "he is in a hurry to catch the post; and I hope the Lord will forgive me for saying that Palmerston had just this instant returned and would go with it. But he has it done up in an envelope, and says boys are not to be trusted. When I was a girl in my teens," pursued Mrs Bowldler, luckily discovering that the second teapot had no water in it, and hastening to the kettle, "we learnt out of a Child's Compendium about a so-called ancient god of the name of Mercury, whence the stuff they put into barometers to go up for fine weather. He had wings on his boots, or was supposed to: which it would be a convenience in these days, with Palmerston's unfortunate habits. For goodness' sake, child," she addressed Fancy, "take him out somewhere, that I mayn't perjure myself twice in one day!"

She vanished.

"*Now*, what have you to say for yourself?" Fancy turned again upon Palmerston and repeated her question.

"That's what's the matter with me, Miss—Fancy, I mean," confessed he, after a painful struggle with his emotions. "I never had nothing to say for myself, not in this world: and—and—" he plucked up courage— "you got no business to play with me the way you did just now!" he blurted.

"Who said I was a-playin' with you?" Fancy demanded; but Palmerston did not heed.

"And right a-top of your sayin' as writin' was unnatural!" he continued.

She stared at him. "What has that to do with it? . . . Besides, whatever you're drivin' at, I didn' mean as all writin' was unnatural. I got to do enough of it for Mr Rogers, the Lord knows! But for them two, as have spent the best part of their lives navigatin' ships, it do seem—well, we'll call it unmanly somehow."

"That makes it all the worse," growled Palmerston, sticking both hands in his pockets and forcing himself to meet her stare, against which he nodded sullenly. "A man has to lift himself *somehow*—when he wants something, very bad."

"What is it you want?" asked Fancy.

"You know what it is, right enough." He glowered at her hardily, being desperate now and beyond shame.

"Do 'I?" But she blenched, meeting his eyes as be continued to nod.

"Yes, you do," persisted he. "I wants to marry ye, one of these days; and you can't round on me, either, for outin' with it; for 'twas your own suggestion."

"Oh, you silly boy!" Fancy reproved him, while conscious of a highly delicious thrill and an equally delicious fear. ("O, youth, youth! and the wonder of first love!") She cast about for escape, and forced a laugh. "Do you know, you're the very first as has ever proposed to me."

"I was thinkin' as much," said the unflattering Palmerston. "Come to that, you was the first as ever offered marriage to me."

"But I didn't! I mean," urged Fancy, "it was only in joke."

"Joke or not," said Palmerston, "you can't deny it." Suddenly weakening, he let slip his advantage. "But I wouldn' wish to marry one that despised me," he declared. "I had enough o' bein' despised—in the Workhouse."

"I never said I despised you, Pammy," Fancy protested.

"Yes, you did; or in so many words—'Unmanly,' you said."

"But that was about writing." She opened her eyes wide. "You don't mean to tell me *that's* the trouble? . . . What have you been writing?"

"A book," owned Palmerston with gloom. "A man must try to raise himself somehow."

"Of course he must. What sort of book?"

"It's—it's only a story."

"Why," she reassured him, "I heard of a man the other day who wrote a story and made A Thousand Pounds. It was quite unexpected, and surprised even his friends."

"It must be the same man Mrs Bowldler told me about. His name was Walter Scott, and he called it 'Waverley' without signing his name to it, because he was a Sheriff; and there was another man that wrote a book called 'Picnic' by Boss, and made pounds. So I've called mine 'Pickerley,' by way of drawing attention,—but, of course, if you think there's no chance, I suppose there isn't," wound up Palmerston, with a sudden access of despondency.

"Oh, Palmerston," exclaimed Fancy, clasping her hands, "if it should only turn out that you're a genius!"

"It *would* be a bit of all right," he agreed, his cheerfulness reviving.

"I have heard somewhere," she mused, "or perhaps I read it on the newspaper, that men of genius make the very worst husbands, and a woman must be out of her senses to marry one."

Again Palmerston's face fell. "I mayn't be one after all," he protested, but not very hopefully.

"Oh yes, I am sure you are! And, what's more, if you make a hit, as they say, I don't know but I might overlook it and take the risk. You see, I'm accustomed to living with Mr Rogers, who is bound to go to hell and that might turn out to be a sort of practice."

The boy stood silent, rubbing his head. He wanted time to think this out. Such an altered face do our ambitions present to most of us as they draw closer, nearer to our grasp!

Suddenly Fancy clapped her hands. "Why, of course!" she cried. "I always had an idea, somewhere inside o' me, that I'd be a lady one of these days—very important and covered all over with di'monds, so that all the other women would envy me. You know that feelin'?"

"No-o," confessed Palmerston.

"You would if you were a woman. But, contrariwise, what I like almost better is keepin' shop—postin' up ledgers, makin' out bills, *to account rendered, second application, which doubtless has escaped your notice*, and all that sort of thing. I saw a shop in Plymouth once with young women by the dozen sittin' at desks, and when they pulled a string little balls came rollin' towards them over on their heads like the stars in heaven, all full of cash; and they'd open one o' these balls and hand you out your change just as calm and scornful as if they were angels and you the dirt beneath their feet. You can't think how I longed to be one o' them and behave like that. But the two things didn't seem to go together."

"What two things?"

"Why, sittin' at a desk like that and sittin' on a sofa and sayin' 'How d'e do, my dear? It's *so* good of you to call in this dreadful weather, especially as you have to hire. . . .' But now," said Fancy, clasping

her hands, "I see my way: that is, if you're really a genius. You shall write your books and I'll sell them. '*Mr and Mrs Palmerston Burt, Author and*—what's the word?—pub—publicans—no, publisher; *Author and Publisher*.' It's quite the highest class of business: and if any one tried to patronise me I could always explain that I just did it to help, you bein' a child in matters of business. Geniuses are mostly like that."

"Are they?"

"Yes, that's another of their drawbacks. And," continued Fancy, "you'd be a celebrity of course, which means that we should be in the magazines, with pictures—*A Corner of the Library*, and *The Rose-garden, looking West, and Mrs Palmerston Burt is not above playing with the Baby*, and you with your favourite dog—for we'd have both, by that time. Oh, Pammy, where is the book?"

"Upstairs, mostly, but I got a couple o' chapters upon me—" Palmerston tapped his breast-pocket—"If you really mean as you'd like—" He hesitated, his colour changing from red to white. Here, on the point of proving it, the poor boy feared his fate too much.

But Fancy insisted. They escaped together to Captain Hunken's garden; and there, in the summer-house—by this time almost in twilight—he showed her the precious manuscript. It was written (like many another first effort of genius) on very various scraps of paper, the most of which had previously enwrapped groceries.

"And to think," breathed Fancy, recognising some of Mr Rogers's trade wrappers, "that maybe I've seen dad doin' up those very parcels, and never guessed—well, go on! Read it to me."

"I—I don't read at all well," faltered Palmerston.

She tapped her foot. "I don't care how bad you read so long as you don't keep me waitin' a moment longer."

"This is Chapter Nine. . . . If you like, of course, I could start by tellin' you what the other chapters are about—"

"*Please* don't talk any more, but read!"

"Oh, very well. The chapter is called '*Ernest makes Another Attempt.*' Ernest is what Mrs Bowldler calls the hero, which means that the book is all about him. It begins—"

'It was late in the evening following upon the events related in the previous chapter'

—I got that out of a paper Mrs Bowldler carries about in her pocket. It is called 'Bow Bells,' and you can depend on it, for it's all about the highest people—

'when Ernest rang at the bell of Number 20 Grovener Square.'

—I got that address, too, out of Mrs Bowldler. She said you couldn' go higher than that. 'Not humanly speakin'' was her words, though I don't quite know what she meant."

"But," objected Fancy, "you might want to start higher, in another book. We can't expect to live all our lives on this one: and there oughtn't to be any come-down."

Palmerston smiled and waved his manuscript with an air of mastery.
He had thought of this.

"There's Royalty!"

"O-oh!" Fancy caught her breath. She felt sure now of his genius.

"We must feel our way," said Palmerston; "I believe in flyin' as high as you like so long as you're on safe ground. Of course," he went on, "there *is* a danger. I don't know who *really* lives in Grovener Square at Number 20; but they're almost sure not to be called Delauncy, and so there's no real hurt to their feelin's."

"Mrs Bowldler might know."

"You don't understand," explained Palmerston, who seemed, since breaking the ice of his confession, to have grown some inches taller, and altogether more masterful. "She don't know why I put all these questions to her. She sets it down to curiosity: when, all the time, I'm *pumpin'* her."

"Oh!" Fancy collapsed.

Palmerston resumed:—

> "'The second footman ushered him to the boudoir, where already he had lit several lamps, casting a subdued shade of rose colour. The Lady Herm Intrude reclined on a console in an attitude which a moment since had been one of despair, but was now languid to the point of carelessness.'"

"What's a console?" inquired Fancy.

"They have one in all the best drawing-rooms," answered Palmerston. "Mrs Bowldler—"

"Oh, go on!" She was beginning to feel jealous, or almost jealous.

> "'She was attired in a gown of old Mechlin, with a deep fall and an indication of orange blossoms, and carried a shower bouquet of cluster roses, the—

"No, I've scratched that out. It said 'the gift of the bridegroom,' and I got it from a fashionable wedding; but it won't do in this place."

> 'Amid these luxurious surroundings Ernest felt his brain in a whirl. He cast himself on his knees before the recumbent figure on the console which gave no sign of life unless a long-drawn and half-stifled sob, which seemed to strangle its owner, might be so interpreted.
> "Lady Herm Intrude," he cried in broken accents, "for the second time, I love you."'"

"It's lovely, Palmerston! Lovely!" gasped Fancy. "Why was he loving her for the second time?"

"He was *telling* her for the second time. He had loved her from the first—it's all in the early chapters. . . . This is the second time he told her: and he has to do it twice more before the end of the book."

> 'As he waited, scarcely daring to breathe, for some answer, he could almost smell the perfume of the orchids which floated from a neighbouring vase and filled the apartment with its high-class articles of furniture, the product of many lands.'

"Oh, Palmerston! And you that never had an 'ome of your own, since you was nine—not even a Scattered one! However did you manage to think of it all?"

She caught the manuscript from him and peered at it, straining her eyes in the dark.

"If you could fetch a lamp now?" she suggested.

But the boy stepped close and stood beside her, dominant.

"*You* know how I came to do it," he said. "Yes—I'm glad you like it. I'll fetch a lamp. But—"

As she pored over the manuscript, he bent and suddenly planted a great awkward kiss on the side of her cheek.

Thereupon he fled in quest of the lamp.

CHAPTER XVI

IS IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

Cai and 'Bias supped together that night, greatly to Mrs Bowldler's relief. But they exchanged a very few words during the meal, being poor hands at dissimulation.

The meal, for the third time running, was laid in Cai's parlour, Mrs Bowldler having delicately elected to ignore the upset caused by the parrot and to treat yesterday as a *dies non*. 'Bias, if he noted this, made no comment.

The cloth having been removed, they drew their chairs as usual to front the fireplace. Cai arose,

found a clean church-warden pipe on the mantelshelf, passed it to 'Bias, and selected one for himself.

"I sent off that letter to-day," he said carelessly.

"Right," said 'Bias; "I sent mine, too."

"Four-thirty post, mine went by."

"So did mine."

"She'll get 'em together, then, first delivery to-morrow."

"Ay."

"That puts us all square. She'll be amused, I shouldn't wonder."

"I didn' try to be amusin' in mine," said 'Bias after a pause, puffing stolidly.

"No more did I." Cai filled and lit his pipe in silence. His conscience troubled him a little. "Well," said he, dropping into his arm-chair, "the matter's settled one way or another, so far as we're consarned. The letters are in the post, and there's no gettin' them out unless by Act o' Parliament. I don't mind tellin' you just what I said, if you think 'twould be fairer-like."

"I'm agreeable."

"You won't take it amiss that I pitched it pretty strong?"

"Not at all," answered 'Bias. "Come to that, I pitched it pretty strong myself."

Cai smiled tolerantly, and felt for the rough draft in his pocket. He fished it forth, unfolded the paper, and spread it on his knee under the lamp-light. Then, having adjusted his glasses, he picked up his pipe again.

"I just started off," said he, "by hintin' that she might be a bit surprised at hearin' from me."

"That's true enough," agreed 'Bias. "She'll be more'n surprised, if I'm not mistaken."

"I don't see why."

"Don't you? . . . Well, no offence. It's a very good way to begin. In fact," said 'Bias in a slightly patronising tone, "it's pretty much how I began myself. Only I went on quick to hope she wasn't—how d'ye call it?"

"I don't know what word *you* used. *I* should have said affronted,' if I take your meanin'."

'Bias gave a start. "As it happens I—er—hit on that very word.
I remember, because it looked funny to me, spelt with two f's.
But I went on to say that I meant honourable, and that she mustn't blame
me, because this kind o' thing happened without respect o' persons."

Cai sat up, stiff and wondering. He took off his glasses and wiped them. "You said—*that?*" he asked slowly.

"I said a damned sight more than that," chuckled 'Bias. "I said that love had its victims as well as its something else beginning with a v, which I forget the exact expression at this moment, and that I'd never looked on myself as bein' in the former cat—no, case. You can't think how I pitched it," said 'Bias, folding his hands comfortably over his stomach. "The words seemed just to flow from the pen."

"Oh, can't I?" Cai, sitting up with rigid backbone, continued to gaze at him. "Oh, they *did*—did they? And maybe you didn' go on to explain you weren't precisely in the first flush o' youth—not what you might call a *passionate boy*—"

It was 'Bias's turn to sit erect. He sat erect, breathing hard. "There—there's nothing unusual about the expression, is there?" he stammered. "Though how you come to guess on it—"

"You've been stealin' my letter, somehow!" flamed Cai.

But 'Bias did not seem to hear. He continued to breathe hard, to stare into vacancy. "Did you pay a visit to Peter Benny this mornin'?" he asked at length, very slowly.

"Well, yes—if you must know," Cai answered sullenly, his wrath checked by confusion, much as the

onset of a tall wave is smothered as it meets a backwash.

"That's right," 'Bias nodded. "Somehow or 'nother Benny's sold us a dog: and, what's more, he sold us the same dog. . . . I don't think," went on 'Bias after a pause, "that it showed very good feelin' on your part, your goin' to Benny."

"Why not?" demanded Cai, whose thoughts were beginning to work. "Far as I can see you did the very same thing; so anyway you can't complain."

"Yes, I can. You know very well I never set up to be a scholar, same as you. By rights you're the scratch boat on this handicap, yet you tried to steal allowance. I thought you'd a-been a better sportsman."

"My goin' to Benny," urged Cai sophistically, "was a case of one eddicated man consultin' another, as is frequently done."

"Oh, is it? Well, you done it pretty thoroughly, I must say."

"Whereas *your* goin' was a clean case o' tryin' to pass off goods that weren't your own, or anything like it. . . . Come, I'll put it to you another way. Supposin' your letter had worked the trick, and she'd said 'yes' on the strength of it—I'm puttin' this for argyment's sake, you understand?"

"Go on."

"And supposin' one day, after you was married, she'd come to you and said, ''Bias, I want a letter written. I thought o' writin' it myself, but you're such a famous hand at a letter.' A nice hole you'd a-been in!"

"No, I shouldn'. I'd say, 'You rate me too high, my dear. Still,' I'd say, 'if you insist upon it, you just scribble down the main points on a sheet o' paper, and I'll take a walk and think it over.' Then I'd carry it off to Benny." 'Bias, who so far had held the better of the argument by keeping his temper, clinched his triumph with a nod and refilled his pipe.

"Benny's an old man, and might die at any moment," objected Cai.

"Now you're gettin' too far-fetched altogether. . . . Besides, 'twouldn't be any affair o' yours—would it?—after I'm married to her."

"Well, you won't be—now: and no more shall I," said Cai bitterly.
"Benny's seen to that!"

"'Tis a mess, sure enough," agreed 'Bias, lighting his pipe and puffing.

"She'll be affronted—oh, cuss the word! Just fancy it, to-morrow morning, when she opens her post! A nice pair of jokers she'll think us!" Cai paced the room. "Couldn't we go up to-night and explain?"

"Five minutes to ten," said 'Bias with a glance at the clock. "Ask her to get out o' bed and come down to hear we've made fools of ourselves? I don't see myself. You can do what you like, o' course."

"I shan't sleep a wink," declared Cai, still pacing. "How on earth
Benny—" He halted of a sudden. "You don't suppose Benny himself—"

"Ch't! a man of his age. . . . No, I'll tell you how it happened, as I allow: and, if so, Benny's not altogether to blame. First you goes to him, and wants a letter written. You give him no names, but he learns enough to guess how the wind sits . . . am I right, so far?"

Cai nodded.

"So he writes the letter and off you goes with it. Later on, in *I* drops with pretty much the same request. I remember, now, the old fellow behaved rather funny: asked me something about bein' the 'first person,' and then wanted to know if I didn' wish the letter written for a friend. I wasn't what you might call at my ease with the job, and so—as the time was gettin' on for dinner, too—I let it go at that."

"You did? . . . But so did I!"

"Hey?"

"I let Benny think he was writin' it for a friend o' mine. Far as I remember, he suggested it. . . . Yes, he certainly did," said Cai with an effort of memory.

"It don't matter," said 'Bias after a few seconds' reflection. "He took it for granted that one of us was

tellin' lies: and likely enough he's chucklin' now at the thought of our faces when the thing came to be cleared up. Come to consider, there was no vice about the trick, 'specially as he wouldn' take any money from me."

"Nor from me," Cai dropped into his chair and reached for the tobacco-jar. "Well," he sighed, "the man's done for both of us, that's all!"

"Not a bit," said 'Bias sturdily. "We'll walk up early to-morrow, and explain. Ten to one it'll put her in the best o' tempers, havin' such a laugh against us both."

PART II.

"He can't have known!" said Mrs Bosenna early next morning, sitting in a high-backed chair beside the kitchen-table. Her face was slightly flushed, and the toe of her right shoe kept an impatient tap-tap on the flagged floor. "He can't possibly have known."

"We'll hope not," said Dinah. "It's thoughtless, though—put it at the best: and any way it don't speak too well for his past."

"He may have *bought* it, you know," urged Mrs Bosenna; "late in life."

"Well, he's no chicken," allowed Dinah; "since you put it like that."

"I wasn't referring to Captain Hunken, you silly woman. I meant *it*."

"Eh?" said Dinah. "Oh!—*him?*"

"'Him' if you like," Mrs Bosenna mused. "It can't possibly be a female, can it?"

"I should trust not, for the sake of a body's sex . . . to say things like that. Besides, I've surely been told somewhere—in the 'Child's Guide to Knowledge,' it may have been—that the females don't talk at all."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Pretty sure. It was *something* unnatural anyhow; or I shouldn' have remembered it."

"Well, and if so," said Mrs Bosenna, "one can see what Providence was driving at, which is always a comfort. . . . I was wondering now if you mind going and carrying him out to the garden somewhere. He couldn't take harm in this weather,—under the box-hedge, for instance."

Dinah shook her head. "I couldn', mistress; no really!"

"The chances are," said Mrs Bosenna persuasively, "he wouldn't say anything,—anything like that again, not in a blue moon."

"He said it to me first, and he said it to me again not ten minutes later. But, o' course, if you're so confident, there's nothing hinders your goin' and takin' him where you like. If you ask my opinion, though, he don't wait for no blue moons. He turns 'em blue as they come."

Mrs Bosenna tapped her foot yet more pettishly. "It's perfectly ridiculous," she declared, "to be kept out of one's own parlour by a bird! Go and call in William Skin, and tell him to take away the nasty thing."

"And him with a family?"

"He's hard of hearin'," said Mrs Bosenna.

"It's a hardness you can t depend on. I've knowed William hear fast enough,—when he wasn't wanted. He'll be wantin' to know, too, why we can't put the bird out for ourselves: his deafness makes him suspicious. . . . And what's more," wound up Dinah, "it won't help us, one way or 'nother, whether he hears or not. We shall go about *thinkin* he's heard; and I tell ye, mistress, I shan't be able to face that man again without a blush, not in my born life."

"It's perfectly ridiculous, I tell you!" repeated Mrs Bosenna, starting to her feet. "Am I to be forced to breakfast in the kitchen because of a bird?"

"Then, if so be as you're so proud as all that, why not go back to bed again, and I'll bring breakfast up to your room."

"Nonsense. Where d'ye keep the beeswax? And run you up to the little store-cupboard and fetch me down a fingerful of cotton-wool for my ears. I'll do it myself, since you're such a coward."

"'Tisn't that I'm a coward, mistress—"

"You're worse," interrupted her mistress severely.

"You never ought to know anything about such words, and it's a revelation to me wherever you managed to pick them up."

Dinah smoothed her apron. "I can't think neither," she confessed, and added demurely, "It could never have been from the old master, for I'm sure he'd never have used such."

Mrs Bosenna wheeled about, her face aflame. But before she could turn on Dinah to rend her, the sound of a horn floated up from the valley. Dinah's whole body stiffened at once. "The post!" she cried, and ran forth from the kitchen to meet it, without asking leave. Letters at Rilla Farm were rare exceedingly, for Mrs Bosenna made a point of paying ready-money (and exacting the last penny of discount) wherever it was possible; so that bills, even in the shape of invoices, were few. She had no relatives, or none whom she encouraged as correspondents, for, as the saying is, "she had married above her." For the same reason, perhaps, she had long since stopped the flow of sentimental letters from the girl-friends she had once possessed in Holsworthy, Devon. If Mrs Bosenna now and again found herself lonely at Rilla Farm in her widowhood, it is to be feared the majority of her old acquaintances would have agreed in asserting, with a touch of satisfied spite, that she had herself to blame,—and welcome!

"There's *two!*" announced Dinah, bursting back into the kitchen and waving her capture. "*Two!*—and the Troy postmark on both of 'em!"

"Put them down on the table, please. And kindly take a look at the oven. You needn't let the bread burn, even if I *am* to take breakfast in the kitchen."

"But ain't you in a hurry to open them, mistress?" asked Dinah, pretending to go, still hanging on her heel.

"Maybe I am; maybe I ain't." Mrs Bosenna picked up the two envelopes with a carelessness which was slightly overdone. They were sealed, the pair of them. She broke the seal of the first carefully, drew out the letter, and read—

"HONOURED MADAM,—You will doubtless be surprised—"

She turned to the last page and read the subscription—

"Yours obediently,"

"TOBIAS HUNKEN."

"Who's it from, mistress?" asked Dinah, making pretence of a difficulty with the oven door.

"Nobody that concerns you," snapped Mrs Bosenna, and hastily stowed the letter in the bosom of her bodice. She picked up the other. Of that, in turn, she broke the seal—

"HONOURED MADAM,—"

The handwriting was somewhat superior.

> "HONOURED MADAM,—You will doubtless be surprised by the purport of this letter; as by the communication I feel myself impelled to make to you—"

Mrs Bosenna, mildly surprised, in truth, turned the epistle over.
It was signed—

"Your obedient servant,

"CAIUS HOCKEN."

She drew the first letter from her bodice. After the perusal of its first few sentences her cheeks put on a rosy glow.

But of a sudden she started, turned to the first letter again, and spread it on her lap.

"Well, if I ever!" breathed she, after a pause.

"A proposal! I knew it was!" cried Dinah, swinging about from the oven door.

Mrs Bosenna, if she heard, did not seem to hear. She was holding up both letters in turn, staring from the one to the other incredulously. Her roseal colour came and went.

"Them and their parrots! I'll teach 'em!"

Before Dinah could ask what was the matter, a bell sounded. It was the front door bell, which rang just within the porch.

Dinah smoothed her apron and bustled forth. It had always been her grievance—and her mistress shared it—against the nameless architect of Rilla farmstead, that he had made its long kitchen window face upon the strawyard, whereas a sensible man would have designed it to command the front door in flank, with its approaches. This mistake of his cost Dinah a circuit by way of the apple-room every time she answered the porch bell; for as little as any porter of old in a border fortress would she have dreamed of admitting a visitor without first making reconnaissance.

A minute later she ran back and thrust her head in at the kitchen-door.

"Mistress," she whispered excitedly, "it's *them!*"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs Bosenna, as the bell jangled again. "They seem in a hurry, too." She smiled, and the smile, if the curve of her mouth forbade it to be grim, at any rate expressed decision. She picked up the two letters and slipped them into her pocket. "You can show them in."

"Where, mistress?"

"Here. And, Dinah, nothing about the post, mind! Now, run!"

CHAPTER XVII.

APPARENTLY DIVIDES INTO THREE.

"You'll pardon us, ma'am, for calling so early," began Cai. He was too far embarrassed to be conscious of any surprise at being ushered into the kitchen.

"—You do the apologisin', of course," had been 'Bias's words in the front porch. "Yours was the first letter written: and, besides, you're a speaker."

"You are quite welcome, the both of you," Mrs Bosenna assured him as he came to a halt. Her tone was polite, but a faint note of interrogation sounded in it. "You have had your breakfast?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Ah, you are early indeed! I was just about to sit down to mine."

"We don't want to interrupt, ma'am, but—" Here Cai looked helplessly at 'Bias.

"Go on," growled 'Bias.

"We—we don't want to seem rude—"

"Never mind rude," growled 'Bias again. "Get it over."

"The fact is, there's been a mistake: a painful mistake. At least," said Cai, growing more and more nervous under Mrs Bosenna's gaze of calm inquiry, "it *would* be painful, if it weren't so absurd." He forced a laugh.

"Don't make noises like that," commanded 'Bias. "Get it over."

"It's about those letters, ma'am."

"Letters?" Mrs Bosenna opened her dark eyes wide; and turned them interrogatively upon Dinah. "Letters?"

"Letters?" repeated Dinah, taking her cue.

Relief broke like a sun-burst over Cai's face. "But perhaps you don't read your letters, ma'am, until after breakfast? And, if so, we're in time."

"*What* letters?" asked Mrs Bosenna.

"They've surely been delivered, ma'am? In fact we met the postman coming from the house."

"Dear me—and did he tell you he had been deliverin' letters here?"

"No—he was on his round, and we took it for granted. Besides, we know they were posted in time."

"William Skin takes the letters some days," suggested Dinah, "if he happens to overtake the post on his way back with the cart. It saves the man a climb up the hill."

"I wonder—" mused Mrs Bosenna.

"Where is he?" Cai's bewildered brain darted at the impossible stratagem of intercepting Skin and getting the letters from him.

"Stabling the pony at this moment, I expect. . . . But I don't understand. What letters are you talkin' about? What *sort* of letters?"

"There—there was one from me and one from 'Bias—"

"Goodness!" she broke in, smiling pleasantly, "What, another invitation?"

"Well—" began Cai.

"Yes," struck in 'Bias.

"You might call it an invitation, o' sorts," Cai conceded.

"'*Course* you might," said 'Bias positively.

"You are very mysterious this morning, you two." The widow turned from one to another, her smile still hiding her amusement. "But let me guess. It appears you both wished to send me an invitation, and something has gone amiss with your letters."

"We both sent the same one," explained Cai, and blushed. "That's the long and short of it, ma'am."

"It doesn't seem so very dreadful." Mrs Bosenna's smile was sweetly reassuring. "You *both* wrote, when it was only necessary for one to write?"

"That's what I kept tellin' him, ma'am," put in 'Bias stoutly. "But he would put his oar in."

"Well, well. . . You both wished to give me pleasure, and each wrote without the other's knowledge—"

"No, we didn't," interrupted 'Bias again.

"Anyway," she harked back with a patient little sigh, "you had both planned your invitation to give me pleasure; and since it was the same—?" She paused on a note of interrogation.

"You might call it the same, ma'am—after a fashion," assented Cai.

She laughed. "Do you know," she said, "I forgot for a moment what friends you are; and it *did* cross my mind that maybe there were two invitations, and they clashed."

"But they do, ma'am!" groaned Cai.

"Eh? Yet you said just now. . . . So there *are* two, after all!"

"It's—it's this way, ma'am: the letters are the same, but the invitation as you call it—" Here Cai paused and cast an irritable glance in the direction of Dinah, who had stepped to the door of the oven to conceal her mirth. If the woman would but go he might be able to explain. "But the invitation don't apply similarly, not in both cases."

"That's queer, isn't it?" commented Mrs Bosenna. "And, supposin' I accept, to which of you must I write?"

"Me," said 'Bias with great promptitude.

"Not at all." Cai turned in wrath on his friend.

"I do think you might help, instead of standin' there and—"

"Can't I accept both?" suggested Mrs Bosenna sweetly.

"No, you certainly can't, ma'am. . . . And since the letters seemin'ly haven't reached you yet, we'd both of us take it as a favour if you'd hand 'em back to us without lookin' inside 'em. We—we want to try again, and send something calkilated to please you better. 'Tis a queer request, I'll grant you."

"It is," she agreed, cutting him short. "But what's the matter with the letters? Did you put any bad language into them by any chance?"

"Ma'am!" exclaimed Cai.

"Bad language?" protested 'Bias. "Why, to begin with, ma'am, I never use it. The language is too good, in a way, an' that's our trouble; only Cai, here, won't out with it, but keeps beatin' about the bush. You see, we went to Mr Benny for it."

"You went to Mr Benny?" she echoed as he hesitated. "For what, pray?"

"For the letters, ma'am. Unbeknowns to one another we went to Mr Benny—Mr *Peter* Benny—he havin' a gift with his pen—" 'Bias hesitated again, faltered, and came to a stop, aware that Mrs Bosenna's smile had changed to a frown; that she was regarding him with disapproval in her eyes, and that a red spot had declared itself suddenly upon either cheek.

"*You* don't seem to be makin' *very* good weather of it either," Cai taunted him; and with that, glancing at her for confirmation, he too noticed her changed expression and was dumb.

"Are you tellin' me,"—she seated herself stiffly, and they stood like culprits before her. "Are you tellin' me this is a game?"

"A—a what, ma'am?"

"A game!" She stamped her foot. "You've been makin' the town's mock o' me with Peter Benny's help —is that what you two funny seamen have walked up here to confess?"

"There was no names given, ma'am," stammered Cai. "I do assure you—"

"No names given!" Mrs Bosenna in a temper was terribly handsome. Her indignation so overawed the pair, as to rob them of all presence of mind for the moment. After all, where lay the harm in asking Mr Benny to word a simple invitation? Since the letters had not reached her, she could suspect no worse; and why, then, all this fuss? So they might have reasoned it out, had not conscience held them cowards —conscience and a creeping cold shade of mutual distrust. "No names given!" repeated the lady. "And I'm to believe that, just as I'm to believe, sir,"—she addressed herself stiffly to 'Bias—"that you never used bad language in your life!"

"I didn' say that, ma'am—not exactly," urged the bewildered 'Bias. "I dunno what's this about bad language. Who's been usin' bad language? Not me."

"Not since your prize-fightin' days, perhaps, Captain Hunken."

"My prize-fightin' days? My pr—Whoever told you, ma'am, as ever I had any, or behaved so?"

"You had better ask your friend here."

"Hey?"

"Perhaps," said Mrs Bosenna sarcastically, "that goes back beyond your memory! Your parrot, if I may say so, has a better one."

"Missus!" expostulated Dinah modestly, while "Oh good Lord!" muttered Cai with a start. His friend's eye was on him, too, fixed and suspicious.

"The parrot?" 'Bias, albeit innocent, took alarm.

"Why, what has he been doin'?"

"It isn't anything he *did*, sir," protested Dinah, taking courage to face about again from the oven door. "It's what he *said*."

"I meant to warn you—" began Cai; but 'Bias beat him down thunderously—

"What did he say?" he demanded of Dinah.

"Oh, I couldn't, sir! I really couldn't!"

"I meant to warn you," interposed Cai again. "There's a—a screw loose somewhere in that bird. Didn't I tell you only the night before last that Mrs Bowldler couldn't get along with him?"

"You did," admitted 'Bias, his tone ominously calm. "But you didn' specify: not when I told you I was goin' to bring the bird up here to Rilla."

"No, I didn': for, in the first place, I couldn', not knowin' what language the bird used."

He would have said more, but 'Bias turned roughly from him to demand of the women—

"Well, what *did* he say? . . . Did he say it in your hearin', ma'am?"

"Ahem!—er—partially so," owned Mrs Bosenna.

"It's no use you're askin' what he said," added Dinah; "for no decent woman could tell it. And, what's more, the mistress is takin' her breakfast here in the kitchen because she durstn't go nigh the parlour."

"And I got that bird off a missionary! A decenter speakin' parrot I've never known, so far as my experience goes—and I've known a good few."

"Folks have different notions on these matters; different standards, so to speak," suggested Mrs Bosenna icily.

"It's my opinion," put in Cai, "that missionary did you in the eye."

"Oh, that's your opinion, is it? Well, you'd best take care, my joker, or you'll get something in the eye yourself."

"We don't want any prize-fightin' here, if you please," commanded Mrs
Bosenna.

"There again!" foamed 'Bias, with difficulty checking an oath. "A prize-fighter, am I? Who put that into your head, ma'am? Who's been scandalisin' me to you?" He turned, half-choking, and shook a minatory finger at Cai.

"I—I didn' say I had any objection to fightin'-men, not when they're quiet," Mrs Bosenna made haste to observe in a pacificatory tone. In fact she was growing nervous, and felt that she had driven her revenge far enough. "My late husband was very fond of the—the ring—in his young days."

It is easier, however, to arouse passions than to allay them. 'Bias continued to shake a finger at Cai, and Cai (be it said in justice) faced the accusation gamely.

"I never scandalised you," he answered. "In fact I done all in my power to remove the impression." Feeling this to be infelicitous—in a sort of despair with his tongue, which had taken a twist and could say nothing aright this morning—he made haste to add in a tone at once easy and awkward, "It's my belief, 'Bias, as your parrot ain't fit to be left alone with females."

"Well, I'm goin' to wring his neck anyway," promised 'Bias; "and, if some folks aren't careful, maybe I won't stop with *his*."

Cai, though with rising temper, kept his nonchalance. "With you and me the creatur' don't feel the temptation, and consikently there's a side of his character hidden from us. But in female company it comes out. You may depend that's the explanation."

"Why, of course it is," chimed in Mrs Bosenna with sudden—suspiciously sudden—conviction. "How clever of Captain Hocken to think of it!"

"Yes, he's clever," growled 'Bias, unappeased. "Oh, he's monstrous clever, ma'am, is Caius Hocken! Such a friend, too! . . . And now, perhaps, he'll explain how it happened—he bein' so clever and such a friend—as he didn't find this out two nights ago and warn me?"

"I did warn ye, 'Bias," Cai's face had gone white under the taunt. "But I'll admit to you I might have pitched it stronger. . . . If you remember, on top of discussin' the parrot we fell to discussin' something—something more important to both of us; and that drove the bird out o' my head. It never crossed my mind again till bedtime, and then I meant to warn ye next day at breakfast."

"You're good at explanations, this mornin'," sneered 'Bias. "Better fit there was no need, and you'd

played fair."

"'Played fair'!"—Cai flamed up at last—"I don't take that from you, 'Bias Hunken, nor yet from any one! You fell into your own trap—that's what happened to *you*. . . . 'Played fair'? I suppose you was playin' fair when you sneaked off unbeknowns and early to Rilla that mornin', after we'd agreed—"

"Well?" asked 'Bias, as Cai came to a halt.

"You know well enough what we agreed," was Cai's tame conclusion.

"Where's the bird, ma'am?" asked 'Bias dully. Both men felt that all was over between them now, though neither quite understood how it had happened. "It—it seems I've offended you, and I ask your pardon. As for my doin' this o' purpose—well, you must believe it or not. That's as conscience bids ye. . . . But one warnin' I'll give— A bad friend don't us'ally make a good husband."

He motioned to Dinah to lead the way to the parlour, and so, with a jerk of the head, took his leave, not without dignity.

Mrs Bosenna promptly burst into tears.

Cai, left alone with her and with the despair in his heart, slowly (scarce knowing what he did) drew forth a red spotted handkerchief and eyed it. Maybe he had, to begin with, some intention of proffering it. But he stood still, a figure of woe, now glancing at Mrs Bosenna, anon staring fixedly at the handkerchief as if in wonder how it came in his hand. He noted, too, for the first time that the tall clock in the corner had an exceptionally loud tick.

"Go away!" commanded Mrs Bosenna after a minute or so, looking up with tear-stained eyes. It seemed that she had suddenly became aware of his presence.

Cai picked up his hat. "I was waitin' your leave, ma'am."

"Go, please!"

He went. He was indeed anxious to be gone. Very likely at the white gate below by the stream, 'Bias was standing in wait to knock his head off. Cai did not care. Nothing mattered now—nothing but a desire to follow 'Bias and have another word with him. It might even be. . . . But no: 'Bias was lost to him, lost irrevocably. Yet he craved to follow, catch up with him, plead for one more word.

He went quickly down the path to the gate, but of 'Bias there was no sign.

Poor Cai! He took a step or two down the road, and halted. Since 'Bias was not in sight there would be little chance of overtaking him on this side of the town; and in the street no explanation would be possible.

Cai turned heavily, set his face inland, and started to walk at a great pace. As though walking could exorcise what he carried in his heart!

Meanwhile 'Bias went striding down the valley with equal vigour and even more determination. His right hand gripped the parrot-cage, swinging it as he strode, and at intervals bumping it violently upon the calf of his right leg, much to his discomfort, very much more to that of the bird— which nevertheless, though bewildered by the rapid nauseating motion, and at times flung asprawl, obstinately forbore to reproduce the form of words so offensive in turn to Mrs Bowldler and the ladies at Rilla.

Once or twice, as his hand tired, and the rim of the cage impinged painfully on his upper ankle-bone, 'Bias halted and swore—

"All right, my beauty! You just wait till we get home!"

He had never wrung a bird's neck, and had no notion how to start on so fell a deed. He was, moreover, a humane man. Yet resolutely and without compunction he promised the parrot its fate.

A little beyond the entrance of the town, by the gateway of Mr Rogers's coal store, he came on a group—a trio—he could not well pass without salutation. They were Mr Rogers (in his bath-chair and wicked as ever) and Mr Philp, with Fancy Tabb in attendance as usual.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied this time?" Mr Rogers was saying.

"I suppose I must be," Mr Philp was grumbling in answer. "But all I can say is, coals burn faster than they used."

"It's the way with best Newcastle." Mr Rogers, who had never sold a ton of Newcastle coal in his life (let alone the best), gave his cheerful assurance without winking an eye.

"So you've told me more'n once," retorted Mr Philp. "I never made a study o' trade rowts, as they're called; but more'n once, too, it's been in my mind to ask ye how Newcastle folk come to ship their coal to Troy by way o' Runcorn."

Mr Rogers blinked knowledgeably. "It shortens the distance," he replied, "by a lot. But you was sayin' as coals burned faster. Well, they do, and what's the reason?"

"Ah!" said Mr Philp. "That's what I'd like to know."

"Well, I'll give 'ee the information, and nothin' to pay. Coals burn faster as a man burns slower. You're gettin' on in life; an' next time you draw your knees higher the grate you can tell yourself *that*, William Philp. . . . Hullo! there's Cap'n Hunken! . . . Mornin', Cap'n. That's a fine bird you're carryin'."

"A parrot, by the looks of it," put in Mr Philp.

"Sherlock 'Omes!" Mr Rogers congratulated him curtly.

"'Mornin', Mr Rogers—mornin', Mr Philp!" 'Bias halted and held out the cage at half-arm's length. "Yes, 'tis a fine bird I'm told." He eyed the parrot vindictively.

"Talks?"

"Damn! That's just it."

"What can it say?"

"Dunno. Wish I did. Will ye take the bird for a gift, or would ye rather have sixpence to wring its neck?"

"Both," suggested Mr Philp with promptitude.

"What yer wrigglin' for like that, at the back o' my chair, you Tabb's child?" asked Mr Rogers, whose paralysis prevented his turning his head.

"Offer for 'n, master!" whispered Fancy. Mr Rogers, if he heard, made no sign. "D'ye mean it?" he inquired of 'Bias. "I'm rather partial to parrots, as it happens: and it's a fine bird. What's the matter with it?"

"I don't know," 'Bias confessed again. "I wish somebody'd find out: but they tell me it can't be trusted with ladies."

"Is that why you're takin' it for a walk? . . . Well, I'll risk five bob, if it's goin' cheap."

Mr Philp's face fell. "I'd ha' gone half-a-crown, myself," he murmured resignedly; "but I can't bid up against a rich man like Mr Rogers. . . . You don't know what the creetur says?"

"No more'n Adam—only that it's too shockin' for human ears. If Mr Rogers cares to take the bird for five shillin', he's welcome, and good riddance. Only he won't never find out what's wrong with him."

"Honest?" asked Mr Rogers.

"Honest. I've lived alongside this bird seven years; he was bought off a missionary; and *I* don't know."

"Ah, well!" sighed Mr Philp. "Money can't buy everything. But I don't mind bettin' I'd ha' found out."

"Would ye now?" queried Mr Rogers with a wicked chuckle. "I'll put up a match, then. The bird's mine for five shillin': but Philp shall have him for a month, and I'll bet Philp half-a-crown he don't discover what you've missed. Done, is it?"

"Done.'" echoed Mr Philp, appealing to 'Bias and reaching out a hand for the cage.

"Done!" echoed 'Bias. "Five shillin' suits me at any time, and I'm glad to be rid o' the brute."

"There's one stippylation," put in Mr Rogers. "Philp must tell me honest what he discovers. . . . You, Tabb's child, you're jogglin' my chair again!"

So 'Bias, the five shillings handed over, went his way; relieved of one burden, but not of the main one.

"Well, if I ever!" echoed Dinah, returning to the kitchen at Rilla.
"If that wasn't a masterpiece, and no mistake!"

"Is the bird gone?" asked her mistress. "Then you might fry me a couple of sausages and lay breakfast in the parlour."

Dinah sighed. "'Tis lovely," she said, "to be able to play the fool with men . . . 'tis lovely, and 'tis what women were made for. But 'tis wasteful o' chances all the same. There goes two that'll never come back."

"You leave that to me," said Mrs Bosenna, who had dried her eyes. "Joke or no, you'll admit I paid them out for it. Now don't you fall into sentiments, but attend to prickin' the sausages. You know I hate a burst sausage."

BOOK III.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PLOUGHING.

It is possible—though not, perhaps, likely—that had Cai obeyed his first impulse and pursued 'Bias down the valley, to overtake him, the two friends might after a few hot words have found reconciliation, or at least have patched up an honourable truce. As it was, 'Bias carried home a bitter sense of betrayal, supposing that he had left Cai master of the field. He informed Mrs Bowldler that he would dine and sup alone.

"Which the joint to-day is a goose," protested that lady; "and one more difficult to halve at short notice I don't know, for my part."

"You must do the best you can." He vouchsafed no other reply.

Mrs Bowldler considered this problem all the rest of the morning. "Palmerston," she asked, as she opened the oven door to baste the bird, "supposin' you were asked to halve a roast goose, how would you begin?"

"I'd say I wouldn't," answered Palmerston on brief reflection.

"But supposin' you *had* to?"

Palmerston reflected for many seconds. "I'd start by gettin' my knee on it," he decided.

Mrs Bowldler, albeit much vexed in mind, deferred solving the problem, and was rewarded with good luck as procrastinators too often are in this world.

Dinner-time arrived, but Captain Hocken did not. She served the goose whole and carried it in to Captain Hunken.

"Eh?" said 'Bias, as she removed the cover. "What about—about Cap'n
Hocken?"

"He have not arrove."

'Bias ground his teeth. "Havin' dinner with *her!*" he told himself, and fell to work savagely to carve his solitary portion.

Having satisfied his appetite, he lit a pipe and smoked. But tobacco brought no solace, no charitable thoughts. While, as a matter of fact, Cai tramped the highroads, mile after mile, striving to deaden the pain at his heart, 'Bias sat puffing and let his wrath harden down into a fixed mould of resentment.

Dusk was falling when Cai returned. Mrs Bowldler, aware that something was amiss, heard his footsteps in the passage and presented herself.

"Which, having been detained, we might make an 'igh tea of it," she suggested, "and venture on the

wing of a goose. Stuffing at this hour I would 'ardly 'int at, being onion and apt to recur." But Captain Hocken desired no more than tea and toast.

Mrs Bowldler was intelligently sympathetic, because Fancy had called early in the afternoon and brought some enlightenment.

"There's a row," said Fancy, and told about the sale of the parrot. "That Mrs Bosenna's at the bottom of it, as I've said all along," she concluded.

"Do you reelly think the bird has been talking?"

"I don't think: I know."

Mrs Bowldler pondered a moment. "Ho! well—she's a widow."

"I reckon," said Fancy, "if these two sillies are goin' to fall out over her and live apart, you'll be wantin' extra help. Two meals for every one—I hope they counted *that* before they started to quarrel."

"I'll not have another woman in the house," declared Mrs Bowldler, and repeated it for emphasis after the style of the great Hebrew writers. "Another woman in the house have I will not! What do *you* say, Palmerston?"

Palmerston, who had been on the edge of tears for some time, broke down and fairly blubbered.

"There's a boy!" exclaimed the elder woman. "Mention a little hard work and he begins to cry."

"I don't believe he's cryin' for that at all," spoke up Fancy. "Are you, Pammy dear?"

"Nun-nun-No-o!" sobbed Palmerston.

"He can't abide quarrellin'—that's what's the matter. . . . Ah, well!" sighed Fancy, and fell back on her favourite formula of resignation. "It'll be all the same a hundred years hence; when we mee-eet," she chanted, "when we mee-eet, when we mee-eet on that Beyewtiful Shore! *And* in the meantime we three have got to sit tight an' watch for an openin' to teach 'em that their little hands were never made. No talkin' outside, mind!"

"As if I should!" protested Mrs Bowldler, and added thoughtfully, "I often wonder what happens to widows."

"They marry again, mostly."

"I mean up there—on the Beautiful Shore, so to speak. They don't marry again, because the Bible says so: but how some *contrytomps* is to be avoided I don't see."

Chiefly through the loyalty of these three, some weeks elapsed before the breach of friendship between Captain Caius Hocken and Captain Tobias Hunken became a matter of common talk. Mr Rogers must have had an inkling; for the pair consulted him on all their business affairs and investments, and in two or three ships their money had meant a joint influence on the shareholders' policy. Now, as they came to him separately, and with suggestions that bore no sign of concerted thought, so astute an adviser could hardly miss a guess that something was wrong. Nor did it greatly mend matters that each, on learning the other's wish upon this or that point where it conflicted with his own, at once made haste to yield. "If that's how 'Bias looks at it," Cai would say, "why o' course we'll make it so. I must have misunderstood him:" and 'Bias on his part would as promptly take back a proposal—"Cai thinks otherwise, eh? Oh, well that settles it! We haven't, as you might say, threshed it out together, but I leave details to him." "If you call this a detail—" "Yes, yes: leave it to Cai." Mr Rogers blinked, but asked no questions and kept his own counsel.

Mr Philp was more dangerous. (Who in Troy could keep Mr Philp for long off the scent of a secret?) But, as luck would have it, Cai in pure innocence routed Mr Philp at the first encounter.

It happened in this way. Towards the end of the first week of estrangement Cai, who bore up pretty well in the day time with the help of Mr Rogers, Barber Toy, and other gossips, began to find his evenings intolerably slow. He reasoned that autumn was drawing in, that the hours of darkness were lengthening, and that anyway, albeit the weather had not turned chilly as yet, a fire would be companionable. He ordered a fire therefore (more work for Mrs Bowldler). But somehow, after a brief defeat, his *ennui* returned. Then of a sudden, one night at bed-time, he bethought him of the musical box, and that John Peter Nanjulian needed hurrying-up.

Accordingly the next morning, as the church clock struck ten, found him climbing the narrow ascent to On the Wall: where, at the garden gate, he encountered Mr Philp in the act of leaving the house with a bulging carpet-bag.

"Eh? Good mornin', Mr Philp."

"Good mornin' to you, Cap'n Hocken." Mr Philp was hurrying by, but his besetting temptation held him to a halt. "How's Cap'n Hunken in these days?" he inquired.

"Nicely, thank you," answered Cai, using the formula of Troy.

"I ha'n't see you two together o' late."

"No?" Cai, casting about to change the subject, let fall a casual remark on the weather, and asked, "What's that you're carryin', if one may make so bold?"

"It's—it's a little commission for John Peter," stammered Mr Philp.
"Nothin' to mention."

He beat a hasty retreat down the hill.

"'Tis curious now," said Cai to John Peter ten minutes later, "how your inquisitive man hates a question, just as your joker can't never face a joke that goes against him. I met Philp, just outside, with a carpet bag: and I no sooner asked what he was carryin' than he bolted like a hare."

"There's no secret about it, either," said John Peter. "He tells me that, for occupation, he has opened an agency for the Plymouth Dye and Cleanin' Works."

"And you've given him some clothes to be cleaned? Well, I don't see why he need be ashamed o' that."

"Well, I haven't, to tell you the truth. For my part, I like my clothes the better the more I'm used to 'em. But my sister's laid up with bronchitis."

"Miss Susan? . . . Nothin' serious, I hope?"

"She always gets it, in the fall o' the year. No, nothing serious. But the doctor says she must keep her bed for a week—and now she's *got* to. . . . There'll be a rumpus when she finds out," said John Peter resignedly: "for she don't like clean clothes any better than I do. But one likes to oblige a neighbour; and if he'd taken my trowsers 'twould ha' meant the whole household bein' in bed, which," concluded John Peter with entire simplicity, "would not only be awkward in itself, but dangerous when only two are left of an old family."

Cai agreed, if he did not understand. He reclaimed his musical box— needless to say, John Peter had not yet engraved the plate—and carried it home, promising to restore it when that adornment was ready. For the next night or two it soothed him somewhat while he smoked and meditated on public duties soon to engage his leisure. For he had been co-opted a member of the School Board in room of Mr Rogers, resigned: and in Barber Toy's shop it was understood that he would be a candidate not only for the Parish Council to be elected before Christmas, but for a Harbour Commissionership to fall vacant in the summer of next year.

The notification of his appointment on the School Board reached him by post on the last Tuesday in September. Now, as it happened, the Technical Instruction Committee of the County Council had arranged to hold at Troy, some four days later, an Agricultural Demonstration, with competitions in ploughing, hedging, dry-walling, turfing, the splitting and binding of spars, &c.

Behold, now, on the morning of the Demonstration, Captain Caius Hocken, School Manager and therefore *ex officio* a steward, taking the field in his Sunday best with a scarlet badge in his buttonhole, "quite," declared Mrs Bowldler, "like a gentleman of the French Embassy as used frequent to take luncheon with us in the Square."

The morning was bright and clear: the sky a pale blue and almost cloudless, the season—

> Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
> Of trembling winter,

—and Cai walked with a lightness of spirit to which since the quarrel he had been a stranger. The Demonstration was to be held at the Four Turnings, where the two roads that lead out of Troy and form a triangle with the sea for base, converge to an apex and branch off again into two County highways.

The field lay scarcely a stone's throw from this apex—that is to say from the spot where the late Farmer Bosenna had ended his mortal career. It belonged in fact to Mrs Bosenna, and had been hired from her by the Technical Instruction Committee for a small sum; but Cai did not happen to know this, for the arrangement had been made some weeks ago, before his elevation to the School Board.

It was with a shock of surprise, therefore, that on passing the gate he found Mrs Bosenna close within, engaged in talk with two rosy-faced farmers; and, moreover, it brought a rush of blood to his face, for he had neither seen her nor heard from her since the fatal morning. There was, however, no way of retreat, and he stepped wide to avoid the group, lifting his hat awkwardly as he passed, not daring to meet the lady's eyes.

"Captain Hocken!" she called cheerfully.

"Ma'am?" Cai halted in confusion.

"Come here for a moment—that is, if it doesn't interrupt your duties— and be introduced to our two ploughing judges. Mr Widger of Callington, Mr Sam Nicholls of St Neot—Captain Hocken." Cai's cheeks in rosiness emulated those of the two men with whom he shook hands. "Captain Hocken," she explained to them, "takes a great interest in education."

For a moment it struck Cai that the pair, on hearing this, eyed him suspiciously; but his brain was in a whirl, and he might easily have been mistaken.

"Not at all," he stammered; "that is, I mean—I am new to this business, you see."

"You are a practical man, I hope, sir?' asked Mr Nicholls.

"I—I've spent the most part of my life at sea, if you'd count that bein' practical," said Cai modestly.

"To be sure I do," Mr Nicholls assented. "It's as practical as farmin', almost."

"In a manner o' speakin' it is," agreed Mr Widger grudgingly. "Men haven't all the same gifts. Now you'll hardly believe what happened to me the only time I ever took a sea trip."

"No?" politely queried Cai.

"I was sick," said Mr Widger, in a tone of vast reminiscent surprise.

"It *does* happen sometimes."

"Yes," repeated Mr Widger, "sick I was. It took place in Plymouth Sound: and you don't catch me tryin' the sea again."

"Now what," inquired Mr Nicholls, "might be your opinion about Labour Exemption Certificates, Captain Hocken?"

Cai was gravelled. His alleged interest in education had not as yet extended to a study of the subject.

Mrs Bosenna came to the rescue. Talk about education (she protested) was the last thing she could abide. Before the ploughing began she wanted to show Captain Hocken some work the hedgers had been doing at the lower end of the field.

At that moment, too, the local secretary came running with word that the first teams were already harnessed, and awaited the judges' preliminary inspection. Mr Widger and Mr Nicholls made their excuses, therefore, and hurried off to their duties.

"I have a bone to pick with you," said Mrs Bosenna, as she and Cai took their way leisurably across the field.

Cai groaned at thought of those unhappy letters.

But Mrs Bosenna made no allusion to the letters.

"You have not been near Rilla for weeks," she went on, reproachfully.

Cai glanced at her. "I thought—I was afraid you were offended," he said, his heart quickening its beat.

"Well, and so I was. To begin brawling as you did in a lady's presence—and two such friends as I'd always supposed you to be! It was shocking. Now, wasn't it?"

"It has made me miserable enough," pleaded Cai.

"And so it ought. . . . I don't know that I should be forgiving you now," added Mrs Bosenna demurely, "if it didn't happen that I wanted advice."

"*My* advice?" asked Cai incredulous.

"It's a business matter. Women, you know, are so helpless where business is concerned." (Oh, Mrs Bosenna!)

"If I can be of any help—" murmured Cai, somewhat astonished but prodigiously flattered.

"Hush!" she interrupted, lifting a quick eye towards the knap of the hill they had descended. "Isn't that Captain Hunken, up above? . . . Yes, to be sure it is, and he's turned to walk away just as I was going to call him!" She glanced at Cai, and there was mischief in the glance. "I expect the ploughing has begun, and I won't detain either of you. . . . The business? We won't discuss it now. I have to wait here for Dinah, who is coming for company as soon as she's finished her housework. . . . To-morrow, then, if you have nothing better to do. Good-bye!"

He left her and climbed the hill again. He seemed to tread on air; and no doubt, when he reached the plateau where the ploughmen were driving their teams to and fro before the judges, with corrugated brows, compressed lips, eyes anxiously bent on the imaginary line of the furrow to be drawn, this elation gave his bearing a confidence which to the malignant or uncharitable might have presented itself as bumptiousness. He mingled with the small group of *cognoscenti*, listened to their criticisms, and by-and-by, cocking his head knowledgeably on one side, hazarded the remark that "the fellow coming on with the roan and grey seemed to be missing depth in his effort to keep straight."

It was an innocent observation, uttered, may be, a thought too dogmatically, but truly with no deeper intent than to elicit fresh criticism from an expert who stood close beside his elbow. But a voice behind him said, and carried its sneer—

"Maybe he ain't the only one hereabouts as misses depth."

Cai, with a grey face, swung about. He had recognised the voice.
Some demon in him prompted the retort—

"Eh, 'Bias? Is that you?—and still takin' an interest in agriculture?"

The shaft went home. 'Bias's voice shook as he replied—

"I mayn't know much about education, at two minutes' notice; and I mayn't pretend to know much about ploughin' and wear a button in my coat to excuse it. But I reckon that for a pound a side I could plough you silly, Cai Hocken."

It was uttered in full hearing of some ten or twelve spectators, mostly townsmen of Troy; and these, turning their heads, for a moment not believing their ears, stared speechlessly at the two men whose friendship had in six months passed into a local byword. Cap'n Hocken and Gap'n Hunken—what, *quarrelling?* No, no—nonsense: it must be their fun!

But the faces of the pair told a different tale.

It was a stranger—a young farmer from two parishes away—who let off the first guffaw.

"A bet, naybours!—did 'ee hear *that?* Take him up, little man—he won't eat 'ee."

"I'll go ten shillin' myself, rather than miss it," announced another voice. "Ten shillin' on the bantam!"

"Get out with 'ee both," spoke up a citizen of Troy. "You don't know the men. 'Tisn't serious now—is it, Cap'n Hocken?—well as you're actin'—"

"Why not?" Cai stood, breathing hard, eyeing his adversary. "If *he* means it?"

"That's right! Cover his money?" cried an encouraging voice behind him.

The young farmer slapped his thigh, and ran off to the next group.
"Hi, you fellows! A match!"

He shouted it. They turned about. "What is it, Bill Crago?"—for they read in his excited gestures that he had real news.

"The fun o' the fair, boys! Two ships'-cap'ns offering to plough for a pound a side—if you ever!"

"Drunk!" suggested somebody.

"What's the odds if they be? 'Twill be all the better fun," answered Mr Crago. "No—far's one can tell they're dead sober. Come along and listen—" He hurried back and they after him.

"If he chooses to back out?" Cai was taunting Bias as the crowd pressed around. So true is it that:—

"To be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain."

"Who wants to back out?" answered 'Bias sullenly.

"If a man insults me, I hold him to his word: either that or he takes it back."

"Quite right, Cap'n';" prompted a voice. "And he can't tell us he didn't say it, for I heard him!"

"I ain't takin' nothin' back." 'Bias faced about doggedly.

By this time, as their wits cleared a little, each was aware of his folly, and each would gladly have retreated from this public exhibition of it. But as the crowd increased, neither would be the first to yield and invite its certain jeers. Moreover, each was furiously incensed: anything seemed better than to be shamed by *him*, to give *him* a cheap triumph.

News of the altercation had spread. Soon two-thirds of the spectators were trooping to join the throng in the upper field, pressing in on the antagonists, jostling in their eagerness to catch a word of the dispute. The competitors in Class D were left to plough lonely furrows and finish them unapplauded. Young Mr Crago had run off meantime to secure the services of the two judges.

Now Mrs Bosenna, after waiting some ten minutes by the lower gate for Dinah (whose capital fault was unpunctuality), had lost patience and walked back towards Rilla to meet and reproach her. She had almost reached the small gate when she spied Dinah hurrying down the steep path to the highroad, and halted. Dinah, coming up, excused herself between catches of breath. She had been detained by the plucking of a fowl, and a feather—or, as you might call it a fluff—had found its way into her throat. "Which," said she, "the way I heaved, mistress, is beyond belief."

Mrs Bosenna having admonished her to be more careful in future, turned to retrace her steps to the field.

They reached it and climbed the slope crosswise. They had scarcely gained the edge of the upper plateau when Mrs Bosenna stopped short and gave a gasp. For at that moment there broke on their view, against the near sky-line, the figure of a man awkwardly turning a plough, behind a team of horses.

"Save us, mistress!" cried keen-eyed Dinah. "If it isn't—"

"It can't be!" cried Mrs Bosenna, as if in the same breath.

"It's Cap'n Hunken," said Dinah positively.

"But why? Dinah—why?"

"It's Cap'n Hunken," repeated Dinah. "The Lord knows why. If he's doin' it for fun, I never saw worse entry to a furrow in my life."

"Nor I. But what can it mean?" Mrs Bosenna, panting, paused at the sound of derisive cheers, not very distant.

The two women ran forward a pace or two, until their gaze commanded the whole stretch of the upper slope. 'Bias, stolidly impelling his team— a roan and a rusty-black—had, in the difficult process of steering the turn, been too closely occupied to let his gaze travel aside. He was off again: his stalwart back, stripped to braces and shirt, bent as he trudged in wake of the horses, clinging to the plough-tail, helplessly striving to guide them by the wavy parallel his last furrow had set.

Down the field, nearer and nearer, approached Cai, steering a team as helplessly. Ribald cheers followed him.

Mrs Bosenna, though quite at a loss to explain it, grasped the situation in less than a moment. She followed up 'Bias, keeping wide and running—yet not seeming to hasten—over the unbroken ground to the left.

"Captain Hunken!"

'Bias, throwing all his weight back on the plough-tail, brought his team to a halt and looked around. He was bewildered, yet he recognised the voice.

While he paused thus, Cai steadily advanced to meet and pass him. He was plainly at the mercy of his team—a grey and a brown, both of conspicuous height—and they were drawing the furrow at their own sweet will. But he, too, clung to the plough-tail, and his lips were compressed, his eyes rigid, as he drew nearer, to meet and pass his adversary. He, likewise, had cast coat and waistcoat aside: his hat he had entrusted to an unknown backer. He saw nothing, as he came, but the line of the furrow he prayed to achieve.

"Captain Hocken!" She stepped forward hardily, holding up a hand, and Cai's team, too, came to a halt as if ashamed. "What—*what* is the meaning of this foolishness?"

"I've had enough, it *he* has," said Cai sheepishly, glancing past her and at 'Bias.

"I ain't doin' this for fun, ma'am," owned 'Bias. "Fact is, I'd 'most as lief steer a monkey by the tail."

"Then drop it this instant, the pair of you!"

'Bias scratched his head.

"As for that, ma'am, I don't see how we can oblige. There's money on it—bets."

"There won't be money's worth left in my field, at the rate you're spoilin' it." She turned upon the two judges, who were advancing timidly to placate her, while the crowd hung back. "And now, Mr Nicholls—now, Mr Widger—I'd like to hear what *you* have to say to this!"

"'Tis a pretty old cauch, sure 'nough," allowed Mr Sam Nicholls, pushing up the brim of his hat on one side and scratching his head while his eye travelled along the furrows. "Cruel!"

"And you permitted it! You, that might be supposed to have *some* knowledge o' farmin'!"

"Why, to be sure, ma'am," interposed Mr Widger, "we never reckoned as 'twould be so bad as all this. . . . Young Bill Crago came to us with word as how these—these two gentlemen—had made a match, and he asked us to do the judgin' same as for the classes 'pon the bills—"

"And so you started them? And then, I suppose, you couldn't stop for laughin'?"

"Something like that, ma'am, *as* you say," Mr Widger confessed.

"And what sort o' speech will you make, down to County Council, when I send in my bill for damages?—you that complained to me, only this mornin', how the rates were goin' up by leaps and bounds! . . . As for these gentlemen," said Mrs Bosenna, turning on Cai and 'Bias with just a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, "I shall be at home to-morrow morning if they choose to call and make me an offer—unless, o' course, they prefer to do so by letter."

At this, Dinah put up her hand suddenly to cover her mouth. But Cai and 'Bias were in no state of mind to catch the double innuendo.

Having thus reduced the judges to contrition, and having proceeded to call forward the local secretary and to extort from him a long and painful apology, Mrs Bosenna wound up with a threat to bundle the whole Demonstration out of her field if she heard of any further nonsense, and, taking Dinah's arm, sailed off (so to speak) with all the trophies of war.

Cai and 'Bias walked away shamefacedly to seek out their bottleholders and collect each his hat, coat, and waistcoat.

"But which of ee's won?" demanded their backers.

"*Damn* who's won!" was 'Bias's answer; and he looked too dangerous to be pressed further.

A wager is a wager, however; and the judges' decision was clamoured for, with threats that, until it was given, the Agricultural Demonstration would not be suffered to proceed. Mr Sam Nicholls consulted hastily with Mr Widger, and announced the award as follows:—

"We consider Captain Hunken's ploughin' to be the very worst ploughin' we've ever seen. But we award him the prize all the same, because we don't consider Captain Hocken's ploughin' to be any ploughin' at all."

Solvuntur risu tabulae—They can laugh, too, at Troy!

CHAPTER XIX.

ROSES AND THREE-PER-CENTS.

Although in her rose-garden—the rose-garden proper—Mrs Bosenna grew all varieties of "Hybrid Perpetuals" (these ranked first with her, as best suited to the Cornish soil and climate), with such "Teas" and "Hybrid Teas" as took her fancy, and while she pruned these plants hard in spring, to produce exhibition blooms, sentiment or good taste had forbidden her to disturb the old border favourites that lined the pathway in front of the house, or covered its walls and even pushed past the eaves to its chimneys. Some of these had beautified Rilla year by year for generations: the Provence cabbage-roses, for instance, in the border, the Crimson Damask and striped Commandant Beaurepaire; the moss-roses, pink and white, the China rose that bloomed on into January by the porch. These, with the Marechal Niel by her bedroom window, the scented white Banksian that smothered the southern wall, and the climbing Devoniensis that nothing would stop or stay until its flag was planted on the very roof-ridge, had greeted her, an old man's bride, on her first home-coming. They had, in the mysterious way of flowers, soothed some rebellion of young blood and helped to reconcile her to a lot which, for a shrewd and practical damsel, was, after all, not unenviable. She had no romance in her, and was quite unaware that the roses had helped; but she took a sensuous delight in them, and this had started her upon her hobby. A success or two in local flower-shows had done the rest.

Now with a rampant climber such as Rosa Devoniensis it is advisable to cut out each autumn, and clean remove some of the old wood; and this is no easy job when early neglect has allowed the plant to riot up and over the root-thatch. Mrs Bosenna had a particular fondness for this rose, and for the gipsy flush which separates it from other white roses as an unmistakable brunette. Yet she was sometimes minded to cut it down and uproot it, for the perverse thing would persist on flowering at its summit, and William Skin, sent aloft on ladders—whether in autumn or spring to prune this riot, or in summer to reap blooms by the armful— invariably did damage to the thatch.

Mrs Bosenna, then, gloved and armed with a pair of secateurs, stood next morning by the base of the Devoniensis holding debate with herself.

The issue—that she would decide to spare the offender for yet another year—was in truth determined; for already William Skin had planted one ladder against the house-wall and had shuffled off to the barn for another, to be hoisted on to the slope of the thatch, and there belayed with a rope around the chimney-stack. But she yet played with the resolve, taken last year, to be stern and order execution. She was still toying with it when the garden-gate clicked, and looking up, she perceived Captain Cai.

"Ah! . . . Good morning, Captain Hocken!"

Cai advanced along the pathway and gravely doffed his hat.
"Good morning, ma'am—if I don't intrude?"

"Not at all. In fact I was expecting you."

"Er—on which errand, ma'am?"

"—Which?" echoed Mrs Bosenna, as if she did not understand.

"Shall we take the more painful business first?" suggested Cai humbly. "If indeed it has not—er—wiped out the other. The damage done yesterday to your field, ma'am—"

"Have you brought Captain Hunken along with you?" asked Mrs Bosenna, interrupting him.

"No, ma'am. He will be here in half an hour, sharp." Cai consulted his watch.

"You have stolen a march on him then?" she smiled.

Cai flushed. "No, again, ma'am. Er—in point of fact we tossed up which should call first."

"Then," said she calmly, "we'll leave that part of the business until he arrives; though, since it concerns you both, I can't see why you did not bring him along with you. Do you know," she added with admirable simplicity, "it has struck me once or twice of late that you and Captain Hunken are not the friends you were?"

Still Cai stared, his face mantling with confusion. This woman was an enigma to him. Surely she must understand? Surely she must have received that brace of letters to which she evaded all allusion? And here was she just as blithely postponing all allusion to yesterday's offence!

But no; not quite, it seemed; for she continued—

"I cannot think why you two should challenge one another as you did yesterday, and make sillies of yourselves before a lot of farmers. It—it humiliates you."

"We were a pair of fools," conceded Cai.

"What men cannot see somehow," she went on angrily, "is that it doesn't end there. That kind of thing humiliates a woman; especially when—when she happens to be cast on her own resources and it is everything to her to find a man she can trust."

Mrs Bosenna threw into these words so much feeling that Cai in a moment forgot self. His awkwardness fell from him as a garment.

"You may trust me, ma'am. Truly you may. Tell me only what I can do."

At this moment William Skin—a crab-apple of a man, whose infirmity of deafness had long since reduced all the world for him to a vain tolerable show, in which so much went unexplained that nothing caused surprise—came stumbling around the corner of the house with a waggon-rope and a second ladder, which he proceeded to rest alongside the first one; showing the while no recognition of Cai's presence, even by a nod.

"I want you," said Mrs Bosenna, "to invest a hundred pounds for me. Oh!"—as Cai gave a start and glanced at Skin—"we may talk before him: he's as deaf as a haddock."

"A hundred pounds?" queried Cai, still in astonishment.

"Yes; it's a sum I happen to have lyin' idle. At this moment it's in the Bank, on deposit, where they give you something like two-and-a-half only: and in the ordinary way I should put it into Egyptian three per cents, or perhaps railways. My poor dear Samuel always had a great opinion of Egypt, for some reason. He used to say how pleasant it was in church to hear the parson readin' about Moses and the bulrushes, and the plague of frogs and suchlike, and think he had money invested in that very place, and how different it was in these days. Almost in his last breath he was beggin' me to promise to stick to Egyptians, or at any rate to something at three per cent and gilt-edged: because, you see, he'd always managed all the business and couldn't believe that women had any real sense in money affairs. . . . I didn't make any promise, really; though in a sort of respect to his memory I've kept on puttin' loose sums into that sort of thing. Three per cent is a silly rate of interest, when all is said and done: but of course the poor dear thought he was leavin' me all alone in the world, with no friend to advise. . . ."

"I see," said Cai, his heart beginning to beat fast. "And it's different now?"

"I—I was hopin' so," said Mrs Bosenna softly.

Cai glanced at the back of William Skin, who had started to hum—or rather to croon—a tuneless song while knotting a rope to the second ladder. No: it was impossible to say what he wished to say in the presence of William Skin, confound him! Skin's deafness, Skin's imperturbability, might have limits. . . .

"You wish me to advise you?" he controlled himself to ask.

"No, I don't. I wish you—if you'll do me the favour—just to take the money and invest it without consultin' me. It's—well, it's like the master in the Bible—the man who gave out the talents. . . . Only don't wrap it in a napkin!" She laughed. "I don't even want to be told *what* you do with the money. I'd rather not be told, in fact. I want to trust you."

"Why?"

She laughed again, this time more shyly. "'Trust is proof,'" she answered, quoting the rustic adage. "You have given me some right to make that proof, I think?"

Ah—to be sure—the letters! She must, of course, have received his letter, along with 'Bias's, though this was her first allusion to it. . . . Cai's brain worked in a whirl for some moments. She was offering him a test; she was yielding upon honest and prudent conditions; she was as good as inviting him to win her. . . . To do him justice, he had never—never, at any rate, consciously—based his wooing on her wealth. For aught he cared, she might continue to administer all she possessed. The comforts of Rilla Farm may have helped to attract him, but herself had been from the first the true spell.

He did not profess any knowledge of finance. A return of four per cent on his own modest investments contented him, and he left these to Mr Rogers.

"Ah!"

His mind had caught, of a sudden, at a really brilliant idea.

"I accept," said he firmly, looking Mrs Bosenna hard in the eyes, and her eyes sank under his gaze.

"Hi! Heads!" sang out a voice, and simultaneously the ladder which William Skin had been hauling aloft, came crashing down and struck the flagged path scarcely two yards away.

A second later Cai had Mrs Bosenna in his arms. "You are not hurt?" he gasped.

She disengaged herself with a half-hysterical laugh. "Hurt?
Am I? . . . No, of course I am not."

"The damned rope slipped," growled William Skin in explanation, from his perch on the ladder under the eaves.

"Slipped?" Cai ran to the rope and examined it. "Of course it slipped, you lubber!" He stepped back on the pathway and spoke up to Skin as he would have talked on shipboard to a blundering seaman in the cross-trees. "Ain't a slip-knot *made* to slip? And when a man's fool enough to tie one in place of a hitch—"

He cast off the rope, bent it around the rung with, as it seemed, one turn of the hand, and with a jerk had it firm and true.

"Make way, up there!" he called.

"You're never going to—to risk yourself," protested Mrs Bosenna.

"Risk myself? Lord, ma'am, for what age d'ye take me?" Cai caught up the slack of the rope and hitched it taut over his shoulder. He was rejuvenated. He made a spring for the ladder, and went up it much as twenty years ago he would have swarmed up the ratlines. "Make yourself small," he commanded, as Skin, at imminent risk of falling, drew to one side before his onset. Cai was past him in a jiffy, over the eaves, balancing himself with miraculous ease on the slippery thatch. "Now ease up the ladder!"

He had anchored himself by pure trick of balance, and was pulling with a steady hand almost as soon as Skin, collecting his wits, could reach out to fend the ladder off from crushing the edge of the eaves. Ten seconds later, by seaman's sleight of foot, he had gained a second anchorage half-way up the slope, had gathered up all the slack of the rope into a seaman's coil, and with a circular sweep of the arm had flung it deftly around the chimney. The end, instead of sliding down to his hand, hitched itself among the thorns of the rampant Devoniensis. Did this daunt him? It checked him for an instant only. The next, he had balanced himself for a fresh leap, gained the roof-ridges, and, seated astride of it, was hauling up the ladder, hand over fist, close to the chimney-base.

The marvel was, the close thatch showed no trace of having been trampled or disturbed.

"Darn the feller, he's as ajjile as a cat!" swore William Skin.

"Pass up the clippers, you below!" Cai commanded, forgetting that the man was deaf. "If your mistress'll stand back in the path a bit, I'll pick out the shoots one by one and hold 'em up for her to see, so's she can tell me which to cut away."

"You'll scratch your hands to ribbons," Mrs Bosenna warned him.

"'Tisn't worth while comin' down for a pair of hedgin' gloves. . . . I say, though—I've a better notion! 'Stead of lettin' this fellow run riot here around the chimney-stack, why not have him down and peg him horizontal, more or less, across and along the thatch, where he can be seen?"

"Capital!" she agreed. "He'd put out more than twice the number of blooms too. They do always best when laid lateral."

"He'll come down bodily with a little coaxin'. The question is how to peg him when he's down?"

"Rick-spars," answered Mrs Bosenna promptly. "The small kind. There's dozens in the waggon-house loft." She signalled to William Skin to come down, bawled an order in his ear, and despatched him to fetch a score or so.

"Hullo!" cried Cai, who, being unemployed for the moment, had leisure to look around and enjoy the view from the roof-ridge. "If it isn't 'Bias comin' up the path! . . . Hi! 'Bias!" he hailed boyishly, in the old friendly tone.

'Bias, stooping to unlatch the gate, heard the call which descended, as it were, straight from heaven, and gazed about him stupidly. He was aware of Mrs Bosenna in the pathway, advancing a step or two to make him welcome. She halted and laughed, with a glance up towards the roof. 'Bias's eyes slowly followed hers.

"Lord!" he muttered, "what made ye masthead him up there? . . . Been misbehavin', has he? 'Tis the way I've served 'prentices afore now."

"On the contrary, he has been behaving beautifully—"

"Here, 'Bias!" called down Cai again. "Heft along the tall ladder half a dozen yards to the s'yth'ard, and stand by to help. I'm bringin' down this plaguy rose-bush, and I'll take some catchin' if I slip with it."

"'Who ran and caught him when he fell?' 'His Bias,'" quoted Mrs Bosenna. "He has been doin' wonders up there, Captain Hunken. But if I were you—a man of your weight—"

"I reckon," said 'Bias, stepping forward and seizing the ladder, which he lifted as though it had been constructed of bamboo, "I han't forgot all I learnt o' reefin' off the Horn." He planted the ladder and had mounted it in a jiffy. "Now, then, what's the programme?" he demanded.

"You see this rose? Well, I got to collect it—I've tried the main stem, and it'll bend all right,—and then I got to slide down to you. After that we've to peg it out somewheres above the eaves, as Madam gives orders. See?"

"I see. When you're ready, slide away."

Just then William Skin came hurrying back with an armful of rick-spars: and within ten minutes the two rivals were hotly at work—yet cheerfully, intelligently, as though misunderstanding had never been,— clipping out dead wood from the rose-bush, layering it, pegging it, driving in the spars,—while Mrs Bosenna called directions, and William Skin gazed, with open mouth.

"This is better than ploughin', ma'am?" challenged Cai in his glee.

"So much better," agreed the widow, smiling up, "that I've almost a mind to forgive the pair of you."

"But I won't ask you to stay for dinner to-day," she said later, when the tangled mass of the Devoniensis had been separated, shoot from shoot, and pegged out to the last healthy-looking twig, and the two men stood, flushed but safe, on the pathway beside her. She stole a confidential little glance at Cai. "For I understand from Captain Hocken that you prefer to make your excuses separately. I have already forgiven *him*: and it's only fair to give Captain Hunken his turn."

Who less suspicious than Cai? Had he been suspicious at all, what better reassurance than the sly pressure of her hand as he bade her good-day? . . . Poor 'Bias!

Once past the gate, and out of sight, Cai felt a strange desire to skip!

"Well, mistress, you are a bold one, I must say!" commented Dinah that night by the kitchen fire, where Mrs Bosenna enjoyed a chat and, at this season of the year, a small glass of hot brandy-and-water, with a slice of lemon in it, before going to bed.

"I don't see where the boldness comes in," said the widow. She was studying the fire, and spoke inattentively.

"Two hundred pounds!"

"Eh? . . . There's no risk in that. You may say what you like of
Captain Hocken or of Captain Hunken: but they're honest as children.
The money's as safe with them as in the bank."

"Well, it do seem to me a dashin' and yet a very cold-blooded way of choosin' a man. Now, if I was taken with one—"

"Well?" prompted Mrs Bosenna, as Dinah paused.

"Call me weak, but I couldn't help it. I should throw myself straight at his head, an' ask him to trample me under his boots!"

"A nice kind of husband you'd make of him then!" said her mistress scornfully.

"I know, I know," agreed Dinah. "I've no power o' resistance at all, an' I daresay the Almighty has saved me a lifetime o' trouble. 'Twould ha' been desperet pleasant at the time though." She sighed.

"But to give two men a hundred pound each, an' choose the one that manages it best—"

"Worst," corrected Mrs Bosenna. "You ninny!" she went on with sovereign contempt. "Do you really suppose I'd marry a man that could handle my money, or was vain enough to suppose he could?"

"O—oh!" gasped Dinah as she took enlightenment. . . . "But two hundred pounds is a terrible sum to spend in findin' out which o' two men is the bigger fool. Why not begin wi' the one you like best, and find out first if he's foolish enough to suit?"

"Because," answered Mrs Bosenna, turning meditative eyes again upon the fire, "I don't happen to know which I like best."

"Then you can't be in love," declared foolish Dinah.

"Sensible women ain't; not until afterwards. . . . Now, which would you advise me to marry?"

"Captain Hunken." Dinah's answer was prompt. "He's that curt. I like a man to be curt; he makes it so hard for 'ee to say no. Besides which, as you might say, that parrot of his did break the ice in a manner of speakin'."

"Dinah, I'm ashamed of you."

"Well, mistress, natur' is natur': and we knows what we can't help knowin'."

"That's true," Mrs Bosenna agreed. It was her turn to sigh.

"Cap'n Hunken's the man," repeated Dinah. She nodded her head on it and paused. "Though, if you ask my opinion, Cap'n Hocken 'd make the better husband."

"It's difficult."

"Ay. . . . For my part I don't know what you want with a husband at all."

"Nor I," said Mrs Bosenna, still gazing into the fire.

"At the best 'tis a risk."

Mrs Bosenna sighed again. "If it weren't, where'd be the fun?"

CHAPTER XX.

A NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH.

Mr Rogers enjoyed his newspaper. To speak more accurately, he enjoyed several: and one of Fancy's duties—by no means the least pleasant or the least onerous—was to read to him daily the main contents of 'The Western Morning News,' 'The Western Daily Mercury,' and 'The Shipping Gazette': and on Thursdays from cover to cover—at a special afternoon *seance*—'The Troy Herald,' with its weekly bulletin of more local news.

"What's the items this week?" asked Mr Rogers, puffing at a freshly lit pipe and settling himself down to listen.

Fancy opened the paper at its middle sheet, folded it back and scanned it.

"Here we are. 'If you want corsets, go to—' no, that's an advertisement. 'Troy Christian Endeavour. Under the auspices of the above-named flourishing society—'"

"Skip the Christian Endeavour."

"Very well. The next is 'Wesley Guild. A goodly company met this week to hear the Rev. J. Bates Handcock on "Gambling: its Cause and Cure." The reverend gentleman is always a favourite at Troy—'"

"He's none of mine, anyway. Skip the Wesley Guild."

"Right-o! 'On Wednesday last, in spite of counter attractions, much interest was testified by those who assembled in the Institute Hall to hear Mr Trudgeon, lately returned from the United States, on the Great Canyon of Colorado, illustrated with lantern slides. The lecturer in a genial manner, after personally conducting his audience across the Great Continent—'"

"Damn," said Mr Rogers. "Get on to the drunks. Ain't there any?"

"Seems not. How will this do?"

> 'Report says that Monday's Agricultural Demonstration —a full report of which will be found in another column—was not without its comic relief, beloved of dramatists. On dit that —'"

"On what?"

"Dit. Misprint, perhaps."

> 'On dit that two highly respected sons of the brine, recently settled in our midst, and one of whom has recently been elected to teach our young ideas how to shoot, were so fired with emulation by the ploughing in Class C as to challenge one another then and there to a trial of prowess, much to the entertainment of our agricultural friends. The stakes were for a considerable amount, and the two heroes who had elected to plough something more solid than the waves, quickly found themselves the observed of all observers. Rumour, that lying jade, hints at a lady in the case. Certain it is that the pair, whose names have of late been syn —been sy-nonymous—with,'—

"—O Lor'! here's a heap of it, master!"

"Skip the long syllables an' get on."

"H'm—m—"

> '—acquitted themselves to the astonishment of the judges, and of everybody else in the field. Search out the lady, as our Gallic neighbours say.'

—"Where's Gallic?"

"Don't know. Ask Shake Benny. He supplies the Troy Notes to the 'Herald.'"

"Oh, does he?"

"Yes: he gets his gossip off Philp; and dresses it up. That's how it's done. Philp has a nose like a ferret's: but he was unfort'nit in his education. You may trust Philp to get at the facts—leastways you can trust him for gossip: but he can't dress anything up. . . . Why, what's the matter with the child?"

Fancy Tabb never laughed: and this was the queerer because she had a sense of humour beyond her years. Though by no means a gleeful child she could express glee naturally enough: but a joke merely affected her with silent convulsive twitchings, as though the risible faculties struggled somewhere within her but could not bring the laugh to birth.

These spasms of mirth, whatever had provoked them, were cut short—and her explanation too—by a heavy footstep on the stairs.

"Cap'n Hunken!" she announced, and went to open the door. "Most like he wants to talk business with you same as Cap'n Hocken did this morning, and I'd better make myself scarce. That's the silly way they've taken to behave, 'stead of callin' together."

"Ay, you're sharp, missy," said her master. "But 'twon't be the same arrand this time, as it happens: so you're wrong for once."

Fancy, if she heard, did not answer, for 'Bias by this time had reached the landing without. She opened to him. "Good afternoon, sir."

"Afternoon, missy. I saw your father in the shop, and he told me to walk up. Mr Rogers disengaged?"

"Ay, Cap'n—walk in, walk in!" said Mr Rogers from his chair. What is it to-day? Business? or just a pipe and a chat?"

"Well, it's business," allowed 'Bias with a glance at the girl.
"But I'll light a pipe over it, if you don't mind."

"And I'll fit and make tea for you both," said Fancy. "It's near about time."

She vanished and closed the door behind her. 'Bias found a chair, seated himself, and filled his pipe very slowly and thoughtfully. Mr Rogers waited.

"The business that brings me—" 'Bias paused, struck a match and lit up—"ain't quite the ordinary business."

"No?"

"No." For a few seconds 'Bias appeared to be musing. "In fact you might call it a—a sort o' flutter. That's the word—ain't it?—when you take a bit o' money and play venturesome with it, against your usual habits."

"Ay?" Mr Rogers looked at him sharply. "When I say venturesome," continued 'Bias, "you'll understand I don't mean foolhardy. . . . Nothin' o' the sort. I want to hear o' something tolerably safe, into which a man might put a small sum he happened to have lyin' about."

"What sort of investment?"

"Ay, that's just what I want you to tell me. Ten per cent, we'll say, an' no more'n a moderate risk. . . . I reckoned as a man like you might know, maybe, o' half a dozen things o' the sort."

"What's the amount?" Mr Rogers's eyes, that had opened wide for a moment, narrowed themselves upon him in a curiosity that hid some humour.

"Put it at a hundred pound."

"Oh!—er—I mean, is that all?"

"You see," exclaimed 'Bias. "You mustn' run away wi' the notion that I ain't satisfied as things are. Four and five per cent—and that's what you get for me—does best in the main. I can live within the income and sleep o' nights. But once in a way—"

"Ay," interrupted Mr Rogers, "and more especially when *it's to oblige a friend*."

'Bias withdrew the pipe from his mouth and stared. "You're a clever one, too! . . . Well, and I don't mind you're knowin'. 'Tis a relief, in a way: for now you know I'm pleased enough with your dealins' on my own account."

"Thank 'ee. I'm not askin' no names."

"As to that, I'd rather not mention the name, either. But I'd be very glad o' your advice: for 'tis important to me, in a way o' speakin'!"

Mr Rogers nodded. "If that's so," said he, "you must give me a little time to think. There's mortgages, o' course: and there's deals to be done in shipping: and there's money-lendin,—though you'd object to that, maybe. . . . Anyway, you come to me to-morrow, and I may have something to propose."

"Thank 'ee. I take that as friendly."

"Right." Mr Rogers let drop a trembling half-paralysed hand towards the newspaper which lay on the floor beside his chair. "Would ye mind—"

'Bias stepped forward and picked it up for him.

"Thank 'ee. No: I want you to keep it. . . . I'm goin' to do a thing that's friendlier yet: though it be a risk. Open the paper at the middle sheet—right-hand side, an' look out a column headed 'Troy News.' . . . Got it?"

"Half a moment—Yes,' Troy News'—Here we are!"

"Now cast your eye down the column till you come 'pon a part about last
Monday's Agricultural Demonstration."

"The devil!" swore 'Bias. "You don't mean to say—"

"'Course I do. Everything gets into the papers nowadays. . . .

You'll find it spicy."

'Bias found the paragraph and started to read, with knitted brows. Its journalistic style held him puzzled for fully half a minute. Then he ejaculated "Ha!" and snorted. After another ten seconds he snorted again and exploded some bad words—some very bad words indeed.

"Thought I'd warn you to be careful," said Mr Rogers. "You don't take it amiss, I hope? In a little place like this there's eyes about all the time—an' tongues."

"I'd like to find the joker who wrote it?" breathed 'Bias, the paper trembling between his hands.

"I can't tell you who *wrote* it," said the ship-chandler; "but I can give a pretty close guess who's responsible for it: and that's Philp."

"Philp?"

"Mind ye, I say 'tis but a guess."

"I'll Philp him!"

"Well, he's no fav'rite o' mine," said Mr Rogers grinning. "He's too suspicious for me, and I hate a man to be suspicious. . . . But he's the man I suspect."

"Where does he live?"

"Union Place—two flights o' steps below John Peter Nanjulian's— left-hand side as you go up. But you can't have it out with him on suspicion only."

"Can't I?" said 'Bias grimly. "I'll ask him plain 'yes' or 'no.' If he says 'yes,' I'll know what to do, and you may lay I'll do it."

"But if he says 'no'?"

"Then I'll call him a liar," promised 'Bias without a moment's indecision. "That'll touch him up, I should hope. . . . *Where* did you say he lives?"

At this moment there came a knock at the door and Fancy entered with the tea-tray.

"If you'd really like a talk with him," said Mr Rogers, blinking, "maybe you'd best let the child here take you to his house. . . . Eh, missy? Cap'n Hunken tells me as how he'd like to pay a call 'pon Mr Philp, up in Union Place."

"Now?" asked Fancy.

"The sooner the better," answered 'Bias, crushing 'The Troy Herald' between his hands.

Fancy's hands, disencumbered of the tea-tray, began to twitch violently. "Very well, master," was all she said, however; and with that she left the room to fetch her hat and small cloak.

"I'd advise you to tackle Philp gently," was Mr Rogers's warning as soon as the pair were alone. "Not that I've any likin' for the man: but the point is, you've no evidence. He'll tell you—and, likely enough, with truth—as he never act'ally wrote what's printed."

"You leave him to me," answered 'Bias grimly, gulping his tea and preparing to sally forth.

"An' you might remember to leave the child outside. If a lady's name is to be handled in the discussion, you understand. . . . Besides which, witnesses are apt to be awk'ard. Two's the safe number when there's a delicate point to be cleared up."

Fancy reappeared and announced herself ready. 'Bias caught up his hat. . . . Left to himself, Mr Rogers lay back in his chair and chuckled. He did not care two straws for Mr Philp, or for what might happen to him. His mind was off on quite another train of thought.

"I wonder what the woman's game is? 'A hundred pound lyin' idle'—and Hocken around with the same tale this forenoon. . . . Ten per cent, and at a moderate risk. . . . She's shrewd, too, by all accounts. . . . Damme, if this isn't a queer cross-runnin' world! A woman like that, if I'd had the luck to meet her a three-four year ago—before *this* happened!" . . . He eyed his palsied hand as it reached out, shaking, for the tea-cup.

"When we get to the door," said 'Bias heavily, as he and Fancy turned out of the street into the narrow entry of Union Place, "you're to step back and run away home."

"No fear," she assured him. "I'm doin' you a favour, an' don't you forget it."

"But you can't come inside with me."

"*That's* all right. Nobody said as I wanted to, in my hearin'. I can see all I want to see. There's a flight o' steps runnin' up close outside the window."

She pointed it out and quite candidly indicated the point at which she proposed to perch herself. "And there's another window at the back," she added: "so's you can see all that's happenin' inside."

"Better fit you ran away home," he repeated.

"You can't *make* me," retorted Fancy. "Unless, o' course, you choose to use force, here in broad daylight. As a friend of mine said, only the other day," she went on, snatching at a purple patch from 'Pickerley,' "the man as would lift his hand against a woman deserves whatever can be said of him. Public opinion will condemn him in this life, and, in the next, worms are his portion. So there!"

"I dunno what you're talkin' about," said 'Bias, preoccupied with the thought of coming vengeance.

"Who's meanin' to lift his hand against a woman?"

"Well, mind you don't, that's all!"

She left him standing on the doorstep, and skipped away up the steps. Having reached a point which commanded a view over the blinds of Mr Philp's front window, she gave a glance into the room, and at once her arms and legs started to twitch as though in the opening movement of some barbaric war-dance.

'Bias, still inattentive, took no heed of these contortions. After a moment's pause he rapped sharply on the door with the knob of his walking-stick, then boldly lifted the latch and strode into the passage.

On his right the door of the front parlour stood ajar. He thrust it wide open and entered. And, as he entered, a female figure arose from a chair on the far side of the room.

"I—I beg your pardon, ma'am!" stammered 'Bias, falling back a pace.

"Polly wants a kiss!" screamed a voice. It did not seem to proceed from the lady. . . . Somehow, too, it was strangely familiar. . . . 'Bias stared wildly about him.

At the same moment, and just as his eyes fell on the parrot-cage on the table, the lady—But was it a lady? Heavens! what did it resemble—this figure in female attire?

"Drat your bird! He won't say no worse! And this is the third mornin'
I've sat temptin' him!"

Mr Philp—yes, it was Mr Philp—in black merino frock, Paisley shawl and ribboned cap on which a few puce-coloured poppies nodded—Mr Philp, with a handful of knitting, and a ball of worsted trailing at his feet— But it is impossible to construct a sentence which would do justice to Mr Philp as he loomed up and swam into ken through 'Bias's awed surmise; and the effort shall be abandoned.

Mr Philp slowly unwound the woollen wrap that had swathed his beard out of sight.

"Clever things, birds," said Mr Philp, and his voice seemed to regain its identity as the folds of the bandage dropped from him. "I wonder whether shavin' would help! . . . I don't like to be beat."

'Bias, who had come with that very intent, lifted a hand—but let it fall again. No, he could not!

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated, and fled from the house.

Outside, Fancy—who had seen all—was executing a fandango on the step.

"Help!" she called, taunting him. "*Who* talked o' liftin' a hand against a woman?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE AUCTION.

One result of the paragraph in 'The Troy Herald' was to harden the two friends' estrangement just at the moment when it promised to melt. Troy with its many amenities has a deplorable appetite for gossip; and to this appetite the contention of Captain Hocken and Captain Hunken for Mrs Bosenna's hand gave meat and drink. (There was, of course, no difficulty in guessing what Mr Shake Benny would have called "the *inamorata's* identity.") Malicious folk, after their nature, assumed the pair to be in quest of her money. The sporting ones laid bets. Every one discussed the item with that frankness which is so characteristic of the little town, and so engaging when you arrive at knowing us, though it not infrequently disconcerts the newcomer. Barber Toy—having Cai at his mercy next morning, with a razor close to his throat—heartily wished him success.

"Not," added Mr Toy, "that I bear any ill-will to Cap'n Hunken. But I back a shaved chin on principle, for the credit of the trade."

A sardonic and travelled seaman, waiting his turn in the corner, hereupon asked how he managed when it came to the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race.

"I'll tell you," answered Mr Toy. "I wasn't at Oxford myself—*nor* at Cambridge; and for years I'd back one or 'nother, 'cordin' to the newspapers. But that isn't a satisfactory way. When you're dealin' with an honest event—*honest*, mind you—as goes on year after year between two parties both ekally set on winnin', the only way to get real satisfaction is to pick your fancy an' go on backin' it. That gives ye a different interest altogether, like with Liberal or Conservative at a General Election. If you don't win this time, you look forward to next. . . . Well, one day Mr Philp here came into the shop wearin' a dark blue tie, and says I, 'You're Oxford.' 'Am I?' says he—'It's the first I've heard tell of it.' 'You're Oxford,' says I: 'and I'm Cambridge, for half-a-crown.' Odd enough, Cambridge won that year by eight lengths."

"I wonder you have the face to tell this story," put in Mr Philp.

The barber grinned. "Well, I thought as we'd both settled 'pon our fancy, in a neighbourly way. But be dashed if, soon after the followin' Christmas, Mr Philp didn't send his tie to the wash, and it came back any blue you pleased. 'Make it one or t'other—*I* don't care,' said I: and he weighed the choice so long, bein' a cautious man, that we missed to make up any bet at all. If you'll believe me, that year they rowed a dead heat."

"Very curious," commented Cai.

"But that isn' the end," continued the barber. "Next year he'd washed his necktie again, and that 'twas Cambridge he couldn' dispute. So we put on another half-crown, and Oxford won by two lengths. . . . 'Twas a pity I could never induce him to bet again, for his tie went on getting Cambridger and Cambridger, while Oxford won four years out o' five."

"If you believe there was any honesty in it!" said Mr Philp.
"'Twas only my suspicious natur' as saved me."

The whole town, indeed, was watching the rivals, and with an open interest very difficult to resent. Nay, since it was impossible to tell every second man in the street to mind his own business, Cai and 'Bias accepted the publicity perforce and turned their resentment upon one another.

They continued, of course, to live apart, and Mrs Bowldler soon learned to avoid playing the intermediary, even to the extent of suggesting (say) some concerted action over the coal supplies. After the first fortnight no messages passed between them—

> "They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
> Like cliffs that had been rent asunder."

If they met, in shop or roadway, they nodded, but exchanged no other greeting. They never met at Rilla Farm. How it was agreed I know not, though Mrs Bosenna must have contrived it somehow; but they now prosecuted their wooing openly on alternate days. Sunday she reserved for what Sunday ought to be—a day of rest.

"The artfulness!" exclaimed Mrs Bowldler on making discovery of this arrangement. "But the men are no match for us, my dear"—this to Fancy—"an' the oftener they marry us the cleverer they leave us."

"Then 'tis a good job Henry the Eighth wasn' a woman," commented Fancy.

"There was some such case in the Scriptures, if you'll remember; and it says that last of all the woman died also. If she did, you may be sure as 'twasn't till she chose."

"I heard Mr Rogers say t'other day, 'Never marry a widow unless her first husband was hanged.'"

"Pray let us change the subjeck," said Mrs Bowldler hastily.

"Why? . . . What did Mr Bowldler die of? I've often meant to ask," said Fancy, "and then again I've wondered sometimes if there ever was any such person."

"There *was* such a person." Mrs Bowldler half-closed her eyes in dreamy reminiscence. "Further than that I would not like to commit myself."

"He's dead, then?"

"He was a fitter in a ladies' tailorin', and naturally gay by temperament. It led to misunderstandin's. . . . Dead? No, not that I am aware of. For all I know he's still starrin' it somewhere in the provinces."

She protested that for the moment she must drop the subject, which invariably affected her with palpitations; but promised to return to it in confidence when she felt stronger.

Throughout these days, however, and for many days to come, she discoursed at large on the diplomacy of widows; warning Palmerston to shape his course in avoidance of them. And that budding author—who had already learnt to take his good things where he found them—boldly transferred her warnings to the pages of 'Pickerley,' which thereby arrived at resembling 'Pickwick' in one respect if in no other.

From these generalities she would hark back, at shortest notice, to the practical present.

"It behoves us—seein' as how a tempory cloud has descended between these two establishments—it behoves us, I say, to watch out for its silver lining in one form or another. Which talking of silver reminds me of electro, and I'll ask you, Palmerston, if that's the way to leave a mustard-pot and call yourself an indoor male?"

Their estrangement had endured some three months before the rivals came again into public collision.

The beginning of it happened through a very excusable misunderstanding.

Is Christmas Day to be reckoned as an ordinary day of the week, or as a Sunday, or as a *dies non?* The reader must decide.

Christmas Day that year fell on a Friday—one of the three week-days tacitly allotted to Cai, who may therefore be forgiven that he chose to reckon it as coming within the ordinary routine. He did so, and at about three o'clock in the afternoon (which was bright and sunny) he reached the small gate of Rilla, to be aware of 'Bias striding up the pathway ahead of him.

He gave chase in no small choler.

"Look here," he protested, panting; "haven't you made some mistake? This is Friday."

"Christmas Day," answered 'Bias, wheeling about.

"I can't help that. 'Tis Friday."

"An' next year 'twill be Saturday," retorted 'Bias with a sour grin; "it that'll content you, when it comes. None of us can't help it. Th' almanack says 'tis Christmas Day, and ord'nary days o' the week don't count. Besides, 'tis quarter-day, and I've brought my rent."

"I've brought mine, too," replied Cai. "Well, we'll leave it to Mrs Bosenna to settle."

They walked up to the house in silence. Dinah, who answered the bell, appeared to be somewhat upset at sight of the two on the doorstep together. (Yet we know that Dinah never opened the front door without a precautionary survey.) She admitted them to the front parlour, and opining that her mistress was somewhere's about the premises, departed in search of her.

'Bias took up a position with his back to the fire and his legs a-straddle. Cai stuck his hands in his pockets and stared gloomily out of window. For some three minutes neither spoke, then Cai, of a sudden, gave a start.

"There's that Middlecoat!" he exclaimed.

"Hey?" 'Bias hurried to the window, but the young farmer had already passed out of sight.

"Look here," suggested Cai, "it's just an well we turned up, one or both. That man's a perfect bully, so she tells me."

"She've told me the same, more than once."

"Always pickin' some excuse for a quarrel. It ain't right for a woman to live alongside such a neighbour unprotected."

"So I've told her."

"Well, he's in the devil of a rage just now,—to judge by the look of him, an' the way he was smackin' his leg with an ash-plant as he went by."

"Was he now?" 'Bias considered for a moment. "You may depend he took advantage, not expectin' either of us to turn up to-day. . . . I shouldn't wonder if the maid properly scared him with news we were here."

Sure enough Dinah returned in a moment to report that her mistress was in her rose-garden; and following her thither, they found Mrs Bosenna, flushed of face and evidently mastering an extreme discomposure.

"I,—I hardly expected you," she began.

"It's Friday," said Cai.

"It's Christmas Day," said 'Bias. "I reckon he counted on that,—that Middlecoat, I mean."

"Eh? . . . Mr Middlecoat—"

"Saw him takin' his leave, not above three minutes ago."

"You,—you saw him taking his leave?"

"Stridin' down the hill, angry as a bull," Cai assured her.

"He's a dreadful man to have for a neighbour," confessed Mrs Bosenna, recovering grip on her composure. "The way he threatens and bullies!"

"I'll Middlecoat him, if he gives me but half a chance!" swore 'Bias.

"If I'd known either of you was in hail. . . . But I reckoned you'd both be countin' this for a Sunday."

"Christmas Day isn't Sunday, not more'n once in seven years," objected 'Bias.

"It's Friday this year," said Cai, with simple conviction.

"Fiddlestick!" retorted 'Bias. "You can't make it out to be like an ordinary Friday—I defy you. There's a—a *feelin'* about the day."

"It feels like Friday to me," maintained Cai.

But here Mrs Bosenna interposed. "'Twon't feel like Christmas to *me* then if you two start arguin'. 'Peace and goodwill' was the motto, as I thought; but I don't see much of either abroad this afternoon."

The pair started guiltily and avoided each other's eyes. Many a time in distant ports they had talked together of Christmas in England and of Christmas fare—the goose, the plum-pudding. They had promised themselves a rare dinner to celebrate their first Christmas in England, and it had come to—what? To a dull meal eaten apart, served by a Mrs Bowldler on the verge of tears, and by a Palmerston frankly ravaged by woe. It had happened—happened past recall, and as Mrs Bowldler had more than once observed in the course of the morning, the worst was not over yet. "For," as she said, "out of two cold geese and two cold puddings I'll trouble you this next week for your entrays and what-not."

"What was Middlecoat's business, ma'am?—makin' so bold," inquired 'Bias.

"Oh!" she answered quickly, "he's a terrible young man! Wants his own way in everything, like most

farmers, and turns violent when he can't get it. . . . He came about next week's sale, among other things."

"What sale, ma'am?"

"Why, surely you must have seen? The bills have been out for days. Squire Willyams is gettin' rid of his land this side of the stream, right down from here to the railway station. Fifty acres you may call it; the most of it waste or else coppice,—and coppice don't pay for cuttin'. You've almost to go down on your knees before anybody will cart it away."

"I *did* hear some word of it down in Toy's shop, now I come to think," said Cai. "But if the land's worthless—"

"It's worth little enough to any one but me and Mr Middlecoat. You see, it marches right alongside our two farms, between them and the Railway Company's strip along the waterside, and—well, Rilla's freehold and Middlecoat's is freehold, and it's nature, I suppose, to be jealous of any third party interlopin'. But I don't want the land, and so I've told him; nor I won't bid against him and run up the price,—though that's what they're aimin' at by an auction."

"Then what in thunder does the fellow want?" demanded 'Bias.

"If you'll climb 'pon the hedge yonder—that's my boundary—you'll see a little strip of a field, not fifty yards wide, runnin' down this side of the plantation. It widens a bit, higher up the hill, but 'tis scarcely more than a couple acres, even so. Barton's Orchard, they call it."

"But what about it?" asked Cai, craning his neck over to examine the plot.

"Why, to be sure I want to take it in for my roses. It lies rather too near the trees, to be sure; but one could trench along the far side and fill the trench with concrete, to check their roots from spreadin' this way; and all the soil is good along this side of the valley."

"Then why not buy it, ma'am, since 'tis for sale? Though for my part," added Cai, looking round upon the beds which, just now, were unsightly enough, with stiff leafless shoots protruding above their winter mulch, "I can't think what you want with more roses than you have already."

"One can never have too many roses," declared Mrs Bosenna. "Let be that there's new ones comin' out every year, faster than you can keep count with them. Folks'll never persuade me that the old H.P.'s don't do best for Cornwall; but when you go in for exhibition there's the judges and their fads to be considered, and the rage nowadays is all for Teas and high centres. . . . When first I heard as that parcel of ground was likely to come in the market, I sat down and planned how I'd lay it out with three long beds for the very best Teas, and fence off the top with a rose hedge—Wichurianas or Penzance sweet briars—and call it my Jubilee Garden; next year bein' the Diamond Jubilee, you know. All the plants could be in before the end of February, and I'll promise myself that by June, when the Queen's day came round, there shouldn't be a loyaller-bloomin' garden in the land."

"Well," allowed Cai, "that's sensibler anyway than puttin' up arches and mottoes. But what's to prevent ye?"

"'Tis that nasty disagreeable Mr Middlecoat," answered Mrs Bosenna pettishly. "He comes and tells me now as that strip has always been the apple of his eye. . . . It's my belief he wants to grow roses against me; and what's more, it's my belief he'd swallow up all Rilla if he could; which is better land than his own, acre for acre. It angers him to live alongside a woman and be beaten by her at every point o' farmin'."

"But you've the longer purse, ma'am, as I understand," suggested 'Bias. "Talkin' o' which—" He fumbled in his breast-pocket and produced an envelope.

"My rent, ma'am."

"Ay, to be sure: and mine, ma'am," Cai likewise produced his rent.

"You are the most punctual of tenants!" laughed Mrs Bosenna, taking the two envelopes. "But after all, they say, short reckonin's make long friends."

She divided a glance between them, to be shared as they would.

"But as I was suggestin' ma'am—why not attend the sale and outbid the fellow?"

"So I can, of course: and so I will, perhaps. Still it's not pleasant to live by a neighbour who thinks he can walk in and hector you, just because you're a woman."

"You want protection: that's what you want," observed 'Bias fatuously.

"In your place," said Cai with more tact, "I should forbid him the premises."

For some reason Mrs Bosenna omitted to invite them to stay and drink tea: and after a while they took their leave together. At the foot of the descent, as they gained the highroad, Cai faced about and asked, "Which way?"

"I was thinkin' to stretch my legs around Four Turnin's," answered 'Bias, although as a matter of fact the intention had that instant occurred to him.

"Well, so long!" Cai nodded and turned towards the town. "Compliments of the season," he added.

"Same to you."

They walked off in opposite directions.

On his way home through the town Cai took occasion to study the Bill of Auction on one of the hoardings. It advertised the property in separate small lots, of which Barton's Orchard figured as No. 9. The bill gave its measurement as 1 acre, 1 rood, 15 perches. The sale would take place at the Ship Hotel, Troy, on Monday, January 4,1897, at 2.30 P.M. Messrs Dewy and Moss, Auctioneers.

In the course of the next week he made one or two attempts to sound Mrs Bosenna and assure himself that she meant to attend the sale and secure Lot 9; but she spoke of it with an irritating carelessness. Almost it might have persuaded him—had he been less practised in her wayward moods—that she had dismissed the affair from her mind. But on Friday (New Year's Day) as he took leave of her, she recurred to it. "Dear me," said she meditatively, "I shall not be seeing you for several days, shall I?"

"Eh? Why not?"

"To-morrow's Saturday; then Sunday's our day of rest, as Dinah calls it.
On Monday's the auction—"

"Ah, to be sure!" Cai had forgotten this consequence of it, and was dashed in spirits for the moment. "But I shall see you there?"

"Perhaps," she answered negligently. "Shall you be attendin'?
Really, now!"

With an accent of reproach he asked how she could imagine that a business so nearly concerning her could find him other than watchful. On leaving he repeated his good wishes for the twelvemonth to come, and with a warmth of intention which she perversely chose to ignore.

To be sure he meant to attend the sale. Nor was he surprised on entering the Ship Inn next Monday, some ten minutes ahead of the advertised time, to find 'Bias in the bar with a glass of hot brandy and water at his elbow. Cai ordered a rum hot.

"Where's the auction to be held?" he inquired of Mr Oke, the landlord.

"Long Room as usual." Mr Oke jerked a thumb towards the stairs; and
Cai, having drained his glass, went up.

In the Long Room, which is a handsome apartment with waggon roof and curious Jacobean mouldings dating from the time when The Ship was built to serve as "town house" for one of Troy's great local families, Cai found a sparse company waiting for the sale to open, and noted with momentary dismay that Mrs Bosenna had not yet arrived. But after all, he reflected, there was no need for extreme punctuality, it would take the auctioneer some time to reach Lot 9.

The company included young Mr Middlecoat, of course; and, equally of course, Mr Philp, who had no interest in the sale beyond that of curiosity; some three or four farmers from the back-country, who had apparently come for no purpose but to lend Mr Middlecoat their moral support, since, as it turned out, not one of them made a serious bid; Squire Willyams' steward, Mr Baker,—a tall, clean-shaven man with a watchful non-committal face; one or two frequenters of The Ship's bar-parlour; and the Quaymaster, by whom (as Barber Toy remarked) any new way of neglecting his duties was hailed as a godsend.

Mr Dewy, the auctioneer, sat with his clerk at the end of the table, arranging his papers and unrolling his map of the property. He was a fussy little man, and made a great pother because the map as soon as unrolled started to roll itself up again. He weighted one corner with the inkpot, and for a second weight reached out a hand for one of three hyacinth vases which decorated the centre of the table. The bulb toppled over and, sousing into the inkpot, sent up a *jet d'encre*, splashes of which distributed themselves over the map, over the clerk, over Mr Baker's neat pepper-and-salt suit, and over Mr. Dewy's own fancy waistcoat. Much blotting-paper was called into use, and many apologies were hastily offered to Mr Baker; in the midst of which commotion 'Bias strolled into the room, and took a seat near the door.

Having mopped the worst of the damage on the map and offered his handkerchief to Mr Baker (who declined it), Mr Dewy picked up a small ivory hammer, stained his fingers with an unnoticed splash of ink on its handle, licked them, wiped them carefully with his handkerchief, picked up the hammer again, and announced that the sale had begun.

"Lot I.—All that Oak Coppice known as Higher Penpyll. Eighteen acres, one rood, eleven perches. Aspect south and south-west. . . . But there, gentlemen, you are all acquainted with the property, I make no doubt. . . . Any one present not possessed of the sale catalogue? Yes, I see a gentleman over there without one. Mr Chivers, would you oblige?"

The clerk, still attempting to remove some traces of ink from his person, distributed half a dozen copies of the printed catalogue. He gave one to Cai. 'Bias, too, held out a hand and received one.

"Lot I.," resumed Mr Dewy. "All that desirable woodland (oak coppice) known as Higher Penpyll. Eighteen acres and a trifle over. *Now*, what shall we say, gentlemen?"

"Fifty pounds," said Mr Middlecoat promptly.

The auctioneer glanced at Mr Baker, who frowned.

"Now, Mr Middlecoat! Now really, sir! . . . This is serious business, and you offer me less than three pounds an acre! The coppice is good coppice, too."

"'Twill hardly pay to clear," answered Mr Middlecoat. "But why can't ye lump this lot in with the two next? . . . That's my suggestion. If Mr Baker is agreeable? They all run in one stretch, so to speak; and, in biddin' for the whole, a man would know where he's *to*."

Mr Dewy, speaking in whispers behind his palm, held consultation with Mr Baker.

"Very well," he announced at length. "Mr Baker, actin' on behalf of Squire Willyams, consents to the three lots bein' put up together— *ong block*, as the French would say. No objection? Very well, then. Lot 1, Higher Penpyll, eighteen acres, one rood, eleven perches: Lot 2, Lower Penpyll, forty-two acres, three perches—forty-two almost exact: Lot 3, Wooda Wood, forty acres, one rood, one perch; all in oak coppice, two to five years' growth. What offers, gentlemen, for this very desirable timbered estate?"

"Three-fifty!"

"Come, Mr Middlecoat!" protested the auctioneer, after another glance at Mr Baker. "Indeed, sir, you will not drive me to believe as you're jokin'?"

Mr Middlecoat, whose gaze had rested on Mr Baker, faced about, and, looking down the table, caught the eye of one of his supporters, who nodded.

"Three-seven-five!" called out the supporter.

"Four hundred!" Mr Middlecoat promptly capped the bid.

"That's a little better, gentlemen," Mr Dewy encouraged them.

Apparently, too, it was the best. For some three minutes he exhorted and rebuked them, but could evoke no further bid. There was a prolonged pause. The auctioneer glanced again at Mr Baker, who, while seemingly unaware of the appeal, slightly inclined his head. Mr Middlecoat's eyes had rested on Mr Baker all the while.

"One hundred acres, as you may say, at less than four pounds the acre! Well, if any man had prophesied this to me on the day when I entered business—" Mr Dewy checked himself, and let fall the hammer. "Mr Middlecoat, sir, you're a lucky man." He announced, "Lot 4—Two arable fields, known as Willaparc Veor and Willapark Vear respectively: the one of six acres, one rood, and six perches; the

other of three and a half acres."

As the auction proceeded, even the guileless Cai could not help detecting an air of unreality about it. Mr Middlecoat bid for everything. Now and again, if Mr Middlecoat miscalculated, a friend helped and raised the price by a very few pounds for Mr Middlecoat to try again: which Mr Middlecoat duly did. It became obvious that Mr Middlecoat had somehow possessed himself of a pretty close guess at what price Squire Willyams would part with each lot instead of "buying in"; that Mr Baker knew it; that the auctioneer knew it; that everyone in the room knew they knew; and that nobody in the room was disposed to prevent Mr Middlecoat's acquiring whatever was offered.

Under these conditions the sale proceeded swiftly, pleasantly, and without a hitch. Cai cast frequent glances back at the door. But the minutes sped on, and still Mrs Bosenna did not appear.

"Lot 9—A field known as Barton's Orchard. Two perches only short of two acres—"

"Say twenty-five," said Mr Middlecoat carelessly.

Again Cai glanced back. The farm land had been fetching on an average some twenty to twenty-five pounds an acre. . . . Why was Mrs Bosenna not here?

On an impulse—annoyed, perhaps, by the young farmer's take-it-for-granted tone—he called out "Thirty!"

The auctioneer and Mr Baker—who had just signified, by a slight frown, that he could not accept the young farmer's bid—glanced up incuriously. Mr Middlecoat, too, turned about, not recognising the voice of his new "bonnet,"—to use a term not unfamiliar in auctioneering.

But Cai did catch their glances: for at the same moment he, too, wheeled about at the sound of a deep voice by the door.

"Forty!"

"Eh?" murmured Mr Dewy and Mr Baker, together taken by surprise. And "Hullo, what the dev—" began Mr Middlecoat, when Cai promptly chimed "Fifty!"

For the new bidder was 'Bias, of course: and well, in a flash, Cai guessed his game. Since Mrs Bosenna chose to tarry, 'Bias was bidding against him. It was a duel. Should 'Bias win and present her with these coveted two acres? Never!

"Sixty!"

"Here, I say!" Mr Middlecoat was heard to gasp in protest. But he too began to suspect a game. "Sixty-five!" The duel had become triangular.

"Seventy!"

"Eighty!" intoned 'Bias.

"A hundred!" Cai's jaw was set.

By this time all heads were turned to the new competitors. Two or three of the farmers were whispering, asking if by any chance there was mineral in dispute. One had heard—or so he alleged—that "manganese" had been discovered somewhere up the valley—before his time—but he could remember his father telling of it.

Mr Middlecoat stepped to the window and glanced out in to the square for a moment. He returned, and nervously bid "Ten more!"

"Excuse me," the auctioneer corrected him blandly; "the gentleman at the far end of the room—I didn't catch his name—"

"Hunken," said 'Bias.

"*Captain* Hunken," prompted Mr Philp.

"Er—excuse me, Mr Middlecoat, but Captain Hunken has just offered a hundred-and-twenty."

"And thirty!" chimed Cai.

"Fifty!" intoned back the voice by the door.

Mr Middlecoat passed a hand over his brow. "Another ten," he murmured to the auctioneer. "Is there a boy handy? I—I want to send out a message?"

"Certainly, Mr Middlecoat," agreed the accommodating but bewildered auctioneer, and turned to his clerk.

"Mr Chivers, would you oblige?"

The young farmer scribbled a word or two on a piece of paper, which he folded and gave to Mr Chivers with some hurried instruction; and Mr Chivers steered his way out with agility. But meanwhile the bidding for Barton's Orchard had risen to two hundred.

"Say another ten, to keep it going," proposed Mr Middlecoat, wiping his brow although the weather was chilly. To gain time, he suggested that maybe there was some mistake; that the gentlemen, maybe, had not examined the map of the property and might be bidding for some other lot under a misapprehension.

Mr Baker objected to this. The description of the lots on the catalogue was precise and definite. The two gentlemen obviously knew what they were about. The field was a small field, but the soil was undeniably of the best, and in the interests of the vendor—

"Two hundred and thirty!" interrupted 'Bias.

"—and fifty!" bid Cai.

There was a pause. Mr Dewy looked at Mr Middlecoat, who under his gaze admitted himself willing to stake two hundred and sixty. "Though 'tis the price of building land!"

"Apparently you are willing to give it rather than let the purchase go," observed Mr Baker drily. "For aught you know both these gentlemen may be desiring it for a building site. Did I hear one of them say two-seventy-five? Captain—er—Hunken, if I caught the name?"

"Two-eighty," persisted Cai.

"Two-ninety!"

"Well, make it three hundred, and I've done!" groaned Mr Middlecoat collapsing.

"Three—"

"What's all this?" interrupted a voice, very sweet and cool in the doorway.

"Mrs Bosenna?—Your servant, ma'am!" Mr Dewy rose halfway in his seat and made obeisance. "We are dealing with a lot which may concern you, ma'am; for it runs "—he consulted his map—"Yes—I thought so—right alongside your property at Rilla. A trifle over two acres, ma'am, and Mr Middlecoat has just bid three hundred for it."

"And"—began Cai: but Mrs Bosenna (taken though she must have been by surprise) was quick and frowned him to silence.

"And a deal more than its value, as Captain Hocken was about to say.
Will any fool bid more for such a patch?"

Cai and 'Bias stared together, interrogating her. But there was no further bid, and Mr Dewy knocked down the lot at 300 pounds.

"Which," said Mrs Bosenna meditatively to Dinah that night, "you may call two hundred and fifty clean thrown into the sea. And the worst is that though Captain Hocken and Captain Hunken are a pair of fools and Mr Middlecoat a bigger fool than either—as it turns out, I'm the biggest fool of all."

"How, mistress?"

"Why, you ninny! They were buying, one against the other, to make me a present, and I stepped in and saved young Middlecoat's face. Yet," she mused, "I don't see what else he could have done. . . . Well, thank the Lord! he'll be humble now, which the others were and he wasn't."

"He's young, anyway," urged Dinah.

"That's something," her mistress conceded. "It gives the more time to rub in his foolishness, and he'll

never hear the last of it."

"Three hundred pounds, too!" ejaculated Dinah. "The very sound of it frightens me. A terrible sum to throw to waste!"

"I wouldn't say that altogether. . . . Yes, you may unlace me.
What fools men are!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST CHALLENGE.

Next Lady-day, which fell on a Thursday, 'Bias called upon Mrs Bosenna with his rent and with the pleasing announcement that in a week or so he proposed to pay her a further sum of seven pounds eight shillings and fourpence; this being the ascertained half-year's dividend earned by the hundred pounds she had entrusted to his stewardship.

She warmly commended him. "Close upon fifteen per cent! I wonder— But there! I suppose you won't tell me how it's done, not if I ask ever so?"

'Bias looked knowing and reminded her that to ask no questions was a part of her bargain. As a matter of fact it was also a part of his bargain with Mr Rogers, and he could not have told had he wished to tell.

"I suppose you've heard the latest news?" said he. "They've chosen me on the Harbour Board—Ship-owners' representative."

"I didn't even know there had been an election."

"No more there hasn't. Rogers made the vacancy, and managed it for me; retired in my favour, as you might say."

"Seems to me Mr Rogers must be weakenin' in his head."

"Oh no, he's not!" 'Bias assured her with a chuckle. "But he's pretty frail in the body. At his time o' life and with his infirmity a man may be excused, surely?"

"I reckon," said Mrs Bosenna, "there's few would have wept if Mr Rogers had superannuated himself years ago. Now if you'd told me he was *turned* out—"

"You're hard on Rogers!" he protested, tasting the joke of it.

"Well, I don't think he took on these jobs for his health, as they say;
and so it comes hard to believe as he goes out o' them for that reason.
But there! he may be an honester man than I take him for. . . .
Well, and so you're becomin' a public man too! I congratulate you."

"I wouldn' call myself *that*," said 'Bias modestly. "But one or two have suggested that a fellow like me, with plenty of time on his hands, might look after a few small things and the way public money's spent on 'em." He might have claimed that at any rate he knew more of harbour affairs than Cai could possibly know of education: but he did not. To their honour, neither he nor Cai—though they ruffled when face to face before folks—ever spoke an ill word behind the other's back. "There's the dredgin', for one thing; and, for another, the way they're allowed to lade down foreign-goin' ships is a scandal."

"Is it the Harbour's business to stop that?"

"It ought to be somebody's business."

"You'll get nicely thanked," she promised, "if you interfere—and as a ship-owners' representative too!"

"There's another matter," confessed 'Bias. "They've asked me to put up for the Parish Council next month. There's a notion that, with this here Diamond Jubilee comin' on, the town ought to rise to the occasion."

"And you're the man to give it the lift!" said Mrs Bosenna gaily.
"Is Captain Hocken standin' too?"

"They say so."

"Then I'll plump for both of you. Wait, though—I won't promise: or when the canvass starts you'll both be neglectin' me."

The next day Cai called in turn with his rent. "And there's another little matter," said he after handing it to her. "You remember that hundred pounds? Well there's a half-year's dividend declared and due on it, and the cheque's to arrive some time next week. What's the amount, d'ye guess?"

"Satisfactory?"

"Seven pounds eight shillings and fourpence. . . . Eh? I *thought* it might astonish you."

"It's—it's such an odd amount," she murmured.

"It's close upon fifteen per cent."

"Yes. You took my breath away for the moment. I wonder at the way you men—I mean, I wonder how *you* do it—turnin' money to such good account? 'Tis a gift I suppose; and you couldn' teach me, even if you would."

Cai received the compliment with a somewhat guilty smile.

"They tell me too," she continued, "that you are standin' for the Parish Council next month."

"Who told you?"

"Oh . . . a little bird!"

Cai did not guess at 'Bias under this description. "Well, you see, with this here Diamond Jubilee in the offing, there's a feelin' abroad that the town ought to sit up, as the sayin' is—"

"And you're the man to make it sit up!" said Mrs Bosenna gaily.

"Well now, I want you to help me."

Mrs Bosenna started, alert at once and on her guard; for the game of fence she had chosen to play with these two demanded a constant wariness.

But it seemed that for the moment Cai had no design to press his suit— or no direct design.

"It's this way," he explained. "You know the stevedores, down at the jetties, are givin' their usual Whit-Monday regatta—Passage Regatta, as some call it? Well, they've made me President this year."

"More honours?"

"And I've offered a Cup; which seemed the proper thing to do, under the circumstances. 'A silver cup, value 5 pounds, presented by the President, Caius Hocken, Esquire': it'll look fine 'pon the bills, and it's to go with the first prize of two guineas for sailin' boats not exceedin' fourteen feet over-all. There's what they call a one-design Class o' these in the harbour: which is good sport and worth encouragin'. There's no handicap in it either: the first past the line takes the prize—always the prettiest kind o' race to watch. Now the favour I ask is that, when the time comes, you'll hand the Cup to the winner."

"It—it'll look rather marked, won't it?" hesitated Mrs Bosenna. She had as small a disinclination as any woman to find herself the central figure in a show, and Cai (had he known it) was attacking one of the weakest points in her siege-defences. But to accept this offer—or (if you prefer it) to grant the favour—meant a move on the board which might too easily lead to a trap. "Besides," she objected, "you can't do that sort o' thing without a few words, and I've never made a public speech in my life."

"You leave the speechifyin' to me," said Cai reassuringly: but it did not reassure her at all. ("Good gracious!" she thought. "He's not the sort to take advantage of it—but if he *did!* . . . You can never trust men.")

Cai, misinterpreting the frown on her brow, went on to assure her further that he could manage a speech all right; at any rate, he would be able by Whit-Monday. He had—he would tell her in confidence —been taking some lessons in elocution of (or, as he put it, "off") Mr Peter Benny.

"Did you ever hear tell of a man called Burke?" he asked.

"'Course I did," answered Mrs Bosenna, albeit the question startled her. "My old nurse told me about him often. He used to go about snatchin' bodies."

Cai considered a moment, and shook his head. "I don't think mine can be the same, or Benny wouldn't have recommended him so highly. There was another fellow that learned to be a speaker by practisin' with his mouth full of pebbles, which struck me as too thoroughgoin' altogether, and 'specially when you're aimin' no higher than a Parish Council. To be sure," he confessed, "I did make a start with a brace of peppermint bull's-eyes, and pretty nigh choked myself. But Benny says that, for English public speakin', there's no such master as this Burke, and so I've sent for him."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs Bosenna. "Won't he charge a terrible lot?— with travellin' expenses too!"

"His works, I mean. The man's dead, and they're in six volumes."

"You'll never get through 'em then, between this and Whitsuntide.
If I was you, I'd keep on at the peppermints."

Although the six volumes of Edmund Burke duly arrived, and Cai made a bold attempt upon their opening tractate, "A Vindication of Natural Society,"—thereby hopelessly bemusing himself, since he accepted its ironical arguments with entire seriousness—in the end he took a shorter way and procured Mr Benny to write his speeches for him.

These he got by heart in the course of long morning rambles; these he rehearsed with their accomplished author; these he declaimed in the solitude of his bed-chamber—until, one day, Mrs Bowldler (whom terror arresting, had held spellbound for some minutes on the landing) knocked in to know if Palmerston should run for the doctor.

By dint (or in spite) of them at the election of Parish Councillors Cai headed the poll with a total of 411 votes. 'Bias, who received 366, came fourth on the list of elected: but this was no disgrace—a triumph rather—for one who had omitted to be born in the town. By general consent the honours stood easy; though, on the strength of his poll, the new Council began by choosing Cai for its chairman. On him Troy laid thereby the chief responsibility for the Jubilee festivities now but two months ahead.

At this first Council meeting, and at the meetings of many committees subsequently called to make preparation for the great day, 'Bias said very little. Those—and they were many—who had looked for "ructions" between the two rivals, and had taken glee of the prospect, suffered complete disappointment.

"You see," he explained to Mr Rogers, "I don't hold by several things Cai Hocken and the Committee are doin'. But they be doin' 'em in the Queen's honour, after their lights: and 'tisn't fitly to use the occasion for quarrellin'. There's only one way o' forcin' a quarrel on me where Queen Victoria's consarned, and that is by speakin' ill of her."

"That's right," agreed Mr Rogers. "You've common ground in the
Widow-woman."

"The—?"

"The Widow at Windsor, as they call her."

"Oh! I thought for a moment—"

"There's widows and widows," Mr Rogers blinked mischievously. "But look here—what's this I'm told about your interferin' down at the Harbour Board, tryin' to get the Commissioners to regylate the ladin' o' vessels?"

"Well, and why not?" asked 'Bias.

"Why not? For one thing you bet it isn' the Commissioners' business."

"It ought to be somebody's business to stop what's goin' on.
Say 'tis mine, if you like."

"Look 'ee here, Cap'n Hunken," said Mr Rogers, showing his teeth.
"If that's your game, better fit you was kickin' up a rumpus on the
Parish Council than puttin' a spoke into honest trade. I didn' make
room 'pon the Board for you to behave in that style."

"I don't care whether you did or you didn'," retorted 'Bias sturdily. "And 'honest trade' d'ye call it?

robbin' the underwriters and puttin' seamen's lives in danger."

"Eh? . . . *You*'re a nice man to talk, I must say! Come to me, you do, and want me to get you anything up to twenty per cent without risk. How d'ee think that's done in these days, with every one cuttin' freights? I gave you credit for havin' more sense."

'Bias stared. "See here," he said slowly, "if I'd known that hundred pound was to be put into any such wickedness, I'd have seen you further before trustin' you with it. As 'tis, I'll trouble you—"

"Hold hard, there!" Mr Rogers interrupted. "You're in a tarnation hurry every way, 'twould seem. Who told you as I'd put that hundred into any vessel below Plimsoll mark?"

"I thought you hinted as much."

"Then you thought a long sight too fast. If you must know, your money's in the old *Saltypool*, and old as she is, that steamship might be my child, the way I watch over her."

"The *Saltypool!* Why, she's the most scand'lous case as has gone out of harbour these three months!"

"Eh?"

"I saw her with my own eyes alongside No. 3 jetty, the evenin' before she sailed. A calm night it was too; and she with her Plimsoll well under and a whole line o' trucks waitin' to be shot into her. She went out before daybreak, if you remember, and God knows how low she was by that time."

Mr Rogers's jaw dropped.

"The idiots!" he muttered. "When I told 'em—" He broke off.
"I say, you're not pullin' my leg?"

"Saw her with my own eyes, I tell you," 'Bias assured him, wondering a little; for the old sinner's dismay was clearly honest.

"Then all I say is, you can call Fancy and tell her to fetch me a Bible, if there's one in the house, an' I'll swear to you I never knew it, an' I never seen it. What's more, I'll sack the captain, an' I'll sack the mate. What's more, I'll cable dismissal out to Philadelphy. What's more—"

"There, there!" interposed 'Bias. "You didn' know, and enough said! I don't want any man thrown out of employ. 'Tis the system I'm out to spoil."

"Skippers are a trouble-without-end in these days," Mr Rogers muttered on, staring gloomily at the fire in the grate; "specially to a man crippled like me. . . . You spend years sarchin' for a fool, an' you no sooner get the treasure, as you think—one you can trust for a plain ord'nary fool in all weathers—than he turns out a *dam* fool!"

On his way from the ship-chandler's 'Bias ran against Mr Philp, who paused in the roadway and eyed him, chewing a piece of news and chuckling.

"That friend o' yours is a wonnur!" preluded Mr Philp.

"Meanin' Caius Hocken?"

"Who else? . . . He's goin' a great pace in these days; but you won't tell me he has flown out o' *that* range? Yes, 'tis Cap'n Hocken I mean; our Mayor, as you may call him; and there's some as looks to see a silver cradle yet in his mayoralty."

"What's the latest?" 'Bias could not help putting the question, yet despised himself for it.

"He's President of the Stevedores' Regatta this year."

"Get along with your news—I heard it ten days ago."

"So you did, for I told you myself. But he's giving a silver cup for the fourteen-foot race."

"And I heard that, too."

"Ay: but what you don't know, maybe, is that he's been up to Rilla Farm tryin' to persuade Mrs Bosenna to attend on the Committee-ship an' hand the cup—his *cup*—to the winner."

"She's never consented?"

"Now I call that a master-stroke. That's the bold way to win a woman. 'Come along o' me, my dear, an' find yourself the lady patroness, life-size. . . . Madam, you'll excuse the liberty,—but may I have the igstreme honour to request you to take my arm in the full view of all this here assembled rabble?' So arm-in-arm it is, up the deck, and 'Ladies an' Gentlemen'—meanin' 'Attention, pray, all you scum o' the earth'—'I'll trouble you to observe strick silence while this lady, with whom you are all familiar—'"

"Steady on!"

"Well, 'familiar' is too strong a word, as you say. 'While this lady, with whom you're all acquainted, presents the gallant winner with a cup, value Five Pounds, which you may have reckoned as an igstravagance when you heard I was the donor, 'but will now reckernise as a sprat to catch a whale—that is, unless you're even bigger fools than I take ye for. 'Twas with the greatest difficulty I indooced Mrs Bosenna—'"

"She never would!" swore 'Bias.

"Well, as a matter o' fact, she hasn't. But you'll allow the trick was clever, and nothin' more left for the woman, if she'd yielded, but to be carried straight off to the altar. 'Twould have been expected of her, and no less."

"What has she done?"

"Taken a wise an' womanly course, as I hear. 'No,' says she, 'I'll go to bottomless brimstone before lendin' myself to such a dodge'—or words to that effect. 'But I'll tell 'ee what I will do,' says she, 'I'll offer this here silver cup on my own account, an' give it with my own hands to the winner. And you can stand by,' says she, 'an' look as pompous as you please.' Either that, or that in so many words. I'm givin' you the gist of it, as it reached me."

"Thank 'ee," said 'Bias, perpending and digging up the roadway with the point of his stick. "'Tis to be her own prize, you say?"

"Yes, an' presented with her own hands. If I was you—bein' a trifle late as you are on the handicap—I'd sail in an' collar that prize. 'Twould be a facer for him."

"No time."

"Whit-Monday's not till the seventh o' June. Four clear weeks: an' Boatbuilder Wyatt could knock you up a shell in half that time. He gets cleverer with every boat of the class; and with a boat built to race once only he could make pretty well sure."

Later that afternoon Mr Philp, who never lost an occasion to advertise himself, paid a call on Mr Wyatt, boatbuilder.

"I found a new customer for you this afternoon," he announced, winking mysteriously. "If Cap'n Hunken should call along you'll know what I mean."

On his homeward road the industrious man had a stroke of good luck.
He espied Captain Hocken, and made haste to overtake him.

"Good evenin', Cap'n Cai!"

"Ah—Mr Philp? Good evenin' to 'ee."

"It's like a providence my meetin' you; for as it chances you was the last man in my mind. I happened down to Wyatt's yard just now, and—if you'll believe me—there's reason to believe he'll get an order to-morrow for another 14-footer,"

"Ay? . . . What for?"

"Why, to enter for the cup you're givin' on Whit-Monday."

"You're mistaken," said Cai. "'Tis Mrs Bosenna that's givin' the cup, not I."

"What? With her own hands?"

"*To* be sure. Why not?"

"Then that accounts for it," said Mr Philp gleefully, rubbing his hands. "He's a deep one, is your friend Hunken! It did strike me as odd, too— his givin' an order to Wyatt in all this hurry: but now I understand."

"Drat the man! what *is* it you understand?"

"Why, as you know, Wyatt can knock him a shell together that'll win the race under everybody's nose. 'Tis a child's play, if you don't mind castin' the boat next day an' content yourself with scantlin' like a packin' case. At least, 'twould be child's play to any one but Wyatt, who can't help buildin' solid, to save his life. If the man had consulted me, I'd have recommended Mitchell. Mitchell never had a length o' seasoned wood in his store: he can't afford the capital. But to my mind he can—take him as a workman—shape a boat better than Wyatt ever did yet."

"And to mine," Cai agreed.

"The cunning of it, too! He to take the prize from her under your nose and you standin' by and lookin' foolish. For, let alone the craft, they say Cap'n Hunken can handle a small boat to beat any man in this harbour. He cleared a whole prize-list out in Barbadoes, I've heard."

"What, 'Bias? Don't you be afraid. He can't steer a small boat for nuts."

"Dear me! Then I must have been misinformed, indeed."

"You have been," Cai assured him. "I reckon Mitchell can knock up a boat to give fits to anything of Wyatt's; and if 'Bias—if Cap'n Hunken is countin' on Wyatt to help him put the fool on me, it may happen he'll learn better."

CHAPTER XXIII.

PASSAGE REGATTA.

"'Tis good to wear a bit of colour again," said Mrs Bosenna on Regatta morning, as she stood before her glass pinning to her bodice a huge bow of red, white, and blue ribbons. "Black never did become me."

"It becomes ye well enough, mistress, and ye know it," contradicted Dinah.

"'Tis monotonous, anyway. I can't see why we poor widow-women should be condemned to wear it for life."

"*You* bain't," Dinah contradicted again, and added slily, "d'ye wish me to fetch witnesses?"

Her mistress, tittivating the ribbons, ignored the question. "I do think we might be allowed to wear colours now and again—say on Sundays. As it is, I dare say many will be pickin' holes in my character, even for this little outbreak."

"There's a notion, now! Why, 'tis Queen Victory's Year—and a pretty business if one widow mayn't pay her respects to another!"

"It do always seem strange to me," Mrs Bosenna mused.

"What?"

"Why, that the Queen should be a widow, same as any one else."

"Low fever," said Dinah. "And I've always heard as the Prince Consort had a delicate constitution."

"It happened before I was born," said Mrs Bosenna vaguely. "Think o' that, now! . . . And yet 'twasn't the widowin' I meant so much as the marryin'. I can't manage to connect it in my mind with folks so high up in the world as Kings and Queens. 'Tis so intimate."

"You may bet Providence tempers it to 'em somehow," opined Dinah. "If they didn' have families, what'd become o' English history?"

If any tongues wagged against Mrs Bosenna for wearing the patriotic colours that day, they were not heard in the holiday crowd at the Passage Slip when, with nicely calculated unpunctuality, she arrived, at 11.32 (the time appointed having been 11.15), to be conveyed on board the Committee vessel. (It should be explained here that the aquatic half of Troy's Passage Regatta is compressed within the forenoon: at midday Troy dines, and even on holidays observes Greenwich time for that event. Moreover, the afternoon sports of bicycle racing, steeplechasing, polo-bending, &c., were preluded in

those days—before an electric-power station worked the haulage on the jetties—by a procession of huge horses, highly groomed and bedecked with ribbons: and this procession, starting at 1 P.M., allowed the avid holiday-keeper small margin for dallying over his meal.)

Mrs Bosenna reached the slip to find Cai waiting below in a four-oared boat which he had borrowed from the Clerk of the Course. A large red ensign drooped from a staff and trailed in the water astern: the crew wore scarlet stocking-caps: bright cushion disposed in the stern-sheet added a touch of luxury to this pomp and circumstance. It might not rival the barge of Cleopatra upon Cydnus; but the shore-crowd, under whose eyes it had been waiting for close upon twenty minutes, voted it to be a very creditable turn out; and Cai, watch in hand, was at least as impatient as Mark Antony. Off the Committee Ship, a cable's length up the river, the penultimate race (ran-dan pulling-boats) was finishing amid banging of guns and bursts of music from the "Troy Town Band," saluting the winner with "See the Conquering Hero Comes," the second boat with strains consecrated to first and second prize-winners in Troy harbour since days beyond the span of living memory, even as all races start to the less classical but none the less immemorial air of "Off She goes to Wallop the Cat."

The crowd parted and made passage for Mrs Bosenna to descend the slip-way: for Troy is always polite. Its politeness, however, seldom takes the form of reticence; and as she descended she drew a double broadside of neighbourly good-days and congratulations, with audible comments from the back rows on her personal appearance.

"Mornin', Mrs Bosenna—an' a brave breast-knot you're wearin'!"

"Han'some, id'n-a?"

"Handsome, sure 'nough!"

"Fresh coloured as the day she was wed. . . . Good mornin' ma'am! Good mornin', Mrs Bosenna—an' a proper Queen o' Sheba you be, all glorious within."

"What a thing 'tis to have money!" remarked a meditative voice deep in the throng.

"Eh, Billy, my son, it cures half the ills o' life," responded another.

"'Tis a mysterious thing," hazarded a woman—"a dispensation you may call it, how black suits some complexions while others can't look at it."

"An' 'tis your sex's perversity," spoke up a male, "that them it don't suit be apt to wear it longest"—whereat several laughed, for where everybody is good-humoured the feeblest witticism will pass.

Mrs Bosenna heard these comments, but acknowledged them only by a scarcely perceptible heightening of colour. She went down the slip-way royally, with Dinah in close attendance: and Cai, catching sight of her and pocketing his watch, snatched up a boat-hook to draw the boat's quarter alongside the slip, while with his disengaged hand he lifted the brim of a new and glossy top-hat.

"Am I disgracefully late?" Without waiting for his answer, as he handed her aboard she exclaimed:

"Oh! and what a crowd of boats! . . . I never felt so nervous in all my life."

"There's no need," said Cai—who himself, two minutes before, had been desperately nervous. He seated himself beside her and took the tiller. "Push her out, port-oars! Ready?—Give way, all! . . . There's no need," he assured her, sinking his voice; "I never saw ye look a properer sight. Maybe 'tis the bunch o' ribbon sets 'ee off—'Tis the first time ye've worn colour to my recollection."

"Dead black never suited me."

"I wouldn' say that. . . . But," added Cai upon a happy thought, "if that's so, you know where to find excuse to leave off wearin' it."

"Hush!" she commanded. "How can you talk so with all these hundreds of eyes upon us?"

"I don't care." Cai's voice rose recklessly.

"Oh, hush! or the crew'll hear us?"

"I don't care, I tell you."

"But I do—I care very much. . . . You don't pay me compliments when we're alone," she protested, changing the subject slightly.

"I mean 'em all the time."

"Well, since compliments are flyin' to-day, that's a fine new hat you're wearin'. And I like the badge in your buttonhole: red with gold letters—it gives ye quite a smart appearance. What's the writin' on it?"

"'President.' 'Tis the only red-and-gold badge in the show.
Smart? I tell 'ee I'm feelin' smart."

It was indeed Cai's day—his hour, rather—of triumph. He had played a winning stroke, boldly, under the public eye: and a hundred comments of the sightseers, as he steered through the press of boats to the Committee Ship, testified to his success. Though he could not hear, he felt them.

—"Well!"

—"Proper cuttin'-out expedition, as you might call it."

> —"And she with a great bunch o' ribbons pinned on her, that no-one shan't miss the meanin' of it."
>
> —"Well, I always favoured Cap'n Hocken's chance, for my part. An', come to think, 'tis more fitty 't should happen so. When all's said an' done, t'other's a foreigner, as you might say, from the far side o' the Duchy: an' if old Bosenna's money is to go anywhere, why then, bein' Troy-earned, let it go to a Troy man."
>
> —"But 'tis a facer for Cap'n Hunken, all the same. Poor chap, look at 'en."

—"Where? . . . I don't see 'en."

> —"Why, forward there, on the Committee Ship: leanin' up against the bulwarks an' lookin' as if he'd swallowed a dog."
>
> —"There, there! . . . And some plucky of the man to stand up to it, 'stead of walkin' off an' drownin' hisself. I like a man as can take a knock-down blow standing up. 'Tis a rare occurrence in these days."

Mrs Bosenna, too, whose wealth (pleasant enough for the comforts it procured, pleasanter, perhaps, for an attendant sense of security, pleasantest of all, it may be, for a further sense of power and importance, secretly enjoyed) had, as yet, of public acknowledgment taken little toll beyond the deference of tradesmen when she went shopping, felt herself of a sudden caught up to an eminence the very giddiness of which was ecstasy. It is possible that, had Cai claimed her there and then, before the crowd, she would have yielded with but a faint protest. You must not think that she lost her head for a moment. On the contrary during her triumphal convoy she saw everything with remarkable distinctness. She knew well enough that some scores of women, all around, were envying her, yet admiring in spite of their envy. Without hearing them, she could almost tell what comments were uttered in boat after boat as she passed. But what mattered their envy, so long as they admired? Nay, what mattered their envy, so long as they envied? The tonic north wind, the sunshine, the sparkle of the water, the gay lines of bunting flickering from stem to stern of the Committee Ship, the invigorating blare of the Troy Town Band, now throwing its soul into "Champagne Charlie," the propulsion of the oars that seemed to snatch her and sweep her forward past wondering faces to high destiny— all these were wings, and lifted her spirit with them. She began to under stand what it must feel like to be a Queen, or (at least) a Prime Minister's wife.

"Ea-sy all! In oars! . . . Bow, stand by to check her!"

Cai called his orders clearly, sharply, in the tone of a master of men. A score of boats hampered approach to the accommodation ladder; but those that had occupants were obediently thrust wide to make way, and easily as in a barge of state Mrs Bosenna was brought alongside. A dozen hands checked the way of the boat, now abruptly. Other hands were stretched to help her up the ladder, which she ascended with smiling and graceful agility. On the deck, at the head of it, stood the Hon. Secretary, with the silver cup ready, nursed in the crook of his arm. It was a handsome cup, and it flashed in the sunlight. The Hon. Secretary doffed his yachting cap. A dozen men close behind him doffed their caps at the signal. They were the successful competitors of the dinghy race, mixed up with committee-men: they had come to receive their prizes. The competing boats, their sails lowered, had been brought alongside, and lay tethered, trailing off from the ship's quarter, rubbing shoulders in a huddle.

Cai, mounting to the deck close behind Dinah, who had followed her mistress, was met by the Hon. Secretary with the announcement that everything had been ready these ten minutes.

Almost before she could catch her breath, Mrs Bosenna found the cup thrust into her hands; the band in the fore part of the vessel ceased— or, to speak more accurately, smothered—"Champagne Charlie"; the group before her fell back to form a semicircle and urged forward the abashed first-prize winner, who stood rubbing one ankle against another and awkwardly touching his forelock, while a silence fell, broken only by voices from the boats around calling "Order! Or-der for the speech!"

Mrs Bosenna, recognising the champion in spite of his blushes, collected her courage, smiled, and said—

"Why, 'tis Walter Sobey!"

"Servant, ma'am!" Mr Sobey touched his forelock again and grinned, as who should add, "You and me, ma'am, meets in strange places."

"Well, I never! . . . How things do turn out!" It crossed Mrs Bosenna's mind that on the last occasion of her addressing a word to Walter Sobey he had been employed by her to cart manure for her roses: and across this recollection floated a sense of money wasted—for to what service could Walter Sobey, inhabitant of a three-roomed cottage, put a two-handled loving-cup embossed in silver?

There was no time, however, for hesitation. . . . With the most gracious of smiles she took the cup in both hands, and presented it to the champion.

"'Tis good, anyhow, to feel it goes to a neighbour: and—and if the worst comes to the worst, Walter, you can always take it back to the shop and change it for something useful."

"Thank 'ee, ma'am," said Mr Sobey, taking the cup respectfully. He backed a pace or two, gazed around, and caught the eye of the Hon. Secretary. "There's a money prize, too, attached to it—ain't there?" he was heard to ask. "Leastways, 'twas so said 'pon the bills." Mr Sobey was proud of his victory; the prouder because he had built the winning boat with his own hands. (Very luckily for him, at the last moment Captain Hocken had judged it beneath the dignity of a Regatta President to compete; and Captain Hunken, missing his rival at the starting-line, had likewise withdrawn from the contest.)

"Certainly," agreed the Hon. Secretary. "Two guineas. Hi, there, aft!
Where's Mr Willett?"

Other voices carried back the call, and presently the Treasurer, Mr Willett—a pursey little man with enormous side-whiskers,—came hurrying forward from the after-companion, where he had been engaged in hearing a protest from an excited disputant—a competitor in the 16-foot class— who had in fact come in last, even on his handicap, but with a clear notion in his own mind, and an array of arguments to convince others, that he was entitled to the prize. Such misunderstandings were frequent enough at Passage Regatta, and mainly because .Mr Willett, whom nobody cared to cashier—he had been Treasurer for so many years,—had as a rule imbibed so much beer in the course of the forenoon that any one argument appeared to him as cogent as any other. He seemed, in fact, to delight in hearing a case from every point of view; and by consequence it could be securely predicted of any given race in Passage Regatta that "You had never lost till you'd won."

Now, on Cai's secret recommendation the Committee had engaged the boy Palmerston—who was quick at sums—to stand by Mr Willett during the forenoon and count out the cash for him. The Treasurer (it was argued) would be suspicious of help from a grown man; whereas he could order a boy about, and even cuff his head on emergency. So Palmerston, seated by the after-companion, had spent a great part of the morning in listening to disputes, and counting out money as soon as the disputes were settled. Nor was objection taken—as it might have been at more genteel fixtures—to a part of the prize being produced from Palmerston's mouth, in which he had a knack of storing petty cash, for convenience of access—and for safety too, to-day, since he had discovered a hole in one of his pockets.

Mr Willett then, rising and cutting short an altercation between two late competitors in the 16-foot race, came hurrying forward with Palmerston, ever loyal, in his wake. For the boy, without blaming anyone, anxious only to fulfil a responsibility that weighed on him, was aware that Mr Willett—whether considered as a man or as a treasurer— had taken in overmuch beer, and might need support in either capacity or in both.

But while Mr Willett advanced, in a series of hasty plunges,—as though the Committee vessel were ploughing the deep with all sail set,—voices around Mrs Bosenna had already begun to call for a speech; and the cry was quickly taken up from the many boats overside, now gathered in a close throng.

"A speech! a speech!"

Mrs Bosenna laughed, and turned about prettily.

"I did not bargain for any speech," she protested. "I—in fact I never made a speech in my life. If—if Captain Hocken would say a few words—"

"Ay, Cap'n," exhorted a voice, "speak up for her, like a man now!
Seems to us she've given you the right."

There was a general laugh, and it brought a heightened flush to Mrs Bosenna's cheek. Cai, not noting it, cleared his throat and doffed his tall hat. "Here, hold this," said he, catching sight of Palmerston, and cleared his throat again.

"Friends and naybours," said he, and this opening evoked loud applause.
As it died down, he continued, "Friends and naybours, this here has been
a most successful regatta. *Of* which, as a fitting conclusion, the
Brave has received his reward at the hands of the Fair."

"Lord! he means hisself!" interrupted a giggling voice from one of the boats.

This interruption called forth a storm of applause. Oars were rattled on rowlocks and feet began stamping on bottom boards.

"By the Brave," continued Cai, pitching his voice higher, "I mean, of course, our respected fellow-citizen, Mr Walter Sobey, whose handling of his frail craft—"

("Hear! Hear!")

"—Whose handling of his frail craft to-day was of a natur' to surprise and delight all beholders."

At this point Mr Willett, the Treasurer, who had for some seconds been staring at the speaker with glazed uncertain eye, interrupted in a voice thick with liquor—

"The question is, Who wants me?"

"Nobody, you d—d old fool!" snapped the Hon. Secretary. "Can't you see
Cap'n Hocken is makin' a speech?"

"*I* see," answered Mr Willett with drunken deliberation, "and, what's more, I don't think much of it. . . . Gentlemen over there 'pears t' agree with me," he added: for from the rear of the group a scornful laugh had endorsed his criticism.

"Any one can tell what *hasn't* agreed with you this mornin'," retorted the Hon. Secretary, still more angrily. "Go home, and—"

But Cai had lifted a hand. "No quarrelling, please!" he commanded, and resumed, "As I was sayin', ladies and gentlemen—or as I was about to say—the handlin' of a small boat demands certain gifts or, er, qualities; and these gifts and, er, qualities bein' the gifts and h'm qualities what made England such as we see her to-day,—a sea-farin' nation an' foremost at that,—it follows that we cannot despise them if we wish her to occupy the same position in the futur'—which to my mind is education in a nutshell."

Again the scornful laugh echoed from the back of the crowd, and this time Cai knew the voice. It stung him the more sharply, as in a flash he recollected that the phrase "education in a nutshell" belonged properly to a later paragraph, and in his flurry he had dragged it in prematurely. His audience applauded, but Cai swung about in wrath.

"My remarks," said he, "don't seem to commend themselves to one o' my hearers. But I'm talkin' now on a subjec' about which I know som'at,— not about *ploughin'*."

The thrust was admirably delivered,—the more adroitly in that, on the edge of delivering it, he had paused with a self-depreciatory smile. Its point was taken up on the instant. The audience on deck sent up a roar of laughter: and the roar spread and travelled away from the ship in a widening circle as from boat to boat the shrewd hit was reported. Distant explosions of mirth were still greeting it, when Cai, finding voice again, and wisely cutting out his prepared peroration, concluded as follows:—

"Any way, friends and naybours, I can wind up with something as'll
commend itself to everybody: and that is by wishin' success to Passage
Regatta, and askin' ye to give three cheers for Mrs Bosenna.
Hip—hip—"

"Hoo-ray! hoo-ray! hoo-ray!" The cheers were given with a will and passed down the river in rolling

echoes. But before the last echo died away—while Mrs Bosenna smiled her acknowledgment—as the band formed up for "God Save the Queen"—as they lifted their instruments and the bandmaster tapped the music-stand with his baton,—at the top of his voice 'Bias delivered his counter-stroke.

"And one more for Peter Benny!"

There was a momentary hush, and then—for Troy's sense of humour is impartial, and everyone knew from what source Captain Hocken derived his public eloquence—the air was rent with shout upon shout of merriment. Even the band caught the contagion. The drummer drew a long applausive rattle from his side-drum; the trombone player sawing the air with his instrument, as with a fret-saw, evoked noises not to be described.

In the midst of this general mirth—while Cai stood his ground, red to the ears, and Mrs Bosenna plucked nervously at the tassel of her sunshade—'Bias came thrusting forward, shouldering his way through the press. But 'Bias's face reflected none of the mirth he had awakened.

"I mayn't know much about ploughin', Cai Hocken—" he began.

"Ah? Good day, Captain Hunken!" interposed Mrs Bosenna.

"Good-day to you, ma'am." He raised his hat without answering her smile. Then, with a gesture that dismissed the tactful interruption, "I mayn't know much about ploughin', though it sticks in my mind that as between us the judges handed me the stakes, even at *that*. But at handlin' a boat—one o' these here dingheys if you will, an' if you care to make good your words—"

"What *was* my words?"

"Oh, I beg pardon." 'Bias corrected himself with a snort of contempt. "'Peter Benny's words,' maybe I should have said: but 'education in a nutshell' was the expression."

"I'll take you up—when and where you please, and for any money,"
Cai challenged, white to the lips and shaking with rage.

"A five-pound note, if you will."

"As you please. . . . I haven't five pound here, upon me."

"Nor I, as it happens. But here's a sovereign for earnest."

"Here's another to cover it, anyway. Who'll hold the stakes? . . .
Will you, ma'am?" Cai appealed to Mrs Bosenna.

"Certainly not," she answered, tapping the deck angrily with the ferrule of her sunshade. "And I wonder how you two can behave so foolish, before folks."

But for the moment they were past her control.

"Here . . . Pam! Pam will do, eh?"

"Well as another."

"Right. Here Pam, take hold o' this sovereign and keep it careful!"

"Mine too. . . . That makes the wager, eh?"

"For five pounds?"

"Five pounds. Right.

"Boats?"

"I don't care. Our own two, or draw lots for any two here, as you please."

"But—gentlemen!" interposed the Hon. Secretary.

"Now, don't you start interferin'"—Bias turned on him sullenly.
"Else you might chance to get what you don't like."

"Oh, they're mad!" wailed Mrs Bosenna, and Dinah was heard to murmur, "You've pushed' em too far, mistress: an' don't say as I didn' warn you!"

"I—I was only goin' to suggest, gentlemen," urged the Hon. Secretary, "it bein' already ten minutes

past noon, and everybody waitin' for 'God Save the Queen.'"

"Hullo!" hailed a voice alongside, at the foot of the accommodation table; and Mr Philp's top hat, Mr Philp's deceptively jovial face, Mr Philp's body clad in mourning weeds, climbed successively into view. "There, naybours!" he announced. "I'm in the nick of time, after all, it seems,—though when I heard the church clock strike twelve it sent my heart into my mouth." He stood and panted.

"Ah! good-day, Mr Philp!" Mrs Bosenna turned, hailing his intervention, and advanced to shake hands.

"Good-day to you, ma'am. Been enjoy in' yourself, I hope?" said Mr Philp, somewhat taken aback by the warmth of her greeting.

"A most successful Regatta . . . don't you agree?"

"I might, ma'am," answered Mr Philp solemnly. "I don't doubt it, ma'am. But as a matter of fact I have just come from a funeral."

"Oh! . . . I—I beg your pardon—I didn't know—"

"There's no call to apologise, ma'am. . . . The deceased was not a relative. A farm-servant, ma'am—female—at the far end of the parish: Tuckworthy's farm, to be precise: and the woman, Sarah Jane Collins by name. Probably you didn't know her. No more did I except by sight: but a very respectable woman—a case of Bright's disease. In the midst of life we are in death, and, much as I enjoy Passage Regatta—"

"You have missed it then?"

"The woman had saved money, ma'am. There was a walled grave, by request." Mr Philp sighed over this remembered consolation. "She could not help it clashin', poor soul."

"No, indeed!"

"And you may or may not have noticed it, ma'am, but when a man sets duty before pleasure, often as not he gets rewarded. Comin' back along the town before the streets filled, I picked up a piece o' news, and hurried along with it. I reckoned it might be of interest if I could reach here ahead of 'God Save the Queen.'"

"Gracious! What has happened?" Mrs Bosenna clasped her hands. Indeed Mr Philp, big with his news and important, had somehow contrived to overawe everyone on deck.

"The news is," he announced slowly, "that the *Saltypool* has gone down, within fifty miles of Philadelphia. Crew saved in the boats. Cable reached Mr Rogers at eleven o'clock, and"—he paused impressively, "there and then Rogers had a second stroke. Point o' death, they say."

Above the sympathetic murmur of Mr Philp's audience there broke, on the instant, a gasping cry—followed by a yet more terrible sound, as of one in the last agony of strangulation.

All turned, as Palmerston—dashing forward between the music-stands of the band and scattering them to right and left—flung himself between Cai and 'Bias at their very feet.

"Masters—masters! I've a-swallowed the stakes!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

FANCY BRINGS NEWS.

"Which," Mrs Bowldler reported to Fancy, who had left her master's sick-bed to pay a fleeting visit to Palmerston's, "the treatment was drastic for a growin' child. First of all Mrs Bosenna, that never had a child of her own, sent down to the cabin for the mustard that had been left over from the Sailin' Committee's sangwidges, and mixed up a drink with it and a little cold water. Which the results was *nil*; that is to say, pecuniarily speakin'. Then somebody fetched along Mr Clogg the vet. from Tregarrick, that had come over for the day to judge the horses, and *he* said as plain salt-and-water was worth all the mustard in the world, so they made the poor boy swallow the best part of a pint, and he brought up eighteenpence."

"Saints alive! But I thought you told me—"

"So I did: two solid golden sufferins. And *that*," said Mrs Bowldler, "was for some time the most astonishin' part of the business. Two solid golden sufferins: and low!—as the sayin' is—low and behold, eighteen pence in small silver!"

"Little enough too, for a miracle!" mused Fancy.

"It encouraged 'em to go on. Captain Hocken—he's a humane gentleman, too, and never graspin'—no, never in his life!—but I suppose he'd begun to get interested,—Captain Hocken ups and suggests as they were wastin' time, mixin' table-salt and water when there was the wide ocean itself overside, to be had for the dippin'. So they tried sea-water."

"My poor Pammy.'"

"Don't you start a-pityin' me," gasped a voice, faint but defiant, from the bed. "If I die, I die. But I got the account to balance."

"I disremember what sum—er—resulted that time," confessed Mrs Bowldler; "my memory not bein' what it was."

"Ninepence; an' two threepennies with the soap—total two-and-nine, which was correct. If I die, I die," moaned Palmerston.

"'Ero!" murmured Fancy, stepping to the bedside and arranging his pillow.

"You take my advice and lie quiet," counselled Mrs Bowldler. "You're not a-goin' to die this time. But there's been a shock to the system, you may make up your mind," she went on, turning to Fancy. "I'd most forgotten about the soap. That was Philp's suggestion, as I heard. They found a cake of Monkey Brand in the ship's fo'c'sle, and by the time Doctor Higgs arrived with his stomach-pump—"

"They'd sent for *him?* What, for two pounds?"

"Less two-an'-nine, by this—as they thought. But, of course, there was the child's health to be considered . . . I ought to mention that before Dr Higgs came Captain Hunken remembered how he'd treated a seaman once, that had swallowed carbolic by mistake. He recommended tar: but there wasn't any tar to be found—which seems strange, aboard a ship."

"It was lucky, anyhow."

"There was a plenty of hard pitch about, and one or two reckoned the marine glue in the deck-seams might be a passable substitute. They were diggin' some out with their penknives when Doctor Higgs arrived with his pump."

"And did he use it?"

"He did not. He asked what First Aid they had been applyin', an' when they told him, his language was not to be repeated. 'D'ye think,' said he, 'as I'd finish the child for—'well, he named the balance, whatever 'twas."

"One-seventeen-three," said the voice from the bed.

"That's so. And 'Monkey Brand?' says he. 'Why, you've scoured his little stummick so, you might put it on the chimbly-piece and see your face in it! Fit an' wrap what's left of him in a blanket,' says Doctor Higgs; 'an' take him home an' put him to bed,' says he—which they done so," concluded Mrs Bowldler, "an' if you'll believe it, when I come to put him to bed an' fold his trowsers across the chair, out trickles the two sufferins!"

"You don't say!"

"He's been absent-minded of late. It they'd only turned his pockets out instead of—well, we won't go into details: but the two pounds was there all the time. 'Twas the petty cash he'd swallowed, in the shock at hearin' about Mr Rogers. . . . And how's *he*, by the way?"

"Bad," answered Fancy, "dreadful bad. I don't think he's goin' to die, not just yet-awhile: but he can't speak, and his mind's troubled."

"Reason enough why, if all's truth that they tell of him."

"But it isn't."

"He brought your own father to beggary."

"Well, you may put it that way if you choose. It's the way they all put it that felt for Dad without allowin' their feelin's to take 'em further. Not that he'd any claim to more'n their pity. He speckilated with Mr Rogers, and Mr Rogers did him in the eye, that's all. And I'm very fond of Dad," continued the wise child; "but the longer I live the more I don't see as one man can bring another to beggary unless the other man helps. The point is, Mr Rogers didn' leave him there. . . . We've enough to eat."

"Ho! If *that* contents you—" Mrs Bowldler shrugged her shoulders.

"Who said it did? We don't ezackly make Gawds of our bellies, Dad and I; but there's a difference between that and goin' empty. Ask Pammy!" she added, with a twitch and a grin.

"I've heard you say, anyway, that you was afraid Mr Rogers'd go to the naughty place. A dozen times I've heard you say it."

"Rats!—you never did. What you heard me say was that he'd go to hell, and I was sure of it. . . . And you may call it weak, but I can't bear it," the child broke out with a cry of distress, intertwisting her fingers and wringing them. "It's dreadful—dreadful!—to sit by and watch him lyin' there, with his mind workin' and no power to speak. All the time he's wantin' to say something to me, and—and—Where's Cap'n Hocken?"

"In his parlour. I heard his step in the passage, ten minutes ago, an' the door close."

"I'm goin' down to him, if you'll excuse me," said Fancy, rising from the bedroom chair into which she had dropped in her sudden access of grief.

"Why?"

"I dunno. . . . He's a good man, for one thing. You haven't noticed any difference in him?"

"Since when?" The question obviously took Mrs Bowldler by surprise.

"Since he heard—yesterday—"

"Me bein' single-handed, with Palmerston on his back, so to speak, I hev' not taken particular observation," said Mrs Bowldler. "Last night, as I removed the cloth after supper, he passed the remark that it had been a very tirin' day, that this was sad news about Mr Rogers, but we'd hope for the best, and when I mentioned scrambled eggs for breakfast, he left it to me. Captain Hunken on the other hand chose haddock: he did mention—come to think of it and when I happened to say that a second stroke was mostly fatal—he did go so far as to say that all flesh was grass and that Palmerston would require feedin' up after what he'd gone through."

"He—Cap'n Hunken—didn' seem worried in mind, either?"

"Nothing to notice. Of course," added Mrs Bowldler, "you understand that our appetites are not what they were: that there has been a distink droppin' off since—you know what. They both eats, in a fashion, but where's the pleasure in pleasin' 'em? Heart-renderin', I call it, when a devilled kidney might be a plain boiled cabbage for all the heed taken, and you knowin' all the while that a woman's at the bottom of it."

Fancy moved to the door. "Well," said she, "I'm sorry for the cause of it: but duty's duty, and I reckon I've news to make 'em sit up."

She went downstairs resolutely and knocked at Cai's parlour door.

"Come in! . . . Eh, so it's you, missy? No worse news of the invalid, I hope?"

"He isn' goin' to die to-day, nor yet to-morrow, if that's what you mean. May I take a chair?"

"Why, to be sure."

"Thank you." Fancy seated herself. "If you please, Cap'n Hocken, I got a very funny question to ask."

"Well?"

"You mustn't think I'm inquisitive—"

"Go on."

"If you please, Cap'n Hocken, are you very fond indeed of Mrs Bosenna?"

Cai turned about to the hearth and stooped for the tongs, as if to place a lump of coal on the fire.

Then he seemed to realise that, the season being early summer, there was no fire and the tongs and coal-scuttle had been removed. He straightened himself up slowly and faced about again, very red and confused (but the flush may have come from his stooping).

"So we're not inquisitive, aren't we? Well, missy, appearances are deceptive sometimes—that's all I say."

"But I'm not askin' out o' curiosity—really an' truly. And please don't turn me out an' warn me to mind my own business; for it *is* my business, in a way. . . . I'll explain it all, later on, if only you'll tell."

"I admire Mrs Bosenna very much indeed," said Cai slowly. "There now,— will that satisfy you?"

Fancy shook her head. "Not quite," she confessed, "I want to know, Are you so fond of her that you wouldn' give her up, not on any account?"

Cai flushed again. "Well, missy, since you put it that way, we'll make it so."

Still the answer did not appear to satisfy the child. She fidgetted in her chair a little, but without offering to go.

"Not for no one in the wide world?" she asked at length.

"Why, see here,"—Cai met her gaze shyly—"isn't that the right way to feel when you want to make a woman your wife?"

"Ye-es—I suppose so," admitted Fancy with a sigh. "But it makes things so awkward—" She paused and knit her brows, as one considering a hard problem.

"What's awkward?"

Her response to this, delayed for a few seconds, was evasive when it came.

"I used to think you an' Cap'n Hunken was such friends there was nothin' in the world you wouldn' do for him."

"Ah!" Cai glanced at her with sharp suspicion. "So that's the latest game, is it? He's been gettin' at you—a mere child like you!—and sends you off here to work on my feelin's! . . . I thought better of 'Bias: upon my soul, I did."

"An' you'd better go on thinkin' better," retorted Fancy with spirit. "Cap'n Hunken sent me? What next? . . . Why, he never spoke a word to me!"

"Then I don't see—"

"Why I'm here? No, you don't; but you needn't take up with guesses o' *that* sort."

"I'm sorry if I mistook ye, missy."

"You ought to be. Mistook me?—O' course you did. And as for Cap'n Hunken's sendin' me, he don't even know yet that he's lost his money: and if he did he'd be too proud, as you ought to know."

"Lost his money?" echoed Cai. "What money?"

"Well, to start with, you don't suppose Mr Rogers got his stroke for nothin'? 'Twas the news about the *Saltypool* that bowled him out: an' between you an' me, in a few days there's goin' to be a dreadful mess. He always was a speckilator. The more money he made—and he made a lot, back-along—the more he'd risk it: and the last year or two his luck has been cruel. In the end, as he had to tell me—for I did all his writin', except when he employed Peter Benny,—he rode to one anchor, and that was the *Saltypool*. He ran her uninsured."

"Uninsured?" Cai gave a low whistle. "But all the same," said he, "an' sorry as I am for Rogers, I don't see how that affects—"

"I'm a-breakin' it gently," said Fancy, not without a small air of importance. "Cap'n Hunken had a small sum in the *Saltypool*—a hundred pounds only."

"I wonder he had a penny. 'Tisn't like 'Bias to put anything into an uninsured ship."

"Mr Rogers did it without consultin' him. Cap'n Hunken didn' know, and *I* didn' know, for the money didn' pass by cheque. Some time back in last autumn—I've forgot the date, but the books'll tell it—the old man handed me two hundred pound in notes, not tellin' me where they came from, with orders to

pay it into his account: which I took it straight across to the bank—"

"Belay there a moment," interrupted Cai. "A moment since you mentioned *one* hundred."

"So I did, because we're talkin' of Cap'n Hunken. Two hundred there were, and all in bank notes: but only one hundred belonged to *him*—and I only found *that* out the other day, when he heard that Mr Rogers had put it into the *Saltypool*, and there was a row. As for the other— Lawks, you don't tell me 'twas yours!" exclaimed Fancy, catching at the sudden surmise written on Cai's face.

"Why not? . . . If he treated 'Bias that way? Sure enough," said Cai.
"I took him a hundred pounds to invest for me, about that time."

"Did he pay you a dividend this last half-year?"

"To be sure—seven pound, eight-an'-four."

"That was on the *Saltypool*," Fancy nodded. "And oh! Cap'n Hocken, I am so sorry! but that hundred pound o' yours is at the bottom of the sea."

"Well, my dear," said Cai after a pause, pulling a wry face, "to do your master justice, he warned me 'twas a risk. There's naught to do but pay up un' look pleasant, I reckon. 'Twon't break me."

"Cut the loss, you mean. The shares was paid up in full, and there can't be no call."

"You're knowledgeable, missy: and yet you're wrong this time, as it happens. For (I may tell you privately) the money didn' belong to me, but to Mrs Bosenna, who asked me to invest it for her."

"Oh!—and Cap'n Hunken's hundred too?"

Cai reached a hand to the mantelpiece for the tobacco-jar, filled a pipe very deliberately, lit it, and drawing a chair up to the table, seated himself in face of her.

"I shouldn't wonder," said he, resting both arms on the table and eyeing her across a cloud of tobacco-smoke. "Though I don't understand what she—I mean, I don't understand what the game was."

"Me either," agreed the child, musing. "No hurry, though: I'll be a widow some day, please God—which is mor'n *you* can hope. But now we get to the point: an' the point is, you can pay the woman up. Cap'n Hunken can't."

"Why not?"

"He don't know it yet, but he can't."

"So you said: an' Why not? I ask. Within a thousand pound 'Bias owns as much as I do."

The child stood up, pulled her chair across to the table, and reseating herself, gazed steadily across at him through the tobacco-smoke.

"Where d'ye keep your bonds an' such like?" she asked.

"In my strong box, for the most part: two or three in the skivet of my sea-chest."

"You got 'em all?"

"All. That's to say all except the paper for this hundred pounds, which 'twas agreed Rogers should keep."

"You're a lucky man. . . . Where did Cap'n Hunken keep his?"

"Darn'd if I know. Somewheres about. He was always a bit careless over his securities—and so I've told him a dozen times,"

"When did you tell him last?"

This was a facer, and it made Cai blink. "We haven't discussed these things much—not of late," he answered lamely.

"I reckoned not. He don't keep 'em in his strong-box?"

"He hasn't one."

"In his chest?"

"Maybe."

"But he don't. He's left 'em with Mr Rogers from the first, or I'm mistaken. I used to see the two bundles, his and yours, lyin' side by side on the upper shelf o' the safe when the old man sent me to unlock it an' fetch something he wanted—which wasn't often. Then, about six months back, I noticed as one was gone. I mentioned it to him, and he said as 'twas all his scrip—that was his word—made up in a parcel an' docketed by you, and that some time afterwards you'd taken it away."

"Quite correct, missy. And t'other one is 'Bias's, as I know. I had 'em in my hands together when I opened the safe as Mr Rogers told me to do, givin' me the key. I took out the two, not knowing t'other from which, made sure, docketed mine careful—to take away—and put 'Bias's back in the safe afore lockin' it. That would be back sometime in October last."

Fancy nodded. "That's what he told me: and up to this mornin' I reckoned Cap'n Hunken's bonds was still there, though it must be a month since I opened the safe. This mornin' I had a talk with Dad—he doesn't know the half about the master's affairs, nor how they've been these two years, and I didn' let on: but I allowed as we ought to look into things and call in Peter Benny—knowin' that Peter Benny was made execlator, if anything happened. So we agreed, and called him in: and I told Peter Benny enough to let him see that things were serious. In the end I fetched the keys, and he unlocked the safe. There was a good few papers in it, which he overhauled. But there wasn' no parcel 'pon the top shelf where I'd seen it last."

"Then you may depend he'd given it to 'Bias unbeknown to you, same as he handed mine over to me. Wasn' that Benny's opinion?"

"Oh, you make me tired!" exclaimed the wise child frankly. "As if I'd no more sense than to go there an' then an' frighten him—an' him with all those papers to look over!"

"Then if you're so shy about worriting Benny—and I don't blame you—why be in such a hurry to worrit yourself? 'Bias has the papers—that you may lay to."

Fancy tapped her small foot on the floor, which it just reached. "As if I should be wastin' time, botherin' you! On my way here I ran against Cap'n Hunken, and of course he wanted to hear the latest of master—said he was on his way to inquire. So I told him that matters was bad enough but while there was life there was hope—the sort o' thing you *have* to say: and I went on that the business would be all in a mess for some time to come, and I hoped he'd got all his papers at home, which would save trouble. 'Papers?' said he. 'Not I!'—and I wonder I didn' drop: you might have knocked me down with a feather. 'Papers?' said he. 'I haven't seen 'em for months. *I* don't trouble about papers! But you'll find 'em in the safe all right, though I haven't seen 'em for months.' Those were the very words he used: and nothin' would interest him but to hear how the invalid was doin'. He went off, cheerful as a chaffinch. It's plain to me," Fancy wound up, "that he hasn't the papers. He trusted you, to start with, and he's gone on trustin' you and the master. Didn' you intejuce him?"

"Sure enough I did," Cai allowed. "But—confound it, you know!—'Bias Hunken isn't a child."

"Oh! if that contents you—" But well she knew it did not.

"Mr Rogers never would—"

"I've told you," said Fancy, "more'n ever I ought to have told. There's no knowin', they say, what a man'll do when he's in Queer Street: *and* the papers have gone: *and* Cap'n Hunken thinks they're in the safe, where they ain't: *and* I come to you first, as used to be his friend."

"Good Lord '" Cai stood erect. "If—if—"

"That's so," assented Fancy, seated and nodding. "If—"

"But it can't be!"

"But if it *is?*" She slipped from her chair and stood, still facing him.

He stared at her blankly. "Poor old 'Bias!" he murmured. "But it can't be."

"Right O! if you *will* have it so. But, you see, I didn' put the question out o' curiosity altogether."

"The question? What question?"

"Why, about Mrs Bosenna."

"What has Mrs Bosenna to do with—Oh, ay, to be sure! You're meanin' that hundred pounds." His wits were not very clear for the moment.

"No, I'm not," said Fancy, moving to the door. In the act of opening it she paused. "'Twas through you, I reckon, he first trusted master with his money."

"I—I never suggested it," stammered Cai.

"I'm not sayin' you did," the girl answered back coldly. "But he went to master for your sake, because you was his friend and he had such a belief in you. Just you think that out."

With a nod of the head she was gone.

Before leaving the house she visited the kitchen, to bid good-night to Mrs Bowldler. But Mrs Bowldler was not in the kitchen.

She mounted the stairs and tapped at the door of Palmerston's attic chamber.

"Hullo!" said she looking in, "what's become of Geraldine?" (Mrs Bowldler's Christian name was Sarah, but the two children vied in inventing others more suitable to her gentility).

"If by Geraldine you mean Herm-Intrude," said Palmerston, sitting up in bed and grinning, "she's out in the grounds, picking—"

"Culling," corrected Fancy. "Her own word."

"Well then—culling lamb mint."

"I should ha' thought sage-an'-onions was the stuffin' relied on by this establishment."

"Seasonin'," corrected Palmerston. "But what have *you* been doin' all this time?"

"My dear, don't ask!" Fancy seated herself at the foot of the bed. "If you *must* know, I've been playin' Meddlesome Matty life-size. . . . These grown-ups are all so *helpless*—the men especially! . . . Feelin' better?"

"Heaps. 'Tis foolishness, keepin' me in bed like this, and I wish you'd tell her so. *I'm* all right—'xcept in my mind."

"What's wrong with your mind?"

"'Shamed o' myself: that's all—but it's bad enough."

"There's no call to be ashamed. You did it in absence o' mind, and all the best authors have suffered from that. It's well known."

"To go through what I did," said Palmerston bitterly, "just to bring up two-an'-nine! 'Tis such a waste of material!"

"That's one way of puttin' it, to be sure."

"I mean, for a book—for' Pickerley.' I s'pose there's not one man in a thousand—not one liter'y man, anyhow—has suffered anything like it. And I can't put it into the book!"

"No," agreed Fancy meditatively. "I don't suppose you could: not in 'Pickerley' anyhow. You couldn' make your 'ero swallow anything under a di'mund tiyara, and that's not easy."

"I'll have to write the next one about low life," said Palmerston. "If only I knew a bit more about it! Mrs Bowldler says it can be rendered quite amusin', and I wouldn' mind makin' myself the 'ero."

"Wouldn't you? Well, *I* should, and don't you let me catch you at it! The man as I marry'll have to keep his head up and show a proper respect for his-self."

Poor Palmerston stared. The best women in the world will never understand an artist.

CHAPTER XXV.

CAI RENOUNCES.

If this thing had happened—?

After Fancy left him Cai dropped into his armchair, and sat for a long while staring at the paper ornament with which Mrs Bowldler had decorated his summer hearth. It consisted of a cascade of paper shavings with a frontage of paper roses and tinsel foliage, and was remarkable not only for its own sake but because Mrs Bowldler had chosen to display the roses upside down. But though Cai stared at it hard, he observed it not.

For some minutes his mind refused to work beyond the catastrophe.
"If *it* had happened—if 'Bias had indeed lost all his money. . . ."

He arose, lit a pipe, and dropped back into his chair.

It may be that the tobacco clarified his brain. . . . Of a sudden the child's words recurred and wrote themselves upon it, and stood out, as if traced in fire—"*He went to master for your sake, because you was his friend and he had such a belief in you.*"

Ay, that was true, and in a flash it lit up a new pathway, down which he followed the thought in the child's mind only to lose it and stand aghast at his own reflections.

''Bias went to Rogers through his belief in me.'

—'I did not encourage him. On the other hand, I said nothing to hinder him.'

—'Yet, afterwards and in practice, I did encourage him, going to Rogers with him and discussing our investments together.'

—'In a dozen investments we acted as partners.'

—'He was my friend, and in those days entirely open with me. He let me read all his character. I knew him to be strict in paying his debts, uneasy if he owed a sixpence, yet careless in details of business, and trustful as a child.'

—'Then this quarrel sprang up between us, and I let him go his way. I had no right to do that, having led him so far. In a sense, he has gone on trusting me; that is, he has gone on trusting Rogers for my sake. To be quit of responsibility, I should have given him fair warning.

—'I ought to have gone to him and said, "Look here; Rogers is a friend of mine, and known to me from childhood. There's honesty in him, but 'tis like streaks in bacon; and for some reason or another he chooses that all his dealin's with me shall keep to the honest streak. If you ask me how I know this, 'twouldn't be easy to answer: I *do* know it, and I trust him as I'd trust myself, a'most. But Rogers isn't a man for everyone's money, and there's many as don't scruple to call him a knave. He hasn't known you from a child, and you haven't known him. You'll be safe in putting it that what he's done honest for you he's done as my friend—"'

Here Cai was seized by a new apprehension.

—'Ay, and—the devil take it!—I've let Rogers see, lately, that 'Bias and I had dissolved partnership and burnt the papers! 'Twouldn't take more than that to persuade Rogers he was quit of the old obligation towards 'Bias—himself in difficulties too, and 'Bias's money under his hand.'

—'Good Lord! . . . Suppose the fellow even allowed to himself that he was *helping* me! If Mrs Bosenna —?'

At this point Cai came to a full stop, appalled. Be it repeated that neither he nor 'Bias had wooed Mrs Bosenna for her wealth; nor until now had her wealth presented itself to either save in comfortable after-thought.

Cai sat very still for a while. Then drawing quickly at his pipe, he found that it was smoked out. He arose to tap the bowl upon the bars of the grate. But they were masked and muffled by Mrs Bowldler's screen of shavings, and he wandered to the open window to knock out the ashes upon the slate ledge. Returning to the fireplace, he reached out a hand for the tobacco-jar, but arrested it, and laying his pipe down on the table, did something clean contrary to habit.

He went to the cupboard, fetched out decanter, water-jug, and glass, and mixed himself a stiff brandy-and-water.

"Hullo!" said a voice outside the window. "I didn' know as you indulged between meals."

It was Mr Philp, staring in.

"I heard you tappin' on the window-ledge, and I thought maybe you had caught sight o' me," suggested Mr Philp.

"But I hadn't," said Cai, somewhat confused.

"I said to myself, 'He's beckonin' me in for a chat': and no wonder if 'tis true what they're tellin' down in the town."

"Well, I wasn't," said Cai, gulping his brandy-and-water hardily.
"But what are they tellin'?"

"There's some," mused Mr Philp, "as don't approve of solitary drinkin'. Narrow-minded bodies *I* call 'em. When a man is in luck's way, who's to blame his fillin' a glass to it—though some o' course prefers to call in their naybours; an' *that's* a good old custom too."

Cai ignored the hint. "What are they tellin' down in the town?"

"All sorts o' things, from mirth to mournin'. They say, for instance, as you and the Widow have fixed it all up to be married this side o' Jubilee."

"That's a lie, anyway."

"And others will have it as the engagement's broken off by reason of your losin' all your money in Johnny Rogers's smash?"

"And that," said Cai, "is just as true as the other. But who says that
Rogers has gone smash?"

"Everyone. I tackled Tabb upon the subject this mornin', and he couldn' deny it. The man's clean scat. He's been speckilatin' for years: I always looked for this to be the end, and when they told me the *Saltypool* wasn't insured, why, I drew my conclusions. As I was sayin' to Cap'n Hunken just now—"

"Eh? . . . Where is he?"

"Who?"

"'Bias Hunken. You said as you been speakin' with him—"

"Ay, to be sure, over his garden wall. I looked over and saw him weedin' among the rose-bushes, an' pulled up to give him the time o' day."

"You didn' tell him about the *Saltypool?*"

"As it happens, that's just what I did. He'd heard she was lost, but he'd no notion Rogers hadn't taken out an insurance on her, and he seemed quite fetched aback over it."

"The devil!"

"I'm sorry you feel like that about him. As I was tellin' him, when I heard your tap here at the window —"

"But I don't—and I wasn' tappin' for you, either."

"Appears not," said Mr Philp, with a glance at the empty glass in Cai's hand.

"Where is he? Still in the garden, d'ye say?"

"Ay: somewheres down by the summer-house. Says *I*, when I heard you tappin', 'That's Cap'n Hocken,' says I, 'signallin' me to come an wish him joy, an' maybe to join him in a drink over his luck. And why not?' says I. 'Stranger things have happened.'"

"You'll excuse me. . . . If he's in his garden, I want a chat with him."
Cai hurried out to the front door.

"Maybe you'd like me to go with you," suggested Mr Philp, ready for him.

"Maybe I'd like nothin' of the sort," snapped Cai. "Why should I?"

"Well, if you ask *me*, he didn' seem in the best o' tempers, and it might come handy to take along a witness."

"No, thank'ee," said Cai with some asperity. "You just run along and annoy somebody else."

He descended the garden, to find 'Bias at the door of his summer-house, seated, and puffing great clouds of tobacco-smoke.

"Good evenin'!"

"Good evenin'," responded 'Bias in a tone none too hospitable.

"You don't mind my havin' a word with you?"

"Not if you'll make it short."

"I've just come from Philp. He's been tellin' you about the *Saltypool*, it seems."

"Well?"

"She was uninsured."

"And on top o' that, the fools overloaded her."

"And 'tis a serious thing for Rogers."

"Ruination, Philp tells me—that's if you choose to believe Philp."

"I've better information than Philp's, I'm sorry to say."

"Whose?"

"Fancy Tabb's."

"She didn' tell me so when I saw her to-day."—(And good reason for why, thought Cai.)—"Still, if she told you, you may lay there's some truth in it. That child don't speak at random. I don't see, though, as it makes much difference, up *or* down?"

"No difference?"

"I didn' say 'no difference.' I said 'not much.' Ruination's not much to a man already down with a stroke."

"Oh, . . . *him?*" said Cai. "To tell the truth, I wasn't thinkin' about Rogers, not at this moment."

"No?" queried 'Bias sourly. "Then maybe I'm doin' you an injustice. I thought you might be pushin' your way in here to suggest our doin' something for the poor chap." Before Cai had well recovered from this, 'Bias went on, "And if so, I'd have answered you that I didn' intend to be any such fool."

"I—I'm afraid," owned Cai, "my thought wasn' anything like so unselfish. It concerned you and me, rather."

"Thinkin' of me, was you?" 'Bias stuffed down the tobacco in his pipe with his forefinger. "I reckon that's no game, Caius Hocken, to be takin' up again after all these months; and I warn you to drop it, for 'tis dangerous."

Whatever his faults, Cai did not lack courage. "I don't care a cuss for threats, as you might know by this time. What I owe I pay,—and there's my trouble. I introduced you to Rogers, didn't I?"

"That's true," agreed 'Bias slowly. "What of it?"

"Why, that I'm in a way responsible that you took your affairs to him."

"Not a bit."

"But it follows. Surely you must see—"

"No, I don't. I ain't a child, and I'll trouble you not to hang about here suggestin' it. I didn' trust Rogers till I saw for myself he was a good man o' business and the very sort I wanted. He sarved me, well enough; and, well or ill, I don't complain to you."

"See here, 'Bias," said Cai desperately. "You may take this tone with me if you choose. But you don't choke me off by it, and you'll have to drop it sooner or later. I was your friend, back along—let's start with that."

"And a nice friend you proved!"

"Let's start with *that*, then," pursued Cai eagerly—so eagerly that 'Bias stared willy-nilly, lifting his eye-brows. "Put it, if you please, that I was your friend and misled you to trust in Rogers, that you lost money by it—"

"Who said so?"

"I say so. Put it at the lowest—that you sunk a hundred pound' in the *Saltypool*—"

"Eh?"

"In the *Saltypool*—" Cai met his stare and nodded. "And not your own money, neither. Mrs Bosenna —"

'Bias started and laid down his pipe. "Drop that!" he interjected with a growl.

"Nay, you don't frighten *me*," answered Cai valiantly. "We're goin' to talk a lot of Mrs Bosenna, afore we've done. Present point is, she gave you a hundred pound, to invest for her. She gave me the like."

"What!" 'Bias clutched both arms of his chair in the act of rising.
But Cai held up a hand.

"Steady! She gave me the like. . . . You handed the money over to Rogers, and close on fifteen per cent he was makin' on it—in the *Saltypool*."

"Who—who told you?"

"Wait! I did the like. . . . Seven pounds eight-and-four was my dividend, whatever yours may have been—eh? You may call it a—a coincidence, 'Bias Hunken: but some would say as our minds worked on the same lines even when—even when—" Cai seemed to swallow something in his throat. "Anyhow, the money's gone, and we'll have to make it good."

"Well, I should hope so!"

"I'll see to *that*, 'Bias—whatever happens."

"So will I, o' course." 'Bias turned to refill his pipe.

Cai was watching him narrowly. "Happen that mightn't be none too easy," he suggested.

"Why so?"

"Heark'n to me now: I got something more serious to tell. The Lord send we may be mistaken, but—supposin' as Rogers has played the rogue?"

'Bias, not at all discomposed, went on filling his pipe. "I see what you're drivin' at," said he. "'Tis the same tale Philp was chantin' just now, over the wall; how that Rogers had lost his own money and ours as well, and 'twas in everybody's mouth. Which I say to you what I said to him: ''Tis the old story,' I says, 'let a man be down on his back, and every cur'll fly at him.'"

"But suppose 'twas true? . . . Did Rogers ever show the bonds and papers for your money?"

"'Course he did. Showed me every one as they came in, and seemed to make a point of it. 'Made me count 'em over, some time back. 'Wouldn' let me off 'till I'd checked 'em, tied 'em up in a parcel, docketed 'em, sealed 'em, and the Lord knows what beside. Very dry work. I claimed a glass o' grog after it."

"And then you took 'em away?" asked Cai with a sudden hope.

"Not I. For one thing, they're vallyble, and I don't keep a safe.
I put 'em back in the old man's—top shelf—alongside o' yours."

Cai groaned. "They're missin' then!"

"Who told you?"

"The child—Fancy Tabb."

'Bias looked serious. "Why didn' she come to me, I wonder?"

"I reckon—knowing what friends we'd been—she left it to me to break the news."

"I won't believe it," declared 'Bias slowly. But he sat staring straight at the horizon, and after each

puff at the pipe Cai could hear him breathing hard.

"The child's not given to lyin'. And yet I don't see—Rogers bein' helpless to open the safe on his own account. At the worst 'tis a bad job for ye, 'Bias."

"Eh? . . . 'Means sellin' up an' startin' afresh: that's all—always supposin' there's jobs to be found, at our age. I don't know as there wouldn't be consolations. This here life ashore isn't all I fancied it."

Now Cai had in mind a great renunciation: but unfortunately he could not for the moment discover any way to broach it. He played to gain time, therefore, awaiting opportunity.

"As for getting a job," he suggested, "there's no need to be downcast; no need at all. If the worst came to the worst, there's the *Hannah Hoo*, f'r instance, and a providence she never found a buyer."

"Ay, to be sure—I'd forgot the bark'nteen."

"Come!" said Cai with a quick smile, playing up towards his grand *coup*. "What would you say to shippin' aboard the *Hannah Hoo?*"

"What?—as mate under *you*? . . . I'd say," answered 'Bias slowly, "as I'd see you damned first."

"But"—Cai stared at him in bewilderment—"who was proposin' any such thing? As skipper I thought o' you—what elst? Leastways—"

"And you?"

"Me? . . . But why? There's no call for *me* goin' to sea again."

"Ah, to be sure," said 'Bias bitterly, "I was forgettin'. You'll stay ashore and make up your losses by marryin'!"

"But I haven't *had* any losses!" stammered Cai. "Not beyond the hundred pound in the *Saltypool*. . . . Didn't I make that plain?"

"No, you didn't." 'Bias laid down his pipe. "Are you standin' there and tellin' me that *your* papers are all right and safe?"

"To be sure they are. Rogers handed 'em over to me, and I took 'em home and locked 'em in my strong-box—it may be four months ago."

"Ay, that would be about the time. . . . Well, I congratulate you," said 'Bias, with deepening bitterness of accent. "The luck's yours, every way, and that there's no denyin'."

"Wait a bit, though. You haven't heard me finish."

"Well?"

"Since this news came I've been thinkin' pretty hard over one or two things . . . over our difference, f'r instance, an' the cause of it. To be plain, I want a word with you about—well, about Mrs Bosenna."

"Stow that," growled 'Bias. "If you've come here to crow—"

"The Lord knows I've not come here to crow. . . . I've come to tell you, as man to man, that I don't hold 'twas a pretty trick she played us over them two hundreds. You may see it different, and I hope you do. I don't bear her no grudge, you understand? . . . But if you've still a mind to her, and she've a mind to you, I stand out from this moment, and wish 'ee luck!"

'Bias stood up, stiff with wrath.

"And the Lord knows, Cai Hocken, how at this moment I keep my hands off you! . . . Wasn't it bad enough before, but you must stand patronisin' there, offerin' me what you don't want? First I'm to ship in your sarvice, eh? When that won't do, I'm to marry the woman you've no use for? And there was a time I called 'ee friend! Hell! if you must poison this garden, poison it by yourself! Let me get out o' this. Stand aside, please, ere I say worse to 'ee!"

He strode by, and up the garden path in the gathering twilight.

Poor 'Bias!

Poor Cai, too! His renunciation had cost him no small struggle, and he had meant it nobly; but for

certain he had bungled it woefully.

His heart was sore for his friend: the sorer because there was now no way left to help. The one door to help—reconcilement—was closed and bolted! closed through his own clumsiness.

It had cost him much, a while ago—an hour or two ago, no more—to resign his pretensions to Mrs Bosenna's hand. The queer thing was how little—the resolutions once taken—Mrs Bosenna counted. It was 'Bias he had lost.

As he sat and smoked, that night, in face of Mrs Bowldler's fire-screen, staring at its absurd decorations, it was after 'Bias that his thoughts harked—always back, and after 'Bias—retracing old friendship faithfully as a hound seeking back to his master.

'Bias would never think well of him again. As a friend, 'Bias was lost, had gone out of his life. . . . So be it! Yet there remained a 'Bias in need of help, though stubborn to reject it: a 'Bias to be saved somehow, in spite of himself, an unforgiving 'Bias, yet still to be rescued. Cai smoked six pipes that night, pondering the problem. He was aroused by the sound of the clock in the hall striking eleven. Before retiring to bed he had a mind to run through his parcel of bonds and securities on the chance—since he and 'Bias had made many small investments by consent and in common—of finding some hint of possible salvage.

His strong-box stood in a recess by the chimnney-breast. A stuffed gannet in a glass case surmounted it—a present from 'Bias, who had shot the bird. The bird's life-like eye (of yellow glass) seemed to watch him as he thrust the key into the lock.

He took out the parcel, laid it on the table under the lamp, and—with scarcely a glance at the docket as he untied the tape—spread out the papers with his palm much as a card-player spreads wide a pack of cards before cutting. . . . He picked up a bond, opened it, ran his eye over the superscription and tossed it aside.

So he did with a second—a third—a fourth.

On a sudden, as he took up the fifth and, before opening it, glanced at the writing on the outside, his gaze stiffened. He sat upright.

After a moment or two he unfolded the paper. His eyes sought and found two words—the name "Tobias Hunken."

He turned the papers over again. Still the name not his—"Tobias Hunken!"

He pushed the paper from him, and timorously, as a man possessed by superstitious awe, put out his fingers and drew forward under the lamplight the four documents already cast aside.

The name on each was the same. The bonds belonged to 'Bias. By mistake, those months ago, he had carried them off and locked them up for his own.

Should he arouse 'Bias to-night and tell him of the good news? He gathered up the bonds in his hand, went to the front door, unbarred it, and stepped out into the roadway. Not a light showed anywhere in the next house.

Cai stepped back, barred the door, and sought his chamber, after putting out the lamp. He slept as soundly as a child.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'BIAS RENOUNCES.

"Is Cap'n Hunken upstairs?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Mr Tabb from behind his pile of biscuit tins and soapboxes. The pile had grown—or so it seemed to Cai—and blocked out more of the daylight than ever. "Won't you step up? You'll be kindly welcome."

"I was told I should find him here." Cai, on requesting Mrs Bowldler that morning to inform him how soon Captain Hunken would be finishing breakfast, had been met with the information that Captain Hunken had breakfasted an hour before, and gone out. ("Which," said Mrs Bowldler, "it becomes not

one in my position to carry tales between one establishment and another: but he bent his steps in the direction of the town. I beg, sir, however, that you will consider this to be strickly between you and me and the gatepost, as the saying is.") Cai at once surmised the reason of this early sallying forth, and, following in chase, ran against the Quaymaster, from whom he learnt that 'Bias had entered the ship-chandler's shop half an hour ago. "He has not since emerged," added the Quaymaster Bussa darkly, as doubtful that in the interim Captain Hunken might have suffered forcible conversion into one of the obscurer "lines" of ship-chandlery, wherein so much purports to be what it is not.

—"I was told I should find him here," said Cai. "But would ye mind fetchin' him down to me? The fact is, I want him on a matter of private business."

Mr Tabb considered for a moment. "If I may advise, sir," he suggested meekly, "you'll find it as private up there as anywhere. The master's past hearin' what you say—or, if he hears, he's past takin' notice: whereas down here, you're liable to be interrupted by customers—let alone that I mustn't leave the shop. And," concluded Mr Tabb, "I would hardly recommend the Quay. Mr Philp's just arrived there."

On recovering from his previous stroke, Mr Rogers had given orders that, if another befell him, his bed was to be fetched downstairs and laid in the great bow-window of the parlour. There Cai found him with Fancy in attendance, and 'Bias seated on a chair by the bedside.

"Good-mornin'," Cai nodded, hushing his voice, and advanced towards the bed almost on tiptoe. "He won't reckernise me, I suppose?"

The invalid reclined in a posture between lying and sitting, his back propped with pillows, his eyes turned with an expressionless stare towards the harbour. Save for its rigidity and a slight drawing down of the muscles on the left side of the mouth, there was nothing to shock or terrify in the aspect of the face, which kept, moreover, its customary high colour.

"He can't show it, if that's what you mean," answered Fancy. "But he knows us, somewhere at the back of his eyes—of that I'm sure. I got to be very clever watchin' his eyes, the last stroke he had, and there was quite a different look in 'em when he was pleased, or when he was troubled or wanted something. If you go over quiet and stand by the window, right where he must see you if he sees at all, maybe you'll notice what I mean."

But Cai, though he obeyed, and stood for a moment in the direct line of their vision, could detect no change in the unwinking eyes.

"Cap'n Hunken will even have it that he hears what's said, or scraps of it. But that I don't believe. . . . I believe 'tis but a buzzin' in his ears, with no sense to it, an' 'twould be jus' the same if we was the band of the R'yal Lifeguards."

"Well, whether he hears or not, I've a piece o' news for 'Bias Hunken, here. . . . P'raps he'd like to step outside an' discuss it?" suggested Cai awkwardly, remembering how he and 'Bias had parted overnight.

"I don't want to hear anything you can say," growled 'Bias.

"Oh, yes, you do! . . . I reckoned as you'd be down here, first thing after breakfast, sarchin' for them papers we talked about."

"Did you, now?"

"And I tried to catch you afore you started; but you'd breakfasted early. . . . Well, the long and short is, they're not lost after all!" Cai produced the bundle triumphantly.

"Eh! Where did you find 'em?" asked Fancy, while 'Bias took the parcel without a word of thanks, glanced at it carelessly, and set it down on the little round table beside the bed.

"In my strong-box. . . . There was two parcels, pretty much alike, on the top shelf of the safe yonder, and I must have taken 'Bias's by mistake. I'm glad, anyway," he went on, turning with moist eyes upon 'Bias, who appeared to have lost interest in the conversation. "I'm glad, anyway, t'have eased your mind so soon, let alone to have cut short your sarchin' which must ha' been painful enough—in a house o' sickness."

"Who was sarchin'?" asked 'Bias curtly. "Not me."

"And that's true enough," corroborated Fancy. "Why, Cap'n Hunken has never mentioned the papers!

I guessed as you hadn' told him they was missin'."

"Eh? . . . I thought—I made sure, by his startin' down here so early—"

"Not a word of any papers did he mention," said Fancy. "He just come early to sit an' keep master company, havin' a notion that his poor old mind takes comfort from it somehow. Seven hours he sat here yesterday, an' never so much as a pipe of tobacco the whole time. Doctor said as a bit o' tobacco-smoke wouldn' do any harm in the room: but Cap'n Hunken allows as he'll be on the safe side."

Cai started. . . . For aught 'Bias knew then—as indeed 'Bias had reason to suspect—this husk of a man, helpless on the bed, had robbed him of his all, ruined him, left him no prospect but to begin life over again when late middle-age had sapped his vigour, attenuated the springs of action, left sad experience in the room of hope. And 'Bias's thought, ignoring it all, had been to sit beside this man's calamity, on the merest chance of piercing it with one ray of comfort!

Whereupon, as goodness takes inspiration from goodness, in Cai's heart, too, a miracle happened, He forgot himself, forgot his loss which was 'Bias's gain: forgot that, keeping his surly attitude, 'Bias had uttered neither a "thank you" nor a word of pity. Old affection, old admiration, old faith, and regard came pouring back in a warm tide, thrilling, suffusing his consciousness, drowning all but one thought — one proud thought that stood like a sea-mark above the flood, justifying all—"Even such a man I made my friend!"

For a long time Cai stared. Then, as 'Bias made no sign of lifting his sullen gaze from the strip of carpet by the bed, he turned half-about towards the door.

"'Bias Hunken," said he gently, "you're a good man, an' deserved this luck better'n me. . . . If you can't put away hard thoughts just yet, maybe you'll remember, some day, that I wished 'ee long life to enjoy it."

His hand was on the door. "Here, though—hold hard!" put in Fancy, who had picked up the bundle of papers. "I don't think Cap'n Hunken understands; nor I don't clearly understand myself. Was it *both* packets you carried home, sir? or only this one?"

"I thought as I'd made it clear enough," answered Cai. His eyes were still on his friend, and there was weariness as well as pain in his voice. "There's only one packet—'Bias's—what you have in your hand. I must have carried it home by mistake."

"Then your's is missin'?"

"That's so," said the broken man quietly.

The child turned and walked to the window. On her way she halted a moment and peered earnestly into the invalid's eyes, as if the riddle might possibly be read there. But they were vacant and answered her nothing. Then for some twenty seconds, almost pressing her forehead to the window-pane, she stood and gazed out upon the glancing waters of the harbour.

"There's only one thing to be done—" She wheeled about sharply. "Why, wherever *is* the man? . . . You don't mean to tell me," she demanded of 'Bias indignantly, "that you sat there an' let him go!"

"I couldn' help his goin', could I?" muttered 'Bias, but his eyes were uneasy under the wrath in hers.

"You couldn' help it?" she echoed in scorn, and pointed to the figure on the bed. "Here you come playin' the Early Christian over a man that, for aught you knew, had robbed you to a stair: and when 'tis your tried friend fetchin' back riches to you—fairly bringin' you back to life at the cost o' bein' a beggar hisself—you let him go without so much as a thank'ee!"

"Cai Hocken don't want my thanks."

"Didn't even want politeness, I suppose—after runnin' here hot foot with the news that made you rich an' him a poor man! Oh, you're past all patience! . . . Who should know what he wanted an' didn't get—I, that had my eyes on his face, or you, that sat like a stuck pig, glowerin' at the carpet?"

"Gently, missy! . . . There—there didn' seem anything to say."

"There was one thing to say," answered the girl sternly, "and there's one thing to be done."

"What's that?"

"It mayn't be an easy thing, altogether. But you'll be glad of it afterwards, and you may as well make up your mind to it."

"Out with it!"

"Mrs Bosenna—Why, what's the matter?"—for 'Bias had interrupted with a short laugh.

"I'd forgot Mrs Bosenna for the moment."

"Right. Then go on forgettin' her, an' give her up. When you come to think it over," urged Fancy with the air of a nurse who administers medicine to a child, "you'll find 'tis the only fit an' proper thing to do."

Again 'Bias laughed, and this time his laugh was even shorter and grimmer than before.

"Well and good—but wait one moment, missy! D'ye know what Cai Hocken said to me, last night in the garden, when he reckoned as I'd lost my money? No, you don't. 'Look here,' he said, 'if you've still a mind to that woman and she've a mind to you, I'll stand aside.' That's what he said: and d'ye know what I answered? I told him to go to hell."

"I see." Fancy stood musing.

"Makes it a bit awkward, eh?—Cai bein' a man of spirit, with all his faults."

"Well," she decided, "unless we can find his money for him, he'll have to marry her, whether or no. 'Faults,' indeed? I believe," went on the wise child, "you two be more to one another than that woman ever was to either, or ever will be."

"We won't discuss that," said 'Bias, "now that Cai's got to marry her."

Cai retired to bed early that night, wearied in all his limbs with much and aimless walking. If, as he trudged highroad or lane in the early summer heat, any thought of Mrs Bosenna arose for a moment and conquered the anodyne of bodily exercise, it was not a thought of grudging her to 'Bias. By the turn of Fortune's wheel 'Bias would win her now. To *him*, at all events, she was lost. Cai had never courted her for her money: but he had courted without distrust, on the strength of his own security in a competence. At the back of his mind there may have lurked a suspicion that Mrs Bosenna, as a business woman, was not in the least likely to bestow her hand on a penniless sailor: but there was no reason why he should allow this suspicion to obtrude itself, since self-respect would have forbidden him, being penniless, to pursue the courtship.

No; if he thought of Mrs Bosenna at all, it was in a sort of dull rage against her sex: not specially against her, who happened to be her sex's delegate to work this particular piece of mischief, but generally against womankind, that with a word or two, a look or two, it could rob a man of a friend—and of such a friend as 'Bias!

'Bias was undemonstrative, Cai had always prided himself on recognising a worth in him which did not leap to the eyes of other men—which hid itself rather, and shunned the light. It had added to his sense of possession that he constantly detected what others overlooked. In this matter of his behaviour to Rogers, 'Bias had eclipsed all previous records. It was (view it how you would) magnificent in 'Bias—a high Christian action—to tend, as he had tended, upon a man who presumably had robbed him of his all.

And at the same moment 'Bias could behave so callously to a once-dear friend—to a friend bringing glad tidings—to a friend, moreover, rejoicing to bring them, though they meant his own undoing! It was almost inconceivable. It was quite unintelligible unless you supposed the man's nature to be perverted, and by this woman.

Cai's heart was bruised. It ached with a dull insistent pain that must be deadened at all costs, even though his own wrecked prospects called out to be faced promptly, resolutely, and with a practical mind. He would face them to-morrow. To-day he would tire himself out: to-night he would sleep.

And he slept, almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. His sleep was dreamless too.

"*Dame, get out and bake your pies—bake your pies—bake your pies*—"

"*Whoo-oo-sh!*"

He sat up in bed with a jerk. . . . What on earth was it? A squall of hail on the window? Or a rocket?—a ship in distress, perhaps, outside the harbour? . . .

"*Dame, get out and bake your pies*—" piped a high childish voice. Some one was unbarring a door

below. A voice—'Bias's voice—spoke out gruffly, demanding what was the matter?

Was the house on fire? . . . No: outside the half-open window lay spread the moonlight, pale and tranquil. The night wind entering, scarcely stirred the thin dimity curtains. This was no weather for sudden hail-storms or for shipwreck. Cai flung back the bedclothes, jumped out—and uttered a sharp cry of pain. His naked foot had trodden on a gritty pebble, small but sharp.

Someone had flung a handful of gravel at the window.

He picked his way cautiously across the floor, and looked out. . . . In the moonlit roadway, right beneath, a girl—Fancy Tabb—was dancing a fandango, the while in her lifted hand she waved a white parcel.

"Ah, there you be!" she hailed, catching sight of him. "I've found 'em!"

"Found what?"

"Your papers! . . . I couldn' sleep till I told you: and I had to fetch
Mr Benny along—here he is!"

"Good evening, Captain," spoke up Mr Peter Benny, stepping out into the roadway from the doorway where he had been explaining to 'Bias. "It's all right, sir. Your papers are found."

"Good evening, Benny! Tis kind of you, surely,"—Cai's voice trembled a little. "What's the hour?" he asked.

"Scarce midnight yet. I reckoned maybe you might be sittin' up, frettin' over this—'Twas the child here, though, that found it out and insisted on bringing me."

"After we'd locked up," broke in Fancy, "and just as I was packin' Dad off to bed, it came into my head to ask him—'I suppose you don't know,' said I, 'of anyone's havin' been to master's safe without my bein' told?' He thought a bit, and 'No,' says he; 'nobody 'cept myself, an' that but once. '*You?*' says I, 'and whoever sent *you* there?' 'Why, the master hisself,' says Dad.—Who else?' 'But what for?' I asks, feelin' as you might have knocked me down with a feather. 'I meant to ha' told you,' says Dad, 'but it slipped my mind. 'Twas one afternoon, when you was out on your walk. I heard Master's stick tap on the plankin' overhead so I went up, thinkin' as he might be wantin' his tea in a hurry. He told me to open the safe an' take out a packet o' papers from the top shelf; which I did.' 'What papers?' said I 'How should I know?' says Dad: 'I don't meddle with his business—I've seen too much of it in *my* life. I didn' even glance at 'em, but locked the safe again, an' put 'em where he told me—which was in the japanned box by his chair!' 'Why,' says I,' that's his Insurance Box as he called it—the same as I handed to Mr Benny only yesterday, to take away and sort through!' . . . After that, as you may guess, I was like a mad person till we'd taken down the bolts again and I'd run to Mr Benny's."

"Ay," chimed in Mr Benny, "I was upstairs and half-undressed: but she had me dressed again an' down as if 'twas a matter of life and death. . . . And when we got out the box, there the papers were, sure enough. After that—for I saw their value to you—no one with a human heart could help running along with her, to bear the news. . . . So here we are."

"'Bias!" called Cai softly. "Didn' I hear 'Bias's voice below there, a while since?"

"Ay, here I be."—It was 'Bias's turn to step out from the shadow of his doorway into the broad moonlight. "And glad enough to hear this news."

"Would ye do me a favour? . . . Dressed, are you?"

"Ay—been sittin' up latish to-night."

"Well, I'm not azackly in a condition to step down—not for a minute or two; and I doubt Mrs Bowldler, if I called her, wouldn' be in no condition either. . . . 'Twould be friendly of you to ask Mr Benny in and offer him a drink; and as for missy—"

"No thank 'ee, Cap'n," interposed Mr Benny. "Bringin' you this peace o' mind has been cordial enough for me—and for the child too, I reckon, Good-night, gentlemen!"

"Cap'n Hunken," said Fancy, "will you take the papers up to him?
Then we'll go."

"May I bring the papers to 'ee?" asked 'Bias, lifting his face to the window.

"Ay, do—if they won't come in. . . . I'll step down and unbar the door."

He lit a candle and hurried downstairs, his heart in his mouth. By the time he had unbarred and opened, Mr Benny and Fancy had taken their departure; but their "good-nights" rang back to him, up the moonlit road, and his friend stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS BOSENNA GIVES THE ROSE.

"It's a delicate thing to say to a woman," suggested Cai; "'specially when she happens to be your landlady."

"You do the talkin', of course," said 'Bias hurriedly.

"Must I? Why?"

"Well, to begin with, you knew her first."

"I don't see as that signifies."

"No? Well, you used to make quite a point of it, as I remember.
But anyway you're a speaker, and it'll need some gift, as you say."

They had reached the small gate at the foot of the path. The day was hot, the highroad dusty. Cai halted and removed his hat; drew out a handkerchief and wiped his brow; wiped the lining of the hat; wiped his neck inside the collar.

"There's another way of lookin' at it," he ventured. "Some might say as 'twas more tactful to let your feelin's cool off by degrees."

"That's no way for me," said 'Bias positively. "Short and sharp's our motto."

"'Tis the best, no doubt," Cai agreed. "But there's the trouble of puttin' it into words. . . . I wish, now, I'd thought of consultin' Peter Benny. There'd be no harm, after all, in steppin' back and askin' his advice."

"No, you don't," said 'Bias shortly. "In my belief, if we hadn't made so free wi' consultin' Peter Benny in the past, we shouldn't be where we be at this moment."

If Cai's thought might be read in his face, he would not have greatly minded *that*, just now.

"In the matter of these letters for instance—"

"I wonder if she ever got 'em?"

"You bet she did. She's been playin' us off, one against t'other, ever since."

"We let our feelin's carry us away."

"We let Peter Benny's feelin's carry us away," 'Bias corrected him. "That's the worst of these writin' chaps. Before you know where you are they'll harrow you up with feelin's you wasn't aware you entertained. Now I don't mind confessin' that, afore Benny had started to make out a fair copy I found myself over head an' ears in love with the woman."

"Me too," agreed Cai, musing.

"You're *sure* you're not any longer?"

"Eh? . . . Of course I am sure. I was only thinkin' how queer it was he should have pumped it out of us, so to say, with the same letters— almost to a syllable."

"There's two ways o' lookin' at that," said 'Bias thoughtfully. "You may put it that marryin's as common as dirt. Nine out o' ten indulges in it; and, that bein' so, the same form o' words'll do for everybody, more or less, in proposin' it; just as (when you come to think) the same Marriage Service does for all when they come to the scratch. If all men meant different to all women, there wouldn't be enough dictionary to go round."

Cai shook his head. "I'm the better of it now," he confessed; "but I got to own that, at the moment, though Benny did well enough, there didn't seem enough dictionary to go round."

"I felt something of a rarity myself at the time," owned 'Bias. "But there's another explanation I like better, though you'll think it far-fetched. . . . You and me—until this happened, there was never a cross word atween us, *nor* a cross thought?"

"That's so, 'Bias."

"Well, and that bein' so, if Benny hit the note for one, how could it help bein' the note for both? . . . I've had pretty rash thoughts about Benny: but—put it in that way—who's to blame the man? Or the woman, for that matter?"

"I like that explanation better," said Cai.

"—Or the woman? She can't help bein' a two-headed nightingale."

"To be sure she can't. . . . We might leave it at that and say no more about it. She'd be sure to understand in time."

"The agreement was, last night," insisted 'Bias with great firmness, "to put it to her straight and get it over."

They resumed their walk and mounted the pathway over which—from the first angle of the outbuildings to the garden-gate—Banksian roses hung from the wall in heavy honey-coloured clusters of bloom. These were scentless and already past their prime; but by the gate at the south-east end of the house the white Banksian, throwing far wider shoots, saluted them with a scent as of violets belated. And within the gate the old roses were coming on with a rush—Provence and climbing China; Moschata alba, pouring over an arch in a cascade of bloom that hid all its green as with shell-pink foam; crimson and striped Damask along the border; with Paul Neyron eclipsing all in size, moss-roses bursting their gummy shells, Gloire de Dijon climbing and asserting itself above the falsely named "pink Gloire"; Reine Marie Henriette— which, grown by everybody, is perhaps the worst rose in the world. Gloire de Dijon rampant smothered the pretender and covered the most of its mildewing buds from sight; to be conquered in its turn by the sheer beauty of Marechal Niel, whose every yellow star, bold on its stalk as greenhouses can grow it, shamed all feebler yellows. Devoniensis flung its sprays down from the thatch. La France and Ulrich Brunner competed—silver rose against cherry rose—on either side of the porch. Yet the fragrance of all these roses had to yield to that of the Cottage flowers, mignonette, Sweet-William, lemon verbena, Brompton stocks— annuals, biennials, perennials, intermixed—that lined the border, with blue delphiniums and white Madonna lilies breaking into flower above them.

Dinah, answering their ring at the bell after the usual delay for reconnaissance, opined that her mistress would probably be found in the new rose-garden. She said it, as they both observed, with a demure, half-mischievous smile.

"Amused to see us in company again, I reckon," said Cai to 'Bias as they went up through the old rose-garden, where the June-flowering H.P.'s ran riot in masses of colour from palest pink to deepest crimson.

"Ay," assented 'Bias, "we'll have to get used to folks smilin', these next few days. . . . Between ourselves, I never fancied that woman, though I couldn' give you any particular reason for it."

"Sly," suggested Cai.

"'Tis more than that. Slyness, you may say, belongs to the whole sex, and I've known men say as they found it agreeable, in moderation."

"I never noticed that in her mistress, to do her justice."

'Bias halted. "Look here. . . . You're *sure* you ain't weakenin'?"

"Sure."

"Because, as I told 'ee last night—and I'll say it again, here, at the last moment—she's yours, and welcome, if so be—"

"—'If so be as I didn' speak my true mind last night, when I said the same to you '—is that what you mean? Here, let's on and get it over!" said Cai, mopping his brow anew.

"'Tis a delicate business to broach, as you mentioned just now," said
'Bias dallying. "We'll have to be very careful how we put it."

"Very. As I told 'ee before, if you like to take it over—"

"Not at all. You're spokesman—only we don't want to put it so's she can round on us with 'nobody axed you.' And you gave me a turn, just then, by sayin' as you never noticed she was sly; because as I reckon, that's the very point we've come to make."

"As how?"

'Bias stared at him in some perturbation. "Why, didn't she put that trick on us over the investment? And ain't we here to give her back her money? And wasn't it agreed as we'd open on her reproachful-like? an' then, one thing leadin' to another—"

"Ay, to be sure—I got all that in my mind really." Cai wiped the back of his neck and pocketed his handkerchief with an air of decision—or of desperation. "What you don't seem to know—though with any experience o' speakin' you'd understand well enough—is that close upon the last moment all your thoughts fly, and specially if folks *will* keep chatterin': but when you stand up and open your mouth—provided as nobody interrupts you . . ."

"I declare! If it isn't Captain Hocken—*and* Captain Hunken with him!"

At the creaking of the small gate, as Cai opened it, Mrs Bosenna had looked up and espied them. She dropped the bundle of raffia, with the help of which she had been staking such of her young shoots as were overlong or weighted down by their heavy blooms, and came forward with a smile of welcome.

"Come in—come in, the both of you! What lovely weather! You'll excuse my not taking off my gloves? We are busy, you see, and some of my new beauties have the most dreadful thorns! . . . By the way"—she glanced over her shoulder, following Cai's incredulous stare. "I believe you know Mr Middlecoat? Yes, yes, of course—I remember!" She laughed and beckoned forward the young farmer, who dropped his occupation among the rosebuds and shuffled forward obediently enough, yet wearing an expression none too gracious.

"'Afternoon, gentlemen," mumbled Farmer Middlecoat, and his sulky tone seemed to show that he had not forgotten previous encounters. "Won't offer to shake hands. 'Cos why?" He showed the backs of his own, which were lacerated and bleeding. "Caterpillars," added Mr Middlecoat in explanation.

"There now!" cried Mrs Bosenna in accents of genuine dismay. "I'd no idea you were tearin' yourself like that—and so easy to ask Dinah to fetch out a pair o' gloves!"

"Do you mean to say, sir," asked Cai in his simplicity, "that caterpillars bite?"

"No, I don't," answered Mr Middlecoat. "But you can't get at 'em and avoid these pesky thorns."

Said Mrs Bosenna gaily,—"Mr Middlecoat called on me half an hour ago wi' the purpose to make himself disagreeable as usual—though I forget what his excuse was, this time—and I set him to hunt caterpillars."

"Dang it, look at my hands!" growled the young farmer, holding them out.

"And last month, wi' that spell of east wind, 'twas the green-fly. But I reckon we've mastered the pests by this time. Didn't find many caterpillars, eh?"

"No, I didn'," answered Mr Middlecoat, still sulkily. "But them as I did you bet I scrunched."

"Well, they deserved it, for the last few be the dangerousest. They give over the leaves to eat the buds. But 'tis labour well spent on 'em, and we'll have baskets on baskets now, by Jubilee Day."

"'Tis the Queen's flower—the royal flower—sure enough," said Cai, looking about him in admiration. He had not visited the new garden for some weeks, and on the last visit it had been but an unpromising patch stuck about with stiff, thorny twigs, all leafless, the most of them projecting but a few inches above the soil. The plants were short yet, and the garden itself far from beautiful; but the twigs had thrown up shoots, and on the shoots had opened, or were opening, roses that drew even his inexperienced eye to admire them.

"I'm afraid there's no doubt of it," said Mrs Bosenna. "I love the old H.P.'s: but you must grow the Teas and Hybrid Teas nowadays, if you want to exhibit. Yet I love the old H.P.'s, and I've planted a few, to hold their own and just show as they won't be shamed. See this one now— there's a proper Jubilee rose, and named *Her Majesty!* Brought out, they tell me, in 'eighty-five: but the Yankees bought up all the stock, and it didn't get back into this country until 'eighty-seven, the last Jubilee year. See the thorns on her, *and* the stiff pride o' stem, *and* the pride o' colour—fit for any queen! She's not the best, though. . . . She'll do for last Jubilee—not for this. Wait till you've seen the best of all!"

She led them to a plant—stunted by the secateurs, yet vigorous—which showed, with three or four buds as yet closed and green, one solitary bloom, pure white and of incomparable shape.

"There!" said she proudly. "That's a tea, and the finest yet grown, to *my* mind. That's the rose for this Diamond Jubilee, and white as a diamond. A proper royal Widow's rose!"

"Is that its name?" asked Cai.

Mrs Bosenna laughed and plucked the bloom.

"On the contrary," said she with a mischievous twitch of the mouth, "'tis called *The Bride!* There's only one bloom, you see, and I can't offer to part it. Now which of you two 'd like it for a buttonhole?"

She held out the rose, challenging them.

"I—I—" stammered Cai, backing against 'Bias's knuckles which dug him in the back—"I grant ye, ma'am, 'tis a fine rose—a lovely rose—but for my part, a trace o' colour—"

"Bright red," prompted 'Bias.

"Bright red—for both of us—"

"And now I've plucked it," sighed Mrs Bosenna.

"Well, if you won't, perhaps Mr Middlecoat will, rather than waste it."

Mr Middlecoat stepped forward and allowed the enormous bloom to be inserted in his buttonhole, where its pure white threw up a fine contrast to his crimsoning face.

"You won't think me forward, I hope?" said Mrs Bosenna, turning about.
"The fact is—though I don't want it generally known yet—that yesterday
Mr Middlecoat, in his disagreeable way, made me promise to marry him?"

Before the pair could recover, she had moved to another bush.

"Red roses, you prefer? Red is rare amongst the Teas—there's but one, as yet, that can be called red—if this suits you? And, by luck, there are two perfect buttonholes."

She plucked the buds and held them out.

"It's name," said she, "is *Liberty.*"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUBILEE.

For the best part of a week before the great Day of Jubilee Cai and 'Bias toiled together and toiled with a will, erecting the framework of a triumphal arch to span the roadway. Within-doors, in the intervals of household duty, Mrs Bowldler measured, drew, and cut out a number of capital letters in white linen, to be formed into a motto and sewn upon red Turkey twill, while Palmerston industriously constructed and wired gross upon gross of paper roses—an art in which he had been instructed by Fancy, who had read all about it in a weekly newspaper, 'The Cosy Hearth.' The two friends talked little to one another during those busy June days. Strollers-by—and it had become an evening recreation in Troy to stroll from one end of the town to the other and mark how things were getting along for the 22nd—found Captain Hocken and Captain Hunken ever at work but little disposed to chat; and as everyone knew of the old quarrel, so everyone noted the reconciliation and marvelled how it had come to pass. Even Mr Philp was baffled. Mr Philp, passing and repassing many times a day, never missed to halt and attempt conversation; with small result, however.

"It's a wonder to me," he grumbled at last, "how men of your age can risk scramblin' about on ladders with your mouths constantly full o' nails."

In the evenings they supped together. Mrs Bowldler had made free to suggest this.

"Which," said Mrs Bowldler in magnificent anacoluthon, "if we see it as we ought, this bein' no ordinary occasion, but in a manner of speakin' one of Potentates and Powers and of our feelin's in connection therewith; by which I allude to our beloved Queen, whom Gawd preserve!— Gawd bless

her! I say, and He *will*, too, from what I know of 'im—and therefore deservin' of our yunited efforts; and, that bein' the case, it would distinkly 'elp, from the point of view of the establishment (meanin' Palmerston and me) if we (meanin' you, sir, and Captain Hunken) could make it convenient to have our meals in common. . . . The early Christians were not above it," she added. "Not they! Ho, not,—if I may use the expression—by a long chalk!"

She contrived it so delicately that afterwards neither Cai nor 'Bias could remember precisely at what date—whether on the Wednesday or on the Thursday—they slipped back into the old comfortable groove.

The arch occupied their thoughts. After supper, as they sat and smoked, their talk ran on it: on details of its construction; on the chances (exiguous indeed!) of its being eclipsed by rivals in the town, some in course of construction, a few as yet existent only in the promises of rumour.

Cai would say, "I hear the Dunstans are makin' great preparations in their back-yard. They mean to bring their show out at the last moment, and step it in barrels."

"I don't believe in barrels," 'Bias would respond. "Come a breeze o' wind, where are you? Come a strong breeze, and over you go, endangerin' life. It ought to be forbidden."

"No chance of a breeze, though." Cai had been studying the glass closely all the week.

"Fog, more like. 'Tis the time o' the year for fogs."

Other matters they discussed more desultorily; meetings of the Procession Committee, of the Luncheon Committee (all the parish was to feast together), of the Tree-planting Committee, of the Tea Committee; the cost of the mugs and the medals for the children, the latest returns handed in by Mr Benny, who had undertaken the task of calling on every householder, poor or rich, and collecting donations. But to the arch their talk recurred.

—And rightly: for in the arch they were building better than they knew. In it, though unaware (being simple men), they were rebuilding friendship.

By Saturday evening the scaffolding was complete, firmly planted, firmly nailed, firmly clasped together by rope—in sailors' hitches such as do not slip. They viewed it, approved it, and soberly, having gathered up tools, went in to supper. On Sunday they attended morning service in church, and oh! the glow in their hearts when, in place of the usual voluntary, the organ rolled out the first bars of "God Save the Queen" and all the worshippers sprang to their feet together!

On Monday the town awoke to the rumbling of waggons. They came in from the plantations where since the early June daybreak Squire Willyams's foresters and gardeners had been cutting young larches, firs, laurels, aucubas. The waggons halted at every door and each householder took as much as he required. So, all that day, Cai and 'Bias packed their arch with evergreens; until at five o'clock Mr Philp, happening along, could find no chink anywhere in its solid verdure. He called his congratulations up to them as, high on ladders, they affixed flags to the corner poles and looped the whole with festoons of roses.

And now for the motto to crown the work! Fancy Tabb coming up the roadway and pausing while she conned the structure, shading her eyes against the sun-rays that slanted over it, beheld Mrs Bowldler and Palmerston issue from the doorway in solemn procession, bearing between them a length of Turkey twill. Mrs Bowldler passed one end up to Captain Hocken, high on his ladder: Captain Hunken reached down and took the other end from Palmerston. Between them, as they lifted the broad fillet above the archway, its folds fell apart, and she read:—

MANY DAUGHTERS HAVE DONE VIRTUOUSLY BUT THOU EXCELLEST THEM ALL.

"My! I'd like to be a Queen!"

"If I had my way, you WOULD," whispered Palmerston, who, edging close to her, had overheard.

"Eh? Is that Fancy Tabb?" interrupted Cai. He had happened to glance over his shoulder and spied her from the ladder. "Well, and what d'ee think of it?" he asked, as one sure of the answer.

"I was sayin' as I'd like to be a Queen," said Fancy. "Queen of England, I mean: none of your second-bests."

"Well, my dear," Cai assured her, bustling down the ladder and staring up at the motto to make sure that it hung straight, "*that* you won't never be: but you're among the many as have done virtuously, and God bless 'ee for it! Which is pretty good for your age."

"*You*'re not," retorted the uncompromising child.

"Eh?"

"'Tis three days now since you've been near the old man, either one of 'ee. How would *you* like that, if you was goin' to hell?"

"Hush 'ee now! . . . 'Bias and me had clean forgot—there's so much to do in all these rejoicin's! Run back and tell 'n we'll be down in half-an-hour, soon as we've tidied up here."

On their way down to visit the sick man, Cai and 'Bias had to pause half-a-score of times at least to admire an arch or a decorated house-front. For by this time even the laggards were out and working for the credit of Troy.

But no decorations could compare with their own.

"That's a handsome bunch, missus," called Cai to a very old woman, who, perched on a borrowed step-ladder, was nailing a sheaf of pink valerian (local name, "Pride of Troy") over her door-lintel. "Let me give 'ee a hand wi' that hammer," he offered; for her hand shook pitiably.

"Ne'er a hand shall help me—thank 'ee all the same," the old lady answered. "There, Cap'n! . . . there's for Queen Victoria! an' it's done, if I die to-morrow." She tottered down to firm earth and gazed up at the doorway, her head nodding.

"She've *got* to be in London to-morrow, of course. . . . But what a pity she can't take a walk through Troy too! Main glad she'd be. . . . Oh, I know! She an' me was born the same year."

Of the doings of next day—the great day; of the feasting, the cheering, the salvo-firing, the marching, the counter-marching, the speechifying, the tea-drinking, the dancing, the illuminations, the bonfires; the tale may not be told here. Were they not chronicled, by this hand, in a book apart? And does not the chronicle repose in the Troy Parish Chest? And may not a photograph of the famous arch constructed by Captains Hocken and Hunken be discovered therein some day by the curious?

To be sure, Queen Victoria herself did not pass beneath that arch. But there passed beneath that arch many daughters who since have grown into women and done virtuously, I hope. If not, I am certain there was no lack of encouragement that day in the honest, smiling faces of Captain Hocken and Captain Hunken as they stood with proprietary mien, one on either side of the roadway, and each with an enormous red rose aglow in his button-hole.

Pulvis et umbra sumus—"The tumult and the shouting dies."—A little before ten o'clock that night Mr Middlecoat and Mrs Bosenna walked up through the dark to Higher Parc to see the bonfires. The summit commanded a view of the coast from Dodman to Rame, and inland to the high moors which form the backbone of the county. Mrs Bosenna counted eighteen fires: her lover could descry sixteen only.

"But what does it matter?" said he. They had started the climb arm-in-arm: but by this time his arm was about her waist.

"My eyes are sharper than yours, then," she challenged.

"Very likely," he allowed. "Sure, they must be: for come to think I reckoned 'em both in my list."

She laughed cosily.

"Shall we go over the ridge?" he suggested. "We may pick up one or two inland from my place."

"No," she answered, and mused for a while. "It's strange to think our two farms are goin' to be one henceforth. . . . The ridge has always seemed to me such a barrier. But I'll not cross it to-night. Good-bye!"

"Nay, but you don't go back alone. I'll see you to the door."

"Why? I'm not afraid of ghosts."

But he insisted: and so, arm linked in arm, they descended to Rilla, where the roses breathed their scent on the night air.

Cai and 'Bias—the long day over—sat in Cai's summer-house, overlooking the placid harbour. Loyal candles yet burned in every window on the far shore and scintillated their little time on the ripple of the tide. Above shone and wheeled in their courses the steady stars, to whom our royalties are less than a pinch of dust in the meanest unseen planet that spins within their range.

The door of the summer-house stood wide to the night. Yet so breathless was the air that the candles within (set by Mrs Bowldler on the table beside the glasses and decanters) carried a flame as unwavering as any star of the firmament. So the two friends sat and smoked, and between their puffed tobacco-smoke penetrated the dewy scents of the garden. Both were out-tired with the day's labours; for both were growing old.

"'Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all,'" murmured Cai. "'Twas a noble text we chose."

"Ay," responded 'Bias, drawing the pipe from his lips. "She've kept a widow just thirty-six years. An unusual time, I should say."

"Very," agreed Cai.

They gazed out into the quiet night, as though it held all their future and they found it good.

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