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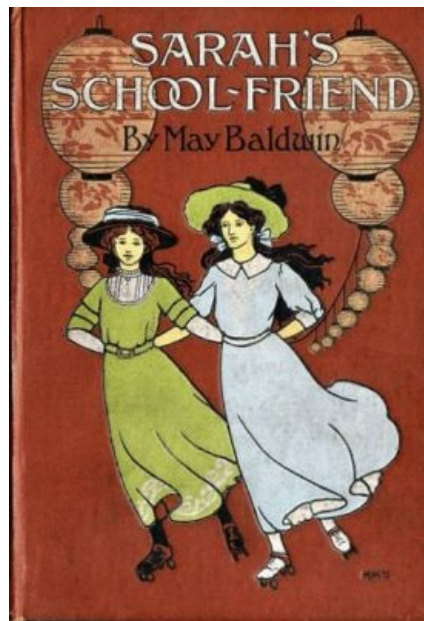
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He took Sarah by the hand and pulled her up on to the bank.  
S.S.F.—Front. Page 179

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# Sarah's School Friend

BY

MAY BALDWIN

Author of 'Two Schoolgirls of Florence,' 'Barbara  
Bellamy,' &c.

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS

by  
Percy Tarrant

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TO  
MY KIND FRIENDS  
OF  
'ALDAMS'

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# Sarah's School Friend.

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## CHAPTER I.

[Pg 1]

### A MILL-HAND'S MANSION.

'It's a dreadful thing to have a father you don't respect,' said Sarah Clay, as she walked into the gilded and beautifully painted drawing-room of the aforesaid father's mansion in Yorkshire.

Her mother gave a little, sharp scream, and let fall the book she was holding in her hand.

Sarah came forward swiftly, picked it up, and turned it over to look at the title, at sight of which she said, with a little laugh, 'What a humbug you are, mother! You know you've never read a single word of this book.'

Mrs Clay's face flushed crimson. "Ow dare you talk similar to that, Sarah?' Only she pronounced it fairly with a true cockney accent, and left out all her *h*'s. 'I don't know w'at women are comin' to nowadays, w'at wi' one thing an' another, w'en it comes to a chit o' sixteen talkin' like that about 'er mother bein' an 'umbug, let alone sayin' she doesn't respect 'er father; an' w'at 'e'd say if 'e 'eard 'er I couldn't say, I'm sure,' she said, flustered.

'Then don't say it,' observed Sarah lightly, as she threw herself lazily into one of the luxurious armchairs opposite her mother, and only then became aware that buried in the depths of another

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easy-chair was another figure—that of a man. For a moment she was taken aback, and started in fright, thinking that it was her father, of whom she might speak disrespectfully behind his back, but whom she did not dare to abuse to his face, fearless though she was by nature. However, to her relief, she saw it was not her father's big, burly form that filled the gold-brocaded chair, but her brother's tall, slight figure.

'Awfully bad form, Sarah,' he murmured in an effeminate voice, after which he laid his head back in an attitude of exhaustion against the chair, and gazed up at the ceiling.

'Yes; I think it must be that 'igh-class, fashionable school that's taught 'er to speak so of 'er parents, an' not respect any one,' agreed her mother in querulous accents.

'I didn't mean to speak disrespectfully to you, dear old mother,' said the girl with a kind of patronising affection.

'I don't know w'at you call it, then, callin' me an 'umbug,' objected Mrs Clay.

'I was in fun, and you know it *is* humbug your pretending to read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,' persisted Sarah.

At the title, the youth in the armchair roused himself, and said in quite a different tone, 'Were you reading that, mater? Is it my copy?'

'Well, I can't say I'd really read it, not to understand it; but I saw it was one o' the books you were studyin', an' I thought I'd take a look at it just to know a little w'at you were studyin' w'en you got back to college,' said his mother apologetically.

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'That's awfully nice of you, mater; but why didn't you ask me about it? I'd have told you anything you wanted to know about my work. That's such a frightfully dry book. I should grind it up for my trip,' replied her son.

'I don't know that I want to know about "trips;" but I feel I ought to try an' educate myself now you two are comin' on, so as not to disgrace you,' began his mother.

But her son, with an impatient movement—which, however, he immediately suppressed—interrupted her. 'Dear mater, what does it matter whether you are learned or not? For my part, I don't see what women want to be educated for at all.'

'Oh, you don't, don't you? You ought to have lived about the year one. You're several centuries behind the times, George!' exclaimed his sister indignantly.

'I wish I had. I'm sure the girls of that time were nicer than they are nowadays,' he replied, calmly relapsing into his nonchalant attitude.

'I'm sure they never talked about not respectin' their dads,' said Mrs Clay plaintively. She had, as will be seen, a habit of harping back to the same grievance, and this remark of her daughter's evidently rankled in her mind.

'Perhaps their fathers were more respectable than mine,' replied Sarah.

'Well, I never did!' cried Mrs Clay, scandalised.

'Draw it mild, Sarah! The pater may be a bit of a tartar sometimes, but he's respectable enough, in all conscience,' remonstrated her brother.

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'I don't think so,' declared Sarah.

Before her mother could utter the protests which her son saw in her face, George said, 'Oh, let her talk! She's got some maggot in her brain, and she wants to air it. It amuses her, and it doesn't hurt us, as long as the pater doesn't come in and hear her; and she'll take good care to shut up if he does,' he wound up with a laugh.

His laugh exasperated his sister, and she retorted with some warmth, 'If I do shut up when he comes in, it's only because he's so violent and hateful!'

'Sarah! Sarah!' came from the mother and son simultaneously, in accents of horrified indignation; and Mrs Clay continued, 'Leave the room at once, miss. I won't sit 'ere an' 'ave my 'usband insulted like that.'

Without a word, the girl rose from her seat and left the drawing-room, shutting the door sharply behind her.

'What's the governor been doing to upset her now?' inquired Mr George Clay of his mother.

'Nothin' that I know of. It's some crotchet of Sairey, now she's begun studyin' the woman's question, as she calls it, an' thinks 'e treats the women 'ere badly.'

'Oh goodness, don't you tell me she's started that! Do they go in for politics at that school, then?' cried her brother. 'I never heard of such a thing at a girls' school; it ought not to be allowed.'

'Well, I don't know that it's politics exactly; it's somethin' to do wi' women's duties to each other an' the 'ard life our mill-lasses 'ave, or somethin'. She was talkin' to me the other evenin' about it, quite beautifully; an' I will say that for Sairey, she don't mind my not understandin', but explains, an' never seems to despise me for my ignorance,' said his mother.

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'I should think not, indeed! Book-learning isn't everything. With all your experience of life you could teach Sarah a precious sight more than she can teach you,' said George.

'It's very nice o' you to talk like that, dear; but I know you're both far above me wi' your beautiful manners an' ways o' talkin',' said the poor woman humbly.

'For goodness' sake, don't talk like that, mother, or I shall be sorry I ever went to Eton and Cambridge if it makes you feel any distance between us!' he cried.

'I don't feel it so much wi' you, dear. It's Sairey I feel it worse wi', an' it's not 'er fault either; it's only that she's so clever an' so beautiful.'

'She's good-looking, certainly; but, then, so are you. She's taken after you, like me.' The young man smiled at his mother in a very pretty way. He certainly had beautiful manners, as his mother said. 'But as for being clever,' he continued, 'I call her a proud peacock.'

'Oh George, I was never as good-lookin' as Sairey, nor you either; nor 'alf such a lady. W'y, she might be a duchess's daughter! Every one says so,' cried his mother, woman-like, dwelling upon the subject of good looks rather than on her son's criticism of Sarah's cleverness.

'That's only education. You'd have been just as duchessy if you'd been educated,' insisted her son, hesitating for a word to use instead of lady-like, for he would not, even to himself, own that his mother was not a lady in the world's acceptance of the word. [Pg 6]

What every one in the West Riding, or heavy woollen district, said was, what a most extraordinary thing it was that the son and daughter of that brute Clay should be so refined when their father was such a rough, uncouth man! The Clay family was one of the many instances in Yorkshire of the mill-hand who rose from being a labourer to be the owner of a large mill and enormous wealth, and who gave to his children the education he had never received himself. But though in most cases the children were better educated and superior in outward seeming to their parents, it was not often that the contrast was so marked. In this case it may have been caused by the fact that Mark Clay, instead of marrying a mill-lass, had taken to wife a very pretty, delicate-looking girl from London, who had bequeathed her good looks to her two children. She, or rather her husband—for little Mrs Clay had no voice in the matter—had sent the boy to Eton and then to Cambridge, and the girl to what her mother called a 'igh-class, fashionable school'—which, if high prices are any criterion, it certainly was.

Mrs Clay shook her head at her son's last remark. 'I should never 'ave made a duchess. I was always timid, an' couldn't 'old up my 'ead as Sairey does. It's somethin' in you both, though I don't 'old wi' Sairey speakin' of 'er father in the way she does.'

'I should think not, indeed,' put in her son. [Pg 7]

'Still, we can't expect 'er to respect us as much as she would if we 'ad the same good manners an' way o' talkin' that she an' you 'ave. It's natural she should feel superior, an' show it, too,' argued the poor woman with some shrewdness; 'an' I've told your dad that it was only w'at 'e might 'ave expected.'

'Pray, don't talk of Sarah's manners being good, nor her way of talking either; they're both as bad as bad can be,' said George Clay, with his soft drawl.

'W'y, you don't never mean to say that, George, an' after all the pounds dad's paid for 'er? For goodness' sake, don't tell 'im, or 'e'll 'alf-kill 'er—'e would! You don't know your father as I do,' cried the mother in consternation.

An expression of annoyance came over her son's face at these words. 'Don't make the pater out worse than he is, my dear mother. He may be violent at times, but I hope he knows better than to use physical force. Anyway, I shall not tell him anything of the sort, and when I say her manners are bad and her language unlady-like'—

'But that's just w'at 'e thinks it isn't; an' though 'e gets angry, 'e thinks a lot o' 'er. An' w'en I don't like the words she uses sometimes, 'e says I don't know the way o' society; that the aristocracy speak like that, an' be'ave so, too.'

'Well, so they do, some of them,' admitted her son.

But before he could finish his remark his mother interrupted him. 'Well, then, that's w'at 'e wants; so if you tell 'im that, dear, 'e'll be in a good temper for the rest o' the evenin'.' She looked wistfully at her son as she made this suggestion.

He laughed good-humouredly. 'All right, mother; if Sarah gives him some of her cheek to-night I'll tell him it's the fashion of the day. It's true enough; but, oh dear! I wish you wouldn't have such fearfully long dinners. That's not the fashion; it's the thing to starve.' [Pg 8]

'It's not a bit o' good you tellin' 'im *that*, for 'e says 'e can afford a Lord Mayor's banquet every day 'e likes, an' 'e 'll 'ave it, an' 'e can't abear to see you sittin' there pickin' at a bit o' chicken, an' not even takin' whisky-an'-soda wi' him.'

'Well, I must go and dress for this Lord Mayor's banquet, and so must you, mother; so go and put on your black silk,' he remarked, as he rose lazily from his armchair.

'Not that old dress, dear; it's so plain an' dowdy. I've somethin' better than that;' and, looking as

pleased as a young girl at his interest in her dress, she went off nodding and smiling at the thought of the pleasure she was going to give him at sight of her new finery.

George Clay was just going to beg her not to put on anything better than the black silk, but on second thoughts checked himself. After all, if it pleased her that was the chief thing, not to mention that his father would probably think her choice more suited to his banquet, for such the dinners at the Clays' might well be called.

On her way to her own room Mrs Clay had to pass her daughter's suite of rooms, and after a little hesitation she knocked at the door of her boudoir.

'Come in,' said a voice, and she entered.

Sarah was sitting on the wide window-seat, looking out over the park towards the town, the tall factory chimneys of which could be seen, at the bottom of the hill, belching out their volumes of smoke, which made even the trees in the park unfit to touch, thanks to the soot it deposited upon their leaves, stems, and trunks.

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'W'y, Sairey, ain't you goin' to begin to dress? W'y 'asn't Naomi put out your things?' exclaimed her mother.

'I'm not coming down to-night; I don't want to see your husband,' said Sarah, still staring out into the park.

'My 'usband, indeed! Who do you think you're talkin' to? You seem to forget I'm your own mother, an' that my 'usband, as you call 'im, is your father, miss! 'Uusband, indeed!' cried Mrs Clay.

'You're sure there's no mistake, mother? You're sure he *is* my father? I sometimes wonder if I could have been kidnapped as a baby, and changed.'

But she got no further, for little Mrs Clay could stand no more. 'You're my child, Sairey. Though you're a deal better-lookin' than ever I was, you are like enough for any one to know I'm your mother,' she protested.

'I wish to goodness I wasn't! Oh mother, don't look like that! I didn't mean you, of course. I'm glad to be your child; but, oh, why did you marry that man? Now, if you had only married Uncle Howroyd.'

'Seein' that I 'ave married 'im, an' that 'e's your father, it's no use talkin' about such things. An', dear, 'e's not as bad as 'e might be. 'E doesn't drink nor beat me,' she said.

'Mother, you talk as if he were a coalheaver,' cried her daughter indignantly.

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'E wasn't a coalheaver; but 'e was a mill-'and, an' I was a milliner's girl in a little shop in London w'en I married 'im, an' I 'adn't a farthing. An' look at the beautiful 'ouse I'm mistress o' now, an' look at the money 'e spends on you an' me both—never stints us for anythin'! I'm sure you ought to be grateful to 'im. I am, for I never expected to rise to this w'en I was a milliner's 'prentice in London.'

'You needn't talk about that. It's bad enough to be a vulgar millionaire's daughter,' replied the girl, and at the same time she dropped from the window-seat and came towards her mother; adding, 'Well, if you want me to come down to dinner I suppose I must ring for Naomi. It's an awful nuisance, and I shall probably have a row with the pater.'

Mrs Clay was going to plead with her daughter as she had with her son; but Sarah, who had suggested dressing partly to get rid of her mother, pointed to the clock, and Mrs Clay hurried away to get ready for dinner herself.

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## CHAPTER II.

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### A DREARY BANQUET.

After the mother had left the room, her daughter seemed in no hurry to get ready for dinner; she turned back to the window, and, taking up her old position on the wide window-seat, sat gazing down at the hideous view of the big manufacturing town, with blackened buildings and tall, smoky chimneys, which lay at the bottom of the hill, and seemed to have a weird fascination for her. It must certainly have been from choice that Sarah Clay looked at them, for she had only to sit at the other side of the broad window-seat, turn her back on Ousebank, and, looking out on the other side of the hill, she would have had a beautiful view over the hill of pretty vales and villages and smiling pasture, and their own fine park; but the girl deliberately turned her back upon nature, and looked not upon art—for art there was not in Ousebank except what was produced in the mills—but upon nature perverted by man, who had turned the beautiful vale into a Black Country with its big factories, which polluted earth and sky, air and water.

She was still staring out with a frown on her face when a knock came to the door, and she called out, 'Come in,' without turning her head to see who the new-comer was.

'Excuse me, miss,' said the voice of the maid, 'but the mistress sent me with this, and you'll best

be getting ready for dinner, for it's late.'

Sarah turned her head, with the air that her mother declared was like that of a duchess's daughter, and looked at the large cardboard box which her maid held in her arms, with a gaze which, to do her justice, she was quite unconscious was haughty. 'What is it?' she asked shortly.

'You just come and see, Miss Sarah,' replied the maid quite politely, but with Yorkshire independence.

Sarah did not resent the tone of the advice, but came slowly from her window-seat, and watched the maid undo the string of the box and take out, with many exclamations of admiration, a beautiful white silk frock elaborately trimmed with lace and ribbons.

'It's grand! Oh miss, make haste and let me do your hair, and put it on you!' cried the maid.

'Now? I have no time. Put it away, and get out my white muslin, Naomi,' replied Sarah, and she turned away after hardly a glance at the pretty dress.

'But you are to wear it to-night. At least, the mistress said would you, please, put it on,' corrected Naomi, as she saw her young mistress's look of indignation at the peremptory order.

Sarah was just going to refuse decidedly; but the thought of her mother's disappointment made her hesitate. The girl had good enough taste to feel that the dress was far too smart for an ordinary family dinner; but, then, as she reflected, it would be in keeping with the rest, which was far too smart, all of it. So she said, 'Very well. Make haste, Naomi.'

'There, miss, you look just like a queen, and fit to live in a palace; though, to be sure, ours is one, or as good as one. Now, just look in the glass and see if you aren't lovely.'

'Yes; it's very pretty,' said Sarah impatiently.

'Are you ill, miss? You don't seem a bit pleased to have such beautiful things. I'm sure if I had everything I could wish for like you I'd be as happy as a queen,' observed Naomi, whom Sarah allowed to say what she liked; in the first place, because she was the daughter of the head mill-watchman, and her family had all—some still did—worked in Clay's Mills; and, in the second place, because they had played together as little children.

'I dare say you would; so am I, because a queen is not at all a happy person; at least, if she is, it's not because she is a queen and can have lots of new dresses and things,' remarked Sarah.

'You wouldn't talk like that if you'd ever had to do without them,' replied the girl.

Sarah turned round and faced the girl. 'Naomi,' she said passionately, 'I'd give anything on earth to be poor and work for my living as you do.'

'Oh miss!' cried Naomi, and 'Oh Sal!' cried another voice, whose owner had overheard this last remark.

For Mrs Clay had just entered the room, and had forgotten that her daughter objected strongly to this shortening of her name, which it was one of her father's aggravating habits to do. 'Oh Sarah,' she cried, 'don't talk such nonsense, and before Naomi, too! Some must be poor an' some rich. It's always been so, and always will be so, an' it's flyin' in the face o' Providence not to be thankful that you're not poor; an' with that lovely gown on, too. 'Ow could you earn enough money to buy a gown like that, do you suppose? W'y, Naomi doesn't earn enough in a year to pay for it, I'd have you to know.'

'Then she ought to,' began Sarah; whereupon Mrs Clay cleared her throat noisily, and said in quite a decided tone for her, 'That'll do, Naomi; you can leave the room.' And when Naomi had done so, she continued in a tone of reproof to her daughter, 'What are you thinkin' of, wishin' you earned your own livin' like Naomi? A nice one you'd be if such a dreadful thing 'appened to you, wi' your 'aughty airs an' scornful ways that no one would put up wi', let alone that you could never earn a penny if you tried.'

'I'm not so sure about that. I've a good mind to try, to show you that you're wrong,' said Sarah meditatively.

Her mother cast a frightened glance at her, and said soothingly, 'There, my dearie, there's no need to think about it; you're far too pretty even to do such a thing. You were born for a mansion, an' I 'ope you'll always 'ave one to live in.'

'I don't. I hope I shall one day have to work for my living, and I shall do it whether it is necessary or not, you'll see,' she declared.

Fortunately both the dinner-gong and an elaborate set of chimes rang out through the house, and Mrs Clay, with a nervous start, said hurriedly, 'There's the chimes! Well, we must be goin'. Don't you look grand to-night, Sairey?'

'That's just what I feel, mother—a great deal too grand for a quiet family dinner; and so are you,' she added, as she looked critically at her mother in the elaborately trimmed, plum-coloured silk dress, so rich that it seemed to prop up the delicate little woman and almost stifle her with its heavy gold trimmings and fringes.

'It's to please your father and George, and nothing's too grand to do that,' said Mrs Clay, as she

went out of the room, making a rustle as she passed along the richly carpeted passages and down the grand marble staircase into the drawing-room. Mr Clay did not trouble himself to go into the drawing-room to fetch his wife, but always walked straight to the dining-room at the first note of the chimes.

George was waiting, as he did every evening, to give his arm to escort his mother to the dining-room, and took her to the dinner-table, where his wife and children found Mark Clay sitting at the top of the large table which groaned under its massive gold ornaments and plate. He was a big, bull-faced man; at first sight so different from his son and daughter that the latter might almost be forgiven her extraordinary suggestion to her mother that perhaps he was not her father at all! It would require a closer observer than Sarah to see a certain set of the chin which was common to him and his two children, though hers took the form of haughtiness, and her brother's had such a pleasant, if indolent, expression that his father had never discovered this hidden characteristic.

'Well, lass, thee'rt grand to-night. How much did tha gown cost? A pretty penny, I'll be bound. Well, lasses will be lasses, and the mills can give as many on 'em as ye like. An' your mother, too, though she's a bit old for such vanity; it's the young uns as want fine feathers. Now then, what are ye scowling at?' cried her father, all in the broadest Yorkshire.

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'It's the fashion to scowl at personal remarks, my dear father,' remarked George, as he 'played,' in his mother's words, with his food.

'Then it's one fashion thee'll ha' to onlearn, dost hear? I'll ha' no lass o' mine scowling at me at my own table,' replied her father, as he brought his fist down on the table with a thump, which made his poor wife jump as well as the crystal and glass, 'which it's a wonder he don't have of gold too,' his well-bred butler observed, with a touch of contempt for his master, which he allowed himself to vent to the equally well-bred housekeeper, and to her only.

George stepped into the breach again. 'How's the market, dad?' he inquired. 'Wool's going up, I hear.'

'Wool's going up, you hear? An' what might you know about wool? Nought as I know of. I wish you did; but there, thee'rt too fine for t' wool-trade, and thou'll never need to know about it, only to spend money,' said the millionaire, purposely, as his son believed, talking in such broad Yorkshire as is not often heard nowadays, and so broad as to be unintelligible to the reader of this tale, for which reason it must be taken for granted, as perhaps his wife's cockney dialect had better be.

However, the inquiry had turned the mill-owner's attention from his daughter and her unbending attitude, and had apparently produced a good effect, for Mr Clay, senior, seemed to be in a better temper for the rest of the dinner, the long, wearisome dinner which he was the only one who seemed to appreciate.

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There was no conversation but the remarks made in a gentle tone by George to his mother, to whom he was as attentive as he would have been to the highest and most beautiful lady in the land.

Sarah kept a silence which might have been considered either sulky or dignified, and Mrs Clay responded in low tones to her son's remarks.

Mr Clay did not condescend to talk to any of them. His wife he never considered as a companion or a person to be conversed with, women being inferior beings in his eyes, and for this reason he did not talk to Sarah, whom he treated with the same contempt, in spite of being very proud of her looks and bearing; while George he considered a nincompoop and weakling, though he was secretly proud, too, of his fine manners and aristocratic appearance.

And so the four ill-sorted people sat each at a different side of the table, with a long stretch of gold-decked and flower-laden cloth between them. 'And a good thing, too, or I think we should fight,' announced Sarah one day.

Poor Mrs Clay put her hand to her head once or twice, and her ever-observant son bent towards her with solicitude as he inquired, 'Don't you feel well, mother?'

'It's only the smell of all these flowers; they make me feel faint-like,' she said.

'It's these lilies; they are too strong for a dining-table; just take them away, Sykes,' he said to the butler, who happened to be close behind George Clay's chair.

The man looked hesitatingly at his master, and then at the young man, and apparently decided to obey the younger one, whom he, like the rest of the staff, liked and respected, instead of the father, whom he detested, and who now cried in a voice of thunder, 'Leave 'em alone, I say! I don't pay for lilies to be thrown away for a woman's whim. Leave 'em alone.'

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'They're cheap enough, and they really never are used for table-decorating. It must have been a mistake of the maid's. Sykes had better remove them, if you don't mind,' said George.

Sykes, being of the same opinion, swiftly removed the vase and handed it to one of the footmen.

Mr Clay, awed by his son's superior knowledge of what was done and not done (in society, he supposed), remained silent, and at last the banquet came to an end, and with suspicious alacrity



Mrs Clay and her daughter rose and left the room, followed by George after his usual murmured apology to his father for not staying with him; for George Clay was as polite, in an indolent way, to his father as he was to every one else.

'Phew, I breathe again!' cried Sarah, as she stamped her feet outside the dining-room door.

'Sh, sh, my dear! Your father might 'ear you. The flowers did make the air sickly.'

'Flowers! It wasn't the flowers. It was everything. I always think of Miss Kilmansegg and her "Gold, gold; nothing but gold!" Phew! how I loathe and detest it all!'

'Draw it mild, Sarah! Even gold has its advantages.'

'It mayn't have to every one's mind. Look what an effeminate creature it's made of you!' she cried.

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George Clay lit a cigarette, with a 'May I?' to his mother, and only smiled as he leant back in an armchair and puffed contentedly away.

Clearly Sarah was not able to rouse her brother by her criticism.

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### CHAPTER III.

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#### STALLED OXEN.

'Now then, now then; have I just come in time for fireworks?' said a man's voice; and Sarah felt a hearty clap of a man's firm hand on her shoulder.

'Uncle Howroyd!' she cried, as she turned and threw her arms round her uncle's neck.

'Gently there, my lass; you needn't stifle me if you can't breathe yourself.—Well, George,' turning to the youth, 'you find life very exhausting as usual, I suppose. But, I say, you haven't got company, I hope?' he inquired, as he noticed the elaborate toilettes of the ladies.

'Oh no; we're only dressed for dinner. W'y didn't you come in time for it, Bill? We've just finished; but you'll find your brother in the dinin'-room, an' he'll ring for something to be brought back for you; there's plenty,' said Mrs Clay.

'I don't doubt that; but I've had my dinner, thank you. I'm a plain man, as you know, Polly, and my dinner isn't such a big affair as yours, by a long way. And I'm not thirsty either, so I'll leave Mark to drink his wine in peace and come along with you into the drawing-room—or *salon*, is it you call it?' he added, with good-humoured banter.

At that moment the voice of Mr Mark Clay could be heard raised in angry tones, apparently scolding the butler or some of his assistants, and Sarah laughed as she said, 'You mean *you* want to be left in peace. There's not much peace in that room or anywhere else where that man is;' and she gave a wave of her hand towards the dining-room.



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He took his young niece's arm and followed his sister-in-law into the drawing-room.

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Mr William Howroyd's bright, cheery face grew grave as he said kindly but seriously, 'Nay, lass, you shouldn't speak so of your father.'

'I don't see what difference that makes. I can't help his being my father. People ought to be

allowed to choose. I would sooner have our watchman for my father than him.'

'Nay, lass, you don't mean that, and I can't have you speak like that of my brother,' said her uncle.

'He's only your step-brother, and you don't get on with him any too well yourself. But don't look so solemn. I'll be quite good and proper if you'll let that twinkle come into your eye again; it isn't you without a twinkle.'

Her uncle laughed good-humouredly as he took his young niece's arm and followed his sister-in-law into the drawing-room. His keen eye flashed round the room, seeming to take in every detail in that one look, just as in his own mill Mr William Howroyd knew every 'hand' and everything they did or did not do, as some of them declared. 'Why, what's been doing here? Here's some fine painting!' he exclaimed, as he went up to a panel in the wall where a landscape was painted, evidently by a master-hand.

'Yes, a Royal Academician came down from London to do that; one thousand pounds it cost. Mark was goin' to 'ave 'im do the lot; but 'e wouldn't do any more after the first, so another man's got to come.'

'Ah, how's that?' inquired Mr Howroyd. 'It's well done; you won't better this. Why, I see it's by Brown—Sir John Brown. It's worth one thousand pounds, is that.'

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'Sir John? 'E wasn't no Sir; just plain Mr Brown 'e was, though 'e gave 'isself airs enough for a Sir, an' wanted to dine with us—a common painter chap!' said Mrs Clay.

George Clay looked annoyed, and coloured at his uncle's amused laugh; his love and loyalty to his mother were much tried when she made a speech of this kind, which, to do her justice, was not often, and generally was, as in this case, an echo of her husband's opinions. 'My dear mother, I had no idea that it was Brown you had here. Why, he's a gentleman we might be proud to see at our table. I wish I had been at home,' he said hastily.

'W'at did 'e call 'isself Mr Brown for, then? If we'd known 'e was a Sir John it would 'ave made all the difference,' objected Mrs Clay.

'It ought not to have made any difference. A man's a man, and with a talent like that even father might have known better than to treat him like a servant,' cried Sarah hotly.

'Well, it doesn't matter; it's over and past now. And he wasn't Sir John then; he's only just been made so, and I dare say he's forgotten all about Ousebank and his treatment here; and for my part I'd sooner have a picture on canvas that you can take away than a painted panel. It's a lot of money to give for that; though, to be sure, he can afford that, can Mark,' said Mr Howroyd.

'Uncle Howroyd, why do you waste time at the end of your sentences like that, when you are always saying you have no time to waste, because it is so precious?'

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'What are you after now, lass?' said her uncle, bending his keen and kindly eyes upon his young niece. 'I expect it's your uncle's rough north-country tongue that's the matter. Come, out with it. What have I said wrong now?'

'Oh, I don't mind your north-country tongue, as you call it, only I don't like the way you repeat yourself. You say, "That's a fine picture, is that," or "She's a good girl, is Sarah;" and it would be quite enough and shorter to say, "That is a fine picture," or "Sarah is a good girl."'

'Sarah! There's manners, correctin' your uncle; a chit o' sixteen that's not left school yet!' protested Mrs Clay.

'Don't you be corrected, Uncle Howroyd. It's very musical the way north-countrymen repeat themselves at the end of the sentence,' said George gently.

Mr Howroyd paid no attention to the last two speakers, but, with an amused twinkle in his eye, tried the two ways of expressing himself. 'You're right, lass; it's a waste of words, is that.'

There was a hearty laugh at this, in which both Mrs Clay and her brother-in-law joined, as the latter said, with a shake of his head, 'I'm afraid I'm too old to get out of the habit of repeating myself. Still, as I talk very fast, perhaps I don't waste so much time after all; so I think you'll have to put up with your old uncle's ways, and try and reform some one else nearer home.'

'If you mean my father'—began Sarah.

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But the tone in which she said 'my father' made her uncle interrupt her sharply. 'No, I don't. I mean nearer home than that; I mean your own tongue, young woman. You let it run on too fast and too freely. I'm sure I don't know what kind of a school that is that you're at; but they don't teach you respect for your elders; and I'm beginning to wonder if you've paid the twopence extra for manners. If you have, you haven't got your two-pen'orth, that's certain.'

'Oh yes, I have; only you don't understand them up in the north,' replied Sarah airily, not in the least abashed or offended, apparently, by her uncle's candid criticism.

'No, we don't that,' he replied emphatically. But, all the same, he most evidently cared more for Sarah than he did for her mother or for her languid brother, to whom he always talked with a kind of good-natured contempt.

'The fact is, Uncle Howroyd, you're worried, and your way of showing it is by scolding me, which is not fair, as *I* am not the person you are angry with, but some one whom you have come to see to-night, unless I'm very much mistaken,' observed Sarah, nodding her head knowingly at her uncle.

'You little witch! how dare you go guessing at your uncle's private affairs like that?' cried Mr William Howroyd, laughing at his niece.

'Oh, dear Bill, I 'ope there's nothin' wrong between you an' Mark? Per'aps you'd better not say anythin' to 'im to-night; 'e's a little put out, just for the minute,' said Mrs Clay.

'For the minute? I'd like to see him at a minute when he isn't put out! And if you're going to say anything to annoy him I wish you would say it to-night, for I'd like to myself, only'—

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'She daren't!' put in George from the depths of an armchair.

Mr William Howroyd turned from his handsome niece, whose hair he was gently smoothing, to her equally handsome brother, who was lying back in the softest chair he could find (and they were all comfortable, 'all of the best,' as Mark Clay said of them, as of everything else he possessed). 'No; and as for you, I don't suppose you'd trouble to say anything to your father if it was to save you all from the workhouse,' he said scornfully.

George Clay was nearly hidden from view by the cushions he had carefully adjusted behind his head; consequently the sudden slight start and swift opening wide of his lazy-looking eyes passed unnoticed even by the eyes of his uncle, who, indeed, would never have thought of looking for alertness or energy in his nephew. 'I might,' he replied lazily. 'I don't fancy the workhouse. Is there any chance of it?'

Somehow every one seemed to think this a joke, and his uncle remarked, 'No, the workhouse would not suit you; no easy-chairs there. It might do you good, though.'

'I wish there was a chance of it! Now that *would* be life!' cried Sarah eagerly.

'Don't talk so silly, child; you don't know w'at the work'ouse is like. It's enough to call down a judgment upon you, bein' so ungrateful to Providence for all the good things it's given you,' cried her mother. 'Fancy the work'ouse after *this*!' Mrs Clay put a world of expression into the last word, as she looked round the sumptuous drawing-room in which they were gathered.

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'Yes, it would be a change; though stranger things have happened,' said Mr Howroyd in his brisk way, and again he missed the look George shot at him.

'I should like to know if there is any chance of it,' George remarked. 'You haven't answered my question yet, uncle.'

'What question? Oh, whether there's any chance of your ever going to the workhouse?' laughed his uncle. 'How can I tell? One hears of kings becoming beggars, so why not Mr George Clay?'

'There's no chance of that,' remarked George.

'How do you know?' began his uncle.

'Don't you be too sure. Our mills might be burnt down, or anything might happen,' cried Sarah.

'Oh, if you mean by a beggar being penniless, that's always possible, of course. What I meant was that I should never beg,' said her brother with quiet decision.

'What would you do? Work?' inquired his uncle.

'I fancy so,' said George; and they all laughed again, as though the idea of George working was a good joke.

But Mrs Clay added, 'An' I'm sure George is clever enough to earn money in any way 'e likes; though, thank 'eaven! 'e'll never 'ave to.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' replied that youth.

'What do you mean by that?' demanded his uncle.

'Just what you meant,' replied the nephew, and this time Mr William Howroyd was struck by the expression on his nephew's face.

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'I'm sure I don't know w'at you're all talkin' about—work'ouses, an' workin' for your livin', an' Sarah wishin' she was poor, an' all! W'ere's the good of 'avin' riches if you can't enjoy it?' said Mrs Clay plaintively. 'Look at this lovely 'ouse, with everythin' in it that mortal man can wish for. W'y, Mrs Haigh was 'ere to-day, and she says Bucking'am Palace isn't grander, and she's been there.'

'I dare say it isn't,' agreed her brother-in-law.

'Who's talking about Buckingham Palace?' cried Mark Clay, as he came into the room.

'We were, Mark, and saying that it wasn't any better than your place,' said his half-brother, as he shook hands with the master of the house.

'Ay, you're right there; as far as money can go you can't beat this house. But why didn't you coom

to dinner, lad?' he cried, his brother's remark having, as the latter intended, put him in a good humour.

'Lad' in the north-country is as often used as 'man,' especially among relatives, and Mark Clay used the word in a friendly way, though his brother was near fifty.

'I had my dinner before I came; but I thought I'd like to have a smoke and a few minutes' talk with you, Mark,' he replied.

'Sit thee down and have a pipe,' cried Mark Clay.

'Not here,' remonstrated his brother, looking round on the delicate brocade hangings and furniture.

Poor Mrs Clay did not dare to open her mouth, though she in her secret heart felt as indignant about it as Mr Howroyd.

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But Sarah had no such qualms. 'You'll have to redecorate this room if you're going to smoke here, and you'll have to find us another drawing-room. Ladies don't sit in a drawing-room where men smoke,' she said.

'Daughters sit where their parents tell them, if they're worthy of the name of daughters.—But, if you don't mind, Mark, we'll go into your study; we can talk better alone,' said her uncle before Sarah's father could say anything.

Whether motives of economy moved him, or whether it was a certain influence which Bill Howroyd, as he was familiarly called, had over most people, Mark Clay got up from his seat, saying, 'Yes, we'll be better without that pert lass's company, Bill,' and led the way to his study.

'That's a blessing!' said Sarah. 'A nice state of things it would be if father took to smoking his horrid pipe here.'

'It would ruin the rose-coloured brocade, and the curtains would smell 'orrid,' said her mother.

'That wouldn't be so bad as not having a single room free from him,' said Sarah, and then added to her brother, who got up at the time, 'Where are you going, George?'

'To have a smoke,' he replied.

'You can smoke your cigarette here, dear; no one would smell that,' said the fond mother.

'Thank you, mother; but I thought of smoking with my father and uncle,' he replied.

'What! beard the lion in his den? What on earth for, George? You know you never do go and smoke with him,' observed Sarah.

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'Don't go to-night, my dear. Your uncle 'as somethin' particular to say to 'im, an' nothin' very pleasant, I could see that; an' you'd best not be there in case 'e's upset. Not but w'at Bill manages 'im better than any one else; still, they'll get on better alone.'

George Clay hesitated a minute, and then, turning back, took up his old position in his armchair, observing, 'Perhaps you're right, and I can go down and see him to-morrow.'

'See whom—Uncle Howroyd?' demanded Sarah.

But George made no reply, and remained sunk among the cushions, his head tilted back and his eyes staring at the painted cupids on the ceiling, which did not give him much pleasure, judging by the half-frown upon his face.

'It's my belief that there's something the matter,' said Sarah after a silence.

'Nonsense, child! W'at should be the matter? There's always worries in business, an' women 'ave no right to interfere in such things nor make any remarks,' said Mrs Clay.

'Well, all I can say is, I wish something would happen. We're just stalled oxen here,' observed Sarah.

'Stalled oxen? W'atever can you mean?' asked Mrs Clay in bewilderment, for she did not recognise the allusion to the verse in Proverbs: 'Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.'

George gave a little chuckle. 'She certainly does not mean what she says.—You'd better read your Bible again, and you'll see that stalled oxen is what we eat, not what we are.'

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'Stalled oxen?' said Mrs Clay, repeating, as was her custom, any remark which she did not understand or agree with. 'Is Sarah callin' us stalled oxen?'

'No, I'm not, mother; I'm the only one that feels like that. George hugs his golden chains, and so do you,' replied Sarah. 'And he doesn't care how doubtful the means are that give them to him.'

George made no reply at all, and after some time the three got up and went to bed.

And so ended an evening typical of many passed in the millionaire's house, which was only less dreary than usual owing to William Howroyd's visit.

## AN UNANSWERED QUESTION.

'It's a beautiful morning, Miss Sarah,' said Naomi, as she pulled up the blinds in her young mistress's room the day after the scenes described in the foregoing chapters.

Naomi's rosy face was glowing with health and happiness, and this seemed to strike Sarah, for she said, as she looked at her, 'Is it your birthday, Naomi?'

'To-day, Miss Sarah? Why, no. I was seventeen the 1st of October. I'm a year and three months older 'n you, miss.'

'What are you so pleased for, then?' she asked.

'I dunno as I'm more pleased than usual, unless it be the fine weather makes one feel happy like.'

'It doesn't make me feel very happy; at least not when I'm at home. I like a fine day at school, because we can go for a long ride or walk, or play tennis or something out of doors,' observed Sarah.

'And so you can do all them things here, miss; there's horses and carriages, and motor-cars, and a beautiful bit of grass for tennis; and if you want a nice walk you can go over the fields and through Brocklehurst coppice to Driffington, or by the Dunnings to Thornborough,' said Naomi, chattering with freedom while she prepared the bath in the little bathroom attached to Sarah's suite of rooms.

Her mistress let her chatter on, and listened while she gave an enthusiastic description of the lovely country walks and rides and drives to be taken in the immediate neighbourhood; and when the maid stopped for a moment to take breath, Sarah remarked, 'Yes; but I don't care to do any of these things up here. Do you know, Naomi, when the train gets near Ousebank, and I see its horrid high chimneys and all the air black, I feel as if the smoke came and wrapped itself round me and smothered me somehow, and I don't breathe freely again till I'm in the train going back to school.'

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Naomi stopped short at the door of the bathroom, her mouth wide open, and stared at her young mistress. She said at last, 'You'll have had a nightmare, I'll be thinking;' then, cheering up at this explanation of Miss Sarah's unpleasant sensations, she went on cheerfully with her preparations for her mistress's toilet. 'And the very best thing you can do, Miss Sarah, is to go for a lovely ride across Cowpen, and over t' hill to Driffington. My! think of all the lasses in the mills as 'u'd give their eyes to have the chance! There's Liza Anne now, she'd be glad eno' of a holiday; these bright days make her back ache dreadful, so she says.'

'Liza Anne's in Clay's Mills, isn't she?' inquired Sarah. Liza Anne was Naomi's elder sister.

'Yes, Miss Sarah; she's a ligger-on, is Liza Anne, and so's Jane Mary,' explained Naomi.

'What's a "ligger-on," Naomi?' inquired Sarah.

'Why, she puts the wool on the carding-machine and ligs it out. She's a good, steady worker is Liza Anne.'

'Oh, I see; layer-on, you mean. I wish I were a "ligger-on," as you call it; there'd be some object to get up for, at any rate.'

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'You spend one day in Liza Anne's place or Jane Mary's, and you'd talk different to that, Miss Sarah,' said Naomi.

Sarah sighed impatiently. 'You all say the same thing to me, and it's all nonsense. You're much happier than I am; you have only to look in the looking-glass and you'll see that, and yet you all persist in saying that I'm happier than you.'

'You ought to be,' replied Naomi, as she gave a final adjusting pat to the lace-bedecked matinée she had just put ready for Sarah to slip into; but she did not attempt to argue with her mistress on a subject which she felt, somehow, was too difficult for her.

Sarah dressed slowly; not that she was a deliberate young person at all, but because she did not see any good in making haste, as there was nothing to do, or rather, to put it truly, as she did not care to do anything. However, in about an hour Sarah went downstairs dressed in a simple but fresh and dainty print frock, and found her brother sitting at breakfast.

'Morning, Sarah. What are you going to do to-day? Anything special on?' he inquired.

'No; at least, I'm not going to do anything special. I believe there's a tennis tournament on at the Haighs'; but I don't feel inclined to go; it's going to be hot to-day, I think.'

'Piping, I should say. Well, if you don't want me to take you to the Haighs' I'll cry off myself; it's a fearful fag playing a tournament in this weather. Good-bye; I'm off,' he added, as he rose from the table.

'Where are you going, George?' inquired Sarah. 'If it's anywhere nice I'll come with you.'

'It isn't,' he replied, and was going out of the room.

'Where is it?' persisted Sarah.

'Into Ousebank,' he replied laconically.

'But that is nice. Take me with you, George.'

'You are the most perverse girl I ever met. You know you hate Ousebank, and yet you call it a nice place to go for a walk,' he scoffed.

'It's interesting. I love to see the mills turn out at twelve o'clock; it's like a living stream of human beings pouring out of a lock-gate, and I love Uncle Howroyd's mill.'

'Well, I sha'n't be there at twelve o'clock, so if that's what you want to go for you'd better stay at home,' observed her brother, who evidently was not very anxious to take his sister with him this particular morning, though, as a rule, he was a most good-natured and attentive brother.

Sarah was quick to notice this, and being the girl she was it made her all the more determined to go with her brother; so she said, 'Ah, but I can go to see Uncle Howroyd, and that's always nice. I simply love going over the mill.'

'Oh!' ejaculated George, looking discomfited for a moment; and then he apparently changed his mind, and said, 'All right, I'll go there with you.'

But when they got to the door of Mr William Howroyd's office he did not say good-bye, but was coming in with her, when Sarah said, 'You needn't stop for me. I may be here some time. You had better go and do your own business, and come and fetch me on your way back.'

'I think I'll come in,' said George, and in he came.

'Uncle Howroyd, do send George off, and say you'll take care of me for an hour or so; he's so dreadfully polite even to his sister that he won't leave me alone with you,' said Sarah.

'Ah, but I don't know that I can take care of such a difficult young lady,' said her uncle teasingly.

'But I should like to see Uncle Howroyd, too,' objected George.

'That's nonsense! You've only come here to bring me, so if you want to see him you can come another time by yourself, not just when I'm here,' said Sarah.

'I thought you wanted to see the mill?' observed George.

'And I thought you came to Ousebank to do some business?' retorted his sister.

'So I did.—As a matter of fact, my business was to see you, sir,' said George, turning to his uncle, who had been listening to this argument between the brother and sister with his usual amused look and twinkle in his eye.

But when his nephew made this direct appeal to him, Uncle Howroyd became the alert man of business, kind and keen, and said, 'At your service, nephew.—As for you, Sarah, if your frock isn't too fine for going into a dirty blanket-mill, old Matthew will take you and show you our wonderful new engine, of which we are so proud.'

'I don't care twopence about your grand engine. I hate grand new things. I'd rather go into the old dyeing-rooms; they have such lovely new shades every time I go,' declared Sarah.

'There! isn't that just like a woman? Hates new things, and wants to go into the dear old dye-rooms to see lovely new shades!' cried her uncle.

Sarah only laughed, as her uncle called old Matthew, the foreman, and told him to take Miss Clay to the dye-rooms and show her all she wished to see, and take care she didn't get her skirts dyed.

'Well, George, anything wrong?' he asked as the door shut upon Sarah, who went off talking in a most friendly manner with old Matthew, and the uncle and nephew were left alone.

'That's what I came to you about,' said George.

Mr William Howroyd looked at his nephew doubtfully. He did not understand him at any time, and this morning the young man spoke in his usual lazy tones, so that his uncle did not know whether George was in any trouble or not; for, as he argued to himself, 'the boy never did show feelings, so that he might be in love or debt or goodness knows what scrape, and yet talk like that;' and Mr William Howroyd had a deeply rooted conviction that all young men did at the universities was to get into mischief of some sort. So he said, 'Come, George, be frank with me. Have you got into any mess? You know if you have I'll be ready to do all I can to get you out of it.'

The young man looked gratefully at his uncle as he replied in his pleasant tones, 'I'm sure you would, uncle, and there's no one I'd sooner come to if I wanted help; but I'm in no mess that I know of. It was only—he hesitated—'something in your manner last night that made me think there was trouble at the mill either present or looming ahead. I know my father is not popular.'

Mr Howroyd looked a little surprised for a moment; then he said cheerfully, 'Dismiss that notion from your mind. I was a little put out last night by something I heard, and I dare say I said all

sorts of disagreeable, sharp things; but there's no danger for your father any more than there is for all of us. Business is not like a profession; you gain more, but you stand to lose more, and it's not so certain as the law, for example. So, if you'll take my advice, you'll go back and study hard, and have a profession at your finger-tips; it never comes amiss to any of us, and there's no harm done if you never follow it.' Then he changed the conversation, and began talking of other things, and was surprised to find what a pleasant and intelligent companion his nephew could be. 'Why, I'd no idea you took such an interest in the heavy woollen trade. It's almost a pity you're not going into it,' cried his uncle at last.

'But that is what I intend doing, in spite of your advice to the contrary,' observed George quietly.

His uncle cast a swift look at him. 'All the same, I should pass all my law examinations, if I were you, in case—in case you might change your mind,' he observed equally quietly; and then the two got up and went across the mill-yard to the dyeing-rooms to find Sarah, who was still there with Matthew.

George noticed the kindly words of greetings and the friendly glances that passed between master and 'hands,' as all the workers are called up north.

'Now, that man's been with us thirty years; he married his wife from here, and his family all work for us; and this one has been fifty years, and only comes once a week just to say he still works at the old mill,' explained Mr Howroyd.

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'That's as it should be,' said George, touching his hat at each greeting, and raising it to an old woman who hobbled past them.

His uncle smiled a little, for such courtesy is not usual in mills, where kind hearts are hidden under rough exteriors and blunt speech; but though the 'hands' smiled, they said to each other, after the uncle and nephew had passed by, that 'he was a gentleman was young Clay, and took after his uncle Howroyd more'n his father, that was plain!'

'Oh uncle, why did you come so soon? I didn't want you yet,' cried Sarah when she saw the two at the door.

'Didn't you? It strikes me it's about time we did come. My word, you've got yourself into a nice state, my lass!' exclaimed Mr Howroyd, as well he might, for Sarah, in her interest in the new shades, had gone too near the huge vats and wet materials, and her dress was the colours of the rainbow, while her hands were a deep crimson.

'But just look what a lovely colour this crimson is, George!' she exclaimed, holding up a rag which she had dyed.

George contemplated his sister in silence, and then said, 'We'd better get a taxi to go home, I think;' and added, 'Yes, it's a pretty shade, but I think there's a little too much blue in it to be quite becoming.' And, turning to the dyer, he began talking pleasantly about dyeing; and when he went away the man remarked to Mr William Howroyd, 'He's a sharp young gentleman is yon, and I think I'll try his advice.'

Meanwhile Sarah was sitting in the cab with her brother, contemplating rather ruefully her stained hands. 'I say, will it come off?' she inquired anxiously.

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'Yes, in time, if you use some acid,' replied her brother, looking at her fingers.

'Oh, but I must get them clean by lunch-time, or father will make a row,' she cried.

'I should advise you to have lunch in your boudoir, as you call it. You can't possibly get all this off at first go. I can't imagine what old Matthew was about to let you get yourself in such a mess. Really, you are very childish for your age, in some ways.'

'What were you talking to Uncle Howroyd about?' demanded Sarah, who did not want to talk about her hands any longer.

'The heavy woollen trade,' replied her brother promptly.

'That wasn't what you came down to see Uncle Howroyd about. A lot you know of the heavy woollen trade or any other trade! Besides, that came out too pat. What you came down to Ousebank for was just the same thing that I came for.'

'I should not have said so,' replied George dryly, with a significant glance at her hands.

'It was, all the same. You came to ask Uncle Howroyd what he meant by talking about the workhouse last night, and so did I; but I thought one of us was enough to ask that question, so now just tell me what he said.'

If George was taken aback by her astuteness, he did not say so, but answered simply, 'He said he did not mean anything, and that there was no chance of the workhouse for us more than for him.'

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'Do you believe that?' asked Sarah.

'He said there was no more chance of our going to the workhouse than his going there,' repeated George.

'Do you believe that?' repeated Sarah.

'No, I do not,' said George gravely.

'Oh George, do you think we are ruined, or anything?' cried Sarah in excitement.

'Oh, do be quiet, and don't talk so loud, or the cabby will hear you! Of course we're not ruined; but it would never astonish me any day if we came a howler. The pater goes too fast, and— But we're all right now; and, for goodness' sake, don't say a word to mother; it would upset her dreadfully. It's only for her sake I'd mind so much.'

'We'd work for her, and she'd be happier with us, without father always shouting at her,' said Sarah.

'Probably we'd have to work for him too, and he might not be angelic as a pauper,' suggested George grimly, perhaps with a view to subdue Sarah's desire for poverty.

'Oh, I never thought of that. Let's hope his money will last as long as he lives,' she cried.

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## CHAPTER V.

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### A RELUCTANT INVITATION.

'We'd better go in the back way, I think,' observed George, tapping at the window of the cab as he spoke and giving the order.

Sarah laughed, as she spread her hands out before her and surveyed them. 'Perhaps it would be as well, for peace' sake,' she remarked.

They were just getting out of the cab at the little back-door leading into the stable-yard behind the house, when, to their dismay, they saw Mr Mark Clay's burly figure come with swaggering walk along the little path through the park towards the same door, probably coming to give some order, or more probably, his children thought, to make himself disagreeable to his stablemen and chauffeurs.

'Quick! in with you; there's the pater!' cried George, who, polite as usual, was holding the cab-door open for his sister.

Sarah needed no second bidding; but, instinctively clutching the front breadth of her skirt in her hands to conceal the stains, she jumped out, ran in at the little gate, and into the house, up to her room by the back-stairs.

George paid the man, who touched his hat and drove off quickly, and the young man noticed that he passed the owner of the park through which he was driving without any greeting at all. George turned to meet his father.

The tall, slim young man, with his refined features, looked a fit heir to the fine home, with its vast park; but a greater contrast to the coarse man who came towards him could not be imagined. He raised his hat to his father, and greeted him pleasantly enough. No one had ever heard George Clay speak otherwise than respectfully to or of his father, in which he compared favourably with Sarah; but if he could civilly do so he avoided his company, and, if the truth be known, he only spent his vacations at home for the sake of his mother and sister. On this occasion he could not with politeness avoid meeting him, and did so with a good grace.

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'Mornin', lad! Where t' been?' inquired Mark Clay, as he gave his son a nod.

'Down to Ousebank, father. It's hot, isn't it?'

'Yes, it's fine and hot. Where's Sarah? Why didn't she stop and say good-mornin' to her dad? I'm not fine enough for her. I'm only good to make money, eh?'

'On the contrary, it was Sarah who was not fine enough to meet you. She stained her hands, and was running off to wash them,' said George.

'Stained her hands! What did she stain her hands for? I won't have her pretty hands soiled; there's no call for her ever to do aught with them but fancy work.'

'Sarah isn't fond of fancy work,' observed George, avoiding a direct answer.

'I don't know what she is fond of, without it's cheekin' me. What do you think she said yesterday? That I was no better than a murderer because I didn't pay a man his high wages when he got too old to work. A nice thing it would be if I had to keep all my sick workmen in luxury, and pay some one else for doing their work. It wasn't by such means that I built this house, I can tell 'e.' Mark Clay spoke broader Yorkshire than many of his men, and even he could speak, and did speak, better English when he chose; in fact, it was only when he was annoyed or angry that he broke out into dialect.

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Sarah ran to her room and plunged her hands into hot water, but, as might have been expected, without any effect; and when the lunch-gong sounded they were still far too brilliant to bear her father's scrutiny. So she rang for Naomi, and said, 'Just tell Sykes to send up some lunch to me, Naomi; and if any one asks where I am, tell them I am very busy. So I am, cleaning my hands;



though you needn't tell them that.'

Naomi went off to do her young mistress's bidding, but came back in ten minutes looking very grave, and said, 'Please, Miss Sarah, the master says as 'ow it don't matter about your hands, and you can go down to lunch with them as they are.'

Sarah stamped her foot with vexation. 'I told you not to say anything about my hands, Naomi.'

'No more I didn't; but the master knew, for he told Mr Sykes to give me that message for you. And please, miss, excuse me saying so, but Sykes he said, "Try and make Miss Sarah come down, for master he gets into such a taking if he's crossed;" and Sykes he says'—

'Never mind what Sykes said. Get me out my pink muslin,' said Sarah shortly, with her most haughty air, and Naomi obeyed in silence.

Sarah's frock was not pinker than her face when she got to the dining-room.

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'So you've been to Howroyd's Mill messing with his dyes, have you? What do you want to go there for when you could come to mine, eh? What did you go to him for, and what did he say?' her father asked suspiciously.

'Nothing very interesting; at least I don't remember anything. Oh yes; he said hands weren't money-making machines, but human souls which had to be cared for,' replied Sarah.

'I don't mean that kind of talk. Did he talk business, eh?' inquired Mr Clay.

'Oh dear no; he never does to me,' she answered.

'Not been croaking, has he?' the millionaire asked with hidden anxiety.

This time it was George who spoke, inquiring, 'Is there anything to croak about, then?'

'I want an answer to my question, and, by gad, I'll have it!' exclaimed his father, bringing his fist down on the table with a crash.

'No; he was very cheerful, as he always is. And now, sir, perhaps you will be good enough to answer my question,' said George, who spoke very quietly but decidedly.

Sarah gave her brother an approving look.

'What question? Oh, whether there's anything to croak about? Not in my opinion; but your uncle — But there, it's no good taking any notice of him. He'd build a palace for his hands to work in and live in, and stop in that old mill all his life, would Bill Howroyd,' replied Mr Clay; and, frowning heavily, the millionaire got up from the table.

'I say, mother, would you mind if I went for a week's shooting to Scotland?' inquired her son.

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'No, dearie; no. You go; it'll do you good. I suppose it's some o' your college friends as 'ave asked you? Yes, you go; there's nothin' for you to do 'ere,' said the fond mother.

'And what about me? What am I to do if you go off and leave me all alone? I shall go melancholy mad in this hole of a place!' cried Sarah.

'Ole!—w'en it's on the top o' a 'ill! W'at silly nonsense you do talk, child! 'Ole, indeed!' said Mrs Clay.

'It is rather rough luck to leave you in your holidays; but Cockburn has asked me so often. Couldn't you ask some one to stay with you—one of your schoolfellows, perhaps?' George suggested.

'Nice, comfortable house this is to ask any one to stay in!' said Sarah sarcastically.

'It's as comfortable as any o' theirs, if it isn't a great deal better,' cried her mother.

'I'd sooner live in Naomi's home if I'd my choice,' said Sarah gloomily.

'Sarah is right in one way, mother,' said George before Mrs Clay could say anything. 'It is not very comfortable to have constant disturbances in one's home; and the governor is very easily angered.'

'Yes, dear, I know,' agreed Mrs Clay, who adored her son, and thought everything he did or said perfection. 'An' it's 'ard for you an' Sarah, for you don't understan' your father, nor ain't used to 'im as I am. But that's not a bad idea o' yours that Sarah should ask one o' the young ladies at 'er school to come an' stay 'ere for a bit.—There's that Miss Cunning'am that you've got the photograph o' in your room. She's got a nice, 'omely face.'

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'She's a duke's granddaughter, whether her face is homely or not. No, I couldn't ask her,' declared Sarah.

'Why not? She'd be the very one. Your father likes people o' 'igh class, though 'e was only a mill-and 'isself. An' she's got such a nice smile on 'er photo,' persisted the mother.

'I couldn't possibly ask her; she'd never come and stay with a manufacturer,' declared Sarah again.

'I'd be bound she'd jump at it. She'd not get a better dinner at 'ome or anyw'ere, nor a better room to sleep in,' said Mrs Clay.

This remark grated upon both her children, as so many of poor Mrs Clay's sayings did; but George, tactful as usual, remarked, 'Suppose you write and ask Miss Cunningham, Sarah; and if she is too proud to visit a maker of blankets, why, she will refuse, and there will be the end of it; and if she accepts, it will show that her friendship for you is stronger than class prejudices.'

Sarah looked at her brother for a minute as if she wanted to say something, but did not do so, and only drummed with her crimson-dyed fingers on the white table-cloth, taking apparently great delight in their appearance.

'Yes; you do as your brother tells you, instead of sittin' there smilin' at them dreadful 'ands o' yours. I'm sure they're nothin' to be proud o'. Now, if you lived in Howroyd's Mill, w'ere your uncle Bill lives, you might be ashamed to ask the young lady to stay wi' you; but 'ere it's quite different,' said Mrs Clay.

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The brother and sister, it will have been noticed, always called their father's step-brother Uncle Howroyd, whereas their mother and father called him Bill or 'your uncle Bill.' The fact was that the younger people did not like 'Bill,' and George said he was thankful for one thing, and that was that his name could not be shortened; while Sarah had made violent protests against being called Sally or Sal, and would not allow any one except her father, whom she could not control, to call her anything but Sarah; and, indeed, the latter name suited her best.

Sarah followed her brother into his smoking-den. 'Pshaw! What a stuffy room!' she exclaimed, as she threw herself upon the cushioned window-seat.

'If it does not please you I fail to see why you have come into it; and as for being stuffy'— Instead of completing his sentence George shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say the accusation was too absurd to be argued about.

'It *is* stuffy, with all those cushions and carpets about, and pictures and gimcracks, for all its big windows. I can't think how you like to stuff it up with all this rubbish,' persisted Sarah.

'This rubbish, as you call it, is worth a pretty penny,' he remarked, lighting a cigarette.

'You're as bad as father, counting everything by what it costs. But, I say, George, why did you go and suggest my inviting Horatia Cunningham to come and stay here? I don't want her; and now you've started mother on it she'll give me no peace till I do ask her, and very likely say something to father, and he'll begin worrying about it, especially if he hears she's a duke's granddaughter. Besides, she wouldn't come if I did ask her,' Sarah remarked.

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'In that case there'll be no harm done if you do ask her. But I can't imagine why you shouldn't; she looks a very nice girl, and you are great friends, aren't you? And what has her grandfather to do with it?' asked George.

'At school we are; but whether we should be after she'd been up here isn't so certain. And as for why I shouldn't ask her, the reason is pretty plain—father,' replied Sarah.

'You mean he might make himself unpleasant?' suggested George.

'There's no need for him to *make* himself; Nature has made him unpleasant,' exclaimed Sarah.

'You need not see much of him. You can go for picnics or drives, and arrange to have lunch earlier or later; and you never breakfast and have tea with him, so it's only at dinner-time that they will meet. I should not think he will get into a rage before a stranger, especially a young girl.'

Sarah seemed to be considering something, and suddenly she blurted out, 'It isn't only that. I don't want her to come here; can't you see why not? They don't know what my people are. Oh, they know we're manufacturers; but that's nothing to be ashamed of. Lots of manufacturers are gentlemen, but we are not gentlefolks, and they—they don't guess it from me,' she wound up half-shamefacedly.

'Then I wouldn't sail under false colours. We are risen from the people, and our parents have not had the education they have been good enough to give us; but it would be contemptible to be ashamed of the fact or of them.'

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'That's very fine and high-flown; but I am ashamed of my father, at any rate. I'd rather not have Horatia Cunningham come here and laugh at my mother behind her back,' said Sarah.

'I should like to see any one dare to do that,' said George, with an angrier look than his sister had ever seen him give.

'She wouldn't mean it nastily; but it's no good pretending that mother does not say the wrong thing sometimes,' said Sarah.

'The wrong thing has been sending you to that school,' said George, his loyalty and love for his mother preventing his acknowledging the truth of this remark; and then he said more kindly, for he sympathised more with his sister than he chose to say, 'I don't believe Miss Cunningham would be nasty in any way. I know her brother slightly at college, and he is "Hail, fellow! well met," with every chap he meets. You take my advice, and write and ask her to come here. You

can tell her, if you like, that—well, that we are *nouveaux riches*, and have no pretensions of being gentlefolks; but that she will have a hearty Yorkshire welcome, and that's not a thing to be despised, let me tell you. Here, sit down and write the letter at once. I shall enjoy myself much more in Scotland if I know you have a companion.'

'I shouldn't mind so much if you were going to be at home,' said Sarah, only half-won over.

George ignored the implied compliment, and said, 'You will get on much better alone. Sit down and write the invitation here. I'll help you.'

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'No, thank you; I'd rather write my own way,' remarked Sarah, as she rose from the window-seat. When she got to the door, she turned back to say, 'I have a presentiment that she'll accept, and it will be all your fault, remember. Whatever the consequences, they will be on your head.'

George only laughed, and sat down himself to accept his shooting invitation.

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## CHAPTER VI.

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### AN EXTRAORDINARY LETTER.

It did not take George Clay five minutes to write his acceptance of his friend's invitation; but his sister did not find her letter quite so easy to write, and she sat at the pretty Chippendale table biting the end of her pen for more than that length of time before she began to write in desperation, only to tear up the letter in despair.

'It's all very well for George to talk; but it's not so easy to sit down and tell a girl you are not a lady, and, what's more, that your parents are not gentlefolks,' said Sarah aloud to herself.

Then she started again, and wrote a friendly invitation, without any embarrassing explanations or apologies.

'George may be able to say that kind of thing in a gentlemanly way—he always does say the right sort of thing—but I shall just chance it,' she muttered to herself, as she sealed up the letter and sent it off by Naomi, without showing it to any one or taking any one's advice upon it. To have done so would have been quite contrary to Sarah's habits, for she was of a very independent character, and the circumstances of her whole life no doubt fostered this characteristic.

'So we've got a grand young lady from London coming up to stay with us plain folk,' said Mr Mark Clay when he saw his daughter at dinner that evening.

'I've asked one of my schoolfellows to come to stay with me; but I don't know that she will come, and I don't know that you will think her grand. She dresses very plainly,' replied Sarah.

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'Then she'll be all the more willing to come if she's poor,' said Mr Clay.

'She's not in the least poor. It's not the fashion for schoolgirls to dress very grandly,' said Sarah hastily.

'Nonsense! People dress as they can afford; and, I'll be bound, I could buy up her father twice over,' said Mark Clay in his boastful way.

Sarah's lips curled scornfully. 'You couldn't buy his rank. I hope to goodness she won't come,' she said.

No notice was taken of this remark, which was put down to Sarah's contradictoriness, and no one knew how heartily the girl repented of her invitation.

Meanwhile Horatia Cunningham opened the letter from her friend, without in the least expecting it to contain an invitation to visit the schoolfellow whom they all talked of as the millionaire's daughter. Great was her surprise on reading it, for Sarah never talked at school of her people or her home, and the girls vaguely imagined that she was unhappy in her home.

'Mamma, just listen to this letter,' Horatia cried, as she read the letter aloud at the breakfast-table:

"DEAR HORATIA,—Will you come and spend as much of the holidays as you can spare with me? We live on a hill outside Ousebank, so that you will not be in a manufacturing town, and we can go for plenty of walks or rides and drives and play tennis as much as you like. I shall be all alone, as my brother is going to stay with friends in Scotland.—Your affectionate friend, SARAH CLAY."

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'What an extraordinary letter! She is not gushing,' said Lady Grace Cunningham, as she continued to pour out the coffee.

'Is she an orphan, and what does she mean by being all alone? Has she no guardian or chaperon?' inquired Horatia's father.

'She has a father and a mother. She is the daughter of a millionaire blanket-maker named Clay.'

'I believe I've heard the name; but I don't know what I've heard of him,' said Mr Cunningham.

'That would account for her odd way of writing,' said his wife.

'What is odd about it?' demanded Horatia.

'Her writing without mentioning her mother's name, and she never says she would like to see you. Besides, to begin with, as a matter of politeness, Mrs Clay should have written to me,' objected Lady Grace Cunningham.

'Sarah is very independent, and I expect she does as she likes at home,' said Horatia. 'But she is a very nice girl, mamma, and I may go, mayn't I?' she begged.

'Do you really want to go? You know these people, though they have great riches, are very often very unrefined. What is the girl like?'

'I'll show you her photograph, and she looks like a queen when she walks,' said Horatia; and in her eagerness to get leave to pay the visit she ran upstairs to fetch the photo, and came back with a portrait of a boy and girl.

'Dear me, what a handsome couple!' exclaimed Lady Grace Cunningham; 'and most refined,' she added, as she passed the photo to her husband for his inspection and opinion. [Pg 54]

'A very fine face—the girl's, I mean; the young fellow looks rather effeminate. I don't think you'd learn anything but good from that girl; but she looks proud. I should never have taken her for a tradesman's daughter,' he remarked, as he put the photo down.

'She is not. He is a manufacturer,' protested Horatia.

'Some of our merchants are of good old stock, and as refined as ourselves, if I may be allowed that piece of boasting,' replied his wife.

'And no doubt these people are. Well, personally, I have no objection to Horatia's going to them, if you have not,' said Mr Cunningham; and he buried himself in his newspaper.

'Hurrah!' cried Horatia, clapping her hands.

'Why this excitement? Are you so fond of this schoolfellow, or do you find home dull?' inquired Lady Grace Cunningham.

'Oh no, mamma; of course I am never dull at The Grange, and I don't know that I am so fond of Sarah. I do like her very much, but I shall see her in another month; so, if you like, I will write and refuse the invitation.'

'By no means. I wish you to grow up large-minded; but you have not explained why you were so delighted at the thought of going to spend a month with these strangers. I don't suppose their riches attract you.'

'Oh no; I don't think one could have a nicer home than this. I believe the real truth is that I should like to see a mill. I read a story about mill-girls once; how they wore pattens on their feet and shawls on their heads, and talked so broadly that you couldn't understand them, and threw mud at strangers. I would like'— [Pg 55]

'To have mud thrown at you?' exclaimed her mother. 'Well, there's no accounting for tastes!'

Horatia gave a merry laugh, such an infectious laugh that both her mother and father joined in it.

'No; I should keep out of their way, and look at them through a window,' she remarked.

'Perhaps they'd throw a stone through the window and break it,' observed Horatia's practical sister.

'Well, I promise to duck my head if I see one coming,' she assured them, laughing.

'I don't suppose there will be any need. I fancy mill-hands, as I believe they call them, are very much civilised, and dress quite grandly now,' said her mother.

'Oh, I hope not! I shall be disappointed if they do,' cried Horatia.

Thus it came about that two mornings after she had despatched her letter Sarah had an answer from Horatia Cunningham, accepting her friend's kind invitation with pleasure, and announcing her arrival at the end of the week.

'So you were right, and she is coming,' Sarah said gloomily to her brother, as she twisted the letter in her fingers.

'That's very nice. You must think of nice expeditions to take her. There is lovely scenery within reach, especially if she's fond of motoring,' he said. [Pg 56]

'I wish to goodness the visit were over. I have a presentiment that it will be a failure,' his sister persisted.

'Don't be absurd! It won't be a failure if you try to make it a success; and, if you don't mind my giving you a hint, be civil to the governor before Miss Cunningham, at all events; it's such bad form not to be, you know,' said George.

'I wish you'd give the governor, as you call him, a hint or two. He's the one who'll make the visit a failure, if it is one. Well, she's going to come, so it's no use groaning about it now,' said Sarah.

'Now, Sally, what are you looking so glum about? I suppose you don't think we're grand enough for your duchess-friend? Never you mind, we'll put our best foot forward. She shall have the royal suite of rooms. I've made up my mind to do the thing handsome,' said Mr Clay.

'Oh Mark, that is good o' you! I 'ope the young lady won't spoil 'em,' said his wife.

The royal suite of rooms, it should be explained, consisted of a bedroom, anteroom, sitting-room, and bathroom, which had been so sumptuously decorated that the workmen called them the 'royal suite;' and Mr Clay, overhearing them, had said the royal suite they should be called. Perhaps it would be prophetic, for stranger things had to come to pass than royalty coming to stay with the Mayor of Ousebank, as he had been, and probably would be again.

Sarah knew she ought to express her gratitude to her father for the honour he was showing to her friend; but no words would come. Sarah Clay was, unfortunately, more in the habit of uttering unpleasant truths than making pretty speeches to her father; and, if the truth be told, she was not altogether pleased at the honour shown, for the rooms were not very suitable for a young girl, and Sarah had an idea that the grandeur would be wasted on Horatia, who, she suspected, would rather have a room near hers.

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George, as usual, came to the rescue. 'That is very kind of you, father; but perhaps, as Miss Cunningham is very young, and is coming for the first time among strangers, she would prefer to be in the west wing near some one she knows. There's the anteroom, next Sarah's; that is very pretty for a girl, and they could share the boudoir.'

Sarah shot a grateful look at her brother; but his pains were thrown away, for Mr Clay, who was not a man to be easily turned from his plan, said, 'She'll soon get used to us, and she can have her maid to sleep next door. No; I've promised she shall have the royal rooms, and I'll not go back on my word.'

'Let's hope she'll appreciate them,' said George in a non-committal tone.

Sarah spent the intervening two or three days in a state of suppressed excitement and unsuppressed irritability; and George at last began to regret, like herself, that her friend was coming, and was sorry for having made the suggestion. He would even have given up his visit to the north if Sarah had accepted his sacrifice; but the latter declared brusquely, 'You couldn't do much good; and, considering that my excuse for asking her here was that I should be alone, it would look rather odd if you didn't go away, after all.'

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So George went off, his parting words to Sarah being, 'Don't worry. Just be as nice to her as you can, and don't, for goodness' sake, be ashamed of being what you are, for you have nothing to be ashamed of.'

'I don't think that,' said Sarah.

'We need be ashamed of nothing in this world except doing wrong,' said George; and the motor started with a hoot of approval of this worthy sentiment.

Sarah waved her hand to her brother, and stood watching him until the motor was hidden behind the trees and a bend in a long avenue, and then turned back to the house, her head bent towards the gravel-path, the pebbles of which she kicked with her feet, to the distinct disapproval of the young gardener who had just rolled it, and viewed this destruction of his work from a distance.

'Ashamed of nothing but doing wrong!' she soliloquised. 'That's not true. One is ashamed of having dirty hands or muddy boots; there's nothing wrong in that.' She turned impulsively as if to say this to her brother, and have the last word; but that being an impossibility, she was reduced to arguing the question out with herself, as Sarah had a habit of doing.

The only person she ever consulted, or whose advice or criticism she accepted, was her uncle Howroyd. But this question she could not ask him, for Sarah hardly liked to own to herself that she was a little ashamed of her uncle Howroyd; at least, not exactly ashamed, but she did not mean to take Horatia Cunningham to see him or the old-fashioned mill-house in which William Howroyd and his father had lived for three or four generations.

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So Sarah was reduced to herself as an authority upon this question for the present, and not being by any means a safe authority, she did not get a wise answer, which might have saved her a great deal of vexation and annoyance; for Sarah decided that George was quite wrong. There were things which were not wrong, and yet one could not help being ashamed of them; and one thing Sarah was ashamed of was having parents who were not only uneducated, but had unrefined ideas.

Sarah had one day-dream, absurd as it may seem, of which she never spoke. Sarah always cherished the hope that she might some day find that she and her brother were not really George and Sarah Clay, but adopted children of Mark Clay, and that by-and-by the news would be broken to them. And yet Sarah was a well-educated, intelligent girl of sixteen, and lived in the twentieth century. The fancy arose from a remark her father once made when she was quite a child: 'They are not my children; they are a cut above me. They've got their mother's features, but they'll have nothing of me but my money.' And upon this half-bitter, half-proud speech of Mark Clay's Sarah

built her romance, which varied as she invented different explanations of the mystery from time to time; but her favourite one was that her mother first married a lord who was ashamed of his wife, and would not acknowledge his children until they were grown up and properly educated; and Sarah used to picture the reconciliation between them and their proud relatives, for whose benefit she composed many fine speeches full of reproof and final forgiveness.

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This may be a little excuse for her want of respect to her father, Mark Clay, by speaking of whom, it will be remembered, as 'your husband' she used to anger her mother. She even half-thought of telling Horatia this tale; but Horatia had a way of turning everything into ridicule, and one of the many things that Sarah could not stand was being laughed at.

The same motor that took George Clay to the station took Sarah that afternoon to meet Horatia Cunningham, who was to arrive at six o'clock, and who persisted in arriving at that hour, although Sarah had written to her and warned her it was the hour when the mill-hands came out; she said she did not mind at all, and supposed that she would be quite safe in a motor with its smart chauffeur; and Sarah, looking so fresh and dainty that many a one turned and looked after the millionaire's pretty daughter, started off for the station, and not one of them guessed she was feeling nervous, and wished with all her might that she were going on another errand. The girl even wished that something might have happened to prevent her friend from coming; but when the train stopped she saw the wish was vain, for Horatia's face was smiling at her from a window, and Sarah forgot her fears for the moment, and smiled back a welcome.

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## CHAPTER VII.

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### HORATIA'S ARRIVAL.

Sarah stepped forward to help Horatia down from the carriage, and suddenly her expression changed to one of mingled surprise and annoyance; seeing which, the young visitor, with a merry laugh, jumped from the carriage to the platform, ignoring the steps and Sarah's outstretched hand.

'There! I said so, didn't I, Nanny?' she cried, turning to her maid, a highly respectable, middle-aged woman, with as good-humoured a face as her young charge.—'Sarah, I said the minute you saw us come out of a third-class carriage you would put on that shocked face of yours. That's partly why I did it.'

'You must excuse Miss Horatia, miss. She's full of mischief, and she got into this carriage at the junction without my seeing what class it was, or I would never have allowed her to do such a thing as arrive here third, with you to meet her, and the "chauffer" and all,' said Horatia's maid.

'Oh, bother the chauffeur! It's nothing to do with him which class I travel!' exclaimed Horatia, who, to do her justice, had no idea that the chauffeur was just behind her. That individual was far too well trained to give any sign of having heard this remark, though it was very different from the way his present employers treated him. Mark Clay bullied his servants, and his timid little wife hardly dared to speak to them. Sarah was very reserved, except with Naomi; while George was as courteous to a beggar as to a lord, having but one manner with them all.

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When Horatia saw what she had done she made a funny little face, and said in an undertone to Sarah, 'I say, Sarah, can't we walk to your house?'

'I don't think we had better. We shall meet the mill-hands coming out, and mother does not like us to do that,' said Sarah.

'Oh, of course, if your mother does not allow it, we can't; but do you think I had better apologise to your man?' she suggested.

'Apologise? Pray, don't think of such a thing! But I suppose you are only saying that to shock me, though why that should amuse you so much I can't think,' observed Sarah.

'You would if you could see your own face; but I really didn't get into that railway-carriage only to shock you. I got in to hear Yorkshire people talk. I saw some country men and women get in, and I just followed them; and, oh Sarah, what does "ginnel" mean, and a "fettle"?''

'I don't know what a "ginnel" is; but "fettle" is a verb. A fettler is the man who cleans the machines in the mill. I have heard the people here talk of "fettling" the hearth when they mean "clean up." And old Matthew, a mill-hand, said the other day he didn't feel in a grand fettle. I suppose he meant "well."'

'A ginnel's a narrow passage, miss. Yon's a ginnel we are just passing,' said the chauffeur to Horatia, slowing down as they passed what is generally called an alley, to which he pointed.

'Oh, thank you very much,' said Horatia genially, and added to Sarah, as she squeezed her arm, 'Oh Sarah, I am enjoying myself so much!'

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Her happiness was infectious, and Sarah turned to her visitor with an amused smile. 'Why, what can you find to enjoy already?' she asked, with some reason, for they were going almost at walking pace through the town, because of the crowds that poured into the streets from almost

every side-turning, so that it could not be the exhilarating motion of motoring that she liked so much.

'Everything! Seeing all those people and hearing people talk Yorkshire,' cried Horatia.

'The people are just like poor people anywhere, only rather dirtier; and I don't like their way of speaking—they have such rough, loud voices,' replied Sarah.

'I think that kind of sing-song they have is musical, and they are not a bit like our villagers; I don't know how, but they are not,' said Horatia, glancing about her, and almost jumping up and down in her eagerness to see all there was to be seen, as they drove slowly along the narrow, and at this time crowded, streets of the grimy manufacturing town.

'Oh, oh, look, Nanny, at that lovely river all purple!' she cried enthusiastically.

'Well, really, Miss Horatia, I can't say that I do admire that. It looks shocking dirty,' said the maid.

'It is. It's lovely before it gets to Ousebank; but it's so polluted by the mills turning all their horrid dyes and things into it that fish can't live in it,' observed Sarah in tones of disgust.

'Well, I call it a lovely colour. Just think how delightful—when you get tired of a dress one colour, you have just got to dip it into the river when the water's the colour you want, and, hey, presto! there you are with a new dress!'

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Even the chauffeur on the seat in front let his face relax into a smile at Horatia's chatter; but Sarah, though she laughed, said decidedly, 'I'd rather send my dresses to proper dyers than put them into that dirty water; and I'd rather see the river clean, and so would you if you lived here.'

They had got clear of the town now, and Horatia, having nothing to look at except an ugly row of cottages, in which even she could not find anything to admire, turned her attention to the car, which she declared most luxurious, and ever so much better than her father's.

'We can go out in it as much as you like, if you like motoring, and go for picnics in the country,' suggested Sarah.

'That will be very nice; but I want to see your mill first,' said Horatia. 'Is it near the house?'

'No; we passed it just now, when you said, "What a big stream of people!"' answered Sarah.

'But they didn't know you,' objected the other.

'Oh yes, they did—by sight, I mean. But what difference would that make? You don't expect them to nod to me, do you?'

'All our villagers do to me, even though I don't know them by sight,' said Horatia.

'Then they are different from our people, and perhaps there are not so many. We have over eight hundred men in our mill, besides women and boys.'

Horatia began to see that Sarah did not care to talk about mill-people, as she called them in her mind, and as they entered the park at the moment, and the house in another moment, she found other subjects for conversation.

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Horatia was a year younger than Sarah and more than a head shorter, and a greater contrast than the two presented could not be imagined: the one tall, slender, dignified, with regular features and clear complexion; and the other short, square-set, with snub-nose and freckled skin, a face only redeemed from plainness by its merry, twinkling eyes and good-humoured mouth, which was always broadening into a smile.

Mrs Clay had seen Horatia Cunningham's photograph, so that she was prepared for a girl with a homely face; but most photographs flatter, and Mrs Clay had not expected to see any one quite so ordinary in appearance, 'an' that plainly dressed,' as she confided to her husband. However, she came forward with a hearty welcome, and as soon as Horatia smiled at her she forgot the slight shock her young guest's appearance had given her.

Horatia jumped out of the car as she had jumped out of the train. 'It is so kind of you to have me; and what a lovely view you have! One would never think the town was so near. I suppose it is hidden behind those trees?' she said.

'No, my dear—Miss Cunningham, I mean—the town is be'ind the 'ouse. My 'usband built the mansion this way on purpose,' said Mrs Clay, in her nervousness dropping the *h's* more than usual.

Sarah kept a keen eye upon Horatia during this speech. She had been dreading this moment, and had only forgotten her anxiety, thanks to Horatia's free praise of all she saw; but not a trace of mockery could she see in her schoolfellow's smile; in fact, Horatia was more polite than she was to the teachers at school, to whom they were expected to be most courteous. 'I suppose she didn't expect her to be educated,' thought Sarah, a little bitterly.

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But she did her school friend an injustice, for Mrs Clay was a far greater shock to Horatia than she was to her hostess; and it said much for the girl's innate good-breeding that she showed no sign of the fact, but only answered frankly, 'Please don't call me Miss Cunningham. I'm not grown

up yet, and my name is Horatia.' And here the thought came into Horatia's mind that she would certainly be 'Oratia' to her hostess, and she felt a wild desire to laugh, but valiantly repressed it; for which she was very thankful when Mrs Clay, with a pretty, pink colour in her delicate, faded cheeks, said, 'Thank you, my dear; it's a very pretty name, but it's difficult to remember. I expect I shall always call you "my dear," as you don't mind, and I am sure you are a very dear young lady.'

Horatia impulsively threw her arms round Mrs Clay's neck, and, kissing her, said, 'I am sure I am going to have a lovely time here, and I think it's awfully good of you to ask me.'

Mrs Clay beamed with delight, and all fears on her part that the visit would not be a success were over.

Sarah's brow cleared. She was rather surprised that Horatia and her mother had taken to each other; but so far so well. The worst was—her father; and Sarah almost longed for dinner-time, so that that meeting also should be over. 'She won't like him, I know,' she murmured, with a recollection of a scene at school when a visitor had been presuming in Horatia's opinion, and she had rather surprised her companions by the frigid air she assumed. 'He'll offend her, and she will say something, and, oh dear! I'm sure there will be a scene,' sighed Sarah.

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However, dinner was two hours off, and Sarah took Horatia through the vast corridors and up to the royal rooms, followed by Horatia's old nurse, who had come in the capacity of maid, and was by her mistress's orders keeping near her charge till she settled down in her new surroundings.

Horatia and her maid were both used to large houses, and had stayed at the ducal mansion of Horatia's relative; but when the door leading into the royal rooms was opened she gave a cry of admiration. 'But am I to sleep here? It's far too grand for me, Sarah. And what a big room! I shall lose myself in it!' she cried.

'My father wished you to have these rooms. There's a bed for your maid next door, in the dressing-room. My mother thought you might be nervous in a new house,' explained Sarah.

'How kind you all are! Fancy taking all that trouble about making me comfortable! I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to give you such a lot of rooms when you come to stay with us,' said Horatia, as she wandered from room to room, and stopped first to admire the writing-table with gold everything, and finally the bathroom with silver fittings.

'I will leave you to rest a little, and when you are ready for a walk in the park, please ring the bell and Naomi will fetch me,' said Sarah as she went off, relieved to find that Horatia took everything in a friendly spirit.

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'Oh Miss Horatia, this is a funny house!' exclaimed Horatia's nurse.

'I don't see anything funny in it,' said Horatia; 'it's a very beautiful one.'

'Yes, miss, it is that; these people must have a mint of money. Why, look at these rooms; they're fit for a king. And to think that poor thing is the mistress of it all. She doesn't look hardly fit,' said the woman.

Horatia let this remark pass in silence; but if her loyalty to her hostess had let her she would probably have agreed with her nurse, for she did feel, somehow, as Sarah did, that it was all too grand, and oppressed her somehow. 'My dresses are not grand enough for these rooms, Nanny, or for this house,' she replied.

But this was too much for the old nurse. 'You'll look a lady and be a lady in the commonest of them, and that's more than these Clays be, for all their money,' she cried indignantly.

'That isn't very nice of you when they are so kind to us, Nanny, and have asked us here so that we may enjoy ourselves,' said Horatia reproachfully.

'No, Miss Horatia, it isn't, and I ought to be ashamed of myself that you have to teach me my duty instead of me showing you a good example; but I felt wild to think of them, perhaps, thinking themselves better than you because they have such a lot of money out of blankets,' said the good woman. 'Why, I'd sooner have The Grange than this house any day.'

'So would I, of course, because it's my home; but I wouldn't mind having a bathroom like this, all marble and silver, and all those lovely little contrivances to wash yourself without any trouble; and I will some day, when I'm rich,' declared Horatia.

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'I'm so glad you've called me "lass"! I was so hoping some one would.'

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And now, being ready for dinner, Horatia rang for Sarah, and the two went down to the painted and gilded drawing-room to wait till the gong sounded, which it presently did, and the three went into the dining-room, where they found Mr Mark Clay, as was his custom, seated at the table.

When they arrived, Mrs Clay, whose duty it was to introduce Horatia to her host, left that duty to Sarah, and Sarah left it to her mother, with the result that no one performed that ceremony.

Horatia had to introduce herself, which she did very prettily. 'How do you do, Mr Clay? Thank you for giving me such a lovely room'—everything was lovely according to Horatia; 'it's the loveliest I have ever seen—better than the peacock-room at Hasingfield.

Now, Hasingfield was the palace of Horatia's ducal relative, her grandfather, and the peacock-room was so famous that even Mark Clay had heard of it; so that Horatia could not have said anything that would have pleased her host better. He held her hand for a moment, and looked down at her bright, smiling face, as he said, 'I'm right glad to see you here, and welcome you to Yorkshire. And there's nothing here that you are not welcome to use as your own. Make yourself at home, lass.'

Horatia's smile broadened as she gave a laugh of delight. 'Oh, I'm so glad you've called me "lass"! I was so hoping some one would. That shall be your name for me, and Mrs Clay will call me "my dear,"' she answered, taking her seat at the table in the best of humours.

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It was a sumptuous repast, and if Horatia got tired of it and of her host's boastings and unrefined remarks, she gave no sign, but seemed, as she had said when she first arrived, to be enjoying herself immensely.

'So the dreaded introductions were safely and happily over, and either she is acting or else she doesn't notice or mind anything,' Sarah said to herself. But she was wrong, for Horatia was not acting, and she did notice, and did mind some things. Later on Sarah was undeceived on this point.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

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### HORATIA.

So the dinner was over, and Sarah heaved a great sigh of relief as the two followed Mrs Clay to the drawing-room.

'What are you sighing for, Sarah? One would think you had just discovered that you were a pauper, and had eaten your last grand dinner; for it was a grand dinner. Was it in honour of little, insignificant me? Because, you know, if it was, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling Mrs Clay that I don't come down to dinner at home, but have schoolroom supper with Nanny; and I don't think mamma would like me to eat all those things every evening,' observed Horatia, taking Sarah's arm and doing a rink step along the hall.

'Oh, we have that kind of dinner every day. There may have been extra trouble taken because of you; but father likes it. You needn't eat any more than you like; but I shouldn't sigh if I heard it was my last in this house,' replied Sarah vehemently.

She spoke so vehemently that Horatia stopped her rinking and looked at her friend in surprise.

'But it is your home,' she said.

'I'd rather live in a cottage,' declared Sarah.

'You say so; but I'd just like to see you turning up your aristocratic nose at the tiny rooms; only, of course, your nose wouldn't turn up properly, not being a snub like mine. Anyway, it would look down on everything. But, I say, Sarah, what a lovely rink this hall would make! If it weren't so hot we might have a fine rink this evening.'

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'Oh my dear, not in this 'all; it's real cedar-board, brought express from abroad for Mr Clay!' cried Mrs Clay in shocked accents. 'I'm sure I don't know w'at 'e'd say if you was to suggest such a thing. Pray don't name it to 'im.'

Horatia laughed gaily. 'I was only in fun. Of course, I shouldn't rink on a parquet floor. I should like to see our butler's face if I did it on our polished oak. I think I'll suggest it to Mr Clay this evening,' she announced.

'You won't see him again. He never comes into the drawing-room in the evening, thank goodness!' said Sarah. The 'thank goodness' slipped out from habit, and she was rather glad that Horatia did not notice it.

'We shall just 'ave a quiet evenin'. Mr Clay likes to smoke 'is pipe after dinner in 'is study, an' I go an' talk to 'im sometimes. So per'aps you won't mind if I go an' leave you two to enjoy yourselves alone.—Your father seems quite cheerful to-night.—I think you an' 'e will get on, my dear,' said Mrs Clay, who was quite cheerful herself, owing to her husband being in a pleasant humour.

It was the first peaceful dinner they had had since Sarah came home; Mark Clay was never a very pleasant companion, and the dinner-table was very often the scene of his rages, but Sarah seemed to anger her father without even opening her mouth, and her mother, much as she missed her only daughter, was generally relieved when she returned to school.

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But before Mrs Clay thought it was time for her husband to have finished his wine and retired to his study to smoke, to the surprise of all three he appeared in the drawing-room, without the obnoxious pipe, and with quite a pleasant expression for him.

'I'm thinking this lass will be dull with only us plain folk, and so I've got a concert for her. Now, what would you like to hear—the opera at Covent Garden, the Queen's Hall concert, or what?'

'Oh, how lovely! The opera, please. That is better than rinking in your parquet hall, Mr Clay,' cried Horatia, clapping her hands.

'Rink in my hall!' cried the millionaire, scandalised; and then, seeing Horatia's twinkling eyes, he laughed his hoarse laugh, and said, 'You'd have Sykes after you if you did. What do you want to rink for? Senseless pastime, I call it. Now, skating I can understand; it's healthy exercise, and you might make use of it in cold countries; but rinking—what's the use on't?'

'Oh, it's such fun! I do love it so!' cried Horatia.

'Well, now, if it's like that, I'll see what we can do. I am afraid I can't get a rink built for you in a day, but I'll see what we can do. For to-night, you'll have to put up with the opera,' said Mr Clay good-naturedly.

Horatia thanked him profusely, and after he had left she said to Sarah, 'Oh Sarah, you *are* rich! I'm sorry I ever came here to stay with you.'

'Why?' inquired Sarah quickly, as the colour mounted to her forehead, for she expected that Horatia was going to say that she did not like people who made such a display of wealth.

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'Because I sha'n't be contented to be just middlingly well off after this, and I never wanted to be rich before; but your father can do everything he likes,' she cried enthusiastically.

'Oh no, he can't,' retorted Sarah.

'What can't he do?' demanded Horatia.

Sarah paused for a moment. She could not very well say what was in her mind, which was that he could not make himself a gentleman, so she said instead, 'He can't buy people's affection, for one thing.'

Horatia gave Sarah one of her quick, quizzical glances, but only replied, 'I don't know so much about that. There's cupboard-love, at any rate; but never mind, let's go and listen to this opera. It's a lovely way of spending the evening,' she added, for Sarah's face had taken on its disdainful expression again.

So the two sat down at the gramophone to listen to Tetrizzini singing in the opera, and Mrs Clay went off to her husband's study to take advantage of his being in a good humour to spend the hour with the husband she worshipped, although she feared him, and had none too happy a life with him.

Mr Clay was smoking a short clay-pipe. If Sarah had been there she probably would have said that another thing that he could not do was to enjoy refined things, or give himself refined tastes, for one of Mark Clay's greatest enjoyments was to smoke his short clay-pipe and the rankest of rank tobacco, though he only did so in private.

'She's a nice young lady, Mark, this friend o' Sarah's, isn't she?' Mrs Clay hazarded.

'Yes, she's a grand lass, is yon. She's always got a joke ready to crack with you, and doesn't give herself no airs; and she might, for I find they're a very high family—two dukes in it, and other titles as well,' said Mr Clay.

'Oh, I don't care about 'er titles; she's a dear young lady in 'erself, an' I'm sure Sarah'll only learn good from 'er,' said Mrs Clay.

'I wish Sarah'd learn not to give herself airs; you'd think she was a duke's granddaughter and not the other. I'm sure she looks at me sometimes as much as to say, "I'm a princess, and you're only a common man," and treats me as if I was the dirt under her feet, instead of being her father, to whom she owes everything,' said Mr Clay, with an aggrieved air.

'She's not good-lookin',' said Mrs Clay, who alluded to Horatia and was trying to put a word in indirectly for her daughter.

'No, she isn't, there's no denying that; but I'd sooner have her opposite me at table, for all her plain looks, than I would our Sally.'

'I wouldn't go so far as that. I'm sure w'en the two came in to-night, an' our girl lookin' so straight an' 'andsome, I felt proud o' 'er; but the other is a dear young lady, an' keeps us all lively,' she said, repeating her one remark about Horatia that she was a dear young lady.

'And if you'll believe me, George,' she wrote to her son two days later, 'your father's a different man since that little girl has been here, as polite to the servants since he spoke sharp to Sykes and the little lady stared at him so surprised like; and so kind to me I hardly know myself. Not that I'm not very grateful to him, and know a man like him must have his worries, and can't always be even-tempered.'

But much had happened during these two days. Sarah had planned these two days, and, indeed, all the visit, as a succession of excursions in the motor, picnics, tennis-parties (for the Clays knew every one for miles round), and rides, and the next morning, accordingly, she said to Horatia, 'I thought we might go to the lakes for lunch to-day; we might start directly after breakfast, and get back for dinner in the evening.'

'Oh, haven't you seen the lakes?' asked Horatia in rather a disappointed tone.

'Yes, of course; but they are always worth going to see,' replied Sarah. 'But if you don't care to see them, or would rather go anywhere else, or do anything else, you have only to say so, and of course we'll do that.'

Horatia's face brightened. 'Do you really mean that? May I do what I like just for the first day or two?' she inquired eagerly.

'Of course you may do what you like to-day and every day while you are here. I would much rather you did. I'm tired of doing what I like; and, besides, it will save me a lot of bother, because I did not want to go to the lakes at all, and I was going to please you.'

'And I should have gone to please you,' cried Horatia, 'so we should both have wasted a day; but I'm afraid you won't care for my plan. I want to go and see your mills.'

'You mean my father's,' said Sarah hastily; but, though her face fell a little, she continued, 'We shall have to ask his leave. I'll ask mother to 'phone to him.'

But this plan of Horatia's was not destined to be carried out, for a message came back to say that Mr Clay would rather they came another day, as he was busy that day, and could not take them over himself.

'Then just let's go down the town and see the outsides of the mills. No; not in the motor,' for Sarah had her hand on the bell to ring for it.

'How, then? Do you want to ride?' inquired Sarah in surprise.

'No; I want to go on Shank's mare, and poke into ginnels. I want to go up a ginnel,' she declared.

'But a ginnel is only a narrow passage. The chauffeur told you so, don't you remember? You've often been up a passage, I suppose?'

'Yes; but not when it's called a ginnel. I want to say I've been up one, and I can't bring it in unless I say, "I went up a ginnel at Ousebank,"' explained Horatia.

Sarah laughed. 'You are funny, Horatia,' she said. However, to please her friend she put on her hat, and the two went off to Ousebank; and whom should they meet but Uncle Howroyd, who stopped quite naturally to speak to his niece and her friend.

'And what are you two lasses doing in Ousebank alone and on foot?' he inquired.

'We've come to go up a ginnel,' said Horatia, her eyes twinkling.

Mr William Howroyd's twinkled in response. 'Eh, what, are you a Yorkshire lassie, then, that you talk so pat about ginnels? And what particular one do you want to go up—the ginnel against my mill?' he inquired.

'Oh, have you got a mill, and can I come and see it?' cried Horatia eagerly.

'Why, of course I've got a mill. Didn't Sarah tell you? Surely you weren't coming to Ousebank without coming to see me?' he inquired reproachfully. Then, seeing that Sarah coloured and looked rather ashamed, he half-guessed the truth, and turned quickly to another subject, and said, 'Come along, then, both of you.—This is not the grandest mill in Ousebank, Miss Cunningham, nor the largest. My brother Clay's is much bigger; but it's the oldest, and I like it best.'

'Oh, please, say Horatia,' she cried, as the three turned towards Howroyd's Mill.

'Horatia! Any relation to the great Nelson?' he inquired, looking kindly down on the eager young face smiling up at him.

'Yes; that's why I am called it; but I like Macaulay's Horatius best, so I pretend I am named after him.'

'What!

Then out spake brave Horatius ...  
And how can man die better  
Than facing fearful odds,  
For the ashes of his fathers  
And the temples of his gods?

Isn't that how it goes?' he asked.

'Not quite; you've left out three lines; but that's the man I mean,' she replied. 'But I forgot. Perhaps I ought not to have asked to go over your mill? Perhaps you are busy, and don't want us, like Mr Clay?'

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'No, I'm not so busy as he is, and I have always time for Sarah, as she knows,' he replied; 'though I don't know that a warm summer morning is the time to go over a mill and into hot rooms.'

'Oh, please, don't discourage me! I've longed to see a mill, and now I am really going to.'

Sarah privately thought Horatia rather childish, but she did not say anything; and Mr Howroyd, who did whatever he did thoroughly, took them over his mill.

'Now, I am going to show you the whole process of making a blanket out of sacks of woollen rags or wool as it comes off the sheep's back,' he announced.

'I hope you are not going to make a lesson of it, Uncle Howroyd,' protested Sarah.

'Of course I am, and am going to question you upon it afterwards,' he said, his eyes twinkling. 'Only, I hope you won't be like a young man that came here for a newspaper once, and went away saying he was much obliged, and had learnt a lot, and then wrote in his paper that we made blankets of old newspapers.'

'And don't you?' inquired Horatia innocently.

'No, we do not,' said Mr Howroyd with emphasis; 'and it's about time you did come and see a blanket-mill if that's all you know about it.'

Horatia not only joined merrily in Sarah's laugh, but listened quite intelligently to Mr William Howroyd's explanation of the material used to make blankets.

'It's most fearfully interesting,' she said with a sigh.

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Mr Howroyd laughed. 'You'd best have gone to the lakes, as Sarah proposed. This is a very dull holiday task you've set yourself, Miss Horatia.'

'I never enjoyed any holiday so much in my life,' she protested stoutly, and a look at her beaming, interested face confirmed her words.

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## CHAPTER IX.

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### A YORKSHIRE MIXTURE.

'Do you particularly want to walk home, Horatia?' inquired Sarah as they were leaving Howroyd's Mill.

'No; I particularly don't want, considering that I have been driving Shank's mare up awful break-neck steps and down precipices,' replied Horatia, who had climbed up and down funny stairs and ladders in the mill, which she called precipices.

'You are not going home, anyway, just now, for the mills are just coming out, and the streets will be crowded, and it's luncheon-time; so you're going to have a plain lunch with me, if you will honour me so far,' said Mr Howroyd, and looked for a delighted acceptance from Sarah. But, to

his surprise, Sarah coloured and looked at Horatia doubtfully. 'I think they'll be expecting us at home,' she said.

'Oh, will they? Can't we send a special messenger? I should so like to stay, and I am so hungry.—You've no idea how hungry I am,' she said, turning to Mr Howroyd with a merry laugh. 'Perhaps if you did you wouldn't ask us to stay.'

Mr Howroyd laughed his cheery laugh. 'It would be the first time there wasn't enough for any stranger at Howroyd's. That's not a Yorkshire failing. We've always enough and to spare for any kind visitor, and they're always sure of a Yorkshire welcome.'

'What's a Yorkshire welcome like? Is it different from any other kind of welcome?' inquired Horatia slyly. [Pg 82]

'Well, we think it's heartier and more sincere. You see, we don't go in for show so much as they do down south; we say there's real old oak up here, and French-polished deal down there.'

'Oh, what conceit!' cried Horatia. 'Are you hitting at me?'

'No; at me,' said Sarah a little bitterly.

'I'm hitting at myself; for old oak, you know, gets worm-eaten.—And you're quite correct, Miss Horatia; that was boasting, and in very bad taste. Let's hope my cook won't have burnt up the chicken and apple-tart to punish me for it,' he said as he led the way into the cool, old parlour of the mill, with its wainscoted walls and old-fashioned furniture.

Horatia sat down in a rocking-chair, and gave a sigh of satisfaction. 'I feel I deserve a rest. I've done a good day's work this morning. I'm afraid I've tired you, Mr Howroyd, and taken up a lot of your time. I'd no idea it took so long to look over a mill. Why, we must have been nearly two hours.'

'Nearer two hours and a half. I calculate one and a half for most of my visitors; but, then, they don't all want to know so much as this young lady,' he replied, laughing.

'Oh, did I ask a lot of questions?' inquired Horatia.

'You did,' said Sarah.

'Well, I *am* enjoying myself,' repeated Horatia for the hundredth time, with always the same emphasis on the 'am.'

Mr Howroyd flashed one of his bright glances at her. 'That's right!' he said. [Pg 83]

'I do like knowing new things and doing new things, and all this is so new to me. I feel as if I were abroad, out of England somewhere; and wool-making—I mean making blankets and woollen things—is most interesting,' said Horatia.

Sarah seemed to be pondering over something. Suddenly she lifted her head—'What holiday-essay are you going to write this summer?'

Horatia gave a merry laugh. 'Oh, well, it wasn't for that I came to stay with you, Sarah. You mustn't think that; but, of course, it will be nice and easy to write one upon wool.'

'Oh, ho! So I have been teaching you your holiday-lesson, have I?' said Mr Howroyd, as he helped Horatia to apple-tart and handed her the cheese; for at Howroyd's Mill no maid waited at lunch. William Howroyd said he had to be careful what he said before a servant, and he could reach all he wanted himself.

Sarah was just putting out her hand to stop her uncle, but decided not to interfere with him, for Mr Howroyd never understood a hint, and, with what his niece considered a lamentable want of tact, would say, 'What are you driving at, lass?' or 'Speak out, child; I like plain speaking.' So, much as Sarah would have liked to prevent her uncle from offering 'such an unfashionable mixture' as apple-tart and cheese, she abstained.

Horatia stared for a moment; then, thinking it was absent-mindedness on the part of her host, burst into a merry laugh. 'You've only just given me apple-tart, Mr Howroyd. I haven't come to the cheese course yet.' [Pg 84]

'But we eat them together in Yorkshire. Come, you like new things; just try cheese and apple-tart; it's a very good mixture, to my mind,' said Mr Howroyd as he held the plate to Horatia.

'Very well, I will try it; but I don't think it sounds very nice, and if I don't like it you must give me a lump of sugar; in fact, I think I had better have one all ready in case it's horrid,' said Horatia, with pretended resignation.

'I can do better than that,' said Mr Howroyd, as, getting up from the table, he opened a cupboard and produced a long, flat box wrapped up in white paper. 'Now, if you don't like our Yorkshire mixture, you shall have one of these; but if you do like it you shall have the box.'

'Chocolates!' cried Horatia, opening the box. Then she took a spoonful of apple-tart, put a square piece of cheese in the middle of it, and ate it; but hastily took a chocolate out of the box, put it in her mouth, and said, 'Delicious!'

Both Sarah and her uncle laughed at Horatia's way out of the difficulty. 'You didn't like it a bit. I saw by your face, so you don't deserve that box of chocolates,' said the former.

'Indeed, she does, and she shall have them if she will accept them!' protested Mr Howroyd.

So Horatia won her chocolates.

Mr Howroyd had telephoned to Balmoral to say that the girls were staying to lunch, and a message was sent back that the motor would be sent about an hour and a half after the lunch. So, when they had finished, William Howroyd led the way into the drawing-room, a big, old-fashioned room, and, drawing two chairs up to the large window, brought out all sorts of quaint, old things for Horatia to see.

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'Oh dear! I never saw anything like these things before; I can't possibly put them into my essay, because I can't describe them. It is a pity, because I really think I should get the prize. I'm sure no one else will see anything so interesting in her holidays,' cried Horatia, as she examined Mr Howroyd's family treasures with interest and reverence.

'I'm sure, I can't see what you find so interesting in these old things; every one has them,' said Sarah half-impatiently.

'Nay, lass, every one has not got a tree made of hair, nor a beautiful model of their church, a hundred years old, made of cork,' her uncle corrected her.

'They may not have exactly that; but they have things that belonged to their grandmothers,' declared Sarah. 'I know you have much grander things at home, Horatia, though you pretend to admire these so much,' she protested.

Horatia coloured a little; but it was not easy to offend her, and she said, with a little laugh, 'I'm not pretending at all; and I only said what was quite true, that I had never seen such things before.'

'Then you are simply laughing at us. You are only interested because we are like savages, with their trinkets and beads, which they think fine jewels,' said Sarah.

This time Horatia was really offended, but she did not say anything; and Mr Howroyd said quickly, 'I shall begin to think you are ill, Sarah, or sickening for a fever, and shall telephone to your mother to send for a doctor, if you talk such nonsense.—Now, Miss Horatia, come and see my greatest treasure of all; and he took her into an adjoining room, without asking Sarah to accompany them at all. By the time they had seen his greatest treasure, which was some wonderful needlework, the motor was announced, and the two girls got into it.

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'Now, I'm just going to time ourselves. We got home in seven minutes last time; do you think we could do it in five to-day?' inquired Horatia of Sarah.

'Certainly not. It's four miles from door to door. You'd no business to do it in seven minutes; and if you incite Tom to do it in five he'll get locked up, if he lives, and he'll well deserve it,' declared Mr Howroyd.

Tom Fox smiled grimly. He had known Mr Howroyd and Mr Howroyd had known him since he was a tiny boy, so he answered, 'You'll not live to see me locked up, Mr Howroyd—not for furious driving in the public road; though I'll not deny that I did put on speed the day missie speaks of, going through the park.'

'Oh, well, if you choose to risk your necks in that wretched car, you must. For my part, there's nothing like a dogcart with a good trotting horse; that's fast enough for me; but then I'm fifty years behind the times, I know. Well, off you go. Good-bye; and come and see me again, and have some more cheese to your tart,' he added, with a laugh and a twinkle of his eye, as he raised his hat to the two girls.

'I will if you'll give me chocolates to help it down,' said Horatia; and the car, with a hoot, sped away.

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'And we have done it in five minutes,' cried Horatia as they drew up at the front-door.

Mrs Clay met them in the hall, breathless. 'Mercy on us, Sarah, w'atever 'appened to the car or Tom? I'm sure my 'eart was in my mouth w'en I saw you comin' along the park. I ran all the way down the stairs, thinkin' I should never see you alive w'en I got to the bottom,' cried the poor woman.

'It's all my fault. I'm so sorry, Mrs Clay! I begged Fox to get home in five minutes, and I made the car go when we got to the park-gates,' said Horatia penitently, as she linked her arm coaxingly in little Mrs Clay's.

'My dear, don't you go for to do such a thing again,' said Mrs Clay, smiling with indulgence at the girl; 'but it's not you I'm blamin', but Tom Fox, who ought to know better than endanger two lives, let alone takin' notice o' a child like you, if you'll excuse my speakin' so freely.'

'You are very good not to scold me; but I do so enjoy going at a tremendous speed, and the motor does run so smoothly, much better than ours, and mother is too nervous to go fast,' explained Horatia.

'I should think not, an' I don't blame 'er. For my part, I 'old on every time I go in it if my 'usband isn't lookin', an' I'd rather by 'alf walk or take the pony-chaise than go in it; but I'll stop Fox playin' such tricks. W'atever would your ma 'ave said if she'd seen you, I can't think.'

They had gone upstairs by this time, and were walking along the corridor at the back of the house, which looked out on the back-yard, which was coach-yard and garage, and Mrs Clay had scarcely finished the above speech when they heard the angry voice of Mr Mark Clay in the yard below.

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'How dare you drive my car at that speed, with my daughter and the Duke of Arnedale's granddaughter in the car? Don't excuse yourself, but take yourself off this moment, and never show your face in Ousebank again, or I'll have you locked up, do you hear?' stormed Mr Clay at the chauffeur. But his speech was interspersed with stronger language than that.

Horatia dropped Mrs Clay's arm, and ran a little in front of her and Sarah, and both of them thought she was running to take refuge in her room from language to which she was not accustomed; but, on the contrary, she ran to the open window, and, leaning out of it, cried, 'Mr Clay, stop, please, and listen to me a moment.—Don't go, Tom Fox.'

At sight of Horatia, Mr Clay's face changed a little, and perhaps he felt a little shame at the language he knew she must have heard; but he was too angry to heed her. 'Excuse me, but this is my business, and my orders must be obeyed.—Get out of this, do you hear, Tom Fox?'

The man, white as a sheet, touched his hat, with a faint smile, to Horatia, and walked off.

'Tom Fox, stop!' said Horatia. 'Wait one moment. If you are really going I will go too, and you can come to the station with me.'

'Horatia!' cried Sarah; and, 'My dear!' echoed Mrs Clay.

Mr Clay looked up at the flushed, determined little face at the window. He was a dogged, self-willed man, and gave way to no one; but he knew when he had met his match. 'What does this mean, Miss Cunningham?' he asked grimly, while Tom Fox stood hesitating in the doorway, and the other servants stood in the background, wondering what would be the end of the scene.

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'It means that *I* drove the car at that break-neck speed, because I turned the high-speed gear, and Tom could not help himself, and he was too much of a man to tell tales of me.'

'You can stop, Tom.—As for you, my lass'—the millionaire paused—'you're a plucky un, you are! You ought to have Yorkshire blood in you, if you haven't,' he concluded, and walked into the house without another word.

'Thank you, miss,' said the chauffeur, as he took off his hat and stood bareheaded, looking up at Horatia.

'I'm sorry I got you into a row, Tom Fox,' she said, 'and I promise you I won't interfere with the motor any more without leave.' Then she withdrew her head.

'Oh, my dear, I don't believe you'd be afraid of anything,' said Mrs Clay, looking at her with admiration.

Horatia only laughed, and Sarah said nothing either.

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## CHAPTER X.

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### PLAIN SPEAKING CLEARS THE AIR.

'Your young lady's got a spirit,' said Sykes to Horatia's nurse, who was as popular below-stairs as her mistress was above, for it is a fact that 'Like mistress, like maid,' is a very true saying, and Miss Cunningham's old nurse behaved in the same kindly, tactful manner towards her fellow-servants that her mistress showed towards her.

But on this occasion Nanny, or Mrs Nancy, as the servants called her, gave way to her feelings, which had been much ruffled on this visit. 'If by spirit you mean she don't allow injustice to be done to a poor man, you're right; but I should like you to know that this isn't what we've been used to—not by no means. Why, our last visit was to Miss Horatia's grandpa, his Grace the Duke of Arnedale, and there we didn't have no scenes; I should say not, indeed! It's not considered good form; that's what they call it.'

'It's not a bad word, isn't that? You talk of a prize-fighter being in good form,' observed Sykes.

'Well, our prize-fighter was in good form to-night, and yet Miss Cunningham knocked him out in the first round,' interposed a young footman, who went in for being a wit.

'Don't you get into the habit of making free with young ladies' names, nor making jokes on them, young man,' said Mrs Nancy severely, as she took up the work which she had been doing in the shade at the back of the house, and went indoors.

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'Now, there's a funny thing; she's only a servant same as us, and yet she thinks herself our better

because her family's got blood. Well, ours has got money, and, for my part, give me good wages and plenty to eat, and blood be blowed!' remarked the young footman, who had been nettled at the reproof.

'No low talk here, please,' said Sykes with dignity as he rose to see about the wine for dinner.

Nanny went upstairs ostensibly to get her young lady's things out for dinner, although, as it was only three o'clock, it was rather early; but in reality she felt that Miss Horatia wanted one of her own people with her at this moment, so she knocked at her door, and found Horatia in the silver-fitted bathroom plunging her head into the marble basin.

'Miss Horatia, my dearie, what are you thinking about? This hot day it's enough to give you your death!' she cried.

'Oh Nanny, I was so hot, and my head does ache! I really couldn't help it,' exclaimed Horatia.

'You lie down on your bed, missie, and I'll lower the blinds and bathe your head with this spray. You've overdone yourself getting into such a taking with that wretched man,' said the old nurse soothingly, as she patted up the pillows for her charge and lowered the green sun-blinds.

'He wasn't a wretched man; he had nothing to do with it. I touched the high-speed gear, I tell you, and poor Tom Fox was as frightened as any one.'

'I wasn't speaking of him. I know he wasn't to blame. And I'm talking of some one else, as you very well know, whom there's no living in peace with; and I know what you're going to say, Miss Horatia—that he's our host, and my better, which he may be the first, but I don't know so much about his being the second, for my father wouldn't have demeaned himself by such language to any man, let alone before women. And as I'm speaking I may as well say it all out, which is that if the master and mistress had known what kind of place we were coming to they'd never have allowed it. And if I write and tell them'—

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'Tell them what, pray?' interrupted Horatia.

'What kind of a man Mr Clay is, which no one has a good word for him; and however you manage to keep him in good temper, Sykes says, he doesn't know,' wound up Nancy.

'I don't want to know what Sykes says; and if you can't talk of more agreeable things than that I'd rather you went away and left my headache to cure itself. I'm only tired after looking all the morning at machines turning round,' announced Horatia.

'And whatever you can find to please you in that passes me. Sykes says those woollen-mills are all one like another, and hot, dirty, greasy places!' declared Nancy.

'I believe you've fallen in love with Sykes,' said Horatia wickedly.

'Miss Horatia! Considering he's got a wife and family!' protested Nancy. But she quoted Sykes no more, which was just what Horatia wanted and expected.

'Now, Nanny, I'm quite all right, so you can get out my white muslin and blue ribbon,' she said.

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'Not that white muslin, miss! You've worn it three times, and it is so plain compared with Miss Clay's,' objected the woman.

'So am I, so it's no good my trying to dress like her, and it's no use your getting angry about it, and arguing, because you know she's beautiful and I'm plain. And what's funnier still, I don't envy her a bit—oh, I don't mean her wealth, but I mean her face and figure—for she isn't a bit happy, and she doesn't enjoy life, and I do most awfully.'

'Because you try to make other people enjoy it, and you know the way to win people's hearts. Why, the way you've won Mr Clay's'— Here Nancy paused.

'As Sykes says,' added Horatia slyly.

'Well, Miss Horatia, you will have your joke; and if I was going to say that it's no wonder, seeing that I have to sit at his right hand, as the place of honour, at the servants' hall dinner. And, oh, miss, if you did but see our table! Well, we live well at his Grace's; but here! You never saw such food—seven and eight courses we have, and fruit and wines. I'm sure I don't know how much they cost.'

'You'll be wanting to stay up here, Nanny; you will never be contented with our plain food after all these luxuries,' suggested Horatia.

Nancy gave a scornful sniff. 'I suppose that is a joke, Miss Horatia; but it's a poor one. For if it were this house or the Union I'd not hesitate between them.'

'Is that a joke, or do you expect me to believe you'd rather live in the workhouse than this place?' inquired Horatia.

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'It's no joke. Nothing would induce me to live here,' said Nancy.

'I wonder why,' said Horatia meditatively. It was just what Sarah said, she remembered.

'It's not half so wonderful as the way you seem to have taken to these people,' said Nancy; and then, feeling that she had gone too far, and that Horatia thought so, she changed the



conversation and spoke of the dirt of Ousebank, which actually was blown to Balmoral.

Then the gong rang, and Horatia, cheery and smiling as ever, went tripping down the grand staircase to the drawing-room to meet Mrs Clay and Sarah. This evening, rather to her surprise, Mr Clay was there, having departed from his usual habit of going straight to the dining-room and sitting down at the table before the ladies appeared. He came forward with a *gauche* gallantry, and offered his arm to Horatia. 'Come, little lass, I hear you lunched at Howroyd's and went over his mill to-day. Couldn't you have waited one day more?'

'He didn't want us to,' said Horatia, taking the millionaire's arm with a simple grace, as if it was quite an ordinary thing for her to go in to dinner in this style, instead of its being the first time.

'I dare say not. Howroyd was only too proud to get you there. I'm talking of my mills, which you could have seen just by waiting a day,' explained Mr Clay.

'Oh, but I am going to see your mills too. I'll come to-morrow if you will let us. Of course they will be much grander than Mr Howroyd's, so it was better to see his first and keep the best to the last.'

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'Oh ay, our stuff's much grander. We make finer cloth than Howroyd's, and turn out ten times as much, I'll warrant,' said Mr Clay, with his boastful laugh.

'I think, my dear, you'd better leave a day between. You can't spend all these fine days in factories. You look tired out, an' Sarah too, trapezing up and down greasy, slippery stairs,' protested Mrs Clay.

'The wife's right, and I'd as soon you waited a few days. I don't know that I want visitors in my mills for a day or so,' chimed in the millionaire.

Sarah looked searchingly at her father, and did not seem to like what she saw in his face, for she turned away with a frown. Mrs Clay evidently did not see anything except that her husband upheld her opinion, and was kind to her, as he had been ever since Horatia had come to Balmoral.

'Why don't you want visitors, father?' inquired Sarah.

'Because I don't,' said her father shortly.

'I dare say you often don't; in fact, I shouldn't wonder if you would rather visitors never came, because they must interrupt work dreadfully,' said Horatia.

'Well, they do interrupt,' agreed the millionaire, glad to find an excuse, 'and we're just at a busy time for a special Colonial order; but I'll get you a day when everything is going smoothly.'

'But Uncle Howroyd is just as busy, and everything goes smoothly there.—Doesn't it, Horatia?—And he found time to take us round; he said it was doing his work all right, because he made a round of the mill every day, and he might as well take us with him as go alone, as it made it more agreeable.'

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Mr Clay gave a scornful laugh. 'I'd like to see myself go the round of all my mills daily! Why, I'd pretty soon be done for. It's easy enough in a paltry place like Howroyd's; and as for him, he spoils his people, and spoils other people's too.' And his face grew dark.

Horatia felt dimly that Sarah was treading on dangerous ground, and that something was annoying her host, so she turned to Mrs Clay and said, 'Sarah says I am to choose what we do every day, so may I choose to go and fish in the Adder?'

'Why, certainly, my dear; not that you'll find any fish there; but if it amuses you, go by all means.'

'Don't you worry about an amusement for to-morrow. I've planned one for you,' said Mr Clay.

'Oh, what is it?' cried Horatia, eager as usual for novelty.

'If she wants to fish, why shouldn't she?' objected Sarah, who had no faith in her father's choice of a day's entertainment.

'But I don't want to fish if there are no fish to catch. There's nothing duller than sitting all day and catching nothing,' put in Horatia. 'What's your plan, Mr Clay?'

'You wait till to-morrow morning, and you'll see,' he replied as they rose from the table.

'It'll be something horrid, you'll see,' said Sarah after they had left the dining-room.

'Why should it be something horrid?' inquired Horatia rather sharply.

'Because my father has not the least idea what kind of thing will please you,' retorted Sarah.

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'How do you know that?' demanded Horatia.

'Because he is far too ignorant,' said Sarah.

'You are not very respectful to your own father,' said Horatia rather coldly, 'and I think that's rather ignorant.'

'Why don't you say we're all ignorant and vulgar? You know you think it in your heart,' burst out

Sarah.

Horatia looked at Sarah for a minute. 'Would you like me to say what I really think?' she inquired.

'Yes, I would; I'd rather you said it than pretend to be enjoying everything and being at home, when you despise us all in your heart. You showed it this afternoon, and I know what you think of my father and mother and uncle, and all of us, although you are too much of a lady to say so. Oh yes; I can see your mouth curling with contempt. I know you are a lady and I am not,' said Sarah, and then stopped, breathless from her tirade.

Horatia looked at her steadily. 'You are quite wrong about one thing. I am enjoying myself immensely,' she began.

But Sarah interrupted her. 'Of course you are, because you make fun of everything and everybody, and you will go away home and make fun of us here as vulgar parvenus.'

'How dare you accuse me of such mean behaviour? You want to hear the truth, and you shall, Sarah. There is one person who is vulgar here, and that is yourself, and you are the only one. I am sorry I ever came to Balmoral just for that reason, because I used to like you so much at school, and be so proud that you liked me best—you seemed so superior to the other girls; but here you have quite changed and become despicable.'

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'Because you have seen my parents, that is all,' said Sarah.

'No; it is not for any such reason. I like your parents very much, and I think your father is a wonderful man to have made such a position for himself without any school education; and I love your mother, and I can't see anything vulgar in them. Vulgarly, mother says, is pretending to be what you are not. Education has nothing to do with vulgarity in its bad sense.'

'I don't believe that. Do you mean to say that you thought my father's behaviour refined this afternoon?' inquired Sarah, speaking slowly.

'It was very natural. It would have been vulgar of my father; but Mr Clay is different. I can't explain very well; but if mother were here she would be able to do it. I don't want to discuss your parents; I'm sorry for you if you can't respect them. And, please, I'd rather you didn't say so to me. But I think there's nothing quite so contemptible as being ashamed of one's family. Why, I believe you are even ashamed of your uncle Howroyd, and I think he's the most splendid man I ever saw, and I am glad we met him this morning, for I verily believe you didn't mean to introduce me to him, and I should have been angry if I had missed seeing him and his mill.'

Sarah did not make any reply, but said, 'Good-night, Horatia,' and turned to go.

In a moment Horatia's arms were round her. 'Oh Sarah! don't be angry and horrid, and don't mind what I said. Forget it all.'

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Sarah turned with wet eyes. 'I dare say you're right, and I am horrid and contemptible; but you don't understand,' she said.

'Yes I do, a little; but why should you think so much about education and titles and things? They don't really matter, or make you happy; and papa says they're going quite out of fashion,' said Horatia, with a merry laugh, as she gave Sarah a final goodnight hug.

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## CHAPTER XI.

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### HORATIA SPEAKS OUT.

One thing Sarah had learnt from Horatia, and that was to be outwardly respectful to her father, whatever she might inwardly feel towards him. It is true, she had been told the same thing by her mother and brother; but one word from her schoolfellow had had more effect than all her brother's arguments or her mother's scoldings.

The next morning dawned cold and rainy; and Sarah was surprised to find that for once the bad weather did not depress her, and the prospect of a day in the house, which she generally dreaded, rather pleased her than otherwise. The fact was that Sarah was glad her father's plans for the day were put an end to. 'He's sure to have thought of something quite unsuitable, that Horatia would not like,' she said to herself.

'Isn't this horrid, Sarah?' cried Horatia when the two met at breakfast, and the rain was falling faster.

'It's a bore; but I dare say we can find something to do,' said Sarah, after looking out of the window and seeing no prospect of better weather.

'It 'as turned quite cold; one might think it was autumn,' complained Mrs Clay, rubbing her hands. 'That's the worst o' our climate, never two days alike. I'm sure I'm starved in this dress; an' so must you be, my dear,' she added to Horatia. 'Starved' is Yorkshire for 'cold.'

'I'm dreadfully sorry,' said Horatia, who was always in extremes of joy or sorrow; 'because of Mr

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Clay's lovely plan, which can't come off now.'

'What was it?' demanded Sarah, who imagined from her way of speaking that Horatia knew and liked the plan.

'I don't in the least know; but I'm quite sure it would have been lovely, and now we can't do it,' she replied.

'I'm not so sure about that,' remarked Mrs Clay.

'Oh, what is it? Do tell me!' cried Horatia.

'I don't think Mr Clay would like me to; but I think 'e'll be in by the time you've 'ad your breakfast, an' before it, if you go on as you're doin', my dear, not eatin' anythin',' she put in; for Horatia, in her excitement, had put down her knife and fork, and was letting her breakfast get cold while she questioned her hostess.

'Hasn't father gone to the mill?' asked Sarah.

'No; 'e's busy over this plan,' replied his wife, smiling at Horatia, and adding, 'It's not often 'e breaks 'is 'abit of goin' to the mill by nine o'clock, for all 'e's so rich, so you must take that as a compliment, my dear.'

'I do. I think it's most awfully kind of him, and I'm simply dying to know what his plan is,' cried Horatia.

'You look anything but dying,' said Sarah, with a glance at Horatia's bright, eager face.

'If you please, ma'am, the master has sent word that he'd be glad if the young ladies would come to the barn as soon as they've finished breakfast,' announced Sykes.

Both girls looked in surprise at this request—which, however, they both prepared to carry out; and Sarah remarked that Sykes looked quite excited for him.

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'It's the plan! What on earth can it be, Sarah? What kind of place is the barn?'

'A huge, ugly, dark, long room,' said Sarah in disgust, for the barn was the last place to amuse one's self in.

'Oh, then, your father is having a magic-lantern show for us. Well, it's very kind of him,' said Horatia in rather disappointed tones, for she was not fond of a magic-lantern.

'We'd better drive there; it will be wet across the grass. Put on your 'ats an' take wraps wi' you in case you get 'ot, for the barn may be draughty,' said Mrs Clay.

'Are you coming, mother?'

'Yes, my dear, if you don't mind. I sha'n't interfere wi' your pleasure, an' I'd like to see the magic-lantern, too,' said Mrs. Clay quite gaily for her.

'Of course, come along. Perhaps Nancy might come too; she'd like to see it.'

'If she goes, Naomi might as well go too; it's absurd to have a magic-lantern for three people,' said Sarah.

Mrs Clay said no more, but put on the cloak her maid brought her, and sat there smiling, in what Sarah considered rather an aggravating way, till the large motor which was to take them all to the barn drove up to the door.

Two minutes brought them to the barn-door.

'Why, there's a band!' cried Horatia; 'or is it a gramophone?'

The door flew open as if by magic when they appeared, and even Sarah gave a cry of admiration as Horatia, clapping her hands, exclaimed, 'Why, it's a rink!—a lovely rink!'

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'It is,' said Sarah, and said no more.

'It's better than a magic-lantern, isn't it, my dear?' inquired Mrs Clay with a happy smile.

'Oh Mr. Clay, you are good!' cried Horatia, as she laid her little hand in his huge, rough one.

The millionaire held it for a moment as he said, 'That's all right. You're more than welcome, my little lass. Now, let's see you play this new-fangled game.'

'But how did you do it? When was it done? You must have had it done since I spoke two days ago,' declared Horatia.

'How did I do it? I did it by turning a golden key, my lass. There's few things that that can't do,' he replied with a rough laugh.

'I should never have imagined that the barn could have been made so pretty and artistic. It was very clever of you to think of it, father,' said Sarah.

The millionaire looked pleased. Perhaps these few words of his proud daughter gave him more satisfaction than all Horatia's delighted thanks, for Sarah was hard to please, and her father

always felt that she secretly, and sometimes openly, despised him; but he only said, 'You didn't think your rough, old father knew what dainty young ladies like you and Miss Horatia would like, did you?'

Sarah coloured, for this was exactly what she had thought; but she replied, 'Then I was mistaken, for it is just the thing for this nasty, cold weather.—Isn't it, Horatia?'

'Yes; but my roller-skates! I have left them at home. I never thought I should get skating up here,' said Horatia suddenly, and her face fell.

'You can have mine. I'll send to the house for them, and we can get a pair in Ousebank for me,' said Sarah.

'I think we can manage that,' said the millionaire, as he made a sign to the footman, who brought two beautiful pairs of roller-skates, and prepared to put them on.

'It's just like Cinderella or a fairy pantomime,' cried Horatia, as she started skimming along the smooth floor.

'My!' cried Naomi to Nancy. 'However can they keep on their feet with they wheels under their boots?'

'It's habit. Miss Horatia's very fond of the pastime,' replied the nurse, as she followed her charge with admiring gaze.

But in a moment Sarah joined Horatia, and then the relations between Nancy and Naomi became strained, for if Horatia rinked well, Sarah rinked much better.

'Oh, ain't she beautiful on they things? Why, it's like a bird, is that,' cried Naomi. 'It's a pastime where you want a good figger.'

'For my part, I like well-made, strong-built figures more than such thin ones,' said Nancy.

'If you'd be calling Miss Sarah thin, I'd have you to know she's not. Her arms are beautiful and round, and so is she, and it's the grapes that are sour, Mrs. Nancy,' retorted Naomi.

Mrs. Nancy did not deign even to notice this remark with a look, but with a slow and dignified step walked over to where Sykes stood watching the two girls with grave, approving face; and Naomi, who was only a young servant, did not presume to join these two, and wished she'd kept her tongue still.



'Ask the band to play "La Rinka," Sarah,' cried Horatia.  
S.S.F.

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'Ask the band to play "La Rinka," Sarah,' cried Horatia, 'and we'll go round together and dance it.'

The band, a local one, struck up 'La Rinka,' and even Mr Clay exclaimed, 'That's something to look at, Polly, ain't it? There ought to be some folk asked to see 'em do it.'

At that moment Horatia and Sarah, still with linked hands, skated up to them, and Sarah said, 'Horatia wishes we could have a skating-party this afternoon. It sounds rather absurd in August; but really the weather is more like November, so I dare say people will like to come.'

'They'll come right enough if I ask 'em to Balmoral,' said Mr Clay, with his usual laugh. 'There's not many refuses my invitations.'

Sarah felt her lip curl; but the thought of Horatia checked her. She gave her a quick look to see if she, too, was disgusted at this boasting, and felt almost cross with her schoolfellow when, with a bright smile, she answered, 'Then do ask them, Mr. Clay. I don't wonder that your invitations are

popular; you do have such good ideas for entertaining your guests. When could we have them? To-morrow?'

'You'd better have them to-day. Who knows but to-morrow may be summer again, and then it'll be too hot for rinking. We'll just 'phone up a hundred or so.'

'A hundred?' gasped Horatia, as she thought of the preparation a party of that kind would require at her own home.

'Oh, they won't all be able to come, but half will; and mother'll give orders for the spread. And now I must be off. Good-bye, and enjoy yourselves.' And the millionaire, with a brusque nod, was off. [Pg 106]

Mrs Clay soon followed him, and the girls skated for another hour, and then decided to stop, so as not to be tired for the afternoon.

'Well, mother, have you got victuals for seventy or so?' inquired Mark Clay when they all met at lunch.

'Yes, Mark, the *chef* is seein' to all that, an' 'e is sure to 'ave everythin' to do you credit.'

'That's right. I've ordered the Ousebank band up, and I met Bill down town, and asked him up. He says he can't rink, but he supposes you'll want some to admire you, so he's coming to do that part. He's a great admirer of Miss Horatia already, it appears.'

'I like him most awfully, and everybody else seems to, too. All the people in his mill do, anyhow; they all looked glad to see him when he went into their part.'

Mark Clay scowled. 'Ay, it's cheap popularity, is Bill Howroyd's; but it's bad policy and bad business. If you let sentiment come into your business you pretty soon have no business left for it to come into.'

No one made any comment upon these remarks, and the millionaire went on in his harsh, dictatorial tones: 'Business is business, say I, and you've got to keep your people under. I'm not making blankets and cloth to please them, nor from philanthropy. I'm doing it to make money, and the man that can make the most money for me I keep, and the one that doesn't make enough goes, and the sooner the better.' And he gave another laugh.

Mark Clay had been eating between his sentences, and had his eyes upon his plate, or he would have noticed Horatia's face. He gave a start of surprise when she said, with indignation in her voice, 'What a horrid, hard-hearted way to talk! I think Mr Howroyd's way is ten thousand times better.' [Pg 107]

Poor little Mrs Clay trembled, and even Sarah grew pale at the thought of the storm Horatia had brought down upon her devoted head.

Mark Clay stared at this girl who presumed to call him horrid and hard-hearted, and to hold up as an example his bugbear and opponent, Bill Howroyd. Horatia returned his look with a perfectly fearless one. 'So you prefer Bill Howroyd's way? Perhaps you prefer his home to mine? He'll never build himself a Balmoral,' said the millionaire with a sneer.

'No; but he'll have a mansion up in heaven, and perhaps that's what he's thinking of,' said Horatia.

Sarah looked at Horatia in amazement, and Mrs Clay looked anxiously at her husband, as if imploring him not to be hard on this daring child; but Mark Clay was not taking any notice of any one, not even of Sykes, who, to divert his attention from this dangerous conversation, was pressing some delicacy upon his master, who was staring moodily in front of him.

Horatia had little idea that she had quoted his mother—William Howroyd's mother's last words to her sons, for they had had the same mother, though their fathers had been very different: 'I've been very happy here; but I am going to a better mansion up in heaven. Be sure and join me there, lads,' she had said.

'Ay, there's something in what you've said, my lass,' observed the millionaire after a pause, which seemed an eternity to those who were present. 'There's sommat in it.' And without another word he rose from the table. [Pg 108]

'Oh Mrs Clay, what have I done? I'd no business to speak to Mr Clay like that. I don't know what made me,' said Horatia, rather ashamed of her plain speaking.

'I think the Almighty made you, my dear; an' may He bless you for 'avin' done so, an' bless the words to my dear 'usband,' said his faithful wife. And she, too, left the room.

'I'd no idea you were religious,' said Sarah to Horatia when they were alone.

'Do you mean you thought I was a heathen?' demanded Horatia with a laugh.

'No; but I never heard you talk like that before,' said Sarah, who could not get over her surprise at the way Horatia had come out. Truth to tell, Sarah had an idea that to talk religion was not good form.

'I never heard myself,' laughed Horatia.

## A RINKING-PARTY.

In spite of Horatia's laugh and her attempt to be as cheerful as ever, depression seemed to have fallen on every one, and Sarah looked the picture of melancholy.

'We'd better go and get ready for our rink-party. I expect everybody will be thankful to have something to do this horrid weather. Not that I mean that they will have accepted your invitation for that reason,' Horatia added hastily.

'Oh, they come because we're rich, of course,' said Sarah; and then she suddenly added, as if it were weighing on her mind, 'I wonder how many would come if we were to lose all our money. Would you, Horatia?'

'Thank you for the compliment. No, I don't think I should; but I should not stay away because you were poor, but because you are not what I thought you were—your character, I mean,' said Horatia, who could speak her mind at times, as will have been noticed.

'You would be the exception if you did stick to us. I expect Uncle Howroyd will, and Naomi, and she will have to be our general servant,' continued Sarah.

Horatia gazed at her in amazement. 'What in the world are you talking about? How are you going to get poor? Oh,' as a thought struck her, 'is there anything the matter? Do you know, to-day I thought there was. Tell me, is there? Because, if so, I don't mean what I said. Of course I will come and see you, and help to cook, too. I can make toffee.'

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But instead of answering, Sarah demanded, 'Why did you think there was something the matter to-day of all days, when father has just shown you how much money he can spend merely for a few hours' amusement? What made you think anything was wrong?'

'I don't really know, now that I come to think of it. I don't think I had any reason; it was an idea that came to me while your father was talking at lunch,' replied Horatia, hesitating.

'It must have been intuition,' said Sarah solemnly.

Horatia was not only a year younger than her schoolfellow, but she was far less fond of study, and she said frankly, 'What's intuition? I know what tuition is, because my brother has it—private tuition from his tutor; but what you mean I can't think, and I do wish you'd speak out plainly and tell me if you are in any trouble about money; because, you know, you need not go spending it on me. I'm quite content to play battledore and shuttlecock in the hall, and I didn't want a rink, really.'

Sarah interrupted her with a smile. 'You need not mind father spending money like that; he's got more than he knows what to do with at present,' she said.

'But if he won't have any by-and-by, why don't you save it up for then?' inquired Horatia.

'He thinks he will always be a millionaire, and so did I till the other day; and then the idea came into my head, just as it came into yours—I can't tell how or why—that there was something the matter, or that there was going to be something the matter, and that one day we should not be so rich. But, Horatia, please don't ever say such a thing to anybody; it would do us great harm, even if it were quite untrue, and perhaps make it come true. And, after all, it may be only my imagination.'

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Horatia looked very grave. 'But, Sarah, if there is any chance of such a thing, why don't you begin to save up?' she repeated.

'But, don't you see? if the mill failed we should have to give up every penny we had, however much we had saved. But, of course, you don't understand these things, and the more I think of it the more impossible it seems. Clay's Mills are as prosperous as ever. Do let's forget about it. Not that I should mind for myself, but I should be sorry for mother, because she likes having lots of money and motors, though she is afraid to go out in them, so let us hope she will live and die in this hateful house.'

Horatia did not argue with Sarah as to whether the house was hateful or not. She rather liked it, for she was too young to perceive that it was overladen with costly ornaments, and she revelled in the royal rooms in which she was installed, and of which she had written long and graphic descriptions home. 'Let us hope so, indeed,' was all she said; and added, 'But do leave off talking about miserable things and get ready for this party. What ought I to wear? One ought to have winter things for skating, but I haven't any best winter dress here.'

'Why not wear your white flannel? And, if you don't mind, I'll lend you a white feather hat and boa. I have never worn them, and I have heaps of other things to wear; mother has a mania for buying me clothes, and I have a wardrobeful never touched.'

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Horatia was just going to refuse, for she preferred wearing her own clothes; but she thought it might please Sarah, so she accepted, and went to her bedroom with them on. 'I've got a new hat and boa, Nanny,' she announced.

Mrs Nancy looked at them, and cried, 'How well they suit you, Miss Horatia! The mistress ought to get you some like them;' for she guessed at once they were Sarah's.

'I'm going to wear them this afternoon,' replied Horatia.

'Wear Miss Clay's hat! Oh Miss Horatia! you can never do such a thing,' protested the old nurse.

'Why not?' inquired Horatia, as she pirouetted before the cheval-glass, admiring the pretty feather toque. 'It's the very thing for rinking, and so is this boa. Look how queerly it is made, with chiffon twined in; that's what makes it so becoming. Clothes make a lot of difference, Nanny. I don't look half so ugly with these on.'

'You never look ugly, Miss Horatia, and you look "distanty" whatever you put on, so there's no need for you to put on other folk's clothes to look nice; the mistress wouldn't like it at all, I'm sure,' said Nancy.

'I don't think she'd mind, Nanny, and I should vex Sarah if I refused, and that's just what I don't want to do,' said Horatia.

'Well, they do suit you, and if you've a fancy for them, and to please Miss Clay, perhaps you'd better; specially if she's got a temper anything like her father's, for they say he's fairly hated at the mills,' said Nancy. [Pg 113]

Nancy did not like Mr Clay, and not all his wealth could make her think him a fit host for her young lady; and, indeed, after his explosion in the back-yard she had taken it upon herself to write to Lady Grace Cunningham, and said: 'I feel sure, my lady, that if you knew the people we are with, you would never let us stay; for not but what this is a palace fit for a king, and we eat like fighting-cocks. Still, they are not what I've been used to since I've been in your service, and his language is shocking, except when in Miss Horatia's presence, which she has a wonderful influence over him, every one says.' In spite of the grammar of this letter being somewhat involved, Nancy's meaning and opinions were pretty clear, and Lady Grace Cunningham took it to her husband, who had a character rather like Horatia's.

'Let the child stay where she is; it will do her all the good in the world, as, you see, she is evidently doing good—taming this boor, by all accounts. Nancy is a rank old Tory, and turns up her nose at any one not born in the purple. Times have changed, as Nancy will find out one day.'

So Lady Grace Cunningham did not recall them, but only wrote and told Horatia that she must shorten her visit if she was not happy.

'I'm enjoying myself immensely. I never met kinder people,' Horatia wrote back. And so she stayed on; and as Nancy was living, as she expressed it, like a fighting-cock, she resigned herself very contentedly to her lot, as she resigned herself to Horatia's wearing Sarah's clothes.

Horatia, with very mingled feelings, went down to the motor which was to take them to the barn. She wondered what kind of people would be there. She had an idea that, as the invitations were issued by Mr Clay, they would be his friends or people of his choice, and Horatia looked forward to an afternoon with a very rough and unrefined set of people. [Pg 114]

Sarah wore the daintiest of costumes, just the right thing for the day and pastime, for Sarah, if left to herself, had very good taste.

'What a lot of motors, Sarah! Does every one have one here?' inquired Horatia, as she saw a number of cars coming up the three avenues which led to Balmoral.

'Most people do,' said Sarah carelessly; 'and they'll use them to-day sooner than their horses because of the bad weather, and some have come a good distance.'

Tom Fox put on speed so as to arrive at the barn before the first of the guests, which would not have been hospitable according to Yorkshire ideas; and the two girls, accompanied by Mrs Clay, had alighted, and were standing inside the door ready to receive the first guests; or, rather, Sarah and her mother were there, for Horatia had gone away under the pretext of putting on her roller-skates, and had her back to the door. The nearer the time came the less she liked the idea of this rinking-party, for though she managed to get on with Mr Clay, she felt that seventy people of that kind would be more than she could bear.

'Well, Miss Horatia, what will you touch with your fairy wand next, eh? I shall expect my old mill parlour to be turned into Aladdin's palace after your next visit,' cried a cheery, brisk voice. [Pg 115]

Horatia turned with delight to greet Mr Howroyd. 'I'm so glad you have come!' she said, with more feeling than she had any idea of.

Mr William Howroyd's keen, kindly eyes gave her a quick glance, and his sympathetic nature jumped at the right conclusion. 'Yes, I'm here; and now, as I can't skate, and you don't know any one here yet, suppose we go to those raised seats there; we shall hear the band, and, I can tell you, our Ousebank band is not to be despised, and we shall see the people rinking, and if you see any one you particularly want to know we'll go down and ask Sarah to introduce her. I don't suppose I shall know half the people here. I'm not a society man, you know.'

The first to arrive were two tall girls and their brother, very pleasant-looking and lady-like; and after them, people came so fast that Horatia could not look closely at them all; but she noticed that they were all well dressed and looked ladies and gentlemen. 'But, then, dress makes a lot of

difference,' she repeated to herself for the second time that afternoon.

'Hallo, Horatia!' cried a boy's voice in her ear; and, turning, Horatia saw her cousin, once removed, George Cunningham, grinning at her.

'Oh George, how on earth did you get here?' she demanded, beaming with delight.

'In the Maddoxes' car, to be sure. Didn't you know I was staying there?'

'I knew you were staying somewhere in Yorkshire, but I didn't know it was near here,' she replied.

'As a matter of fact, it isn't so very near; but we came over in an hour, in spite of the beastly roads. But, I say, it's a jolly good idea of yours this,' he observed. [Pg 116]

'Of mine? What do you mean? This isn't my party; it's Mr Clay's and Mrs and Miss Clay's idea—this rink, I mean.'

'Oh, well, he called it Miss Horatia Cunningham's party. That's what made us come. I wanted to see you, and see how you get on with these people. But I'm jolly glad I came. The old buffer does it in style.'

'This is Mr Howroyd, Mr Clay's brother,' said Horatia hastily, to warn her cousin that he must be careful what he said; but when she turned to introduce her cousin to him, Mr William Howroyd had disappeared. He had slipped away as soon as he saw that Horatia had a congenial companion. That was William Howroyd's invariable way, always doing kindly, unobtrusive acts, and then effacing himself.

George Cunningham gave a hearty laugh. 'The bird has flown,' he said.

'And a good thing, too. Suppose he had heard his brother called an "old buffer"?' said Horatia reprovingly.

'He's heard him called much worse than that, by all accounts. Your host isn't too popular, for all his money.'

'Well, anyway, it's horrid of you to come and eat his food, and then criticise him,' said Horatia.

'Begging your pardon, I haven't eaten anything yet; and talking of grub, what do you say to coming and having some? There's a splendid spread behind that glass screen,' he said.

'It's much too early. Don't be so greedy, but come and rink before it gets too full,' said Horatia; and the two went off. [Pg 117]

When they had made several rounds, Horatia stopped near the two tall girls who had come in first, and they immediately complimented her on her rinking. 'You rink as if you thought no one was looking at you,' they told her.

Horatia laughed. 'How should one rink when people *are* looking? In a different way?' she asked.

'No, one shouldn't; only most people look a little self-conscious,' they replied.

Horatia noticed the slight Yorkshire intonation which she thought so musical, and was inclined to laugh at her former fears, for there were no 'Mark Clays' at the party, and she soon heard many familiar names mentioned as being present.

One of the Maddox party eventually asked her to have an ice. 'Come and sit in this alcove place, and I'll fetch you one,' he suggested.

Horatia was tired, for she had already rinked for some time in the morning, and she sat back in the alcove, half-hidden from sight.

'I always wonder how many more entertainments Mark Clay will hold out for?' said a voice quite near her.

'Why, is he shaky?' inquired another.

'Not that I know of; but these fortunes made in a day, so to speak, generally melt away in the same way.'

'I understood he was a solid man,' said the second speaker.

'So he is—so he is, for aught I know. I only know that we all have that feeling about him. Perhaps the wish is father to the thought, for he's none too popular.' [Pg 118]

'Still, you need not wish him to be ruined, even if you don't like him. I suppose he does some good with his money? These rich Yorkshire manufacturers are most generous as a rule,' said the other, evidently a stranger.

'He's an exception. His half-brother, Howroyd, gives twice as much, with not a quarter his money. Pity he's not the millionaire, now. He's beloved far and near.'

'What's wrong with Clay? This is a generous entertainment, for instance.'

'Oh yes, he'll do this to show off; but he's an awful brute to his workpeople—grinds them down



and shows no mercy to weak or worn-out employés.'

'Here, Horatia, I've got the ice,' said young Maddox.

'Thank you. I'm glad we're not millionaires, Jack. People only hate you for it,' she remarked.

'Do they? I'd chance that if I could be one. Look what this man can do? Anything he likes! Make a rink in a day! Come on and have a turn,' said young Maddox, to whom this particular example of the power of wealth naturally appealed.

Horatia was unusually quiet, for her, that afternoon, and the moment Mr Clay appeared at the door she started up to him to tell him how much they were enjoying themselves, for she wished to show him attention, and to show him, too, that she had not meant to criticise him that afternoon.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

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### HORATIA'S INFLUENCE.

The millionaire did not look very prepossessing as he stood near the door, his tall, powerful form towering above the young skaters; his coarse, red face darkened by a scowl.

'There's an ugly-looking brute just come into the rink,' young George Cunningham had said to Horatia, who had replied, 'That's Mr Mark Clay,' and had made straight for her host, dodging the skaters very cleverly.

Sarah, on the other hand, who had been near the door when her father appeared, gave one glance at his ill-tempered face, and skated in the opposite direction. She thought that he had not seen her. Not that it would have made any difference, for his family were wont to avoid their head when he was what his wife called 'put out about something'—which, alas! was only too frequently the case.

Not so Horatia. She saw the danger-signals, but was no more afraid of him than she would have been of a fly, to use her own expression. 'We are enjoying ourselves so much! It was a brilliant idea of yours,' she said, beaming at him and giving his arm an approving pat.

Mark Clay looked down at the eager little, freckled face, with its snub-nose; and, in spite of himself, he smiled back at her. 'I'm glad you are enjoying yourself. I did it for that. You must come and spend your winter holiday with us. It'll be a more seasonable pastime then, it seems to me,' he replied.

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'But are you going to keep this as a rink? I thought you used it as a barn in the autumn and winter?' inquired Horatia.

'We can build another,' he replied lightly, as if building another huge barn was the work of a few hours. 'Come, let's see you go round.'

Horatia accordingly started off, and Mark Clay followed her with approving eyes.

'She's a nice, dear girl, isn't she, Mark?' said his wife, emboldened by her husband's softer expression to approach him.

'She is that,' he replied with emphasis.

'The man seems fond of his daughter. I heard he was as harsh at home as he is abroad; but I see he has been maligned,' said a visitor, who did not know Sarah.

'That is not his daughter, I am sure, for they say she is the prettiest girl in Ousebank,' replied a friend.

'Well, that is a very nice, bright-looking girl, and a millionaire's daughter is always pretty in the eyes of the world; gold makes most things beautiful,' replied the lady; and she had hardly uttered the words when Sarah herself, noticing that the two were strangers, and had not had refreshments, came up to them.

'Won't you come and have some tea?' she asked in her dignified and rather stiff way.

'Thank you; it would be nice. Are you Miss Clay, then?' inquired the lady, who recognised that she was speaking to the prettiest girl present, at all events.

'Yes,' said Sarah gravely.

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'We thought the young lady laughing and talking to Mr Clay must be his daughter; they seemed so friendly,' observed the stranger, as she and her friend skirted the barn to get to the refreshment-tables.

Sarah could not help colouring slightly. 'No; she is only a schoolfellow who is staying with us,' she replied; and the lady thought she had never met with such an unapproachable girl, and wondered whether it was shyness or pride. She had no idea that she was touching on a sore point.

When the party was over and the last motor had disappeared down the long avenue, Horatia gave a little sigh of relief. 'I am glad they have gone. I couldn't have skated another minute,' she said.

'You needn't have gone as long as you did. Why didn't you stop?' demanded Sarah with uplifted brows. 'I was wondering at you; you scarcely rested at all. I'm not a bit tired, because I rested at intervals.'

'I simply can't stop when I see other people. I must rink too,' she declared.

There was a glorious sunset, and Tom Fox prophesied a fine day on the morrow.

'So it will be too hot to rink then, and it's just as well, as you have such a mania for it that you wear yourself out,' observed Sarah.

'Yes, my dear, you 'ave such dark circles round your eyes! I don't know w'at her ladyship would say if she could see you just now lookin' so tired,' added Mrs Clay.

'She would say I was a foolish girl, as she did last time I came from the rink dead-tired. I expect it's like taking to drink,' said Horatia, and she gave a merry laugh.

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Mr Clay smiled at her. He was very quiet; but he had lost the scowl he had when he arrived at the barn, for which his wife was very thankful.

'To-morrow I am going over your mills, you know, Mr Clay,' she informed him.

He opened his mouth as if to protest, but only said, 'You'll be too tired; better rest a few days. You shall go over the mills before you go home. Not that there is anything so very wonderful to see, or to interest a young lady like you.'

'I haven't half-written my essay yet; I expect I shall find some more to put in after I've been round with you,' explained Horatia.

'Don't you go putting me and my mills into print,' said the millionaire, looking almost afraid.

Horatia only laughed merrily as ever. 'I'll let you read my essay before I send it up. Yes!—clapping her hands—that's an awfully good idea. You shall read it through, and tell me anything I have left out; and you shall sign at the end, "Audited and found correct.—Mark Clay, millionaire mill-owner."'

It was impossible not to laugh at the girl, and equally impossible to be gloomy while Horatia was bubbling over with good spirits. The drooping line round Mrs Clay's mouth had almost disappeared since Horatia's advent.

During this drive even, Horatia had managed to chase away Mr Clay's ill-humour, and his wife leant back comfortably, with a feeling that she need not fear any storms, as the dear young lady would 'keep things pleasant.'

When they got out of the motor and were going together to their rooms, Horatia took Sarah's arm and began dancing along the polished surface with a rinking movement. 'I thought you said you were tired out, and I thought, too, that the rink was specially built to prevent you from rinking here,' observed the latter, who was trying, with some difficulty, to keep her balance and her dignity during this peculiar mode of progress.

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'So I did. I must stop,' agreed Horatia.

'You said I had changed, and that you did not know me before you came here. And I certainly did not know you,' remarked Sarah abruptly.

'How am I changed? I feel just the same,' said Horatia, stopping short and facing Sarah. 'Didn't I always laugh and make jokes at school? Where's the difference?'

Sarah did not reply directly, for it was difficult to explain what she meant. 'I did not say you were changed. I said I did not know you, and I don't now. Why are you so nice to my father?' she suddenly demanded.

'I've a good mind to ask you why you are so nasty to him,' retorted Horatia; 'but I won't, because I don't want to know. And as for my being nice to him; you don't generally go and stay in people's houses, and then be rude or disagreeable to them. Besides'—and here Horatia stopped.

'Besides what?' asked Sarah.

'Besides, it's time to go and dress for dinner. I shall feel quite dull and unimportant when I go home and have to be a schoolgirl again; no dressing for dinner, and no dinner to dress for, only schoolroom supper, and it all depends upon cook's temper whether we get anything very nice or not,' laughed Horatia.

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As Horatia evidently did not intend to answer her question, Sarah said no more on the subject; but she wondered very much what Horatia meant to say. Sarah knew quite well she had not meant to say, 'Besides, it is dinner-time.' Perhaps it was as well Horatia had stopped before she added that she was 'sorry for Mr Clay.' 'Because,' she observed to herself, 'she would have wanted to know why I was sorry for such a rich man, and I really could not have told her. And, besides, Sarah is so proud that she would hate to be pitied.'

Sarah walked thoughtfully to her room, and there, instead of dressing for dinner, she threw herself down in her favourite place, the broad window-seat that looked towards Ousebank, her chin resting on the two palms of her hands. 'Why am I so nasty to him?' she muttered to herself. 'Why is every one nasty to him? At least, I don't know that we are any of us nasty—he wouldn't let us; but we are not "nice," like Horatia.' Sarah did not attempt to answer this question; she sat there staring out over Ousebank, and asked herself why she could not be 'nice' to her father if Horatia could.

Naomi came to the door twice and knocked, and the second time she ventured to open it; but, seeing Sarah, as she thought, looking cross and staring out of the window, she went away again without daring to interrupt her. But as time went on and no call came from her young mistress, the good girl began to be anxious for fear Miss Sarah should be late for dinner and thereby 'upset' Mr Clay, a thing to be avoided. So she came in, and, standing at the door, coughed. She had to do this two or three times before Sarah woke up to the fact of her presence, which she did with a start. 'Oh Naomi, what is it?' she asked.

'Dinner, Miss Sarah,' said Naomi.

'Dinner?' Sarah started up in real fright this time. 'Has the gong gone? I never heard it,' she cried.

'No, miss, not yet, but it soon will,' said Naomi, bustling about to get Sarah ready.

'Then what do you mean by telling me such a story? I've a good mind not to get ready at all,' said Sarah irritably and rather foolishly.

'Whatever would be the good of that, Miss Sarah, upsetting of Mr Clay for nothing, let alone that I never told no story? You asked me what I came for—at least, so I understood it—and I answered you, "Dinner," and that's what I am here for. Oh, do make haste, Miss Sarah! You could keep on that white skirt, and just slip on this pretty bodice; master won't never notice. There's the gong! Oh dear, oh dear!' said Naomi, getting quite flustered in her anxiety to get Sarah ready in time.

'You needn't be in such a state, Naomi; we are not all slaves or prisoners that we have to be ready to a minute,' observed Sarah coolly, and taking extra long instead of hurrying.

'No, Miss Sarah; but there's no call to do things a purpose to annoy any one. Now, there's Miss Horatia going down as pleasant as can be,' protested Naomi.

'You see we can't all be as pleasant as Miss Horatia, Naomi,' remarked Sarah a little bitterly.

'You can be a deal pleasanter than her. Why, a word or a smile from you goes further than all Miss Horatia's smiles, if only you'd give yourself the trouble. Not that I'm saying a word against Miss Cunningham, for there's no denying she makes the house a different place; and so they all say, from the master downwards,' observed Naomi, her loyalty to her young mistress struggling with her desire to be just and truthful.

'How does she do it, Naomi? I can't make it out. The house has been much more comfortable since she came, and yet she doesn't do anything but laugh, and you know any fool can laugh,' said Sarah, as she laughed herself and ran off after Horatia.

'Miss Horatia's no fool, though,' observed Naomi, as she folded up and arranged Sarah's clothes.

Before dinner was half-over, Sarah had to acknowledge to herself that she had not been fair to Horatia in saying that she made things pleasant by laughing, and it fell out in this wise.

The two girls arrived in the drawing-room at the same moment, and there, according to his new practice, they found Mr Clay, who had taken to coming properly into the drawing-room and going into dinner with his women-folk. His face lightened as he saw the two girls; but instead of offering his arm to Horatia, he gave it to his wife.

Mrs Clay did not take it for a moment. Such an attention had never been paid her before in all their married life, for long before Mark Clay had gained his wealth he had ceased to show any civility to his wife.

Sarah was as much surprised as her mother, though she had more tact than to show it. Horatia looked pleased, but said nothing.

In the middle of dinner one of the footmen, who had gone out to get a dish, came in with perturbed countenance, and said something to Sykes in an undertone.

'Impossible,' said the butler. 'Say we're at dinner, and they must wait.'

'They say they won't wait,' murmured the footman, and added something more, which apparently startled Sykes, who, giving some orders to the under-footmen, left the room, and after a short absence came back and said to Mr Clay, 'Excuse me, Mr Clay, but you're wanted just a minute.'

'Wanted?' exclaimed the millionaire, with a dark flush on his face. 'Tell them to be off, whoever it is.'

'Please, Mr Clay, sir, excuse me, but if you'd see them a minute. It's a deputation from the mill,' insisted Sykes.

Mr Mark Clay turned with a face distorted by rage; but before he could say a word Horatia cried,

'Oh Mr Clay, do let me come with you and listen to the deputation. I do so want to hear real Yorkshiremen talk.'

'You can hear me. I talk broad enow at times,' said the millionaire, purposely speaking broad Yorkshire; 'and I've nowt to say to them.'

'You'd just better go,' she said, nodding her head at her host. 'Father says things are topsy-turvy now, and the poor man has more power than he used to have; and, besides, I would like to hear them talk.'

'Come forward, then,' said the millionaire, and rose from the table.

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Sykes cast a look of gratitude and relief at Horatia; and poor Mrs Clay, wiping away a tear, said, 'God bless her!'

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## CHAPTER XIV.

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### A MILLIONAIRE FOR FIVE MINUTES.

'Oh Sarah, I do 'ope they will come to an agreement! There's a lot o' discontent goin' on, an' your father is that determined,' sighed little Mrs Clay.

'Do you think he really is my father?' demanded Sarah.

'W'atever do you mean by talkin' such nonsense?' inquired Mrs Clay, indignation taking the place of anger for the time.

'Only that one would think he was Horatia's father, to see the way she goes on, as if she were a daughter of the house,' replied Sarah, her lip curling.

'Sarah, I'm ashamed o' you showin' such wicked jealousy to that dear girl. If you got on wi' your father there'd be no occasion for 'er to do as she does; but if she 'adn't interfered to-night w'at would 'ave 'appened? A strike very likely, an' we're not safe from it yet. There's a lot o' discontent,' repeated her mother.

'I hate interfering people!' was all Sarah said.

Then there was silence, while both mother and daughter strained their ears to listen for any sound of voices from without, dreading to hear Mark Clay's loud, rough voice raised in angry tones. But no sound was to be heard, and Mrs Clay said after a time, 'I'm glad 'e's listenin' to 'em; it'll do 'em good if they can say their say, even if 'e don't give way to 'em.'

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Horatia meanwhile had tripped away with a light, dancing step, for which she was very often taken to task, not only at school, where she was told to walk properly and be more serious, but also by her mother, who said it was undignified for a girl of fifteen.

Mark Clay walked heavily beside his young companion, scarcely listening to her chatter—for it must be confessed that Horatia was rather a chatterbox, or, as her father said, 'had a good deal to say for herself'—but some words she said caught his ear. 'I dare say they are envious of your riches. I never cared to be rich before; in fact, I never thought about money, because we always seem to have everything we want at home; but since I have been at Balmoral I have envied you your riches, and thought it was rather unfair that you should have such a lot.'

'Oh, you think I've more than my share, do you, like all the rest of them? Well, I s'pose it's natural; but I'm not going to share it up for all that, as they'll pretty soon find out,' replied the millionaire.

Horatia had the sense not to say any more, and, indeed, there was no time, for they were at the door of the steward's room, where business was transacted in connection with the employés on the estate, and in this room were six men standing, cap in hand, near the outer door, which led into the yard.

Horatia wondered to herself if they kept near that door so as to have a way of escape in case their master got into one of his passions; but these sturdy Yorkshiremen were afraid of no one and nothing. Strong, sturdy, and independent, they stood there, with civil but determined faces. They were the old mill-hands, and had been with Mark Clay from boyhood; and among them was Naomi's father.

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'Well, men, is t' mill burnt down that I can't even eat my dinner in peace, but must come at once to speak with you?' inquired Mr Clay.

'Sorry to interrupt your dinner, master; but we know it's a long business, is that, up at Balmoral, and we've got to take an answer back to our mates down Ousebank by nine o'clock,' said Naomi's father, who was evidently the spokesman.

'Oh, and what may you want to know?' inquired Mark Clay in a tone which did not promise much.

Luke Mickleroyd looked for a moment doubtfully at Horatia. 'It's business we want to talk, Mr Clay,' he said.

'Have your say, lad, and have done with it. This young lady is going to judge between us to-night, and the sooner you say what you've got to say the better we'll be pleased, for our dinner's cooling on the table, and that's not the way we treat guests up north,' said Mr Clay in a more conciliatory tone. The reminder of Horatia had done Luke Mickleroyd's cause a good turn, as he saw.

'Well, master, it's like this, only I doubt little missy there won't understand aught about it. The young men say there's a lot more boys taken on in the mill to what there ought to be,' began Luke.

Mr Clay interrupted angrily. 'Ought to be? And who's to settle that but me?'

'I am, for to-night; you said I might. Do let me feel like a millionaire just for five minutes!' said Horatia in an undertone, pulling at the mill-owner's sleeve to make him attend to her.

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The millionaire threw himself into the big armchair at the top of the broad table which divided him from his men, and said with a rough laugh, 'Have your way, lass. I'm rich enough to let you have your whim, if you don't go too far. Let's see how you'd manage a mill.—Now then, Luke, let Miss Cunningham hear your tale, and see what she says to it.'

'We've got to deal with you, master,' began one of the others rather gruffly, for he thought Mark Clay was treating them and their wrongs lightly.

But Luke Mickleroyd had heard from his daughter Naomi of the influence Horatia had over the mill-owner, and said, 'I'm spokesman, if you please, mates.—And this is what we've come to say. There's two men been turned off because they've been ill, and boys put on in their place.'

'They did no more work than the boys,' observed Mark Clay, 'and took double the wages.'

'They didn't do quite as much work, 'tis true; but they did it better, and we always made up by the end of the day between us what they couldn't manage when 'twas heavy work; but the men say they ain't going to do it for the boys.'

'No, of course not,' said Horatia impulsively.

'Oh, of course not, you say?—Well, go on,' said Mr Clay.

'And these men have got wives and families to support, and who'll take them on if they're turned out of Clay's Mills for not being able to do their work?'



'We've come to say there's two men been turned off because they've been ill, and boys put on in their place.'

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'I've nought to do with that. Business is business, and you can't mix sentiment up with it,' said the master.

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'But, then, some one will have to support them,' said Horatia.

'The rates will,' said Mr Clay.

'Well, you pay the rates, so you may just as well keep them at the mills; the work gets done, and it makes no difference to you whether their friends help them to do it or not, and, you see, it won't get done with those boys, because the men won't help them. So, I say, take the two men back.—And, oh! I do think it kind of you men to do their work, and come and speak up for them,' wound up Horatia.

Mr Clay gave her a glance. The plain little face was lit up by animation, and he smiled. Then he turned to the men. 'Very good, lads; you hear what the young lady says. I promised her her way, and she shall have it.' Here his face grew stern. 'But it's to her I've given way, not to my men, remember that. What Mark Clay does is done, and won't be undone; and there's no parleying

between master and man in Clay's Mills; so the next time the men want to come up to see me, tell them it's no good; Mark Clay receives no deputations from his men. If they don't like his ways they can leave him; it's as they like.'

'We're not likely to do that without we're forced. We've worked for you, man and boy, these thirty years, some of us, Mr Clay,' said Luke Mickleroyd.

'I sha'n't force you. I know good workers when I've got 'em, and give 'em good wages, too,' said Mr Clay. And this was quite true, and no better work was turned out of any mill than that done by Clay's Mills.

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'We thank you for receiving us to-night, master.—And we are much obliged to you, miss, for your kind words,' said Luke Mickleroyd.

The millionaire rose from his seat. 'And now, I suppose, we can go and have our dinner?' he said sarcastically.

'Good-night, Mr Clay.—Good-night, miss,' said the men, and they filed out into the yard.

The millionaire grunted something which might be interpreted to be a farewell, and turned to walk out of the other door. He did not wait to let Horatia pass out first; indeed, he had never even offered her a seat, though he had sat down himself, these courtesies not being in his way. Horatia, however, did not seem to notice the want of politeness, but said a bright goodnight to the deputation, and followed her host out of the room.

Sykes was waiting at the back-door, watching the door of the steward's room; and beside him was Naomi, and the moment the men appeared she ran forward and said, 'Has he given in, father?'

Sykes followed, and came up in time to hear Luke Mickleroyd reply, 'Yes, he's given way this time, lass.'

'That's a good job! Well, go on into the servants' hall, and have a drink to celebrate the good news. I must make haste and serve the rest of the dinner. And another time do you take and come a little later and give a man a chance to have his dinner in peace,' said Sykes, hurrying off.

'I think we'll be going on to give the answer. I don't feel in no mood for drink,' said Luke.

'Why not, lad? All's well that ends well, and we've got our way this time,' said one of the others.

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'Ay, we've got it this time; but we sha'n't get it next, without that young lady works miracles, same as she seems to do wi' Mark Clay,' replied the man gloomily.

'Tell us about it, father. She's really jolly, ain't she? Whatever did she go to see you for? She's a caution, is Miss Horatia!' exclaimed Naomi.

'She's a real good young lady, and wanted to do the family and us men a good turn. Now, if he'd got a daughter like that!' said Luke.

'Oh, come, father, I'm not going to have a word said against Miss Sarah. She's not gay like Miss Cunningham, 'tis true; but she's as grieved ['grieved' means 'vexed' in Yorkshire] about the way her father carries on as can be, only she's too much of a lady to go putting herself in a man's place,' said Naomi, defending her young mistress hotly.

'The other's more of a lady if you go by blood,' put in Tom Fox, who was a staunch admirer of Horatia since the affair of the motor, and had heard from Cunningham's chauffeur who Horatia was.

'We don't go by blood here; we go by money,' said Naomi scornfully; and the other servants laughed.

Mrs Nancy, needless to say, was not there, or this conversation could not have taken place.

Mrs Clay looked up eagerly when the two returned. Sarah, too, looked up, and, though she did not show it, she was just as anxious to hear the result. But neither of them dared to put any questions to Mr Clay.

'Here's a young lady who wanted to be a millionaire for five minutes,' he said, with a hoarse laugh.

'W'atever do you mean, Mark?' asked Mrs Clay timidly.

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'It's all right, Mrs Clay. Mr Clay agreed to do what they wanted,' said Horatia hastily, to relieve her anxiety.

'Nay, lass, that I didn't. I agreed to do what you wanted, and that's a very different thing, as the men'll find out if they try it on again. There's only one will in Clay's Mills, and one person to have any wants,' said the mill-owner.

'What does he mean about your being a millionaire for five minutes?' demanded Sarah, who did not want her father to begin a tirade about Clay's Mills and his rights.

'I just wanted to be a millionaire for five minutes, and Mr Clay let me.—You *are* good-natured to me!' Horatia said, turning to her host and beaming at him.

'And you used that five minutes' power to give the men their way? They'll always want it now,' said Sarah slowly.

'That's what I'm a bit afraid of; but I'll teach them a lesson next time,' said Mr Clay grimly.

'Oh Mark! don't be 'ard on 'em,' began Mrs Clay.

But Horatia exclaimed, 'He wasn't a bit; he was very nice, and has taken two delicate men with families back into the mills.—I must see these mills, Mr Clay,' said Horatia.

'So you shall to-morrow, if you like, and then you'll see them two fettlers doing their work, as if they'd all day to fettle one machine,' replied Mr Clay.

'What's a fettler, and what is to fettle a machine?' inquired Horatia with interest. 'I think I've heard that word before.'

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'Clean it up, and if they don't do it sharp while the machine is going there's an accident, and they get caught in the works, and that's what'll likely happen to them two, and you'll feel sorry then you had them back,' he replied.

It was late when they had finished dinner, and the mill-owner said 'Good-night' when his wife and the girls left the dining-room.

'Oh my dear, God bless you!' cried Mrs Clay when they were in the drawing-room, as she took Horatia's hand in hers.

'I didn't do anything; I just amused myself,' said Horatia, laughing. 'But I expected to see quite different men. They looked quite quiet and respectable.'

'What did you expect them to look like?' demanded Sarah. 'They were respectable mill-hands, as my father was years ago.'

'But I expected to see wild, fierce men, like those in the French Revolution, demanding their rights, and brandishing sticks and things.'

'Oh my dear! we ain't come to that, an', please God, we never shall,' protested Mrs Clay with a shudder.

'They can look wild and fierce. You've only to watch them at a football-match to see what they'd be like in earnest if they're like that at play,' said Sarah.

'Then I 'ope I shall never see 'em so,' repeated Mrs Clay.

'And that's what you wanted to do—amuse yourself with the sight of infuriated Yorkshiremen?' said Sarah, whom some demon seemed to possess that evening.

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Horatia turned indignantly to her. 'I didn't do it for any such reason. I suppose you think I meddled, and perhaps I did; but I only did it as your friend, Sarah, and I don't think you're very nice,' she said.

'I can't think w'at's come to you, Sally! Don't be so disagreeable. Miss Horatia only means to be kind, and we're all much obliged to 'er,' said Mrs Clay.

'Yes, we are,' said Sarah; 'I expect the men meant mischief; but you have only done good for to-night. There'll be a row, sooner or later, and then father'll have to stand firm or lose his position. Not that I think that would be a bad thing, except for mother's sake. Still, it isn't every one that would use five minutes of being a millionaire just to do good to other people, and you're a good sort, Horatia. So don't mind what I say. I'm always cross at Balmoral. I can't breathe here.'

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## CHAPTER XV.

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### A VISIT TO CLAY'S MILLS.

The next morning dawned bright and sunny, as Sarah saw when Naomi drew up her blinds. She also saw that the girl's face was swollen with crying. 'What is the matter, Naomi?' she asked anxiously, for Sarah was very kind-hearted, and she was very fond of her young maid.

'It's Ruth, miss; she's been took with the croup, and mother's been up all night with her, and the doctor says he doubts if we shall pull her through. And, oh, she's such—a—darling, is Ruth!' Here Naomi burst into tears again.

'Poor little Ruth! I'll go and see her to-day, Naomi, and ask if there is anything we can do for her,' said Sarah; and she dressed with more alacrity than usual, in her desire to go and visit Naomi's home.

Horatia was always up earlier than Sarah, and generally went for a run in the park before breakfast. She had just come in and was sitting at the breakfast-table chattering with Mrs Clay when Sarah appeared, and, with a hurried 'Good-morning' to them both, plunged into the subject of which she was full. 'Naomi's sister is ill, mother. I'm going to see her this morning, so will you,

please, go to the mills with Horatia?' she said.

Mrs Clay looked a little vexed. 'Your father will be grieved if you don't go, Sarah. 'E thinks you might go to your own mills sometimes, instead of always goin' to your uncle Howroyd's,' she protested.

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'They're not my own mills. I have nothing to do with them. If I had I'd soon alter them,' Sarah replied hotly. 'Besides, Uncle Howroyd's mill is a pleasure to go over; my father's are a pain.'

'Oh Sarah, you do say such things! An' w'at-ever you mean I don't know 'alf the time. I'm sure there's no need to go over more of the mills than you like. You can stop before you get a pain, if that's w'at you mean,' Mrs Clay added doubtfully, for Sarah had begun to laugh.

'It's not a pain in my body, mother; it's a pain in my mind that they give me.—But I would have gone with you to-day, Horatia,' she observed, turning to her schoolfellow, 'if my maid Naomi's sister had not been taken ill; but I must go and see how she is. And I shall take Naomi with me, and let her have a holiday for the rest of the day,' she announced.

Mrs Clay did not rebuke her daughter for taking it upon herself to give a servant a holiday, any more than she did for settling her plans for the day without any reference to her mother; but only said plaintively, 'W'at's the matter with little Ruth? I suppose it's nothin' catchin', or they'd 'ave told me first; but still, I do think I should be more use than you, Sarah; you don't know anythin' about sickness. W'at 'as Ruth got?'

'Croup, and I thought I'd take her some jelly or something; children always like jelly,' said Sarah.

'Jelly—when the poor child can't swallow, very like! You'd better by 'alf let me go, Sarah; the poor mother'll not 'ave a moment to talk to you if the child's really bad, an' you'll only find yourself in the way. You go with Horatia to the mills, an' I'll call at Mickleroyd's an' do w'at I can do for 'em.'

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'Martha Mickleroyd won't stand on ceremony with me, and I'm not so ignorant as you think about croup. You have to put the child in hot water. We had first-aid and domestic lessons at school. Besides, I promised Naomi I'd go, so I must,' declared Sarah in such a determined tone that Mrs Clay, who never could oppose any one for long, gave way with a sigh.

Horatia had been looking from one to the other, listening with her quick, eager look to the conversation, and longing to join in it, but half-afraid for fear of vexing Sarah; but now she could no longer resist the temptation. 'Can't we all go on our way to the mills? I should like to see a mill-hand's cottage, and I needn't go into the sick-room at all.'

Mrs Clay looked relieved. 'I'd far rather 'ave it so, Sarah. You don't know for certain that it isn't 'oopin'-cough or somethin' o' that sort. Women are that ignorant,' she declared.

'Martha Mickleroyd isn't ignorant; she's a very clever woman, and no more ignorant than—lots of ladies,' Sarah finished hurriedly. She had nearly said, 'than you are,' but luckily remembered in time.

'I believe that; but it isn't every lady that knows as much about illness as I do; an' as Miss 'Oratia 'ere wants to go to see a mill-'and's 'ome'—Mrs Clay was saying.

But Sarah broke in with impatience, 'One would think we were Hottentots or savages, or something, by the way Horatia talks!'

Horatia coloured as she answered, 'Oh, but indeed I don't; you quite mistake me. Father is very much interested in the housing question, and all sorts of things that have to do with the poor, and putting stone baths in their houses, and all that will make them healthier,' she explained eagerly.

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'Very kind of your father, I'm sure, my dear; but I think you'd better not talk about stone baths for the Mickleroyds. Mark won't 'ave it. 'E won't, indeed; 'e told Luke Mickleroyd so,' said Mrs Clay.

Sarah's lip curled. 'If that child has no bath to be put into it will die, and it'll be his fault, then,' she observed, as she rose from the table.

'No, it won't; it'll be the fault of its mother, who hasn't a small bath in her house,' said Horatia.

Horatia had spoken on the impulse of the moment, without any thought of contradicting or annoying Sarah; but the latter cast her a furious look, and then, drawing herself up, said, 'When will you be ready to start?'

Horatia felt crushed by Sarah's manner; but it was so uncomfortable to start out in the morning in this way that she determined to try to conciliate her. 'Don't be horrid and up in the clouds above us all;' and she took Sarah's arm with a coaxing smile.

Sarah could not help smiling, for this was an old school accusation which Horatia had made when Sarah once asked how she looked proud and haughty, and the girls had all laughed at it. 'I don't feel there; I've told you that before; but you can't or won't understand how I hate and despise it all.'

'Well, never mind; let's go and see those Mickleroyds. You don't hate and despise them,' said Horatia.

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Half-an-hour later the party in the motor stopped at the point of the main street from which a 'ginnel' or alley led to the Mickleroyds' house, in one of the oldest parts of the town, and quite



near the mills.

Luke Mickleroyd, as will be remembered, was the chief watchman of Clay's Mills, and could have afforded a nice little house in the suburbs on the tram-line, for he earned good wages; but he found it more convenient to be close to the mills, so that he could rest between his rounds, and in cold weather warm and refresh himself during the night.

'What a funny old place! I wonder they don't pull it down,' said Horatia, as she picked her way over uneven and broken paving-stones to the house, which had steps, with no balustrade, leading down to an open cellar-door and up to another door.

'It belongs to my father,' said Sarah curtly.

Horatia said no more, and determined not to make any comments whatever she saw, 'not even if the paper were hanging off the walls and the place in ruins,' she said to herself.

But once they were inside the cottage the scene was changed. Everything was spotlessly clean; the walls were prettily papered; the furniture was handsome and old-fashioned; and Maria Mickleroyd came forward with a pleasant smile on her tired, anxious face. 'Pleased to see you, Mrs Clay, and Miss Sarah; and you've brought Omi,' pronounced 'Oh my,' to Horatia's amusement. 'That's main kind of you. Little Ruthie's dropped off into a lovely sleep for the minute; but, thank you, I shall be glad to have Omi for the day, if Miss Sarah is sure she can spare her, for I shall be up to-night again, and I might rest a bit by-and-by. Luke's resting now.'

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'No, I'm not resting, missus,' said Luke Mickleroyd, coming down a narrow staircase. 'I've had my sleep, and was coming to take a turn at watching. I ought to be good at that, seeing it's my trade; but Miss Sarah's found us some one better, I see, in Omi.'

'We're glad to know the child is better, Luke,' said Mrs Clay, as she added some suggestions about the child's treatment. 'An' now we're goin' on to the mills; but if the doctor orders anythin' special, or Ruthie fancies w'at you can't get, be sure an' send up to us. The master won't grudge you that. An' if you want Naomi the night, keep 'er, so long as we know. Jane Mary could come wi' the message after the mills are out. A walk would do her good.'

'Jane Mary won't come nigh Balmoral,' put in Naomi suddenly.

'How'd thy tongue, Omi!' said her father, and Naomi subsided.

'Jane Mary should do w'at she's told; she's too independent,' said Mrs Clay, and, with a short 'Good-morning,' they all went off.

Sarah turned to wave a friendly farewell, whereupon Mrs Clay said, with some irritation, 'It seems to me, Sarah, that folk 'ave only got to be nasty to your father for you to like 'em. It's not much good goin' on like that. You know w'at the Bible says: a 'ouse divided against itself cannot stand.'

'I wonder if that's true,' said Sarah gravely.

'Sarah, 'owever dare you!' exclaimed Mrs Clay; and even Horatia looked rather shocked at this remark.

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'Oh, I'm not talking about the Bible; of course I believe that. I meant what you said,' explained Sarah. But this was not much better.

'Thank you, Sarah. W'atever I said, I 'ope it was true. I'm not in the 'abit of tellin' untruths.' Mrs Clay had forgotten what she had said.

'You only said what you thought, and we can all make that kind of mistake. I only meant that I wonder whether I do like people better if they dislike father.'

'Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself, for 'e's a good father. An' look at all these mills; every brick is 'is an' built by 'im—'is money, I mean—an' thousan's of poun's' worth of wool goods sent out every week—well-made goods, too, as every one will tell you. 'E's a wonderful man is your father, an' one to be proud of, not despised. Most girls would 'old their 'eads 'igh for bein' 'is daughter, not 'old it 'igh to despite 'im.—Oh, good-mornin', my men! good-mornin'!' Mrs Clay exclaimed, as the gates were thrown open for them to enter, and she saw some men crossing the yard.

The men replied by a surly 'Good-morning;' one or two touched their hats, but the most of them took no notice of the master's wife and daughter at all.

Mark Clay met them at the door of his private office, a plainly furnished little room, the same now as it had been thirty years before, when it had been just built. 'This is my private room,' he said.

Horatia looked round with interest. 'It's a very business-like-looking room,' she said, after searching in vain for something more complimentary to say.

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'That's the biggest compliment you can pay it, and it is a true one, too. There's millions have passed through my hands in this room,' he said proudly.

''Ave you 'eard that Luke Mickleroyd nearly lost his little Ruth in the night?' said Mrs Clay. 'We've just been to see 'em an' leave Naomi there.'

Mrs Clay never liked to take the responsibility of doing anything herself; but Mark Clay turned to her more angrily than Horatia had ever seen him, and said, 'I won't have you go to the hands, encouraging them in independence and idleness. You call for Naomi on your way back. Do you hear? She doesn't get wages for nursing her sister. What's her mother there for?'

'But, Mark, the mother's got the 'ouse to clean an' meals to cook; they're such a large family, an' useful to us,' protested Mrs Clay.

'I don't care. I won't have it, I say. I shall have the other girl wanting her day off; so you do as I tell you. If the mother can't see to the girl, let her go to the hospital. What do I pay to the hospitals for if it isn't for them to be useful to me? You can tell her so on your way home, and take Naomi back with you to her work,' blustered Mark Clay.

'Oh, are we going straight home? I thought we could, perhaps, go to Fountains Abbey to-day, and you would come with us?' cried Horatia.

Sarah shot a quick look of surprise at her friend, who added, 'You said I might choose what I liked best to do every day, didn't you, Sarah?'

'Of course,' said Sarah.

'But, my dear, w'yever didn't you mention it before we started? We would 'ave taken a picnic-basket along wi' us,' cried Mrs Clay.

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'That doesn't matter, Polly; send Fox for it while we're looking over the mills. That's a good idea of the lass. We'll all go to Fountains. Do you go and telephone to them to put in plenty of champagne and lemonade for the girls,' said the mill-owner boisterously.

Mrs Clay hurried off to the telephone to give her directions, while Mark Clay started with the two girls over the mills.

'I couldn't write an essay on this,' said Horatia, as they were hurried through yard after yard, on each side of which were doors which the millionaire just ordered to be opened, and into which they gave a peep as he told them, 'In there there's thousands of pounds' worth of rags and wool for blankets,' or 'cloth,' as the case might be.

'My father doesn't want you to; he only wants you to see what a huge business he has. I hope he has succeeded,' said Sarah.

Horatia was saved the trouble of answering, for they now entered the room where the machinery drowned every sound. 'Doesn't it make them deaf or make their heads ache?' she shouted at length to Mark Clay.

'Make me deaf? No fear; I don't stop in here long enough,' he replied, misunderstanding her, and not imagining it was the workpeople she was thinking of.

And again Horatia was silent.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

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### THE MILLIONAIRE'S PICNIC.

'Oh dear! my head aches, at any rate,' sighed Horatia when they came out of about the fiftieth room. 'I am glad we are going motoring; it will blow my headache away.'

'Ay, it's a big place, is Clay's,' said the millionaire with an air of satisfaction.

'There's Uncle Howroyd. I'm going to ask him to come with us to-day,' observed Sarah abruptly.

'What's he wanting?' inquired his half-brother.

Whatever Mr William Howroyd wanted with the millionaire, it did not seem important, for he stopped when Sarah met him, and the two went off together, away from Clay's Mills; and Mr Clay, after waiting a moment to see if his brother was returning, turned to Horatia. 'If you'll excuse me, young lady, I'll give some orders for this afternoon, and tell them to have some pieces done, ready for me to see when I come back. That's the way to get rich, my lass; look after the pieces and the bales'll look after themselves.' And the millionaire, with a hoarse laugh, went off to 'look after the pieces.'

Horatia stood at the door looking after him, and scarcely noticed a man who half-smiled and raised his hat. She supposed that he was a man with some manners, which the rest of them did not seem to possess; she had no idea that it was a personal attention to her till he said, 'We're much obliged to you for making t'master listen to us. It's saved a lot o' trouble for the minute.'

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Now, Horatia, as will have been noticed, acted and spoke upon impulse, so she now asked eagerly, 'What trouble has it saved? And why has it only been saved for the minute? Were you all going to strike if he hadn't seen you?'

'Can't say what we mightn't have been obliged to do,' said the man.

'I don't see how you are obliged to do anything unless you like; but was that what they wanted you to do?' persisted Horatia.

'That was one thing. But, see here, missy, if you can speak a word for us, do 'e. They say you can do a lot wi' the master; he's a bit too hard wi' us, and the young uns won't stand it. That's where the trouble will come in.'

'What kind of trouble?' inquired Horatia.

The man did not look at her. He was gray-haired, and had been at Clay's Mills for twenty years, and had an affection for the place. Besides which, he was 'used to the master's ways,' and knew that a good workman earned good wages and need not fear being turned off so long as he did good work; but the younger men hated Mark Clay, and there were fewer old men there than in most mills, for the moment they got ill or showed signs of feebleness in any way they were discharged. Mark Clay lost more than he gained, for they would have kept the younger ones in order. But all this the man did not say to Horatia; he only repeated, 'I can't say what they might not do when their blood's up.'

'But tell me what they say they'll do.'

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'Strike,' said the man. 'But you'd best not repeat that,' he added, almost regretting his confidence, and going off for fear of adding more.

'There's a fool's trick you've been at, Sam,' said a comrade, 'a-telling that young lady what the men say. She'll repeat it all to the master.'

'I never breathed a word of their threats. I only said they'd strike, and he knows they've threatened that before.'

'You didn't say a word about what them young lads said they'd do—you know what?' the other demanded. 'They'd be turned off to-morrow if he got wind on 't.'

'D' ye think I'm a fool? Of course I didn't. But I'll tell you what. They've got som'at in their heads at Balmoral, for that young lady kept on asking what they would do and what trouble there would be if the master didn't do what we asked him,' retorted the first speaker.

The second looked gloomily before him. 'It'll be a bad day for my Tom if them words of his get repeated to the master; and it's nought but lads' hotheaded talk; they don't mean it.'

'I'm none so sure o' that, mate; but it's best to forget it. Anyway, the master's off gallivanting for the day, and mayhap it'll take his mind off the mills a bit. If he'd do that more frequent it 'u'd be better for all—better for him and better for us,' the man wound up gravely.

In the meantime Sarah had gone to meet her uncle, and invited him to come motoring.

'Me! Nay, lass; I've other fish to fry. I'm not a millionaire like Mark, able to go away and amuse myself all day.'

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'Now, uncle, you know that's nonsense; you can get away far more easily than father, because you are not in such a frightful hurry to get rich. Besides, you can always stop your work to do an act of charity, and it is a real act of charity to come with us to-day,' declared Sarah, tucking her arm in her uncle's.

'Indeed! How's that? Is Tom Fox, the chauffeur, ill, and have I got to do his work?' inquired Mr Howroyd.

'No; and if he were, one of the other chauffeurs could take his place. You've got to come and sit beside me, so as to prevent any one else sitting beside me, because you are the only one I can bear to have near me,' explained Sarah.

'Upon my word, if I were not your old uncle I should feel quite flattered,' said Mr Howroyd in a joking way; but he grew grave as he added, 'But as it is, my lass, I'm sorry to hear you talk like that. What's wrong with the others, eh?'

'I don't know that there's anything wrong with them. I think it's me that there's something wrong with,' replied Sarah.

'But I don't understand. Didn't you tell me Miss Horatia was to be of the party? What's gone crooked between you two?' he inquired.

'I don't know; at least, it sounds silly, but I can't bear her being such friends with father. She seems to think everything he does and says all right, and it isn't; it's all wrong, and I think it's horrid of her!' said Sarah.

'Steady there, my lass. I don't think it's the place of children to criticise their elders at all, and certainly not their fathers; and as for this you tell me about Miss Horatia, why, what would you have her do—abuse her host, and talk against him to his daughter?'

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'You don't understand, Uncle Howroyd. Just you come for this picnic, and then see if I am not right,' begged Sarah.

'I sha'n't think that; but I think I'll come, only I must go home and change first, and give some orders for the men,' said her uncle.

'Then I'll come too. I feel as if I shall say something horrid to somebody if I don't.'

'Then you'd best come along with me, for you'll be poor company for the others in this mood;' and he took her back to Howroyd's Mill with him.

An hour later the five started for Fountains Abbey, with a huge hamper strapped on at the back of the car.

'It's a pity you don't appreciate good liquor, Bill, for there's first-class champagne there,' said Mark Clay as they spun along.

'I don't know that it is, for I couldn't afford it very often,' remarked his brother cheerfully.

'Pshaw! I've no patience with such rubbish! You could afford it fast enough if you didn't waste all your money in pensioning off half your old incapables and keeping the others at work, and going on as if you ran a mill for the benefit of the hands,' said the millionaire.

'So I do, I hope,' replied his brother, with the same good-humoured twinkle in his eye.

'Then I suppose you'll be giving them all the profits next, and we shall see you working as a hand yourself?' said Mark Clay, in a tone that implied his expectation of such a thing, as, indeed, was the case.

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Mr William Howroyd laughed quietly. 'I shall keep the head of Howroyd's Mill as long as I live, as my father was before me, and his father before him, and I shall look after the old folks as they did, and, as I hope, those that'll come after me will do.'

There was silence for a moment, for Mr Howroyd was not married, and they wondered who would come after him. Mark Clay thought the mill should be made into a company with his; but William Howroyd had very decidedly declined to entertain that idea.

So it happened that it was with these words in their ears that they came into sight of the beautiful ruins of Fountains Abbey, built by those who acted upon the same principles.

Horatia had sat between Mr and Mrs Clay all the way; but the minute they arrived she caught Sarah by the arm and said, 'Come and explore the ruins, and let us find a place and take a sketch of it.'

'We must stop with the others,' said Sarah.

'Oh no, we needn't; you are only saying that because you are cross with me, and it's no good, because I can't help the things that you don't like in me. And besides, I want to talk to you.'

'How do you know what things I don't like?' inquired Sarah.

Horatia danced a queer little dance of her own, and then, coming back to Sarah, said, 'Of course I can feel when you don't like things, but I can't help that. Come and have a walk with me; I want to ask you about something.'

There was no resisting Horatia's good spirits, and it was too glorious a day to quarrel or be disagreeable; so, after seeing that Mr William Howroyd had gone off with her father and mother, Sarah walked along with Horatia. 'What do you want to ask me about?' she demanded of her friend.

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'Well, it's this: why do you hate being rich?' she asked.

Sarah stared at her in wonder for a moment. 'Was that really what you wanted to ask me?' and as Horatia nodded her head, she continued, 'What an extraordinary question! I should think any one could see why for herself. Do you think it's any pleasure to eat off Sèvres china, so valuable that a servant goes in dread of his life lest he should break a piece, or to have gold plate one is afraid of scratching, or to be surrounded by stuffy carpets?'

Horatia interrupted her with a merry little laugh. 'How can you be surrounded by carpets?' she demanded.

'You know quite well what I mean, only you choose to turn it off with a laugh, and that's one of the things I don't like about you; you turn things just the way you choose. And the carpets do seem to stifle me, though you don't believe it,' declared Sarah.

'I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to laugh; but the picture of you surrounded by stuffy carpets did amuse me so. But one thing I don't believe, and that is that you really hate being rich,' persisted Horatia.

'You mean that I tell untruths?' replied Sarah.

'No, I don't; I mean that you wouldn't really like to be poor. I don't believe you'd even like to have so little money as we have, though it's plenty for us; and as for being really poor, I'd just like to see you try it. At least, I just wouldn't, because I'd hate to see you miserable, and you would be miserable with no money and no one bowing down before you and getting you what you want before you asked for it, and everything.'

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'Well, I've a kind of idea that you will have a chance of seeing who is right, you or I, one of these days,' was Sarah's answer.

'I wish you'd tell me why you say that, Sarah—I do really,' said Horatia.

To say what she really felt was impossible to Sarah, for at the bottom of her hatred of her riches was the feeling that they had been unjustly, if not dishonourably, obtained, and that other people knew it and despised them for it, and this was gall and wormwood to a girl of her proud spirit.

'How can I possibly tell you why any idea comes into my head any more than I can tell you why I think it's going to rain to-night in spite of its being so lovely just now?' demanded Sarah.

'That's quite a different thing. There's a west wind blowing, and it feels like rain,' said Horatia; 'there's a reason for that.'

'Very well; there's a feeling in the air as if the home of Clay were going to fall,' retorted Sarah.

'Then there must be some reason for it; and if you know it I think you ought to try and prevent it for your mother's sake, even if you would like it to fall,' said Horatia.

'You think girls can do anything, but you are wrong; they can't, and I don't know any reason why it should fall, and I dare say it's all imagination. Why does it interest you so much?' asked Sarah. [Pg 156]

'Sarah, tell me, why won't Naomi's sister come near Balmoral?' asked Horatia abruptly.

'Because she hates my father. Every one isn't so fond of him as you are,' said Sarah.

'Why does she hate him? Doesn't she work in his mills?' Horatia inquired.

'Yes, that's one of the reasons. Besides, her young man was a hand, and was turned off. Father is not popular with his hands,' said Sarah sarcastically.

'Are you?' demanded Horatia, turning upon her.

Sarah did not answer for a minute, for the question took her aback; then she laughed. 'No, I don't fancy I am. They think me proud, and I suppose I am, though goodness knows what I have to be proud of,' she said.

'You might be proud of being so pretty, but I know you are not,' said Horatia. 'I don't see why that girl should hate your father.'

'And I don't see why you should like him,' returned Sarah.

'I know you don't, and I am sorry for it and for lots of things; but it's no good worrying about them when we are out on a picnic, especially as I am starving of hunger, as you say here, and I see Tom Fox waving the flag to show that lunch is ready.'

The millionaire was in the best of humours, paying his wife attention, telling Tom Fox playfully to be sure and have a good lunch, and see that his horse had one too! and joking with Mr Howroyd and Horatia, and with Sarah when she gave him a chance.

'Have you got right yet?' inquired her uncle after lunch, as they were preparing to go back. [Pg 157]

'Not right enough to change places with any one; but they were better to-day, I must say.'

'Oh, were they? How very condescending you are! Upon my word, Sarah, you want taking down a peg badly,' said her uncle, who, however, took his old place beside his niece.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

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### A DISASTROUS BONFIRE.

The return journey, as return journeys after a day's pleasuring often are, was a much quieter affair than the drive on the way out. Even Horatia was rather silent as she sat between her host and hostess, and Mr William Howroyd seemed lost in thought.

It was the millionaire who broke the silence with one of the hoarse laughs with which he generally prefaced his boastful remarks. 'See that speck yonder? That's Balmoral, on t' hill; you can see it for twenty miles round on a clear day like this. There's not another property in the country that comes nigh it, though I say it as shouldn't.'

'Is that really Balmoral? Oh yes, of course I see it; they are making a bonfire of weeds in the park,' exclaimed Horatia.

Mr Clay leant forward. 'Bonfire of weeds? I don't see any bonfire. Your eyes must be sharper than mine,' he remarked; and then turning to Tom Fox, he said, 'Can you see aught, Tom?'

'No, sir; leastways, not at Balmoral. That fire's far enough from us,' replied the chauffeur.

'Fire?' cried Mrs Clay, starting nervously.

'Pshaw! Fire! It's a bonfire,' said Mr Clay very decidedly; adding, 'Put on steam, Tom; we're crawling. I don't go in a motor to crawl, man.' But he looked anxiously and uneasily in the direction of Balmoral, for he, too, could now see a bonfire or something. [Pg 159]

Mr William Howroyd had said never a word; but his face grew stern and grave as he leaned forward.

Sarah looked at him, then towards Balmoral, and then she turned to him again. 'It's not near the house, Uncle Howroyd; it's only a bonfire.—What are you all so upset about?' she demanded; for Tom, who was noted for his cautious driving, seemed to have caught the excitement, and was driving faster than Sarah had ever known him do.

Mr Howroyd took field-glasses from his pocket, and fixing them to his eyes, gazed earnestly in front of him; then he muttered something under his breath. When he took the glasses away, he had an expression in his eyes Sarah had never seen there before; but he did not answer her question, and his niece could not imagine what had come to her cheery, good-humoured uncle.

The car was going pretty fast, and Mr Clay seemed satisfied with the progress they were making for the next few minutes, as well he might, for it was above legal speed.

'Uncle Howroyd, we shall be fined, if we don't get killed first,' observed Sarah, who was surprised that her uncle did not make some protest against what she considered reckless speed.

Mr Howroyd did not seem to hear what she said, and she gave his arm a tug; but at that moment a red tongue of fire shot up high above the trees in Balmoral park; and now that they were nearer, all—including Mark Clay himself, whose eyesight was not very good—could see that this was no bonfire.

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'Put on speed!' he roared to the frightened Tom Fox.

'We're at thirty-five now, sir,' said the man.

'Put on the highest you can,' again shouted Mr Clay, with a muttered imprecation.

But Mr Howroyd leant forward, and putting his hand on his brother's arm, said kindly but firmly, 'Nay, lad, we'll be there in a short time now. Think of the wife and these two lasses. You've no right to put their lives in danger, even if you think your property's in danger.'

'They're in no danger,' he answered brusquely, as he threw off the other's restraining arm.

Horatia, who did not know what fear was, and was rather enjoying the rate at which they were going, happened to glance at Mrs Clay, who was really fainting with fright. 'Oh, Mrs Clay's ill!' she cried in alarm. 'Stop—pray stop!'

Whether Mr Clay would have taken any notice of her or not is doubtful; but Tom Fox, who had reluctantly put on speed at his master's repeated commands, took advantage of this excuse to slow down a little, which was just as well; for, springing up out of nowhere, as they seem to reckless drivers to do, appeared a policeman, who commanded them to stop.

'Confound you, man! can't you see my place is burning?' Mr Clay roared out to him.

'What! Mr Mark Clay is it?' exclaimed the man in surprise, and in no friendly tone. 'You've no right to endanger the public in this way, whatever trouble you may be in.'

But Mr Howroyd interfered. 'And you've no right to stop us longer than to take the name when it's an urgent matter, Marmaduke,' he said.

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The man touched his hat. 'Beg pardon, Mr Howroyd, I didn't know you were of this party. We reap as we sow in this world, and Mr Clay's fond enough of the law when it's on his side and against others.—Go on, Tom Fox; only mind, if there's an accident I'm witness that you were warned,' he said, as he moved back and let them pass.

'Shall we be fined?' asked Sarah of her uncle.

'I don't know. No; I shouldn't think so in a case like this, especially as we had luckily slowed down a bit,' he replied. But he did not seem to care much, which surprised Sarah, who knew that he did not care for motoring at all, and was always severe on wild driving.

'I think we shall. You can't go scorching along just because some trees have caught fire. People's lives are more important than a few hundred pounds. You don't seem to care about us at all,' she protested.

'Don't be so silly and childish, Sarah; and mind you go straight into the house and stay there,' he replied.

They were now near enough to see that some trees were burning; but as they were nowhere near the house, Sarah could not quite understand her uncle's 'fidgetiness,' as she called it.

'How on earth did that tree catch fire,' Horatia suddenly ejaculated as a tall poplar was seen blazing, 'and after such a wet day as yesterday?'

'I can tell you how it caught fire. It was set on fire by some of your friends of yesterday; that's how it's caught fire, and that's their way of saying "Thank you" to me for giving in to them; but they've taught me a lesson, and one I sha'n't forget, and I hope it'll satisfy you too, young lady,' replied Mark Clay grimly.

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'I don't believe it. It would be too silly of them, to begin with; and, besides, why should they burn

the trees? If they wanted to be wicked like that they'd burn the house,' declared Horatia.

'Ay, so they would have done before now if they'd had half a chance; but it's too well protected. Why, there's police in it day and night, and they know it!' he declared.

'All the same, I agree with Horatia, it does seem funny after yesterday,' chimed in Sarah from the back-seat. 'And I can't think how those top branches caught.'

'No, because you don't know your home as well as you might,' said her father.

'What does he mean?' asked Sarah of her uncle.

'I suppose he means that the granaries are on fire, and that they've set the trees alight,' explained Mr Howroyd, whose face was very white and set, but with a different look of determination from his brother's.

They were in the park now.

'Turn off to the right, Tom,' said his master.

'Take the women-folk to the house first, Mark,' pleaded his brother.

'To the fire, Tom. I'll catch the rascals red-handed!' roared Mr Clay.

'Don't get out; go on in the car,' said Mr Howroyd to his niece in an undertone; but his advice fell on deaf ears.

Sarah was excited enough now, for they had turned a sharp corner at an angle, which made Mrs Clay give a sharp cry, and there in front of them were the blazing remains of two huge barns and some charred trunks of trees, while others were still burning.

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In the roar and crackle of the flames and the crash of falling timber, the approach of the motor had not been heard by the excited and interested crowd who were watching the progress of the flames.

'Watching! Not one of them raising a hand to stop it!' muttered Mr Howroyd between his teeth.

Mrs Clay clasped her hands in despair.

The millionaire bounded from the car and was among them before any one saw him. 'You cowardly curs, that'll take my money and burn my property! Off my land, I say! I'll pay you for this! You shall all be in prison before the week's out! I see you all, and know you too well, curse you!'

'We haven't done aught to your property. You can't say we have. We saw the flames in Ousebank oop o' t' hill, and we ran to see. There's no harm in that, and you can't have the law on us for't,' said a big, burly man.

'You're trespassing on my land, every one of you, and I'll prosecute you for that, if I can't for aught else. There's plenty of boards to warn you,' said Mr Clay.

The crowd melted away as if by magic, and they saw the gardeners trying feebly to check the progress of the flames.

Their master stood and watched them in grim silence for a little time. His presence and the disappearance of the crowd seemed to give them increased vigour, for they worked with a will now, and crash came down a tree which had just caught and would have carried on the flames to another plantation.

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'That's right; rather late in the day. If you'd done that earlier it might ha' been better. And where's the rest of you? There's twenty men in the grounds somewhere, let alone the house; you could have had thirty at this, and worsted those scoundrels if you'd chosen; but you didn't, and I'll not forget it—I'll not forget it!'

'The others are guarding t' house, master' said the head-gardener. 'Sykes wouldn't let a man leave; he's there—armed, and swore he'd shoot the first hand that came nigh the house, let his business be what it might.'

A grim smile relaxed the millionaire's features for a moment as he heard this news; but they grew grim again as he asked bitterly, 'And weren't the garage and stable men enough to guard the house without the rest of you, whose business is to keep my ground in order?'

The man turned back to his work of chopping off smouldering branches, as he said in a surly tone, 'I'm here, sir, doing my best, and so's these lads, seven on 'em, and it's no use blaming them that has tried to help when your property is being destroyed for the fault of them that hasn't had the courage to do it.'

'Courage to do your work!' said Mark Clay in a tone of contempt. 'And where's the police?'

They were there, too, now, though where they had been up to this moment did not seem certain.

'You can stand here now; the harm's done and the robbers gone,' he said when they came to him. 'Bah! you're all in the same box.'

'Excuse me, Mr Clay, you mustn't bring charges like that against us,' said one of them.

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But Mark Clay took no notice of him or his protest, but walked back to the motor, where Mrs Clay and Horatia still sat. 'Home, Tom, as long as I've got one,' he muttered, as he got in and sat moodily looking before him, and taking no notice of his white and shivering wife, or of Horatia, who sat there looking the picture of misery; nor did he notice, apparently, that neither Sarah nor Mr Howroyd was of the party.

Tom Fox drove up to the front-door, and Sykes, irreproachable as usual, came down the steps and helped his master and mistress out of the car. He gave no sign of anything at all unusual being amiss, for he was always very grave, till his master said in a grim tone, 'Had any visitors, Sykes?'

'No, sir; but we were ready for them if they'd come,' he then replied significantly.

'Ay, you're true Yorkshire grit,' said his master, as he passed on into the house in front of his wife, who, indeed, would hardly have got up the steps but for Horatia's help and support.

'Oh Sykes! Oh, w'at a dreadful affair this is!' moaned Mrs Clay.

'We'll have to get rid of them southerners; they wouldn't face the crowd, and are skulking in the stable-yard. I told the master what it 'u'd be, but he wouldn't hearken to me. I'd got my men all ready, and not one would have disobeyed me. Even Naomi came home to help, and offered to use a gun if I'd show her how,' related Sykes, hoping by this tale of devotion to please his mistress and distract her thoughts from a sad subject.

But the effect was disastrous, for Mrs Clay gave a cry of horror and burst into tears. 'Shoot! W'y should Naomi want a gun to shoot wi'? 'Oo's she goin' to shoot? Oh, 'ow dreadful it all is! Shoot, indeed! 'Oo do you want to shoot, Sykes?' she asked wildly.

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'I don't want to shoot any one, ma'am; no more don't Naomi. And as the danger's all over now we'd best say no more about it,' replied Sykes.

'Are you sure the danger's over?' demanded his mistress. And Horatia asked the same question with her eyes.

Sykes made her a sign, which she did not understand, and replied to Mrs Clay by saying in a soothing tone, 'Yes, ma'am, yes; the danger's quite over, if there ever was any. There's not a soul inside these park-gates except those that have a right to be; and, after all, the master can afford a little loss like this afternoon.'

Mrs Clay gave a little sigh, and said, 'I think, my dear, I'll lie down a bit, if you'll stop by me. I don't fancy bein' alone.'

And Horatia willingly went with her hostess.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

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### NANCY PACKS UP.

Poor Mrs Clay lay down on the sofa in the drawing-room and shut her eyes. Horatia sat beside her, kicking the corner of one of the rich Persian rugs that lay about the drawing-room; not that she was in a bad temper—indeed, Horatia was rarely in a bad temper—but as an outlet to her superfluous energy.

It was pain and grief to Horatia Cunningham to sit still at any time; but this afternoon, when she felt so excited and wanted to hear all about the fire, it was a severe trial to her patience.

Mrs Clay was evidently worn out by the events of the day. Horatia glanced at her from time to time, but did not like to break the silence. Great was her relief, therefore, when a knock came at the drawing-room door.

Mrs Clay opened her eyes. 'Who can that be?' she demanded, clutching Horatia's arm in her nervousness.

'Only one of the servants, I expect,' replied Horatia, looking towards the door, in the hope that it would be some one with news of some sort.

'But they never knock at the drawing-room door,' objected Mrs Clay.

'Hadn't you better tell them to come in?' suggested Horatia, for Mrs Clay lay there, clutching her hand and talking in whispers, but not giving any answer to the person at the door.

'Oh no, my dear. I—we don't know who it is,' gasped the poor thing, who was evidently quite unnerved, and no wonder.

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'Shall I go and see who it is? I dare say it is one of the servants, who did not like to come in and disturb you, because they know you are resting,' said Horatia.

'I think you'd better ring for Sykes,' objected Mrs Clay, still keeping her hold of Horatia.



'I'm sure it's only a servant, perhaps Sykes himself. I'll only open the door a little bit,' said Horatia, loosening her hand from Mrs Clay's and running to the door, which she opened, as she promised, only a little bit, and then exclaimed, 'Nanny! it's you, is it? What's the matter?' For it was against all etiquette for Mrs Nancy to come down to this part of the house. Moreover, the old nurse looked disturbed and flurried.

'Excuse my disturbing you, Miss Horatia, but I couldn't get any one to come, they're all that upset and put about; but I want to know what train you're going by. The packing's all done, and you can start as soon as you like; and the sooner the better for me,' she wound up viciously.

'What nonsense are you talking, Nanny? Why should we pack up and go away just because a granary and a few trees are burnt down? We don't live in the trees!' said Horatia, laughing.

'It's no laughing matter. If you remember, I said to you when we first came here that it was no place for us, and now you see how true my words have come?' said Mrs Nancy.

'I don't remember any words of yours that have come true, and I shouldn't advise you to say that, Nanny, or they'll think you know something about it, and, perhaps, did it yourself,' retorted Horatia jokingly. [Pg 169]

Nancy gave a kind of snort. 'Don't you go carrying your love of a joke too far, miss; and if you think there's any chance of me being accused, that's all the more reason that we should go before worse happens,' she said gloomily.

'Why, Nanny, who would have thought you'd be such a coward? It's all over now, and we can't go away all of a sudden like this, even if we wanted to, and I don't. I want to stop and see what will happen next, and help if I can.'

'Help! You'll be burnt in your bed before you can help yourself, let alone any one else,' cried Nancy. 'Be guided by me, miss, and let us take the night-mail. Sykes says there's one passes about eight o'clock. We could telegraph at once, and her ladyship would be delighted to see you. Don't pass another night under this doomed house.'

'Miss 'Oratia, w'at is it? 'Oo are you w'isperin' to out there?' asked Mrs Clay.

'It's only Nancy, my nurse; she wants to speak to me about something. I won't be a minute,' Horatia answered her; and then, stepping into the passage, she said hurriedly, 'Nancy, who told you that? Tell me at once all you know. When are they going to set fire to the house? To-night?'

'How should I know, miss? I can only say what I think,' replied the old nurse, whose usually cheery face was puckered up with anxiety and fright.

Horatia took her nurse by both arms. 'Now, Nanny, you've just got to tell me. Do you know anything, or don't you?' [Pg 170]

'I know we're among a lot of savage folk that don't respect other folk's property, and it's about time we went home,' declared the old woman.

Horatia gave a stamp of the foot. 'You are aggravating, Nanny! Do you know of any plot to burn the house? Because if so'—began Horatia; but she got no further.

For Nancy broke in with indignation, 'Well, I never, miss! A pretty pass things have come to when you accuse me of knowing of plots! As if I'd mix myself up with their wicked deeds! No, miss, I do not *know* anything; but I'm not blind nor deaf, and I have heard quite enough to make me pack our trunks,' said the nurse.

'That's just what I want to know. What have you heard or seen? Do tell me, Nanny. I shall be much more comfortable if I know,' entreated Horatia.

'We shall both be much more comfortable when we are back at The Grange,' said the nurse.

'It's no good you turning it off like that, Nanny, for I'm just going to hold your arms like this till you tell me, and it's no use your wriggling like that, for you can't get away; you may be bigger, but you didn't learn gymnastics in your youth, and so you are not so strong in the arms as I am.'

'I learnt one thing that you haven't, and that is respect for my elders,' said Nancy severely, and trying to look dignified, but failing, as may be imagined.

'I shall respect you all right if you tell me the truth,' replied Horatia, unabashed by the rebuke.

'You don't want me to go carrying tales from the servants' hall, do you? What do you suppose the mistress would say to that?' said Nancy. [Pg 171]

'Mamma would say you were quite right in this case, because I am not asking out of curiosity, but because I really ought to know,' said Horatia.

'Well, miss, if you will have it, you will; but, of course, I only know what little Naomi has told me of what she has heard down the town to-day, and of course it mayn't be true,' said Nancy.

Horatia stamped her foot with impatience. 'Never mind whether it's true or not; tell me what she said,' entreated Horatia.

'Naomi says that her sister Maria Jane says'—Horatia began to think that the tale was going to be

too complicated altogether, but the old woman went on—'that the men say there wouldn't have been a brick left of Balmoral this morning if they hadn't been given way to yesterday; and that's your doing, miss.'

Horatia coloured a little with pleasure. 'Then what on earth are you making this fuss about? The danger is over, as you see,' she cried eagerly.

Old Nancy shook her head. 'You haven't heard the rest. That old stupid—well, I beg his pardon, as we're in his house, and you seem to like him, miss; though how you can, or what you can see in him, and after how you've been used'—she said.

'Oh, never mind all that, Nanny; do tell me the rest! Mrs Clay will be calling me again, so pray make haste!' exclaimed Horatia.

'Well, he goes down to the mills and undoes all the good you've done by saying it was the last time a mill-hand would put foot in his park, for he built that to be away from them, and he isn't going to have his peace disturbed; and it wouldn't do them any good either, for he'd let them have their way this time to please you, but it was the first and last time he'd do such a thing.' Nancy stopped.

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'That's not all. Go on, Nanny,' said Horatia.

'Well, Naomi's sister, you know—she hates Mr Clay, of course'—began Nancy.

'Why of course?' interrupted Horatia.

'You know that story, surely, don't you, miss?'

'What story? How should I know why Naomi's sister hates Mr Clay? It's very wrong of her,' said Horatia.

'So it is; but her young man—the young man she was going to marry, I mean—was turned off by the master, and'—

'I expect he was a bad workman; that's his own fault,' said Horatia. 'But never mind about that story. Oh dear! I don't know which story I want to know. You are tiresome to-day, Nanny. What did Naomi say?'

'It was her sister. Naomi had nothing to do with it; she's too fond of Miss Sarah,' said Nancy.

Horatia peeped into the drawing-room. Mrs Clay still had her eyes shut, and by her breathing Horatia guessed what was indeed the case—that she had fallen asleep; so Horatia gave a sigh, and resigned herself to listen to Nancy's long-winded tale in the hope of getting at the truth in time. 'Come and sit on this seat outside the front-door, it is so hot in the house; and, besides, I am afraid of some one coming and hearing you,' she said, leading her nurse to a bench outside the drawing-room window. 'Now, about Naomi's sister.'

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'It wasn't Naomi's sister herself,' began Nancy.

Horatia gave a groan; but so great was her anxiety to hear the truth that she made a great effort and controlled herself. Then Nancy went on: 'He said he'd burn the Clays out of Ousebank, and that they should have a taste of it this very day, to show Mark Clay what he might expect if he didn't alter his ways;' and Nancy stopped again.

'What else did Naomi say?' asked Horatia, who looked grave enough now.

'She said they'd burn the house next, or try to, and then the mills; and that's what they will do, and very likely it'll be this night; and if it isn't, it'll be to-morrow or the next day. And now perhaps you'll come home with me,' Nancy wound up.

'Indeed I won't! Fancy leaving friends when they are in such trouble!' Horatia exclaimed.

'You won't help them by staying. I know you've done some good; but it hasn't helped, after all, and Miss Sarah's gone off and left you, and it isn't the proper place for you at all.'

'I wonder where she is. Do you know, Nanny?' inquired Horatia, for she had been wondering about this ever since she had turned round in the motor to speak to Sarah, and had found that she had vanished.

'No, miss, I don't. I supposed you'd know. At any rate, she had no call to go away at such a time, and leave you alone to take charge of her ma, and all these dreadful things happening. I'm sure her ladyship will blame me for not bringing you away at once; and if anything should happen'—here Nancy threw up her hands in horror as she wound up, 'I should never forgive myself—never, whatever the mistress might do.'

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'As we're both going to be burned in our beds, according to you, you won't have to try to forgive yourself,' observed Horatia.

'Don't talk so dreadful callous, Miss Horatia; and, if you don't mind for yourself, you might consider me that you're running into danger,' protested Nancy. Not that she cared about herself half so much as she did for her young charge; but because she thought this argument might have some weight with Horatia, who always thought of others before herself.

'You needn't stop if you're afraid. I shall write to mother to-night and ask her to let me stay alone,' announced Horatia.

'Miss!' cried Nancy reproachfully.

Horatia gave a little laugh. 'Oh dear! there's nothing to laugh at, only it always seems easier for me to laugh than to cry, or else I should cry now. It is dreadful to think that all this money is wasted,' she said.

'It isn't wasted yet, and perhaps Mr Clay will see reason, though they say he's wonderful obstinate; and if I was you, miss, I'd not meddle any more. You meant well, no doubt; but, you see, you're very young, and it hasn't done much good, after all; and it's best not to interfere in other folk's business.'

The tears rose to Horatia's eyes. 'I know that. In fact, I'm afraid I've done harm, and that's one of the reasons I must stop,' persisted Horatia.

'But you won't tell Mr Clay what I've said. Leastways, I didn't say it,' cried Nancy, in alarm. 'Naomi said that her sister said that'—

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'Oh, never mind who said it. Of course I sha'n't mention any names, but I shall certainly warn Mr Clay of what the people mean to do.'

'Then you'll do the very harm you want to stop,' said old Nancy solemnly.

'Why?' asked Horatia.

'Because it'll only make him more determined. You don't know these Yorkshire folk; there's nothing will turn them if they get a thing into their heads. And let Mr Clay hear that they've threatened to burn him out of the place, and he'll make the place too hot to hold them, and they'll pay him out,' said the old woman shrewdly.

Horatia did not make any reply. She felt that there was some truth in Nancy's remarks, and she gave a little sigh as she thought to herself how difficult it was not to harm where you only meant to do good. At last she said, 'I won't say anything to Mr Clay; but I'll have a talk with Sarah, and she shall do as she likes.'

'She won't tell him; she knows him too well,' said Nancy, and she had hardly uttered the words when Mrs Clay, who had evidently been dreaming, awoke with a start, and called Horatia. 'You won't leave to-night, miss?' the nurse said, in a last attempt.

'No, no; I really couldn't, Nanny; but we're quite safe, for there are a lot of police guarding us.'

Nancy groaned as she went off.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

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### AN UNPLEASANT MOMENT.

Mr Howroyd and Sarah, it will be remembered, had not been seen since they arrived at the scene of the fire in the park. Mr Howroyd had vaulted from the car as soon as his half-brother; and when the latter made his angry speech, and sent off the townspeople, William Howroyd went after them as quickly as he could. But he had not gone far when he heard quick, light footsteps behind him; and, turning to see who it was, he saw Sarah, looking very hot, coming hurrying after him. 'What do you want, my lass? You go home. The town's no place for you to-night,' he said.

'Yes it is, Uncle Howroyd. I want to see Jane Mary. I'm sure this is some of her doing,' she panted as she came up to her uncle.

'And if it is, what good will it do you to know it, even if she owned up, which she won't, you may be sure?' inquired her uncle, stopping, rather unwillingly, to talk to his niece.

'Oh, she'll tell me; she's not afraid of me. She knows I'm on her side,' said Sarah.

'A fine statement that! Then what are you going to do? Incite them to more outrages? Because, if that's your intention, you certainly won't come; and I must say, Sarah, you don't show a very nice spirit in taking this tone.'

'What tone?' demanded Sarah, looking rather defiant.

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'Why, rejoicing in your father's loss, and openly taking the part of his enemies,' said Mr Howroyd.

'I'm not rejoicing in it; I'm awfully sorry. I would have given anything to have prevented it; and it's just to prevent any more that I am going down to Ousebank,' replied Sarah.

William Howroyd turned and continued his way towards Ousebank. As it was evident that Sarah meant to go to the town, it was better that she should go with him than alone, which he was convinced she would do if he did not let her come with him; so he only said testily, 'I never did pretend to understand women, but you beat every one of them. I don't know what you do mean;

but I'm glad to hear you are not so undutiful as I thought you were. Not that you'll do any good by going to Ousebank, because you'll not turn these people.'

'If you think I'm going to try to turn Jane Mary because I want to save papa's property for him you are mistaken, because I don't care a fig if it is destroyed or not; but I do care about Jane Mary, and I don't want her to get into trouble, and that's why I am going to see her.'

'You're a queer girl, Sarah; but I think you'll be sorry one of these days for the part you're acting now. Why, that little schoolfellow of yours has a more friendly feeling for your father than his own daughter,' observed Mr Howroyd, as the two walked hurriedly along the path through the park, which was a short-cut to the town.

'Oh Horatia! You say you don't understand me; but I think I'm much easier to understand than Horatia. She came up here to be my friend and companion, and sympathise with me, and, lo and behold! she goes and makes friends with father, and cares much more for father and mother than for me,' complained Sarah.

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'And I don't blame her,' said Mr Howroyd.

Sarah laughed. 'I wonder you don't follow her example; but you don't, and you know, Uncle Howroyd, it's no use your pretending to champion my father, because you don't really care for him a bit except from duty, and you like me much better,' she announced coolly.

'I don't like you at all to-night, and I disapprove of your behaviour to your parents very strongly. As I told you before, you will be sorry for it one day,' said her uncle.

They had reached the outskirts of the park and come out on the high-road as Mr Howroyd said this; and about a hundred yards to the right of them, coming down the hill, they saw a crowd of people, and heard the murmur of many voices. It was the townspeople coming from the fire, who had been longer in coming because they had kept to the drive, not daring to use the short-cut.

'It's the hands!' said Sarah.

'You'd best turn back, my lass; you can't do any good, and you're far too young to mix yourself up with this kind of thing,' her uncle entreated her.

Sarah shook her head. 'I am going on; but if you want to go ahead, do; I shall be all right with these people,' she affirmed.

But this was more than Mr Howroyd could bear. 'Nay, you'll not do that if I can stop it, lass. You don't want to be the talk of the town, do you? But whether you do or not, you're not going to have your way. There'll be scandal enough without Mark Clay's daughter adding to it by going marching through the town with the rabble that have just burnt her father's barns,' said Mr Howroyd; and he quickened his steps to avoid being caught up by the rabble, as he called them.

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But in spite of his efforts, the crowd behind gained on them, and they heard the foremost say, 'It's William Howroyd, that's who it is. He's a different man to his brother, that he is. He'd never turn us out of his park, wouldn't Mr William.'

'He's got Clay's lass with him, though. What d'ye say lads, shall we let her come into t' town if he won't let us go into his park, or shall we turn her back same as he did us?'

There were mingled shouts of 'Let her be!' and 'Nay, nay, let's turn her back, same as he did us, and teach him a lesson!'

They were close behind now, and Mr William Howroyd could no longer pretend not to hear what they said. The road was wide, and bordered by banks and hedges. He took Sarah by the hand and pulled her up on to the bank with him; but even in that moment he noticed that her hand did not tremble in the least, but was, as a matter of fact, steadier than his own.

'I'm not going to run away from them, Uncle Howroyd. I'm not a bit afraid of them,' she protested, as he pulled her up after him.

'You do as I tell you; but you couldn't run away from them if you wanted to,' he replied.

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Sarah stood on the bank beside her uncle, and waited for the crowd to come up to them. They were only about fifty in all, and mostly young men, and they seemed undecided what to do when they saw Mr Howroyd standing upon the bank by the roadside, with his niece beside him.

William Howroyd's pleasant, cheery face was graver than most present had ever seen it, as he stood and watched the men come up and stand, half-sheepishly and half-defiantly, in a kind of irregular semicircle round them.

As none of them spoke, except in murmurs to each other, Mr Howroyd decided to break the ice, and began, in his brisk, ringing voice, which had a very stern tone in it to-night: 'Well, men, what do you want of me? I've made way for you to go forward. Why don't you go?'

'We want a word with you first, Mr Howroyd,' said one of the foremost, who had already shown himself to be antagonistic.

'I want no words with men who break the laws of the land,' replied William Howroyd sternly, and as he said this some of the men remembered that he was a Justice of the Peace.

'We've broken no laws, Mr William. We never set the barn afire, and you can't prove that we did,' said one rather anxiously.

'You stood by and let it burn; and you forget that it was my brother's property,' he replied.

'Mark Clay's no blood-brother of yours. We've nought again' you, Mr William.—Let 'im be, lad; he've allus right on his side, and he's a good master, is Mr William,' said an older man, walking on.

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'Noa; but we've summat again' Mr Clay, and I say let the Clays stop in their park—they want it to themselves, and let 'em have it; but we won't have 'em in Ousebank,' said the first speaker in a surly voice.

'The park's private property, and you've no right there, and my brother had a right to turn you out to-night. I'd have done the same if you'd come into my house; but we're all equal on the public road, and if you molest us here you'll answer for it to me in another place,' said Mr Howroyd with determination.

All this time Sarah had stood beside her uncle, her eyes flashing, but giving no other sign that she was moved by the discussion; but she now said, 'The men are right, Uncle Howroyd. I will go back to Balmoral;' and she turned to go up the hill.

Poor Mr Howroyd might well say he did not understand women, for this was the last thing he had expected Sarah to do, and it embarrassed him very much, for he wanted to get to the town as soon as he could and stop possible disturbances; but it was impossible to let Sarah return to her home alone on an evening like this. He stood looking first at the crowd, which was now passing on, and then at Sarah, doubtful which to accompany, when the question was decided for him by a man in the crowd, who came forward and said, 'I'll see Miss Clay home, Mr William; you'll be wanted down Ousebank to-night.'

'Mickleroyd!' cried Mr Howroyd in amazement. 'You here! I didn't expect to see you among this lot.'

William Howroyd feared no man, and 'said his mind,' as he was wont to express it, and he was far too popular for it to be resented, perhaps because his 'mind' had never anything but kindness in it, though it was very truthful.

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'I'll answer for my presence here if need be, Mr. William; but let me take the young lady home. She'll be safe with me, and the town'll be safer if you are there,' said the old man, with sturdy independence.

'I'll come, Luke.—Good-night, uncle,' said Sarah, deciding the question, as usual, for herself.

'Good-night, Sarah. I'm glad you're going home; your mother'll be worrying about you, I'll be bound, and she'll want some one to comfort her,' said her uncle as he turned to go down the hill.

'Oh, Horatia's doing that, I've no doubt. I can't think why she wasn't me, and I her. She'd have liked to live at Balmoral,' replied Sarah.

'She's a good young lady, Miss Sarah, and, if you'll excuse me, she's done the master a mint of good. It's what he wants, some one to say a word in season, and make him a little softer like,' said Luke Mickleroyd.

'You're all alike, Luke; you think there's no one like Horatia Cunningham, and I can't think why except that she has a pleasant way of saying things,' said Sarah a little bitterly.

'It isn't only that, miss; it's that she's got a lot of heart. But I know you've got a heart too, and a heart of gold; only I often think 'tis a pity some people cover it up so carefully that it wants a lot of digging to come at,' remarked the man.

'I suppose you are talking about me; but don't I show you any feeling, Luke?' asked Sarah rather reproachfully.

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'Yes, miss, of course; and I wasn't thinking of you at the minute, as it happened. I'm sorry I said what I did about Miss Cunningham if it annoyed you, for I know from Naomi how kind you are, and what a true friend to all our family. If I said anything, it was because I was thinking 'twas a pity you didn't take things as the other young lady does, for if you had very likely matters would never have come to this pass.'

Sarah did not answer a word, and the two walked on in silence. Luke Mickleroyd was thinking bitterly of the part his daughter Jane Mary had taken in the day's work, and Sarah's thoughts were not more pleasant.

'I dare say you're right, Luke; but one can't change one's character. If a person's born proud and horrid like me she can't help it; it's her nature to be so,' she said after a pause.

'There's something above nature, Miss Sarah; and though I'm not one to preach, I know you know better than me, not being a scholar, that you can be changed,' replied the man.

Sarah was so surprised at such a speech from a mill-hand that she found no words to reply; but when he had left her, by her desire, at the back of the house, she made her way to her room by the back-stairs, and taking up her favourite attitude on the wide window-seat, sat and gazed out

over Ousebank.

'I hate them all! I hate Ousebank, and the mills, and the hands—the ungrateful people; they turned against me even, though they know I have always taken their parts and sympathised with them,' she burst out. Then the words of her uncle came back to her that she would one day regret the attitude she had taken up, and she wondered whether she didn't regret it a little now. And then Luke Mickleroyd's remarks haunted her, and with a sudden impatient movement she got up and went to the door. There she paused irresolutely, and then, half-shamefacedly, she turned back and knelt down by her bedside; and after ten minutes she got up and walked swiftly out of the room and down the stairs, wondering rather at have said; and though she said her prayers night and morning as a matter of habit, she did not remember ever having prayed in the daytime before.

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## CHAPTER XX.

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### SARAH'S FIRST STEP TO CONQUEST.

Sarah walked swiftly along the passages, her head erect, her colour a little brighter, and her lips half-smiling instead of being curved in a contemptuous droop; and on her way she met Naomi.

'Oh miss!' cried Naomi, and then stopped short, and looked curiously at her young mistress.

'Well, Naomi, what is it? What are you looking at me like that for? Has anything more happened?' demanded Sarah.

'No, miss; thank goodness there's nothing more than you know, and that's enough, and too much. I was only thinking you look rare and beautiful this evening,' blurted out the maid.

'What nonsense, Naomi! I'm just hot and red, and you don't like pale people,' replied Sarah; but she was pleased all the same; for though she was not in the least vain of her good looks—which she would have exchanged willingly for Horatia's parentage—she liked to be admired, and she walked on, feeling very satisfied with herself.

Naomi looked after her admiringly. 'There's not a young lady can hold a candle to her in all the county. But wherever's she going? Why, that's not the way to the drawing-room; she's going to the master's room. Well, it isn't often she pays him a visit, and it mostly ends badly, if it doesn't begin so. How she comes to be his daughter I can't think; she's too good for the like of him. I'd sooner have believed she was a duke's daughter,' she soliloquised.

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Meanwhile Sarah, conscious that she was doing a noble action in conquering her own feelings, walked on, as Naomi had said, to her father's special sitting-room, which he called his study, but in which his only study was how to make more money.

Sarah tapped at the door, and her father's voice growled something which she took to be an invitation to come in, so she opened the door and entered the room; but on the threshold she paused and hesitated. Her father was sitting in his big easy-chair in front of his bureau, writing. He did not look up at once, thinking it was a servant, who could wait his pleasure, and Sarah had time to notice his forbidding expression. It seemed to her that her father had never looked more unlovable, as he sat there with a scowl on his face, writing no doubt letters to the police or whatever authorities he wished to invoke aid from to punish the incendiaries; and as he wrote such a malignant and fierce expression came over his face that Sarah made a movement to retreat; but the noise she made in doing so attracted Mr Clay's attention, and, looking up sharply, he exclaimed, 'What! you, Sally?' and laid down his pen to hear what his daughter had to say to him.

'Yes, father; I came to tell you how sorry I am about all this affair to-day,' she said.

Mr Clay looked keenly and a little suspiciously at his daughter. She stood there, looking so like a culprit apologising for her misdeeds, that the thought flashed across him that perhaps she had something to be sorry for. She made no secret of her sympathy with the 'hands,' and she had not expressed sorrow or indignation at the time, so that the mill-owner may be excused if he believed for the moment that she had had something to do with the fire.

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'Are you sorry?' he asked dryly. 'I thought you didn't care if I lost every penny of my money. That's what you always say. Are you sure you're not sorry that your friends are going to get into trouble, eh? I suppose you didn't know anything about it beforehand? Because, you know, I sha'n't make any exceptions. Those that burn my property shall pay for it.'

'Father,' cried Sarah indignantly, 'how can you think such a dreadful thing of me? If that's what you think, I'm sorry I came to you at all;' and she turned to go.

'Stop a minute, my lass,' said her father. 'I'd like to get to the bottom of this. Why did you come?'

'I came to tell you I am sorry for your loss,' said Sarah half-sullenly.

'You are sure you didn't come to beg these people off their punishment?' persisted Mr Clay.

'Yes, I am quite sure of that. I should never waste my time asking you to show mercy to any one,'

cried Sarah, her eyes flashing.

Mark Clay looked at his daughter with an angry light in his eyes. 'I'm glad you've got so much sense, my lass,' he said coldly, and went on with his writing.

Sarah hesitated a minute. She was sorry for the words the moment they were out of her mouth. It was a miserable end to her attempt at making friends with her father; but her father's head was bent over his writing, and his face had on the stubborn look she knew so well, so she reluctantly turned away, and went back to her own room.

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'He means mischief,' she said as she leant her chin on her hands. 'He's more dangerous when he is quiet like that than when he blusters.'

How long she sat Sarah did not know, until she was startled by hearing the dinner-gong clanging through the house. She gave a violent start, and looked round to see if Naomi had put out her dress for dinner, and saw, to her surprise, not only that she had not done so, but that it was the dinner-hour, so that either dinner must be late—an unheard-of thing in that house—or she had not heard the dressing-bell, and this must be the dinner-gong.

'But where is Naomi, and why was my dress not put out for me?' Sarah asked herself, and in answer to her unspoken question Naomi appeared.

'Oh Miss Sarah, I'm so sorry; I've fair forgot everything to-day, with all the upset! Oh miss, do let me dress you quick!' she cried, in great distress.

'It's the dinner-gong, then?' inquired Sarah.

'Yes, miss; there hasn't been any other. Sykes he forgot to ring the dressing-bell; the first time in his life, he says, that he ever did such a thing. The only one that's gone on the same as usual is the French *chef*, and, of course, he doesn't care a bit about us English folk. All he said when he heard about this was, "Vell, he got plenty money build more barns; but if his dinner isn't to the minute he'll swear, and so there it is, ready to dish." So pray make haste, Miss Sarah, for master's sure to be upset easy to-night,' Naomi wound up.

'Naomi, was Jane Mary in this?' inquired Sarah abruptly.

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It will be noticed that they both alluded to the incendiarism as 'this.'

Naomi replied, 'I couldn't say, Miss Sarah. I couldn't say anything for certain about it, on any account.'

'You mean you won't; and that means that you don't trust me,' replied Sarah.

'No, indeed, miss; I'd trust you as soon as I would myself. But it's the real truth; I don't know anything, nor I won't know anything. And if I was you I'd do the same. It'll be the safest way and the best in this business,' Naomi told her earnestly.

Sarah sighed. 'It's going to be a bad business for those that do know anything about it,' she said.

'It would have been worse if some of them had had their way,' observed Naomi.

'Then you do know something about it?' exclaimed Sarah.

'I know what they're all talking about, but what's true and what's false I couldn't tell you.'

'Is my mother dressed for dinner?' inquired Sarah suddenly, abandoning the attempt to pump Naomi.

'No, Miss Sarah; the mistress has been lying down ever since she came in, with Miss Horatia.'

'Lying down with Horatia?' ejaculated Sarah.

'I mean lying down, with Miss Horatia sitting beside her holding her hand like a daughter,' Naomi corrected herself.

Sarah coloured violently, and Naomi wondered what made her do so. Poor Sarah was being made to feel all round what a poor sort of daughter she was, and she felt irritably that it was only since Horatia came that this fact had been obvious. But Sarah was wrong. Her attitude towards her parents had always been noticeable, and her brother and mother had constantly upbraided her with it; but it was Horatia's coming which had brought this home to her, and she did not like it.

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'That will do, Naomi,' she said, giving an impatient tug to the sash that the maid was tying, and she ran lightly down the corridors and the wide marble staircase to the dining-room.

Mr and Mrs Clay and Horatia were all there, and dinner was begun; and Sarah noticed, to her annoyance, that all three were dressed in the clothes they had worn for the picnic. 'Oh, you haven't changed! I have; that's why I am late.'

'We were all too upset to think of dress; we're not like you, above caring about these things,' said her father bitterly.

'Sarah thought you wouldn't like to see 'er in 'er dusty clothes, Mark; an' I would 'ave changed too, only I was so tired I thought you'd excuse me; an' Miss 'Oratia 'ere was too kind to leave me alone, my nerves bein' upset,' put in Mrs Clay in order to shield her daughter, and really making

things worse by contrasting Sarah's conduct with Horatia's.

'Yes, she's a good, kind lass, is Miss Horatia,' said Mr Clay, giving her a friendly look, as he pressed some favourite dish of his on her.

Sarah had dreaded dinner, being of the same opinion as Naomi that her father would be upset. Indeed, he had looked very much upset and ready for an explosion when she left him in his study; but it was 'Horatia again,' she said to herself, and she thought angrily that Horatia cared nothing about those poor people who had got themselves into trouble.

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She was angrier still when Horatia replied, 'I'm not at all good or kind at this minute, for I should like to put all those people I saw in the park into prison.'

'You'll have your wish before long, little lass, for that's where they'll all be,' said Mr Clay.

'Oh, but I shall be very sorry if they really do go to prison. I only wished it from revenge, and, of course, that's a very wrong motive,' cried Horatia. She looked across at Sarah to help her; but Sarah would not look at her friend or join in the conversation at all.

'I don't know whether it's a wrong motive or not, but I do know that it's necessary to punish those wretches for destroying my property; and punished they will be,' Mr Clay replied.

'There wasn't many o' 'em really doin' that, Mark,' said Mrs Clay timidly.

'They were doing as bad, standing by watching the destruction; and I'll have every man of them clapped into prison,' said the millionaire.

Mrs Clay said no more, and Horatia began to chatter about other things, amusing both Mr and Mrs Clay by her shrewd remarks.

Sarah sat sullenly by, and when dinner was over she went straight up to her room instead of joining the others in the drawing-room. 'They prefer Horatia to me, so let them have her. I'm sure she's welcome to do daughter,' Sarah said to herself. Perhaps finding her place usurped awakened Sarah to the knowledge that she had a place to fill in her home, and that she was not filling it.

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The next day Mr Clay went down to his mills as usual, and no word had been said about the events of the day before; but Sarah was not deceived. Her father, she was sure, was planning his revenge, and sooner or later he would, as he had said, clap his enemies into prison.

Naomi could give her no information on the subject, and Mr Howroyd refused point-blank to discuss the matter. 'You'll hear all there is to hear in time; but it may come before me to be heard, and I can't discuss it with you or any one else.'

The next morning came a very polite letter from Lady Cunningham to Mrs Clay, thanking her for all her kindness to Horatia, and begging that she might return in time to pay a visit to some relatives, who desired that she might accompany her parents, as she was a great favourite.

'I don't wonder at that, my dearie; you'd be welcome anywhere, with your bonny bright face,' said Mrs Clay.

'I sha'n't let you go unless you promise to come again soon,' said Mr Clay, with a heavy attempt at humour.

'Oh, but I am coming! I've enjoyed myself immensely,' cried Horatia willingly.—'Good-bye, Sarah. I shall be so glad to see you back at school. We shall be friends again then as we used to be, sha'n't we?'

'I don't feel as if anything were going to be as it used to be,' said Sarah; but she kissed Horatia very affectionately when they parted.

'I believe it's your doing that mamma sent for us, Nanny,' said Horatia when the two were in the train.

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'And if it was, I'm not a bit ashamed of it,' said Nancy stoutly, 'for I couldn't have stayed another night there, starting and trembling at every sound, and dreaming shocking dreams of being burnt alive in my bed.'

'It's awfully selfish of us to come away and let them be burnt alive in their beds, if you think it's at all likely,' remarked Horatia.

'Then I'll have to be selfish, for I don't consider it's any part of my duty to stop and be burnt with them, which it's their own fault in a way, for they do say that Mr Clay's made himself fairly hated by his ways.'

'I don't hate him,' observed Horatia.

'No, miss, so I saw; but however you put up with him and his common ways, let alone his hasty temper, I can't make out. Well, we've seen the last of them, thank goodness! so I'll say nothing against them,' remarked Mrs Nancy with satisfaction.

'I've promised to go and stay with them again soon,' observed Horatia.

'That's if her ladyship allows it,' replied Nancy, in a tone that implied that the mistress wouldn't



allow it.

Horatia only laughed. 'It will be nice to see them all again,' she said. And this time she meant her own family.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

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### CLAY'S MILLS PLAYING.

Sarah was sitting in her own room, rather cross with herself for feeling lonely, and trying not to acknowledge, even to herself, that she missed Horatia, or to own that her schoolfellow made things go more smoothly, somehow. It was a stormy-looking morning, and Sarah was wondering what she should do with herself, when she felt a gentle hand placed on her shoulder, and, turning in surprise, saw her brother standing behind her, with his usual pleasant smile on his face.

'Good-morning!' he said, as he kissed her.

'Goodness me, George! Where on earth did you spring from?' she cried in surprise. 'I thought you were in Scotland.'

'So I was till yesterday; in fact, I've only just arrived,' he remarked.

'You've been travelling all night, and you look as fresh and clean as if you'd just dressed for breakfast! But that's just like you. I believe you'd be miserable if you had your hair untidy or your face dirty,' she observed.

'It certainly isn't a pleasant idea. Besides, there is no need for it in this case, seeing that they provide plenty of hot water in the through sleeping-car,' remarked George, seating himself on the window-seat opposite his sister.

'All the same, I should think it would be pleasanter to travel by day. And what brought you back a week before your time?' Sarah demanded.

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'I thought I should like to have a last look at the old home,' he replied dryly. 'I have more affection for it than you have, you see.'

'How did you hear about it?' inquired Sarah.

'I saw something in the papers, and wired to Uncle Howroyd, and he said I had better come back. I meant to come in any case, though, as soon as I saw the papers,' explained George.

'What did the papers say? I haven't seen one, and no one will tell me anything. Uncle Howroyd is worst of all, because, he says, he's a magistrate; but I suppose it's just because I am only a girl, since he will talk to you,' said Sarah.

'He only told me the real facts of the case, and said he thought my place was at home, if only to comfort my mother.' Here George paused a moment, and then continued, 'She seems to miss that little Miss Cunningham. She's been rather lonely these last two days.'

There was a tone of reproach in his voice, and Sarah answered quickly, 'I've been too miserable and worried to talk to any one.'

'I'm afraid the pater will be in a terrific rage about it,' replied George; and, having made his reproach, did not recur to it.

'Will be in a rage? What do you mean? He has been in a rage ever since it happened. He ought to be cooling down by now; but I don't suppose he'll do that till he's got them all in prison,' replied Sarah.

'Then you don't know?' inquired George.

'Know what? Have they been tried and let off? It's too bad of Uncle Howroyd not to tell me, and I wanted so to know,' cried Sarah.

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'They can't get a case against them. No one will give evidence, not even the head-gardener; he says he didn't see how the fire began, and it might have been burning weeds that caused it,' said George.

Sarah laughed. 'I am glad!' she exclaimed in a tone of delight.

'I'm not. It's a very disgraceful thing that a man's property should be destroyed and no one punished,' said George, with unwonted sternness.

'But father said he'd prosecute them all for trespassing,' observed Sarah.

'You'll be glad to hear that he has been told that no magistrate would convict; it's something about a right of way,' said George.

'George, I am sorry they did it; but I do think he has provoked them, and he is hard to his workpeople,' said Sarah.

'I know; but this isn't the way to make him better. In fact, I am afraid they've enraged him so that goodness only knows what will be the end of it,' said George gloomily.

'I suppose you'd mind dreadfully if we did lose all our money?' suggested she.

'Of course I should; and so would you, whatever nonsense you may talk to the contrary!' cried George testily. 'And it's to do what I can to smooth matters down and prevent any such catastrophe that I have hurried home. Not that I can do much good,' he wound up.

'Oh George, it would be jolly to live in a little cottage, and do as one liked, and dress as one liked, and not have to sit for hours over long, stupid meals, and have to walk half a mile from your bedroom to the dining-room!' cried Sarah. [Pg 197]

'You'd be a nice one in a cottage! You'd want the whole of it to yourself to begin with; and as for doing what you like, you would not be able to do that if you were poor any more than, or nearly as much as, if you were rich. You'd have to keep the house clean, and do the cooking, and be a drudge. How would you like that, pray?' he inquired.

'Lovely!' said Sarah with enthusiasm.

George looked at her curiously, with a half-amused expression. 'I only hope you mayn't be put to the proof, but it wouldn't surprise me. However, I mustn't stop here talking; I want to see the governor. I suppose he's gone to the mills?'

'Yes; but I don't advise you to go there after him. You know he's always in a worse humour in the morning than he is in the afternoon when he's had some lunch. Wait and see him then. We might go down to the rink father had made on purpose for Horatia. I think he'd have got her the moon if she had asked for it,' observed Sarah.

George laughed. 'She was very nice to mother. By the way, if you really want to skate, I'll go and tell her; she'd like to come down and watch us, and the walk would do her good.'

'All right,' agreed Sarah, as her brother went off to fetch his mother.

'It was so kind o' your father to 'ave this floor laid. 'E's good enough to people if they only take 'im the right way, only 'e mustn't be crossed; 'e never 'as been. Oh deary me! w'at 'e'll do now that they've crossed 'im in this business, I don't know. 'E says 'e'll best 'em yet, for 'e's never been bested by any man, an' doesn't mean to be,' said Mrs Clay as she walked along, clinging to her son's arm. [Pg 198]

'I dare say he'll calm down in a day or two. It is very irritating. He can't "best" the law, as he calls it,' said George in a soothing tone.

'Well, there's no fear o' 'is goin' against the law, for 'e doesn't 'old wi' that,' said Mrs Clay.

'Then we may console ourselves that his "besting" will be legal, in which case no harm will come of it,' said George with a smile, as, having put his skates on, he gave his hand to his sister and took her for a round.

Mrs Clay sat on the raised stand, and watched the two as they skated round and round, doing all sorts of figures, and performing rinking feats for her special benefit, as she was well aware.

'Beautiful, my dears—beautiful! But, oh, do be careful! Suppose you were to fall an' break your pretty noses or legs, or anythin'!' she ejaculated at intervals.

The two skaters laughed heartily at this last remark. 'I believe you would care more about our noses than our legs, mother,' said Sarah, 'though they aren't half so important.'

'There's nothin' so important to a woman as good looks—except bein' good,' said Mrs Clay seriously when they stopped to rest for a few minutes beside her.

After a couple of hours they went back to lunch, and found their father had just come back from the mills. He greeted George in a friendly enough manner.

'I got your telegram, my lad, thank you; and it's nice of you to hurry home to stand by your dad in his fight. For I suppose that's what you've come for, isn't it?' [Pg 199]

'Yes, father, certainly, as I told you in my telegram. I only wish I had been there; they wouldn't have got off scot-free, the scoundrels!' replied George.

'That's the right spirit, my lad. I wish you had been there; but I've got the best of them. They didn't know Mark Clay when they tried that game on with him; but they'll know him better now,' said the mill-owner.

'What have you done, sir?' inquired George, in his calm way, which gave no sign of his secret anxiety on the subject.

Mark Clay gave a chuckle, which made Sarah feel very uneasy; but only said, 'You'll see, my boy—you'll see. Just wait till the end of the week. It'll be public property then, and folks will see whether Mark Clay's an easy man to beat.'

George avoided looking either at his mother or Sarah; for, truth to tell, he felt very uncomfortable. This cheerfulness on the part of his father boded no good. But he asked no more

questions, and talked about the sport he had had in Scotland.

'George,' said Sarah after lunch, 'what's he up to?'

'I don't know,' replied her brother, too depressed to comment upon her mode of expression.

'Well, I believe I know. He's going to turn them all off. You see if he isn't. That's what he means by saying, "Wait till the end of the week." Oh dear! oh dear! What a business there'll be! There were at least a hundred in the park that day.'

'It's their own fault. But that would be cutting off his nose to spite his ears, wouldn't it? It would inconvenience him dreadfully to dismiss so many men at once,' objected George. [Pg 200]

George, it will be observed, knew even less of his father's business than Sarah, whose visits to her uncle Howroyd's mill and her acquaintance with the Mickleroyd family gave her some knowledge of the working of the mills; so she answered now, 'Oh, he won't care. He'll shut a workroom up and make the others work harder. You may trust him for not inconveniencing himself; it's the people who will be thrown out of employment that I am sorry for.'

George did not argue the matter with her, but walked off to see his uncle, who had nothing consoling to say to him, except that he would stand by them whatever happened.

'And what do you suppose he expects to happen?' George asked his sister, rather irritably, when he returned.

'Goodness knows! All I know is that I shall be glad when this week is over,' she replied.

But Sarah was wrong, for when the time came there was no gladness at Balmoral.

'You were right, Sarah,' said George, coming in and throwing himself down on a cane armchair in the garden, near where his sister was sitting reading.

'I generally am,' said Sarah lightly. She and her brother were great friends in spite of their abuse of each other.

'It's no joke,' he replied seriously; and Sarah, looking to see what was the matter, was struck by her brother's grave looks. He was coming out in quite a new aspect. [Pg 201]

'What's no joke? Oh, do you mean that I was right about father's revenge?' she inquired.

'I don't know about its being a revenge; but he's turned out that crowd that looked on at the fire, and the hands have revenged themselves by striking, and Clay's Mills are "playing."'

It should be explained that 'playing' in the north country means not working, and a very serious thing it is, especially in a large mill.

Sarah dropped her book, and sat there, open-mouthed, looking at her brother. 'Clay's Mills "playing"! Our hands have gone out on strike?' she gasped.

Her brother nodded silently. 'Of course they'll have to give in; the governor can hold out longer than they can; but it means a terrible loss,' he said at length.

They were sitting there staring blankly at each other when they heard their father's voice. Both started as if they had been caught doing something wrong, and instinctively looked round to see if there was any possibility of escaping without being seen; but they saw that this was impossible, for Mr. Clay was making for them.

'Oh George! he'll be in a towering rage. You talk to him. I'm sure to say something to irritate him,' said Sarah in a hurried undertone.

'He doesn't look much upset,' observed George; and just at that minute the millionaire came within hearing, and called out a cheery 'Good-morning' to them.

'Well, my lad, I've got rid of a lot of bad material to-day,' he remarked jocosely.

'You mean the hands, father?' said George, as he rose and politely placed a chair for his father. [Pg 202]

'Yes, I mean the hands,' said Mr Clay, mimicking, with little success it must be owned, his son's soft, drawling tones and refined accents.

'I'm sorry you found them all bad material,' George replied, without noticing this.

'I didn't say I did; but part of it was bad, and as the good wouldn't stay without the bad, out they both had to go, and bitterly they'll rue the day they did it,' declared Mr Clay.

'I hope you won't,' burst out Sarah.

Her father looked as if he were going to get into one of his violent rages, but refrained, as he had done lately; and again Sarah could not help noticing the change that had taken place since Horatia's coming, though Horatia had not been able to prevent him from doing this latest act. 'I hope not; Clay's Mills sha'n't "play" for them,' he said quietly; but there was a satisfied look on his face that Sarah could not understand.

It was Saturday, and all that day and all Sunday the millionaire went about looking aggressively cheerful. 'He only does it just to annoy us,' said Sarah.

'It doesn't annoy me. I'm only too glad to see one cheerful face in the midst of so many gloomy ones, though I should like to know what it means,' said George.

'So should I, for Naomi says father has a big contract on, and will lose thousands every day he stands idle,' said Sarah.

George looked very serious. 'What can he be thinking of? He must be going cracky,' he opined.

'Oh no, he isn't,' said Sarah a few minutes later; 'he's done them, somehow. Look!'

George looked out of the window. 'The mills are working!' he exclaimed. 'How has he done it?'

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## CHAPTER XXII.

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### 'FURRINERS' IN OUSEBANK!

The young Clays stood and stared at each other in blank amazement. Then they looked out again at the cluster of tall chimneys which belonged to Clay's Mills, and which were belching forth great volumes of smoke as if in contemptuous defiance of those who had dared to try to stop their mighty engine.

'It is our mills!' repeated Sarah, as if she had almost disbelieved her eyes.

'Yes, there's no mistake about it; they are our mills; and yet I could have vowed I saw some of the hands pass by the park-gate this morning when I went to speak to the park-keeper. They were going away from Ousebank in search of work, I supposed.'

'I expect you are mistaken. How could the mills work without the hands? Unless they climbed down, and I'm sure they won't do that. Besides, you don't know their faces, do you?' asked Sarah.

'I guessed who they were by the way they glared at me; it made me pretty uncomfortable,' said George.

Sarah looked at her brother, who was smoking a gold-tipped cigarette. 'You don't look very uncomfortable,' she observed.

'Oh George! Oh Sarah! Do you see that the mills are workin' again?' cried Mrs Clay, her lips trembling, as she came into the room where her children were.

George put his arm round his mother. Even Sarah was moved to be demonstrative, and, taking her mother's hand, fondled it.

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'What is it, mother? Why does that frighten you so? It is a very good thing, though I don't know how it has come about,' said George gently.

Mrs Clay only shook her head. She made no reply, but stood gazing out over Ousebank, her eyes fixed on the cluster of chimneys that belonged to their mills. They had finished the firing probably, for the chimneys were not smoking so violently now, but some smoke was still coming out.

Sarah seemed very thoughtful, and soon left the room to go in search of Naomi. 'Have the hands gone back, Naomi?' she asked abruptly.

'You've seen it, then? Our lads haven't, I know. I can't make it out at all. I'd give something to know what's happened; but now that none of the townspeople are allowed farther than the park-gates we hear no news at all,' replied Naomi.

'Naomi, I must know how they've managed it. I shall come down the town with you,' cried Sarah.

'Very well, miss. I'll be ready in two minutes,' said Naomi, and went off.

On her way she met Mrs Clay, who looked relieved at meeting her, and remarked, 'Oh Naomi, just tell Miss Sarah that Mr Howroyd 'as 'phoned to say that none of us are to go into the town to-day.'

'None of us, ma'am? Do you mean not even me?' inquired Naomi, looking blank.

'Oh, you! No, you won't matter; they won't 'urt you,' said Mrs Clay, quite severely for her.

Naomi returned slowly to Sarah's room. 'Mistress says no one is to go into the town to-day, by Mr Howroyd's orders, except me; so, please, miss, may I run down and find out what it all means?'

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As may be imagined, Sarah did not understand this message at all; but when Naomi had explained as well as she could, her young mistress said with decision, 'I'm coming with you, Naomi. Something dreadful is the matter. I expect they are burning up all the fuel, or doing some damage to the mill.'

'Please, Miss Sarah, don't be angry, but I daren't take you. It's as much as my place is worth, and you might get roughly handled if the lads are angry with the master,' said Naomi.

'You need not take me, but you can't prevent me from going with you. In fact, if you like you can start first. I will go alone,' persisted Sarah.

Naomi would have liked to argue with Sarah; but she knew it would be a waste of time, so she went off, and instead of making herself smart, she caught up a shawl, threw it over her head, and ran down the back-stairs and out at the back-door as quick as she could.

'No, you don't!' cried a voice behind her, and a strong hand grasped her shoulder none too gently.

With a little cry Naomi turned, to see herself confronted by Sykes, who exclaimed, 'Whatever are you up to, Naomi? I thought you were a mill-lass, and we don't want none of them up here.'

'So I am for the moment. Let me pass, Mr Sykes. Miss Sarah wants to know what's on in Ousebank.'

'No good, I'll warrant; and don't get mixing up with it,' was the butler's parting remark as he released her.

Naomi sped across the park; but what was her surprise to see ahead of her, running as fast as she could, another mill-lass! Naomi made after her quickly, meaning, if she were a friend, to ask what was doing in Ousebank, and, if not, to demand her business at Balmoral. 'Wait a bit, lass,' she called out when she got near enough to be heard; but the girl only ran on faster. She was tall and slender, and not unlike Jane Mary, Naomi's sister; and the thought struck Naomi that if it was her sister, she was after no good. 'Jane Mary,' she shouted, 'if you don't stop I'll heave this stone at you!'

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The figure in front stopped at this threat, and turned.

'Miss Sarah! I beg your pardon, miss; I didn't know you,' cried Naomi in surprise.

'Now that you do know me, and see that I mean to go to Ousebank, perhaps you'll drop that stone—it might have killed me if it had fallen on my head—and let me walk beside you instead of in front.'

Noami looked rather guiltily at the stone in her hand, and dropped it, saying apologetically, 'I thought it might be some one up to no good. But do you suppose they won't know you, miss?'

'You didn't,' observed Sarah with a laugh.

'Not your back; but all Ousebank knows your face, and they'll maybe turn nasty to you,' Naomi warned her.

'They'll be too busy to stare at a mill-lass, and I shall keep as well behind you as I can.'

Naomi looked doubtfully at her mistress. 'Perhaps if you were to tie this handkerchief round your face, as if you'd got toothache, you'd pass better,' she suggested, handing Sarah a large white pocket-handkerchief with a coloured border.

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Sarah took it and wrapped it round her face, saying as she did so, 'It will make me very hot. But I'll tell you what, we'll go straight to your house, Naomi; they will know all about it there, and we sha'n't mix in the crowd.' Sarah's courage, as may be seen, was oozing away with all Naomi's warnings.

But Naomi proved a Job's comforter. 'I doubt we'd better not go home, Miss Sarah. There's Jane Mary fair off her head, she's that mad with the master, and she's turned against all of you. She'd think you were a spy or something, and be nasty as like as not.'

Sarah said no more, and as they had come to the town now they had enough to do to pick their way through the crowded streets. 'The mills can't be working, Naomi. Here are some of the chief hands,' she said in an undertone.

'I never thought they were. It's some mischief they're doing. Hark! did you hear what yon man said?' inquired Naomi in the same tone.

'No; at least, I could not understand, he spoke such broad Yorkshire. I thought he said something about "furriners,"' replied Sarah.

'That's what he did say. Oh miss, come into the ginnel [alley] till these men pass,' cried Naomi, pulling Sarah into the said 'ginnel,' just in time to avoid a party of young men, who were evidently very excited, and were anathematising Mark Clay. 'Miss, you'd best go to Howroyd's. There's a fine to-do to-day,' entreated Naomi.

'Perhaps I'd better,' agreed Sarah, who was not very happy in her mill-lass's get-up. At no time did Sarah like meeting the 'hands;' but in this disguise she disliked it still more. It was only a mad impulse which made her don the disguise, and she rather regretted it now that she saw the state of the town. So she willingly turned towards Howroyd's Mill.

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'The master's at the telephone. He's been there most of the morning, and it's no use your coming to-day; you'd best leave your message,' said the maid, who did not recognise Sarah. Indeed, she had only opened the door a few inches, taking them to be poor girls come to ask help from the ever-ready philanthropist, William Howroyd.

'Let me in, Mary,' said Sarah, coming forward and untying her disguising handkerchief.

The maid gave a little shriek, and grasping Sarah by the hand, drew her inside. 'Miss Sarah, my dear! however could you? And the town all against your father! Come forward! Pray, come forward!'

Sarah very willingly went 'forward,' as they say in Yorkshire, and gave a sigh of relief as she threw off the shawl which covered her head, and sank into a chair. 'What is the matter, Mary? What has my father done now?' she demanded.

'You don't know? Oh deary me!' cried the maid, with lifted hands and much shaking of the head.

'No; tell me quick,' said Sarah abruptly.

Mary looked fearfully round, as if the information was dangerous to give. 'He's got in a lot of furriners—blacklegs—to run the mills,' she said in a hoarse whisper.

Sarah looked at her in horror, mingled with incredulity. 'Foreigners! How could he? And how could they do the work? Besides, where did he get them from, and when did they come? It's impossible!' she cried.

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'It's true for all that,' said Mary, nodding her head.

'I must see Uncle Howroyd,' said Sarah. 'Go and tell him I'm here, Mary.'

'I told you not to leave the house,' was her uncle's remark when he came in, looking graver and sadder than Sarah had ever seen him.

'Yes, I know; but I simply had to come, and no one recognised me. See, I was a mill-lass,' said Sarah, throwing her shawl over her head to show her uncle.

She looked so pretty and coaxing—for Sarah could be charming to those she loved—that her uncle smiled, and said with a sigh, 'Well, you're safe enough now you're here, and I've half a mind to send for your mother and George. Anyway, I must telephone to tell them you are here.'

'Oh no, Uncle Howroyd; I must go back for lunch,' cried Sarah, not adding what was in her mind—that her father would be angry if she were not home for lunch.

'You'll have to stay now you've come, child. There'll be no going home for you to-day, so you'll have to do with a plain dinner to-night; and Naomi had better go back and fetch what you want, unless I go and fetch them and your mother myself,' replied Mr Howroyd.

'Do you mean that you think mother isn't safe at Balmoral?' cried Sarah, starting up.

'I hope so. Do you suppose I should be here and not with her if she weren't?' demanded Mr Howroyd. 'No; it's only that I doubt if your father will be able to get home to-day, and I thought she'd feel safer with me.'

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'She has George,' said Sarah quickly, for she sometimes resented other people speaking slightly of her brother, however much she might do so herself.

'Ah yes, she has George. Well, I'll just 'phone to her;' and he went off, only to return in a few minutes to say, 'You are right; she prefers George, and George prefers Balmoral. He says I am to tell you to stop where you are, if it's any use telling you to do anything.'

'I sha'n't obey George; but as it's Hobson's choice, I will stay with you, Uncle Howroyd; but, please, tell me, how did father manage to get foreigners to do his work?'

'That's more than any one but himself knows; but he smuggled them into the mills yesterday, and they slept there all night, it seems; but who they are, or where they came from, or how they are getting on, no one knows,' replied Mr Howroyd.

'They can't stop in there always, and the people will kill them when they come out,' said Sarah.

'Your father will protect them, and so shall I, if it comes to that; but it's a bad business, a very bad business; and what will be the end of it, who can tell?'

'I know they'll burn down the mills—that's what always happens—and we shall be ruined,' said Sarah.

'That won't ruin you, because they are insured, and let us hope it won't come to that. Besides, the mills are so well guarded that they can't get near them,' said Mr Howroyd in a tone which showed that he had thought of this danger himself.

Mr Howroyd was now called away, and Sarah was left to her own thoughts, which were not pleasant ones. Somehow, when it came to the point, the thought of her father being burnt in his mill or ruined by his workpeople's spite was not so lovely, and she was relieved when Naomi reappeared with a bundle in her arms.

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'I didn't dare to bring a portmanteau, miss, or even your dressing-bag. I was afraid with all these folk about ready for any mischief, so I've just brought a few necessities, as the mistress says; and she sends her love, and says she's glad you are safe with your uncle, though she wishes you'd stayed with her.'

'I wish I had, Naomi. Tell her I would never have come if I had known I should not be able to get back, and that if she will tell Uncle Howroyd I may, I'll come home at once,' said Sarah.

Trouble was doing Sarah good, and her affectionate message did her mother good; though she hurried off to the telephone to tell Mr Howroyd that she forbade Sarah to attempt to come home, and to inform him that Mr Clay was stopping at the mill too.

And so the weary, dreary day wore on, and the excitement in the streets grew. After nightfall the older men held indignation meetings in public, where they had huge audiences of sympathisers, the entire population being on their side, as a matter of fact.

'Foreigners in Ousebank! We've never had such a thing before, and we don't want it now,' they all agreed. As for the younger men, they held meetings too; but their meetings were held within closed doors, and what was said at them was not divulged.

'They're brewing mischief they young uns, sir,' said Luke Mickleroyd to Mr Howroyd when he came in for a few minutes before he took his watch for the night. [Pg 213]

'I'm afraid they are. We must only pray and trust that they may not carry it out,' replied Mr Howroyd.

'Ay, sir, that's all we can do. I shall keep a sharper lookout to-night than I've ever done, and, please God, they'll be kept from doing harm to others and bringing sorrow on themselves,' said the good and pious old watchman.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

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### OUTWITTED.

All that night Sarah lay and tossed and turned, or fell into fitful slumbers, in which she had hideous dreams of the mills being burnt down, and her father with them. After a very vivid one, in which she saw the mill-owner standing, a tall, burly figure, on the top of one of the chimneys, with flames all round him which in a minute must devour him, she woke with a muffled cry, to find Naomi standing beside her with a frightened face.

'What has happened, Naomi? Tell me the worst at once,' cried Sarah.

'There's nought to tell, good or bad, so far as I know. But are you ill, Miss Sarah?' inquired the maid.

'No; I'm quite well. But the mills, and my father—are you sure that—that he's alive and well?' asked Sarah.

'So far as I know he is, and so are the mills; but no one has seen the master since yesterday, for he never came home last night. He sent to say he should stop in the mills all night,' said Naomi.

'Naomi, I must get up. Quick, get me some hot water,' cried Sarah, jumping up as she spoke.

'It's only six o'clock, miss. I shouldn't have come in and wakened you, only I thought I heard you call. You'd best go to sleep again; you're upset with all these doings, and no wonder.'

'I can't sleep, and I want to go to the mills,' declared Sarah. [Pg 215]

But Naomi exclaimed in alarm, 'Impossible, miss! Don't you think of doing such a thing! Mr Howroyd won't hear of it, I know. Besides'—here Naomi paused, and added in a rather embarrassed manner, 'you can't, Miss Sarah.'

'I can't go to the mills—our own mills, Naomi? What do you mean? You are hiding something from me. Are they burnt down or damaged in any way?' asked Sarah anxiously.

'Not so far as I know, miss; but you can't go into them for all that. No one can,' repeated Naomi.

'Naomi, have you seen the mills to-day? Are the chimneys all standing just as usual?' demanded Sarah.

'Why, yes, to be sure they are, and smoking; and big fires they are making, too, for I saw red sparks coming out of one. Why, what's the matter, Miss Sarah? You must be getting downright nervous,' observed Naomi, for Sarah had started and given a little shiver at this last remark.

'It's nothing, only I had a horrid dream about one of the chimneys; but if you say you saw them standing, with nothing unusual about them, it's all right.' And Sarah gave a half-nervous laugh as she thought of the 'unusual' appearance they had in her dream. 'All the same, I'm going to get up; it's no use lying in bed when you can't sleep,' she continued.

While she was dressing, Sarah's thoughts recurred to the conversation she had just had with Naomi, and she suddenly remembered that the girl had never explained her mysterious statement that no one could go into Clay's Mills. So she rang her bell, and telling Naomi to do her hair, sat down on a chair while this process went on, and came to the point at once. 'I suppose father has barricaded himself and the men into the mills; but I could have got through all right,' [Pg 216]

she observed.

'The master has barricaded himself in; but the pickets set by the hands to guard the mills have barricaded every one else out, and they wouldn't let you pass if it was ever so, not for life or death, for it's been tried,' replied Naomi.

'How do you mean for life or death?' asked Sarah, bewildered at this extraordinary statement.

'What I say. One of those foreigners was taken ill and wanted a doctor, and no doctor would they let through, not even Mr Howroyd; and if any one could get round Ousebank folk it would be Mr William, for he's fair worshipped by them all for his goodness.'

'What's going to be the end of it all?' cried Sarah.

'I couldn't say, Miss Sarah. I don't know what's going on, nor I don't want to. It's safest not, and so mother thinks, for she won't have a word about it in our house; and Jane Mary has to hold her tongue there, though they do say she talks like a man at the young fellows' meetings, and is as bad or worse than they, egging them on. Not that I know anything about it,' Naomi hastened to add.

'There are none so ignorant as those that won't know, eh, Naomi?' said Sarah slyly.

'Perhaps not, miss,' agreed Naomi, as she shut her lips tightly, and was not to be induced to say any more.

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Meanwhile the night at Balmoral had not been much more restful. In the morning George said to his mother in a decided tone which she had not heard him ever use, 'I am going into Ousebank, mother. I shall go and see Uncle Howroyd, and if he approves I shall try and see my father.'

'Oh my dear, my dear, don't you do it! I couldn't stay here alone—I couldn't really!' she cried, wringing her hands.

'Then come with me. We'll motor down, and at best they can only stop the car and make us turn back; but I don't think they will. Come, mother, that's not a bad idea; it will make a change, and bring you nearer to the governor, and you will see Sarah and give her a scolding for her disobedience.'

'I don't feel like scolding any one. I shall only be too thankful to have her safe by me; though who knows whether any of us are safe anywhere?' said poor little Mrs Clay, whom the events of the past week had frightened out of her wits.

'I think you exaggerate the danger. They may try to fire the house—in fact, I rather expect they will, only I fancy the police are guarding us too well for them to succeed; but as for touching us or attempting our lives, I don't for a moment believe they would do any such thing—not Ousebank men,' said George, composed as ever.

'Oh, but it isn't only Ousebank men; there are some agitators come down,' cried his mother.

'They'll not put their heads in a noose, catch them, however much they may incite other fellows to. Don't you worry, mother; trust to me. I'll take you safe to Uncle Howroyd's,' said George.

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Mrs Clay meekly did as she was bid. At bottom she was rather pleased to be going near her husband and insubordinate daughter, and by the time she got into the motor her fears were calmed.

Sarah was looking out of the mill-house window when she saw the car drive up to the big gates of the little front-garden. 'Mother, oh, I am glad to see you!' she cried, as she kissed her mother affectionately.

Mrs Clay's pale cheeks grew pink with pleasure at the affectionate greeting, and she clasped her tall daughter in her arms. 'My dearie, I am glad to have you again!' she exclaimed.

'You ought to scold her well, Polly, instead of petting her; but it is always the way with the prodigal—he has the fatted calf,' said Mr Howroyd.

'George says he's going to see his father,' said Mrs Clay.

'If the pickets will let him,' observed his uncle.

'Exactly so,' said George.

'You can't possibly,' cried Sarah; 'they won't even let Uncle Howroyd through, so they certainly won't let you.'

'There's no harm in trying, anyway. I half-thought they might be unpleasant when we passed through the town; but they only scowled a bit,' observed George, as, having made his mother comfortable in an easy-chair, he kissed her and took up his hat to go.

'You are really going, dear?' said his mother.

Sarah expected her to protest with tears; but she did nothing of the kind. 'I believe,' mused Sarah, 'that she cares more for father's safety than she does for George's!' And this idea was so surprising to her that she, too, let her brother go without a protest. Not that arguments would have been any good, as his sister knew.

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'That boy has more grit in him than I suspected,' said George's uncle, as he watched his nephew walk with his deliberate gait out at the gate towards the notorious mills.

'I'd have given something to go with him to see what will happen when they turn him back. George is awfully obstinate, uncle; I dare say he'll stand there and argue with them till they let him through because they're sick of him and his polite requests to be allowed to go into his own father's mills,' observed Sarah.

Mr Howroyd laughed, though it was not his usual cheery laugh. 'He'll be a cleverer fellow than I take him for if he gets past that picket, will George.'

However, half-an-hour later the telephone rang. 'It's from Clay's Mills,' Mr Howroyd informed them, 'and they're calling for you, Polly.'

'Oh dear, 'ave they 'urt 'im?' Mrs Clay cried, and flew to the telephone. 'It's George,' she announced in accents of surprise; 'an' 'e says father is quite well, an' very glad to see 'im, an' 'e shall stay a bit.'

'How did he get in? Ask him that, mother,' demanded Sarah, who was naturally curious on the point.

'E says 'e walked in,' repeated her mother.

Sarah went to the receiver herself. 'Nonsense; he couldn't.—How did you get past the pickets, George?'

'Walked past, I tell you. They argued a little, but I told them I was on their business as well as my own, and they let me walk in. They're awfully good fellows, really, and you all exaggerate their ferocity.'

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Suddenly Naomi came running into the room. Howroyd's house was not so ceremoniously ordered as Balmoral; but still Sarah was a little surprised at Naomi, till she said, 'There's a balloon-ship up above Ousebank, and you never saw such a funny thing in your life. Come and see it, Miss Sarah.'

'I suppose she means an air-ship,' said Sarah; but as she had nothing else to do, and time was hanging heavy on her hands, she followed Naomi into the garden. 'Yes, it is an air-ship,' she said. 'I wonder what it is doing up here.'

'It's going towards the hill—over Balmoral. We shall see where it goes if we go up to the roof, Miss Sarah,' said Naomi, who had never seen such a thing before, and was all agog with curiosity.

To please her, Sarah went up to the roof lookout.



As the two stood and watched the air-ship something dropped from it.

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'Yes, it is over Balmoral, and they seem to be descending and doing manoeuvres over the house. I suppose they are going to look at it closer; but they won't be allowed in to-day, for Sykes is suspicious of a bird even. We really might be in Russia, to judge by the state of siege we are in,' she observed.

She had still more reason to make the comparison a little later, for as the two stood and watched and commented on the movements of the air-ship something dropped from it.

'What was that, Miss Sarah?' asked Naomi.

'Fire! They've outwitted us after all!' said Sarah, and she fled downstairs as hard as she could.—

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Uncle Howroyd, ring up the fire-brigade. They've set fire to Balmoral!' she panted.

'How do you know? Who told you so?' he inquired, evidently unbelieving, as well he might, for there was a posse of police guarding the house and grounds.

'We have seen it. They dropped fire out of an air-ship. Do send for the brigade!' cried Sarah, stamping her foot with rage at the delay.

For a moment her uncle stared at her in stupefaction; then he clapped his hand to his forehead. 'It's that agitator scoundrel that's put them up to it!' he cried; and he rang up the brigade, only to drop the receiver with a gesture of despair. 'They've had a call some miles off,' he cried.

'Uncle Howroyd, we must do something.'

'Yes,' he agreed. 'Wait a bit.'

Presently Sarah heard the mill-bell ring, and saw her uncle standing bareheaded at a window looking on his yard, in which the hands summoned from their work were gathered.

'My friends of many years, I have to ask a favour of you. My brother's house is burning, and the brigade is away. Who'll help to save a Yorkshireman's home, however much he has blundered, for a Yorkshire family?'

'We will, Mr William,' cried a hundred voices, and five minutes later there was not a man to be seen in the yard; but Sarah and Naomi, who had climbed to the lookout, saw them hurrying up the road to the hill on which Balmoral stood.

Flames were coming out of the top windows.

'They may save the lower part,' said Sarah.

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'The marble staircase won't burn, will it?' asked Naomi.

Sarah laughed hysterically. 'No; but it won't be much use alone,' she remarked.

'It's going to be a big fire,' observed Naomi in an awe-struck voice.

'I'm glad my father is not there,' was Sarah's apparently irrelevant reply.

Naomi was surprised for the second time that day at Sarah's solicitude for her father. She did not know that her dream had something to do with it. Besides, Mr Mark Clay, boastful and blustering, was a different man from Mark Clay a prisoner in his own mills, with his beautiful house burning.

'Oh miss, the royal suite is on fire! See!' cried Naomi, as she saw the flames come out of that wing.

Sarah said nothing; but her lips tightened as she saw the wanton destruction of her home, and, now that she came to think of it, there were countless treasured possessions of her own there that she wanted to save.

'I wonder if I ought to tell mother?' she asked herself.

But she need not have troubled. Mrs Clay knew, and was talking about it in melancholy accents to Mary, her brother-in-law's maid. 'It's no more than I expected, Mary; an' the mills will go next,' she said.

'Let's hope not, ma'am; and now that Mr William's gone up something may be done to save it,' said Mary, who had great faith in her master.

But Mrs Clay had no faith in any human help; and when Sarah came down she found her mother dry-eyed and resigned. 'Yes, my dear, I know; it's the Lord's will. The Lord gave, an' the Lord taketh away. I began poor, an' I suppose it's 'is will I should end so. Per'aps I lay too great store by riches.'

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'Never mind, mother, I'll work for you, and you shall never want, even if I have to scrub floors to support you,' said Sarah.

Mrs Clay shook her head; but the tears came now and relieved her. 'It's for you I care most, dearie. Your 'ands were never made to scrub floors or do any menial work,' she declared, as she stroked Sarah's soft, white hands.

'I don't believe anybody's hands were made to be idle, and I mean to use mine, you'll see,' she said.

'Per'aps it's not so bad as we think. We must 'ave patience,' said Mrs Clay. 'Go an' see 'ow it's goin', my dear.'

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

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It is always the unexpected which happens. Here was Mrs Clay taking the destruction of her cherished possessions quite calmly, and only praying silently, as Sarah saw, that her husband and son might be saved. And here was Sarah getting angrier and angrier as she watched the fire spreading, apparently unchecked, and swallowing up not only the costly treasures for which she did not much care, but her own personal treasures, for which she cared more than she expected.

Naomi made matters worse by her lamentations. 'To think of all the beautiful carpets and curtains ruined; and, oh, Miss Sarah! all your dresses, and that picture in your boudoir that you are so fond of, some Italian view or something! Oh dear! oh dear! the more I think of it the worse it seems. It's wicked, is this morning's work!'

'It's a fine morning for a fire—the sun shining, and just a nice breeze blowing to fan the flames,' observed Sarah sarcastically.

But Naomi did not perceive the sarcasm; and after a wondering and rather reproachful glance at her young mistress, she remarked, 'It's what I call a bad morning; but, then, I suppose you're glad, because you want to be poor; though how you can stand there quiet-like, and see all your poor ma and pa's things burnt up, let alone everything you can call your own, passes me—it does.'

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A smile flitted over Sarah's face as she thought how far out Naomi was in her judgment; but it passed speedily as she saw a huge tongue of flame dart up and blaze high above the trees.

'It's the garage! The petrol has taken fire!' said Naomi. 'Whatever could they have been thinking of to leave it there? Surely they've never left those beautiful cars to burn themselves up?'

'They don't seem to have done anything to stop the fire. If Uncle Howroyd hadn't been there himself, and if they had not been his hands, I should have said they had helped it, like the men the other day,' remarked Sarah.

'No fear of that. Mr William's men will stand by him and do what he says, for his sake. It's not been their fault that Barmoral's burnt to the ground, I'll lay,' declared Naomi with vehemence.

'No, I'm sure of that,' said Sarah, who felt a pang which surprised her at the words, 'Barmoral's burnt to the ground.' Not that they were quite true, for Balmoral was still burning furiously; but they soon would be.

Suddenly Naomi made a terrible suggestion. 'Miss Sarah, suppose anybody is in the house?' she cried.

Sarah turned on her quite angrily. 'Who should there be in the house? Of course there's no one in it. The fire began at the top, and it's not likely any one would stay up there to be burnt,' she cried, for this thought had never struck her; she had taken it for granted that the servants would have escaped at once. After the first fright she added more calmly, 'Of course they are safe. Balmoral is only three stories high, and the top story is only attics and storerooms and servants' bedrooms, and they are not likely to be up there at this time of the day. But, pray, don't go suggesting horrors of that kind to mother, or you will make her quite ill.'

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'I'm sorry if I upset you, and I know you've a feeling heart, though you don't care about the house burning, so I'll say no more and hope for the best,' said Naomi.

Sarah felt as if she could shake her for her determined pessimism. However, she said nothing, but stood and watched the flames in silence till they seemed to be dying down a little, and then she reluctantly turned from the absorbing sight, and went downstairs to give her mother the news.

'I think they've got the flames under, mother,' she said; but Mrs Clay took little notice. 'Mother, don't you hear? They've got the flames under at last.'

'Yes, my dear, I 'ear, an' I'm glad of it; but it's your father I'm thinkin' about. I do 'ope an' pray 'e's safe,' she replied.

'Why shouldn't he be? The mills are all right,' said Sarah.

'Yes; but I don't know if 'e's there. I keep ringin' 'im up, an' there's no answer, so 'e's not in the mills, for they always call 'im for the telephone.'

'The old hands would; but, you see, everything is different now. Let me try,' observed Sarah, taking up the receiver, and ringing, at intervals, for some minutes. 'They are all looking at the fire from the lookout,' she remarked at length, as she put the receiver down.

Mrs Clay shook her head. 'It isn't like your father to stand an' watch 'is property burn; 'e'll be up an' doin' somew'ere,' she declared.

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'Would you like me to go and see if he is still there?' suggested Sarah. Not that she supposed for a minute that her mother would allow her to go, for she objected to her walking through Ousebank on ordinary occasions when the mill-hands were out, so she was still less likely to let her go to-day when the town was in a state of excitement never known before, and, to crown all, their mills in a state of siege and their family so unpopular.

But Sarah was mistaken. Her mother said gratefully, 'If you would just run to the mills, dear, I should be very glad. Even if they won't let you through, they'll tell you, or some one will tell you,

if your father 'as come out.'

Sarah was just starting for her room to fetch her hat, when she remembered that she had no hat. She had come down with a shawl over her head like the mill-lasses, for whom she hoped to be mistaken; and Naomi had not thought of bringing one with the other necessaries which she had made into a bundle.

'And I don't suppose you've got a hat to your name now, Miss Sarah,' the maid observed gloomily when consulted on the subject.

Sarah gave her hair a brush, and remarked lightly, 'Well I must go bareheaded. Perhaps it will please those people to see the state of poverty they have reduced me to.' And off she started, regardless of Naomi's protests and offers to go and get a hat somewhere.

'Eh, but she's a proud lass, is yon!' said more than one whom she passed, her head high and her eyes looking straight ahead of her, not seeing or noticing the groups through which she passed. [Pg 228]

'Ay, she counts us the dust under her feet,' said another, and the group agreed; while one of the number observed, 'Perhaps she'll think differently when she sees her property laid in the dust;' and a younger man laughed, though the others said, 'Nay, 'tis nought to laugh at. Clays are no friends of mine; but I was always agin that. 'Tis a wicked deed they've done up at Balmoral, and tricks with air-ships isn't a Yorkshire way of fighting, though 'tis a dirty trick he've played us with his foreigners.'

But Sarah had not the satisfaction of hearing any of the remarks disapproving of the fire, and her heart swelled as she thought that all Ousebank was glad of their loss; for no one—not even an acquaintance, herself the wife of a mill-owner—stopped her to condole with her. Sarah had no idea that it was her own repellent bearing that prevented them, nor that this same lady went home and said to her family, with tears in her eyes, 'It made my heart ache to see her walking alone through all those crowds, with her head bare and face so grave. I'd have been glad to take her hands and say how sorry I was; but she wouldn't look at me, but passed me as if I was quite beneath her. I didn't dare to stop her.'

Nor, apparently, did the pickets dare—or care—to do so either, as Sarah came straight up to the chief gate and knocked at it.

A cautious face appeared at the other side of a little window, and a moment afterwards the little postern-gate was opened wide enough to let her slip in, and speedily shut to with a clang by two men who were posted there in case any one should attempt to enter with her. [Pg 229]

'Thank you. Will you take me to my father?' she said to the men, whom she recognised as old hands.

'He's in the dye-house, miss. They 're making a beautiful new colour, and the master's rare and pleased about it,' replied the elder man.

'But the fire? Doesn't he mind about the fire?' inquired the girl.

The man looked at her, not understanding. The fire's all right, miss; they made it a bit too hot this morning, but it's all right now. We've got proper stokers and all,' he assured her, evidently thinking she was afraid the engine was not being properly attended to, and alluded to that.

It flashed across Sarah that they did not know of the fire at Balmoral. Then her father did not know, and she would have to tell him! She went very slowly towards the dye-house. This possibility had never struck her. Even though they could not see Balmoral from Clay's Mills, there was the telephone, and the pickets outside; but then Sarah remembered that for some reason or other the telephone had been abandoned, and naturally the pickets would not for obvious reasons choose to give the news.

She found her father and George in the dye-room as she had been told, the former jubilant over the new shade, and George standing by apparently as interested as his father.

'What! Sally? There's a brave girl to come and see the prisoners! But it's an ill wind that blows no one any good. Here's George showing himself quite a business man, with the makings of a fine wool-merchant in him, and I never knew it. So that's all the strike has done—got them two Clays to fight instead of one,' cried Mr Clay, and Sarah was struck by her father's pride in George. [Pg 230]

She did not answer, but stood looking appealingly at her brother.

Mr Clay misunderstood her, and said, 'You don't like the idea of a merchant-brother; but you'll have to get used to it. I don't mean to let him go back to college. He knows a lot of useful stuff, and these are ticklish times.'

George understood his sister better, and, answering her look, said, 'What's the matter, Sarah? Is mother ill?'

Mr Clay looked anxiously at her. In his egotism he had not thought of his timid little wife, whom all this might well have made ill; but that he was not devoid of regard for her Sarah saw by his face.

'No, it's not mother; it's Balmoral.—Father, I thought you knew,' she stammered.

'Knew what? Speak out, girl. What's happened there. Nothing short of an earthquake could harm it; it's well enough protected.'

'It's burning, father,' Sarah blurted out.

The mill-owner looked at her unbelievably, and laughed his boisterous laugh. 'Burning! Nonsense! They couldn't get near it to damage it. Why, there's fifty police up there guarding it, and a pretty penny it's costing me—a pretty penny all this.'

Sarah looked pitifully at her father. 'They dropped fire from an air-ship, father; but Uncle Howroyd and all his hands have gone up there to try to put it out,' she hastened to add, for her father's face terrified her.

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He took no more notice of her; but turning to George, on whom he seemed all of a sudden to rely, he said, 'What does the girl mean with her cock-and-bull story of an air-ship setting my house on fire? Why should an air-ship'—He paused. 'How could they get an air-ship?' he continued.

'Perhaps I'd better go to the lookout, father,' said George.—Come, Sarah,' and he took his sister by the hand and hastened along the dye-yard towards the spiral staircase to the lookout.

The mill-owner let them go without a word, not attempting to follow them, for it was an arduous climb to the lookout, and the mill-owner was a stout and heavy-built man, and had not been up there for years. He stood for a little as if puzzled, then went to the entrance-yard to the porter, and asked, 'Have you seen or heard aught of any fire at Balmoral?'

'No, sir; not except what Miss Clay said,' he replied.

Meanwhile Sarah was breathlessly hastening up the stairs, and telling George all that had happened.

'Why didn't you tell us before?' he demanded.

'Because we never imagined you didn't know. I thought every one in the town knew, and mother did try to telephone to you, but she couldn't make any one hear,' explained Sarah.

George groaned, but made no more reproaches, and soon they came out on the lookout.

The flames were still raging, though not so high. Evidently the petrol had burnt out; but not so the fire, alas!

'It will burn to the ground,' George remarked, as he stood there with glasses to his eyes. 'They are trying to save the west wing, but I doubt if they will.'

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'Oh George, let me look! I never thought of using glasses! Why, you can see the people running about with buckets!' cried Sarah.

'It feels like a bit of myself gone; but you don't care, of course,' he remarked, as he reluctantly tore himself away to go down and tell his father.

'I do care. And, oh George, I'm awfully sorry for father! What will he do or say?' cried his sister.

'I don't know. But how did mother take it?' he asked.

'She said it was God's will. Somehow, I don't think it surprised her; she seemed to expect a disaster as soon as she knew about these foreigners being brought in, and I don't think she'll care if only father is safe,' said Sarah.

'Poor mother; she doesn't think of herself at all. Still, I know the place is heavily insured. Father is too cautious a man not to see to that, though he'll never get those pictures or their value back again, nor his plate. I must try to break it to him; but it isn't a thing one can break,' said George.

'Well, boy, what's this story? Any truth in it? More trees burnt?' asked Mr Clay.

'They've done worse this time, father; they have managed to set fire to the house. But Uncle Howroyd is working for all he's worth, and so are his men, so let us hope they'll save the valuables,' said George.

He spoke so calmly and collectedly that his father failed to grasp the extent of the calamity.

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'I don't rightly understand. Is it the house that's on fire, and which part?' he demanded. Evidently he only imagined that it was some small outbreak which would soon be got under.

George hesitated. 'It's got a good hold of the house, sir—the fire, I mean; but we can build it up again.'

'Build it up again? Build up Balmoral again? You don't know what you're talking about. There's a million sunk in that house,' he cried angrily, and yet he did not believe them till he saw George's pitying look.

'It's not really bad, my lad?' he asked.

'Yes, father, it's pretty bad; but the house is insured.'

The millionaire gave a yell of rage. 'If they've done it, by heaven they shall pay for it!' And he made a dash for the front entrance.

## 'A BAD BUSINESS.'

After a moment of consternation, Sarah and her brother followed their father, and arrived at the front gate in time to see him dash out and down the street before the pickets on duty at the gate had seen what was happening, or had time to prevent his escape, if, indeed, they had wished to do so. Perhaps they felt that to prevent a man from going to rescue his property from destruction would be exceeding their duty, or perhaps they thought they had gone far enough, for they made no attempt to stop him, and looked after him with not unfriendly faces.

'He may run, but he'll not run so fast as the flames,' said one to the others.

'And you're a set of blackguards for what you've done, and I'd sooner be a blackleg any day than a blackguard,' shouted the watch inside the gate to the watch outside.

'I'd nought to do with it, Ben; I'm only obeying orders standing here, and there's no denying that the master's driven the lads to it. They've hot blood, and he's roused it,' replied the picket, who did not seem to resent the plain speaking of his former mate.

'No one is ever driven to setting other folk's homes on fire,' said the watchman bluntly.

'George, what do you think he's going to do?' demanded Sarah of her brother, who was standing, cigarette in mouth, listening with apparent indifference to the colloquy of the past and present hands.

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'Gone to see what they are doing at Balmoral,' observed George.

'Hadn't you better go after him?' suggested his sister.

'I don't think so. Strikes me I'd better keep a lookout for possible air-ships dropping down upon us here. They'll get a warm reception if they do,' said George with significance.

'I wonder where they got the air-ships from. Naomi says it's the London agitators who have done it all,' said Sarah.

'Very likely. Well, it's a miserable business. I don't care for the men we've got here overmuch, though they do their work very well, and it was very clever of the governor to have got them here and at work so promptly,' said George.

'A good deal too clever! And see what the result has been! He tricked the hands, and the hands have tricked him, and he has come worst off so far,' retorted Sarah.

'I don't know about that! There's a proverb which says, "He laughs longest who laughs last," and we've yet to see who that will be. So far, the men have burnt Balmoral, but that loss is insured against; but they have not bettered their position, and they are losing money, whereas the governor is making money by the change.'

'One would think it was you who didn't care now; you stand there smoking, as if nothing were the matter,' remarked Sarah.

'If you will tell me what good I should do by getting excited I might try it; but I don't know of anything to be gained by making a row. You'd better go back to mother, and tell her the mills are all right, that father's gone to see what he can do at Balmoral, and that I shall stop here until further notice. Try to put a good face on it, and cheer her up, Sarah. She isn't fit for all this worry,' urged her brother.

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'I'll do my best,' replied Sarah; and she went back to her mother, and left her brother in charge of the mills and of the men.

The two porters at the gate were his devoted servants, and talked to him with the freedom of old workmen, as they deplored the present condition of things. 'And the sooner we see the backs of those chaps the better,' said one. 'They are quick enough, but they're not thorough; and they'd chuck it up to-morrow if it weren't for the high wages they're bribed with.'

'I shouldn't have thought that would pay,' observed George in his usual lazy, indifferent way.

The man gave him a look, and said in a significant tone, 'It doesn't—at least, it wouldn't in the long-run; but it pays better than letting the mills "play," especially with this big contract on for blankets for abroad. The hands knew that, and that's why they struck. They thought the master'd have been obliged to give way to get it done. And so did I, and so he would have if he hadn't got those chaps by a miracle.'

'How did he get them?' inquired George, asking the same question that every one else was asking.

The man laughed, with an evident appreciation of the smartness that could accomplish what looked like a miracle, although he shook his head disapprovingly. 'He telephoned to somewhere abroad—I don't rightly know if 'twas France or Belgium; in fact, he've been 'phoning for days; and it seems there was a wool-mill shut down, and these men out of employ, and he had the

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whole lot brought over and put in here by midnight on Sunday. They came in wagon-loads from a station ten miles off, and not a soul knew. Oh, he managed it well, did the master! But they laugh best who laugh last, as the saying is.'

George took a whiff of his cigarette. 'So you think the men will laugh the last? Do you think they'll burn the mills down?' he inquired.

'No, sir; I don't think they could if they would, and I doubt if they would. 'Twould be wholesale murder, with all those hands inside. Besides, there'll be some arrests for this other job, and that'll cool their blood. No; what I'm afraid of is those men in here,' said the old man, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder towards the mill-buildings.

'What do you think they'll do?' George demanded.

'They'll go. They're getting tired of the confinement and the dullness. Besides, they are frightened. Goodness knows how they've got to know anything of what's going on outside, but they have; and if they hear of this fire it'll be all up with us. They'll go, and a sack of gold won't keep them.'

George looked very thoughtful. 'Where do they sleep, and what do they eat?' he asked.

'Oh, they sleep on blankets and wool in the barns. And they've got their own cooks, and there's plenty of food of the kind they like,' replied the man, with true British contempt for foreign messes.

'What food have they, and how did you get enough in for them?' George asked.

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'That's the master again! There's sacks and sacks of flour and coffee and beans, and things that we thought were bales of wool, and tins of milk; and they eat a lot of them things, and very little meat, except bacon. But they're crying out for vegetables. Mark my words, Mr George, they won't be here much longer, double pay or not.'

George turned and left him, and went for a walk through the mills. The men greeted him rather surlily, from which he opined that they could not be French, though they spoke that language; but when he put any questions they declined to answer, saying that their orders were not to give any information to any one. However, they seemed to be working well, and so George remarked to their manager.

'Yes, sir; they are doing time-work. They will get a bonus each if the work they are doing is finished by a certain time,' replied the man.

'I see,' said George, and then he looked thoughtful again. They would finish the contract and go. He walked back to the office, from whence he meant to go to the lookout again to see how the fire was going, but was in time to hear the ring of the telephone. 'Halloa!' he said.

'It's Sarah! Do you see what's happened at Balmoral?' she inquired.

'No; but I imagine it's burning or burnt to the ground,' said George in a resigned tone.

'The fire's out; at least, there's only smoke to be seen. But everybody's come away, and I am afraid some one is hurt, for I saw through the glasses that they were crowding round something, and then the men made a stretcher, and they are bringing whoever it is to Ousebank,' said Sarah.

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'God forbid that any life has been lost! Let me know what it is as soon as you know. I can't leave the mills till father comes back, and I don't know that I shall even then. I think I'm wanted here.'

'I wish I could be there with you!' exclaimed Sarah.

'You've got to stay where you are and look after mother. How is she?' inquired George.

'She's all right. At least, she sits quite quietly, and says it's God's will, and that she doesn't care as long as she has all of us. But it's very dull here. Women always do have the dull work to do in this world,' observed Sarah.

'They think they have; but I don't think you'd be much better off here; it's not particularly lively being with a lot of sulky foreigners who won't talk to you.'

'How can they if they're foreigners?' protested Sarah.

'They can talk French all right, some of them; but they won't answer me in their own language,' said George.

'I dare say they don't understand your French,' said Sarah.

But George declined to notice this insulting remark. Sarah was evidently called away from the telephone, and ring as he might he could get no answer from her or any one at Howroyd's. He tried to get on to the office, but was told that Howroyd's was 'playing,' as they say in the north country, because the most of the men were at Balmoral. So there was nothing for it but to possess his soul in patience, and watch the men at their dinner-hour eating bacon and haricot beans, and a kind of soup made out of George could not imagine what, seeing that the cooks had no vegetables to make it with, and drinking wine and water.

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'They seem to enjoy their food,' George remarked to Ben the gate-keeper.

'Yes, sir, they do; and a little seems to go a long way with them. But listen to them now that their tongues are loosened! Goodness only knows what they are saying, but they seem excited enough. I'd give a good deal to understand their jargon,' replied Ben.

'It's Flemish, I fancy. Anyway, I can't understand it. I wish I had some one to send to Howroyd's. I suppose it wouldn't be safe for one of you to leave the gate?' said George.

'Safe or not, I daren't risk it. The master's orders were not to leave it without his permission, if I wanted to stay with him. But I shouldn't worry, sir; ill news travels apace, and if there were anything wrong you'd have heard it soon enough,' said the man.

He had scarcely uttered these words when their attention was attracted by a knocking at the entrance-gate; and upon Ben going to the window to look out, he saw the picket on duty making signs to him to come to the gate and speak. The man looked so disturbed, and almost ashamed, that Ben knew there was nothing to fear from him except bad news, and that he felt pretty sure he should soon hear.

'Now, what villainy have you been up to?' he asked, as he opened the gate half-way.

'It's no use making bad blood by hard words, Ben. I told you before I've had nought to do with the happenings at Balmoral. We're only fighting for our rights and our livelihood, that you're trying to take away from us; but there, I didn't come to say all that, but to see the young master, if he'll let me have a word with him,' said the man.

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'I shouldn't think he'd have anything to say to you, and I shouldn't have thought you'd the face to speak to him when you're trying to ruin him; and as for me taking your livelihood away, you've done it yourselves. Dogs in the manger, I call you; won't work yourselves, and won't let any one else.'

'Have done, Ben, and let me see Mr George. I've got a message that won't wait,' said the other.

The gate-keeper went to find George, who was again at the telephone in a vain effort to communicate with his sister, with whom he felt very irritated for leaving him without news for so long.

'Wants to see me? One of the pickets, you say? Does he want to come to terms, do you think?' inquired George.

'I doubt it, sir; but you'd better see him. He says his message won't wait.'

Thus entreated, George left the telephone and went to the gate.

'Excuse me, Mr George,' said the man, standing bareheaded to speak to him, which even George knew was a token of great respect—was it also sympathy?—coming from a mill-hand of his father's. 'Excuse me, but we think you're wanted at Howroyd's. There's been an accident'—

'An accident? To whom?' interrupted George.

'To the—to Mr Clay, sir,' said the man.

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George was just hurrying off, but stopped for a moment. Suppose this were a ruse to get him out of the mills. He half-thought of trying to get a message to Sarah before leaving the mills.

But the man, seeming to guess his thoughts, said, 'We sha'n't interfere with the mills, sir, if you'll take my word for it.'

'You can scarcely expect me to feel very secure, can you?' said George quietly.

'No, sir, I know; but I swear to you I'll fetch you if you're wanted here. But do you go to Howroyd's at once,' said the man so earnestly that George hesitated no longer. Touching his hat as he passed them, he walked rapidly to his uncle's, where he found all in confusion.

The first person he saw was Sarah. 'What is the matter with father?' he asked.

'I don't know,' said Sarah.

'Don't know! Where is he?' asked George.

'In the sitting-room; that's why I couldn't get at the telephone. They disconnected it to stop the noise. The doctors are with him,' replied Sarah, who looked white and shaken.

'How did it happen? Did he get burnt? Is there no one to tell me anything?' asked George in despair.

'I don't know. He was brought on a stretcher, and Uncle Howroyd came with him, and he and mother have gone into that room. I don't know any more than you; but, oh, I am glad you've come!' cried Sarah, bursting into tears.

'Come and sit down,' said George, putting his arm round his sister's shoulder. 'Some one will come out in a minute, I hope.'

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It was William Howroyd who came. 'You here, my lad! That's right. You'll have to take the head of affairs now,' he said kindly but sadly.

'Is my father—dead?' asked George, with pale lips.



'No, no, not dead; but it's a stroke, and he won't be fit for business for some time. If I can help you I will; but it's a bad business, a very bad business. Well, my home is yours, as you know, and you must all stay here for the present. As for the future, why, you can stay here then if you will. It's not a mansion, but there's room enough for us all.'

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

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### TRUE YORKSHIRE GRIT.

'Can I see my father, sir?' said George.

'Yes, of course, my lad. Go in. He won't know you, but you may go in,' said his uncle.

Mrs Clay sat watching beside her husband, who lay on his improvised couch in the sitting-room, and she looked up dully when her son came in. 'They've killed 'im this time, George,' she said.

'I hope not, mother. He'll pull through this,' replied her son.

But his mother shook her head. 'E'll never get over bein' bested by the men. 'E's always been so masterful all 'is life, an' they've mastered 'im at last,' she declared.

'I don't know so much about that. Father said I was to stop at home and help him, and I mean to do it, and see if things can't be straightened out again,' said George, with youthful confidence.

Mrs Clay looked at her son proudly. 'You've the same spirit as your father, though you've never shown it before; but this coil's too 'ard for you to untwist, lad. You'd best leave it to your uncle Bill; 'e'll do the best 'e can for us all, an' there'll always be a bite an' a sup for us while 'e lives. But Clay's Mills are a thing of the past now, lad.'

Sarah, who, without asking leave of any one, had followed her brother into the sick-room, broke in now. 'We're not going to live on charity, mother. If we really are poor I shall just work in a mill, that's all. I won't live on any one else, not even Uncle Howroyd.'

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Her mother and brother both gave her a warning glance.

George said in low tones, 'It's no good exaggerating the misfortune. We have met with losses, and my father may not be a millionaire at this moment; but I hope we may not long trespass on Uncle Howroyd's hospitality, though there is no talk of living on charity.'

As he said this his father opened his eyes, and it seemed to George that there was a gleam of consciousness in them. He bent over the sick man, and said in low, clear tones, 'Father, I'll do my best to keep the mills going. That is your wish, is it not?'

'E can't 'ear, George,' sighed his mother.

'I think he understood,' declared George; and though the others did not agree with him, they said no more to discourage the young man.

'Come, Sarah,' George said gently to his sister, as he drew her out of the room with him, 'you'll have to help me to put all this business right.'

'I? What can I do? I know nothing about accounts, you know,' cried Sarah, secretly pleased, all the same, at the idea of being of use.

'You are often down at Uncle Howroyd's, and I hear you talking of "fettles and pieces," and goodness knows what all,' observed George.

Sarah laughed. 'I suppose you mean fettlers (people who clean the machines) and piecers (those who join the pieces of wool or yarn together when it breaks),' she explained.

'There! You see I don't even know these words, and if I have to go into accounts and details I must know them, or I shall be showing my ignorance, and the people will have no confidence in me,' returned George.

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'But those foreigners don't understand you. What will you do with them?' inquired Sarah.

'Nothing. I shall send them off the minute this contract is done,' said George. 'That is to say, if Uncle Howroyd approves.'

'What are you going to do with my approval, my lad?' demanded William Howroyd, coming in and putting his hand for a moment kindly on his nephew's shoulder.

Sarah was struck by his serious and troubled face. She wondered whether it was anxiety for his brother's health or sorrow for the misdeeds of the Ousebank men. She did not know that there was a third reason added to these two; but she soon was to know it.

'I want to pack off those men as soon as the contract we have in hand is finished,' said George.

'They've saved you and me any trouble, George, lad. They've discharged themselves,' said Mr

Howroyd gravely.

George looked at his uncle aghast. 'You mean that the foreigners have gone—without a minute's warning?' he asked.

'They have that,' replied Mr Howroyd.

'But why did they suddenly do that? They seemed to go back to work willingly enough after their dinner,' said George.

'It seems they had some means of communicating with the outside world. When they heard of your poor father's illness, and were told he was ruined, and his house even burnt down, they decided to leave a sinking ship,' said Mr Howroyd.

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'Uncle Howroyd, do you think it is a sinking ship?' inquired Sarah.

Mr Howroyd considered a little; but, being a man who thought honesty always the best policy, he replied frankly, 'I think we shall save enough out of the wreck to keep you afloat; but I think Clay's Mills must shut.'

'I don't understand that, sir. Of course, I know that we must have lost a good deal by the fire, and this contract, too, will be a serious loss; but there is the insurance of the house, and I understand that, thanks to you and other kind helpers, a good deal was saved at Balmoral,' observed George.

'That is so, my lad; but the trouble is—and that's what caused your father's illness—the house was not insured,' said Mr Howroyd.

'Oh, but, uncle, it was. I happen to know, because father said the insurance he paid would keep a family comfortably,' interrupted Sarah.

'I know, and so I thought; but, owing to threats they received, saying it was going to be burnt down, the company asked such a heavy premium that your father refused to pay it, and said he'd take precautions instead. It was a mad thing, and no one but him would have dared to do it. And now, what are you going to do with an empty mill, whose hands have all struck, and whose head is lying unconscious?' inquired Mr Howroyd kindly but discouragingly.

The brother and sister had drawn closer to each other instinctively in this their first trouble, for trouble it was to both.

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'If we give up the mills, what have we to live on? I don't know my father's affairs, but I imagine he has a large capital,' said George.

'It's difficult to explain to you, but most of it was in the mills. I expect that you will have a few hundreds a year when the business is wound up. But things have not been so prosperous as they have appeared of late with your father, and he spent freely,' replied Mr Howroyd.

George sat silent after this; but Sarah suddenly exclaimed, 'George, don't give it up! Open the mills again, and try to keep them going with the old hands. I know you could, with Uncle Howroyd's help, and I'll stop at home and help you all I can, and take care of mother.'

George gave his sister a swift glance, and then appealed to his uncle. 'What do you say, sir? Is it any use my trying?'

'My lad,' said Mr Howroyd in a moved tone of voice, 'if you had asked me that question a month ago I should have told you to go back to your Greek and your Latin at college, and leave blanket-making to those who know what they are doing; but if you like to try, I'll not be the one to stop you. It won't be much worse if you fail.'

'Oh, but he won't fail.—Will you, George?' cried Sarah.

'I hope not; I can but try,' said George.

But the two enthusiasts had a sudden check when they informed their mother.

'George run the mills! You don't know w'at you are talkin' about.—That's your doin', Sarah; you've always some maggot in your 'ead.'

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'But Uncle Howroyd said he might try,' said Sarah.

'Your uncle Howroyd's kindness itself, an' generous to a fault. Don't you see you'd be runnin' them on 'is credit? Who'd trust George if they thought 'e was responsible? An' if your uncle Howroyd stan's surety 'e runs to lose 'eavily,' said Mrs Clay, who knew something about business.

'I never thought of that,' said Sarah slowly.

'Mother, you know that a certain sum was settled on me when I came of age, and was not invested in the business,' said her son.

'Yes, dear; but don't you touch that. You'll only lose it, an' then w'ere will you be?' she protested.

'Where I am now, under the necessity of earning my own living, and that will be no hardship,' said George, with his pleasant smile.

But their mother was not to be persuaded. 'Your father was a wonderful man. You 'aven't 'is talents, though you're dear, good children,' was all she would say.

'My father's talents didn't prevent him from making a horrid mess of things,' began Sarah hotly.

But George silenced his sister, and said to his mother, 'Very well, dear mother, if you do not wish me to try to carry on father's business for him till he is able to take it up again himself, then I will not do so; but I shall ask Uncle Howroyd to take me into his mill to learn the business of a blanket-maker. I mean to be sooner or later.'

Mrs Clay looked at her son in amazement. 'You, George! But all your book-learnin'—w'at are you goin' to do wi' all that? Is it all goin' to be wasted? All your beautiful, expensive education an' all?' she expostulated. 'An' Sarah, too, talkin' o' stayin' at 'ome an' 'elpin'! She'll 'ave to go to some school, though I doubt whether we can afford her present one.'

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'I don't think that school is much loss to Sarah, though it seems to have suited Miss Cunningham. But as for my book-learning, I mean to try to apply it to manufacturing; and if it is not much use there, as I fear it won't be, still no knowledge is lost, and I shall always have my books and the pleasure of reading,' remarked George.

'Well, my dear, you must do as you think best. If you could do such a thing as keep the mills goin' till your father was about again, 'twould be a grand thing, an' give 'im new life w'en 'e came to 'imself, an' I've no right to be a 'indrance in your way; so do as you wish, dear, an' God bless you for a dear, good boy!' said his mother, after some argument.

'Come along Sarah, let's go and look at our mills. It's rather disgraceful, but, do you know, I've never been over the whole of them before,' said George.

'It will be dreadful to see them empty and "playing," as the people say,' said Sarah.

'Please, sir,' said Naomi, 'the French *chef* is here, and wants a month's wages and compensation for loss, he says.'

George paused on the threshold. 'I thought Sykes was seeing to all that, and housing the people till we could settle with them?' said George.

'He says he wishes to leave this country of savages at once,' said Naomi, with a toss of her head.

'I expect there's money in the till at the mills,' said Sarah.

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'I'll write him a cheque on my own bank, and I shall be thankful to eat no more of his elaborate messes,' observed George; and he did so, though the cheque was a much bigger one than he had expected, and the operation had to be repeated till most of the servants were satisfied, after which George said, with a laugh, to his sister, 'I hope Sykes and Naomi and Tom Fox won't present their bills, for, to tell the truth, I've used up all my balance, and rather more.'

'Have you paid every one else?' asked Sarah.

'Yes; and I had no idea we had such an army to wait upon us. You've no idea what the total comes to,' said George, as he ruefully totalled it up.

'There must be lots of money somewhere,' said Sarah vaguely.

'Ah, now you begin to understand what poverty means,' said George. 'It's not quite so lovely, is it, after all?'

Sarah did not choose to answer this taunt, and was saved from the necessity of doing so by the announcement that Tom Fox and Sykes the butler were outside.

'I shall have to overdraw and realise some money,' observed George to his sister, after he had told Naomi to show them in.

'And please, sir, they speak for me, if you'll excuse me,' said Naomi as she ushered them into the room.

Sarah was surprised to find how disappointed and hurt she felt at this cupidity on the part of Naomi, and she would not look at her at all.

'Ah, Sykes, you want your wages? How much will that be?' said George, quiet and pleasant as usual.

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'No, no, Mr George, I didn't come for them, sir. If you'll excuse me, sir, and not think it a liberty, but I've a nice house, a biggish house, though 'tis a cottage compared to Balmoral of course; but it's lying empty, and it would be convenient to have it used, and I'm going there myself to-night, and if you'd condescend for the next few months'—said Sykes, with much clearing of his throat and apologetic coughs.

'That's exceedingly kind of you, Sykes,' cried George, much touched. 'Where is this house?'

'Right opposite Balmoral, on the hill, Mr George. It touches the grounds, and what I was thinking was, you could make a gate into the grounds, and you'd be like in your own park, same as before.'

'I know the house. It's a big one, as you say. You've made money, then, Sykes?'

'Yes, sir; the master was always liberal, and I've saved, and done well in investments. I'd be pleased to wait on you, same as before. And Tom Fox here— Why don't you speak up, Tom?'

urged Sykes.

'I'd be glad to remain in your service, Mr George, and motor you down to town, as I hear you are taking on the business. I saved the motors, all on 'em,' said Tom.

'I don't know how to thank you, my friends, except by accepting your offers with all my heart; and if the mills pay all right you must take shares,' said George, with his winning smile.

'Well, we've got three servants and a motor, so far,' said Sarah; 'because, of course, Naomi is going to stay, and it will be very nice to be still on the hill instead of living in Ousebank. I hate Ousebank'.

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George wanted to remind Sarah that she had hated Balmoral; but he decided not to cast up the past, as she was so much improved, so he only said, 'Yes, I've often looked at that Red House, and wondered whose it was, and who would come and live in it. I little thought that it would be ourselves.'

'It reminds me of the Bible,' observed Sarah abruptly.

'What does?' asked George. 'The Red House?'

'No; all the other servants fleeing like the hireling, but our own Yorkshire servants staying with us, and offering their services and houses, and all.'

'There's another text it makes me think of,' said George reverently, 'and that is to put your trust in God.'

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

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### SARAH IS MUCH IMPROVED.

'George, I'm going to cheer mother up by telling her what a nice house we have had offered to us,' said Sarah, full of the new plans.

'I don't fancy anything will cheer mother while father lies there in that condition. However, she will be glad that Sykes has shown himself loyal,' replied George, who was just going down to the mills.

Mrs Clay had been sitting by her husband the whole of the day, and no power could induce her to leave him; but now Mr Howroyd had persuaded her to come and take some food. The two met George and Sarah in the passage.

'Going out, George? What are you living on to-day—air or excitement? Don't you know it's dinner-time?' he exclaimed when he saw that his nephew had his hat in his hand and was evidently going out.

'I was just going to the mills, uncle. I shall be back in half-an-hour,' said George.

'What are you going to do there? They are shut up, and Luke Mickleroyd and the other watchmen are in charge. Come and have some food, lad; it will help your mother to eat if she sees you eating. You must all badly want something; you've starved all day.'

George Clay put down his hat, remarking, 'I had no idea it was so late.—Come, mother, take my arm.'

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'Mother, we have something so nice to tell you,' said Sarah, speaking in a gentler voice than was her wont to her mother.

'Ave you, my dear?' said Mrs Clay indifferently.

'Yes; we've got a house for you to live in already.'

'I know, Sarah. Your uncle is very kind. I'm sure I'm very grateful to 'im,' said Mrs Clay.

'Oh, but it isn't Uncle Howroyd; it's Sykes. He wants us to live in his Red House on the top of the hill,' cried Sarah, her face aglow with pleasure at the good news she was imparting.

'Sykes, our butler! I 'aven't come to sharin' my butler's 'ouse,' said Mrs Clay, bridleing.

'But he's going to wait on us just as he used to do,' explained Sarah.

'Wat's the good o' talkin' nonsense, Sarah? 'Ow can I order a man about in 'is own 'ouse? An' 'ow can you want your poor father to open 'is eyes an' look upon the ruins o' 'is beautiful mansion? It's downright indecent o' you to be so glad that you've got to live in a poky little 'ouse; but, at least, you sha'n't drag your father an' me to live there, to be reminded o' the beautiful past,' said Mrs Clay.

'Nay, Polly, my dear, you are taking this quite wrong. The children are behaving as well as can be, and Sykes too; and it's not a poky house, by any means. In fact, it's as big as this, and I don't know that it would be a bad idea, after a little while,' urged Mr Howroyd.

'I'm sure, Bill, I don't want to complain; but it's all so strange without Mark, an' to think o' 'im in Syke's 'ouse, after w'at 'e's been used to,' said his sister-in-law.

Sarah restrained her first impulse to reply indignantly, and said, 'I don't think father would mind, and it was partly for his sake I was glad. I thought he could still have his park and grounds, and you forget he could not see the ruins of Balmoral, because the plantations come between.'

'Besides, mother, if things go well we shall perhaps be able to build the house again,' suggested George. But he was no more successful than his sister in cheering his mother.

She answered him, quite shortly for her, 'That you'll never do, George. There'll never be another Balmoral, so don't you think it. There are not many men like Mark, an' there never was a 'ouse like 'is now'ere, not even the King's, so I've 'eard, an' I'm glad an' proud to 'ave lived in it; but I'll try an' be resigned to the will o' Providence; an' if you both wish it, an' your uncle thinks it right, I'll go to Sykes's 'ouse w'en your father is able to be moved.'

Mrs Clay said 'Sykes's 'ouse' in a tone of such contempt that her brother-in-law observed, with his genial laugh, 'One would think it was the workhouse by the way you talk, instead of being as big as many a manufacturer's. But I know you are thinking of the old place, and, of course, after what you've been used to it is a trial; but you must pluck up courage and be thankful that you have your family still and no lost lives to mourn over.'

Mrs Clay shook her head in a melancholy way; she was not to be comforted, and the others gave it up.

'One would think he had been the best and kindest husband in the world, instead of being'—began Sarah after dinner, when her mother had hurried back to her husband's room; but here she checked herself.

'Well, there's one thing—you'll excite no envy, hatred, and malice at the Red House; and you know the proverb, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith,"' said their uncle.

'Oh!' cried Sarah, and then explained, 'That's just what I said when we lived at Balmoral; but I didn't mean it to come about in this dreadful way.'

'Ay; but things never do come about in the way we want or expect,' said Mr Howroyd as he rose from the table, leaving the brother and sister together.

'George, what are you thinking of?' asked his sister abruptly, after the former had sat for some time smoking a cigarette, and leaning back in his old indolent way.

'Thinking of? I'm thinking that I've undertaken a task too big for me, and that I should do better to accept Uncle Howroyd's offer of winding up affairs,' he replied.

'Then you are a coward! And I only wish I were your age and a man, and I'd carry on the mills myself, and show people.'

George looked at his sister with an amused smile, which was his usual way of treating her outbursts, and which always exasperated her; but he hastened to say, 'Steady there, Sarah! I never said I was going to back out, only that things seem more difficult than they did when I began.'

'Why? After Sykes's offer, and Tom Fox's? I never told mother of him. It didn't seem to be any use, because she doesn't care for anything or feel grateful about anything.'

'I hope I shall have as good a wife; but she will be difficult to find,' observed George.

'You'll probably marry a virago; easy-going people like you generally do, and you'll be henpecked all your life,' was Sarah's consoling remark.

Then they both laughed, which did them good. Not very long after they went to bed, and, being young and full of hope, to sleep.

It seemed to them both that they had just shut their eyes when they heard the clanging of a bell; and, starting up in alarm, they recognised it as the bell of their uncle's mill calling the people to work.

George decided to go down to the mills, and a very short time saw him dressed and at the gates.

"'Tis young Clay,' he heard as he passed down the street, through groups of idle men, women, and girls, whom he guessed to be their former employés. They had nothing to get up for; but habit was too strong for them, and they had risen and turned out at the same hour.

'What'll he be going to do at t' old mills?' some of them inquired of each other.

'I be main sorry for him. He's a right good young gentleman, they say,' said one woman.

'I wish he'd run the mills. I'd work for him,' said another.

'If he'd have you; but I doubt he'd not have one of his father's hands after what's happened,' was the retort.

'He's but a youngster; he can't run the mills. They'll have to shut down till the old master comes

to, or this one gets old enough,' said a shrewd old hand.

'Yes, 'twould never do for he to start blanket-making without experience; he'd soon run aground. I'd not work for him,' remarked another old man.

Evidently no one had any idea that George intended to try his hand at the business, in spite of inexperience and youth; and, indeed, as he went down the street he found himself wondering how he was to set about it, and whether he had not better brave Sarah's scorn and give it up. But he reasoned with himself, 'I will go on till my private capital is exhausted, and if I have failed by then I'll own it and give up.' With new resolve, he walked briskly on and entered the silent mills.

The clang of the gate as it shut after him struck painfully on his ears, and he went to the office and sat down to think. 'If only I knew what to do! Perhaps this room will inspire me,' he murmured. But the room did not seem to do so; on the contrary, he was oppressed with the sense of the failure in which all the business done in that room had ended.

Suddenly the door opened, and Sarah, dainty and fresh in the muslin Naomi had thoughtfully brought her, almost her only possession in the way of clothes, came in. 'George, I have an inspiration,' she said.

Her brother looked up with a smile. 'That's funny,' he replied, 'for that's just what I was sitting here waiting for.'

'That's a nice, useless thing to do!' said Sarah.

'On the contrary, it appears to have been answered,' he said.

'Oh, well, it wasn't your sitting there that made me come and have that inspiration; it was the clanging of Uncle Howroyd's bell. Why don't you do the same thing?' inquired Sarah. [Pg 260]

'Do what?' demanded George, who did not think much of this inspiration.

'Ring the bell—the big bell, I mean—to call the hands in, just as if nothing had happened,' urged Sarah.

'Nothing would happen if I did, except that we should have a gaping crowd round the gate, and the fire-brigade coming to see if we had a fire. So, if that's your inspiration, I'm inclined to agree with you that my waiting for it has been useless,' returned George.

'I wish you'd try, George. I believe the hands would all come back, and we should get the contract done after all,' persisted Sarah. 'They looked at me in quite a friendly way as I passed, and lots of the men touched their hats, a thing they never did before.'

George hesitated. 'But I don't feel that I could take them back again,' he said.

'Then what do you mean to do? You can't run the mills with new hands,' she protested.

'No; but I can't take back the men who have destroyed our property,' he declared.

'They are, or soon will be, taken up; so they won't apply,' began Sarah, when her brother interrupted her.

'Sarah,' he cried with sudden vigour, 'you have inspired me after all! I will have the bell rung, and when the people come, as some are sure to come, out of curiosity, I will make them a speech, and explain that those whom my father dismissed are still dismissed, but that the rest I shall be glad to have back. I'll speak to the manager, and see what he thinks.' [Pg 261]

The manager and Ben looked admiringly at George.

'There's pluck for you! Let's hope it will be rewarded. At any rate, we can but try,' they said; and they gave orders for the big mills-bell to be rung, and the few faithful ones stood in the yard, making a kind of bodyguard round George, and waited for the curious crowd to arrive.

Sarah watched from the office window, and her eyes shone with excitement as she heard the sound of clogs and many footsteps coming down the street. 'I was right' she cried. 'It's our old hands! I knew they'd come.'

And they did come, till the mill-yard was packed, and then George made them a speech.

'My father is stricken down by the misdeeds of some of his former employés, and in his absence I am going, with the help of my good friends here, to run my father's mills. Those of you who voluntarily left his employ are welcome to return to it; those he discharged will not be admitted.'

Such, in brief, was the young man's speech. The hands noticed that he had not called them 'friends,' nor, indeed, had his tone been friendly, but only business-like and curt, in marked contradiction to the way he had spoken of 'my good friends here,' alluding to those who had remained at their posts. But they were just men, and they respected the young man all the more for bravely and boldly 'standing up to them,' and showing his loyalty to his father and those who had stood by his father.

Some few slunk away. They were those Mr Clay had discharged—an act which had brought about the strike. But this time their discharge was accepted. Without exception the hands took up their old places; the engine, which had stopped, went on again; the fires, which had not yet gone out, [Pg 262]

were replenished; and before William Howroyd could get down to see what new misfortune this was, Clay's Mills had ceased to 'play.'

'Nay, my lass, you can't be serious. Men are not a flock of sheep to come back to you just because the bell rings,' he protested when Sarah told him the tale.

'Just go into the rooms and see for yourself,' she said. 'They are all setting to work with a will.'

'But I meant to have a talk with George and try to arrange things,' objected Mr Howroyd. 'One can't restart a business like this in this hap-hazard manner.'

'It's not hap-hazard; it's just natural. They're sorry for us and for everything, and they've just come back as if nothing had happened. I really think George is a born business man; he's quite left off being half-asleep all the time,' cried Sarah.

'It's my belief he's been more wide awake than we knew "all the time,"' quoted her uncle.

'Anyway, he's quite wide awake now. And, oh! it's so funny to hear him when they come and ask him some questions he doesn't know anything about. He puts up his pince-nez, looks very wise, and says, "You had better go on as you have always done for the present."'

Mr Howroyd pinched her cheek. 'You are far too wide awake, especially when it comes to criticising other people. Well, I expect I can go back to my own mill. I'm not wanted here. I shall soon be coming to your George for advice. Dear, dear! who would have thought it? He looked as if it was too much trouble to live. This bad business has done you both good—you as well as him, and you badly wanted some improvement, my lass. It'll be a proud day for your father when he hears what you have both done,' said Mr Howroyd as he went off, looking bright and cheery again.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

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### SARAH BECOMES A BUSINESS WOMAN.

Mr Howroyd had not been gone very long when George came in, his usually calm, unruffled brow puckered, and his face wearing a worried look. 'I say, Sarah, I'm afraid I've been very presumptuous in undertaking to carry on my father's business,' he said.

'What has happened? Aren't they behaving all right?' inquired Sarah, looking anxiously at him.

'Oh, the hands? Yes. Hurst, the manager, says they have come back in a good spirit, and are working all they know to get the contract done. He says he never saw smarter work,' George told her.

'Then I don't see what you are worrying about,' said Sarah, laughing, as she added, 'I expect they want to show that they are as good as any "Frenchies," as they call the foreigners.'

'But that isn't the trouble; it's father's customers and the people he has done business with. Some of them have called in and intimated pretty plainly that they don't mean to have any dealings with me,' he observed.

'How horrid of them! They might at least have waited to see how you got on,' exclaimed Sarah in great indignation.

'Well, it was rather my own fault. I suppose they can't afford to wait and see how things go in business. They began talking about business deals, and using all sorts of terms which, I suppose, are current in the wool-trade, and I let them see that I didn't understand anything about it,' said George.

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His face was so melancholy and his forehead so wrinkled that Sarah burst into a hearty laugh.

'It's no laughing matter; it spells ruin to us if our clients—customers, I mean—fight shy of us, and we shall be worse off than if I had never meddled with the matter,' he said severely.

'I am very sorry, George; but I could not help it; it is so funny for you to be so worried and fidgety. Why didn't you say Uncle Howroyd would stand surety, and refer them to Hurst? He has been manager for years, and father used to say that Hurst knew as much about the business as he did himself. If I were you I'd get him to write a circular-letter to all those people, and say that in father's temporary absence from business he is managing for you by Mr Howroyd's advice.'

'I never thought of it. I'm very unfit for all this. I like the dyeing and the chemical part of the business; but what all these men said was Chinese to me. I wish you'd just tell me what some of these words mean,' he said, as he sat down to the table and began questioning his sister.

'I can tell you a good deal, because, you see, I am always down at Uncle Howroyd's, and he lets me go into his office and talk to him while he is working. I've often seen the other merchants and buyers come in; but it seemed quite simple; they just ordered what they wanted, and Uncle Howroyd put the pieces on.'

'Put the pieces on what?' inquired George. 'Don't laugh; tell me what that means.'

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'Put the pieces to be made on to the machines—the lengths of blanketing or cloth,' said Sarah.

'Excuse me, Mr George, but Mr Blakeley is here,' said Ben the gate-keeper, coming into the office.

'Who is Mr Blakeley?' inquired George.

'He's one of our buyers, sir,' replied the man.

'Oh George, I know him! Do have him shown in here,' entreated Sarah. 'He is such a nice, good-humoured man.'

But circumstances alter cases, and Sarah was surprised to find that the good-natured Mr Blakeley, whom she always saw smiling and ready to complete a deal with her Uncle Howroyd, became a brusque, serious business man with her brother.

'I have an order on hand here, Mr Clay; but I should prefer if you will allow me to cancel it. I understand that there are changes in the mills, and it is rather particular that it should be woven exactly as it was,' he said, after having made some curt and perfunctory inquiries after Mr Mark Clay's health.

George evidently did not understand what he meant, and was just saying, with his usual courtesy, 'Oh, certainly; we should not, of course, hold you to your word.'

But Sarah broke in. She had been used to talk to these men when they came to see her uncle, and they had all admired the handsome girl, and showed her attention to please her uncle, who was evidently very fond of her and proud of his niece. So she felt no shyness with Mr Blakeley, and said, 'What difference do the changes make, Mr Blakeley? My father did not weave the cloth, and the manager and foremen who looked after these things are still here.'

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Mr Blakeley looked at her, and an amused smile crept over his face at her business-like tone. 'Quite true, Miss Sarah; but the weavers of this particular cloth have left, I understand, and I would rather not trust it to new ones.'

'Of course not,' began George.

But Sarah interrupted again. 'You'd better hear what our manager has to say. Father won't be pleased if he finds we have sent good customers away.'

'There's a good business woman for you!' cried Mr Blakeley with a laugh. "'Tis a pity you are not a man; you could go into partnership with your brother and father.'

Meanwhile George had acted on Sarah's advice, and sent for Mr Hurst, who came at once. 'There's no call for you to withdraw your order, Mr Blakeley. We've got the wools you asked for, and there's one of the weavers who has done your cloth before, so I think you may be easy in your mind about its being done as well as ever. We're turning out some fine work, and there's a new shade you might find useful, which perhaps you'd like to see.'

Mr Blakeley pricked up his ears at the news of a new shade, and went off quite eagerly with the manager.

George heaved a sigh of relief. 'You pulled us through that time, Sarah; but it won't always go like that. I can't push.'

'You must, or you'll get pushed to the wall; but I have had another inspiration since I came down. Why don't you weave a lot of coat-lengths of that new shade? It's much more suitable for that than for blankets.'

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'I thought the same thing when I saw it, and said something of the kind to father, and he said he should try samples. They were almost the last words he said to me that day before he left me.'

'It was only yesterday,' observed Sarah.

George stared at her. 'So it was! I can hardly believe it. It seems weeks ago; but I am glad you reminded me of it, for it will please father to find we have carried out his wishes, and I think it might "catch on," as he said.'

'The fact is, you've got dazed with the shock. I believe you felt it more than I did. I am very sorry for father being ill, and I think the hands who burnt our house behaved disgracefully, and I'm glad they were turned off; but I can't help feeling that it was father's own fault, and that perhaps it will do him good.'

'It's not our business to judge his treatment of his employés. He was a very liberal father to us,' said George.

'You are not so hard-hearted'—began Sarah; but a prolonged ringing at the telephone interrupted her.

'It's mother,' she announced, 'and she's calling for you.'

George went and listened. 'Father is conscious, and has asked for us,' he cried, and his face lightened.

'I'm very glad,' replied Sarah quietly; but her face showed no such joy as her brother's. It is to be

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feared that where her father was concerned Sarah was somewhat hard-hearted.

'We must go at once,' said her brother, taking up his hat.

'I don't think you ought to leave the mill till the dinner-hour. The bell will ring in a quarter of an hour. Can't you wait till then?' objected Sarah, who, as is seen, was more business-like than her brother, thanks to her intercourse with her uncle Howroyd.

'Perhaps you are right. Then you had better go, and say I will be there almost directly,' he suggested.

Sarah started with mingled feelings. She was glad, really glad, that her father had recovered consciousness, and was therefore, she supposed, getting better; but the fact was, Sarah felt very resentful and sore that he had made himself so hated, and she walked very slowly along the streets that separated her father's mills from Mr Howroyd's.

'E knows me, Sarah!' cried her mother, whose face was transfigured with joy. 'Thanks be to God, 'e knows me, my dear 'usband!'

For the life of her, Sarah could not show any great joy, but only inquired, 'Has he asked for me, or is it only George he wants to see, mother?'

'E mentioned you both, an' asked w'ere Sally was,' said her mother, forgetting, in her great relief, the small detail that Sarah disliked being called so.

'Then I'd better go to him and tell him George will come in as soon as he can leave the mills,' said Sarah, preparing to go into the sitting-room, which was still being used as the stricken man's bedroom.

'Don't you say any such thing! Don't you breathe a word about the mills or Balmoral or anything. 'E's not to be excited, the doctor says. I've 'alf a mind to tell 'im 'e shall see you by-and-by; it would be a dreadful thing if you were to upset 'im. You don't always get on too well with your father, Sarah,' Mrs Clay wound up reproachfully.

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'I sha'n't say anything to upset father while he is lying there so ill. I only meant to explain why George did not come at once,' explained Sarah.

'You needn't explain. Sick folk don't want explanations,' objected Mrs Clay. 'Say George is out.'

'Very well,' agreed Sarah, and she went into the sick-room. It was a relief not to see her father lying there with unseeing eyes and breathing so heavily; but, somehow, Sarah felt very uncomfortable under his keen glance to-day. Still, she managed to say, 'I am glad you are better, father.'

'Ay, I'm going to get better; but I'll never be the man I was. I've made a mess of it, Sally, and I shall not leave you the big fortune I meant you to have to match your pretty face, my little lass. I've not done right, and I shall never be able to do it now,' said the sick man.

'Yes, you will, father. You will be all right in a few weeks, and you can make another fortune, and build Balmoral again,' cried Sarah eagerly, as she impulsively took her father's hand, and then started on finding that it lay limp in hers.

A spasm passed over the invalid's face at her words; and if Mrs Clay had not been too much afraid of her husband she would have stopped Sarah and sent her away. As it was, she gave a little groan from the background, as much as to say, 'You've done the very thing I told you not to do.'

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'There'll never be another Balmoral. It would take me too long, and I doubt if Clay's Mills will ever be themselves again. I'd like those fellows to be sent off the minute the contract's done. It'll take them another week; but I'll be glad to see the backs of them. I wish they'd never come,' said Mr Clay, who seemed to have a feverish desire to talk.

'They've gone, father,' said Sarah.

But this was too much for Mrs Clay's patience. 'That'll do, Sarah. Your father's not got to talk business w'ile 'e's so bad.—There, Mark, don't you worry; everything's going on as well as can be expected,' she said, in what she thought was a soothing tone.

Her husband waved her aside. 'Let be, Polly! Let the lass speak; I must know the worst.—So they've gone, the villains! When they thought I was done for, the rats forsook the sinking ship. Ay, 'twas a bad day for us, was yon. Well, that ends it! The credit of Clay's Mills has gone for ever. I'd best not get better. You'll have a little something to live on; and that's all I've done with my toiling and moiling. I'm best dead,' he said.

Mrs Clay grasped Sarah's arm in a convulsive grip. 'Don't breathe another word. I forbid you!'

Sarah felt sure she should do more good by speaking; but she remained obediently silent.

'It's strange—a sick man's fancy, I suppose—but I thought I heard our bell. There's no mistaking it. And, hark! there it is again. Am I light-headed, Polly, or what's that bell I heard?' he asked.

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'No, Mark, no, you're not light-headed; it is your own bell. All's goin' as well as can be expected,' replied poor Mrs Clay.

'What does she mean? Speak up, my lass; why are they ringing my bell? Speak, I tell you!' he commanded.

So Sarah spoke, and told him what her brother had done.

The mill-owner listened in silence, and Sarah scarcely recognised her father's voice when he said, 'Thank God, my credit's saved! I don't deserve such children; but you take after your mother, and she's brought you up right. I've been a hard man, and I'd have been your ruin if you hadn't prevented it.' Then he shut his eyes, only to open them and say, 'Tell the hands I'm glad they've come back;' and with a sigh he went off into a refreshing sleep.

'And, oh George! he was so different, so humble and gentle. It did make me feel so ashamed of myself,' cried Sarah to her brother when he came in to lunch.

'I'm glad to hear it. It's about time you were,' announced George.

'You needn't say that now,' said Sarah, 'just when everything is going all right.'

'I don't know that everything is going all right; in fact, I'm rather glad I did not come in time to talk to father, for I should not have given such a glowing account of everything as you have,' he remarked.

'You are dreadfully pessimistic. Of course there are ups and downs in business; it's only that you are not used to it,' insisted Sarah.

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'It's mostly downs at present unfortunately,' said George; and he was to repeat the remark only too often in the weeks that followed.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

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### 'A MIRACLE.'

It was some weeks after the events related in the last chapter, and George was looking years older, so his mother told him.

'Nay, lad, you must let me help you,' said Mr Howroyd. 'I've a few thousands lying idle, and you'll want them to keep the mills going for the next few weeks.'

'Do you mean to say it costs a thousand a week to keep the mills going?' cried Sarah.

'It does that, lass, and I hear you've no orders coming in,' replied her uncle.

'Then what's the good of their doing work if no one will buy it?' said Sarah, whose enthusiasm had died out, and who was now as pessimistic as her brother.

'Have it done ready for buyers. We often have to fill our warehouses in bad times till we can find a market for our goods; and as George won't go and ask for orders'—began his uncle.

'I really could not, Uncle Howroyd. I should feel like a beggar,' protested George.

'Then you must sit here and wait till buyers come; it's only a case of holding out long enough. Hurst is a good man, and a first-rate manager. I don't know why the buyers have left you. I'm afraid it's some mischief that's been made over the trial of the young men for firing the house, and their heavy sentence. It has not done Clay's Mills any good.'

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'I know that, uncle, and that's why I don't want to take your money. It's only throwing good money after bad,' said George.

'Haven't I got any money?' inquired Sarah.

Mr Howroyd laughed as he said, 'Not yet. You'll have all that and more when I'm dead and gone.'

'And I hope that will be never!' cried Sarah impetuously.

'Then you'd better take this money now. I've neither chick nor child, so it's yours,' he said with his cheery smile.

'George, I think you'd better. Taking it from Uncle Howroyd is not taking charity,' said Sarah.

'I should think not,' put in her uncle.

George let himself be persuaded, in spite of his firm conviction that feeling was so strong against Clay's Mills and their owners, and that they were practically being boycotted by the buyers.

And he was right. The weeks dragged on, and since the big contract, which had been finished and sent off to time, thanks to the goodwill of the hands, no order of any importance had come in, and George heard of them being placed elsewhere in the town.

'It's no good, Sarah,' he said one day. 'I knew we were done for when I read that article in the paper about ill-gotten gains, and there have been others since.'

'Is Uncle Howroyd's money gone?' inquired Sarah.

'Practically, and the warehouses are full. I mind more for father and the hands; they've come back to us, and everything is going well in the mills, and Hurst is a good business man; but it's no use making good cloth if people won't buy it.'

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'Hasn't the new dye taken at all?' inquired Sarah.

'Yes, to a certain extent, and it is the only thing we are selling; but it wants some fashionable person to take it up, and I really couldn't push it or ask any of my friends,' he observed.

'I might ask Horatia to get her mother to have a costume that colour,' said Sarah doubtfully; 'but she hasn't written lately. She said they were coming up north in their motor, and should call and see us all. But I expect they've read those things that have been written, and don't want to have anything to do with us now we're ruined, or going to be.'

'In that case you can't possibly write to her. But I wish I knew what to do. I have even been to see some of the buyers, only to be refused,' said George a little bitterly.

'Oh, have you really? That was plucky of you, because I know you hate it so. I do wish something would happen. I hate going into father's room and having to tell him that things are rather slack. You know the doctor says he will soon be able to go down to the mills himself, and then he'll know the truth,' said Sarah, who, it will be observed, had quite changed in her feelings towards her father.

'Well, they say when things come to the worst they will mend, and things have come to about the worst with us, so let's hope they will mend,' said George, rousing himself and trying to speak cheerfully.

'That proverb is rubbish,' said Sarah, with some of her old violence; 'things often come to the worst and just end there.'

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'We've done our best, anyway, so we shall have that consolation,' remarked George.

'How much longer can you hold out?' inquired the practical Sarah.

'Practically I'm at the end of my tether, and was thinking of warning the hands that the mills may have to shut down at the end of next week.'

'Oh, wait a day, George, and don't do anything without asking father first; he ought to be asked, and he may think of a way out of the difficulty,' entreated his sister.

'All right; but a day won't make any difference, unless a miracle happens,' observed George.

'Father will have been out for his first drive, and will be stronger, for one thing,' said Sarah. 'And, who knows? a miracle may happen.'

'Lady Grace and Mr and Miss Cunningham to see you, Miss Sarah,' announced Sykes.

Sarah gave a little cry of joy, and looked significantly at her brother. 'Oh George'—she began.

But he said hastily, 'Don't ask a favour, Sarah. When people come to pay a call of civility they don't want to be bothered about business.'

'Very well,' said Sarah, who was not so self-willed as she used to be.

Horatia rushed at her. 'Oh Sarah! I am so glad to see you, and so sorry to see Balmoral—I mean, not to see it. Father wants to look over your mills, and I want to see your father,' she cried, bubbling over with high spirits as ever.

Meanwhile Lady Grace and Mr Cunningham were shaking hands with George, and congratulating him upon his energy and plucky attempt to keep on his father's business.

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'Let's all go down to the mills,' cried Horatia.

'It's dinner-hour now; but if you will stop and have lunch with us we shall be very glad, and we will go after lunch. It won't be a Balmoral lunch,' said George, smiling at her.

'All the better; we shall be finished the sooner,' said Horatia, 'and the mills take an awfully long time to see.'

'Then will you come and see father? He does not come down yet, and mother has her lunch with him; she can't bear to leave him,' said Sarah.

Horatia accordingly went off with Sarah, and found the mill-owner looking very different; but it was Mrs Clay who seemed the most changed. She looked years younger, and so quietly happy. Horatia could not understand it at all, not being given to troubling her head about people's characters.

After lunch—which, after all, was a very good one, and served in Sykes's best style, to do honour to the guests—the party drove down to the mills.

Sarah could not help thinking what a good thing it would be if Lady Grace Cunningham should take a fancy to this new cloth, she was such a striking-looking woman, and a well-known figure in society; but the girl determined not to suggest it, though her heart beat a little quicker when they

were coming to the dyeing-rooms.

Before this they passed the warehouses, and George good-naturedly opened the doors to let Horatia see more blankets than she would ever see again in her life.

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'How full it is! This place was quite empty when I last came,' she cried innocently.

George blushed like a girl. 'It's a slack time with us,' he said, and hastily shut the door.

But Mr Cunningham stopped a moment. 'They are not sold, then?' he inquired.

'No,' said George; 'but let me show you something more interesting.'

'Then it's rather fortunate I called, for I fancy I know a buyer. It's a large line of steamers I have a share in that are starting, and want a big consignment of blankets to be numbered and delivered by a near date,' said Mr Cunningham; and he began to go into figures with George.

The two went off with the manager to do some telephoning, and Lady Grace Cunningham walked on with the two girls to the dyeing-rooms. Sarah felt more than ever that she could not say anything, though she showed the new shade and the cloth.

'Oh mother, do have a coat and skirt of it!' cried Horatia. 'It does suit you so well! Just see!'

'But I don't suppose I am allowed to buy it wholesale like this?' Lady Grace protested.

'I believe one firm in London has stocked some. George will know the name,' said Sarah; but her eyes were shining with such pleasure that Lady Grace saw that the suggestion had given great pleasure.

'If you will let me have the name I will certainly order a costume. I have never seen the shade, and I think it ought to become very popular; it is such a good winter colour,' she said.

'Thank you very much,' said Sarah quietly; but her face said a great deal more.

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When Mr Cunningham joined them, Horatia insisted on his looking at the new cloth. He admired it as much as his wife, and said, 'I wish you'd have a dress of that shade. I'm so sick of dull colours, and this is really becoming.'

Horatia clapped her hands. 'She's going to when Mr Clay tells us the name of the place where you can buy it.'

'I can do that; but you would give me great pleasure if you would let me send you a length,' said George.

And Lady Grace gracefully accepted the offer, knowing that it gave the young man, as he said, great pleasure; and adding, 'But let me know where it can be got in London, for I am sure to be asked.'

When they took their leave, George and Sarah looked at each other, smiling. 'The miracle has happened, George!' the latter exclaimed.

'Thank goodness!' he said. 'Oh Sarah, if you only knew how that warehouse full of blankets has weighed upon me!'

'Then I wonder you're alive to tell the tale,' said a cheery voice behind him.

They both laughed. 'Oh Uncle Howroyd, isn't it lovely? Mr Cunningham has given George such a big order, and Lady Grace is going to wear the new shade. They've been to call.'

'I know. They called on me first,' said their uncle.

'Did you ask them to help us?' cried Sarah, her face falling.

'Nay, lass; I'm as proud as you, and I never said a word except that young George was battling bravely. Mr Cunningham told me he had come on purpose to see if he could get blankets, and, as a matter of fact, he asked me; but I hadn't any ready. So, you see, it was Providence helping those who help themselves,' he replied.

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Meanwhile the Cunninghams were speeding south with the dress-length packed in the carrier at the back of the motor.

'I don't recognise the description I heard of that family,' observed Lady Grace Cunningham; 'and it just shows that one must never believe what one hears, for according to you and Nanny they were very different.'

'Yes; I noticed that. And young Clay, too, is not in the least like Maxwell's description of him. He said the young man was an easy-going fellow, who looked always half-asleep, as if life was a bore to live, and was only fit to lounge in fashionable drawing-rooms. I shall ask him what he means,' said her husband.

'But that's how Sarah talked of him. I expect he's changed, and so is she; in fact, they are all changed,' declared Horatia.

'But you told me Mrs Clay was a meek, trodden-down creature, and Mr Clay a rather violent man, and that Sarah could not bear him. And as for Nanny's description, it was worse still, and I find

Mrs Clay very different, and Sarah is devoted to her parents, especially her father.'

'I know,' agreed Horatia, nodding her head. 'I was so astonished that my eyes nearly dropped out of my head. But it's the fire that has done it. It's burst up all their bad qualities. I can tell you it was pretty uncomfortable last time I stayed there; and when you tell Nanny your opinion of them, she'll say a miracle must have happened.'

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'I think they have been having a hard struggle. The young fellow betrayed it when he showed that full warehouse. I heard something about it. There is a feeling against them. Even our shipping people objected to trading with them. But I'm glad I persuaded them; it may give them a lift, and one thing leads to another.'

'Yes; and you must make that shade the fashion, mother. Wear it at your big reception, will you?' begged Horatia.

'And get it copied at once?' laughed her mother.

'Yes, because Mr Clay was so kind to me. Think of that rink that he had made just to please me!' cried Horatia.

'Ah, that was a waste of money! They won't be able to throw their money about like that for some time to come,' said Mr Cunningham, shaking his head.

'No; and a good thing, too. I don't approve of these colossal fortunes,' said his wife.

'Unless one has it one's self,' laughed her husband.

'It just shows how quickly they can be lost,' she observed.

'Well, it seems to have done them all good, so I don't think we need regret it or pity them,' said Mr Cunningham.

'Only, I do wish you had seen Balmoral; it was like Aladdin's palace. I never saw anything like it,' cried Horatia.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

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### LAST.

The worst had come and passed. Two days later Mr Clay announced his intention of going down to the mill. 'Not that I'm going to take things out of your hand, lad—nay, I shall never be good for much again—but just to see the old place, and say a word to some of the hands,' he explained.

'Will you wait till this afternoon, father?' asked George.

'Why? What's doing?' inquired his father.

'Only carrying bales for a big order,' said George.

'I'd like to see that; it means business,' persisted the mill-owner. And he had his way.

'I wanted to get the warehouse cleared before he came,' George explained to his sister, who was his confidante; for Mrs Clay, strange to say, took no interest in the mills or her son's proceedings except so far as it pleased father.'

However, Mr Clay came down, and saw the huge bales being sent off to the shipping line. His quick business eye took in the whole situation at a glance. 'You've been slack. It's been a heavy pull,' he said gravely.

'Yes, father; but the worst is over, and things are looking up. We've cleared this side, and I've had two more smaller orders since Mr Cunningham's,' said his son.

'And you've borne all that worry alone, and never told me a word. You're too good to your old father, both of you, for I've brought it on you; it's me the buyers have forsaken, not you. But they'll come round again. We make good cloth and blankets, and they know it,' he said; but he did not boast as he used to do.

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The hands, looking rather ashamed and shy, greeted him respectfully as he walked slowly along, dragging his paralysed foot after him. 'I'm glad to see you again,' he said again and again.

But when he had gone, they shook their heads and said Mark Clay would never be the man he had been, and that it was the young master they must look to now.

'And a good master he'll be, though he's a bit too polite, and down upon what he calls rudeness, which is only our way,' said one of the young men.

'You've taught them London manners, lad,' said Mark Clay, looking at his son quizzically, as he noticed how no man, woman, or child passed the young master without some greeting.

George laughed. 'I couldn't stand their rough ways,' he admitted.

'Well, I've nought against it, and I see you've made some other alterations for their benefit; but I've nought against that either. You've done well by the mill and by me, and I'm proud of you, and proud of my girl, for she's got a shrewd business head, too, it seems.'

'Yes; I couldn't have done it without her. She is so quick, and seems to know the right thing by instinct,' said George.

'That's the woman's way. It's wonderful how they'll see things we can't. Your mother's the same,' replied Mark Clay. [Pg 285]

And George made no comment on this change of front, though he remembered the times without number that his blood had boiled when the millionaire had spoken contemptuously of his wife, and told her that she did not know what she was talking about.

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It is two years later, and a motor-car drove up to a beautiful house that stood on the place that Balmoral formerly occupied. Out of the motor stepped a young man with a good-humoured, freckled face, very like Horatia, whom he handed out, and who was now a very nice-looking girl of seventeen.

'We've come to your house-warming, Sarah,' she cried. 'And, oh, what a beautiful house! It's almost as good as the last one. And you've got a marble staircase and all. Why, it's exactly like the other!' she cried.

Sarah shook her head. 'It's not so big or so grand; but we tried to make it like the last to please father and mother. Poor mother was always talking of her marble staircase, so that's exactly copied, and so is the parquet flooring, and her rooms are as like as we could make them; but we have no royal apartments for you this time,' she said.

'I'm glad of it. I don't mind telling you now that I used to have a nightmare every night, dreaming that burglars had come in and murdered me for my wealth—thinking it was mine, you know,' Horatia confided to her.

'Father is in the drawing-room waiting to see you. He is still rather an invalid,' said Sarah as she led the way to it. [Pg 286]

'It's almost the same, Sarah!' Horatia cried again. 'Yes; and we still have the gold plate and Sèvres china. Sykes saved a lot of things, we found afterwards; but it's not so palatial, and father wouldn't have it called Balmoral any more. He said that was boastful.'

'Oh! What is the name of the house, then?' inquired Horatia.

'Father will tell you,' said Sarah.

'So you've kept your promise, and come to stay with us again; only, this time it's my son's house,' said Mr Mark Clay.

'Oh no, father; he says not,' cried Sarah.

Mr Clay shook his head. 'I lost my all when I lost Balmoral, and he built up the fortune again. I'll never have a mansion here; but I'm content to stay in my son's till I get a mansion in the sky,' he said.

Horatia smiled at the allusion to her speech. 'What is the name of the house?' she asked.

'Horatia House. We all wished to have something to remind us that it was your family we had to thank for having a home again. You made the tide turn and the dye take. George wanted to call it Arnedale House, after your ancestor; but Sarah said, "Call it Horatia House," and so we did.'

'And a very pretty name it is,' said little Mrs Clay, who looked very pretty herself.

'That is a very pretty compliment you have paid me! I feel I ought to make a pretty speech of thanks, but I don't know how,' cried Horatia with a merry laugh.

'Here's the mill-owner,' said his father, as George came in, looking as aristocratic as ever, with the same pleasant smile and perfect manners, only wide awake. 'I've a right to be proud of my children, haven't I? They're all I am proud of now,' said Mr Clay as he took a hand of each. [Pg 287]

And Horatia and her brother agreed with him that he had a right to be proud of his children.

THE END

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SARAH'S SCHOOL FRIEND \*\*\*

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