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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SHE AND I, VOLUME 2 ***

John Conroy Hutcheson

"She and I volume two"

Chapter One.

I Dream.

True, I talk of dreams;
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,
Which is as thin of substance as the air;
And more inconstant than the wind, who woos
Even now the frozen bosom of the north,
And, being anger'd, puffs away from thence,
Turning his face to the dew-dropping south.

Il est naturel que nos idées les plus vives et les plus familières se rétracent pendant le sommeil.

I had a most curious dream about Min that very night.

Probably this was owing to the reactionary mental relief I experienced after all my doubts and jealousies—you know, "joie fait peur" sometimes. It might also have resulted from the stronger impression which my last interview with her had made upon my mind, coupled with all the sweet hopes and darling imaginings that had sprung suddenly into existence, when her rose-red lips told me in liquid accents that she loved me. How deliciously the words had sounded! I seemed to hear them now once more; and, that kiss of ecstasy—I almost felt it again in all its passionate intensity!

But, the physiology of dreams, and their origin and connection with our day life, are subjects that have never been clearly explained, frequently investigated though they have been by intellects that have groped to the bottom of almost every phenomenal possibility in the finite world. We have not yet succeeded in piercing through the thick veil that hides from our gaze the unseen, ideal, and spiritual cosmos that surrounds, with its ghostly atmosphere, the more material universe in which we move and breathe and have our being. We are oblivious, in most cases, of that thought-peopled, encircling essence; although, it influences our motives and actions, perhaps, in a greater degree than we may be willing to allow.

I shall not attempt to solve the workings of the varied phantasmagoria that flitted across the horizon of my brain that night, curious as they were; nor, will I try to track out how, and in what way, they retraced the events of the past, and prognosticated the possibilities of the future. The task in either direction would be as hopeless as it is uninteresting; consequently, I will abandon it to the attention of more inquiring psychological minds than my own, hurrying on to tell what it was that I dreamt.

My vision was a threefold one—a series of dreams within dreams.

First, I thought that I was on a wide, whitened Alpine plain. It was night. In front of me, towered on high the rugged peaks of the Matterhorn, imposing in their grandeur; further on, in the illimitable distance, I could descry the rounded, snowcapp'd head of Mont Blanc, rearing itself heavenward, where the pale, treacherous moon kept her silent watch, and from whence the glistening stars twinkled down through an ocean of space, touching frosted particles of matter with scintillations of light, and making them glitter like diamonds—world-old, transparent jewels, set in the cold, ice-blue crown of the eternal glacier.

I could thus see myself, gazing through my dream eyes on my *eidolon*, as if it were only a reflection in a mirror. *It* was walking here on this wide Alpine plain, all alone; and I recognised also that I had the power to analyse and appreciate the motives by which it was led hither, the desires by which it was actuated—the strange thing, being,

that I felt, within myself, all the thoughts and ideas that must have occurred to *my other self*.

At the same time, however, I seemed to be, as it were, but an inactive spectator of all that happened; looking on the visionary events of my dream as if I had no share or part in them. I appeared to possess, while they occurred, a sort of dual existence, of which I was perfectly cognisant, then and afterwards.

I knew that I—my other self—wished to reach the heights of the Matterhorn before and above me: the region of perpetual snow. I sympathised with that wish; and yet, I could look on at all my efforts to accomplish it, as if I were uninterested in their success, whilst I still felt, within myself, all the agony and suspense that must have filled the mind of my wraith, I could see myself making repeated exertions to reach the heights; constantly climbing, never getting any higher. I appeared to patrol a narrow circle, whose circumference I was unable to cross. Round and round I went, continually striving to get upwards and onwards:—still, always finding myself in the same identical spot, as if I had not advanced an inch. I grew tired, weary, exhausted. I felt sick at heart and in body. A nameless, indefinable horror seized upon me.

Then, all of a sudden, Min appeared.

She stood on the peaks above me; her figure presented in strong relief against the dead, neutral tint of the ice-wall behind her. I could see her face plainly—the look of entreaty in her eyes and the beckoning motion of her hands. She was calling to me, and urging me to join her; and—I *could* not!

A wide crevasse yawned before me, preventing any forward movement. It yawned deep down in front of my feet, fathoms below fathoms, piercing down, seemingly, to the centre of the earth. Looking over its edge I could mark how the vaulted arc of heaven and the starry firmament were reflected in its bottomless abyss; while, its breadth, seemed immeasurable. I saw that I could not cross it by the path I had hitherto pursued; and yet, whenever I turned aside, and tried to reach the mountain top by some other way, the horrible crevasse curved its course likewise, still confronting me. It was always before me, to arrest my progress. I could not evade it, I could not overleap it; and yet, there stood Min calling to me, and beckoning to me—and, I could not join her. It was maddening!

The moonlight faded. The twinkling stars went in one by one. There was a subdued darkness for a moment; and then, day appeared to break.

The snowy expanse appeared to blush all over—

“And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn
God made himself an awful rose of dawn.”

Did you ever watch an Alpine sunrise? How the light leaps from peak to peak, warming the monotonous white landscape in an instant with a tinge of crimson lake, and making the ice prisms sparkle like sapphires!

It was just so in my dream:—not a detail was omitted.

With the brightening of the dawn my troubles began to disappear. The crevasse narrowed, and the distant peaks of the Matterhorn approached nearer. Min was close to me, so close that I could almost touch the hand she held out to guide my steps. I heard her say, “Come, Frank, come! courage, and you’re safe!” I was stepping across a thin ice bridge, which I suddenly perceived in front of me, leading over the gulf that separated us. I felt her warm, violet breath on my cheek. I was just planting my feet on the further side of the glacier, and going to clasp her in my arms, when—the frail platform on which I was crossing gave way:—I fell downward through the chasm with a shriek of terror that she re-echoed, and—I awoke!

Again, I was in the midst of an arid, sandy desert. The sun’s rays seemed to pelt down with blistering intensity on my uncovered head. There was not a single tree, nor a scrap of foliage anywhere in sight, to afford a moment’s shelter:—all was barrenness; parching heat; death!

I felt faint—dying of thirst. I fancied I could hear the rippling of waters near me, the splashing of grateful fountains; but, none could I see. Around me, as I lay stretched on the scorching sands, were only sun-baked rocks, and the scattered bones and skeletons of former travellers, who had perished by the same dreadful, lingering agony through which I was, apparently, doomed to die.

After a time, I thought I could distinguish the murmuring of waters more plainly; and, stay—did I not perceive a stately grove of palms in the distance? The water must be there!

I totter to my feet: I bend my feeble steps thither, and sink down beneath the welcome shade. I hear a sweet voice calling to me: I see an angel form stretching out a goblet of crystal water to my parching lips; and, as I reach my hand forth to grasp it, I see that the face is that of Min! I give vent to a cry of ecstasy; but, at the same moment, the goblet falls from my shaking hand, shattering into a thousand pieces on the sands of the desert; and—the vision fades away from my gaze.

All is darkness again. I am awake!

Once more the kaleidoscope of my dream changed.

I am now floating in a battered boat, without either sails or oars, on the boundless waters of the ocean. I can hear the lap, lapping of the sobbing sea against the sides of my frail craft; and the ripple of the current, hurrying along in its devious course the boat, which is as powerless to resist its influence as a straw upon the stream.

Presently the current spins onward faster and more furiously. I see the faint outlines of purple hills breaking the vacant curve of the horizon. A delicious fragrance from tropic flowers fills the air—the perfumes of the jessamine, the

magnolia, the cereus. A sweet, delicious languor creeps over me. I feel a vague sense of rest and happiness, which, to my onlooking self, seems almost unaccountable; for, there am I, still all alone on the ocean, swept onward towards the purple hills in the distance, over the smooth-flowing surface of azure liquid, while, not a sound is to be heard, save the restless murmuring of the many-voiced sea.

The boat glides on.

Now I find myself encircled by radiant groups of picturesque coral islands, all covered with palm-trees, whose waving branches are entwined with varied-hued passion-flowers. Lilies and ferns, narcissi and irises, are intermingled in one chaos of beauty, skirting the velvet sward that runs down to the water's edge.

On each tiny islet, the lavish wealth of nature, freely outpoured, seemed to make it a perfect paradise. Brilliantly-plumaged birds flitted here and there, their colours contrasting with the green foliage. Gauzy-winged insects buzzed to and fro. The notes of the nightingale, or some kindred songster, could be heard, singing an ecstatic soprano to the cooing bass of the dove and the rippling obbligato of babbling brooks—that filtered through golden-yellow sands into the lap of the mother of waters—amid the sympathetic harmony of gushing cascades, whose noisy cadence was toned down by distance to a melodious hum.

And now I find that I am alone no longer.

I see Min stepping forward to greet me, advancing down the sloping turf-bank of the first island I reach; but, I cannot land. I cannot touch her hand.

No. The current sweeps my boat onward, past each tiny paradise in turn; and, on each, I still see Min always coming towards me, yet never reaching me! Swiftly the boat glides, swiftly and more swift; until, at last, Min, the palm-tree-shaded coral islets and all, are lost to sight—gradually yet in a moment.

I now seem to be borne along on the tide of a tempestuous torrent, through rocky defiles and beneath frowning precipices.

I am in the centre of a cyclone. The sickly lightning plays around me. The thunder mutters—growls—rolls—peals forth—in grand ear-breaking crashes, that appear to shake the dense sky overhead; but still, whenever the electric coruscations light up the sable darkness, I can see Min's face, apparently ever before me, ever inviting me on, ever inapproachable!

Anon, the boat glides back into the ocean again. Soon after, I find myself floating amongst an army of icebergs, all glittering with distinct gradations of tint, from that of pale sea-green up to intense blue. In front of me stretches a frozen field of hummocky ice, like that I had seen in my first vision.

There, too, stands Min. The current is bearing me to her; but, again, ere I can touch the spot where she stands, my boat careens heavily against a drifting berg, and is dashed to pieces.

Instead of sinking in the water, however, I feel myself floating in air. The atmosphere that encircles me is all rosy illumination, as it had been during the Alpine sunrise. I hear the most beautiful, heavenly music, and the sound as of many voices singing together in the sweetest of harmonies.

I see the gilded domes and minarets of a wondrous city that seems to be built in the centre of the zenith. I am wafted nearer and nearer to it, borne up on the pinions of the air. And, now, I can discern its golden gates!

There, stands Min, again, before them. She is clothed all in a white garment, that gives out a radiance as of light; while, on her head is a jewelled crown, fashioned in the shape of olive leaves and fastened in front with a single diamond star, whose beams almost blind me. Both her outstretched hands are extended to greet me. A loving smile is on her lips, in her eyes. I can hear the beautiful music chiming louder and louder; the harmony of the voice-chorus echoing more and more distinctly; I am on the threshold of the golden gates; I am just clasping Min's outstretched welcoming hands with oh, such a fond, enduring clasp; when—I awake.

This time my réveil is in real earnest:—the vision had passed!

It is broad daylight; and, a bright summer morning.

The London sparrows are chirping away at a fine rate in the garden. I fancy, too, that I can hear my favourite thrush in the distance.

Dog Catch, also, is whining and scratching at my door to tell me that it is time for me to get up, and take him out for his walk.

And, then, I recollect all.

I realise that I've only been dreaming; although, I almost believe that I can see Min's dear face and outstretched arms still before me.

Of course, it was only a dream.

But, curious, wasn't it?

Manoeuvring.

O! slippery state of things. What sudden turns,
What strange vicissitudes in the first leaf
Of man's sad history. To-day most happy,
And ere to-morrow's sun has set, most abject!
How scant the space between these vast extremes.

The recollection of my strange visions which, I confess, somewhat affected me on my first waking, I put off from me at once. What were they, after all, but dreams, "begot of nothing but vain fantasy?"

I reasoned thus, philosophically, reflectively, rationally, within myself, as I dressed.

I determined to dismiss the matter from my thought at once; for, even if it prognosticated anything and was intended to withdraw the veil from futurity, it ought only to convince me of one fact, or fancy, namely, that, notwithstanding that I might have a hard struggle to win my darling, I should win her in the end:—that, also, in spite of antagonistic mammas and contrary circumstances, she would then be my own, my very own Min!

Would you not have thought the same in a like case?

I trow, yes!

I will not deny that I expended the most elaborate pains on my toilet that afternoon, before waiting upon Mrs Clyde in accordance with my promise to Min. I did not otherwise comply fully with the essential requirements of Madame la Comtesse de Bassanville's *Côte Complet du Ceremonial*—such as causing an influential friend, who could speak of my morals and position, to have a previous audience with "the responsible relation" of "the young person who had attracted my notice;" nor, did I don a pair of "light fresh-butter-coloured kid gloves." Still, I undoubtedly betrayed a considerable nicety of apparel all the same.

Indeed, I absolutely out-Hornered Horner; and, had anybody detected me when engaged in the mysteries of the dressing-room, I would certainly have been supposed to have been as anxiously considerate respecting the choice I should make between light trousers and dark, a black coat and a blue one, and whether I would wear a white waistcoat or not, as a young lady costuming herself for a ball, and debating with her maid the rival merits of blush roses and pink silk, or of white tarlatan and clematis.

It was, also, some time ere I could summon up enough resolution to knock at the door of Mrs Clyde's residence, when, my decorative preparations accomplished, I at length succeeded in getting round to her house.

The expedition strangely reminded me of a visit I was once forced to pay to a dentist, owing to the misdeeds of one of my best molars; the dread of the impending interview almost inducing me to turn back on the threshold and put off my painful purpose for a while—even as had been my course of procedure when calling at Signor Odonto's agonising establishment. On that occasion, I remember, I recoiled in fright from the dreaded ordeal, seeking refuge in "instant flight."

I could not do so now, however. I had promised Min to speak to her mother as soon as possible; and, independently of that engagement, the interview would have to be gone through sooner or later, at all hazards. "An' it were done quickly, it were well done;" so, at last, my hesitation passed away under the influence of this, really vital, consideration. I nerved myself up to the knocking point. I gave a loud rat, tat, tat! that thrilled through my very boots, causing a passing butcher's boy, awed by its important sound, to inquire, with the cynical empressment of his race, whether I thought myself the "Emperoar of Rooshia." I turned my back on him with contempt; but, his ribald remark made me feel all the more nervous.

"Mrs Clyde at home?" I asked of the handmaiden, who answered my summons.

Yes, Mrs Clyde was at home.

Would I walk in?

I would; and did.

So far, all was plain sailing:—now, came the tug of war.

Mrs Clyde was standing up, facing the door, as I entered the drawing-room into which the handmaiden had ushered me.

"Won't you sit down, Mr Lorton?" she said, politely.

She never forgot her good breeding; and, I verily believe, if it had ever been her lot to officiate in Calcraft's place, she would have asked the culprit, whom she was about to hasten on his way to "kingdom come," whether he found the fatal noose too tight, or comfortable and easy, around his doomed neck! She would do this, too, I'm sure, with the most charming solicitude possible!

I noticed of her, that, whenever she was bent on using her sharpest weapons—of "society's" armoury and, methinks, the devil's forge-mark!—she always put on an extra gloss of politeness over her normal smooth and varnished style of address.

I didn't like it, either.

Civility may be all very well in its way, but I cannot say that I admire that way of knocking a man down with a kid glove. It is a treacherous mode of attack; and very much resembles the plan Mr Chucks, the boatswain in *Peter Simple*, used to adopt when correcting the ship's boys.

That gentleman would, if you recollect, courteously beckon an offender to approach him, doffing his hat the while as if speaking to the quarter-deck; and then, begging the trembling youngster's pardon for detaining him, would proceed to inform him in the "politest and most genteel manner in the world" that he was "the d—d son of a sea cook,"—subsequently rattaning him furiously, amidst a plethora of expletives before which the worst Billingsgate faded into insignificance.

I may be singular in the fancy, but, do you know, I prefer civil words to be accompanied with civil deeds, and contrariwise:—the "poison of asps" does not go well with honied accents!

"Pray take a seat, Mr Lorton," said Mrs Clyde. "I was expecting you to call; and waited in, on purpose not to miss seeing you. My daughter has told me,"—she went on, taking the initiative, ere I had a chance to speak—cutting the ground from under my feet, as it were, and rendering my task each moment more arduous—"My daughter has told me that she and you were talking some nonsense together last night, which it is best for all parties, my dear Mr Lorton, should be at once forgotten! You'll agree with me, I'm sure?"

And she looked at me with a steady gaze of determination and set purpose in her eyes, before which I quailed.

"You will agree with me, I'm sure, Mr Lorton,"—she repeated again, after a pause, as I was so bewildered by her flank attack that I could not get out a word at first. I declare to you, I only sat looking at her in hopeless dismay, powerless—idiotic, in fact!

"But I love Min, Mrs Clyde,"—I stammered—"and she has promised—"

"Dear me! This is quite delicious," laughed Mrs Clyde—a cold sneering laugh, which made me shiver as if cold water were running down my back—"quite a comedy, I do declare, Mr Lorton. I did not think you were so good an actor. Love! Ha, ha, ha!" and she gave forth a merry peal—to my intense enjoyment, you may be sure.

Oh, yes! I enjoyed it, without doubt:—it was dreadfully comical!

"It is no laughing matter to me, Mrs Clyde," I replied at last, emboldened by her ridicule—"I love Min; and she has promised to marry me, if you will only give your consent, which I have come to ask to-day."

I got up as I spoke, and faced her.

I was prepared to do battle till the death. Desperation had now made me brave.

"Now, *do* let us be serious," said the lady, presently.

She apparently found it difficult to stifle her laughter at the humour of the whole thing:—it was really such a very good joke!

"I *am* serious, Mrs Clyde," I said, half-petulantly, although I tried to be impressive. I was solemn enough over it all; but, my temper has always been, unfortunately for me, too easily provoked.

"I never heard of such a thing in my life," she continued, taking no notice, apparently, either of me or of my answer. "Fancy, any sane person talking of love and marriage between a boy and girl like that! You must be joking, Mr Lorton. Really, it is too absurd to be credible!" and she affected a laugh again, in her provoking way.

A capital joke, wasn't it?

"I am not joking, I assure you, Mrs Clyde," I answered sturdily, endeavouring, vainly, to bear down her raillery by my gravity. "I was never more serious in my life. I'm not a boy, Mrs Clyde; and I'm sure Min is old enough to know her own mind, too!"

This was an impertinent addendum on my part; and, my opponent quickly retorted, with a thrust, which recalled my good manners.

"You are very good to say so, Mr Lorton; but permit *me* to judge best in that matter! Pray, how old are you, Mr Lorton, if I may be allowed to ask the question?"—she said, looking at me with great "society" interest, as if she were examining a specimen of the extinct dodo.

"Three-and-twenty," I said sententiously, like a catechumen responding to the questions supposed to be addressed to "N or M."

"Dear me!" she ejaculated in seeming surprise. "Three—and—twenty? I really would not have thought it! I wouldn't have taken you to be more than eighteen at the outside!"

She hit me on my tenderest point. I looked young for my age; and, like most young fellows, before time teaches them wisdom, making them strive to disguise the effect of each additional lustrum, I felt sore always when supposed to be more youthful than I actually was. I was, consequently, nettled at her remarks. She saw this, and smiled in amusement.

"I *am* twenty-three, however, Mrs Clyde, I assure you," I said warmly; "old enough to get married, I suppose!"

"That entirely depends on circumstances," she said coldly, as if the matter was of no interest to her whatever; "years are no criterion for judgment"—and she then stopped, throwing the burden of the next move on my shoulders.

I did not hesitate any longer, however.

"Will you allow Min to become engaged to me?" I said, valiantly, plunging at once into the thick of the combat.

"Pray, Mr Lorton," she replied, ignoring my query, "what means have you for supporting a wife? People cannot live upon nothing, you know; and 'love in a cottage' is an exploded fallacy."

She spoke as lightly and pleasantly as if she were conversing upon some ordinary society topic with another lady of the world like herself. She very well knew what she was about, however. She was "developing her main attack"—as military strategists would say!

You see, I had never given the subject of ways and means an instant's consideration, having remitted the matter to Providence with that implicit trust and cheerful hopefulness to which most enraptured swains are prone. I had only thought of loving Min and being loved by her:—engagement naturally following between us; and, that, was all I had thought of as yet.

When the time came for us to be married, our guardian angels would, no doubt, take care to provide us with the wherewithal!

"Sufficient for the day" was "the evil thereof." Till then, I was quite satisfied to let the matter rest; living, for the present, in the fairy land of my imagination where such a thing as filthy lucre was undreamt of.

Mrs Clyde's inquiry, therefore, took me all aback. "What means had I for supporting a wife?" Really, it was a very uncalled-for remark!

I had to answer it, nevertheless. Of course I could only tell the truth.

"I've only got two hundred and fifty pounds a-year of my own at present, Mrs Clyde," I said; "but—"

"Two—hundred—a-year!"—she said, interrupting me ere I could finish my statement, placing a horribly sneering emphasis on each word, which made the sum mentioned appear so paltry and insignificant, that it struck me with shame.—"I beg your pardon—two hundred and fifty! Why, how *young* you are, Mr Lorton. Do you really think you could support a wife and establishment on that income? I thought you were joking, my dear young friend,"—she added—"you know it would barely pay your tailor's bill!"

And she looked at me from head to foot with her merciless quizzing eyes, taking in all the elaborateness of the apparel that I had donned for her personal subjugation.

"You have not heard me out, Mrs Clyde," I answered, spurred upon my mettle.—"I am not quite dependent on that income. I also write for the press!"

I said this quite grandly, on the strength of my contributing an occasional magazine article at stray intervals to one of the current periodicals—getting one accepted for every dozen that were "declined with thanks;" and, being the "musical critic" of a very weakly weekly!

"O-oh, indeed!" she exclaimed.

There was a most aggravating tone of pity mingled with her surprise.

She evidently now looked upon me as more presumptuous than ever, and hopelessly beyond the pale of her social circle!

"And how much,"—she asked, in a patronising way which galled me to the quick,—"*do you derive from this source?* That is, if you will kindly excuse my saying so? The proposal which you have done my daughter and myself the honour to suggest, necessitates my making such delicate inquiries, you know."

"I do not earn very much by my pen, as yet, Mrs Clyde," I answered—"but, I hope to do more in a little time, when my name gets recognised. I'm only a beginner as yet."

"Well, if you would take my advice, Mr Lorton, you would remain so. I've heard it frequently said by some of your penny-a-liners—I believe that is what you literary gentlemen call yourselves—that, authorship reaps very poor pay. It makes a very good stick, but a bad crutch; and I don't think you can expect to increase your income very largely from that quarter! The only author I ever knew personally, sank into it, poor fellow, because he could do nothing else; and, *he* led a wretched existence from hand to mouth! He was never recognised afterwards in society, of course!"

"Genius is not always acknowledged at first, Mrs Clyde," I said loftily.

Her sneers at the profession, which I regarded as one of the highest in the world, provoked me.

Fancy her calling all authors "penny-a-liners!"

"So, all unsuccessful men say!" she replied curtly.—"But,"—she went on, putting aside all my literary prospects as beneath her notice, and returning to the main point at issue,—"*is that* all you have got to depend upon for your anticipated wife and establishment?"

She smiled sweetly, playing with me as a cat would with a mouse.

"All I have, certainly, at present, Mrs Clyde,"—I said, abashed at the sarcasm thus directed against my miserable income, which she did not take the slightest pains to conceal.—"But I shall have more by-and-by. We are both young; and, if you will only give me some hope of gaining your consent, when I have achieved what you may consider sufficient for the purpose, I will work for her and win her. O Mrs Clyde!"—I pleaded,—"let me only have the assurance that you will allow her to wait for me. I will work most nobly that I may deserve her!"

"All this is mere rhapsody, Mr Lorton,"—she said in her icy accents, throwing a shower of metaphorical cold water on my earnest enthusiasm.—"Do you seriously think for a moment that I would give my consent to my daughter's engagement to you in your present position?"

"I hoped so, Mrs Clyde," I replied, timidly.

I did not know what else to say.

"Then you hoped wrongly," she said. "You are really *very* young, Mr Lorton! I do not mean merely in years, but in knowledge of the world! You positively wish me to sacrifice all my daughter's prospects, and let her be bound to a wearisome engagement, on the mere chance of your being able at some distant period to marry her! Do I understand you aright? I certainly gave you credit for possessing more good sense, Mr Lorton, or I should never have admitted you to my house."

"O, Mrs Clyde," I said, "be considerate! Be merciful! Remember, that *you* were young once."

"I am considerate," she answered—"still, I must think of my daughter's welfare, before regarding the foolish wishes of a comparative stranger!"

Throughout the interview, she invariably alluded to Min as "her daughter," never mentioning her name.

It seemed as if she wished to avoid even the idea of our intimacy, and to make me understand how great a gulf lay between us.

"But I love her so, Mrs Clyde!" I pleaded again, in one last effort. "I love her dearly, and she loves me, I know. Do not, oh! do not part us so cruelly!"

"This is very foolish, Mr Lorton,"—she replied, coldly;—"and there is not much use, I think, in our prolonging the conversation; for, none of your arguments would convince me to give my consent to any such hair-brained scheme. Even if your offer had otherwise my approval, which it has not, I could not bear the idea of a long engagement for my daughter. You yourself ought to be more generous than to wish to tie a girl down to an arrangement which would waste her best years, blight her life; and, probably, end in her being a sour, disappointed woman—as I have known hundreds of such cases to end!"

"I do not wish to bind her," I said. "I only want your provisional consent, Mrs Clyde. I will diligently try to deserve it; and you will never regret it, you may be assured."

"I cannot give it, Mr Lorton,"—she replied in a decisive way.—"And if you meet my daughter again, you must promise me that it shall be only as a friend."

"And, what if I refuse to do so?"—I said defiantly.

"I should leave the neighbourhood," she said promptly.—"And, if you were so very ungentlemanlike, as still to persecute her with your attentions, I should soon take measures to put a stop to them."

What could I say or do? She was armed at all points, and I was powerless!

"Will you let me see your daughter; and, learn from her own lips if she be of the same opinion as yourself?" I asked.

I was longing to see Min. I wanted to know whether she had been convinced by her mother's worldly policy, or no.

"It is impossible for me to grant your request," said Mrs Clyde. "My daughter is not at home. She went down to the country this morning on a visit to her aunt; and the date of her return depends mainly on your decision now."

This was the finishing blow.

I succumbed completely before this master-stroke of policy, which my wary antagonist had not disclosed until the last.

"Oh! Mrs Clyde," I said; "how very hard you are to me!"

"Pardon me, Mr Lorton," she replied, as suave as ever.—"But, you will think differently by-and-by, and thank me for acting as I have done! Your foolish fancy for my daughter will soon wear off; and you will live to laugh at your present folly!"

"Never!" I said, determinedly, with a full heart.

"But you will promise not to speak to my daughter otherwise than as a friend, when you see her again?" she urged:—not at all eagerly, but, quite coolly, as she had spoken all along.

I would have preferred her having been angry, to that calm, irritating impassiveness she displayed. She appeared to be a patent condenser of all emotion.

"I suppose I must consent to your terms!"—I said, despairingly.—"Although, Mrs Clyde, I give you fair warning that, when I am in a position to renew my suit under better auspices, I will not hold myself bound by this promise."

"Very well, Mr Lorton," she said, "I accept your proviso; but, when you make your fortune it will be time enough to talk about it! In the meanwhile, relying upon your solemn word as a gentleman not to renew your offer to my daughter, or single her out with your attentions—which might seriously interfere with her future prospects—I shall still be pleased to welcome you *occasionally*"—with a marked emphasis on the word—"at my house. What we have spoken about had, now, better be forgotten by all parties as soon as possible, excepting your promise, of course, *mind!*" and she bowed me out triumphantly—she victorious, I thoroughly defeated.

What a sad, sad change had occurred since happy last night!

All my bright hopes were obscured, my ardent longings quenched by fashionable matter-of-fact; and, Min herself had gone from me, without one single parting word!

I was born to be unlucky, I think; everything went wrong with me now. Like the lonely, hopeless hero in Longfellow's translation of Min's favourite *Coplas de Manrique*, I might well exclaim in my misery—

"Let no one fondly dream again,
That Hope and all her shadowy train
Will not decay;
Fleeting as were the dreams of old,
Remembered like a tale that's told,
They pass away!"

How did I know, too, but, that, ere I saw my darling again, months might elapse, during which time all thoughts of me might be banished from her heart?

One proverb tells us that "absence makes the heart grow fonder;" another, equally entitled to belief, warns anxious lovers that "out of sight" is to be "out of mind."

Which of the two could I credit?

Besides, even if she were constant and true to me, Mrs Clyde would certainly never give her consent to our engagement, I was confident—no, not if we both lived and loved until doomsday!

All these bitter thoughts flashed through my mind in a moment, one after the other.

I was angry, indignant, wretched.

Chapter Three.

"Nil Desperandum."

To-morrow's sun shall warmer glow,
And o'er this gloomy vale of woe
Diffuse a brighter ray!

"O you lovers, you lovers!"—exclaimed little Miss Pimpernell, on my unbosoming myself to her, and recounting the incidents of my unhappy interview with Min's mother, shortly after I quitted the scene of my discomfiture.—"O you lovers, you lovers! You are always, either on the heights of ecstasy, or deep down in the depths of despair! Be a man, Frank, and let her see what noble stuff there is in you! There is nothing in this world worth the having, which can be obtained by merely looking at it and longing for it. Bear in mind Monsieur Parole's favourite proverb, 'On ne peut pas faire une omelette sans casser les oeufs!' You mustn't expect that a girl is going to drop into your mouth, like a ripe cherry, the moment you gape for her! Young ladies are not so easily won as that, Master Frank, let me tell you! Put your shoulder to the wheel, my boy! You will have to work and wait. Remember how long it was that Jacob remained in suspense about his first love, Rachel—seven, long years; and, *then*, he had to serve seven more for her after that!"

"Ah, Miss Pimpernell!"—said I,—"but, seven years were not so much to the long-lived men who existed in those times, as seven months are to us ephemerals of the nineteenth century! Jacob could very well afford to wait that time; for he was not over what we call 'middle-age' when he married; and was, most likely, in the flower of his youth on his ninetieth birthday!—He did not die you know, until he had reached the ripe age of 'an hundred and forty and seven years.'—Besides, he had Laban's promise to keep him up to his work; but, I have no promise, and no hope to lead me on, if I do wait—and what would I be at the end of seven years? Why, I would be thirty—quite old."

"Nonsense, Frank!"—replied the dear old lady, in her brisk cheery way, jumping round in her chair, and looking me full in the face with her twinkling black eyes.—"When you are as old as I am, you will not think thirty such a very great age, you may be sure! And, I didn't say, too, that you should have to wait seven years, or anything like it—although, if you really love Miss Min, you would think nothing of twice that time of probation. As for Jacob's age, the vicar could explain about that better than I, Master Frank, sharp though you are; you had best ask him what he thinks on the subject? What I say, is, my boy, that you must make up your mind to work, and wait for your sweetheart; work, at any rate—and wait, if needs be. 'Rome wasn't built in a day;' and, when did you ever hear of the course of true love running smooth? Be a man, Frank! Say to yourself, 'I'll work and win her,' and you will. Put your heart in it, and it will soon be done—sooner than you now think. There's no good in your sitting down and whining at your present defeat, like the naughty child that cried for the moon! You must be up and doing. A man's business is to

overcome obstacles; it is only us, women, who are allowed to cry at home!"

"But, Mrs Clyde dislikes me," I said.

"What of that?" retorted Miss Pimpernell; "her dislike may be overcome."

"I don't think it ever will be," I said, despondingly.

"Pooh, Frank," replied the old lady;—"never is a long day.' She's only a woman, and will change her mind fast enough when it suits her purpose to do so! You say, that she only objected on the score of your position, and from your not having a sufficient income?"

"Yes,"—I said,—"that was her ostensible reason; but, I think, she objects to me personally—in addition to having other and grander designs for Min."

"Ah, well,"—said Miss Pimpernell,—"we haven't got to consider those other motives now; she rejected your offer, at all events, on the plea of your want of fortune?"

"Yes," said I, mechanically, again.

"Then, that is all we've got to deal with, my boy,"—she said.—"Mrs Clyde is quite right, too, you know, Frank. You have got no profession, or any regular occupation. Let us see if we cannot mend matters. In the first place, are you willing to work? Would you like some certain employment on which you can depend?"—And she looked at me kindly but searchingly over her spectacles.

"Would a duck swim?" said I, using an expressive Hibernicism.

"Well, what sort of employment would you like?" she asked.

"Anything," I replied.

"Come, that's good!" she said.—"And what can you do?"

"Everything," I said.

She laughed good-humouredly.—"You've a pretty good opinion of yourself at any rate, Master Frank, if that's any recommendation:—you will never fail through want of impudence. But, I'll speak to the vicar about this. I think he could get you a nomination for a Government office."

"What, a clerkship?"—I said, ruefully, having hitherto affected to despise all the race of her Majesty's quill drivers, from Horner downwards.

"Yes, sir,"—she said,—"'a clerkship;' and a very good thing, too! You need not turn up your nose at it, Master Frank; I can see you, although I *do* wear glasses! Grander men than you think yourself, sir, have not despised such an opening! Here *is* the vicar,"—she added, as her brother walked into the room.—"How lucky! we can ask him now."

The vicar overheard her remark.

"Hullo, Frank!" said he; "what is it, that Sally and you are conspiring together? Can I do anything for you, my boy?"—he continued, in his nice kind way,—"if so, only ask me; and if it is in my power, you know that I will do it."

"He wishes to get into a Government office; don't you think you could help him?" said Miss Pimpernell.

"You want to be in harness, my boy, eh?"—said the vicar, turning to me.—"That's right, Frank. Literature will come on, in due course, all in good time. There's nothing like having regular work to do, however trifling. It not only gives you a daily object in life, but also steadies your mind, causing you better to appreciate higher intellectual employment! I thought, however, my boy, that you looked down on 'Her Majesty's hard bargains,' as poor Government clerks are somewhat unjustly termed?"

"That was, because I thought they were a pack of idlers, doing nothing, and earning a menial salary for it. 'Playing from ten to to four, like the fountains in Trafalgar Square,' as *Punch* declares," I said.

"Ah!" said the vicar, "that is a mistake, as you will soon find out when you belong to their body. They *do* work, and well, too. Many of the grand things on which departmental ministers pride themselves—and get the credit, too, of effecting by their own unaided efforts—are really achieved by the plodding office hacks, who work on unrecognised in our midst! Our whole public service is a blunder, my boy. There is no effective rise given in it to talent or merit, as is the case in other official circles. The 'big men,' who are appointed for political purposes, get on, it is true; but, the 'little men,' who labour from year's end to year's end, like horses in a mill, never have a chance of distinguishing themselves. When they are of a certain age, and attain a particular height in their office, they become superannuated, and retire; for, should a vacancy occur, of a higher standing in the public secretariat, it is not given to *them*—although the training of their whole life may peculiarly fit them for the post! No, it is bestowed on some young political adherent of the party then in power, who may be as unacquainted with the duties connected with the position, as I am ignorant of double fluxions! This naturally disgusts men with the service; and, that is why you generally hear Government offices spoken of as playgrounds for idle youths, who enter them to saunter through life—on the strength of the constituent-influence of their fathers on the seats of budding MP's."

"I really thought they never worked," said I. "There's Horner, for instance. You don't suppose, sir, that *he* confers such inestimable benefit on his country by his daily avocations in Downing Street?"

"Ah, poor Jack Horner!" laughed the vicar; "he's really not very bright. But, we need not be so uncharitable as to think that he does not do his money's worth for his money! He writes a beautiful hand, you know; and, I dare say, his mere services as a copying machine are of some value. Government clerks do not all play every day, Frank:—you will, I'm sure, find plenty to do, if you go into office life. I remember, in the time of the Crimean war, that a friend of mine, employed in the Admiralty at Whitehall, used to have to stop up every alternate night at his office, the whole night through; and this was the case, too, at all the other public departments! The clerks in each room were obliged to take it in turn for night duty; while, those who were free to go home—and they did not leave work until long after the traditional 'four o'clock' on most days—had to specify where they could be found every evening, in case they should be suddenly wanted on the arrival of despatches from the seat of war. Of course this state of affairs is not ordinary; still, Government clerks are not idlers as a body:—on the contrary, you will find them thorough working-men."

"Working-men!" ejaculated little Miss Pimpernell, raising her beady black eyes in astonishment to her brother, "why, I thought all working-men, properly so-called, were mechanics!"

"That is the radical politician's view, my dear," answered the vicar. "Let a man be apprenticed to a skilled trade, and carry a bricklayer's hod, or a carpenter's rule. Let him only wear slops and work in an engine-room, or use a mason's trowel—so long as he does these things and receives his wages weekly, he is a 'working-man;' and, must have the hours of labour made to suit him, the legislation of the country altered on his behalf, the taxation of the public judiciously contrived to steer clear of him. He is the typical 'working-man,' my dear, of whom demagogues are always prating:—the fetish, before which so-called 'liberal' statesmen fall down and worship!

"But, your poor agricultural labourer, who lives in poverty, and dirt, and misery—starving annually on a tenth portion of the wages that the skilled mechanic gets—he is no working-man; oh no! Nor the wretched London clerk; he, also, is no working-man; nor the Government hack; nor the striving, hard-worked doctor; besides, many professional men and struggling tradesmen, who, for the larger portion of their lives, inch and pinch to scrape out existence!

"None of these are working-men; although they work harder—and for many more hours per diem than the mechanic—on, in most instances, a less income than the happy protégé of the radical law-maker gets by the addition of his weekly wages at the year's end.

"And yet, the clerks, and the struggling tradesmen, and professional men, have to pay poor-rates and house-rates, and all sorts of petty taxes, from which the fetish 'working-man' is free; besides the income-tax, which never approaches him. The latter, often getting from three to five pounds in wages, can dress as he pleases, live in a single room for five shillings a week, pay no rates or taxes; and may, finally, disport himself as he likes—leaving off work whenever the fancy strikes him and resuming it again at his pleasure—without consulting the convenience or the wishes of his employer, who is, through trades' unions and special class legislation, entirely at his mercy!

"Clerks, shopkeepers, and struggling professional men, cannot do this, however. *They* have to conform to certain rules of society; and keep up an appearance of respectability on, frequently, half the sum that the mechanic gets in wages, as I've said already—while groaning under a burden of taxation from which the great 'liberal' fetish is completely free. *He* is a 'working-man,' my dear:—*they*, are nothing of the sort.—Oh, no!"

"Do they really obtain such good wages?" I inquired;—"if so, what on earth do they do with the money?"

"Yes,"—said the vicar, in full swing of his favourite political argument,—“if anything, I have rather understated the case than exaggerated it. The manager of one of the telegraph-cable manufactories down the river, told me the other day, that, many of the hands drew four and five pounds regularly each Saturday. And these men, he further informed me, spent the greater part of this in drink and pleasuring on their off-days. They will have good food and the best, too—such as I cannot afford, in these days of high butchers' bills; notwithstanding that they make such a poor show for their money, and save none of it, either! I do not complain of this, politically speaking, for, 'an Englishman's house is his castle,' you know, and he has the right to live as he pleases; but, I do say, that when poor curates and clerks are so taxed, these men ought to bear their share of the taxation, possessing, as they do, incomes quite as large and in many cases greater."

"But, they are taxed indirectly, though, are they not?"—I asked.

"Certainly; but, so also are all of us, the larger number of *real* working-men of the country—quite in addition to the heavy burden we have to bear of local and direct taxation! The pseudo 'working-man' should fairly contribute his quota to all this—particularly, since his bottle-holders have been so clamorous for giving him a share in the government of the state. If he wants 'a share in the government,' why, he should help to support it:—that's what I say!"

And the vicar then went off into a tirade against class legislators and radical politics, not forgetting to animadvert, too, on the "Manchester School"—his great *bête noir*.

"I wonder what Mr Mawley would say, to hear you run down his favourite party so!"—I said, when he gave me another opening to put in a word.—"He's such a rabid Liberal."

"Mawley is thorough," said the vicar; "I do not agree with his views, certainly; but *he* really believes in them and acts up to his theories, which is more than can be said for a good many of our 'Liberal' statesmen! What can *one* think of them when one hears them talking of 'economy,' and cutting down the poor clerk's salary, without dreaming of touching their own little snug incomes of five thousand a-year!"

"But what has all this got to do with Frank's appointment, brother?" asked Miss Pimpernell, with a sly chuckle of satisfaction. She always said she disliked arguments; but, she was never better pleased than to hear the vicar expressing his sentiments on topics of the day. He was so earnest and delighted when he got a good listener—

although, he was rather shy of speaking before strangers.

“Dear me!”—exclaimed the vicar, rubbing his forehead vigorously.—“I declare, I thought I was talking to Parole d’Honneur! You must forgive me, Frank.”

“Do you think you could manage to get him an appointment, my dear?”—repeated my little old friend, bringing the vicar back to our main question, now that she had unhorsed him from his Radical charger.

“Yes, certainly,”—replied the vicar, cordially,—“I do not see why I should not. I’ll speak to the bishop to-morrow, if I can catch him in. He’s got some good influence with the ministry; and, with mine in conjunction, the two of us together ought to manage it, eh, Sally?”

“And how soon do you think, sir,”—I asked,—“would you be likely to procure it for me? I’ve been a long time idle; and, I am, now, anxious, you know, to make up for lost time.”

Miss Pimpernell’s words had thoroughly spurred me up. I wanted to set to work for Min at once.

“How soon, eh, my boy?”—said he, kindly.—“You must have some special object to be so anxious for employment! But, you need not be shy, Frank; I can guess it, I think, without your telling me; and, I’m glad of it. How soon, eh? Let me consider. If I see the bishop to-morrow, as I very likely shall, we might arrange to get you a nomination in a fortnight, I think; but, I’m certain, I can promise obtaining it within a month at the outside. Will that do, Frank?”

“Oh, thank you, sir!”—I exclaimed, in grateful gladness,—“that is ever so much sooner than I expected! I thought it might take months to get me an appointment! I shall be ready for it, however, when it comes, all the same, dear sir.”

“You had better get crammed in the meantime, however, my boy,” said the vicar, reflectively.

“‘Get crammed,’ brother!”—said Miss Pimpernell, aghast at the term, of which she clearly did not understand the slang sense. “Get crammed! Why, what do you mean? Frank is thin, certainly, and he might be a little stouter to advantage; but, has he got to be of a particular weight, the same as the height of recruits is measured for the army?”

The vicar laughed, and held his sides in hearty merriment.—“Sally, Sally!”—he exclaimed after a while.—“You will be the death of me some day! I did not allude to physical cramming, such as the Strasbourg geese undergo; but, mental stuffing. A ‘crammer’ is a ‘coach,’ you know.”

“I’m sure I don’t,”—said little Miss Pimpernell, energetically;—“for, what with your crammers and coaches, I really do not know what you are speaking about!”

“Well, my dear, I’ll now enlighten you,”—said the vicar, still laughing at the old lady’s very natural mistake.—“Crammers and coaches, are certain high-pressure machines, in the form of man, for forcing any amount of superficial knowledge into uneducated youths within a fixed time. It is an unnatural process, resulting pretty much in the same way as does the artificial mode of fattening geese:—the latter have diseased livers; while, the subjects of high-pressure cram are usually afterwards subject to unmitigated ignorance—of the worst kind, because it pretends to learning—in addition to an insufferable pedantry, which can never convince judges acquainted with the genuine article! Ah, my dear, as Pope wisely wrote, ‘a little learning is a dangerous thing!’”

“Then you mean tutors,”—said Miss Pimpernell.—“Why could you not call them by their proper name?”

“I could, my dear,”—said the vicar, good-humouredly,—“but, the term I used, is an old relic of college jargon; you see how hard it is to cure oneself of bad habits!”

“And you think Frank will want to be ‘crammed,’ then?”—asked Miss Pimpernell, making use of the very word she had just abused, because she thought her brother might feel hurt at her implied reproach. The dear old lady would have talked slang all day if she had believed it would have given the vicar any satisfaction!

“Yes, my dear,”—he replied.—“You see, he might have to compete for his appointment with a dozen others; and, as the examination for the civil service is now pretty stiff in its way, it would not do for him to fail. Frank has received a good sound public school education; but, they ask so many purely-routine questions of candidates, that he had better have a tutor who makes these subjects his speciality, to put him up in the little details of the machinery.”

“I never thought of that,”—said I.—“It is so long since I left school, that I fear I may be plucked!”

“Oh, you’ll be quite ready for the examination in a week, my boy,”—said the vicar, to encourage me.—“The examiners only require superficial knowledge; not, honest groundwork—although, they pretend to test the effects of a ‘good liberal education!’ One of these public crammers would make you fit to pass in any certified time, if you could barely read and write. He would hardly require even that preliminary basis to work upon, for that matter. But, I ought not to blame them; for, I am a coach myself, or, rather, was one, once, when I had the time to read with pupils for the university. These competitive examinations are a mistake, I think,”—he continued,—“for the men who pass them the most brilliantly seldom make the best clerks, which one would imagine to be the result mainly desired. I would prefer, myself, the present middle-class examinations at Oxford—which they lately instituted, for discovering talent and merit—to all these hot-house tests; although, of course, I may be biassed against them, through the recollection of my old don days, when I was at college.

“Not but what the idea of throwing open all appointments in the public service is better than the former custom of close patronage. The system is only abused, that’s all, in consequence of the Competition-Wallah business being carried to excess. Your poor man, whom the change was especially supposed to benefit, has no chance now, unless he has the money to pay for the services of a crammer—be his attainments never so great. The examinations have really degenerated into a technical groove, into which aspirants have to be regularly initiated by a ‘coach,’ or they

will never succeed in getting out of it, to receive their certificates of proficiency.

"I will write you down the name of a good man to apply to, Frank,"—he added.—"He'll pass you, I warrant, or I will eat my hat! And now I must be off, my boy. I have a lot of visiting to do to-night ere I can hope to go to bed. I'll not forget to speak to the bishop, as I have promised; and, I think, you may rely upon getting a nomination for a good office within the time I have named. Have you anything to do out, Sally—any letters to post?"—he then said, turning to his sister, and putting on the hat he had just volunteered to eat.—"No? Then I'm off. Good-night, Frank! Mind you go to that tutor to-morrow,"—he said, handing me the address he had hastily scribbled down; and, he went out on some errand of mercy, leaving Miss Pimpernell and myself to resume our tête-à-tête conversation, which he had so satisfactorily interrupted.

"Well, Frank!"—said she, as his coat tails disappeared out of the doorway,— "will not that do for you?"

"I should just think it would!"—I replied, buoyantly;—"and I do not know how to thank you and the vicar for all your kindness. I can't tell what I should have done without your help!"

"Oh, never mind that, my boy,"—she answered kindly;—"we are both only too glad to assist any one, especially you, Frank, whom the vicar calls his 'old maid's son!' All you have to do now, is, to be hopeful and persevere! Only let me see you and Miss Min happily married in the end—for I, you know, like to see young lovers happy:—I have such a large amount of romance in me!" Indeed she had, I thought, when she laughed cheerily at the idea.

"I'll work, never fear,"—I said—"but, promotion is very slow in Government offices. It may be years before I have a decent income such as would satisfy Mrs Clyde!"

"Don't think of that, my boy,"—she said, presently.—"Don't look too far ahead! Let me see what my Keble says," she added, taking down the volume of the *Christian Year*, which she constantly consulted each day, from its regular place on her corner of the mantelpiece, where it always stood guard over her favourite chair.—"Ah,"—she continued, turning over the pages,— "I knew that I would find something to suit you. Just hear what he says of the 'lilies of the field'—

"'Alas! of thousand bosoms kind
That daily court you and caress,
How few the happy secret find
Of your calm loveliness!
Live for to-day! to-morrow's light
To-morrow's cares shall bring to sight,
Go, sleep like closing flowers at night,
And Heaven thy morn shall bless.'"

"Ah! But do you think I shall be successful?"—I asked, wishing to have my own hopes corroborated.

"To be sure you will, my boy. Why, there you will have another hundred a-year at once added to your income, besides what you make from your literary work! In a short time you will be quite 'an eligible person,' I do declare!"—she said, laughing away my fit of the blues, in her bright brisk way.

"And do you think Min will wait for me?"

"Certainly, Frank. You wrong her by the very question. She's not the girl to change, or, I'm very much mistaken in her honest, noble face. She will be constant and true, after what she has said to you, until death!"

"Oh, thank you for that assurance,"—I said.

I went home completely contented and happy.

You may wonder, perhaps, at this buoyancy of temperament, that enabled me to get over so quickly the disappointment and dejection I was suffering from at Mrs Clyde's brusque rejection of my suit?

But, you must recollect that I was naturally sanguine, as I have previously told you; and, the memory of my unhappy defeat, although not quite forgotten, became merged into the hopeful anticipations I now had—of working for my darling, and being enabled to renew my offer, in a short time, with better chances of success.

Hang care! It killed a cat once, you know. Was it not Lord Palmerston, by the way, who once made that capital classic hit at the versatile chief of the Adullamites in Parliament during a debate on the budget, when he said—"Atra cura post equitem sedet?"

Care should not sit behind *me*, however; or, in front of me, either!

I wasn't going to be a martyr to it, I promise you.

I would soon see Min again; and, in the meantime, I could wait for her and love her, in spite of all the stern mammas in creation, and notwithstanding that my tongue might be tied for awhile.

As long as I knew that she loved me in return, whom or what had I to fear?

I was, at all events, emperor of my own thoughts;—and, she was mine, *there!*

“Up for Exam.”

Say, should the philosophic mind disdain
That good which makes each humbler bosom vain?
Let school-taught pride dissemble all it can,
These little things are great to little man!

In pursuance of the vicar's advice, I hied me without delay to the tutor whom he had specially recommended; and, setting to work diligently, crammed, as hard as I could, for my expected examination.

“Cramming,” nothing more nor less, was, undoubtedly, the system pursued by this modern instructor of maturity—I cannot say ‘of youth,’ as the majority of his pupils were men who had long cut their wisdom teeth, and worn the virile toga almost threadbare:—stalwart men, “bearded like the pard,” in the fashion of Hamlet's warrior, which has now become so general that heroes and civilians are indistinguishable the one from the other.

The crammer dosed these with facts and figures at a five-hundred-horse-power rate, interlarding them with such stray skeleton scraps of popular information as mendicant scholars may pick up from the sumptuously-spread tables of the learned, through those crumb-like compilations of chronology and history, with which we are familiar, styled “treasures of knowledge:”—thus, he injected into the brain of his neophytes dates by the dozen and proper names—geographical ones in particular—by the score, impressing them on stubborn memories through the aid of some easily-learnt rhyme, or comic association, that made even the dullest comprehension retentive for awhile.

His entire curriculum consisted, mainly, in the getting by heart, with their answers, of sundry old civil service examination papers which he kept in stock—continually increasing his store as fresh ones were issued by the examining board, until he was at length master of every question which had ever puzzled a candidate from the era of the first competition down to the present day.

His motive in this was very obvious. The crammer argued, not only wisely, but well, that a certain proportion of these questions were pretty safe to be again propounded in subsequent contests, just as one sees antique Joe Millers appear again and again, at regular recurring intervals, in the excruciating “Facetiae” columns of those penny serials, of limited merit and “unlimited circulation,” that delight the eyes and ears of below-stairs readers, the staple of whose mental pabulum they principally form.

The crammer was right in his premises, as I've said, the old queries being so frequently put and re-put, that they amount on average to fifty per cent, at least, of the total number that may be set to-morrow, to addle the brains of the Smiths, Browns, and Robinsons who may be ambitious of serving their country in a red-tape capacity.

It has often struck me that the general principles of our national system of education are open to considerable improvement.

We go to work on a wrong foundation.

Any plan of instruction, meant to be permanent in its effects, should be homogeneous: we, on the contrary, so break up and divide the different branches of ordinary knowledge, that they resemble more a number of disconnected particles, loosely strung together without order or uniformity, than the kindred units of a harmonious whole—as should properly be the case.

We mark out and specify, geography, history, science, and Belles Lettres, as distinct subjects for study—whereas, in reality, they dovetail into one another in the closest bonds of relationship; and, were they only thus judiciously intermingled, in one, thorough, cosmical course of learning, they would, most likely, be better understood in their separate parts, and, undoubtedly, be better remembered.

For instance, in grounding the young idea in the geography of any particular country, the main points of its history should follow as a natural sequence. Its seas and rivers would lead to the consideration of commerce and the polity of nations:—the mention of its towns, suggest the names of its great men in literature and art. Its scenery would call to mind the poets who might have made it famous, the artists who may have portrayed its beauties with their pencil; while, to pursue the theme, its valleys and mountains would remind the student of the value of agriculture and mineral wealth—besides attracting his notice to atmospherical and other scientific phenomena, that can be far more readily comprehended by young learners, when thus seen, as it were, in action, than if taught merely in separate dry treatises that seem to have little in common with the busy, bustling, moving world, whose laws they affect to expound.

My plan, indeed, would be a further development of the Kindergarten scheme, and the Pestalozzian system, generally.

As soon as children had passed through the rudimentary stages of instruction, being able to spell and read correctly, their advanced studies should be entirely shorn of their present routine characteristics. They might be made so full of life, and even amusement, that they would thenceforth lose their *lesson* look; and be, correspondingly, all the more easily-learnt. In fact, they would appear more as a series of interesting pastimes than school tasks.

Instead of making boys and girls con so many pages, say, of the geography of China, at the same time that they are wading through the history of the Norman Conquest, for instance; those two subjects should be made to bear the one upon the other.

The deeds of Duke Robert would lead to a consideration of the places mentioned in connection with them, their geographical position, geology, local traditions, celebrities, and other archaeological associations; while, their after-bearing on the history of our country should not be omitted.

The doings of the Black Prince might, also be exemplified as inducing the study of the geography of northern France. Cressy, and Poitiers, and Agincourt, might, naturally, suggest the first use of gunpowder, its composition, and invention; and, then, the improvements in modern weapons of war would follow as a natural consequence, which would end in their being compared with the old flint implements, that are so frequently found to the delight of antiquaries' hearts.

In this way, the literature of any particular period might be combined with its history and geography:—science, and other technical matters, being incidentally introduced; and, the pupil's imagination, in addition, kept in play, by allowing him or her to peruse such good historical novels and light essays as would bear upon the life and times of the people of whom they were reading.

Celebrated battles of the world, memorable deeds, and famous men, would then no longer be classed in separate order, as so many bald facts, and dates, and names, to be learnt and remembered in chronological sequence; but, the young student would take such deep interest in them from the various pieces of desultory and comprehensive information he may have picked up in reference, that he could tell you "all about them" in succinct narrative—in lieu of merely being only able to mention their bare statistical connections.

You may urge, perhaps, that this system would take a long time to work; and that a large portion of the knowledge thus learnt would be quickly forgotten?

But, to the first objection I would reply, that, I do not see why it should take any longer than the ordinary practice of educating children, now in vogue; as, instead of considering the various subjects separately, they would only be taught the same things contemporaneously, as parts of a whole; and, I certainly would be inclined to "back" one of my scholars, if I instructed any on the principle, to know more of the general history and polity of the world and of the different countries respectively that compose it—besides possessing a fair acquaintance with modern literature and science—than one taught in the old fashion for thrice the time.

With regard to your second demurrer, I would say, that, granting that a good deal of this stray information might pass in at one ear and out of the other; still, much would remain—sufficient and more than sufficient to render the scholar better educated, as a rule, than many men who yearly obtain high honours at the university for special attainments in "the humanities."

Under my system, they would be educated to more practical purpose for future usefulness; for, the knowledge of college men is generally limited to certain class books, while, generously-schooled youths, on this plan, would have extracted the honey from almost every volume they could pick up, ranging from Pinnock's *Catechism of Common Things* at one extreme, to Ruskin's *Ethics of the Dust* at the other—and, I think, that allows a very fair margin for criticism!

But, you may now ask, what on earth have I, Frank Lorton, got to do with all this; especially at the present moment, when I have not yet passed my examination before Her Majesty's Polite Letter Writer Commissioners?

What, indeed! All I can say for my unpardonable digression is, that I was, I suppose, born a reformer at heart, having an itching desire to be continually setting matters straight around me of all kinds and bearings. The mention of those confounded "crammers," led me on to talk about examinations in general; and, while on the topic, I could not stop until I had thoroughly relieved my mind from an incubus of educational zeal that has long lain there dormant.

Now, I will proceed again, with your permission and pardon—which latter, I'm confident, is already granted.

Thanks to an excellent memory, and a firm resolve to succeed "by hook or by crook," I made the most of all my crammer taught me; although, like most of his pupils, I found it at first rather irksome. However, my work had to be done, and I did it. I consoled myself with the reflection that it was all for Min eventually; and, obeying the behests of my tutor, I quickly learnt all the endless series of names and dates that he entrusted to my memory—to the very letter and spirit thereof.

In a fortnight, he told me that he considered me "safe" to pass "the board"—an assurance which I was by no means sorry to hear; as, independently of my discovering that "cramming" is not the most interesting mode of beguiling one's time, I received at the end of the same period, through the kind exertions of the vicar on my behalf, a nomination to the Obstructor General's Office.

The official letter conveying the gratifying intelligence of my nomination, directed me, also, to present myself on the following Tuesday morning, at "ten of the clock" precisely, before the examining board of commissioners—taking care to furnish myself with a duly authenticated certificate of baptism and one testifying my moral character; neither of which had I any difficulty in procuring.

Thus provided, and crammed, "up to the nines," by my temporary pedagogue, I put in my due appearance, as required, to have my attainments tested:—in order that I might be reported upon as fit, or not, to undertake the very onerous duties of the office to which I had been probationally appointed.

I was quite hopeful as to the result, for my "crammer" again impressed me at the last moment with his entire conviction that I would pass with *éclat*; while, my good friend the vicar, who had given me the most flaming of testimonials, cheered me up with his cordial wishes for my success, as did also dear little Miss Pimpernell, in her customary impulsive way.

"Down along in Westminster, not far from the side of the wa—ter," as is sung in the eloquent strains of a certain "Pretty Little Ratcatcher's Daughter," who was known and admired "all around that quar—ter," stands the not-by-any-means-gloomy-looking mansion of Her Majesty's Polite Letter Writer Commissioners—over whose fell door so many trembling candidates for situations under Government might, very reasonably, trace the mystic characters of

the inscription surmounting Dante's *Inferno*—"Lasciate ogni speranza doi ch' entrate!"

Arrived here, and mounting a series of stairs until I had reached the topmost floor, to which I was directed by the janitor, I found myself at last in a long, low, gothic-lighted room—whose windows had commanding views of the grand hotel over the way, the roof of the Abbey alongside, and the police station in the centre of the problematical "green" in front.

Here, the competitors could reflect—while awaiting their papers, or when chewing the cud of contentment or despair at the contemplation of the same—on what might be the vicissitudes of their lot in the event of their failure or success.

At a given signal, fifty-nine other persons and myself, all doomed to compete for six vacancies in the much-desired office of the Obstructor General, were ushered, like schoolboys, into another and inner room, opening out of the former and garnished with rows of green-baize-covered tables, running from end to end.

This room seemed to bring back to me a host of old recollections; and, each moment, I was expecting to see the ghost of "Old Jack," my head instructor at Queen's College School in days of yore, and hear him exclaiming in his well-remembered stentorian tones—"Boy Lorton—you are detained for inattention! Stop in and write five hundred lines!"—and, then, to see him come swooping down the room upon me, with wrath and majesty seated on his bald brow and his gown flowing behind him.

He generally took such enormous strides, when moved with a sudden desire to punish some lost soul, whom he might suspect of the heinous crimes of idleness or "cribbing"—both unforgivable offences in his calendar—that the aforesaid gown, I recollect, seemed frequently to float over his head—forming in conjunction with his square college cap, alias "mortar board," a regular "nimbus," like that surrounding the heads of the saints in old pictures.

The Polite Letter Writer Commissioners—or rather, their executive—were, I must confess, much quieter in their demeanour, moving about as stealthily as if they were engaged in any number of Gunpowder, or Rye House Plots, or other conspiracies.

Perhaps, you say, they were much too orderly in their proceedings for me?

Well, I don't think so, exactly; still, I do not believe much in the justice and impartiality of the Vehmgerichte, Parliamentary committees, the Berlin police, the prefects of the past empire, Monsieur Thiers's communistic courts-martial, or of the New York Erie Ring—nor, indeed of any representative, or, other body, which hides its deeds and decisions under a cloak of secrecy!

Be that as it may, the method of the examiners did not tend to reassure us, speaking collectively of the sixty of us who now awaited judgment—fifty-four of whom were pre-ordained to failure, and *knew it*, which certainly militated against any chance of their looking upon the preparations for their torture with a lenient eye.

At regular intervals along the green-baize tables were deposited small parcels of stationery, consisting of a large sheet of sanguinary blotting-paper, a quire or so of foolscap, a piece of indiarubber, an attenuated lead-pencil, a dozen of quill pens, with others of Gillott's or Mitchell's manufacture, and an ink bottle—the whole putting one in mind of those penny packets of writing requisites that itinerant pedlars, mostly seedy-looking individuals who "have seen better days," pester one's private house with in London; and which they are so anxious to dispose of, that they exhibit the greatest trust in your integrity, leaving their wares unsolicited behind them, and intimating that they will "call again for an answer."

The present parcels were also "left for answers"—answers on which depended our future prospects and position!

Seated in state, on a sort of daïs in the centre of the room, was a courteous and urbane personage of affable exterior. He was further hedged in with a species of outwork of the sentry-box formation, which concealed his lower limbs from view:—a precaution evidently designed to protect him from the fierce onslaught of some demented candidate—who, when suffering from the continuous effect of "examination on the brain," might have been suddenly goaded to frenzy by a string of unsolvable questions.

This gentleman entreated us, as a first step, to "stand by" the forms—like a crew of sailors about to make sail; and then, in the words of the Unjust Steward, to "sit down and write quickly," each in front of one of the little piles of stationery.

We obeyed this injunction as well as we were able, although many of us, unaccustomed to rapid penmanship, found the latter part of the order rather difficult of accomplishment. It was all very well to say, "Sit down and write quickly!" but, what, if we had nothing to say, and didn't know how to say it?

Ah!

Under the tutelage of the superintending chief, lesser satellites ministering occasionally to our wants in the matter of pens and paper, and distributing fresh series of questions to us every hour or so, we were for three days put through the paces of what the examiners held to be "the requirements of a sound liberal English education"—I, certainly, should, however, have thought but "small potatoes," as the Americans say, of the general attainments of the lot of us in this respect, if all we possessed were tested on the occasion, or even a tithe of our knowledge!

If one could have set aside one's own interest in the contest, the scene in that long low room of the Polite Letter Writer Commissioners was amusing enough.

You should only have watched the anxious glances we bent around on each other, after first scanning over the

printed lists supplied to puzzle us! How we cordially sympathised with the hopeless vacant stare of ignorance, proceeding from some tall, bearded individual, well on in his twenties—who looked far more fit to shoulder a musket and go to the wars, like our French friend, “Malbrook,” than to be thus condemned again to school-boy duties! How we glared, also, at any brilliant competitor, whose down-bent head seemed too intent on mastering the subject set before him; and, whose ready pen appeared to be travelling over paper at far too expeditious a rate for our chances of winning the clerkly race! With what horror and despair, we confronted a “poser” that was placed to catch us napping:—how we jumped at anything easy!

Taking note of the examiner’s watchfulness; the hushed silence that reigned around, only broken by the scribbling sound of busy workers and the listless shuffling of the feet of others, who, having, as they sanguinely thought, completely mastered their tasks, had nothing further to occupy their time until “the gaudy pageant” should be “o’er”—the whole thing, really, was school all over again!

I believed, every moment, that I was back again once more in the well-remembered “B” schoolroom at Queen’s—where and when Old Jack, promenading all in his glory, caused me often to “tremble for fear of his frown,” like that “Sweet Alice,” whom Ben Bolt loved and basely deserted.

To still further carry out the romantic resemblance, we were allowed an hour at noon for rest and refreshment each day that the examination lasted.

Many, undoubtedly, devoted this interval steadily to recruiting the wants of the inner man; but, one could well fancy them bursting off madly into some boyish game, with all the ardour that their previous application may have generated—the shouts of the Westminster scholars in the adjacent yard bearing out the illusion.

I spent my play-hour in wandering through the classic shades of the Abbey next door, looking over the memorial tablets of “sculptured brass and monumental marble,” erected to the honour of departed worthies:—I wished, you know, to keep my mind in a properly reflective state for the afternoon hours of examination—history and other abstruse studies being usually then set.

A few mad, hair-brained youths, however, I was sorry to observe, beguiled the interregnum with billiards and beer; but, these, I’m delighted to add, got handsomely plucked for their pains—as they richly deserved. You and I, you know, never drink beer or play billiards. Oh, dear no! Never, on my word!

As all things must come to an end at some time or other, the examination proved no exception to the rule, duly dragging its weary length along until it came to a dead stop.

A week afterwards I learnt my fate. I had not passed with the “*éclat*” my tutor prophesied; but, I contrived to get numbered amongst those fortunate six who secured their appointments out of the entire sixty that competed.

I only got through “by the skin of my teeth,” the crammer said; still, that was quite sufficient for me. I had, therefore, you see, no cause of quarrel with the examining board. They had, it is true, made me out to have only barely come up to the required standard in French—a language with which I had been familiar from childhood; but, they compensated for this, by according me full marks in book-keeping—which I had been totally ignorant of a week before the examination; and, I only answered the questions asked me therein through dint of the wholesale theoretical cramming of my tutor!

So much for the value of the ordeal.

I maintain that, in many instances, these competitive examinations are quite uncalled-for, and a great mistake.

In the one I was engaged in, for example, two-thirds of the candidates were men who had already been employed in the public service as “writers”—some for years. Now, if these were held competent to fulfil the duties of office life, as they must have been, or they would not be thus employed, surely, it was unnecessary, as well as unfair and absurd, to subject them to test the school-boy acquirements, that many had forgotten, which offered no real proof of their aptitude to be public accountants.

And, secondly, I firmly believe that competition neither produces the best clerks—out of those who thus initiate their official life, and who might not have been engaged beforehand, as writers or otherwise; nor does the system, as I’ve already said, afford any guarantee for a sound education on the part of those examined.

The Polite Letter Writer Commissioners, I have no doubt, do their duty as well as they can, in that position and state of life to which an enthusiastic reformer, backed up by an Act of Parliament, has called them; but, at the present time, ignorance has every facility afforded it for riding rampant over their “crucial” tests, while “crammers” drive, with the greatest glee, coaches and sixes by the score through their most zealous enactments.

If the competitive theory is to be the basis of our civil service organisation, it should be extended to all classes and grades in official life; and not be limited merely to the junior clerk at the bottom of the red-tape ladder.

Let every one, up to the under-secretaries of state and members of the cabinet even, be examined and tested and docketed in due order of merit—in the same way as the Chinese conduct their mandarin school—and distribute variously coloured buttons to graduates of different degrees, letting “the best man win,” in accordance with the old motto of the now extinct “Prize Ring.”

Perhaps, if ministers were subjected to some such ordeal—and there might be a good deal in it if it were only properly conducted—they would find themselves fit to grapple with more vital matters than political pyrotechnics, which are only fired off to suit popular clamour; and, were they better acquainted with history, especially that of their own country—as they would be, if forced to “cram” like the commissioners’ candidates—they would hesitate before

sacrificing the old renown of England, and the interests which she has consolidated with her blood and treasure for generations, to suit a bastard diplomacy invented by the "peace-at-any-price" party of patriotism-less patriots!

The vicar, naturally, was delighted with my success; and, as for little Miss Pimpernell, she was quite jubilant.

"Dear me, Frank!" she said, when I took the letter announcing my appointment to show her the same evening I received it. "I am *so* glad—I can't tell you how glad—my dear boy! Why, we will have you and Miss Min soon setting up house-keeping! Did I not tell you that things would be certain to come right, if you only waited, and worked, and hoped? Never you go against Keble again, my boy."

I promised her I would not. I should have liked also to have spoken to Mrs Clyde immediately, as Min was still away, and I could hear nothing of her; but, she had left town, too, and so I was unable to carry out my wish—which, indeed, Miss Pimpernell had strongly advised against my doing. The latter counselled me to wait awhile before I renewed my offer; and, it was just as well, perhaps, that Mrs Clyde *was* away. I might, you know, have put an end to all my hopes in a jiffy, if circumstances had not prevented my hurrying matters again to a crisis!

It was very sad for me not to be able to see Min, and hear *her* congratulations; but still, that could not be at present; and, in the meantime, other folk took interest in me.

It is wonderful, how people living in a small suburb, or remote country village, are obliged to submit to having their actions canvassed, and the incidents of their private life made public property of, by other persons with whom they may have nothing whatever in common!

For instance, what earthly concern was it of Mr Mawley's, whether I chose to accept a Government appointment, or not? Why should *he* have the impertinent officiousness to lecture me when he heard of my joining the Obstructor General's Office; and, *I*, be forced to submit to his remarks thereon?

He doubted, forsooth, whether I was really suited to the work! He "hoped" I would "get steadier," he was pleased to say; and, he was also kind enough to express the desire for me to learn that "deference towards my superiors," with which I was, at present, according to his idea, "sadly unacquainted!"

Indeed! It was just like his presumption.

I wonder if he thought himself one of the "superiors" in question. Did he wish me always to allow his ridiculous assertions to pass unquestioned?—

Lady Dasher, too, had her say. But, as she suggested a valuable hint to me, I condoned her offence.

I had gone to call one afternoon soon after the change in my condition, which everybody, by the way, seemed pleased at, that I cared about, save dog Catch. The poor fellow missed his walks sadly, having now to put up with a short morning and evening stroll, instead of being out with me all day, as he frequently had been before, when, my time being my own, I was free to roam.

"My lady" appeared more melancholic than ordinarily, when congratulating me on my successful entry into public life. She spoke as if she were condoling with me on the demise of a near relative.

I returned this by praising a new fuchsia with five pink bells and a golden coronal, which she had lately added to her collection; and, she then gave me the hint to which I have drawn attention.

"Ah! Mr Lorton," she said, after a pause, "life is very uncertain!"

"Just so," I said, acquiescing in her truism, in order to keep up the conversation,—“but we cannot help that, you know, Lady Dasher.”

"No, indeed!" she sighed, rather than spoke.—“And that ought to make us more careful, especially on entering into life as you are now doing. My poor dear papa used to say that every young man should insure; and I would recommend your taking out a 'policy,' isn't that what they call it? *He* did not insure his life—poor dear papa did not require it; but he always advised every one else doing so!”

"That's what most people do,"—I said; still, I was thankful for the hint, and carried it into effect shortly afterwards.

While on the point of friendly congratulations and advice, I should not forget to mention, that Horner also had his fling at me, perpetrating what he considered a joke at my expense.

"Bai-ey Je-ove!" he said the very next Sunday when I met him outside the church after service. "You aah one of aws, now, Lorton, hay?"

"Yes," I said.

"Aw then, my de-ah fellah, you mustn't chawff me any mo-ah, you know. *Dawg don't eat dawg*, you know—ah, hay, Lorton!"

And he chuckled considerably at his feeble wit.

Poor Horner!

“Love Lies Bleeding.”

What is my guilt that makes me so with thee?
Have I not languished prostrate at thy feet?
Have I not lived whole days upon thy sight?
Have I not seen thee where thou hast not been;
And, mad with the idea, clasp'd the wind,
And doated upon nothing?

Although Mr Mawley had expressed such a disparaging opinion anent my capabilities for official work, I do not think I made such an inefficient clerk on the whole.

I did not mulct my country of any portion of the hours appointed for my labour, pleading Charles Lamb's humorous excuse, that, if I *did* come late, I certainly made up for it “by going away early!” On the contrary, my attendance was so uniformly regular, that it attracted the notice of the chief of my room, getting me a word of commendation.

Praise from such a quarter was praise indeed, as the individual in question was one of the old order of clerks, stiff, prosaic and crabbed to a degree—who looked upon all the new race of young men that now entered the service as so many sons of Belial. “Their ways” were not “his ways;” and, their free and easy manners, and absence of all that wholesome awe of chiefs which had been customary in his day, proved, beyond doubt, that official life in general, and that of *his* department in particular, was decidedly “going to the devil!”

He lived in the office, I verily believe; coming there at some unearthly hour in the morning, and leaving long after every one else had sought their homes.

The messengers had been interrogated on the subject of his arrival, but they protested that they always found him installed at his usual desk, no matter how early they might set about clearing out the room in anticipation of the ordinary routine of the day; while, as for the time of his departure, nobody could give any reliable information respecting that!

The hall-porter, who remained in charge of the establishment when business was over, might, perhaps, have afforded us some data on which we could have decided the mooted point, but he was a moody, taciturn personage, who had never been known to utter a word to living man—consequently, it was of no use appealing to him.

One of the fellows reported, indeed, that once having to return to the office at midnight, in search of his latch-key which he had forgotten in his office-coat, and without which he was unable to obtain admittance to his lodgings, he found old “Smudge,”—as we somewhat irreverently termed the chief,—who was particularly neat and nice in his handwriting—working away; minuting and docketing papers, just as if it had been early in the afternoon. It was his firm persuasion, *he* said, that Smudge never went away at all, but remained in the office altogether, sleeping in a waste basket, his head pillowed on the débris of destroyed correspondence!

Of course we did not really believe in the latter part of this statement; still, it was quite feasible, I'm sure, now that I think it over.

His habit every morning was to draw a great black line, punctually as the clock chimed half-past ten, across the middle of the attendance—book, which stood on a bracket near the door, handy for everybody coming in; the clerks having to sign it on entering, inserting the exact time at which they put in an appearance. Our normal hour was supposed to be ten, the half-hour being only so much grace allowed for dilatory persons delayed by matters “over which they had no control”—although few they were who did not take advantage of it.

Why the old gentleman drew this line, none could tell; for, no bad results ensued to sinners who signed after its limitation—many of those who were invariably late, being subsequently duly promoted in their turn, as vacancies occurred.

But, the practice appeared to give Smudge great satisfaction. He, probably, took some malicious pleasure in scoring up the delinquencies of his staff, mentally consigning the underliners, most likely, to irretrievable ruin, both in this world and the next!

I, as I've already said, was an exception to this rule.

I must explain, however, that my good hours did not proceed from any intense wish on my part to ingratiate myself with the chief. They were rather owing to the fact, that the omnibus I specially patronised, generally arrived in town from the remote shades of Saint Canon's by ten o'clock sharp—a result usually obtained through hard driving, and on account of an “opposition” conveyance being on the road.

Smudge, nevertheless, took the deed for the will; and he complimented me accordingly, much to my surprise.

“Ha! Mr Lorton,” he growled to me one morning, on my coming in just as the hour was striking. “You'll be picking up the worm soon, you come so uncommonly early! Never once down below the line—good sign! good sign! But, it won't last, it won't last,”—he added thinking he had spoken too graciously.—“All of you begin well and end badly; and *you* won't be any better than the rest!”

He then hid himself behind a foolscap folio, to signify that the audience was ended.

It was quite an event his saying so much to me, his conversation being mostly confined to finding fault with us in the briefest monosyllables of the most pungent and forcible character; for, he seldom uttered a word, save with reference to some document that might be submitted for his approval and signature.

During the entire time that I remained under his watchful leadership, he never spoke to me, but once again in this gracious manner. Indeed, when I mentioned the circumstance to all the fellows, they expressed considerable doubt as to his having spoken to me so at all, ascribing my account of our interview to the richness of my imagination; but, he really did say what I have related. I am rather proud of the fact than not.

My comrades as a body were a nice, gentlemanly set; and we got on very well together.

As a matter of course, we had one especial individual who was commonly regarded as the butt of the room—a good-natured, heavy man, with a dull face and a duller comprehension; but, he seemed proud and pleased always when singled out as a mark for our chaff:—he took it as an honour, I think, ascribing our fun to delicate attention.

We had also a “swell,” who was as irreproachable in his dress as Horner:—I remember, the whole office felt flattered when his name once appeared in the list of those attending the Queen’s Drawing-room; while, his fashionable doings, as recorded in the columns of the *Morning Post*, caused our room to be envied by every other division of “the branch.”—Young and old, “swell” and butt not excepted—we consorted on the friendliest of footings. We were knit together in the closest bonds of brotherhood; and were in the habit of looking down upon all other departments as not to be compared to that, of which our room, was, in our opinion, the acknowledged head.

Generally speaking, men belonging to the public service are more gregarious, and stick to one another in a greater degree, imitating the clanship of Scotchmen and Jews, than those occupied in any other walk in life.

Professionals move, as a rule, in petty cliques; city people find their interests clash too much for them to associate in such harmony as do those engaged in Government offices. They may be said, certainly, to form a clique, and to have strong party interests also; but then, their clique is so large a one that the prominent features of narrow-mindedness and utter selfishness, which distinguish smaller coteries, are lost in its more extended circle; while, its interests are self-centred, its members having nothing to fear or expect from the outside public.

And yet, with all that good fellowship and staunch fidelity, as a class—when personal pique, and what I might call “promotion jealousy,” does not interfere to mar the warm sympathies that exist between the units of this officially happy family—Government clerks are a very discontented set of men, grumbling from morning until night at their position, their prospects, their future.

Really, when I first joined, I thought them all so many Lady Dashers in disguise. I could hardly believe that such cheerful fellows should be at heart so morbidly exacerbated!

They do not, it is true, grumble at those of their own standing in the service; nor do they try to out-manoeuvre their fellows of the same department; but, third-class men are jealous of those in the second-class, second-class men of lucky “seniors,” hankering after their shoes; and all, alike envious, both individually and collectively, of other branches, unite in one compact band of martyrs against the encroachments and tyrannies of higher officialdom—considering chiefs, secretaries of state, and such like birds of ill-omen, as virtual enemies and oppressors, with whom they are bound to prosecute a perpetual guerilla warfare:—a warfare in which, alas! they are sadly over-matched.

Smith does not mind in the least—that is, as far as human nature can be magnanimous—that Robinson, of his own office, should be preferred before him, and raised to a superior grade in advance of his legitimate turn. He may, undoubtedly, believe it to bear the semblance of “hard lines” to himself personally, that he was not chosen instead; still, he puts it all down to Robinson’s wonderful luck, and his own miserable fatality, bearing his successful comrade no ill-will in consequence.

But, let Jones, of another branch, be placed in the vacancy;—just hear what Smith says then!

Words would fail to express his sentiments in the matter.

Jones, he considers, is a nincompoop, who has fed all his life on “flap-doodle,” which, as you may be aware, Lieutenant O’Brien told Peter Simple was the usual diet of fools. Jones is a man *totally* devoid of all moral principle. How “the authorities” could ever have selected such a person to fill so responsible a post is more than he, Smith, or any one else, can understand! And, besides, how unfair it was, to take a clerk from another and different office—and one essentially of a lower character, Smith believes—and put him “over our heads in this way,” as he says, when rehearsing his wrongs and those of his official brethren before a choice audience of the same—from which the chief is the only absentee:—it was, simply disgraceful!

Smith thinks he “will certainly resign after this,” and—he doesn’t!

He goes on plodding round in his Government mill, grumbling and working still to the end of his active life, when superannuation or a starvation allowance comes, to ease his cares in one way and increase them in another! And, to do him scant justice, he really *does* work manfully, at a lesser rate of pay, and with fewer incentives to exertion through hopes of advancement, than any other representative person under the sun—I do not care to what class or clique he may belong!

He is the miserable hireling of an ungrateful country, from his cradle to his grave, in fact.

It is all very well for people unacquainted with the machinery of these offices to talk about the idleness of Government clerks generally; and joke at the threadbare subject of “her Majesty’s hard bargains.”

No doubt, some places are sinecures, and that a larger number of clerks are employed in many offices than there is work for them to do; but, we must not go altogether to the foot of the ladder to remedy this state of things!

Why do not such ardent reformers as Mr Childers, and men of his stamp, cut down their own salaries first, before they

set about pruning those of poor ill-paid subordinates?

I can tell them, for their private satisfaction, that, if they did so, the onlooking public would have a much stronger belief in the honesty of their reformatory zeal than it at present possesses!

It is not the "little men" that swell the civil list, as the vicar told me before I saw it for myself, but, the "big wigs."

These are the ones who fatten on the estimates, the root of the evil lying concealed under the snugly-cushioned fauteuils of cabinet ministers and their pampered placeholders and hunters—not, beneath the straight-backed horsehair chairs of miserable clerks. It is unmanly thus for giants to gird at pigmies!

I would advise all the clerks in the various Government offices to form a "union," in order to obtain redress for their wrongs; and to "strike," if needs be—you know, that strikes are all the rage now!

You demur to my argument? It would be a conspiracy, you say?

Dear me! You are quite wrong, I assure you. A conspiracy is only a conspiracy so long as it is unsuccessful. When it is triumphant, it is known no longer by that term!

Then, it is styled a "Revolution," or a "Restoration," or a "Grand Party Triumph," as the case may be. Just in the same way, is a man a "traitor," or a "patriot," who tries to serve his country, according to his lights, as he is either defeated in his purpose, or victorious. Besides, when men thus work together in a body, their words and deeds, although identically the same, are regarded in a different light to the words and deeds of mere individuals. In the one case they may be grand and glorious; in the other, they are stigmatised, perhaps, as insignificant, and, indeed, often criminal.

Witness, how a robber on a large scale, such as a privateersman confiscating the goods of an innocent merchant, or a chancellor of the exchequer putting his hand into a poor taxpayer's pocket, is held up in history to the admiration and honour of posterity; while, a petty thief, who may steal the watch of Dives, or a starving wretch, who snatches a loaf out of a baker's shop, gets sent to the treadmill—their actions being only chronicled in the police news of the day.

Or, again, look at your colossal murderer, like the Kaiser "Thanks to Providence," when he prosecuted the invasion of a neighbouring country the other day, in defiance of his kingly word—as published in a public proclamation, bearing his signature.

He sacrificed thousands of lives in furtherance of his own ambition; but, he is a "conqueror," bless you! A hero, to whom men bow the knee and cry, "Ave, Caesar!"—Your puny villain, on the other hand, who only cuts one unfortunate throat, is hung!

"Circumstances alter cases," runs the saying:—it should more properly be, the light in which we view them—that makes all the difference, my dear sir, or madam!

Let the Government clerks strike, I say. "Frappez et frappez fort," as the Little Corporal used to express it; that is, if they are unable to get their grievances adjusted without some such extreme measure—of which there does not seem to be much likelihood at present, considering the reformatory tendencies of Jacks in office.

A strike, however, would soon bring the latter to reason, and show whether these subordinates were worth keeping on, or not!

You don't believe it?

Ah! just wait and see!

Fancy, the consternation at Carlton House Terrace, the dismay in Downing Street, some fine morning, when no clerks were forthcoming!

Imagine the tons of correspondence awaiting answers, the acres of accounts to be audited, the minutes that would *not* be made, the "submissions" that could *not* go forward, the files that should have been docketed, and initialled, and stowed away uselessly till doomsday; and, that must, instead, remain untouched, uncared for!

The Secretary of State might want valuable statistics, to answer some obstinate inquiring member in the House that very day, but, nobody could prepare them—to his default; and so, the inquiring member might make a cabinet question of it, and defeat the Government!

The general commanding at the autumn manoeuvres might, perhaps, be in urgent need of footwarmers for the regiments under his charge; but, he couldn't get them, as no permanent clerk would be at the War Office to countersign his order!

The channel fleet might all need refitting; but, none of them would be able to go into dock, as the Admiralty gentlemen—who only knew when their bottoms were last scraped—were not at their posts!

In fact, every department—the Colonies, the Foreign Office, and each one else, would be topsy turvey; because, only the high sinecurists, who never did anything but sign their names to documents prepared by "those useless Government clerks," would be present to conduct the business of the country; and, *they* would not have the remotest idea how to set to work, you know!

The "Control Department" might, certainly be called on for help in the emergency; and then, we would probably have

some more “queer things of the service” for a short time.

But, it couldn't last. The whole official machinery would come to a dead stop.

You would then see the ardent reformers at their wits' ends; while, the honourable person who keeps the purse-strings of the ministry would be down on his marrow bones—entreating the ill-used and recalcitrant seceders to return to their employment, when “all would be forgiven;” and begging them, at the same time, to accept the increase to their salaries which they had demanded, as a token of his sincere regard and esteem!

Before I became one of the staff of the Obstructor General's Office, I had not given the position of Government clerks a thought, excepting to look down upon them generally—as I have previously remarked, and as, indeed, most people are in the habit of doing who are unconnected with the service.

Now, however, that I was one of them, I was filled with the most thorough corps feeling. Their ills were my ills; their hopes my hopes; and, such thoughts as I have noted were continually passing through my mind.

This is the case with most that are similarly employed.

I like men to believe in the special calling or profession they follow:—I do not think much of those who run down their trade.—The latter are usually bad workmen, you'll find.

If I were a boot-black, to-morrow, I would, I am certain, lean to the delusion that the polishing of pedal integuments was the noblest sphere in life!

Indeed, I have known many more extraordinary conversions than mine.

I've seen one of the most brutal and bloodthirsty of warriors settle down into an earnest preacher of the gospel. I have heard a prize-fighter lecture on the atomic theory; and, I am acquainted with a violent radical demagogue “of the deepest dye,” who, by means of a nice berth and a snug salary, has been turned into the most conservative of county magnates—looking upon all his former proceedings with horror, and a virtuous amazement that he could ever have been so led astray!

So, you need not be surprised at my thus changing my sentiments. In addition, I was new to the service; and, “new brooms sweep clean,” we are told—although, the special work of the room in which I was placed at the office was not by any means of an interesting character. In fact, it was rather the reverse, you will say, when I tell you what it consisted in.

Some eight of us were engaged from ten to four o'clock every day, six mortal hours, in checking a lot of old accounts, and bills, that had been paid and settled years before.

There was no benefit to be derived by the country, even if we *did* detect an error of calculation, which was rarely the case; for, the money would not be refunded, be never-so-many minutes made of the incident—the parties concerned being commonly scattered all over the globe, and, if appealed to, would probably reply that they knew nothing now about the circumstance, and cared less, most likely.

And yet, there were we, day after day, made to go over and over these old vouchers, comparing them with ledgers and store-books, and all sorts of references, for no earthly good whatever!

It is thus, that much time is wasted and unrequired labour paid for in the public service, when, by judiciously doing away with unnecessary work, the number of clerks might be economised, and their labour consequently better remunerated.

You can't get men to become interested in unprofitable work.

My comrades in the Obstructor General's Office were jolly and cheerful enough, and old Smudge not too exacting and fault-finding. After a little experience, I managed to arrive at the knowledge of the exact amount of work which would satisfy him. If one did more than this, he thought you much too pushing a fellow to belong to his slow, steady-going branch; and if less, why, you were an idle person, not worth your salt.

But, the whole thing was very tedious and dry to me. I could, get through Smudge's quantum of accounts easily in half my time:—the rest of my hours hung heavily on my hands.

One can't read the *Times* all day, you know. The very obligation, too, to be tied down to a certain routine and chained to a desk, galled me. I could have accomplished ten times the amount of labour I did, if I had been allowed to do it at my own convenience, and not forced to the ten to four régime.

I was always thinking of Min, also, and fretting at her absence—for, she did not come back to Saint Canon's for months after I got my appointment.

My whole thoughts were filled with her image. The difficulty of my position with regard to her and her mother likewise troubled me.

So, taking all these points into consideration, my office life was not a happy one,—though, if matters had been arranged more comfortably for me, touching the future, I would have cheerfully put up with more temporary annoyances than I actually suffered, slaving on indefinitely under Smudge's rule.

As it was, I couldn't.

I used to dream of Min all day, imagining what she might be doing down in the country.

I fancied all sorts of things about her.

I thought that she would forget me and like some one else better, knowing how joyfully Mrs Clyde would encourage any wooer whose presence might tend to make her turn from me.

The worst of it was, too, that I had no one to sympathise with me. I could not, exactly, go round asking people to "pity the sorrows of a disappointed lover!"

As Lamartine sings in his "Tear of Consolation":—

“Qu’importe à ces hommes mes frères
Le cœur brisé d’un malheureux?
Trop au-dessus de mes misères,
Mon infortune est si loin d’eux!”

How could I implore sympathy? Would you have given me yours?

I would be almost ashamed to tell how I was in the habit of "mooning away my time," thinking of Min—when, the first novelty of the office having worn off, I found my duties so wearisome and easily got through, that I had nothing to keep me from thinking!

I used to idle sadly.

I often wasted hours, in dreamily composing intricate monograms on my blotting-paper, in which Min's name was twisted into all sorts of flowery characters, which were intermingled so as to be nearly incomprehensible to any one unacquainted with my secret.

My fellow-clerks got an inkling of it, however.

They used to ask me, who "M" was; and, when I got savage, and told them to mind their own business, they would "chaff" me, inquiring whether "the unknown fair" was obdurately "cruel," or no!

Little Miss Pimpernell tried to cheer me up - telling me to "hope on, hope ever;" and, to stick steadily to my work, for, that Min would be certain to come back soon, when all would be well. But, I could not content myself.

I got pale and thin, worrying myself to death.—Even Lady Dasher saw the change in me, hinting one day to the vicar, in my hearing, that she was positive I was in a decline, or suffering from heart-disease, and that office-work was really too hard for me.

And when Min *did* come back, things were but little brighter for me.

The first opportunity I had of speaking alone to her, I asked her if I might still call her by her Christian name. She said, "certainly," with a little tremor in her dear voice and a warm blush which almost tempted me to say more. But, I remembered having pledged my word to Mrs Clyde, and did not urge my suit, then or thereafter, by words or looks—as far as I could help the latter.

We did not meet often now; and, perhaps, it was as well that we did not, for our position was awkward for both of us.

When we did, however, it seemed very hard for me to speak to her in cold conventional terms—when, my heart was overflowing with love towards her; and, this made me appear constrained; while, she showed a shy avoidance of me, which, only natural as it was, pained me—although I was certain, all the time, that she had not changed towards me in the least.

Really, if it had not been for the kind contrivances of dear little Miss Pimpernell, I don't think we would have met for a long, long time, at all.

Now, that my days were fully occupied at "the office," you know, I could not meet her out, or see her at the window; and, in spite of her mother's gracious intimation that I might call occasionally, I did not care about going there in the evening to be stared into formality under her icy eye.

When Christmastide came round again, too, there were no more of the happy days that had occurred on its previous anniversary.

Although I had obtained special leave from my chief, through working up an enormous number of old accounts beforehand, and thus gaining his good will, it was entirely thrown away:—Min did not present herself at the room of the evergreens once!

Mrs Clyde had checkmated me, again, there.

Had it not been for Miss Pimpernell's pleadings, I think I would now have gone against her advice, and brought matters to an issue by another proposal before the year was out.

My better judgment, however, restrained me from this, when I reflected over all the circumstances of the case in more reasoning moments.

I saw that it was best for me to wait until the full probationary period which my old friend had prescribed should elapse. I waited accordingly; but, my heart was daily torn with a despair and longing, that very much altered me from

the merry Frank Lorton of former times.

Could I hope?

Would she only wait for me, too?

Should my trust and my devotion be finally rewarded?

Miss Pimpernell said "yes," and Min, when I saw her, *looked* it; but, my heart frequently said "no"—and, I was miserable in consequence!

It is a truism, that, when one loves truly, one is never satisfied.

Chapter Six.

"My Life, I Love Thee!"

—Then, in that time and place I spoke to her,
Requiring, tho' I knew it was mine own,
Yet for the pleasure that I took to hear,
Requiring, at her hand, the greatest gift,
A woman's heart, the heart of her I loved.

When "hope deferred," and baffled love combined, had well-nigh made me as miserable and woebegone as I could possibly be, I heard a piece of news one day which almost nerved up my halting resolution to bring affairs to a final issue by speaking out again to Mrs Clyde—no matter what might be the result.

The joyful intelligence was circulated by the pleased Lady Dasher, that, Mr Mawley had at length proposed for her daughter, Bessie. It was time for it, as he had angled around and nibbled warily at the tempting bait offered him—like the knowing fish that he was—for months before he would permit himself to be caught!

The curate had, doubtless, noticed at length that the damsel was comely withal; and, his heart yearned towards her. The reverend gentleman, however, had not been unobservant of the charms of other maidens with whom he had been brought in contact, so, it may be presumed that his heart had "yearned" in vain for them; or, peradventure, these had not played with him so dexterously, when once hooked, as did the fair Bessie—who had not been the granddaughter of an Irish peer for nothing!

Still, there is no object to be gained now in raking up all of Mr Mawley's old conquests or defeats, ere his present "wooing and a'":—he had been accepted, in this his most recent venture, and was engaged explicitly—Lady Dasher taking very good care to inform everybody of her acquaintance of the fact, in order that there might arise no such little mistake as that of the curate's backing out of the alliance.

Her ladyship only wished for one thing more to make her "happy," so she said; and that was, that her "poor dear papa" were but alive, so that she might tell him, too, about the coming event. This was impossible though, as she added, with her customary melancholy shake of the head, and a return to her normal expression of poignant grief; for, as she said very truly, "one can never expect to be thoroughly happy in this weary pilgrimage of ours!"

Her complete gratification would, certainly, have been little less than a miracle.

The engagement was of very short duration, Bessie's mamma acting up to the Hibernian policy of "cooking her fish," as soon as she had captured him. There's "many a slip," you know, "'twixt cup and lip."

Mawley would probably have gladly lingered yet awhile longer amid the festive scenes of clerical bachelorhood, flirting—in a devout way, of course—under the shade of the church, with Chloe and Daphne, those unappropriated spinsters of the parish who took pleasure in ministering to the social wants of the curate and others of his cloth.

But, it was not to be. Lady Dasher was, for a wonder, wise in her generation; and, the twain—not my lady and Mawley, but her daughter and ditto—were married within a month after the public announcement of their attachment, much to the surprise of Saint Canon's, the mortification of sundry single ladies thereof, and the well-disguised delight of Lady Dasher, who, even on such a festive occasion, looked more melancholic than ever.

It was this, that nerved me up to desperation. Why, thought I, the day after the wedding, as I paced along the Prebend's Walk—over which the long-branched elms and waving oaks and thickly-growing lime-trees formed a perfect arch, in all the panoply of their new summer leaves, sheltering one from rain and sun alike—why, thought I, should that fellow, Mawley, be made happy, and I not?

Really, I could not answer the question at all satisfactorily.

You see, I was not able to come to a decision with myself as to whether I should repeat the darling request which I had made to Min very nearly twelve months before, or wait on still in suspense. The risk of the former course was great, for, Mrs Clyde might, and most likely would, put an end immediately to all communication whatever between us, should she continue hostile to my suit—an eventuality horrible to contemplate; and yet, would it not be better for me to be relieved from the existing state of uncertainty in which my mind was plunged?

What must I do?

I had to determine that point, at all events.

I could not settle it in a moment: it was far too weighty a consideration—it required serious deliberation. So, I paced on, still moodily to the end of the Prebend's Walk; and, although it was raining heavily, sat down on the stone balustrade of the little rustic bridge over the fosse, facing the river.—“Ah me!” I reflected, calling to my memory Thackeray's sad lament, in that seemingly-comic “Ballad of the Bouillabaisse,” which is all the more pathetic from its affected humour.

“Ah me! how quick the days are flitting!
I mind me of a time that's gone
When I'd sit, as now I'm sitting,
In this same place—but not alone.

“A fair young form was nestled near me,
A dear, dear face looked fondly up,
And sweetly spoke and smiled to cheer me—
There's no one now to share my cup.”

As I was musing thus sadly, I was unexpectedly tapped on the shoulder by Monsieur Parole d'Honneur, who had come up quietly behind me, without my noticing his approach. He was on his way to pay a visit to his “good vicaire” at the vicarage, after giving his usual Wednesday lecture at the neighbouring “college for young ladies;” where, blooming misses—in addition to their curriculum of “accomplishments” and “all the 'ologies”—were taught the noble art of family multiplication, domestic division, male detraction, feminine sedition, and, the glorious rule of—*one!*

Me grieving, he joyously addressed.

“Ohe! my youngish friends”—his general term in speaking to me—“how goes it?—Hi—lo!” he went on, seeing from my face, as I turned my head to speak to him, that, “it” did not “go” particularly well—“Hi—lo! vat ees ze mattaire?—you look pallide; you have got ze migraine?”

“No,” I answered; “there's nothing the matter with me, I assure you, Monsieur Parole. I'm all right, thank you.”

“Ah! but yes,” he retorted—“you cannot deceives me. You are pallide; you take walks on feet this detestable day.—Mon Dieu! votre climat c'est affreux!—I knows ver wells, Meestaire Lorton, dat somesings ees ze mattaire!”

“But, I'm quite well, I tell you,” said I.

“Quaite well en physique, bon:—quaite well, here?” tapping his chest expressively the while—“non! I knows vat ees ze mattaire. C'est une affaire de coeur, ees it not, mon ami? You cannot deceives me, I tells to you! But, nevaire mind dat, my youngish friends: cheer oop and be gays—toujours gai! I have had, myselfs, it ees one, two, tree,—seex lofes! Seex times ees mon coeur brisé, and I was désolé; and now, you sees, I'm of a light heart still!”—and he laughed so cheerily, that, even Lady Dasher, I think, could not have well helped chiming in with his merriment.

I did not laugh, however. “Pardon me, monsieur,” I said,—“I'm not in a joking mood.”

“Come, come, mon brave,” he continued, seeing that my dejection was beyond the point where it could be laughed away; and accommodating himself to my humour, with the native delicacy of his race—“I have myself, suffered:—ainsi, I can condoles! You know, my dear, youngish friends, when I was déporté de mon pays, hé?”

I nodded my head in acquiescence, hardly feeling inclined for the recital of some revolutionary anecdote, which I thought was going to be related to me. Monsieur Parole, however, astonished me with quite a different narration.

“Leesten,” said he.—“When I did leeves my Paris beloved, hélas! I was tored from my lofe—my fiancée dat I adore! I leaves her in hopes and au désespoir. I dreams of her images in my exiles! When I learns at my academies ze young ladees, ze beautiful Eenglish mees, I tinks of ma belle Marie, her figure, and her face angélique, wheech I sail nevaire forgets—no, nevaire! And I says to myselfs, ‘Ah! she ees more beautifuls dan dese!’ Mais, mon ami, I was deceives by her all dat time. Not sooner go I from France, dan she ees marie to un grand, gros, fat épicier of La Villette—Marie dat was fiancée au moi, gentilhomme! Mais, mon Dieu; when I was heard ze news, I was enragé—I goes back to Paris. I fears notings—no mouchard—no gend'armerie—no notings—although, I was suspect and deporté de France! I sends un cartel—you comprends—to ze gros bon ami de ma Marie, ce cochon d'un épicier! We meets in ze Bois: I gives him one leetel tierce en carte dat spoils his lovmakings for awhile; and, I leeves France again for evers—dat is, unless ma patrie and ze sacred cause of ze République Française calls upon me—but, not till den! So, you sees, my youngish friends, dat oders suffer like yourselfs. I have told to you my story; cheer oop! If ze ladees have deceives you, she is not wort one snaps of ze fingers!”

“But, she has not deceived me,” I said.

“Den why are you mélancolique?”

“Because, because—” I hesitated:—I was ashamed to say what made me despondent.

“For ze reasons dat you don't knows weder she lofes you or not?” he asked. “Ah, ha! Den, why not ask her, my friends? You are young; you have a deesposeetion good; you are handsome—”

“O-oh, Monsieur Parole,” I exclaimed at his nattering category of my attributes, almost blushing.

“Ah, but yes,” he went on—“I am quaite raite. You are handsome; with un air distingué; reech.”

I shook my head, to show that I could not lay claim to being a millionaire, in addition to my other virtues.

“No, not reech, but clevaire; and you will be reech bye-bye! I see not why ze ladees should not leesten to you, mon ami, he?—But, if she does note; why, courage! Dere are many odere ladees beautifool also in England; and, yet, if you feels your loss mooch, like myselfs with ma perfide Marie, why you can go aways and be console, as !”

His words encouraged me:—and, my face imperceptibly brightened.

“Ah, ha! dat is bettaire,” he said—“I likes you, Meestaire Lorton; and it does me pain to sees you at deespair like dese! Cheer oop; and all will be raite, as our good friend, ze vicaire, all-ways tells to us. We will go and sees him now!”

He took my unresisting arm, and carried me off to the vicarage; changing the conversation as we went along, and gradually instilling fresh hope into my heart.

I dare say you think it was very idiotical on my part, thus to bewail my grief to another person; and allow a few empty words to change the current of my feelings?

But then, you must recollect, that I would not have comported myself in this way with a brother Englishman.

If Horner had told me of *his* woes, for example, similarly as I told mine, or let them be drawn out of me by Monsieur Parole, I confess I would have been much more likely to have laughed at, than sympathised with him.

A Frenchman, however, is naturally more sentimental than any of ourselves. He looks seriously and considerately on things which we make light of.

Besides, in my then cut-throat mood, I was longing for sympathy; and would have made a confidante of any one offering for the post—barring Lady Dasher or Miss Spight—neither of whom would I have chosen as a depository were I anxious to give my last dying speech and confession to the world; although, they would probably cause the same to be circulated fast enough—judging by their habit in regard to that sort of private information respecting the delicate concerns of other people which is passed on from hand to hand “in strict confidence, mind!” and which is not to be told to any one else “for the world!”

Monsieur Parole’s story was a good lesson to me.

I saw that he who had had grief as great, and greater than mine, for I knew that Min loved me and was constant—had concealed it so that none who looked on his round merry face, would have supposed him capable of a deep emotion; while, I, on the contrary, had paraded my little anxieties, like a fool!

He also taught me determination; for, I resolved now, that, on the first opportunity I had, I would speak to my darling again, and have my fate settled, without more delay—for good or ill, as the case might be.

I would not remain in suspense any longer.

Within a week, this wished-for opportunity came.

Some mutual friends, to whom, indeed, Min had been the original means of my introduction—they living without the orbit of the Saint Canon circle—asked me to a large evening party that they gave late in the season.

There, I met my darling, as I hoped—unaccompanied by her mother, which I had *not* imagined would happen; consequently, my chances for speaking to Min would be all the more favourable.

There was so general a crush of people; that, although the rooms were large and there were many nice little retreats for tête-à-tête conversation, in balconies that were covered in like marquees and snug conservatories, besides the stair landings—those last “refuges for the destitute” who might desire retirement—I had to put off my purpose until evening wore on to such a late hour, that I thought I would not be able to speak to my darling at all!

After midnight, however, my opportunity came.

First getting rid of a horrible person, who would persist in following Min about under the false pretence that his name was on her card for several of the after-supper dances—an assertion I knew to be ridiculously unfounded; for, I had taken care to place my own name down for as many as Min would give me, and, all the latter ones I had appropriated also without asking her permission, thinking that when that happy time arrived, she would not be very hard on me for my presumption; nor was she.

Extinguishing the interloper—some people have such blindness of mental vision, that they never can see when they are not wanted!—I managed at length to open proceedings.

It was while in a quadrille that I began referring to the agonised state of my mind, and explained the mental suffering I then was experiencing.

Min listened attentively, as far as she heard, a warm flush on her dear face and a light sparkling in the deep grey eyes; but, I would defy any lover to plead his cause with due effect in that mazy old cotillon dance, which a love of French nomenclature in the early part of the century, taught us to style “quadrille.”

How can you inform the object of your passion that you adore her, with any becoming effusion of sentiment, when you are chassez-ing and balancez-ing like a human teetotum? How, breathe the words of love; when, ere you have completed your avowal, you have to make a fool of yourself in the “Cavalier seul,” the cynosure of six different pairs

of eyes besides those of the girl of your heart? How, tone your voice, sweetly attuned though it may be to Venusian accents, when, one moment, it may be inaudible to her whom you address, through the rampagious galloping and ladies-chaining of excited quadrillers; and, the next, be so raised in pitch, from the sudden hush that falls on band and dancers alike, between the figures, that your opposite vis-à-vis, and the neighbouring side couples, can hear every syllable of your frantic declaration—much to their amusement and your discomfiture?

You cannot do it, I say.

No, not if you were a Talleyrand in love matters; and, so completely versed in the pathology of the “fitful fever,” as to be able to diagnose it at a glance; besides nursing the patient through all the several stages of the disease—watching every symptom, anticipating each change, bringing the “case,” finally, to a favourable issue!

No, sir, or madam, or mademoiselle, as the case may be; you cannot do it—not in a quadrille, at all events, or I will;—but, no, I won’t bet:—it is wrong to do so, Min told me!

Presently, on the music stopping, I led her to a seat in a quiet corner. “Here”—thought I—“I shall be able to have you to myself without fear of interruption!”

I commenced my tale again; but, Min, evidently, did not wish to come to any decision now. She wanted to let matters remain as they were.

I could see this readily, by the way in which she tried to put me off, changing the conversation whenever I got on to the forbidden ground, and suggesting various irrelevant queries on my endeavouring again to chain her wilfully-erratic attention down to the one topic that I only thought worthy of interest.

The feminine mind, I believe, delights in uncertainty.

Girls are not half so anxious to have their lovers “declare themselves,” as some ill-natured people would have us think. They much prefer holding on in delightful doubt—that pleasant “he-would-and-she-wouldn’t” pastime that precedes a regular engagement or undoubted dismissal—just as a playful mouser sports with its victim, long after the trembling little beast has lost its small portion of life; pretending that it is yet alive and essaying to escape, when pussy knows right well that poor mousey’s fate is sealed, as far as any further struggles on its part are concerned.

A man, on the contrary, abhors suspense.

It is not business-like, you know.

He much desiderates a plain answer to a plain exposition of fact or fancy—even when it takes the form of that excruciating little monosyllable “no.”

Those diminutive arts and petty trickeries of feigned resistance, with which our “angels without wings” strive to delay the surrender of the maiden-citadels of their hearts, are but vexatious obstacles to his legitimate triumph. These, the veteran wooer attempts to carry by storm at once, seeing through their utter transparency:—to the unpractised Damon, however, they assume the proportions of an organised defence.

Look at my case, for instance:—I had hardly managed to manoeuvre Min into my selected corner, and to say two words on the subject that occupied all my thoughts; when, she, who had previously condoled with me on the “horrid crowd” that prevented our having “a nice chat” together, as “we used to have last year,” and joined in abusing “that wretched quadrille,” which had interfered so sadly with our talking, now tried to baulk my purpose of an explanation by every means in her power.

Ladies having generally ample resources to suit such ends, it was almost useless for me to combat her obvious resolve.

The moment I sat down beside her, what does she do, but, ask me to get her an ice—it was “so hot!”

Of course, I started off to procure it, our conversation being stopped meanwhile; but then, when I had scrambled through the crowd in the doorway, making ninepins of all the male wallflowers; had rudely jostled the peripatetics on the staircase; and, literally, fought my way into the supper-room and back to her again with the desired dainty—what do you think was my reward?

I assure you, there was the identical, horrible person, with sandy hair and sallow, elongated features—whom I had before routed in the matter of Min’s dancing with him,—seated in my chair, chattering away at a fine rate to my darling; and, she?—

Was listening to his sallies with apparent contentment.

It was, enough to have caused a Puritan to swear!

She saw that I was annoyed; but, she thanked me so prettily for her ice, that my anger towards her was instantly appeased:—not so, however, toward the interloper! I gnawed, in impotent fury, the attenuated ends of the small fragment of a moustache which nature had allotted to me, and talked at him and over him, so pointedly, that he had to beat a retreat and claim some other partner for the ensuing waltz.

We were again left alone; but, Min, still, wouldn’t listen to me a moment!

“Oh, Frank!” she said. “This is *our* dance, I think, is it not? We have sat out *such* a time! Do let us begin.”

I liked dancing, but wanted to speak more; so, I got angry again.

"You are cruel to me, Min,"—I said.—"You *know* that I wish to speak to you seriously, and you won't let me have a chance. You can joke and laugh, while I'm breaking, my heart! I will leave you"—and, I walked away from her out of the room and down the staircase—very proudly, very defiantly, very miserably.

On my way I met, or rather encountered, our sandy friend who had spoiled my interview. There was a heavy crush on the stairs; and so, somebody else having shoved against me, I revenged myself on this gentleman, giving him such a malicious dig in the ribs from my elbow as elicited a deep sighing groan. This was some slight satisfaction to me. It sounded exactly like the affected "Hough!" which paviours give vent to, when wielding their mallets and ramming down the stones of the roadway!

In the hall, as I was hunting for my overcoat and hat, which had been buried beneath an avalanche of other upper garments, Min, who had followed me down, laid her hand timidly on my arm. She looked up in my face entreatingly.

"You are not going yet, Frank, are you?" she asked.

"Yes," said I, curtly. "What should I stay for? Do you think I find it so amusing to be laughed at? It is very poor fun, / think!"

"But you, surely, won't go before saying good-bye to the lady of the house, Frank?" she then said.

She evidently thought, you see, that I was going to commit an unpardonable breach of good manners; and, that made her call me back—nothing else!

I returned with her to the drawing-room. Min's face was quite pale now; and, the little rosebud lips were pressed closely together, as if in set determination. She perceived that she could not any longer put off what she knew was coming—no matter what might have been her kindly intent in so wishing to do.

On our entrance the band was playing the *Mabel* waltz. How well I remember it!

We joined in for a few turns; and, as I clasped my arm round her darling waist, feeling her warm heart beating against mine, I longed to clasp her so always, and waltz on for ever!

In a little while we rested; and, getting her to walk out on to the canopied balcony through the French windows of the drawing-room, I there said my say to her, amidst the waving ferns and showy azaleas that surrounded us.

We had the place all to ourselves; for, as it was now early in the morning, most of the guests had already gone:—the indefatigables who remained were too busily engaged to mind us. They were making the most of the last waltz, which was protracted to an indefinite length.

"Min, my darling,"—said I, after a brief pause, looking straight down into her honest, upturned face,—“will you promise to be my wife, or no?”

"O-oh, Frank!" she murmured, bending her head down without another word.

"Darling!"—I continued.—“You know full well that I love you; and I've thought, dearest, that you loved me a little?”

"Hush! Do not speak so, dear Frank; you grieve me so," she said.

"Have you forgotten all the past then, Min? Don't you remember last year, and all that happened then?"—I asked.

"I remember, Frank," she whispered, rather than spoke.

"And do you not love me still, darling?" I pleaded:—"Look up into my face, and let me see your eyes:—*they* won't deceive me, I know!"

But, the dear, grey eyes would not meet mine.

"Oh, Min, my darling!" I asked again, pressing her closely to my heart, "will you not promise to be my wife? Sweet, I love you so!"

"They are looking at us, Frank,"—was her rejoinder—"let us waltz on."

We had some more turns, "Mabel" still dominant in the orchestra. O that air! I can hear it now, as I heard it then, ringing yet in my ears—as it will continue always to haunt me!

When we stopped again, I repeated my question once more. I was determined to have an answer, good or bad.

"Frank," she said, hurriedly, "I cannot say anything; I have promised:—I have promised. Pray, do not ask me!"

She spoke with great agitation. There was a tremor in her voice; and, I could see *now* that the soft grey eyes, which were piteously turned to mine, were tearful and sad. I was mad, however, with love and grief, or I could not have resisted the mute entreaty I there read—to be silent.

"Min," I went on to say, passionately, "you must now decide whether we are to meet again, or part for ever! You know how I love you now, have loved you ever since I first saw your darling face,—will love you until my heart ceases to beat! But, I cannot, oh! I cannot go on like this. The suspense is killing me:—anxiety and uncertainty are driving me mad! Tell me, Min—dear as you are to me, I ask it for the last time—whether you will promise to be my wife? Only

give me a grain of hope, that I may have something to look forward to; something to work for; some object in life? At present, I have nothing; and, my existence is a burden to me!"

"Can we not be friends still, Frank?" she asked, sadly.

"No, Min," I answered; "I cannot promise any longer what I feel unable to perform. You must be everything to me or nothing! I would lay down my life for you, darling! Won't you give me some hope?"

"Oh, Frank! do not torture me,"—she exclaimed, in a choking voice—"I have pledged my word, and I cannot break it."

"Better to break my heart than your mother's selfish command!" I said, bitterly, knowing, now, how she had probably been bound down to refuse me, should I again offer my love.

O wise, far-reaching, far-seeing Mrs Clyde!

"Do not be so unkind to me, Frank," said Min, half sobbingly, after a little time, during which I tried to keep down my own emotion; and, I felt a warm little tear drop on the hand in which I still clasped hers in a lingering clasp—"I have been a friend, though, to you; have I not, Frank?" she asked me.

"Tell me, Min," I said, making a last appeal; "do you love me—have you ever loved me? Let me have some consolation, to comfort me!"

"I must not say anything, must not promise anything. I have given my word to mamma. But, oh, Frank! do not be angry with me. Let us be friends still, won't you?"

"No," said I, sternly—I wondered afterwards at my cruelty; but, I was goaded on to desperation, and hardly knew what I was saying.—"We part for ever now, Min! Your mother may certainly procure you a wealthier suitor, but none who can love you as truly as I do, as I have done! Good-bye. I dare say you will soon be happy with some one else; but, perhaps, you will think sometimes of him whom you have discarded, whose heart you have broken, whose life you have wrecked?—No, I do not want you to think of me at all!" I added, passionately, at the last—and then, I left her.

What a walk home I had, in the early dawn!

I would not take a cab, although several passed me. I wanted to be alone in my misery; and so, I walked the whole way to Saint Canon's—three miles if it were an inch, over a rough, newly-stoned road, too, and in patent-leather boots with paper soles! I never thought of that, however, nor felt the stones, notwithstanding that my boots were entirely worn out when I reached home. I might have been walking along on a Brussels carpet, for all that I knew to the contrary!

My thoughts were agony:—my mind, a perfect hell; and, that dreadful *Mabel* waltz seemed to be continually running through my brain, tinkling the death knell of all my hopes!

The tune always recurs to me, whenever my memory goes back to the night of that miserable evening party, with all its attendant scenes and circumstances; and, I hate it!

Two bars of it whistled now, no matter where I heard them, or in what company I might chance to be, would bring me mentally face to face with my misery again!

O Min, Min!

She never knew how I loved her, or she would never have rejected me like this!

This was my consolation—ample, wasn't it?

Chapter Seven.

Her Letter.

Ay de mi! Un anno felice,
Parece un soplo ligero:
Perô sin dicha un instante,
Es un siglo de tormento.

"—And with mine eyes
I'll drink the words you send, though ink be made of gall!"

It was broad daylight when I got home.

I did not go to bed; but, passed the weary morning hours in walking up and down my room, chewing the bitter cud of hopeless fancy, and in a state of excitement almost approaching to madness.

At last, the time arrived for me to start to town to my office.

"Hey, humph! what is the matter, Mr Lorton?"—growled old Smudge to me, as I proceeded to sign the attendance book before the fatal black line was drawn against the late comers—"Look ill, look ill! hey? Late hours, late hours, young man, young man; dissipation, and all the rest of it, hey? I know how it will end—same as the rest, same as the

rest!"—and he chuckled to himself over some blue book in his corner, as if he had, in the most merry and unbending mood, "passed the time of day" with singular bonhomie!

I only gave him a gruff good-morning, however. I walked listlessly to my desk, where he presently also came, to take me to task about some account I had checked—so as to tone down any presumptuous feelings I might have in consequence of his graciousness:—the "balance" was, thus, "pretty square" between us.

I never found the office-work so tedious, my fellow-clerks so wearisome, nor the whole round of civil service life so dreadfully "flat, stale, and unprofitable," as on that miserable day after the party!

The day seemed as if it would never come to an end.

The wretched hours lengthened themselves out, with such indiarubber-like elasticity, that, the interval between ten and four appeared a cycle of centuries!

I was longing to be free, in order to carry out a determination to which I had come.

I had resolved to see Mrs Clyde and plead my cause again with her; for, I had observed from Min's manner, that it was not *her* objection to me personally, but, her promise to her mother which had prevented her from lending a favourable ear to my suit.

Four o'clock came at last—thank heaven!

I rushed out of the office; procured a hansom, with the fastest horse I was able to pick out in my hurry; and, set out homewards.

I arrived within the bounds of Saint Canon's parish within the half-hour, thanks to the "pour boire" that I held out, in anticipation of hurry, to my Jehu.

A few minutes afterwards, I called at The Terrace.

The ladies were both out, the servant said.

I called again, later on.

Still "not at home," I was told; although, I knew they were in. I had watched both Min and Mrs Clyde enter the house, shortly before my second visit. I was evidently intentionally denied!

I went back to my own home. I spent another hour or two, walking up and down my room in the same cheerful way in which I had passed the morning; and then—*then*, I thought I would write to Mrs Clyde.

Yes, that would be the best course.

I sat down and penned the most vivid sketch of my present grief, asking her to reconsider the former decision she had given against me. I was certain, I said, that it was only through *her* influence that Min had rejected me; and I earnestly besought her good will. I was now in a better position, I urged, than I had been the previous year, my income being nearly doubled—thanks to Government and what I was able to reap from my literary lucubrations:—what more could she require? Besides, my assets would increase, at the least, by the ten pound bonus which a grateful country annually aggregates to the salary of its victims each year—not to speak of the fortune I might make by my "connection with the press!" In fact, I said everything that I could, to colour my case and get judgment recorded in my favour.

But, my toil was all in vain!

I sent over my letter by a servant, with instructions to leave it at the door; while, I, waited in all the evening expecting an answer, in breathless suspense.

None came; but, next morning I received back my own despatch enclosed in another envelope, unopened, unread.

I went down to the office that day in quite a cheerful mood again, I can tell you!

How I did enjoy Brown's balderdash; the witty sallies of Smith; Robinson's repartees; Jones' jocosities!

When, after my official labours, I returned again to Saint Canon's that evening, I made another attempt to see Mrs Clyde.

No. The servant who answered the door, when I timidly called for the third time at the house, told me that instructions had been given to say "not at home" always *to me*.

Pleasant!

War had been declared:—a "guerre à outrance," as I had anticipated; but, it was a struggle in which I was stretched on the ground at my adversary's mercy, with her vengeful blade at my heart!

I then wrote to Min.

It was a long letter. I bewailed my hasty severance of the old relations between us, and asked her to have pity on my sad fate. I poured out all the flood of feeling which had deluged my breast since we had parted at the party. I begged, I implored her not to desert me at her mother's bidding.

My letter I posted, so that it should not be stopped en route, and returned to me unread by my darling, whom I asked to write to me, if only one line, to tell me that she had really received my appeal safely—requesting her, also, to reply to me at my office that I might get her answer in the soonest possible time.

I dreamt of her subsequently, the whole night through:—it was a horrible dream!

A third day of torture in my governmental mill. Six mortal hours more of dreary misery; and, helpless boredom at the hands of Smith, Brown, Jones, and Robinson!

And, then, I got my reply.

It was “only a line.” Very short, very sweet, very bitter, very pointed; and yet, I value that little letter so highly that I would not exchange it for the world! The words are stained with tear-drops that, I know, fell from loving, grey eyes; while, its sense, though painful, is sweet to me from its outspoken truthfulness:—I value it so highly, that I could not deem it more precious, if it were written on a golden tablet in characters set with diamonds—were it the longest letter maiden ever wrote, the sweetest billet lover ever received!

“Frank! I cannot, I must not grant your request. Do not wring my heart by writing to me again, or speaking to me; for, I have promised, and we are not to see each other any more. I am breaking my word in writing to you now, but, oh! do not think badly of me. Indeed, indeed, I am not heartless, Frank. It has not been my fault, believe me. I shall pray for you always, always! I must not say any more.”

“Minnie Clyde.”

That was all the little note contained; but, it was quite enough.

Was it not?

When I had read it and read it, over and over again, I was almost beside myself,—with a grief that was mixed up with feelings of intense anger and rage against her whom I looked upon as the author of my sufferings—Mrs Clyde.

Min had been again sent down to the country, the very day on which I received her heart-breaking letter. This I heard from my old friend, dear little Miss Pimpernell, who tried vainly to console me. She endeavoured to make me believe that “all would come right in the end,” as she had prophesied before; but, I refused to be comforted. I could not share her faith. I would not be sanguine any more; no, never any more!

I saw Mrs Clyde at church the very next Sunday. I went there in the hope that my darling might have returned, and that I would see her—not from any religious feeling.

There was only her mother there, however.

I waited to accost her at the church door after the service was over.

“Oh, Mrs Clyde,” I said, “do not be my enemy!”

But, she took no notice of me:—she cut me dead.

I was convinced that all was lost now.

It was of no use my longer attempting to fight against fate:—I gave up hope completely;—and then—and then—

I went to the devil!

Rochefoucauld says in his pointed “Maxims” that—

“There is nothing so catching as example; nor is there ever great good or ill done that does not produce its like. We imitate good actions through emulation, and bad ones through the malignity of our nature, which shame restrains and example emancipates.”

That was my case now.

I suppose I had had it in me all along—the “black drop,” as the Irish peasants call it, of evil; and, that shame had hitherto prevented me from plunging into the whirlpool of sinful indulgence that now drew me, a willing victim, down into its yawning gulf of ruin and degradation. That bar removed, however, I made rapid progress towards the beckoning devil, who was waiting to receive me with open arms. I hastened along that path, “where,”—as Byron has described from his own painful experience—

*“—In a moment, we may plunge our years
In fatal penitence, and in the blight
Of our own soul, turn all our blood to tears,
And colour things to come with hues of night!”*

I declare to you, that when I look back on this period of my life—life! death, rather I should say, for it was a moral death—I am quite unable to comprehend the motives that led me to take such a course. My eyes were not blinded. I must have seen that each stride placed me further and further away from my darling, erecting a fresh obstacle between us; still, some irresistible impulse appeared to hurry me on—although, I could not but have known how vain it would be for me to recover my lost footsteps: how hard a matter to change my direction, and look upwards to light and happiness once more! Glancing back at this period—as I do now with horror—I cannot understand myself, I say.

I went from bad to worse, plunging deeper and deeper into every wickedness that Satan could suggest, or flesh hanker after—until I seemed to lose all sense of shame and self-reproach.

My connection with officialdom was soon terminated.

I got later and later in my attendance; so that, old Smudge's prediction was shortly fulfilled, for, I became no better than the rest, in respect of early hours.

One day the chief spoke to me on the subject, and I answered him unguardedly.

I was not thinking of him at the time, to tell the truth; and when he said, "Mr Lorton, late again, late again! This won't do, you know, won't do!" I quite forgot myself; and, in speaking to him, called him by the nickname under which he was known to us, instead of by his proper appellation.

"Very sorry, Smudge," said I, "very sorry; won't be so again, I promise you, sir!"

He nearly got a fit, I assure you; while, all the other fellows were splitting with laughter at my slip!

"Mr Lorton, I will report you, sir!" was all he said to me directly; but, as he shuffled off to his desk, with the attendance book recording my misdeeds under his arm and his face purple with passion, we all could hear him muttering pretty loudly to himself. "Smudge! Smudge!"—he was repeating;—"I'll Smudge him, the impudent rascal! I wonder what the dooce he meant by it! What the dooce did he mean by it?—mean by it?"

I begged his pardon off-hand, immediately, of course, although I would not give him the written apology he peremptorily demanded.

Do you know, I did not like to deprive him of the extreme pleasure it would give him to submit his case against me—in clerky, cut-and-dried statement—to the chief commissioner, under-secretary, first lord, or whoever else occupied the lofty pedestal of "the board," that controlled the occasionally-peculiar proceedings of the Obstructor General's Department.

I knew with what intense relish he would expatiate on the wrong which "the service" had sustained in his person at my hands—the "frightful example" I presented, of insubordination and defiance to constitutional authority; and how, he would draw up the most elaborate document, detailing all this, in flowing but strictly official language, on carefully-folded, quarter-margined foolscap, of the regular, authorised dimensions!

What a pity, I thought, it would be to interfere with such neat arrangements by submitting to a *Nolle Prosequi*—as I would have done, had I tendered the recantation of my error that he insisted on!

At the same time, however, I checkmated his triumph, by forwarding to the people in high places the resignation of that position as a clerk of the tertiary formation, which I had, been nominated to, examined in respect of, and competed for, under the auspices of Her Majesty's Polite Letter Writer Commissioners; and which I had been duly appointed to—all in proper official sequence—but one short year before, plus a few additional months, which were of no great consequence to any one.

My withdrawal left, at any rate, one place vacant for some member of Parliament's constituent's son, who would, probably, be much more worthy in every way for the honours and duties of the situation—which, really, I do not think I ever estimated at their proper value!

This was some satisfaction to me, I assure you; and, combined with the sum of one hundred and ten pounds sterling—less income-tax on one-fourth part of the said amount, or thereabouts: I like to be correct—was all the benefit I ever received from my connection with "Government."

My year's probation was, I may say without any great exaggeration, thrown away; for, the knowledge I gained was not of a character to advance my interests in any other walk in life, professional or mercantile. Still, I bear no malice to officialdom, if officialdom cares to obtain my assurance to that effect. The few words—far between, too—which I have dropped to you, anent the combination of the ill-used servants of the country in opposition to their grievances, have been more intended to redress the wrongs of those hard-worked, poor-paid sufferers in question, than meant as a covert attack on the noble authorities of the great, lumbering institution they belong to—the spokes of whose broadly-tired wheels they may be said to form.

For my part, I adore governmental departments, looking on all of them with a wide admiration that is tempered with wholesome awe; and, believing them to be so many concentrations of virtue and merit, which are none the less real because they are imperceptible.

The giving up of my appointment was the finish of my mad career.

I awoke now to a consciousness of all my foolishness and wickedness; the revelation of the misery, present and future alike, which my conduct had prepared for me, coming to mind, with a sudden, sharp stroke of painful distinctness that prostrated me into an abyss of self-torture and repentance.

Ah! There is no use in repining, unless one mends matters by deeds, not words. Repentance is worth little if it be not followed up by reformation. But, how many of us rush madly, headlong to destruction, without a thought of what they are doing; never mindful of their course, till that dreadful refrain, "Too late!" rings in their ears.

As the poetical author of the ode to the "Plump Head Waiter at The Cock," has philosophically sung,—and, as many a weather-beaten sufferer has cruelly proven,—

“So fares it since the years began,
Till they be gather’d up;
The truth, that flies the flowing can,
Will haunt the empty cup:
And others’ follies teach us not,
Nor much their wisdom teaches;
And most, of sterling worth, is what
Our own experience preaches!”

I remembered now having come across a passage in Massillon’s *Petit Carême*, some two or three years before, during a varied course of French reading at the library of the British Museum,—an old haunt of mine long previously to my ever knowing Min; and this passage occurred to me in my present condition, expressing a want I had long felt, and which I was now all the more bitterly conscious of. It is in one of the sermons which the seventeenth century divine probably preached in the presence of the Grand Monarque. It is entitled “*Sur la Destinée de l’Homme;*” and might, for its practical point and thorough insightedness into human nature, be expounded to-morrow by any of our large-hearted, Broad Church ministers. In its truth, I’m sure, it is catholic enough to suit any creed:—

“Si tout doit finir avec nous, si l’homme ne doit rien attendre après cette vie, et que ce soit ici notre patrie, notre origine, et la seule félicité que nous pouvons nous promettre, pourquoi n’y sommes-nous pas heureux? Si nous ne naissons que pour les plaisirs des sens, pourquoi ne peuvent-ils nous satisfaire, et laissent-ils toujours un fond d’ennui et de tristesse dans notre coeur? Si l’homme n’a rien au-dessus de la bête, que ne coule-t-il ses jours comme elle, sans souci, sans inquiétude, sans dégoût, sans tristesse, dans la félicité des sens et de la chair?”

Because he can not!

The pleasures of life, however varied, and grateful though they may be at the time, soon wither on the palate; and then, when we appreciate at last the knowledge of their dust and ashes, their Dead Sea-apple constituency, we *must* turn to something better, something higher—the joys of which are more lasting and whose flavour proceeds from some less evanescent substance.

Such were my reflections now; and, in my abasement and craving for “the one good thing,” I thought of the kind vicar.

During all the time of my rioting and sin, I had never been near either him or Miss Pimpernell. I would not have profaned the sanctuary of their dwelling with my presence!

Both had tried to see me—in vain; for, I had separated myself entirely from all my former friends and acquaintances, burying the early associations of my previous life in the slough of the Bohemian-boon-companionship, into which I had thrown myself in London.

The kind vicar had written to me a long, earnest, touching letter, which did not reproach me in the least but invited me to confide in him all my troubles; and, the dear old lady, also, had sent me many an appeal that she might be allowed to cheer me. But, I had not taken notice of their pleadings, persevering still in evil and shutting my ears to friendly counsels—as I likewise did to the voice of reason speaking in my inner heart.

Now, however, in my misery, I bethought me of these friends. I went shame-faced and mentally-naked, like the prodigal son, once more to the vicarage.

And how did they receive me?

With the pharisaical philosophy of Miss Spight’s school, looking on me as a “goat,” with whom they had nothing to do:—“a lost soul,” without the pale of their pity and almost below the par of their contempt?

Not so!

Dear little Miss Pimpernell got up from her arm-chair in the corner, and kissed me—the first time she had done such a thing since I was a little fellow and had sat upon her knee; while, the vicar shook me as cordially by the hand as he had ever done.

“Dear Frank!” exclaimed the former. “Here you are at last. I thought you were never coming to us again!”

That was all the allusion *she* made to the past.

“My boy,” said the vicar, “I am glad to see you.”

That was all *he* said; but, his speech was not mere empty verbiage. He meant it!

I shall not tell you how they both talked to me: so tenderly, so kindly. It would not interest you. It only concerned myself.

By-and-by, after a long interview, in which I laid all my troubles before these comforters, the vicar asked me what I thought of doing.

“I shall go away,”—I said.—“I have exhausted London.—‘I have lived and loved,’ as Theckla says; and there is no hope of my getting on here! I would think that everybody would recall my past life, whenever they saw me, and throw it all back in my teeth.”

"But, you can live all that down, my boy," said the vicar.—"The world is not half so censorious as you think now, in your awakening; and, remember, Frank, what Shakspeare says, 'There is no time so miserable, but a man may be true!'"

"Besides," I went on,—"I want change of scene. All these old places would recall the past. I could never be happy here again."

"Well, well, my boy!" he answered sadly. "But, we shall be sorry to lose you, Frank, all the same, although it may be for your good."

I had thought of America already, and told him that I intended going there. Not from any wide-seated admiration of the Great Republic and its citizens; but, from its being a place within easy reach—where I might separate myself entirely from all that would recall home thoughts and home associations:—so I then believed.

"I shall go there," I said, bitterly.—"At all events, I shall be unknown; and, can bury myself and my misery—a fitting end to a bad life!"

"My boy, my boy!"—said the vicar, with emotion.—"It grieves me to the heart to hear you speak so. Know, that repentance brings us always once more beneath the shelter of divine love! You will think of this by-and-by, Frank:—you may carve out a new life for yourself in the new world, and return to us successful. Be comforted, my boy! Do not forget David's spirit-stirring words of promise,—'They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy; and he that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him!'"

Chapter Eight.

"Good-Bye!"

So, upon the verge of sorrow
 Stood we blindly hand in hand,
Whispering of a happy morrow
 In the undiscovered land!

The world is not half so bad a place as some discontented people make out.

Our fellow-mortals are not *always* striving after their own interests, to the neglect of their duty towards their neighbour:—the mass of humanity not entirely selfish at heart—no, nor yet the larger portion of it, by a good way!

Of course, there are some ill-natured people. Blisters, are these; moral cataplasms imposed on us, probably, to produce that very feeling we admire, acting as they do by contrast—one of the most vivifying principles of mental action.

But, when we come to calculate their percentage, how very few they are in comparison with the better-disposed numbers of God's creatures that live and breathe, and sicken and die in our midst, and whose kindly ministrations on behalf of their suffering brethren and sisters around them, remain generally unknown, until they are far beyond any praise that the world can give.

Yes, humanity is not so debased, but that its good points still excel its bad! Just as you see but one real miser in a fixed proportion of men; so, are there, I believe, quite as small a representative set of absolutely heartless persons. I am certain that the "good Samaritans" outvie the "Levites" in our daily existence—opposed, though my theory may be, to the ruling of the old doggerel, which cautions us that—

"'Tis a very good world to live in,
To spend and to lend, and to give in;
 But,
To beg, or to borrow, and to get a man's own,
'Tis the very worst world that ever was known!"

Look at my present case, for instance. Of course, personal instances are, as a general rule, wrong; but, one cannot very well argue without them—especially when telling a story, and when they come up so opportunely in front of one's nose, so to speak.

No sooner was it generally known in Saint Canon's that I was going away, than I met with offers of sympathy and assistance from many that I did not expect. I did not require their aid, yet, the proffer of it could not help being grateful to one's feelings, all the same.

There was Horner now. You know that I was always in the habit of "chaffing" him, taking a malicious pleasure in so doing, from the reason that he could not "chaff" me back again in return. Well, you wouldn't have supposed that he bore me any great love or friendship, or felt kindly disposed towards me? But, he did!

About a week after I left the Obstructor General's Office, he came to me—I assure you, much to my astonishment—offering me his assistance.

"Bai-ey *Je-ove!* Lorton," said he, "sawy to he-ah you have left us, you know—ah. Thawght you might be in a hole, you know—ah? And, Bai-ey *Je-ove!* I say, old fellah,"—he added, almost dropping his drawl in his earnestness,—"if I can help you in any way at all—ah, I should weally be vewy glad—ah!"

The “us,” whom I had “left—ah,” referred, of course, to officialdom; but, it was kind, wasn’t it?

There was old Shuffler, too.

“You ain’t a goin’ to Amerikey, sir, is you?” he asked me just before my departure, meeting me in the street.

“Yes, I am, Shuffler,” I replied, “and pretty soon, too!”

“Lor! Mister Lorton; but I’m right loth to ’ear it! I’ve got a brother myself over in Amerikey; s’pose now, sir, I was to give you a letter to ’im? It might, you know, some’ow or hother, be o’ service, hay?”

“America is a large place, Shuffler,” I answered.—“Whereabouts is he over there, eh?”

“Well, sir,” said he, “I don’t ’zackly knows were ’e his; but I dessay you’ll come across him, sir. I’ll give you the letter, at hany rate;”—and he did too, although I combated his resolution. I need hardly add that I never met the said “brother in Amerikey” of his; so, that it was of no use to me, as I told him—although, it was a considerate action on Shuffler’s part!

Lady Dasher, also, did not forget me.

Believing that the last of the Mohicans still lived, and that the continent of the setting sun resembled Hounslow Heath in the old highwaymen’s days, she presented to me—a blunderbuss!

It was one with which her “poor dear papa” had been in the habit of frightening obstreperous White Boys, who might assail the sacred premises of Ballybrogue Castle—the ancestral seat of the Earls of Planetree in sportive Tipperary, as I believe I’ve told you before. The weapon, she informed me, was a most efficient one, having once been known—when missing the advocate of “young Ireland” it was aimed at—to demolish a whole litter of those little gentlemen with curly tails who assist, in conjunction with the “praties,” in “paying the rint” of the trusting natives of the Emerald Isle; consequently, its destructive powers were beyond question, and it might really, she thought, be of the utmost utility to me on the western prairies, where, she believed, I was going to “camp out” for ever!

My lady gave me, in addition, a piece of advice, which she implored me always to bear in mind throughout my life—as she had invariably done—and that was, that, “Though I might unfortunately be poor, never to forget being proud”:—it was the pass-word to her morbid system.

And the vicar, and dear little Miss Pimpernell, and Monsieur Parole d’Honneur—how can I speak of all their kindness—evinced in many, many ways—ere I left the old parish and its whilom associations behind me?

Little Miss Pimpernell worked a supply of knitted socks, “comforters,” and muffetees, sufficient to last me for a three years’ cruise in the Polar circle in search of the north-west passage. The vicar gave me letters of introduction to some American friends of his, who received me afterwards most kindly in virtue of his credentials—he wanted to do much more for me, but I would not allow him; and as for Monsieur, he *would* not be denied, in spite of my telling him, over and over again, that I had no need of temporal assistance.

“Ah! but yes!” he said to me, in a parting visit he paid me the night before I started. “You cannot deceives me, my youngish friends! Lamartine was un republicain, hé?—Bien, he go un voyage en Orient; you, my dears Meestaire Lorton, are going to walk on a voyage en Ouest—dat is vraiseuble. Ha! ha! Ze one visite the Arabes of ze old world, ze oders ze Arabes of ze nouvelle; and,—bote requires ze money, ze l’argent, ze cash. Ha! ha! Non, my youngish friends, you cannot deceives me!”

“But, I assure you, Monsieur Parole,” I replied. “I really have plenty—much more, indeed, than I absolutely require.”

“Ah! but yes! My dears, you *moost* take him to obliges me. I have gote here a leetle somme I doos note want. If you takes him note, I peetch him avays—peetch him avays, vraitment!”

And he handed me a little roll of banknotes, which I subsequently found to contain a hundred pounds.

It was, as I say, of no use my trying to get him to take them back; he would have no denial:—he absolutely got offended with me when I persisted in my refusal.

“Non!” he said. “When you come back a reech mans, you can pays me back; but, note till den! Non, Monsieur Lorton! I believes you considers me a friend. You offend me if you refuse! Take hims for ze memory de notre amitie!”

What could I do? I had to take the money after that.

The only *great* thing that grieved me at parting was the thought that I could not see Min, to have one parting word; but, even that favour was afforded me:—God was very good to me!

I had gone to the vicarage to say a last good-bye to the dear friends there. I was ushered into Miss Pimpernell’s parlour; but *she* was not there. Somebody else was, though; for, who should get up from the dear old lady’s seat in the fireside corner—where she always sat, winter and summer alike—but, my darling!

The surprise was almost too much for me, it was so unexpected. I thought it was her ghost at first.

“Min!” I exclaimed.

“Oh, Frank!”—she said, coming forwards eagerly—“and could you have the heart to go away without my seeing you again?”

I drew back.

“Min,”—said I,—“do not come near me! You do not know what has occurred; how I have sinned; how unworthy I am even to speak to you!”

She would not be denied, however. She came nearer me, and took my hand. “But, you have repented, Frank,”—she said—“have you not?”

“Oh, my darling!”—I said,—“I *have* repented; but that will not bring back the past. I can never hope to be forgiven, I know. I ought not to speak to you even!”

“Ah, Frank!”—she replied, looking up into my face with her dear grey eyes, which I had thought I would never look upon again.—“Don’t you remember that sermon the vicar preached last year, when we were in church together? and, don’t you remember the words of his text, how assuring they ought to be to us?—‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool!’”

We were both silent.

Presently, as we sat side by side, Min spoke to me again.

“You will not forget me, Frank, will you?” she asked.

“That is very likely!” I said, laughing in my heart at the idea.

“And you will be good, Frank, will you not?”

“My darling,” I said, “with God’s grace I shall never from henceforth be unworthy of your trust in me, either in thought, in word, or, in deed.”

“But America is *so* far off!” she said again after a bit, with a tender little sigh.

“Not so *very* far,”—I replied,—“and, though my body may be a few miles distant from you—for it *is* only a few miles over the sea—you may know that my heart will always be with you. I shall be ever thinking of the time when I can come back and claim you as my own darling little wife!”

“But I can make no promise, you know, Frank!”—she said.

“Never mind that, darling!”—I replied.—“I am sanguine enough to believe you will not change towards me if I deserve you by my life; and I shall never marry anyone else, I know!”

“It is so hard, too, our not being able to write to each other! I will never be able to know what you are doing!” she said, again.

“Ah, yes, you will!” said I, to encourage her.

As she became despondent, I got sanguine; although, a tear in the soft grey eyes would have unmanned me at once.

“Miss Pimpernell is going to write to me, you know,”—I continued,—“and I to her; so you will be made acquainted with all I do and, even, think. I will write fully to the dear old lady, I promise you!”

She gave me a little Bible and Prayer-book, before we separated, in which she had written my name; and, told me that she would pray every night for me, that I might know that her prayers joined mine, and that both, together, would go up before the Master’s throne - notwithstanding that the Atlantic might roll between us.

She also gave me a likeness of herself, which was of more solace to me afterwards than I can tell.

A little, simple photograph it was, that has lain before my eyes a thousand times—in hope, in sadness, in sickness, in disappointment; and, that has always cheered me and encouraged me in some of the darkest moments of my life, ever bringing back to my mind the darling words of the giver.

And then, we parted.

One sobbing sigh, that expressed a world of emotion. One frenzied clasp of her to my heart, as if I could never let her go; and, our “Good-bye” was spoken, accomplished:—a good-bye whose recollection was to last! until I returned to claim her, receiving the welcome that her darling rosebud lips would gladly utter; and watching, the while, the unspoken delight that would then, I know, dance from the loving, soul-lit, truth-telling, grey eyes!

Chapter Nine.

Across the Atlantic.

O’er the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
Our thoughts as boundless and our souls as free,
Far as the breeze can bear, the billows foam,
Survey our empire and behold our home!

“Sir,” said the Honourable Mister Pigeonbarley of Missouri, “we *air* a peculiar people. Jes so!”

Have you never noticed how, when travelling on a long journey, the wheels of the railway carriage in which you are sitting seem always to be rattling out some carefully studied tune, to which the jolts of the vehicle beat a concerted bass; while, the slackening of the coupling chains, in combination with the concussion of the buffers as they hitch up suddenly again, sounds a regular obbligato accompaniment—the scream of the steam whistle, and the thundering whish and whirr of the train through a deep cutting or tunnel, or over a bridge with water below, coming in occasionally as a sort of symphony to the main air?

Have you never noticed this?

No? Bless me, what a *very* unimaginative person you are! I have, frequently; and yet, I do not think I am any brighter than the ordinary run of people.

Drawn some odd thousands of miles by the iron horse, as it has been my fortune to be during different periods of my life, I have seldom failed to associate his progress thus with those lesser Melpomenean nymphs, who may be selected to watch over the destinies of the steam god and fill up their leisure hours by “riding on a rail,” in the favourite fashion of the South Carolinian darkeys.

Of course the carriage wheels do not perpetually sing the same song:—that would be monotonous.

They know better than that, I can assure you. Sometimes they rattle out the maddest of mad waltzes—such as that which the imprudent German young lady, living near the Harz Mountains, found herself dancing one day against her will, when she had given expression to the very improper statement, that, she would “take the devil for a partner,” if he only would put in an appearance at the gay and festive scene at which she was then present. Sometimes, again, they will evolve, note by note, the dreariest air that the composer of the Dead March in *Saul* could have devised; or, croon you out a soothing lullaby, should you feel sleepy, to which the charming melody of “The Cradle Song” would bear no comparison. In fact, the nymphs know their work well; and so alter their strains as to suit every mood and humour of the variously-tempered travellers that listen to their musical cadences.

As I proceeded now on my way to Southampton, where I was to take the ocean steamer for my passage to America, the railway nymphs were busy with their harmonies.

Not sad or dispiriting by any means, but briskly enlivening was their lay.

They seemed to me to sing—

“You’re off on your travels! Off on your travels,
To fame and fortune in another land!
To wait and work, Frank! Wait and work, Frank!
Ere you gain your own Min’s hand!”

And, perhaps, it was from the recollection of Monsieur Parole d’Honneur’s kindness, and from my having been in company with him that winter in Paris, where I had heard that opera of Offenbach’s for the first time, but the tune of the carriage wheels was strangely like the “Pars pour Crete” chorus in the second act of *La Belle Hélène*—where, if you remember, the unfortunate Menelaus is hustled off the stage, in company with his portly umbrella and other belongings, in order to make room for the advent of Paris, the “gay deceiver,” the successful intrigant!

Although my thoughts were wrapped up in memories of Min and her parting, hopeful words, and my inner eyes still saw her standing at the window, waving her handkerchief to me in mute adieu, my outward vision was keenly watchful of each landpoint the train hurried by.

I remember every incident on the way.

Not a thing escaped me.

The outlook for baggage at Waterloo; the feeling of the obsequious porter expectant of a *douceur*; the mistake I made in getting my ticket which had to be rectified at the last moment; the confused ringing of bells and clattering of trucks up and down the platform; the slamming of doors and hurrying of feet to and fro:—then, the sudden pause in all these sounds; the shrill whistle, betokening all was ready; the converting of all the employés into animated sign-posts, that waved their arms wildly; the grunt and wheeze from the engine, as if from a giant in pain; the sharp jerk, and then the steady pull at the carriage in which I was sitting; the “pant, pant! puff, puff!” of the iron horse, as he buckled to his work with a will; and then, finally, the preliminary oscillation of the ponderous train, the trembling and rumbling of creaking wheels along the rails—as we glided and bumped, slowly but steadily, out of the terminus—the distance signal showing “all clear” to us, and blocking the up line with the red semaphore of “danger.”

Past Vauxhall, once famed for its revelry—conspicuous, now, only for its picturesque expanse of candle-factory roofs and the dead boarding that is displayed skirting the railway:—Clapham, villa-studded and with gardens laid out in bird’s-eye perspective:—Surbiton, dainty in its pretty little road-side station, all garnished with roses and shell-walks:—Farnborough, where a large proportion of our passengers, of military proclivities, alight en route for Aldershot, and celebrated of yore for the “grand international” contest with fisticuffs between a British Sayers and a Transatlantic Heenan:—Basingstoke, the great ugly “junction” of many twisted rails and curiously-intricate stacks of chimneys; until, at length, Southampton was reached—a town smelling of docks and coal-tar, and dismal in the evening gloom.

Not a feature of the landscape on my way down was lost to me; although, as I’ve said, I was thinking of Min all the time the train was speeding on.

I was wondering within myself, in a duplicate system of thought, when I would see the scene again, in all its variations, as I saw it clearly, now; and whether the green meadows, and fir-summited hills, and shining water-

courses that wandered through and around them—nay, whether the very telegraph posts and wires, and the country stations we rattled past so quickly and unceremoniously, as if they were not worth stopping for—would look the same on my coming back to England and my darling once more!

But, I was not sad or down-hearted.

Her last words had rendered me almost as hopeful as she professed to be; so, in spite of my great grief at our parting, a grief which was too deep for words, I was endeavouring more to look forward sanguinely to the future than dwell on all our past unhappiness—which I tried to put away from me as a bad dream.

I was only musing, that's all.

It is impossible to keep one's mind idle, you know; for, even when engaged in an abstract contemplation of the most engrossing theme, the fancy *will* stray off into by-paths that lead to strangely dissimilar ideas and very disconnected associations.

As the German steamer in which I was going to New York did not start until next day, I put up for the night at Radley's—that haven of shore-comfort to the Red-Sea-roasted, Biscay-tossed, sea-sickened Indian warriors returning home by the P and O vessels—where, you may be sure, I met with every attention that my constitution required in the way of rest and refreshment; and, at midday on the morrow, embarking on board the stately *Herzog von Gottingen*, I passed through the Needles, outward-bound across the Atlantic to the "New World" of promise!

Ocean voyages are so common now-a-days that they are not worth mentioning.

Mine was no exception to the rule; the only noticeable point that I observed being the rare courageous temperament of the Teutonic ladies, and the undaunted spirit they displayed in "fighting their battles o'er again" at the saloon table, in despite of the insidious attacks of Neptune. No matter how frequently the fell malady of the sea should assail them—at breakfast, or lunch, or dinner, or at any of the other and many meals which the ship's caterer thought necessary to our diurnal wants—these delicate fair ones would "never say die," on having to beat a precipitate retreat to their cabins. They would return again, I assure you, in a few minutes, to resume the repast which had been temporarily interrupted; smiling as if nothing had happened, and showing, too, that nothing *had* happened, to seriously interfere with their deglutinal faculties!

This was not my first voyage—I did not tell you so before?

Well, suppose I did not; don't you remember my saying that I was not aware of being under any obligation to you which would make me regard you as the receptor of *all* my secrets?

This was not my first voyage, I say; consequently, ship-board life was no novelty to me—nor the Atlantic Ocean, either, for that matter. I was used to the one, I had seen the other previously. I was as much at home to both, in fact, as I had been in the vicarage parlour standing beside dear little Miss Pimpernell's old arm-chair in the chimney corner!

I love the sea, in rest or unrest.

It is never monotonous to me, as some find it; for I think it ever-changing, ever new. I love it always—under every aspect of its kaleidoscopic face.

When, bright with mellow sunshine, it reflects the intense blue of the ocean sky above, with a brisk breeze topping its many-furrowed waves—that are racing by and leaping over each other like a parcel of schoolboys at play—and cutting off sheets and sparkling showers of the prismatic foam that exhibits every tint of the rainbow—azure and orange, violet, light-green, and pale luminous white,—scatters it broadcast into the air around; whence it falls into yeasty hollows, a sort of feathery snow of a fairy texture, just suited for the bridal veils of the Nereides—only to be churned over again and tossed up anew by the wanton wind in its frolicsome mirth.

Or, when, in a dead calm, it appears to lie sleeping, heaving its tumid bosom in occasional long-drawn sighs—that make it rise and sink in rounded ridges of an oily look and a leadeny tinge, except at the equator, where they shine at midday like a burnished mirror.

Or, again, when storm-tossed and tempest-weary, it rages and raves with all its pent-up fury broken loose—goaded to frenzy by the howling lashes of Aeolus and the roar of the storm-fiend. Then it is grand and awful in its majesty; and when I see it so it makes me mad with a triumphant sense of power in overriding it—as it boils beneath the vessel's keel, longing to overwhelm it and me, yet impotent of evil!

Whether in calm or in storm—at dawn of day, with the rosy flush of the rising sun blushing the horizon up to the zenith, or at night, with the twinkling stars shining down into its sombre depths and the recurring flashes of sheet lightning lighting up its immensity, which seems vaster as the darkness grows—it is to me always attractive, ever lovable.

In its bright buoyancy it exhilarates me; in its calm, it causes me to dream; and, in its wild moods, when heaven and sea appear to meet together in wrestling embrace, I can—if joyous at the time—almost shout aloud in ecstasy of admiring awe and kindred riot of mind; while, should I feel sad during the carnival of the elements, I get reflective, and—

"As I watch the ocean
In pitiless commotion,
Like the thoughts, now surging wildly through my storm-tost breast,

The snow-capt, heaving billows
Seem to me as lace-fring'd pillows
Of the deep Deep's bed of rest!"

Did you ever chance to read Châteaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme*?

It is a queer book for a Frenchman to have written, but abounding in beautiful description and startling bits of observation. I remember, one evening on the passage out, when it was very rough, having a particular sentence of this work especially called to my mind. It was that in which the author discourses on the Deity, and says,—

"I do not profess to be anything myself; I am only a solitary unit. But I have often heard learned men disputing about a chief originator, or prime cause, and I have never been able to comprehend their arguments; for I have always noticed that it is at the sight of the stupendous movements of nature that the idea of this unknown supreme 'origin' becomes manifested to the mind of man."

This sentence was the more impressed on my memory, from the fact, that, on the very same evening, while reading the appointed portion of the Psalms out of the little Prayer-book which Min had given me—a duty that I had promised her to perform regularly every day—I came across a verse, which, in different language, expressed almost the very same thing. It was the one wherein David exclaims, "They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters, these men see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep!"

Our voyage was uneventful, beyond this one instance of rough weather—when, throughout the night, as the steamer pitched and heaved, rolling and labouring, as if her last hour was come, the screw propeller worked round with a heavy thudding sound, as if some Cyclops were pounding away under my bunk with a broomstick to rouse me up, my cabin being just over the screw shaft. It went for awhile "thump:—thump! thump, thump, thump! Thump:—thump! Thump, thump, thump!" with even regularity; and then would suddenly break off this movement, whizzing away at a great rate, as the "send" of the sea lifted the blades out of the water, buzzing furiously the while like some marine alarm clock running down, or the mainspring of your watch breaking!

In the morning, however, only the swelling waves—that were rapidly subsiding—remained to remind us of the gale; and, from that date, we had fine weather and a good wind "a-beam," until we finally sighted Sandy Hook lightship at the foot of New York Bay.

We did this in exactly ten days from the time of our "departure point" being taken, off the Needles.—Rather a fair run on the whole, when you consider that we lost fully a day by the storm, compelling us as it did, not only to slacken speed, but also to reverse our course, in order to keep the vessel's head to the sea, and prevent her being pooped by some gigantic following wave—as might have been the case if we had kept on before it, as the unfortunate *London* did, a short period before.

My first impressions of "the Empire city," as the proud Manhattanese fondly style it, were, certainly, not favourable; rather the contrary, I may say at once, without any "beating about the bush."

You see, I landed on a Sunday. It was likewise wet—a nasty, drizzling, misty morning, fit to give you the blues with its many disagreeables and make you bless Mackintosh, while cursing Pleiads. Now, either of these two conditions—I do not refer to the act of benediction or its reverse, but to the fact of its being Sunday and wet—would have been sufficient to detract from the attractive merits of any English town; how much more, therefore, from those possessed by the great cosmopolitan metropolis of Transatlantica? This city is in bad weather a hundred-fold more desolate than London, in an aesthetic sense, and that is saying a good deal; and, on a Sunday, through the absence of any Sabbatarian influences and the working of teetotal tastes, it is more outwardly dull and inwardly vicious than any spot north of Tweed—Glasgow, for example, where the name of the illustrious Forbes Mackenzie is venerated!

To commence with, during the early morning we had warped into dock at Hoboken, the Rotherhithe—and, in some respects, Rosherville—of New York, being situated on the opposite side of the river; and here, the *Herzog von Gottingen* lay, with her bowsprit jammed into a coal shed and her decks, aforesaid so white and clean, all bespattered with dirt, and encumbered with hawsers and cables. These latter coiling and uncoiling themselves here, there, and everywhere, like so many writhing sea-serpents, and, tripping you up suddenly just when you believed you had discovered a clear space on which you might stand without imperilling your valuable life.

Besides, the crew were engaged in getting up luggage from the lower hold by the aid of a donkey engine, which made a great deal of clattering fuss over doing a minimum amount of work—in which respect it resembled a good many people of my acquaintance, by the way. It was not pleasant to have the iron-bound cover of a heavy chest poked into the small of one's back without leave or licence, and the entire article being subsequently deposited on one's toes! No, it was not. And, to make matters worse, the escape steam, puffing off in volumes from the waste pipe in a hollow roar of relief at being no longer compelled to earn its living, was condensing an additional shower for our benefit—that was not more agreeable, in consequence of being warm—as if the drizzling rain that was falling was not deemed sufficient for wetting purposes!

After settling matters with the Custom House, and crossing the ferry from Hoboken, myself and all my goods packed in a hackney carriage hung on very high springs—like the old "glass coaches" that were used in London during the early part of the century, although, unlike them, drawn by a pair of remarkably fine horses—my drive through the back slums of New York to one of the Broadway hotels was not of a nature to dispel my vapours.

The lower parts of the town, adjacent to the Hudson, are about as odoriferous and architecturally beautiful as a sixth-rate seaport in "the old country." While, as for Broadway itself—that much be-praised-boulevard—Broadway, the "great," the "much pumpkins, I guess"—to see which, I had been told by enthusiastic Americans, was to behold the very thirteenth wonder of the world!—Well, the less I say about it, perhaps the better!

If you are still inquisitive, however, and would kindly imagine what your feelings would be on beholding Upper Oxford Street on a November day—with a few draggling flags hung across it, one or two “blocks” of brown-stone buildings interspersed between its rows of uneven shops, and a lofty-spired church, like Saint Margaret’s, jutting out into the roadway by the Marble Arch—you will have a general idea of my impressions when first looking at the magnificent thoroughfare that our cousins love.

It has evidently secured its reputation, from being the only decent street in New York—just as Sackville Street in Dublin is “a foine place entirely,” on account of its being the only one of any respectable length or width in the city on the Liffey—if you will kindly permit the comparison for a moment?

I was disappointed, I confess.

Ever since boyhood I had pictured America, and everything belonging to it, from Fennimore Cooper’s standpoint. I thought I was going to a spot quite different from any locality I had previously been accustomed to; and, lo! New York was altogether commonplace. Nothing original, nothing tropical, nothing “New World”-like about it. It was only an ordinary town of the same stamp as many I have noticed on this side of the water—a European city in a slop suit—“Yankee” all over in *that* way!

In regard to its extent, which I had been led to believe was quite equal to, if not surpassing, our metropolis, I found that I could walk from one side of it to the other in half an hour; and traverse its length in twice that time—the entire island on which it is built being only nine miles long. “Why,” thought I, when I had arrived at this knowledge, “some of our suburbs could beat that!”

When bright days came, Broadway undoubtedly looked a little better—Barnum’s streamers, “up town,” floating out bravely over the heads of the “stage” drivers—but I was never able to overcome my first impressions of it and New York generally; and, to make an end of the matter, I may say now, that the longer I stayed in the “land of the settin’ sun,” north, south, east, and west—I had experience of all—the less I saw to like in it.

The country and the scenery are well enough; but the people!

Ah! if the Right Honourable John Bright and other ardent admirers of everything connected with the “great Republic” on the other side of the ocean, would but go over, as I did, and study it honestly from every point of view for three years, say, they *must* come to a different opinion about the nation which they are so constantly eulogising at the expense of their own!

Don’t let them merely run over to see it in gala trim, however, and have its workings explained only to them through a transatlantic section of the same clique of which they are members at home; but let them go in a private capacity and see things for themselves, mixing amongst all classes of the American community, and not only in one circle.

They won’t, though.

The Manchester manufacturer of “advanced views” visits the Massachusetts manufacturer;—and, derives all *his* knowledge of America and her institutions from him. The trades’ union delegate of England palavers with the working-men’s societies of the eastern states; whence he gets *his* information of Transatlantic polemics. The ballot enthusiast over here talks, and only *talks*, mind you! with the believer in the ballot over there; and so arrives at *his* conclusions on the subject of secret voting—and then, all these return to this “down-trodden,” “aristocracy-ridden,” “effete old kingdom,” and prate about the glorious way in which their several theories work across the ocean—not one of them having resided long enough beneath the stars and stripes to be able to judge of the truth of what they allege, as they are quite contented to take for gospel the hearsay with which they bolster up their own opinions!

If these respective persons would only go out and live, I say, for three years consecutively in the States, and move about outside of their respective bigotted grooves, they would find out, in time, that, the boasted free, liberty-loving, advanced, progressive commonwealth on the other side of “the big pond,” is?—one of the most despotic, intolerant, morally-and-politically-rotten republics that ever existed, bar none!

What will your ballot-advocate—who anathematizes “Tory coercion,” and is continually urging into notice the “purity of election” that characterizes the system of our “cousins”—say, to the fact, that one party of “free and enlightened citizens” of the model cosmos of his admiration regularly sell their votes to the highest bidder; while, another set, under a military despotism, are compelled to exercise the franchise only in a manner pleasing to a dominant faction? What will your Democratic Dilke, or Ouvrier Odger—who may, in this “speech-gagged,” “oppressed” country, heap scurrilous abuse on royalty and overhaul the washing bills of her Majesty without let or hindrance—say, for the “liberty of speech” on the other side; where, if they were to utter a word in favour of the conquered Confederates, amongst a certain school of “black republicans,” they would run the risk of having a revolver bullet in their epigastric region before they knew where they were?

How would your communistic enthusiast, who bawls out about the equality of all men, like to see, as I have seen, “respectable culled pussons,” representatives of the beloved “man and a brother,” *wearing livery*, the “badge of servitude,” which is only supposed to be donned by the “menials of European tyrants?” And yet, these darkey flunkies are in the service of free and equal citizens of a “Great Republic,” strange to say!

What does your Manchester “Spinning Jenney,” the earnest upholder of free trade, say to the “Protection” policy of his congeners in the States?

How can he reconcile his statements *here* with facts *there*?

Where is the “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,” now, when you really come to dive below the surface, and see things as they are in America, eh?—

But, bless you, these reformers will *not* so regard the objects of their veneration. They will only see them in the light in which they choose to see them; and would swear black was white in order to answer their purpose!

Your true radical or republican—the name “liberal” is a misnomer—is, as I have often heard the vicar say, one of the most intolerant, illiberal persons under the sun. His idea of freedom, is, that everybody should be free to do as *he* pleases:—if they object to his programme, they are evidently not sufficiently “advanced” to suit him! His liberty of speech, is, for himself to spout away ad libitum on his hobby, and everybody else who may not agree with him to hold his tongue! His theory of equality is, for all above him in station to be brought down to *his* level, and then, for *him* to remain cock of the walk!

I have studied the animal. That’s his view of it, depend upon it! He will not be convinced. He will not even “argue the point,” nor listen to a word said on the side contrary to that which he espouses. He has *his* opinions, he says; and will stick to them, right or wrong—notwithstanding the home truths that may lie in those of others opposed to him. Dogged, certainly:—liberal, no! Do you doubt what I say?—Let us go to particulars then.

Your candid disestablishers, for instance,—will they meet your outspoken churchmen, who stand up for the old faith in the constitution, on an open platform; and discuss the question of a national church on a common footing, where both its opponents and its supporters can be heard?

Will your would-be-republican, foregathering at some Hole-in-the-Wall meeting, allow a conservative speaker to say a word in opposition to his progressive puerilities? Your teetotal-alliancer, in a quorum of water-drinkers, will he *let* a licensed victualler utter a protest against his scheme for universal abstinence?

No.

Each and all of these several cliques are, in common with all cliques, narrow-minded and intolerant. They prefer being kings of their respective small companies and enjoying the mutual admiration of a packed assembly, to coming out boldly like men and letting the pros and cons of their schemes be ventilated in free discussion at genuine meetings, composed of diverse elements.—Do you want any further proof?

I confess, I don’t like republics or republicans. Once upon a time, before seeing how they worked, I undoubtedly had a leaning towards the “liberalism,” as I thought it, of this school; but a thorough exposure of the “institution” and the character of its partisans in America and in France have completely opened my eyes to their real nature.

Were I asked, now, to define a republic, I should say that it was a general scramble for power and perquisites, by a lot of ragged rascals with empty pockets, who have everything to gain by success, and nothing to lose by failure.—A sort of “rough and tumble” fight, in which those with the easiest consciences, the loudest tongues and the wildest promises, come to the fore, letting “the devil take the hindmost!”

It is a so-called commonwealth, wherein the welfare of the mass is subordinated to party spirit; and in which each aspirant for place and power, well knowing that his chief ambition is to “feather his own nest” without any afterthought of patriotism, kicks down his struggling brother—likewise on the lookout for the loaves and fishes of office—ostracising him, if he doesn’t put up with the treatment quietly!

I may be wrong, certainly, and I’m open to argument on the point, but I like our old system best. I infinitely prefer a gentleman with a reputation, to a snob with none; and a clean shirt to a dirty one! and if you allow that I possess the right of selecting my future rulers, I would much rather have those whom birth and education have taught at least toleration, than a parcel of grubby-nailed democrats, innocent of soap-and-water, who wish to choke their one-sided creed, willy-nilly, down my throat, in defiance of my inclinations and better judgment; and whose sole interest in “their fellow man” is centred in the problem—how to line their own pockets at his cost, in the neatest way!

“Sans culottes” and the “Bonnet Rouge” for those who like them; but, as a matter of choice, I prefer a pair of decent “inexpressibles” and a Lincoln and Bennett “chapeau!” As the elder Capulet’s first scullion sagely remarked to his fellow-servant—

“When good manners shall lie all in one or two men’s hands, and they unwashed too, ’tis a foul thing!”

There are men calling themselves “politicians”—save the mark! that would have us pull down the old constitutional machine, (lumbering it may be,) which has served our purpose for generations, and whose working and capabilities we have tested some odd thousand years; to replace it with the newfangled gimcrack model which is continually getting out of gear across the Atlantic; and I have no patience with them. I do not particularly desire to run America and its people down; but, when we are in the habit of criticising the deeds and doings of our continental neighbours, without much reticence as to our likes and dislikes, I do not see why any especial immunity should be placed over Americans to taboo them from honest judgment!

I must say that when I hear and read the fulsome admiration that it has been the fashion of late to express and write concerning our so-called “cousins,” it fairly makes my blood boil. If nobody else *will* “take the gilt off the gingerbread,” why shouldn’t I try to do so?

The truth of the matter, with regard to America, is that the Columbian eagle makes such a tremendous cackling over every little *egg* it lays, that we cis-Atlantic folks rate its achievements much higher than they deserve!

We do not kick up a fuss about our general proceedings; consequently, we imagine something very great must have happened to cause the Bird o’ Freedom to burst into such gallinacious paeans of delight.

The “advancement” of the first Republic, you say?—Why, it has taken over a hundred years to grow, and it *ought* to be arriving at maturity by this time!

The determination of its citizens displayed in crushing out secession?—They took four years to do it in, although they had an army and navy provided to their hand, and were receiving recruits in hundreds from the masses of incoming emigrants, up to the very end of the struggle; while, the Southerners had to improvise everything, and their forces dwindled down day by day.

We put down the Indian mutiny in 1857 with a little handful of troops, that had to confront thousands upon thousands of insurgent Hindoos before a single reinforcement could arrive from England:—*we* never triumphed so loudly about what we did on that occasion; and yet, our campaign against the Sepoys was fought over a far more extended territory than the war for the “Union.”

Their progress, you remark?

Pooh, my dear sir! One would almost think, to hear you talk, that the old world had stood still in sheer astonishment ever since the “new” was ushered into being!

Granted, that a few wooden shanties are run up “out west” on the prairies, and styled “towns,” and that these towns grow into “cities” by-and-by:—what then? Are there not miles of streets, and houses without number, added to London, and other little villages over here every year, which do not attract any comment—except in the annual report of the Registrar General?

Their Union Pacific Railway, connecting New York with Saint Francisco; and hence abridging the distance between Europe and Asia!

A “big thing,” certainly; but have you forgotten our Underground line, and the Holborn Viaduct, and the Thames Embankment—either and all of which can vie with the noblest relics of ancient Rome?

Bah! Don’t talk to me in that strain, please. Has not France also achieved the Suez Canal, and Italy the Mont Cenis tunnel—both works surpassing any feat of Transatlantic engineering ever attempted. Why, their Hoosaic tunnel, which is not near the size of the Alpine one, and which has been talked of and worked at for the last twenty years, is not yet half completed! Have we not, too, run railways through the jungles of India, and spanned the wastes of Australia with the electric wire?

Ha! while alluding to telegraphs, let us instance the Atlantic cable. *That* strikes nearer home, doesn’t it? Originated as the idea was by an American, Cyrus Field—to whom may all honour be given—can you inform me which country is entitled to take credit for its success—slow England or smart America?

You won’t answer, eh? Then I’ll tell you.

The company that conducted that undertaking to a triumphant issue—was got up in London, and formed mostly of Englishmen. The money that paid for the ocean cable—came out of the pockets of English shareholders. English manufacturers constructed it:—English artisans fashioned it; and an English ship, the largest ever built, manned by an English crew, laid it. There! what do you say to that now, eh?

“Caved in?”

I guessed so. Thought *we* “could crow some, I reckon.”

But, I will say no more on the subject. I have allowed you to have the free benefit of my opinions—such as they are—at your private valuation, no discount allowed!

You don’t seem pleased—what is it that you say?

You want to hear about my doings; and not my opinions?

Bless me! How very impatient you are. I was only just going to continue my story!

How can you hear about me without hearing my opinions also?

I dare say they may not appear palatable to you. There is no accounting for tastes; and, as you probably know, “*veritas odium parit!*”

Still, you cannot separate a man and his opinions; they are inseparable.

Fancy an individual without an opinion of his own!

Why, he would be a nonentity—a thing!

Don’t talk nonsense.

Chapter Ten.

A Hard Fight.

Across the wide Atlantic—
It drives me almost frantic,
To watch the breakers breaking, and hear their dull, low roar!—
My soul is winging madly;

And my eyes are peering sadly,
As I span the long, long distance from my home-girt shore!

I was disgusted with America in more ways than one.

Being of a hopeful, castle-building temperament, I had sanguinely thought that I would meet with employment there at once; and, be able to master in some unknown, mysterious way, the great art of money-making, on the very instant that I landed in the New World!

I really imagined it, I think, to be an enchanted place, where every newly-arrived person became magically changed into a sort of Midas on a small scale; transforming everything he touched, if not into gold—the days of California were now over—at all events into Washington “eagles,” or Mexican silver dollars, or even greenbacks, which were better than nothing, although greasy and not acknowledged at their nominal value.

Upon my word, I really believe that that was my secret opinion concerning America before I actually crossed the Atlantic!

Probably, I would not have told you so had you asked me then; but I think that was my real idea about it. It was to me an Eldorado, where ill-luck was undreamt of; and where I should be able to heap up riches without the slightest out-of-the-way exertion on my part, in an incredibly short space of time:—riches that would enable me to return home, in the character of a millionaire, in a year or two at the outside, and claim Min’s hand from the then-unresisting Mrs Clyde!

Was I not a fool? Pray, say so, if you think it.—/ won’t mind, bless you! for, I know that there are more such in the world besides myself, eh?

I soon found out my mistake.

Not only was the cost of living excessively high—I had to pay twelve dollars a week for a bedroom in Brooklyn, an adjacent suburb, with “board” of which I did not partake very frequently, through an inherent dislike to bad cookery—but employment of any description was so difficult to be obtained that for every vacant situation advertised in the New York papers there were several hundred applicants, amongst whom an Englishman stood a very poor chance of being selected when competing with native citizens.

Do you know, Transatlantica is about the very worst quarter of the globe for an educated man to go to, who has no scientific attainments, such as a knowledge of chemistry and engineering—which may occasionally stand him in good stead.

For skilled artisans, or those brought up to a regular trade, there are good wages to be had, and constant work; but a “gentleman,” or clerk—unless he intends reversing the whole training of his life, which he will find an extremely difficult thing to do—had far better go and break stones on the highways at home, than think to improve his condition by emigrating to America!

There are some men who can throw off all old associations and the habits in which they have been bred from boyhood, but, not one in a thousand—though I have myself seen an Oxford graduate acting as an hotel tout in Cincinnati and the son of a “Bart, of the British Empire” driving a mud cart in Chicago!—neither of these, either, had been brought down by drinking, that general curse of exiled Englishmen in ill-luck.

I had good introductions; and yet, although I met with great hospitality in being asked out to dinner, I could never get any employment put in my way.

A dinner is a dinner, certainly, and a very good thing in itself—not to be sneezed at, either, in the Empire City, let me tell you; for, there, you can have as neat a repast served, whether in private houses or at the Great Delmonico’s of “Fourteenth Street,” as you would meet with at one or *two* haunts I wot of in the Palais Royale. Still, I leave it to yourself, a dinner is but a poor “quid” to him lacking the “quo” of an immediate fortune—is it not?

Matters began to grow serious with me; for, my income having amounted to *nil* since my landing in the new world, my assets were gradually diminishing. I had only a few pounds left; as my expenditure for lodging alone was at the rate of over two guineas a week; and Monsieur Parole d’Honneur’s loan, which I looked upon only in the light of trading capital, I had determined not to touch on for personal need.

What should I do?

I went to one of the American gentlemen to whom I had been introduced, and laid my position before him. He advised me, as he had previously advised me, to “look about” me.

I had “looked about me” already for some three months—without anything coming of it; however, I looked about me now again, and?—met Brown of Philadelphia!

“Brown of Philadelphia” was one who is known among our “cousins” as a “live” man. Brown of Philadelphia was an enterprising man; he was more: he was a benevolent man. He had a splendid scheme, he told me, for turning over thousands of dollars at once. He had no wish to merely better himself, however. He was a man with a large heart, and would make my fortune too. It seemed as if Providence had specially interfered to prevent his meeting with a partner until I had answered his advertisement! / should be his partner. I need not know anything of the business—*he* would manage all that. What I should have to do, would be, to take care of all the money that came in—a post for which both he and I thought I was peculiarly fitted. And the scheme?—

Perhaps you will laugh when I tell you. It was selling blacking!

There is nothing to be ashamed of in it, though. Have not Day and Martin made a fortune by it, and a name in all the world? Has not many a proud merchant prince risen to eminence on a more ignoble commodity?

Blacking! There is something noble in causing the feet of posterity to shine; and to be the means of testing the standing of a would-be gentleman! Clean boots are an essentiality of society; why should I shrink from the responsibility of helping to produce them?

Well, whether you consider it a lowering trade or not, Brown of Philadelphia suggested our "going into" blacking together. He knew of a place, he said, where he could get it for "next to nothing;" and, as he then pertinently observed, I must be aware that it might be disposed of in New York at more than cent, per cent, profit. So, why should we not embark in it? If we did, Brown of Philadelphia—only he was opposed to betting, on moral principle—was prepared to wager a trifle that we would soon have more "greenbacks" than we should know what to do with!

He had an office already, had my benevolent friend,—"located" in a first-rate part of Broadway. All I should have to do, he explained, would be to put a small sum into the concern—so as to be independent, as it were, and not merely accepting "a big thing" at his hands—and, my fortune was made. If I would contribute, say, five hundred dollars—"a mere song"—we might go joint shares in what would turn out to be a most remarkably go-a-head enterprise; yes, sir!

Strange! But, the amount he mentioned was the exact sum, in American exchange, of my capital—about which, you know, I had previously spoken to him in a friendly and communicative way. It *was* odd, my just having sufficient, wasn't it?—Yet, how lucky, to be sure! And then, there was no necessity for my being acquainted with the business:—he would manage that. My duty would be to take in money—exactly what I liked! That's what took my fancy so amazingly—"tickled" me, as Artemus Ward would have expressed it—so I repeat it!

Brown of Philadelphia was the soul of honour, as well as distinguished for his smartness and benevolence. He did not want to impose on *me*, bless you!

No; on the contrary, he gave me a reference to a large bank "down town," and also to a notorious shoddy celebrity who lived "up" town,—to the former of which I went, making inquiries as to his stability. Certainly, they knew Mr Brown of Philadelphia. Had a large balance at present in their hands. As far as they were aware—must be reticent in commercial matters, you know—perfectly responsible party. Could I have taken any further precaution? I think not, after this statement.

Quite satisfactory, wasn't it?

I did not go to shoddy character in Fifth Avenue, because it was a horribly long pull there in the street "cars:"—thought bank reference sufficient, wouldn't you?

Perfectly satisfactory, I thought; and told Brown of Philadelphia so at our next meeting, when I lunched with him by appointment.

We next went to see the office—our office—in Broadway, afterwards. Just the thing—possibly a trifle small; but then we could enlarge in time, eh? Not the slightest doubt. Brown of Philadelphia and I excellent friends. He dined with me at an hotel that day—at my expense on this occasion.

After dinner, arranged business matters as partners should do, drawing up a deed of associationship, and so on. Brown of Philadelphia produced roll of dollars in "greenbacks" - his share of the capital of our embryo firm. I produced roll of "greenbacks"—my share of capital of embryo firm. Both parcels sealed up; and given into Brown of Philadelphia's custody, as senior partner, to deposit same in our joint names at a bank on the morrow.

Brown of Philadelphia and I then parted with words and signs of mutual respect and admiration; and I hied me to my Brooklyn lodgings in high delight at the fortunate turn in my affairs.

Why, I would be rich in a few months; and then:—

What delightful dreams I had that night!

We were to meet again the next morning punctually at "ten sharp" at "the office."

I was there to the minute, but Brown of Philadelphia wasn't; and, although I waited for him many subsequent minutes after the appointed time, he never came—nor have I clapped eyes on him from that day to this.

Faithless Brown! He robbed me of my belief in human nature, in addition to my hoarded "greenbacks."

The office, I found, had been taken by the keen philanthropist for a week, a few dollars of the rent being advanced by him as security on account. On asking at the bank, which had in the first instance satisfied me of his integrity, the cashier told me that Brown of Philadelphia had drawn out all of his available balance the very afternoon on which I had made my inquiries respecting him; and where he was gone, no one knew!

"Skedaddled," evidently. As for shoddy celebrity, "up town," to whom Brown of Philadelphia had also referred me, said that my friend had swindled *him* a short period before. Good joke, his being given as a reference!

I put the affair in the hands of the police; but they gave me about as much comfort as our guardians in blue would have done.

They said he had gone south. I went to Baltimore after him; but I could not meet him, although I was full of determination and had taken a revolver with me in case Brown might have his "shooting irons" handy!—The blunderbuss that had belonged to the deceased Earl Planetree, and which Lady Dasher had given me as a useful

parting present, I had left behind in England, thinking that such a valuable object of antiquity should not be recklessly risked.

The police then telegraphed for me to come north—while I was enjoying the canvas-backed ducks of “Maryland, my Maryland,” and nursing my vengeance. I came “up north;” but it was of no use. I never saw Brown of Philadelphia again, or recovered my lost capital.

It had gone where the good, or bad, niggers go; and I only hope “Brown” has gone there too!

This misfortune filled up the measure of my troubles, though they were numerous enough already.

To get employment of a regular character, which became more necessary to me now than ever—was as impossible as it had been all along!

Nobody seemed to want anybody like me, in spite of my being not unskilled in foreign languages, and up to clerk’s work—having not yet forgotten the book-keeping which my crammer had crammed into me for the benefit of the “Polite Letter Writer Commissioners.”

I was not actually in necessity, as I had still sufficient funds left to defray my bare living expenses for some months, with strict economy; but I had not come to America merely to exist! I had left home to make my fortune, I tell you; and, how could I be satisfied at this state of things? I was losing time, day by day; and not approaching one whit nearer to the object of my life!

In addition to these reflections, I had found out the truth of the time-honoured maxim, “*coelum non animam mutant qui trans mare currunt.*”—I might go from the old world to the new; but I could not leave my old memories, my old thoughts behind me!

At first, the novelty of things about me distracted my attention.

I was in a strange country amongst fresh faces, all connected only with the present, so that, I had little time to look back on the past.

Besides, I was hopeful of carving out a new career for myself; and hope is a sworn antagonist to retrospection.

But, as I began to get used to the place and people, never-forgotten scenes and associations came back to mind, which I felt were more difficult to banish now, three thousand miles away, than when I was on the spot with which they had been connected.

Oh! how, bustled about amidst a crowd of unsympathising strangers, to whom our domestic life is only an ideality, I longed for the quiet and charm and love of an English home!

I think that your wanderers and prodigals and black sheep, little though you may believe it, appreciate family union and social ties much more than your steady-going respectables who never stray without the routine circle of upright existence; never err; are never banned as outcasts!

The former look upon “home”—what a world does the very name convey to one who has never known what it is!—much as Moore’s “Peri” regarded Paradise, and as the lost angels may wistfully think of the heaven from which they were expelled. Perhaps they overrate its attributes, imagining, as they do, that it is a blissful state of being, for ever debarred to them; but they *do* have such feelings—the dregs, probably, of their bitter nature!

I can speak to the point, for, I was one of this class.

I was a prodigal, a black sheep, a wanderer. One on whom Fate had written on his forehead at his birth, “unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,” and yet, I had the madness, (you may call it so,) to dream of regeneration and happiness!

How many a time had I not pictured to myself the home of my longing. Nothing grand or great occurred to me—my old ambitions were dead.

I only wished for a little domain of my own, where some *one* would look up to me, at all events, watching for my coming, and receiving me with gladness “in sorrow or in rest.” A kingdom of affection, where no angry word should be ever spoken or heard; where peace and love would reign, no matter what befell!

It was a dream:—you are right. I thought so, now, often enough, far away from England and all that I held dear; and, unsuccessful as I always had been, as I always seemed doomed to be!

Happiness for me? What a very ridiculous idea! I was a lunatic. I should “laugh with myself,” as poor Parole d’Honneur used to say!

I knew what sundry kindly-natured persons would say, in the event of my returning to England empty-handed, were I to lead the steadiest life possible.—“Here is Frank Lorton back again like a bad penny!”—they would sneer.—“Reformed from all his wild ways, eh? Really, Mrs Grundy, you must not expect us to believe *that!* Can the leopard change his spots?”—and so on; or else, kindly hint, that,—“when the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be: when the devil got well, the devil a monk was he.”—Oh yes, I had little doubt what *their* charitable judgment would be!

Still, the thought of these people’s opinions did not oppress me much; for I knew equally well that, should some freak of Fate endow me with fame and fortune, they would be the first to receive me with open arms—ignoring all my former social enormities.—Their tune would be slightly different then!

It would be—"Dear me! how glad we are to see him back! You know, Mrs Grundy, that you always said he would turn out well.—His little fastnesses and Bohemian ways?—Pooh! we won't speak of those now:—only the hot blood of youth, you know—signs of an ardent disposition—we all have our faults;"—and so on.

No, I was not thinking much of "society's" opinion; but, of that of others, whose good esteem I really valued. *They* believed in me still:—was I worthy of it?

I thought not.

I doubted myself. Understand, I had no fear of making any new false step in the eyes of the world; or of plunging anew into the dissipations and riotous living of so-called "life," in return for which I was now eating the husks of voluntary exile: young as I was, I had already learnt a bitter lesson of the hollowness and deception of all this!

It was another dread which haunted me.

The vicar had, without in any way making light of them, condoned my misdeeds, telling me that there was more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner, than for ninety-and-nine just persons that had never offended: while, my darling—she who had the most cause to turn from me, the greatest right to condemn—had forgiven me; and bidden me to look forward to the future, with the hopeful assurance that she was certain that I would never give her reason again to doubt her faith in me.

But, the fatherly affection of the one, the devoted confidence of the other, merited some greater return on my part than mere "uprightness of life,"—in the worldly sense of the expression! Surely, they did?

A man's words and actions may be above reproach, as far as society is concerned; and yet, he may not have a particle of true religion about him. Both the vicar and Min, however, were earnest Christians. They were deeply religious, without a suspicion of cant or affectation; and they wished me to be so, too. I had promised to pray to please them; but, had I kept my promise? No, I had failed:—my conscience told me so!

As long as things had gone smoothly with me, I believe I *did* pray—with the faith that my petitions were heard above; but, when dark days came, God seemed to forsake me, and my prayers were cast back into my own bosom. I might repeat a form of words a thousand times over; still, how could I be said to pray when the spirit was wanting?—It was only a jugglery, like the repeating machine in which the Burmese believe, or the beads of irreligious Catholics.

Min had specially pointed out a text of promise to me in the *Psalms*, where it is said, "No good thing shall He withhold from them who lead a godly life;" and, I had hoped in it; yet now, when I saw all my plans fail, this text took away my faith. Everything was withheld from me, I thought; therefore I could not lead a godly life, no matter how strenuously I strove to do so. I was outcast and forgotten! I had gone through the "vale of misery;" but I could not "use it as a well;" for my pools were empty! Instead of my Creator directing my "going in the way," He had left me to stumble forward blindly, until I had fallen into the Slough of Despond,—the sink of unbelief!

How hard it is to find that faith which enables us to pray in the confident belief of our supplications being attended to! I remember once reading a passage in a sermon preached by the Archdeacon of Saint Albans in Westminster Abbey some thirteen years ago, which was now brought to my mind. It was one of a series specially designed "for the working classes," and entitled *The Prayer of Human Kind*. The passage ran as follows:—

"Why do some penitents—penitents really at heart—still groan, and try, by self-infliction and by keeping open their wounds, to appease God, and find no comfort to their souls? Is it not that they have not really taken to their hearts that God *is* their Father in Christ; and that, 'even as a father pitieth his own children, so is the Lord merciful to them that fear him?' Had they, by faith, taken this blessed truth to their souls, they might and would, not in hopelessness and dread, but in trust and penitential love, make their wants known as a child to its parent; they would arise, and in humble compunctions, and not desponding trust, say, 'Father, I have sinned.' They would carry each trouble to him, and say, 'Lord, thou knowest me to be set in this strait, or under that temptation; Lord, deliver me.' 'Thou seest the longing desire of my heart; Lord, grant it.' 'Thou knowest my weakness; Lord, strengthen me.' They would carry and lay their separate cares before Him, and cast them on Him, knowing that He careth for them. They would ask, knowing that they will receive; knowing that an answer that withholds what is asked for is as real, and frequently a more merciful answer, than one that grants it."

Ah! That was the faith I could not fathom:—that was why my prayers gave me no comfort, I suppose. And yet, it is said that God, whom rich men find so difficult of approach, manifests Himself to us more in adversity than in prosperity. I could not believe in this myself; for, when I was successful, I really seemed to have faith, and could pray from my heart; while, now, despondent, it appeared hypocrisy on my part to pretend to bend my knees to the Almighty; I felt so despairingly faithless!

La Mennais says, in his *Paroles d'un Croyant*, that—

"Il y a toujours des vents brûlants, qui passent sur l'âme de l'homme, et la desséchant. La prière est la rosée qui la rafraîchit."

And, again,—

"Dieu sait mieux que vous ce dont vous avez besoin, et c'est pour cela qu'il veut que vous le lui demandiez; car Dieu est lui-même votre premier besoin, et prier Dieu, c'est commencer à posséder Dieu."

The sirocco of sorrow had fanned its hot breath over my soul; but, no grateful spring shower had cooled it through prayer. God, certainly, knows better than we what we should desire; but why does He not instruct us in His wishes?

Perhaps you think this all milk-and-watery talk, and that I do not mean what I say?

But I do. Even those people whom you might think the most unlikely persons to have such thoughts, will have these reflections, so why not speak of them?

Some, I know, believe that all religious conversation should be strictly tabooed in any reference to secular matters. But it seems to me a very delicate faith that will only stand an airing once a week, like your church services on Sundays! I have thought of such things, and I'm not ashamed to mention them.

Acting on my mind at the same time—in concert with these religious doubts, and the consciousness of my unlucky fortunes—was a strong feeling of home-sickness, which grew and grew with greater intensity as the months rolled by.

I got so miserable, that, I felt with Shelley—

“I could lie down, like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care
Which I have borne and yet must bear!”

For what profit did this warring against destiny bring me? Nothing—nothing, but the “vanity and vexation of spirit,” which a more believing soul than mine had apostrophised in agony, ages before I was born.

You may not credit the fact of the Swiss mountaineers pining of what is called “Home-woe,” when banished from their beloved glaciers, the same as Cyrus's legions suffered from *nostalgia*; and, may put down the Frenchman's *maladie du pays*, which some expatriated communists are probably experiencing now in New Caledonia, to blatant sentimentality; but they are each and all true expositions of feeling.

We Englishmen are generally prosaic; but some of us have known the terrible yearning which this home-sickness produces in us in foreign lands. The Devonshire shepherd will weep over the recollections which a little daisy will bring back to him of the old country of his childhood, when standing beneath an Australian gum tree. I have seen a Scotchman in America cherish a thistle, as if it were the rarest of plants, from its native associations; and I know of a potted shamrock which was brought all the way across the ocean in an emigrant ship, by an Irish miner, and which now adorns the window of a veranda-fronted cottage at the Pittsburgh mines in Pennsylvania!

Some of us *are* “sentimental,” you see. I can answer for myself, at least; and I know that the air of “Home, sweet Home,” has affected me quite as much as the “Ranz des Vaches” would appeal to the sensibilities of an Alpine Jödeller!

I got home-sick now. The passion took complete possession of me.

The burning, suffocating heat of the summer “in the States,” caused me to pant after the cool shade of the old Prebend's walk at Saint Canon's; and call to mind those inviting lawns and osiered eyots along the Thames, where I used to spend the warm evenings at home. I thought as Izaak Walton, the vicar's favourite, had thought before me—that I would cheerfully sacrifice all hopes of worldly advancement, all dreams of fortune, all future success, problematical though each and all appeared—

So, I the fields and meadows green may view;
And daily by fresh rivers walk at will,
Among the daisies and violets blue,
Red hyacinth and yellow daffodil;
Purple narcissus, like the morning's rays,
Pale gander grass and azure culver keys.

In the gorgeous Indian summer, when the nature of the New World seems to awake, dressing all the trees in fantastic foliage of varied hue, my fancies were recalled to a well-remembered Virginian creeper that ornamented the houses of the Terrace, where my darling lived; for its leafy colouring in the autumn was similar to that I now beheld—in the chrome-tinted maples, the silvery-toned beeches and scarlet “sumachs” of the western forests.

And in the frozen winter, of almost Arctic severity and continuance, home was brought even nearer to me—in connection with all the cherished memories of that kindly-tempered season. I thought of the old firesides where I had been a welcome guest in times past; the old Christmas festivities, the old Christmas cheer, the—bah! What good will it do to you and I thus to trace over the aching foot-prints of recollection?

I used to go down to the mouth of the Hudson river, that I might watch the red-funnelled Cunard steamers start on their passage to England—sending my heart after them in impotent cravings: I used, I remember, to mark off the days as they passed, in the little almanack of my pocket-book—scoring them out, just as Robinson Crusoe was in the habit of notching his post for the same purpose:—I used to fret and fret, in fact, eating my soul away in vain repinings and foolish longings!

And, still, my fortunes did not brighten—notwithstanding that I hunted in every direction for work, and tried to wean my mind from painful associations by hopeful anticipations of “something turning up” on the morrow. The morrow came, sure enough; but no good luck:—my fortunes got darker and darker, as time went on; while my home yearnings grew stronger.

I would have borne my troubles much better, I'm certain, if I could only have heard from my darling.

There was no hope of that, however, as you know. Even if Min would have consented to such a thing, which I knew she would not have done, I should never have dreamt of asking her to write to me in opposition to her mother's

wishes. It is true that I had dear little Miss Pimpernell's letters; but what could *they* be in comparison with letters from Min?—although, of course, the kind old lady would tell me all about her, and how she looked, and what she said, in order to encourage me?

It was a hard fight, a bitter struggle—that first year I passed in America; and, my memory will bear the scars of the combat, I believe, until my dying day.

Still, time brought relief; and, opportunity, success—so the world wags.

Chapter Eleven.

“Life!”

I hold it truth with him who sings,
On one clear harp, in divers tones,
That men may rise, on stepping stones
Of their dead lives, to higher things!

However grievous and crushing we may consider the trials and troubles of life to be, while they last, they are never altogether unbearable.

The load laid upon us is seldom weighted beyond the capacity of our endurance; and then, when in course of time our ills become alleviated, and the burden we have so long borne slides off our backs, the relief we feel is proportionately all the greater, our sense of light-heartedness and mental freedom, the more intense and complete.

Existence, to follow out the argument, is not always painted in shadow, its horizon obscured by dark-tinted nebulosities! On the contrary, there is ever some light infused into it, to bring out the deeper tones—“a silver lining” generally “to every cloud,” as the proverb has it. So, I now experienced, as I am going to tell you.

The second year of my residence in America opened much more brightly than the miserable twelvemonth I had just passed through might have led me to hope—if I could have hoped on any longer, that is!

Early in the spring, when the warming breath of the power-increasing sun was slowly unloosing the chains of winter—when the rapid-running Hudson was sweeping down huge blocks and fields of ice from Albany, flooding New York Bay with a collection of little bergs, so that it looked somewhat like the Arctic effect I had seen on the Thames on that happy Christmas of the past, only on ever so much larger a scale—I received letters from England that cheered me up wonderfully, changing the whole aspect of my life.

“Good news from home, good news for me, had come across the deep blue sea”—in the words of Gilmore's touching ballad; and “though I wandered far away, my heart was full of joy to-day; for, friends across the ocean's foam had sent to me good news from home”—to further paraphrase it.

Good news?—“glorious news,” rather, I should say!

Yes, I had not only a glad, welcome letter from Miss Pimpernell, in which the dear little old lady made me laugh and cry again; but, I also heard from the good vicar, who was one of the worst correspondents in the world, never putting pen to paper, save in the compilation of his weekly sermons, except under the most dire necessity, or kindly compulsion.

To receive an epistle from him was an event!

And, what do you think he wrote to me about? What, can you imagine, made dear little Miss Pimpernell's lengthy missive—scribed as it was in the most puzzling of calligraphies—of so engrossing an interest, that I read it again and again; valuing it more than all her previous budgets of parish gossip put together, entertaining as I thought them before?

Once, twice, three times?

No, I do not believe you can guess what it was that gave me such delight in the “good news from home,” sharp and shrewd though you may think yourself.

If you will take my advice, you had better treat it as a conundrum and “give it up.”

Don't keep you in suspense, eh?

Well then, I will tell you—here goes.

It is a long story—too long to describe in detail; but the upshot of it was that my kind friend the vicar, cognisant of the sincere affection that existed between my darling and myself, and knowing the suffering that had been caused to us both by the enforced silence which we had to maintain towards each other, had interceded with Mrs Clyde on our behalf; and, what is more, had done so successfully!

There, fancy that! Don't you think I had sufficient reason to be rejoiced?

Min and I were to be allowed to write to each other for a year—as “friends,” a condition of intimacy to which her mother seemed to attach a good deal of point, as she had made it an obligatory proviso to our correspondence. Mrs

Clyde had, in addition to this, tacked on a sweeping clause to the agreement, to the effect that, in case my prospects at the end of the year should not warrant my returning to England and claiming Min as my promised wife—prospects of a short engagement and an easy settlement being also satisfactory—the whole negotiation should fall to the ground and be considered null and void; we, reverting to our original and hopeless position of *soi-disant* strangers or “friends” at a distance, and looking upon the interlude of our letter-writing as if it had never occurred.

I did not give much thought, however, to this ultimatum.

I was too full of happiness at the idea of being allowed to correspond at once with my darling, and hear from her own dear self after the weary months that had passed since our separation. Why, I would be able to tell her all my plans and hopes and fears, conscious that her sympathy would never fail to congratulate me in success; condole with me, cheer me, encourage me, in failure!

And then, her letters! What a feast they would be, coming like grateful dew on the thirsty soil of my heart—sunshine succeeding to the April shower of disappointment that lay on my memory. Her letters! They would be so many little Mins, visiting me to soothe my exile, and bringing me, face to face and soul to soul, in the spirit, with their loving autotype at home!

I was nerved to action at once.

Before the day on which I received the welcome intelligence was one hour older, I had sat me down and penned a hurried sheet of ecstatic rapture to my darling—the first number of our delightful little serial which was going to be regularly issued every fortnight until further notice in time for posting on mail days! I only just managed to catch the European packet, so I could not write a very long letter on this occasion—as I had also to answer the vicar’s and Miss Pimpernell’s communications; but I said quite enough, I think, to let my darling know, that, although she had not been able to hear from me directly before, she had never been out of my thoughts.

You may be sure, too, that I did not forget to send a short note to Mrs Clyde, thanking her for her kindness to us both. Indeed, I *was* grateful to her; for serious consideration of my past conduct had led me to think that she might have only judged wisely in her opinion as to what was the best course to adopt for her daughter’s future happiness. Now, she had amply atoned for her former harshness, as I esteemed it, by her permission for our correspondence; and, notwithstanding that she never responded to my note, I regarded her thenceforth in the light of a friend.

On reading over the vicar’s letter after getting this happy business concluded, I saw—what had escaped my notice at first—that he had not been content with merely exerting his influence with Mrs Clyde for my benefit. His good offices had gone much further. He had again spoken for me to his patron, the bishop—who, you may recollect, was the means of my getting that appointment to the Obstructor General’s department; and my old friend wrote that they had great hopes of being able to procure me a nice little secretaryship under Government, which would probably bring me in enough income to marry upon.—Only think!

What do you say to that, eh?

It was true, though; or the vicar would never have expressed himself so confidently.

He added, that it was best for me to remain where I was in the meanwhile, persevering in my resolution of living a steady life, and that all might turn out well for me. He said, that my interests should not be neglected in my absence; and, that there would be no use of my returning until I got something certain.

His words, and this amicable settlement of matters between my darling and myself, awoke a new life in me. I did not despair any longer. I felt that God had at last heard not only my prayers, but also those of her, who, I knew, was praying for me at home; and that, if He had not appeared to grant my former petitions, the answer to them had been withheld for the all-wise purpose of making me look to Him more earnestly than I might have done, if prosperity had rewarded my first effort! Before, I had trusted entirely to myself, never thinking of appealing to His aid.

Now, I assure you, I could have struggled on to the death—even had Fortune still gone against me even in America; but, the fickle goddess alike altered her expression *there*, as circumstances improved for me *here*, so that, I was not called upon to exercise any further endurance in adversity.

My temporal troubles ended as my more serious difficulties disappeared—all being in due accordance with the old adage which tells us that “it never rains but it pours.”

One morning, soon after hearing from England, as I was conning over the advertisement columns of the *New York Herald*, I chanced on a notice which immediately caught my eye. An “editor” was wanted, without delay, at the office of one of the other leading-journals of the city, where applications were requested from all desirous of taking the “situation vacant.” Who could this have reference to, but me?

I thought so, at all events, and “exploited” the supposition.

I did not allow the grass to grow under my feet, I can assure you.

I hurried off instanter to the address mentioned; and, although newspaper men of the New World, unlike ours, are uncommonly early birds, getting up matutinally betimes so as to catch the typical worm—in which respect they resemble the entire business population of Transatlantica—I found, on my arrival, that I was the first candidate who had appeared on the scene.

It was a good omen, for your “live Yankee” likes “smartness;” consequently, I was sanguine of success.

You may, peradventure, be “surprised to hear” of my thinking myself fit for such a post, having had such a slight

acquaintance with literature at home?

That did not dissuade me, however, in the least.

I have so great a confidence in myself, that I would really take the command of the Channel fleet to-morrow if it were offered to me—as Earl Russell proposed to do, when he was simple “Lord John;” and, as a civilian First Lord of the Admiralty has since done, although he possessed so little nautical knowledge that he might not have been able to tell you the difference between a cathead and a capstan bar, or, how to distinguish a “dinghy” from the “second cutter.” I suppose he thought, like Mr Toots, that, “it didn’t matter!”

Conceit, you say?

Not at all.—Only self-reliance, one of the most available qualities for getting on in the world; for, if a man does not believe in himself, how on earth can he expect other people to believe in him?

“Guess” I posed you there!—to use one of my patent Americanisms.

Besides, an American “editor,” if you please, is of a very different stamp to an English one. The “learned lexicographer”—and pedantic old bore, by the way—Doctor Johnson, defined the individual in question to be “one who prepares or revises any literary work for publication;” and, we generally associate the name with the supreme head of a journalistic staff—he who is addressed indignantly as “sir” by those weak-minded persons who write letters to newspapers, and who signs himself familiarly “Ed.” But, at the other side of the Atlantic, the term bears a much wider application, extending to all “connected with the press”—from the “head cook and bottle-washer,” down, nearly, to that bottle imp, the printer’s “devil.”

Political writers; correspondents, “special” and “local;” reviewers; reporters; stenographers, or “gallery” men; dramatic and musical critics; “paragraphists”—the new name for fire and murder manifolders, and other “flimsy” compilers; and, penny-a-liners:—each and all, are, severally and collectively, “editors,” beneath the star-spangled banner of equality and freedom.

Hence, there was not so much effrontery after all in my applying for the position, eh?

The proprietor of the paper whom I now canvassed did not think so, at least; and *he* was the party chiefly concerned in the affair besides myself; so, I should like to know what *you’ve* got to do with it?

He was a “Down-easter,” a class of American I had already learnt specially to dislike—the ideal and real, “Yankee” of the States; but, he spoke to the point, as most of them do, without any waste of words or travelling round the subject—more than can be said for some “Britishers” I know!

He was leaning over the counter of the advertisement office as I entered, settling some calculation of greenbacks with the cashier, and “guessed,” ere I had opened my mouth to explain my presence, that I had come about that “vacancy up-stairs.”

“Been in the newspapering line before?” was his next interrogatory—a very pertinent one; for, Transatlantic journalists, as a rule, manage to try every trade and calling previously to sinking down to “literature”—similarly to some of those bookseller’s “hacks” over here who mortgage themselves to flash publishers when all other means of livelihood have failed them.

When I answered “Yes” to this question, he did not wait to hear anything further.

“Go up-stairs and try your hand,” said he—“we’ll soon see what you’ll amount to, I reckon. We don’t want any references here. We take a man as we find him. Guess I’ll give you twenty-five dollars a week, anyhow, for one week sartain; and then, if we suit each other, we can raise the pile bimeby. Say, are you on?”

I “guessed” I *was* “on;” and, went up-stairs to the paste-and-scissors purlieus with much gusto.

It was a very good commencement for me—I who had nothing to bless myself with before, for, the salary would pay my board and lodging twice over. It was a beginning, at any rate; and, as we subsequently did “suit each other,” my down-east friend behaved very fairly, keeping to his promise of “raising my pile”—a synonym for increasing the weekly sum of “greenbacks” he allowed me for my labours. I had never any reason to repent the bargain—nor did I.

The work I had to do was by no means arduous, although, in many respects, of a novel character. From the fact that my residence in America had not been yet sufficiently extended to enable me to master the ins and outs of Transatlantic politics, the leading articles—or “editorials” as they are there styled—which I had to write were but few in number, and entirely referring to social subjects of local interest; notwithstanding that I was occasionally allowed to enlighten the Manhattan mind in the matter of European affairs. If my special “editor’s” duties were thus light, I made up, however, for their deficiency, by enlarging upon the skeleton telegrams that came every night across the ocean—“expanding news,” so to speak—and by also writing, on the arrival of every steamer, while seated in the back parlour of the journal’s office in New York, the most graphic special correspondent’s letters from Paris and London!

With regard to the telegrams. Half a dozen words only might come over the cable, to say, for instance, that the late Emperor Napoleon, who was the then supposed arbiter of the Old World, had nominated Count somebody or General that to a fresh portfolio; or that, the “scion of the house of Hapsburgh” was suffering from tooth-ache; or that, John Bright was going to Dublin to lecture “on Irish affairs.”

My duties were such, that, when these telegrams appeared, in all the glories of print, the next morning, they had grown in such a miraculous way, that they took up half a yard of room, instead of but a few lines of type. Had you read them, you would have found their contents thoroughly explanatory, entering into the most minute details—as to

how Napoleon's change of ministers would affect "the situation;" how poor Francis Joseph's attack of caries might, could and would raise again the ghost of "the Eastern question;" how the advent of the great Radical leader in Ireland would be the signal for a general Fenian uprising—and, so on.

I *only* mention these cases in point, to describe the way in which I clothed my skeletons with solid substrata of flesh and blood. The public, you see, had only so much the more information for their money—which was, probably, just as reliable as if it had been really "wired" under the Atlantic! Nobody was the wiser; nobody, the sufferer by the deception; so, what was "the odds" so long as they were correspondingly "happy"—in their ignorance?

My correspondent's letters were much more mendacious compositions.

I am quite ashamed to tell you what long columns of flagrant description I was in the habit of reeling off—touching certain races in the Bois de Boulogne, soirees at the Tuileries, and working-men's "demonstrations" in Hyde Park—of which I was only an imaginative spectator!

I used to rake up all my old reminiscences of the boulevards and cafés and prados, giving details concerning the "petit-crèvés" and "cocottes," the "flaneurs" and "grandes dames" of the once "gay" capital—gay no longer; and, interspersing them with veracious reports respecting the latest hidden thoughts of "Badinguet," and vivid descriptions of the respective toilets of the Empress Eugenie, Baroness de B—, Madame la Comtesse C—, la belle Marquise d'E—, and all the other fashionable letters of the alphabet—chronicling the very latest achievements in "Robes en train" and "Costumes à ravir" of the great artist Worth. Even the men folk of America—"shoddy" of course—dote on those accounts of European toilets, which we never see given in any of our papers, excepting where the appearance of the Queen's Drawing-Room may be passingly noted; or, when the *Morning Post* exhausts itself over a "marriage in high life."

When my spurious intelligence was dated from London, I had to draw on a fertile memory for popular rumours concerning revolutionary doctrine, and express a conviction that things were not going very well with John Bull, politically or socially, hinting, also, at the prospect of an early Irish rebellion—and, generally, manufacture similar "news" of a kind that is peculiarly grateful to the jaundiced palates of our English-hating, jealousy-mad cousins over the way.

When Min came to know of this practice of mine, she did not like it. She wrote to me to say that it was acting untruthfully to pretend to correspond from a place when I was not actually there.

The habit was certainly reprehensible, I admit, as I admitted to her; but, then, what can a writer do if blessed with a vivid imagination?

Besides, I had a precedent in Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, you know; and, as Byron says—

"—After all, what is a lie? 'Tis but
The truth in masquerade; and I defy
Historians, heroes, lawyers, priests, to put
A fact without some leaven of a lie.
The very shadow of true truth would shut
Up annals, revelations, poesy,
And prophecy—except it should be dated
Some years before the incidents related."

Even on this side of the water, too, authors have frequently to use their pens as if they did not chance to possess a conscience—one of the worst possessions for any aspirant in the journalistic profession to be encumbered with, I may remark by the way!

You seem to be astonished at my observation? I will explain what I mean more lucidly.

Supposing a journalist belongs to a Conservative organ, he must back up the party, don't you see, at all hazards; and, although in his inmost heart he may have a faint suspicion that Mr Disraeli's popularity is on the wane, it will not do for him to write his leading articles to that effect exactly, eh? Oh, dear no! He has to assert, on the contrary, that "the masses" are loudly calling on *Punch's* friend "Dizzy" to save England from the utter extinguishment predicted by our dear Bismarck the other day at Versailles! While, should your potent pressman, on the other hand, wield the goose-quill of any ponderous or lively daily paper that may advocate "Liberalism," and support the elect of Greenwich through thick and thin, do you think he gives you his candid opinion anent "the people's William" then in power, or respecting that bamboozling Alabama business?

Not he!

Why, he knows, as well as you do, of the tergiversation that has distinguished the entire political career of the Risque-tout Prime Minister; and yet, he has to speak of him as if he were the greatest statesman England has ever seen—hanging on his words as silver, when knowing them all the while to be but clap-trap Dutch metal! Convinced, as he must be, that the Washington Treaty is one of the trashiest pieces of diplomacy that has ever disgraced a government, and that the whole community has been dissatisfied at having to make the Americans a nice little present of three millions of money—in settlement of a claim for which neither the law of nations nor moral opinion held us responsible—he is obliged to argue that it is "a splendid triumph for the ministry," and that the "public is overjoyed" to grease Uncle Sam's outstretched palm!

You know, the deeds of "our William" *must be* bolstered up; lest "waverers" should waver off to the ranks of the "Constitutionalists," and the "great Liberal party" come to grief at the next general election!

So, how can a journalist have a conscience? You see I'm right, and that I had some excuse for my foreign correspondence of American origin.

I lay the whole blame of the transaction, however, on the narrow shoulders of my lanky "down-east" proprietor:—*he* is the man to blame in the matter, not I!

After a time, I got tired of this work. I then left the journal on which I had been first engaged—with no hard feelings on either side, let it be mentioned—to join the literary staff of the *Aurora Borealis*, an organ of quite a different complexion, and of considerable notoriety in the empire city, as it was famed for its bizarre sensations and teeming news.

Here my labours became much more extended—my experiences and knowledge of all shades of American life and character the more varied and complete in consequence.

Years before, when at school in England, I had made some acquaintance with shorthand, in order to save me trouble in noting down lectures—for the purpose of afterwards writing themes thereon, as we had to do at Queen's College, under "old Jack's" rule; and, having kept up the acquisition, I found it now of considerable use, for, it caused me to be sent about much more than might otherwise have been the case—to report the speeches of prominent public men, whether they were "stumping the provinces" throughout the Union, or basking in the blazing "bunkum" of the capital at Washington.

What an enormous amount of empty talk have I not had to attend to, noting it down carefully, as if it were of the most vital importance that not a syllable should be lost!

I have listened, with amused ears often, and busy pencil, to the diabolical denunciations of our poor ill-used country, which have long since made famous Senator Sumner—the greatest Anglophobist in the States; hearkened to Horace Greeley's eager utterances, delivered in thin falsetto voice, wherein he urged, as he urged to the last, universal brotherhood and reconciliation between the North and South; heard Andrew Johnson, the whilom president and one of the ablest who ever occupied that position for ages, defend himself against impeachment—that had been promoted through the bitter animosity of a hostile faction—with the eloquence and legal ability of a Cicero and the fearlessness of a Catiline:—

Reported Ben Butler, the ex-general, and now lawyer, of New Orleans, where he attached to himself an infamous notoriety, that will never desert him—"The Beast," as Brick Pomeroy, the western wit, calls him—pelting his prosy platitudes and muddy language at the New York "rowdies," who responded with a more practical shower, of dead cats, and eggs that had seen their better days:—reported Frederick Douglas, the tinted expounder of "advanced Ethiopianism," who regularly tells his audiences—of sympathising abolitioners—that he had been "bought for three thousand dollars when a slave"—a precious deal more than he was worth, to judge by his appearance—although, he somehow always forgets to speak of the present price he asks, for his "vote and interest!"

Reported Miss Anna Dickenson, the female champion, of whom report says that she loveth the forementioned negro advocate even more as "a man" than as "a brother," and who blinks her eyes and rolls out her sentences at such a rate that the one dazzle while the other appal the poor stenographer who may have to "follow" her:—reported Mesdames Susan B Anthony—please notice the "B"—and Cady Stanton, besides a host of other strenuous assertors of "woman's rights" and male wrongs—in respect of petticoat government, "free love," and various similar amiable, progressional theories that mark the advancement of our Transatlantic sisterhood!—Yes, I have reported each and all of these as they declaimed to their glory and satisfaction—and my disgust and impatience, when their loquacity has extended to such a length that I have had to sit up all night in order to write out my shorthand notes in time for the waiting press—confound them!

Beyond this, I have "interviewed" politicians of every school and temper—from Fernando Wood, the chief "wire puller" of swindling Tammany Hall, up to doughty, tongue-tied General Grant, the "useless slaughtering" commander of the northern forces during the civil war—having had the pleasure of learning from the former how "logs" are "rolled" in the furtherance of party ends; and, from the latter, although the information only came out in dribbled monosyllables in answer to gently disguised questions, for the reticent warrior can hardly put two words of a sentence together, that he had been "bred up a farmer," and, considered himself "more fit" for "that state of life" than any other—in which opinion, as he has never been publicly tried in the calling, I cordially agree with him.

I have, likewise, "interviewed" prize-fighters, before they proceeded to take action in some "merry little mill;" Mormon prophets' wives, who had come east to purchase Parisian finery for the after delectation of Utah eyes, and the envy of other polygamous families not so favoured as they; Chinese missions, under the escort of a Burlinghame; condemned criminals, awaiting the fatal noose, and who wished to give their "last speech and confession" to the world; Japanese jugglers, who expressed their opinion of the States—the main object of every reporter's cross-examination generally—in a sort of phonographic language, too, in which the signs were feats of legerdemain and the "arbitrary characters," the butterfly and basket tricks!

In fact, I "interviewed" everybody that was worth "interviewing," and who could be got at to be "interviewed."

Seen life?

I should just think I had. I would not dream of fancying myself in a position to give any trustworthy opinion on the subject of America and its people, unless I had thus mixed amongst all classes of the community during a lengthened stay in the country—although, mind you, your "working-man's friend," and "trades' union delegate," and "Alliance" teetotaller, and "liberal" peer, and disestablishing Nonconformist—tourists all of only three weeks' experience—think they can take in, in one glance, the whole extent of a continent embracing some hundred million square miles, understanding the entire working of the "institutions," of the "great republic" through travelling on a railroad from New York to Chicago!

As you will have noticed, reporters over there are set to very varied work instead of being fixed in any one especial groove as in England.

On the paper, for instance, to which I was attached, all the staff used, regularly in turn, to do the dramatic criticism at the various theatres. We, also, had to report the sermons at all the many churches of various religious denominations on Sunday—whether they were Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Unitarian, Universalist, or other which would tire you to even hear named; not omitting the “Spiritualists,” “Agapemonites,” and the “Peculiar People”—so, as was pointed out in an opposition paper at the time, we “took the devil and the deity on week days and Sundays alternately!”

On the whole, putting the higher class of Americans on one side—I refer to those who mostly belong to the older families, in some instances tracing back their descent to the days of the Puritan Fathers, and who, having learnt culture and refinement abroad, rarely mix in public life in the States—the general faith and morality of our Yankee “cousins” have never been so tersely described as in the “Pious Editor’s Creed” of the *Biglow Papers*, which were written, as you are doubtless aware, by an American, too:—

“I du believe in special ways
O’ prayin’ an’ convartin’;
The bread comes back in many days,
An’ buttered, tu, for sartin;
I mean in preyin’ till one busts
On wut the party chooses,
An’ in convartin’ public trusts
To very privit uses!”

In one speciality, the New York journals, otherwise so inferior, set an example which might be imitated to advantage by their London contemporaries;—and, that is, in their news, the back-bone of an ostensible “news”-paper.

I say nothing for their tone, which is essentially low—exhibiting, as it does, a tendency of rather pandering to the vitiated appetites of the mob than seeking to raise the standard of public taste and public manners; nor, for their literary power and status, as their leading articles are mostly a collection of loose sentences, strung loosely together without method or reasoning, and they frequently display such crass ignorance in the way of blunders in history and geography, as would shock an English school-boy.

But then, their variety of intelligence from all parts of the world, telegraphic and specially written, in one morning’s issue, is greater than you would gather in any one of our dailies in the consecutive numbers of a week!

Take away the leading articles, foreign correspondence, and parliamentary intelligence of our Jupiters of the press; and what have you got left? Only some police reports and an attenuated column of telegrams—solely from France and Germany, or some other part of Europe.

We have an Atlantic cable; what news of America do our newspapers publish through its means? Simply the rise or fall in the value of gold, and the price of Erie and other shares! We have a telegraph line to India:—of course, we get general intelligence, of interest to all people, respecting our great eastern, empire? No, we only hear what “shirtings” and cotton goods generally realise at Calcutta; and, the current rupee exchange of Bombay!

It is the same case with regard to Australia and elsewhere.

Although we have ample means of communication, the reading public know no more now about what is going on in “Greater Britain” than it did before the days of steam and telegraphs—comparatively-speaking. The Americans, on the contrary, learn every morning the least incident that has occurred in their remotest territory; besides, having European news in abundance—the Atlantic cable being used to an extent which would, judging by their slight patronage of it, send an English newspaper proprietor into a fit!

We in London hardly keep pace with the the doings of our provincials within easy railway distance of the metropolis, much less take notice of our dependencies:—the existence of places without the London radius is seldom brought home to the readers of our daily metropolitan papers, except some “Frightful Murder,” or “Painful Accident,” or “Dreadful Calamity” occurs, to fasten ephemeral attention on them for awhile!

Why, cannot we have such general news as the Americans have every day, in our papers, from all parts of the British empire, as well as that “foreign” intelligence, which is limited mostly to the adjacent continent?

The expense, you say?

Rubbish, my dear sir! Why, in the case of a war, no pains are spared to send out good correspondents of position and ability; no money grudged to bring home information, even if special modes of conveyance have to be organised. Surely, in times of peace, a tithe of this expenditure would not be wasted in making our colonies and the “mother” country better acquainted with each other—to the future benefit of both?

I may be wrong, certainly, for we are all of us liable to error. You know—

“Different peoples has different opinions—
Some likes apples and some likes inions!”

Still, I think that English readers are probably just as anxious to know what is going on in India, in Australia, the West Indies, and others of our outlying settlements—where their relatives and friends, and our country-men, are spreading our nation, our language, and our civilisation—as to hear that Monsieur Thiers has gone to Switzerland, or that Prince

Esselkopf is taking "the waters" at Dullberg on the Rhine! Such, is my opinion—at all events.

But, Min's letters, eh?

I'm just coming to them.

Chapter Twelve.

"Homeward Bound."

There's Jack has made a wondrous marriage;
There's laughing Tom is laughing yet;
There's brave Augustus drives his carriage;
There's poor old Fred in the "Gazette;"
On James's head the grass is growing;
Good Lord! the world has wagged apace
Since here we set the claret flowing,
And drank, and ate the Bouillabaisse.

Min's letters! Ah, how I expected them, awaited them, devoured them!—from the first tender response that came in answer to mine, to the last little darling oblong-enveloped, dainty hand-written missive I received—ere I shook off the dust of the "Empire City" from my New-World-wearied feet, and left Sandy Hook behind me!

It would be a vain task, should I attempt to describe to you the agony of suspense in which I watched every week for the arrival of the European mail; for, I'm sure, that Sir Samuel Cunard himself could not have evinced so deep an interest in the safety of his steamers as I did; no, not even if they had been uninsured, and the underwriters declined all offers of "risk" premiums, be they never so high and tempting!

Long before the regular *Scotia*, the *Java*, or the *Russia* could, in their several turns, possibly have achieved the ocean passage, I was on the look out for them; prophesying all manner of disasters in the event of their being delayed; and overjoyed, with a frenzied rapture, should they be signalled in advance of their anticipated time! And then, when they had glided up New York Bay and anchored in the Hudson, how rapidly would my eager impatience bear me to the dingy old Post office "down town," where I would sometimes have to wait for hours before the letters were sorted and delivered!

Should there be none for me, I was in despair—imagining all the various calamities, probable and improbable, that might have happened—although I might have heard from England only a few days previously; while, should I obtain a dearly-prized note from my darling, I was in ecstasy—only to be on the look out for the next mail a moment afterwards!

I was never satisfied.

I remember an official in the Ann Street Bureau asking me one day, what made me "so almighty lonesome" about the "old country;" and "guessing," when I took no notice of his question, that I had "a young woman over the water."

Young woman, indeed! If looks could kill, that inquisitive and ill-mannered person was a dead man on the spot!

I never heard anything so impertinent in my life!

Her letters!

I could almost see, as I read them, the dear, earnest, soul-lit grey eyes, gazing once more into mine; the loving little hand that penned each darling sentence. In fancy, I could mark the changing expressions that swept across the sweet Madonna face, whose every line I knew so well, as, down-bent on the rustling paper, some sad or happy recollection filled her mind for awhile, in detailing those little events of her daily life which she related to please me. She wrote to me easily and naturally, just as if she were talking to me—the greatest charm a letter can have. The written words appeared to speak out to me in silvery intonations and musical rhythm:—the very violet ink seemed scented with her breath!

Dear little Miss Pimpernell had endeavoured to satisfy, as far as she was able, the longing cravings of my heart for any intelligence about Min—how she was looking, if she saw her often, did she think of me, if she was happy or miserable at my absence; but, how little could her budgets compare with the letters I now got regularly, once a fortnight at least, from Min herself—the fountain-head of all my desires!

She told me everything—where she went, what she did, even what she thought—in simple, artless language that made me know her better, in the thorough workings of her nature, than during those long months of our intimacy at home.

I had plenty of news, too; besides information, on sundry little points, which was only of interest to us two.

Nothing passed in Saint Canon's with which I was not made acquainted; and, I now learnt much that Miss Pimpernell had not told, or which I had been unable to make out and understand, through the difficulties I met with in the dear old lady's penmanship.

Her writing resembled more the intricate movements of a particularly sharp-legged and frisky spider, previously dipped in very pale ink, over the pages she laboured at so painstakingly for my benefit, than any ordinary

calligraphy! *She*, however, believed it especially neat and intelligible; and, I would not have undeceived the dear old soul for the world!

In one instance, she had mentioned—so I deciphered the intelligence—something about Horner marrying, as I thought, Lizzie Dangler; but, I now found out from Min, that my Downing Street friend was *engaged* only, not married; and, that the object of his choice was Seraphine Dasher, instead of the former young lady—the error being easily explainable in the fact, that all of Miss Pimpernell’s capital letters, with the exception of her “B’s” and “H’s,” bore a close family resemblance to each other; while, the remaining components of her words were composed of a single dash, and besides that, nothing. Hence, arose the mistake of my confounding the two names, both of which commenced with a “D”—which it was a wonder that I saw at all, it being Miss Pimpernell’s weakest capital!

But, I knew now who had really got the handkerchief thrown by the Sultan of Downing Street; while Lizzie Dangler was yet free to bless some more sagacious swain. So, also, was lispng, little, flaxen-haired Baby Blake, whom I had believed much more likely to capture Horner than the Seraph, as she was always chaffing him and making light of his attentions.

However, girls are so deceptive, that, unless you are let into the secret, you can never find out the happy individuals whom they really favour. We men folk, on the contrary, soon contrive to exhibit the state of our feelings to unsympathising outsiders, who laugh at us and deride us thereanent! We are “creatures of impulse:”—they, the most barefaced little dissimulators possible!

Fancy, Horner being married, though!

“Bai-ey Je-ove!” It would be, to me, well-nigh incredible!

Fancy his “popping the question” to Seraphine—who, I’m positive, must have giggled in his face when that interesting operation was gone through; and, then, his subsequent interview with Lady Dasher, who probably detailed for his instruction, how her “poor dear papa” had acted on a similar memorable occasion!

I should only like to learn how many times his eye-glass was really appealed to, to help him out of a sentence; and, how frequently he said “Ba-iey Je-ove!” before the whole thing was arranged and his mind set at ease!

The marriage was to take place very soon—really, all of our acquaintances were getting married, and having their courses of true love to run smoothly for them, unlike Min and I!

After the ceremony was over between these twain, I was told that Lady Dasher—who, now that her two daughters would be “off her hands,” no longer had any necessity to keep up a separate establishment—was to move from The Terrace, with her fuchsias and other belongings, and take up her residence for the future with her first son-in-law, Mr Mawley; the curate being now ensconced in that villa, whose furnishing by old Shuffler, lang syne, had caused me so much jealousy and grief!

Ah! This *was* news.

I chuckled immensely over the idea of the relict of the gin distiller settling down like a wet blanket on the connubial couch of the curate!

Whenever the ghost of “poor dear papa,” in a reminiscential form, was made to walk the earth again, I would be avenged for all the quips and jibes which Mawley had formerly selected me to receive! He would meet with an antagonist now, worthy of his carping, critical metal! I wished him joy of the situation!

Mawley and Lady Dasher together in one house, permanently!

I say no more.

Is it not strange how you may live on and live on in some quiet country spot, or retired suburb, without anything ever occurring to vary the dull monotony of its even existence; and yet, the moment you go away from this whilom, stagnant neighbourhood—which you had got to believe was everlastingly unchangeable—change then succeeds change with startling rapidity:—as you at a distance hear from those friends whom you had left behind—to simmer on there, as you had simmered on, until the end of the chapter?

Of course, from having become more interested with the deeds and designs of those actors that might be connected with the new scenes amidst which you may now be situated, you will not attach such importance to these events as you would probably have done had you been yet living on in the time-honoured routine of your old abiding-place. They are to you, at present, only so many little fly-blows on the scroll of time, so to speak. But, there was a period when you would have regarded them as of the utmost moment; and when, the deaths of people whom you thought would never die, the marriages of those that seemed the most unlikely subjects for matrimony, the flittings of persons of the “oldest inhabitant” class—that you calculated would stick-on there for ever, and their replacement by the advent of new families, whom you would have supposed to be the last in the world to settle down in the locality in question—would have been matters of nine days’ wonderment.

It was so now with myself in, regard to Saint Canon’s.

Horner’s engagement, Lady Dasher’s contemplated removal, the idea of the curate’s incubus—all of which would have once filled me with surprise, astonishment, delight—I only looked upon with half-amused interest.

Even the intelligence that Miss Spight had joined the sisterhood organised by Brother Ignatius, hardly affected me as it would formerly have done.

I belonged to another world now, as it were; and, the announcements of births—Mrs Mawley had already presented her lord and master with a little pledge of her affection—and bridals, and burials, at the two last of which I might once have assisted, hardly awoke a passing interest in me!

I was too far removed from the orbit in which these phenomena were displayed.

I felt that there were not many now in whom I felt concern at Saint Canon's.

No exceptions, you ask?

Certainly, there were exceptions.

I am astonished at your making the observation.

How could I otherwise "prove the rule," eh?

Min told me that Monsieur Parole d'Honneur was as gay and as full of anecdote as of yore. She also told me, too, that the kind-hearted Frenchman having chanced to meet her out one day, long before she had been able to hear from me directly, had, in the most delicately-diplomatic way, led the conversation round to America, so that he might tell her that I was not only well, but doing well!

This was at the time I had written a rapturous note to him, after my first interview with my friend, "Brown of Philadelphia,"—before, you may be tolerably certain, that philanthropical polisher had "sloped to Texas" with the capital Parole d'Honneur endowed me with.

He did not mention that latter fact of his generosity to Min, however; but, she knew of it, for I told her of it when we parted, and she then said that she thanked him in her heart for his kindness to me, and would always "love" him for it—so she said!

The vicar and Miss Pimpernell—also "exceptions,"—I heard, were just as usual; the former as much liked as ever by rich and poor alike, in the parish; the latter, trotting about still, with her big basket and creature comforts for those whom she spiritually visited.

Old Shuffler, too, wobbled on, as he had wobbled on as far back as I could recollect, Min told me; and rolled his sound eye, and stared with his glass one, as glassily as then.

I heard also that "Dicky Chips" was as frolicsome and light-hearted a bullfinch as when Min first had him, and had learnt several new tricks.

But, poor old Catch—my dog—whom I had so loved, had died in my absence; not from old age, for he was but young, having only seen his fifth birthday; but, "full of honours," as every one liked him and respected him who knew of his sagacity and faithfulness, and saw his honest brown eyes and handsome high cast head.

Dear old doggy!

I had had him from the time he was a month old; and he and I had hardly ever been, parted from that time until I went to America.

He used to accompany me wherever I went, by day; and sleep across my room door at night.

He never had had a harsh word from me but once, that I remember; and, that was respecting a certain little matter connected with a stray sheep, about which we happened to differ on the occasion.

Poor Catch! I can fancy I hear his eager bark now. It was a welcome to which I looked forward on my return to England, as only secondary to the pleasure I would have in meeting Min; and, I confess, when I heard of his loss, I mourned him more than I had ever mourned one whom the world calls "friend," before. He was faithful always; changing never. How many reputed "friends" will you find to act thus?

I think that Lord Byron's recollection of his trusty dog must have absolved him from a hundred character blots. Do you remember those lines he wrote to the memory of "Boatswain," on the monument he erected in his honour at Newstead Abbey? I would like them on Catch's tomb, if I only knew where the dear old fellow lies; for, what "Boatswain" was to Byron, so was he to me:—

"In life the foremost friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend,
Whose honest heart is still his master's own,
Who labours, fights, lives, breathes for him alone,
Unhonour'd falls, unnoticed all his worth,
Denied in heaven the soul he held on earth!"

Min's news did not come all at once.

It was spread over an expanse of many months, during which I was rambling over the States;—reporting this speaker and that;—studying "life and character" in every way—from the inspection of negro camp-meetings, where coloured saints expounded doctrinal views that would have made Wilberforce shudder, to participating in a presidential election, wherein I had the opportunity of seeing the inherent rottenness of the Transatlantic "institution" thoroughly exposed.

When I was thus bustling about, amidst so many varied phases of life, I could not very well sympathise with the quiet doings of Saint Canon's.

But, on my return to my Brooklyn lodgings, when once more appointed to regular newspaper work at the office of the journal with which I was connected in New York, the old home longings returned also as strong as ever—stronger, as time went on!

I got in the habit of again marking my almanack, as Robinson Crusoe notched his post, every day; saying to myself the while, that I was brought one day nearer to my darling as the sun went down; one day nearer as it rose on the morrow:—one day nearer to the date of my exile being ended!

I remained in America much longer than I intended.

However, as Mrs Clyde did not carry out her threat of closing our correspondence at the end of the first year of our quasi-engagement, I had still Min's dear letters to encourage me and cheer me on.

I do not know what I should have done without them.

There was no benefit to be derived from my going back until the Government appointment, which the vicar had the promise of for me, should be vacant. But, this, the wretched old gentleman who continued to hold it, would not give up until he reached the age of superannuation, when he would be forced to retire—in which respect he was not unlike many old field officers in the army, and "flag" ditto in the navy, who *will* persist in remaining on the "active list" of both services long past the age of usefulness, to the prevention of younger men from getting on!

O "seniority!"

Thou art the curse of all classes of officialdom in England—"civil" and "military" alike!

By-and-by, however, when my patience had become exhausted, and I was seriously thinking of starting home with the few hundred dollars I had made on the American press, the vicar wrote for me to come.

The old gentleman—might his "shadow never be less," I devoutly wished—had betaken himself to his plough after an arduous official service of forty years. He only retired, however, because he received a pension amounting to his full salary, for which he had striven and kept me out of his shoes so long. Putting the thought of this on one side, the secretaryship was now mine, as soon as I arrived to claim it—the sooner that was, the better, the vicar added, as if I needed any stimulus to return to home and my darling!

What a delightful, darling letter Min sent to me, too!

She told me that I was to start off immediately—"at once, sir,"—on receipt of her tender little missive. She was expecting me, looking for me, awaiting me!

She had learnt all the songs I liked; had prepared the dresses in which I had said she looked best; would greet me, oh, so gladly!

I was to keep my promise and arrive on Christmas-eve, when her mother would be happy to see me; and she—well, she didn't know yet whether *she* would speak to me or not:—it, really, depended whether I was "good!"

I took my passage in a steamer leaving the next day; but, instead of getting home on Christmas-eve, I only arrived at Liverpool a day before the close of the year—six days late! However, I was in England at last, in the same dear land that held my darling; and she would forgive me, I knew, when she saw how glad I was to get back to her dear little self. "Naughty Frank!" she would say—"I won't speak to you at all, sir!"

And, wouldn't she?

Oh, dear no!

All the way up to town from the fair city on the Mersey, the railway nymphs, whom I had previously noticed on my journey to Southampton, were as busy as then, with their musical strains.

The burden of their present song, echoing through my heart, was,—

 "Going to see Min! Going to see Min!
 Going to see Min, without delay!
Going to see Min! Going to see Min!
 Soon! Soon!! Soon!!"

The last bars chiming in when the buffers joined the chorus with a "jolt, jolt, jolt."

As the train glided, at length—after some six hours of reeling and bumping and puffing along, the railway nymphs never slackening their song for an instant, into the Euston-square station—I saw the kind vicar and dear little Miss Pimpernell awaiting me on the platform.

It was just like their usual kindness to come and meet me thus!

I had telegraphed to them from Liverpool, telling them the time when I might hope to be in London; and, there they were to the minute, although I had never expected them, having only informed them of my coming, in order that they might let my darling know that I was on my way to her.

I jumped out of the carriage before it stopped, in defiance of all the company's bye-laws; and, advanced to clasp their outstretched hands. But—

What was it, that I could read in the grave kind face of the one, the glad yet sorrowful eyes of the other, before a word had passed on either side? What was it, that congealed the flood of joyful questionings, with which I went forward to meet them, in an icy lump pressing down upon my brain; and, that snapped a chord in my heart that has never vibrated since?

Min was dead!

Chapter Thirteen.

"Death."

O sweet and strange it seems to me, that ere this day is done,
The voice, that now is speaking, may be beyond the sun—
For ever and for ever with those just souls and true—
And what is life, that we should moan? Why make we such ado?

What! Min dead—my darling whom I had hurried home to see once more, the whisper of whose calling I had heard across the expanse of vast Atlantic in eager entreaty; and whose tender, clinging affection I had looked forward to, as the earnest of all my toils and struggles, my longing hopes, my halting doubts, my groans, my tears!

It could not be.

I would not believe it. God could not be so cruel as man; and what man would do such a heartless deed?

It was false. Could I not hear her merry, rippling laughter, as she came forth heart-joyous to greet me; see the dear, soul-lit, grey eyes beaming with happiness and love; feel her perfumed violet breath as she raised her darling little rosebud of a mouth to mine—as I had fancied, and pictured it all, over and over again, a thousand times and more?

Hark! was not that her glad voice speaking now in silvery accents—"O, Frank!" nothing more; but, a world of welcome in the simple syllables?

Dead!

How could she be dead, when I was waiting to hear from her truth-telling, loving lips what she had written to tell me already—that she trusted me again, as she had trusted me in those old, old days that had passed by never to return; and, loved me still in spite of all?

Dead! It was a lie. They wanted to deceive me. They were joking with me!

Min, my darling, dead? It could not be. It was impossible!

Did they take me for a fool?

I could laugh at the idea.—What did they mean by it?

Min, dead!—God in heaven—how *could* they torture me so!

But, it was true.

I cannot bear to speak of it all now, it unmans me. It makes me, a great strong man, appear as a little sobbing child!

I do not know what went on for days after I realised what had happened to me. I was mad, I believe; for they said I had lost my senses.

And even now, sometimes, I feel as if I were not myself, when I recall the past with all its empty dreams—in which I almost attained to paradise—that were ruthlessly swept away in one fell swoop by the agony of hell I suffered on being conscious of my loss.

No, I am not myself. There is something missing in me—something that completed my identity; and, without which, I am not even a perfect atom on the ocean of time—as I will be nothing in, the labyrinth of eternity!—For,—

"The waves of a mighty sorrow
Have whelmed the pearl of my life;
And there cometh for me no morrow,
To solace this desolate strife!"

When I was able to bear the narration, I was told all.

Min had caught a violent cold only a week before the Christmas-eve on which she expected me; and, in spite of all that science and love could do, she died before the dawn of the new year. She had looked forward to seeing me to the last, hoping against hope. She knew, she had said, that I would keep my word and come when she sent for me. But, when Christmas-eve arrived without my coming, she did not seem disappointed. She then said that God had willed it otherwise—something must have arisen to prevent my arrival—*we would meet again in the Great Hereafter*:—she would leave a message for me, to reconcile me to our brief separation, ere we met once more.

And, with that thought of me in her great loving heart, with that blessed reliance in her Saviour's promise, and with a smile of ecstatic bliss on her lips, she "fell asleep"—without my seeing her, O my God!

Perhaps, on recollecting many of the incidents of my story, and calling to mind the tone and manner in which I have described them, you may have thought me then merry and light-hearted, where now I am moody and sombre?

True; but, life is made up of grave and gay.

It is hackneyed to say that "the clown that grins before the audience, who laugh with and at the merryandrew and his antics, is frequently weeping behind his mask;" yet, it is often the case.

Life is hysterical and spasmodic.

Many of us, believed by surface-studying people to be the gayest of the gay, have in reality a dull, rending pain gnawing us inwardly the while—like as the fox was gnawing the Spartan boy's entrails; and, like him again, we are too proud—for what is courage but pride?—to speak of our suffering. We do not "wear our hearts" on our sleeve "for daws to peck at!"

The "consolation of religion," you suggest?

Bah! How can I be consoled, when I have been bereft of all that made existence dear, receiving nothing in return—nothing but doubt and uncertainty, and a despair unspeakable?

Could comfort accrue to me, when I wandered back along the pathway of memory, catching sunny glimpses of the rosy future which my imagination had marked out, and then comparing these with the dreary outlook that now was mine?

When I think of what might have been and now can never happen, I rave!

I should count my loss a "gain," you say?

I cannot, I cannot!

Saint Paul might have so truly exemplified the position of earthly misery as opposed to heavenly reward; but, I am powerless to give the deduction a personal application.

You tell me to look above, and have faith in the hope of rejoining her?

She is there, I know—that is, if there be a just God, a heaven, and angels in paradise; but, how can I, sinner as I am and as I have been, dream of climbing up to such a height?

It is an impossibility. I dare not hope for mercy and forgiveness. Why, the very angels would scout me; and she, who was always glad of my approach, would now draw aside the hem of her raiment lest I should touch it and defile her!

Do you know, that, the acutest pang that thrills through my heart, arises from the consciousness, that, while she was here, I was unworthy of her—as I would be doubly so were I now able to take the wings of the morning and reach the uttermost parts of heaven where she dwells.

Learn, O brothers! loving, like myself, hopelessly, unsuccessfully:—learn by me, by my blighted life, my lost present, my vanished hopes of heaven, that, the worst possible use to which you can put the divine image in which you are clothed, is "to go to the devil" for a woman's sake! Should she be deserving of your affection, as in most cases she will probably be—ten times more than you are of hers—this is one of the most inferior proofs that you can give of it; while, should she be unworthy of it, as may happen, you are a dolt for your pains—to put the motive of action at no higher level.

And O sister women, daughters of England, fair to look upon, tender-hearted, ministering! think, that although no man that ever lived, but one, is perfectly worthy of a pure woman's love, many an erring brother may be recalled from his down-treading steps to hell, to higher, nobler duties by your influence; as many a soul is damned, both here and hereafter through your default!

Bear with me yet a little longer. I shall soon be done. It is a relief to me thus to unbosom myself. Like Aenone—"while I speak of it, a little while, my heart may wander from its deeper woe."

Min taught me to pray; and I *have* prayed; but, the most fervent spirit that ever breathed out its conscience to its Maker could never hope to undo the past.

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" It was all very well for him who had faced Azrael, and looked upon himself as a dying man, to speak thus!

Beautiful as is the sentiment contained in the words, are they *true*?

I know that a brave man, one who does not credit an eternity and has not the slightest thought on the subject of future salvation or future punishment, can, when quitting the only world of his knowledge, look upon his approaching end with a courage and an apathetic calm which resemble the smiling fortitude wherewith the ancient gladiators uttered their parting salutations to Nero—when, in expectation, they waited for the fatal thumb to be turned down, in token of their doom.

I can well believe that an earnest Christian, likewise, regards his instant dissolution, with equanimity and, even joy—

through contemplation of the everlasting happiness in which he devoutly trusts.

Still, how do both, the irreligious man and the hopeful believer, bear the loss of those dear to them—they themselves being left behind, forsaken, to grieve over their vacant chairs, their despoiled folds?—Has not Death his sting for them; the grave, its awful triumph?—

I do not always speak like this, however; nor are my thoughts ever bitter and despairing.

“Fret not thyself,” says the Psalmist, “lest thou be moved to do evil;” and, I try not to fret when I remember the message my darling left for me with Miss Pimpernell—who watched by her dying bed and told me what she had said, in her very own dear, dear words. It is then that I haunt the old scenes with which her presence will ever be associated in my mind; and, weave over again the warp and woof of vanished days.

The trim market gardens dwindling down in the distance, thickly planted, as of yore; the winding country lanes intersecting, which twist and turn in every direction of the compass, and yet find their way down to the silent river that hurries by their outlets; the old stone, buildings, about whose origin we used to perplex ourselves—all remind me of her and happiness!

The very scent of the hedgerows, a pot-pourri of honeysuckles and roses, and of red, pink and white hawthorn, brings back to me her sayings when we walked and talked together there—long, long ago, it seems, although it was but yesterday.

And, in the Prebend’s Walk memory is more and more busy still, as I pace along its weary length solitary, alone—for, even my poor old dog had died during my absence; and what were those idle, fair-weather acquaintances, whom the world calls “friends,” to me in my grief! I am better without their company: it makes my mind unhealthy.—

So, I walk, alone with my heart and its grief!

The stately lime-trees bend as I pass them by; and, seem to sigh for her who is gone, never to return. The ruined fosse, stagnant and moss-covered, speaks of ruin and desolation. The crumbling walls that once encircled the Prebend’s residence, also reveal the slowly-sure power of the destroyer’s hand, more and more apparent each year that rolls over them.

But, the church, Norman—turretted and oaken-chancelled, is fullest of these bitter-sweet memories of my darling.

All its old-fashioned surroundings appear in keeping with my feelings:—the carved galleries, the quaint, up-standing pulpit with its massive sounding board, the monumental tablets on the walls, the open-raftered roof; and, when, sitting in the high box-pew, where I first saw her, the organ gives forth its tremulous swell—before some piercingly pitched note from the *vox humana* stop, cries out like a soul in agony like mine—I can almost believe I see her again sitting opposite me, her sweet madonna face bent down over her Bible, or upturned in adoration, as I then noticed it!

I feel that her unseen presence is near me, watching me from the spirit world above; or else, hovering by me, to guide my errant footsteps on the pathway to heaven and lead my thoughts, through the recollection of her faith and purity, and love, to things on high.

Would that I felt her presence always:—would that my thoughts, my actions, my life, were such as she would have had them!

It was after I had gone to the old church for the first time—it was weeks before I could have the resolution to go—that Miss Pimpernell gave me my darling’s message; touching with a tender touch on her last moments here.

She told me she had never seen or heard of so peaceful an end as hers—such fervent faith, such earnest reliance on her Saviour. She seemed to have a presentiment from the first, of her death; and, when she was told there was no hope of her recovery, she only grieved for those she left behind; and for me and my disappointment, my old friend said, chief of all.—

“I know he will be sorry,”—she said at the last.—“But, tell him that I loved him and trusted him to the end. Tell him good-bye for me, and to be good—not for my sake only, but, for God’s!”

These were the last words she uttered.

She died, Miss Pimpernell said, with a soft sigh of contentment and a smile of seraphic happiness on her face; and, the face of the dead girl—she added sobbing—looked like the face of an angel in its purity and innocence, and with the stamp of heaven on its lifeless clay.

She is buried in the churchyard where she and I so often mused and spoke of those who had gone before—little thinking that *she* would be so soon taken, and *I*, left desolate to mourn her loss.

Her grave is a perfect little garden.

Loving eyes watch it, loving hands tend it. A little, green, velvet-turfed mound is in the midst, planted round with all the flowers that she loved—snowdrops and violets in the early part of the year, roses and lilies in summer, little daisies always—for she used to say she liked them because others generally despised them.

I go there twice a day, morning and night. Her mother knows of my visits; but, we never meet, even there! She does not interfere with me; and *I* have buried the feud of the past in Min’s grave. *There* my heart finds only room for love and grief, ebbing and flowing in unison; coupled with a hope, which becomes more and more assured, now that I have received her message, that we shall yet meet again in that promised land where there is no death and no

parting, only a sweet forgetfulness of the ills of life, and a remembrance of all its joy—the happy land of which my dream foretold in the early days of our love.

When I breathe the bloom of the flowers that rise from my darling's resting-place in the early summer time, I almost experience peace! Her sainted presence *must* be watching over me, I am convinced; and, my soul expands with a desire and a resolve, so to guard my life, that I may hereafter obtain "the crown incorruptible" that now, I know, she's wearing!

This is in summer.

But, in winter—winter which is connected by a thousand close and closer associations with her, I cannot so be content!—

It was at Christmas tide that I first spoke to her:—Christmas when we parted. On Christmas-eve we were to have met again:—it was Christmas when she died—

—In winter?—

Ay de mi!

Chapter Fourteen.

"Desolation."

As when a soul laments, which hath been blest,
Desiring what is mingled with past years,
In yearnings that can never be exprest
By sighs, or groans or tears;
Because all words, tho' cull'd with choicest art,
Failing to give the bitter of the sweet,
Wither beneath the palate, and the heart
Faints, faded by its heat!

The Christmas bells, they are ringing; but ringing no gladness to me! Ringing, and ringing, and ringing; a death-peal, which fain would I flee.

The feathery flakes are falling from the dull-grey, pall-like sky; falling, and falling, and falling; and, slowly they gather and lie.

The snowy-white mantle it covers, the churchyard and meadow and lea, as now by her grave I am kneeling;—yet, nothing but darkness /see!

The little red robin is carving a cross on her grave with his feet; as he hops from the head-stone and carols, his requiem low and sweet.

All nature is hushed, and the stillness, of earth and of air and sky, though pierced by the song of the robin, but whispers a long "good-bye!"

Good-bye to my darling! 'Tis ended; gone are the hopes of my life—O God! that our fates were blended, and finished this desolate strife!

The End.

[Chapter 1](#) | [Chapter 2](#) | [Chapter 3](#) | [Chapter 4](#) | [Chapter 5](#) | [Chapter 6](#) | [Chapter 7](#) | [Chapter 8](#) | [Chapter 9](#) | [Chapter 10](#) | [Chapter 11](#) | [Chapter 12](#) | [Chapter 13](#) | [Chapter 14](#)

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