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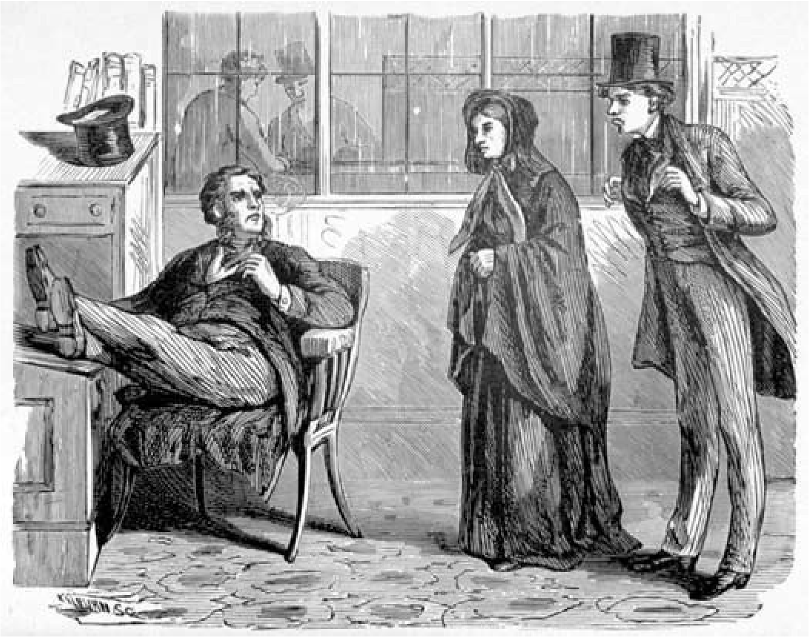
STARRY FLAG SERIES
OLIVER OPTIC

THE STARRY FLAG SERIES,

BY OLIVER OPTIC.

I. THE STARRY FLAG; or, The Young Fisherman of Cape Ann.
II. FREAKS OF FORTUNE; or, Half round the World.
III. BREAKING AWAY; or, The Fortunes of a Student.
IV. SEEK AND FIND; or, The Adventures of a Smart Boy.
V. MAKE OR BREAK; or, The Rich Man's Daughter.
VI. DOWN THE RIVER; or, Buck Bradford and his Tyrants.



THE BANKER'S PRIVATE OFFICE.—Page 199.

MAKE OR BREAK;

OR,

THE RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER.

BY

OLIVER OPTIC,

AUTHOR OF "YOUNG AMERICA ABROAD," "THE ARMY AND NAVY STORIES,"
"THE WOODVILLE STORIES," "THE BOAT-CLUB STORIES,"
"THE RIVERDALE STORIES," ETC.

BOSTON
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MAKE OR BREAK.

TO

MY YOUNG FRIEND

KATE V. AUSTIN

This Book

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

"MAKE OR BREAK," is the fifth of the serial stories published in "OUR BOYS AND GIRLS"—a magazine which has become so much the pet of the author, that he never sits down to write a story for it without being impressed by a very peculiar responsibility. Twenty thousand youthful faces seem to surround him, crying out for something that will excite their minds, and thrill their very souls, while a calmer, holier voice, speaking in the tones of divine command, breathes gently forth, "Feed my lambs."

The lambs will not eat dry husks; they loathe the tasteless morsel which well-meaning sectarians offer them, and hunger for that which will warm their hearts and stir their blood. The heart may be warmed, and the blood may be stirred, without corrupting the moral nature. The writer has endeavored to meet this demand in this way, and he is quite sure that the patient, striving, toiling Leo, and the gentle, self-sacrificing, and devoted Maggie, do nothing in the story which will defile the mind or the heart of the young people. The Bible teaches what they sought to practise. He is satisfied that none of his readers will like Mr. Fitzherbert Wittleworth well enough to make him their model.

The author is willing the story should pass for what it is worth; and there is no danger that it will be over or undervalued, for the young people are even more critical than their elders. But the favor already bestowed upon it has added to the weight of the writer's obligation to the juvenile reading public; and in giving them the story in its present permanent form, he trusts that it will continue to be not only a source of pleasure, but a stimulus to higher aims, and a more resolute striving for what is worth having both in the moral and material world.

WILLIAM T. ADAMS.

HARRISON SQUARE, MASS.,
July 28, 1868.

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MAKE OR BREAK;

OR,

THE RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER .

MR. WITTLEWORTH GETS SHAVED.

"Next gentleman!" said André Maggimore, one of the journeyman barbers in the extensive shaving saloon of Cutts & Stropmore, which was situated near the Plutonian temples of State Street, in the city of Boston.

"Next gentleman!" repeated André, in tones as soft and feminine as those of a woman, when no one responded to his summons.

"My turn?" asked a spare young man of sixteen, throwing down the Post, with a languid air, and rising to his feet.

"Yes, sir," replied André, politely; and if the speaker had been out of sight, one would have supposed it was a lady who spoke. "Have your hair cut?"

"No; shave."

The barber seemed to be startled by the announcement, though there was not the faintest smile on his face to discourage the candidate for tonsorial honors. The young man looked important, threw his head back, pursed up his lips, and felt of his chin, on which there was not the slightest suspicion of a beard visible to the naked eye. Mr. Fitzherbert Wittleworth would not have been willing to acknowledge that he had not been shaved for three weeks; but no one could have discovered the fact without the aid of a powerful microscope.

Mr. Wittleworth spread out his attenuated frame in the barber's chair, and dropped his head back upon the rest. André looked as grave and serious as though he had been called to operate upon the face of one of the venerable and dignified bank presidents who frequented the shop. He was a journeyman barber, and it was his business to shave any one who sat down in his chair, whether the applicant had a beard or not. If André's voice was soft and musical, his resemblance to the gentler sex did not end there, for his hand was as silky and delicate, and his touch as velvety, as though he had been bred in a boudoir.

He adjusted the napkin to the neck of the juvenile customer with the nicest care, and then, from the force of habit, passed his downy hand over the face upon which he was to operate, as if to determine whether it was a hard or a tender skin. Several of the customers smiled and coughed, and even the half-dozen journeymen were not unmoved by the spectacle.

"What are you going to do, Fitz?" asked the occupant of the adjoining chair, who had just straightened himself up to be "brushed off."

"I'm going to have a shave," answered Mr. Wittleworth, as confidently as though the proceedings were entirely regular.

"What for?"

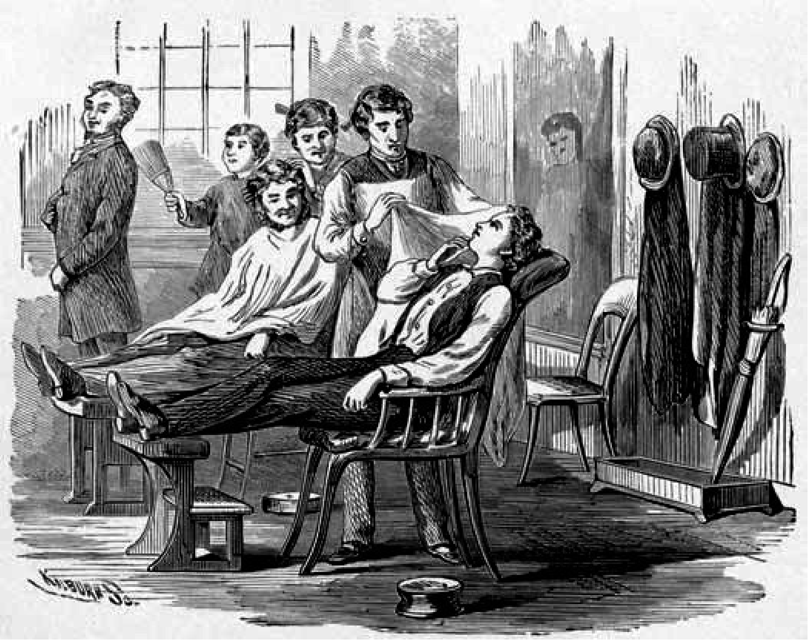
"To have my beard taken off, of course. What do you shave for?"

"Put on the cream, and let the cat lick it off."

"That's a venerable joke. I dare say the barber did not gap his razor when he shaved you. I always feel better after I have been shaved," added Mr. Wittleworth, as André laid a brush full of lather upon his smooth chin.

Those in the shop chuckled, and some of them were ill-mannered enough to laugh aloud, at the conceit of the young man who thus announced to the world that his beard had grown. Even the proprietors of the extensive shaving saloon looked uncommonly good-natured, though it was not prudent for them to rebuke the ambition of the prospective customer.

André lathered the face of the juvenile with as much care as though it had been that of the parsimonious broker at the corner, who shaved only when his beard was an eighth of an inch in length. Not satisfied with this preparatory step, he resorted to the process used for particularly hard beards, of rubbing the lather in with a towel wet in hot water; but André did not smile, or by word or deed indicate that all he was doing was not absolutely necessary in order to give his customer a clean and an easy shave. Then he stropped his razor with zealous enthusiasm, making the shop ring with the melody of the thin steel, as he whipped it back and forth on the long strip of soft leather, one end of which was nailed to the case, and the other end held in his hand. The music was doubtless sweet to the listening ears of Mr. Wittleworth, if not as the prelude of an easy shave, at least as an assurance that all the customary forms had been scrupulously complied with in his individual case.



MR. WITTLEWORTH GETS SHAVED.—Page 14.

Slapping the broad-bladed razor on his soft hand, the barber approached the young man in the chair. With a graceful movement he brought the instrument to bear gently on the face.

"Does it pull, Fitz?" asked the tormentor in the next chair.

"Of course not; André always gives a man an easy shave," replied Mr. Wittleworth.

"Certainly; but some people have tough beards and tender faces."

"If your beard is as soft as your head, it won't hurt you to shave with a handsaw," retorted Mr. Wittleworth.

The laugh was at the expense of the tormentor, and he retreated from the shop in the "guffaw," and Fitz was permitted to finish his shave in peace—in peace, at least, so far as this particular tormentor was concerned, for a more formidable one assailed him before his departure. André went over his face with the nicest care; then lathered it again, and proceeded to give it the finishing touches. He was faithful to the end, and gave the juvenile patron the benefit of the entire length and breadth of his art, omitting nothing that could add dignity or perfection to the operation. It was quite certain that, if there was anything like an imperceptible down on his face at the commencement of the process, there was nothing left of it at the end.

Mr. Wittleworth's hair was oiled, moistened with diluted Cologne water, combed, brushed, parted, and tossed in wavy flakes over his head, and was as fragrant, glossy, and unctuous as the skill of André could make it.

"One feels more like a Christian after a clean shave," said Mr. Wittleworth, as he rose from the chair, and passed his hand approvingly over his polished chin. "Barbers, good barbers, do a missionary work in the world."

"What are you doing here, Fitz?" demanded a stern-looking gentleman, who had just entered the shop, and stepped up behind the juvenile customer.

"I came in to get shaved," replied Mr. Wittleworth, abashed by the harsh tones.

"Shaved!" exclaimed Mr. Checkynshaw, the stern-looking gentleman, well known as the senior partner of the great banking house of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co. "Shaved!"

"Yes, sir; I came here to be shaved, and I have been shaved," replied the young man, trying to assume an air of bravado, though he was actually trembling in his boots before the lofty and dignified personage who confronted and confounded him.

"Is this the way you waste your time and your money? I sent you to the post-office, and you have been gone over half an hour."

"I had to wait for my turn," pleaded Mr. Wittleworth.

"When I send you to the post-office, you will not loiter away your time in a barber's shop, you conceited puppy. I'll discharge you!"

"Discharge *me*!" exclaimed Mr. Wittleworth, stung by the epithet of the banker. "I think not, sir."

The young gentleman placed his hat upon his head, canting it over on one side, so as to give him a saucy and jaunty appearance. Mr. Checkynshaw, whose clerk, or rather "boy," he was, had often scolded him, and even abused him, in the private office of the banking-house, but never before in a place so public as a barber's shop in 'Change Street, and in 'change hours. He felt outraged by the assault; for Mr. Wittleworth, as his employer had rather indelicately hinted, had a high opinion of himself. He straightened himself up, and looked impudent—a phase in his conduct which the banker had never before observed, and he stood aghast at this indication of incipient rebellion.

"You think not, you puppy!" exclaimed the banker, stamping his feet with rage.

"I think not! It wouldn't be a prudent step for you to take," answered Mr. Wittleworth, stung again by the insulting appellations heaped upon him. "I know rather too much about your affairs to be cast out so thoughtlessly."

"I will discharge you this very day!" replied the banker, his teeth set firmly together.

"I think you will find that the affairs of Messrs. Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co. will not go on so smoothly without me as they do with me," added Mr. Wittleworth, as he canted his hat over a little more on one side, and pulled up his shirt collar.

"Without you!" gasped the banker, confounded by the assumption of his employee.

"Perhaps you will find it so, after you have done your worst."

"Conceited puppy! I took you into my office out of charity! Go to your place. Charity can do no more for you."

"If you can afford to discharge me, I can afford to be discharged," replied Mr. Wittleworth, as he stroked his chin, and walked out of the shop.

"The young vagabond!" muttered Mr. Checkynshaw. "I took him to keep his mother from starving. André," he added, imperiously.

The barber with the effeminate voice and the silky hands turned from the customer he was shaving, and bowed politely to the magnate of the house of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co.

"André, my daughter Elinora goes to a juvenile party this evening, and wishes you to dress her hair at four o'clock."

"Yes, sir; with Mr. Cutts's permission, I will attend her at that hour."

Mr. Checkynshaw looked as though Mr. Cutts's permission was not at all necessary when he desired anything; but Mr. Cutts did not venture to interpose any obstacle to the wish of a person so influential as the banker. Mr. Checkynshaw turned to leave, went as far as the door, and then returned.

"André," he continued, "you spoke to me of a boy of yours."

"My adopted son, sir," replied the barber.

"I don't care whether he is your son, or your adopted son. What sort of a boy is he?"

"He is a very good boy, sir," answered André.

"Can he read and write?"

"Very well indeed, sir. The master of his school says he will take the medal at the close of the year."

"I shall discharge that puppy, and I want a good boy in his place. Send him to me at half past two this afternoon."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Checkynshaw. Perhaps I spoke too soon, sir; but I did not want a place for him till next vacation."

"Send him up, and I will talk with him," said the banker, imperatively and patronizingly, as he hurried out of the shop.

He was met at the door by a girl of fifteen, who modestly stepped out of the way to let the magnate pass. She was dressed very plainly, but very neatly, and in her hand she carried a tin pail. The loud talk of the barber's shop politicians and the coarse jests of rude men ceased as she walked behind the long line of chairs to that where André was at work. She was rather tall for her age; her face was pretty, and her form delicately moulded. She was all gentleness and grace, and rude men were awed by her presence.

André smiled as sweetly as a woman when he saw her, and his eye followed her as she went to the stove, and placed the pail by its side.

"Maggie, send Leo to me as soon as you go home," said he, in the softest of his soft tones, as she left the shop.

CHAPTER II.

BOY WANTED.

From the tin kettle, which Maggie had placed by the stove, there arose an odor of fried sausages—a savory mess to a hungry man, possessed of a reasonable amount of confidence in the integrity and conscientiousness of sausage-makers in general. André made himself as useful as possible to his employers, and they could not well spare him in the middle of the day to go home to his dinner, for during 'change hours the shop was full of customers. If there was a lull any time before three o'clock, he ate the contents of the tin pail; if not, he dined at a fashionable hour.

André could not well be spared, because there were certain dignified men, presidents of banks and insurance companies, venerable personages with a hold upon the last generation, who came from their homes in the middle of the day to read the newspapers at the "China," or the "Fireman;" staid old merchants, who had retired from active life, and went to the counting-room only to look after the junior partners—men who always shaved down town, and would not let any barber but André touch their faces. His hand was so soft and silky, his touch so tender and delicate, and his razors were so keen and skilfully handled, that he was a favorite in the shop.

Years before, André had set up a shop for himself; but he had no talent for business, and the experiment was a failure. He was too effeminate to control his journeymen, and his shop was not well ordered. All his regular customers insisted on being shaved by André; and, while he paid the wages of two men, he did all the work himself. The rent and other expenses overwhelmed him; but he had the good sense to sell out before he became involved in debt.

There he was, in the shop of Cutts & Stropmore, and there he was likely to be—a journeyman barber to the end of his mortal pilgrimage. The highest wages were paid him; but André had no ambition to gratify, and when one week's wages were due, every cent of the earnings of the preceding one was invariably used up. If there was a ten-cent piece left in his pocket on Saturday morning, he took care to spend it for something to gratify Maggie or Leo before he went to the shop. For this boy and girl—though they were not his own children, or even of any blood relation to him—he lived and labored as lovingly and patiently as though God had blessed him in the paternal tie.

Half an hour after Maggie left the shop there was a brief lull in the business, and André seized his kettle, and bore it to a kind of closet, where hair oils, hair washes, and the "Celebrated Capillary Compound" were concocted. With a sausage in one hand and a penny roll in the other, he ate as a hungry man eats when the time is short. André's appetite was good, and thus pleasantly was he employed when Leo, the barber's adopted son, entered the laboratory of odoriferous compounds.

"Maggie says you want to see me," said Leo.

The boy was dressed as neatly as the barber himself, but in other respects he was totally unlike him. He had a sharp, bright eye, and his voice was heavy, and rather guttural, being in the process of changing, for he was fifteen years old. On the books of the grammar school, where he was a candidate for the highest honors of the institution, his name was recorded as Leopold Maggimore. If Leo was his pet name, it was not because he bore any resemblance to the lion, though he was a bold fellow, with no little dignity in his expression.

"I sent for you, Leo," replied André, when he had waited long enough after the entrance of the boy to enable us to describe the youth, and himself to dispose of the overplus of fried sausage in his mouth, so that he could utter the words; "Mr. Checkynshaw spoke to me about you. He wishes to see you at half past two o'clock."

"Mr. Checkynshaw!" exclaimed Leo, wondering what the head of the well-known banking house could want with an individual so insignificant as himself.

"He wants a boy."

"Does he want me?"

"I suppose he does."

"But, father, I shall lose my medal if I leave school now," added Leo.

"You must not leave now; but you can see Mr. Checkynshaw, and explain the matter to him. He is a great man, and when you want a place, he may be able to help you."

"The cat may look at the king, and I will go and see him; but I don't see what good it will do. Fitz Wittleworth is there."

"He is to be discharged," quietly added André, as he deposited half a sausage in his mouth.

"Fitz discharged!" exclaimed Leo, opening his eyes.

"Yes; he has been, or will be to-day."

"But what will the firm of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co. do without him? Fitz tells me that he carries on the concern himself."

"Fitz is conceited; and I think the concern will be able to get along without him."

"But he is some relation to Mr. Checkynshaw."

"I think not; the banker says he took him into his office to keep him from starving."

"Fitz says Mr. Checkynshaw's first wife was his mother's sister."

"That is not a very near relation, and the banker will not tolerate his impudence on that account. No matter about that; Mr. Checkynshaw wishes to see you at half past two. You can tell him about your medal, and tell him, very respectfully and politely, that you can't leave school. He may like the looks of you, and help you to a place when you do want one."

André did not think it would be possible for any one to see Leo without liking the looks of him; and he was quite sure that he would make a favorable impression upon even the cold, stern banker. A call-bell on the case of Mr. Cutts sounded, and André hastened back to the shop, having only half satisfied the cravings of his hunger. A customer was already seated in his chair, and he went to work upon him, with his thoughts still following Leo to the banker's private office. He had high hopes for that boy. Mr. Cutts had proposed to take him as an apprentice to the barber's business; but, while André had no ambition for himself, he had for Leo, and he would not think of such a thing as permitting him to follow his trade, which, however honorable and useful did not open to the youth the avenues of fame and fortune.

On this important subject Leo had some views of his own. He certainly did not wish to be a barber, and he was almost as much opposed to being a banker or a merchant. He wished to be a carpenter or a machinist. He was born to be a mechanic, and all his thoughts were in this direction, though he had not yet decided whether he preferred to work in wood or in iron. But his foster-father had higher aspirations for him, and Leo had not the heart to disappoint him, though he continued to hope that, before the time came for him to commence in earnest the business of life, he should be able to convince him that the path to fame and fortune lay in the mechanic arts as well as in commerce and finance. Leo walked out into State Street, and, by the clock on the old State House, saw that it was too early to call upon the banker.

Mr. Fitzherbert Wittleworth did not go to the banker's office when ordered to do so. He went to his mother's house, to tell her that Mr. Checkynshaw had threatened to discharge him. He had a long talk with her. She was a sensible woman, and reproved his self-conceit, and insisted that he should make peace with the powerful man by a humble apology.

"Mother, you may eat humble pie at the feet of Mr. Checkynshaw, if you like; I shall not," replied Fitz, as he was familiarly called, though the brief appellative always galled him, and the way to reach his heart was to call him *Mr.* Wittleworth.

"If you get turned off, what will become of us? Your father isn't good for anything, and what both of us can earn is hardly enough to keep us from starving," answered the poor woman, whose spirit had long before been broken by poverty, disappointment, and sorrow.

"I would rather starve than have the heel of that man on my neck. I have done everything I could for the concern. I have worked early and late, and kept everything up square in the private office; but there is no more gratitude in that man than there is in a truck horse. He don't even thank me for it."

"But he pays you wages; and that's enough," replied his more practical mother.

"That is not enough, especially when he pays me but five dollars a week. I am worth a thousand dollars a year, at least, to the concern. Checkynshaw will find that out after he has discharged me," added Mr. Wittleworth, pulling up his collar, as was his wont when his dignity was damaged.

"Go back to him; tell him you are sorry for what you said, and ask him to forgive you," persisted Mrs. Wittleworth. "This is no time for poor people to be proud. The times are so hard that I made only a dollar last week, and if you lose your place, we must go to the almshouse."

"What's the use of saying that, mother?" continued the son. "It seems to me you take pride in talking about our poverty."

"It's nothing but the truth," added Mrs. Wittleworth, wiping the tears from her pale, thin face, which was becoming paler and thinner every day, for she toiled far into the night, making shirts at eight cents apiece. "I have only fifty cents in money left to buy provisions for the rest of the week."

"Folks will trust you," said Fitz, impatiently.

"I don't want them to trust me, if I am not to have the means of paying them. It was wrong for you to pay six cents to be shaved; it's silly and ridiculous, to say nothing of leaving the office for half an hour. You did wrong, and you ought to acknowledge it."

"Mother, I'm tired of this kind of a life."

"So am I; but we cannot starve," replied the poor woman, bitterly. "It is harder for me than for you, for I was brought up in plenty and luxury, and never knew what it was to want for anything till your father spent all my property, and then became a burden upon me. You have been a good boy, Fitzherbert, and I hope you will not disappoint me now."

"I shall do everything I can for you, mother, of course; but it is hard to be ground down by *that* man, as I am."

The young gentleman said *that* man with an emphasis which meant something.

"I cannot help it," sighed the mother.

"Yes, you can. In my opinion,—and I think I understand the matter as well as any other man,—in my opinion, Mr. Checkynshaw owes you fifty thousand dollars, and is keeping you out of your just due. That's what galls me," added Fitz, rapping the table violently with his fist.

"It may be and it may not be. I don't know."

"I know! That man is not an honest man. I know something about his affairs, and if he presumes to discharge me, I shall devote some of my valuable time to the duty of ventilating them."

"Don't you do any such thing, Fitz."

"I will, mother! I will find out whether the money belongs to you or not," added the young man, decidedly. "I have my private opinion about the matter. I know enough about Checkynshaw to feel certain that he wouldn't let fifty thousand dollars slip through his fingers, if by any trickery he could hold on to it. If he has a daughter in France, fifteen years old, as she must be, wouldn't she write to him? Wouldn't he write to her? Wouldn't he go and see her? Wouldn't he send her money? She don't do it; he don't do it. I do all the post-office business for the firm, and no such letters go or come."

Mr. Wittleworth was very decided in his "private opinion;" but at last he so far yielded to the entreaties of his mother as to consent to return to the office, and if Mr. Checkynshaw wasn't savage, he would apologize. This he regarded as a great concession, very humiliating, and to be made only to please his mother.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CHECKYNSHAW IS VIOLENT.

MR. Fitzherbert Wittleworth walked slowly and nervously from his home to the banking-house in State Street. The situation was just as far from pleasant as it could be. He did not wish to deprive the family of the necessaries of life, which were purchased with his meagre salary, on the one hand, and it was almost impossible to endure the tyranny of Mr. Checkynshaw on the other hand. To a young man with so high an opinion of himself as the banker's clerk entertained, the greatest privation to which he could be subjected was a want of appreciation of his personal character and valuable services.

The banker had an utter contempt for him personally, and regarded his salary as high at five dollars a week, which was indeed a high rate for a young man of sixteen. Mr. Checkynshaw sat in his private office, adjoining the banking-house, when Mr. Wittleworth presented himself. He scowled savagely as the young man entered.

"You have concluded to come back—have you?" said he.

"Yes, sir," replied Fitz.

"Well, sir, you have only come to be discharged; for I will no longer have a stupid and useless blockhead about. I was willing to tolerate you for your mother's sake; but I won't submit to your impudence."

Stupid and useless blockhead! It was no use to attempt to effect a reconciliation with a person who had, or professed to have, such an opinion of him. Not even the strait to which his family was reduced could justify him in submitting to such abuse.

"Mr. Checkynshaw, I don't allow any man to insult me," Fitz began. "I have treated you like a gentleman, and I demand as much in return."

"Insult you? Impudent puppy!" gasped Mr. Checkynshaw. "What are we coming to?"

"You insulted me in a public barber's shop. Not content with that, you call me a stupid and useless blockhead—*me*, sir."

"No more of this! Take your pay, and be gone! There's five dollars, a full week's salary for three days' service," added the banker, pushing a five-dollar bill across the desk towards Fitz.

The young man was not too proud to take it.

"Go! Don't stop here another minute," said the wrathy banker, glancing at the clock, which now indicated the time he had appointed for the coming of Leo Maggimore.

"I am not ready to go just yet. I have a demand to make upon you. You have defrauded my mother out of a fortune."

"That will do! Not another word," said Mr. Checkynshaw, turning red in the face.

"My mother will take steps to obtain her rights."

"Will you go?" demanded the banker.

"No, sir. I will not till I have said what I have to say. You shall either prove that your first daughter is alive, or you shall deliver to my mother the property."

Mr. Checkynshaw could not endure such speech as this from any man, much less from his discharged clerk. He rose from his chair, and rushed upon the slender youth with a fury worthy a more stalwart foe. Grasping him by the collar, he dragged him out of the private office, through the long entry, to the street, and then pitched him far out upon the sidewalk. As he passed through the entry, Leo Maggimore was going into the banking-office. Not knowing the way, he inquired of a person he met in the long hall.

Leo did not know the banker, and was not aware that the excited gentleman he had seen was he; and he did not recognize Fitz in the young man who was so violently hurried before him. He followed the direction given him, and reached the private office of the banker. Through an open window he saw the clerks and cashiers rushing to the door to witness the extraordinary scene that was transpiring in the street. Taking off his cap, he waited for the appearance of Mr. Checkynshaw, who, he supposed, had also gone to "see the fun." As he stood there, a jaunty-looking individual hastily entered the office.

"What do you want?" asked this person.

"I want to see Mr. Checkynshaw," replied Leo.

"Go through that door, and you will find him," added the jaunty-looking man, in hurried tones.

Leo, supposing the man belonged there, did as he was directed, and inquired of an elderly clerk, who had not left his desk, for the banker. He was told to wait in the private office, and he returned, as he was bidden.

He found the jaunty-looking person taking some papers from the safe. He put a quantity of them into the pockets of his overcoat, locked the heavy iron door, and took out the key.

"Mr. Checkynshaw won't be here again to-day. You will have to call to-morrow," said the man, in sharp and decided business tones.

"He sent for me to come to-day at half past two," replied Leo.

"He was unexpectedly called away; come again to-morrow at this time," added the jaunty person, briskly.

"I can't come to-morrow at this hour; school keeps."

"Come at one, then," replied the business man, who did not seem to care whether school kept or not.

"Will you tell him, sir, that I came as he wished, and will call again at one to-morrow?"

"Yes, yes. I will tell him all about it," answered the brisk personage, as he took a small carpet-bag in his hand, and led the way out through the banking-room.

The clerks had returned to their desks, and were again busy over their books and papers; for the excitement had subsided, and people went their way as though nothing had happened. The unwonted scene of a man in Mr. Checkynshaw's position putting a clerk out of his office excited a little comment, and the banker had stopped in the long hall to explain to a bank president the occasion of his prompt and decisive action. Leo and the jaunty man passed him as they left the building; but the boy did not know him from Adam.

"Where do you live, my boy?" asked the jaunty man, coming up to him when he had crossed State and entered Congress Street.

"No. 3 Phillimore Court," replied Leo.

He had before lost sight of the man, who, he had already concluded, from finding him in the private office and at the safe, was one of the partners in the house of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co. He could not imagine what a person of so much importance could want of him, or how it concerned him to know where he lived.

"Is it far from here?"

"Not very far."

"I want the use of a room for five minutes, to change my clothes. I live out of town, and am going to New York to-night. Perhaps your mother would let me have a room for a short time," added the person.

"I haven't any mother; but you can have my room as long as you like," answered Leo, glad to accommodate so important a person. "It isn't a very nice one."

"Nice enough for me. How far is it?"

"Close by High Street; but it's right on your way to the cars."

"Very well; thank you. I'm much obliged to you. If it's far off, I can run up to a hotel, for I'm in a hurry. I have no time to spare."

The jaunty man walked at a rapid pace, and seemed to be greatly excited, which Leo attributed to his proposed journey, or to the pressure of his business.

"Do you know Mr. Checkynshaw?" asked the man of business.

"No, sir; I never saw him in my life, that I know of," replied Leo. "You are one of the partners—are you not?"

"Yes," replied the jaunty man, promptly.

"Are you Mr. Hart, sir?"

"That is my name. How did you know me?"

"I didn't know you; but I guessed it was Mr. Hart."

They hurried along in silence for a few moments more. Leo was thinking, just then, how it would be possible for Mr. Hart to tell Mr. Checkynshaw that he had called that day, and that he would call at one the next day, if he was going to New York by the afternoon train. He was quite sure Mr. Hart could not get back in time to tell the banker that he had obeyed his mandate. He was a little perplexed, and he was afraid the mighty man would be angry with him for not keeping the appointment, and perhaps visit the neglect upon his foster-father. Being unable to solve the problem himself, he ventured to ask Mr. Hart for a solution.

"It won't make any difference. Mr. Checkynshaw will not think of the matter again till he sees you to-morrow," replied Mr. Hart. "He will have enough to think of when he gets to the office to-morrow without troubling his head about you."

"Perhaps, as you are his partner, Mr. Hart, you can do the business just as well," said Leo.

"Very likely I can. What did Mr. Checkynshaw want of you?" asked the partner.

"He is going to discharge Fitz, and—"

"Discharge Fitz! What is that for?" demanded Mr. Hart, as if very much astonished at the intelligence.

"I don't exactly understand what for; but he wants me to come in his place; or at least he wants to see me about coming."

"Well, you seem to be a very likely young fellow, and I have no doubt you will suit us. I am willing to engage you, even after what little I have seen of you."

"But I can't go yet, Mr. Hart," interposed Leo.

"Why not? When can you come?"

"I can't go till the first of August; that's what I wanted to tell Mr. Checkynshaw. He was so kind as to think of me when he wanted a boy; and I want to have it made all right with him. I expect to take one of the Franklin medals at the next exhibition, and if I leave now I shall lose it."

"That's right, my boy; stick to your school, and I will see that you have a first-rate place when you have taken the medal. Haven't we got most to your house?"

"Just round the corner, sir. I'm afraid Mr. Checkynshaw will not like it because he did not see me this afternoon."

"He was out, and it isn't your fault; but I will tell him all about it when I come back, and he will not think of it again."

"But he wants a boy."

"Well, he can find a hundred of them in an hour's time; and, as you can't take the place, it will make no difference to you. I will make it all right with him so far as you are concerned."

"This is my house," said Leo, when they reached the dwelling at No. 3 Phillimore Court.

Leo opened the front door,—which was indeed the only door,—and led the banker to his own room on the second floor. The gentleman closed the door, and as there was no lock upon it, he placed a chair against it to serve as a fastening. He did not appear to be in a very great hurry now, and it was evident that he did not intend to change his clothes; for, instead of doing so, he took from the pockets of his overcoat the papers and packages he had removed from the safe. He broke the seals on some of the parcels, and opened the papers they contained. He did not stop to read any of them. In a bank book he found a package of bank notes.

"Three hundred and fifty dollars," muttered he, as he counted the money. "A mean haul!"

He examined all the papers, but no more money was discovered. The jaunty man looked as though he was sorely disappointed. He gathered up the papers, rolled them together, and then looked about the little chamber. On one side of it there was a painted chest, which contained Leo's rather scanty wardrobe. He raised the lid, and thrust the bundle of papers down to the bottom of it, burying them beneath the boy's summer clothing. Closing the chest, he took his carpet-bag, and left the room. Leo was waiting for him in the entry; but "Mr. Hart" was again in a hurry, and could not do anything more than say again he would make it all right with Mr. Checkynshaw.

Probably he did not keep his promise.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. CHECKYNSHAW RUSHES.

Mr. Checkynshaw felt that he had fully vindicated his personal dignity, and that of the well-known house whose head he was. The bank president he met in the entry did not think so, but believed that a person of such eminent gravity ought to call a policeman, instead of making himself ridiculous by resorting to violence. The banker explained, and then returned to his office. He was alone; and, seating himself in his cushioned chair, he gave himself up to the reflections of the moment, whatever they were.

Whether the grave charges and the angry threats of Mr. Fitzherbert Wittleworth were the subject of his thoughts was known only to himself; but as he reflected, the muscles of his mouth moved about, his brow contracted, and he seemed to be mentally defending himself from the charges, and repelling the threats. Certainly the bold accusation of the banker's late clerk had produced an impression, and stirred up the anger of the great man; but it was very impolitic for the discharged clerk to "beard the lion in his den."

The safe in the private office contained the valuable papers of the banker, while those of the firm whose head he was were placed in the vaults of the great banking-room. He kept the key of this safe himself. If it ever went into the hands of the clerk, it was only to bring it from the lock-drawer in the vaults; he was never trusted to deposit it there. Mr. Checkynshaw did not look at the safe till he had thoroughly digested the affair which had just transpired. When he was ready to go home to dinner, just before three o'clock, he went to the safe to lock it, and secure the key where prying curiosity could not obtain it.

It was not in the door, where he had left it; but this did not startle him. His thoughts appeared to be still abstracted by the subject which had occupied them since the affray, and he was walking mechanically about the office. He went to the safe as much from the force of habit as for any reason, for he always secured it when he was about to leave.

"Charles!" he called, raising one of the ground-glass windows between the office and the banking-room.

The door opened, and one of the younger clerks presented himself.

"Bring me the key of this safe from the drawer in the vault."

Charles bowed, and Mr. Checkynshaw continued to walk back and forth, absorbed in thought.

"The key of the safe is not in the drawer, sir," replied the clerk.

The banker tried the safe door, and then felt in all his pockets. The safe was locked, but he had not the key. He went to the vault himself, but with no better success than the clerk had had.

"The puppy!" muttered the banker. "He has stolen that key!"

Mr. Checkynshaw's lips were compressed, and his teeth were set tight together. He paced the room more rapidly than before.

"Fudge!" exclaimed he, after he had worked himself into a state of partial frenzy, as the hard muscles of his face suddenly relaxed, and something like a smile rested upon his lips. "He couldn't have done it."

Certainly not. The banker had not opened the safe till after his return from the barber's shop, where he had reproved his clerk, and Fitz did not go near the safe during the sharp interview in the office.

"Burnet," said the banker, going to the open window.

This time the elderly man, to whom Leo Maggimore had applied, presented himself.

"Have you seen the key of my safe?" demanded Mr. Checkynshaw.

"No, sir."

"Where is it, then?"

"I do not know, sir," replied Burnet, whose communications were always "yea, yea; nay, nay."

"I have discharged Fitz."

Burnet bowed.

"He was saucy."

Burnet bowed again.

"I kicked him out for his impudence."

Burnet bowed a third time.

"My key is gone."

Burnet waited.

"But the safe is locked."

Burnet glanced at the safe.

"Who has been in my office?"

"A boy, sir."

"Who?"

"I don't know, sir; he asked for you. I sent him to your office."

"That was the barber's boy."

Burnet bowed: he never wasted words; never left his desk to see a row or a military company, and would not have done so if an earthquake had torn up the pavement of State Street, so long as the banking-house of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co. was undisturbed.

"Who else?" asked the banker.

"A man, sir."

"Who?"

"I don't know; he entered by your private door; the boy and the man went out together."

"Send for the safe people."

Burnet bowed, and retired. In half an hour two men from the safe manufactory appeared. They opened the iron door, and the banker turned pale when he found that his valuable papers had been abstracted. The three hundred and fifty dollars which "Mr. Hart" had taken was of no consequence, compared with the documents that were missing; for they were his private papers, on which other eyes than his own must not look.

The safe men fitted a new key, altering the wards of the lock, so that the old one would not open the door. What remained of the papers were secured; but those that were gone were of more importance than those that were left. Mr. Checkynshaw groaned in spirit. The threats of Mr. Fitzherbert Wittleworth seemed to have some weight now, and that young gentleman suddenly became of more consequence than he had ever been before. Fitz could not have stolen these papers himself, but he might have been a party to the act.

"Burnet!" called the banker.

The old clerk came again. Nothing ever excited or disturbed him, and that was what made him so reliable as a financial clerk and cashier. He never made any mistakes, never overpaid any one, and his cash always "balanced."

"What shall I do? My private papers have been stolen!" said the banker, nervously. "Who was the man that came out of the office?"

"I don't know, sir."

"What was he like?" demanded Mr. Checkynshaw, impatiently.

"Well-dressed, rowdyish, foppish."

"And the boy?"

"Fourteen or fifteen—looked well."

"Send for André Maggimore, the barber."

Burnet bowed and retired. Charles was sent to the saloon of Cutts & Stropmore; but it was four o'clock, and André had gone to dress the hair of Elinora Checkynshaw. The banker was annoyed, vexed, angry. He wanted to see the boy who had left the office with the man "well-dressed, rowdyish, foppish." He did not know where Leo lived, and the barber had no business to be where he could not put his hand on him when wanted. Impatiently he drew on his overcoat, rushed out of the office, and rushed into the shop of

Cutts & Stropmore. Mr. Cutts did not know where André lived, and Mr. Stropmore did not know. André was always at the shop when he was wanted there, and they had no occasion to know where he lived. Probably they had known; if they had, they had forgotten. It was somewhere in High Street, or in some street or court that led out of High Street, or somewhere near High Street; at any rate, High Street was in the direction.

There was nothing in this very definite information that afforded Mr. Checkynshaw a grain of comfort. He was excited; but, without telling the barbers what the matter was, he rushed up State Street, up Court Street, up Pemberton Square, to his residence. He wanted a carriage; but of course there was no carriage within hailing distance, just because he happened to want one. He reached his home out of breath; but then his key to the night-latch would not fit, just because he was excited and in a hurry.

He rang the bell furiously. Lawrence, the man servant, was eating his dinner, and he stopped to finish his pudding. The banker rang again; but Lawrence, concluding the person at the door was a pedler, with needles or a new invention to sell, finished the pudding—pedlers ring with so much more unction than other people. The banker rang again. Fortunately for the banker, more fortunately for himself, Lawrence had completely disposed of the pudding, and went to the door.

"What are you about, you blockhead? Why don't you open the door when I ring?" stormed the banker.

"I think the bell must be out of order, sir," pleaded Lawrence, who had heard it every time it rang.

"Go and get a carriage, quick! If you are gone five minutes I'll discharge you!" added the great man, fiercely, as he rushed into the parlor.

"You are late to dinner," said Mrs. Checkynshaw.

"Don't talk to me about dinner! Where is Elinora?"

"Why, what is the matter?" asked the lady, not a little alarmed by the violent manner of the husband.

"Matter enough! Where is Elinora? Answer me, and don't be all day about it!"

"In her dressing-room. André, the hair-dresser, is with her."

Mr. Checkynshaw rushed up stairs, and rushed into the apartment where André was curling the hair of a pale, but rather pretty young lady of twelve. His abrupt appearance and his violent movements startled the nervous miss, so that, in turning her head suddenly, she brought one of her ears into contact with the hot curling-tongs with which the barber was operating upon her flowing locks.

"O, dear! Mercy! You have killed me, André!" screamed Elinora, as her father bolted into the room.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Checkynshaw," pleaded André.

"You have burned me to death! How you frightened me, pa!" gasped the young lady.

"Mind what you are about, André!" exclaimed the banker, sternly, as he examined the ear, which was not badly damaged.

"The young lady moved her head suddenly. It was really not my fault, sir," added André.

"Yes, it was your fault, André," replied Elinora, petulantly. "You mean to burn me to death."

"I assure you, mademoiselle—"

"Where do you live, André?" demanded the banker, interrupting him.

"Phillimore Court, No. 3," replied the barber.

"I want you to go there with me at once," bustled the banker. "Is your boy—What's his name?"

"Leo, sir."

"Leo. Is he at home?"

"I think he is. Do you wish to see him, sir?"

"I do. Come with me, and be quick!"

"Leo would not be able to serve you, sir; he cannot leave his school."

"I want to see him; my safe has been robbed, and your boy was with the man who did it."

"Leo!" gasped the barber, dropping his hot iron upon the floor, and starting back, as though a bolt of lightning had blasted him.

"Yes; but come along! I tell you I'm in a hurry!" snapped Mr. Checkynshaw.

"He can't go now, pa," interposed the daughter. "He must finish dressing my hair."

"He shall return in a short time, Elinora," replied the banker.

"He shall not go!" added she, decidedly, and with an emphasis worthy of an only daughter.

"Leo!" murmured the poor barber, apparently crushed by the terrible charge against the boy.

"No. 3 Phillimore Court, you say," continued the banker, as he moved towards the door, yielding to the whim of the spoiled child.

The barber did not answer. His eyes rolled up in his head; he staggered and fell upon the floor. Elinora shrieked in terror, and was hurried from the room by her father.

CHAPTER V.

LEO MAGGIMORE.

Andre Maggimore had an apoplectic fit. Perhaps the immense dinner he had eaten in the shop had some connection with his malady; but the shock he received when the banker told him that Leo was implicated in the robbery of the safe was the immediate exciting cause. André was a great eater, and took but little exercise in the open air, and was probably predisposed to the disease. The dark shadow of trouble which the banker's words foreboded disturbed the circulation, and hastened what might otherwise have been longer retarded.

Doubtless Mr. Checkynshaw thought it was very inconsiderate in André Maggimore to have an attack of apoplexy in his house, in the presence of his nervous daughter, and especially when he was in such a hurry to ascertain what had become of his valuable private papers. If the banker was excited before, he was desperate now. He rang the bells furiously, and used some strong expressions because the servants did not appear as soon as they were summoned.

Lawrence had gone for the carriage, and one of the female servants was sent for the doctor. Mr. Checkynshaw handed his daughter over to her mother, who also thought it was very stupid for the barber to have a fit before such a nervous miss as Elinora. The banker returned to the room in which André lay. He turned him over, and wished he was anywhere but in his house, which was no place for a sick barber. But the doctor immediately came to his relief. He examined the patient; André might live, and might die—a valuable opinion; but the wisest man could have said no more.

Mr. Checkynshaw could not afford to be bothered by the affair any longer. He had pressing business on his hands. He directed the doctor to do all that was necessary, and to have his patient removed to his own residence as soon as practicable. After assuring himself that Elinora had neither been burned to death nor frightened to death, he stepped into the carriage, and ordered the driver to take him to No. 3 Phillimore Court.

The banker was very much annoyed by the awkwardness of the circumstances. He judged from what André had said, that he was much attached to his foster-son, and he concluded that Leo was equally interested in his foster-father. It was not pleasant to tell the boy that the barber had fallen in a fit, and might die from the effects of it; and if he did, Leo might not be able to give him the information he needed. It would confuse his mind, and overwhelm him with grief. Mr. Checkynshaw could not see why poor people should grieve at the sickness or death of their friends, though it was a fact they did so, just like rich people of sensibility and cultivation.

He thought of this matter as the driver, in obedience to his mandate, hurried him to Phillimore Court. If he told Leo, there would be an awkward scene, and he would be expected to comfort the poor boy, instead of worming out of him the dry facts of the robbery. If he had ever heard of Maggie, he had forgotten all about her. Had he thought of her, the circumstances would have appeared still more awkward. He had already decided not to inform Leo of the sudden illness of his father. When he reached the humble abode of the barber, and his summons at the door was answered by the fair Maggie, he was the more determined not to speak of the calamity which had befallen them.

Leo was at home; but it would be disagreeable to examine him in his own house, and in the presence of Maggie. He changed his tactics at once, and desired the boy to ride up to his office with him. Leo wondered what Mr. Checkynshaw could want of him at that time of day. It was strange that a person of his consequence had thought of him at all; and even "Mr. Hart" had proved to be a false prophet. He concluded that the banker had discharged Fitz, and needed a boy at once; but the gentleman was too imperative to be denied, and Leo did not venture to object to anything he proposed. He followed the great man into the carriage, and regarded it as a piece of condescension on his part to permit a poor boy like him to ride in the same vehicle with him.

Mr. Checkynshaw did not speak till the carriage stopped before the banking-house in State Street; and Leo was too much abashed by the lofty presence of the great man to ask any question, or to open the subject which he supposed was to be discussed in the private office. He followed the banker into that apartment, thinking only of the manner in which he should decline to enter the service of his intended employer before the completion of his school year.

"Burnet," said Mr. Checkynshaw, opening the window of the banking-room.

The old cashier entered, and bowed deferentially to the head of the house.

"Send for Mr. Clapp," added the banker; and Burnet bowed and retired, like an approved courtier.

Leo was not at all familiar with the police records, and had not learned that Mr. Clapp was the well-known constable,—the "Old Reed" or the "Old Hayes" of his day and generation,—and the name had no terrors to him.

"Boy, what is your name?" demanded Mr. Checkynshaw, when the door had closed behind the cashier.

"Leopold Maggimore, sir," replied he.

"Leopold," repeated the banker.

"I am generally called Leo, sir."

"Did the barber—your father, if he is your father—send you to my office to-day?"

"Yes, sir; he sent me, and I came; but you were not in."

"Why didn't you wait for me?"

"I was told you would not be back again to-day, sir."

"What time were you here?"

"At half past two, sir. There was some trouble in the entry at the time. A gentleman had a young fellow by the collar, and was putting him out of the building."

"Just so. Who was the gentleman?"

"I don't know, sir; I didn't see his face."

"I was that gentleman."

"I didn't know it, sir. It was just half past two, and I wanted to be on time."

"Who told you I should not be back again?" demanded the banker more sternly than he had before spoken.

"Mr. Hart," replied Leo, who regarded his informant as excellent authority.

"Mr. Hart!" exclaimed Mr. Checkynshaw, staring into the bright eyes of Leo to detect any appearance of deception.

The banker prided himself upon his shrewdness. He believed that, if there was any person in the world who was peculiarly qualified to expose the roguery of a suspected individual, he was that person. In conducting the present examination he only wanted Derastus Clapp for the terror of his name, rather than his professional skill as a detective.

Mr. Checkynshaw believed that he had intrapped his victim. Mr. Hart could not have told Leo that the head of the house would not return to the office that day, for the very simple reason that Mr. Hart was dead and gone. The old style of the firm was retained, but the Hart was gone out of it. The boy was telling a wrong story, and the banker laid his toils for unveiling the details of a gigantic conspiracy. Fitz lived somewhere in the vicinity of High Street,—Mr. Checkynshaw did not know where, for it would not be dignified for a great man like him to know where his clerk resided,—and it was more than possible that Leo and he were acquainted. Very likely the innocent-looking youth before him was an accomplice of Fitz, who, since the disappearance of the papers, had really become a terrible character.

"Yes, sir; Mr. Hart told me," repeated Leo, who could not see anything so very strange in the circumstance.

"Mr. Hart told you!" said the banker, again, endeavoring to overwhelm the boy by the intensity of his gaze.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Hart."

"Was Mr. Hart in this office?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was Mr. Hart doing?"

"He wasn't doing anything. I was standing here waiting for you when he came in."

"Which way did he come in?" interrupted the banker.

"The same way we did just now," added Leo, pointing to the door which opened into the long entry.

"Very well; go on."

"He told me to go into the big room," continued Leo, pointing to the banking-room. "I went in there, and asked the man that just came in here for you."

"You asked Burnet for me?"

"I didn't know what his name was; but it was the man you just called in here."

"Burnet; go on."

"He told me to come in here and wait for you."

"Burnet told you so?"

"Yes, sir; and when I came back, Mr. Hart was taking some papers and things from that safe, and putting them in the pocket of his overcoat. Then he locked the safe, and put the key in his pocket."

"Go on," said Mr. Checkynshaw, excited by these details.

"Then Mr. Hart told me Mr. Checkynshaw would not be in again to-day, and I must come again to-morrow."

"What then?"

"I went out through the big room, and he came right after me."

Leo, without knowing why he was required to do so, described in full all that had taken place after he left the banking-room till "Mr. Hart" had changed his clothes, and left the house of André.

"How did you know this person was Mr. Hart?" asked the banker.

"He told me so, sir. I asked him before we got to my house if he was Mr. Hart, and he said he was. When he told me Mr. Checkynshaw was not in, and I saw him take the things out of the safe, and put the key in his pocket, I knew he belonged here, and being in this office, I guessed it was Mr. Hart. He promised to get me a good place when I leave school, and to explain the matter to you, and make it all right, when he came back from New York."

"Perhaps he will do so," added Mr. Checkynshaw, with a sneer.

But the banker was completely "nonplussed." He found it difficult to believe that this boy had anything to do with the robbery of his safe. At this point in the investigation, Mr. Clapp arrived. It was now quite dark. Most of the clerks in the banking-room had left; but Burnet was called, and instructed to remain with Leo, while the banker and the detective held a conference in the next room. Leo could not tell what it was all about. Not a word had been said about a boy to fill Fitz's place. He asked Burnet what Mr. Checkynshaw wanted of him; but the cashier was dumb.

After the banker had told the officer all about the affair, they went into the private office, and Leo was subjected to a long and severe questioning. Then he learned that "Mr. Hart" was not Mr. Hart, and that the safe had been plundered. He was filled with astonishment, not to say horror; but every answer he gave was straightforward, and at the end of it the skilled detective declared that he had had nothing to do with the robbery.

"Do you know Fitz Wittleworth?" demanded Mr. Checkynshaw, sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Did he ever say anything to you about me?"

"I have heard him call you Old Checkynshaw; but he never said anything that I can remember, except that you couldn't get along in your business without him."

"Did he ever say anything about any papers of mine?" asked the banker, scowling fiercely.

"No, sir."

The banker plied Leo with questions in this direction; but he failed to elicit anything which confirmed his fears. A carriage was called, and Mr. Checkynshaw and the constable, taking Leo with them, were driven to the house of the barber.

CHAPTER VI.

LEO'S WORKSHOP.

When the banker and the detective reached the barber's house, the supper table was waiting for André and Leo. Perhaps Mr. Checkynshaw wondered how even a poor man could live in such a small house, with such "little bits of rooms." It had been built to fill a corner, and it fitted very snugly in its place. André thought it was the nicest house in Boston, and for many years it had been a palace to him.

It contained only four rooms, two on each floor. The two rooms up stairs were appropriated to the use of Maggie and Leo. The front room down stairs was required to do double duty, as a parlor, and a sleeping-room for André; but the bedstead was folded up into a secretary during the day. In the rear of this was the "living room." In the winter the parlor was not used, for the slender income of the barber would not permit him to keep two fires. In this apartment, which served as a kitchen, dining and sitting room, was spread the table which waited for André and Leo.

The barber almost always came home before six o'clock; for, in the vicinity of State Street, all is quiet at this hour, and the shop was closed. Maggie sat before the stove, wondering why André did not come; but she was not alarmed at his non-appearance, for occasionally he was called away to dress a lady's hair, or to render other "professional" service at the houses of the customers. Certainly she had no suspicion of the fearful truth.

She was rather startled when the unexpected visitors were ushered into the room by Leo; but the detective was gentle as a lamb, and even the banker, in the presence of one so fair and winning as Maggie, was not disposed to be rude or rough. Mr. Clapp asked some questions about the man who had come to the house that afternoon, and gone up to Leo's room. She had seen him, and her description of his appearance and his movements did not differ from that of her brother. No new light was obtained; but Mr. Clapp desired to visit the apartment which "Mr. Hart" had used.

Leo conducted the visitors to this room. It was possible, if the robber had changed his clothes there, that he had left something which might afford some clew to his identity. The detective searched the chamber, but not very carefully. As he did so, he told Leo that he desired to clear him from any connection with the crime.

"I hadn't anything to do with it, and I don't know anything about the man," replied Leo, blushing deeply.

"I don't think you had, my boy," added the officer, candidly. "But this man may have hidden something in the house, without your knowledge."

"I hope you will find it if he did. You may search the house from cellar to garret, if you like; but he didn't go into any room but this one."

"How long was he in this room?"

"Not more than twenty minutes, I guess; I don't know."

"Where were you while he was here?"

"I was down cellar."

"Down cellar!" exclaimed Mr. Checkynshaw. "All the time he was in the room?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were you doing there?"

"I was at work there. When I heard Mr. Hart, or the man, whatever his name is, coming down stairs, I went up and met him in the entry. You can go down cellar, if you like."

"I think we will," said Mr. Checkynshaw.

The detective looked into the bed, under it, in the closets, drawers, and into the seaman's chest which contained Leo's wardrobe. He did not expect to find anything, and his search was not very thorough. He examined the till, and felt in the clothing; but he did not put his hand down deep enough to find the papers the robber had deposited there. If the rogue had left anything, he had no object in concealing it; and Mr. Clapp reasoned that he would be more likely to leave it in sight than to hide it.

When the search had been finished in the room, and the result was as the detective anticipated, Leo led the way to the cellar. Here was presented to the visitors a complete revelation of the boy's character and tastes—a revelation which assured the skilful detective, deeply versed as he was in a knowledge of human nature, that Leo was not a boy to be in league with bad men, or knowingly to assist a robber in disposing of his ill-gotten booty.

The cellar or basement was only partly under ground, and there was room enough for two pretty large windows at each end, the front and rear of the house, and in the daytime the apartment was as light and cheerful as the rooms up stairs. Across the end, under the front windows, was a workbench, with a variety of carpenter's tools, few in number, and of the most useful kind. On the bench was an unfinished piece of work, whose intended use would have puzzled a philosopher, if several similar specimens of mechanism, completed and practically applied, had not appeared in the cellar to explain the problem.

On the wall of the basement, and on a post in the centre of it, supported by brackets, were half a dozen queer little structures, something like miniature houses, all of them occupied by, and some of them swarming with, *white mice*. In the construction of these houses, or, as André facetiously called them, "*Les Palais des Mice*," Leo displayed a great deal of skill and ingenuity. He was a natural-born carpenter, with inventive powers of a high order. He not only made them neatly and nicely, but he designed them, making regular working plans for their construction.

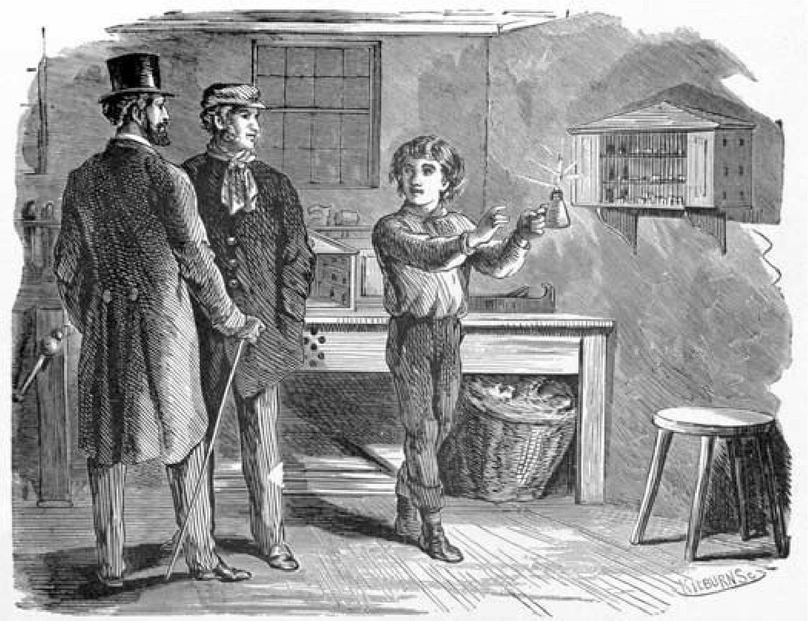
The largest of them was about three feet long. At each end of a board of this length, and fifteen inches in width, was a box or house, seven inches deep, to contain the retiring rooms and nests of the occupants of the establishment. Each of these houses was three stories high, and each story contained four apartments, or twenty-four in the whole palace. The space between the two houses was open in front, leaving an area of twenty-two by fifteen inches for a playground, or grand parade, for the mice. The three sides of this middle space were filled with shelves or galleries, from which opened the doors leading into the private apartments. The galleries were reached by inclined planes, cut like steps.

Monsieur Souris Blanc passed from the gallery into one room, and from this apartment to another, which had no exterior door, thus securing greater privacy, though on the outside was a slide by which the curious proprietor of the palace could investigate the affairs of the family. Madame Souris Blanche, who considerately added from four to a dozen little ones to the population of the colony every three or four weeks, apparently approved this arrangement of rooms, though it was observed that three or four mothers, notwithstanding the multiplicity of strictly private apartments, would bring up their families in the same nest, cuddled up in the same mass of cotton wool.

Over the "grand parade" was a roof, which prevented the mice from getting out over the tops of the nest-houses. Though this space was open in front, and the play-ground protected only by a fence an inch high, the little creatures seldom fell out, for it was five feet to the floor of the cellar, and this was a giddy height for them to look down.

This establishment contained fifty or sixty white mice—from the venerable grandfather and grandmother down to the little juveniles two weeks old, to say nothing of sundry little ones which had not appeared on the "grand parade," and which looked like bits of beef, or more like pieces of a large fish worm. Other establishments on the wall contained smaller numbers; and, though it was impossible to count them, there were not less than a hundred and fifty white mice in the basement.

When Leo conducted the visitors to the cellar, all the tribes of mice were in the highest enjoyment of colonial and domestic bliss. Though most of them scampered to their lairs when the gentlemen appeared, they returned in a moment, looked at the strangers, snuffed and stared, and then went to work upon the buckwheat and canary seed, which Leo gave them as a special treat. Squatting on their hind legs, they picked up grains or seeds, and holding them in their fore paws, like squirrels, picked out the kernels.



LEO'S WORKSHOP.—Page 76.

In other houses, they were chasing each other along the galleries, performing various gymnastics on the apparatus provided for the purpose, or revolving in the whirligigs that some of the cages contained. It was after dark; and, having reposed during the day, they were full of life and spirit at night. The detective was delighted, and even Mr. Checkynshaw for a few moments forgot that his valuable papers had been stolen. Both of them gazed with interest at the cunning movements and the agile performances of the little creatures.

"I see why you remained down cellar so long," said the detective, with a smile.

"I was at work on that mouse-house," replied Leo, pointing to the bench.

The palace in process of construction was somewhat different from the others. Instead of being open in front of the "grand parade," it had a glass door, so that the occupants of the establishment could be seen, but could not fall out.

"What is that one for?" asked Mr. Clapp.

"I'm making that for Mr. Stropmore," answered Leo. "I gave him one lot, but his cat killed them all. The cat can't get at them in this house, and they can't fall out."

"Elinora would like to see them," said Mr. Checkynshaw, graciously.

"I should be very glad to show them to her, or to give her as many of them as she wants," replied Leo.

"Perhaps she will come and see them. But, Mr. Clapp, we must attend to business."

The detective was in no hurry to attend to business, so interested was he in the performances of the mice. He was quite satisfied that a boy whose thoughts were occupied as Leo's were could not be implicated in the robbery. The banker led the way up stairs, and Leo was questioned again. He described the rogue once more, and was sure he should know him if he saw him again. The banker said he would call and see Mrs. Wittleworth and her son, while the detective was to take the night train for New York, where "Mr. Hart" was supposed to have gone. The officer, who knew all the rogues, was confident, from the description, that the thief was "Pilky Wayne," a noted "confidence man." The theft was according to his method of operation.

"Where do you suppose father is?" asked Maggie, as Leo was about to leave the house to show Mr. Checkynshaw where Mrs. Wittleworth lived. "It is after seven o'clock, and he is never so late as this."

"I don't know," replied Leo. "I haven't seen him since one o'clock."

The banker was disturbed by the question. It would be annoying to tell such a pretty and interesting young lady, poor girl though she was, that her father was very ill. It would make a "scene," and he would be expected to comfort her in her great grief.

"Your father—Is he your father, miss?" asked he, doubtfully.

"He is just the same. He adopted both Leo and me," replied Maggie.

"He went to my house, this afternoon, to dress my daughter's hair," added Mr. Checkynshaw; and there was something in his manner which disturbed the fair girl.

"Is he there now?"

"Yes, I think he is. My people will take good care of him."

"Why, what do you mean, sir?" demanded Maggie. "Take good care of him?"

"He had an ill turn this afternoon."

"My father!" exclaimed Maggie.

"I sent for the doctor, and he has had good care," added the banker, as soothingly as he could speak, which, however, was not saying much.

"What ails him?"

"Well, it was an attack of apoplexy, paralysis, or something of that kind."

"My poor father!" ejaculated Maggie, her eyes filling with tears. "I must go to him at once."

Maggie took down her cloak and hood, and put them on.

CHAPTER VII.

MON PERE.

Maggie's ideas of apoplexy or paralysis were not very definite, and she only understood that something very terrible had happened to her foster-father, whom she loved as though he had been her real parent. Leo was hardly less affected, though, being a boy, his susceptibility was not so keen. His first feeling was one of indignation that the banker had not told him before of the misfortune which had overtaken the family. It was cruel to have kept Maggie from her father a single moment longer than was necessary.

"Where is poor father now?" asked Maggie, as she adjusted her hood, and wiped the tears from her eyes.

"He is at my house; but you need not worry about him," replied Mr. Checkynshaw. "The doctor has attended to his case, and he shall have everything he needs."

"Where do you live, sir?" asked Leo.

"No.—Pemberton Square."

"Come, Maggie, we will go to him," added the boy.

"I want you to go with me, and show me where Fitz lives," interposed the banker.

"He lives at No.—Atkinson Street, up the court," answered Leo, rather coolly, as he picked up his cap and comforter.

"I want you to show me the house."

"I must go with Maggie."

Mr. Checkynshaw looked as though the barber's serious illness was of no consequence, compared with his affairs.

"We can go that way, Leo, and you can show him the house as we pass through Atkinson Street," said Maggie, leading the way to the door.

This arrangement was satisfactory to the banker; the house was locked, and Leo led the way out of the court. The humble abode of Mrs. Wittleworth was pointed out to Mr. Checkynshaw; and, after he had been admitted, Leo and Maggie hastened to Pemberton Square, so sad and sorrowful that hardly a word was spoken till they reached the lofty mansion of the great man. With trembling hand Leo rang the bell; and Maggie's slender frame quivered with apprehension while they waited for a reply to the summons. Lawrence answered the bell more promptly than when its call had disturbed him at his dinner.

"Is André Maggimore here?" asked Leo, timidly.

"Who?" demanded Lawrence.

"André Maggimore—the barber—the hair-dresser," replied Leo.

"You mane the man that had the fit," added the servant. "Indade, he's here, thin."

"How is he?" asked Maggie, her heart bounding with fear lest she should be told that her poor father was no more.

"He's a little better; but the docthor says it'll be a long day till he is able to handle his razors again. What's this he called the disase? The para-*ly*-sis! That's just what it is!"

"Poor *mon père*!" sighed Maggie.

"We would like to see him, if you please," added Leo.

"And who be you? Are you his children?" asked Lawrence.

"We are."

"I'm sorry for you; but he's very bad," added Lawrence, who had an Irish heart under his vest, as he closed the front door.

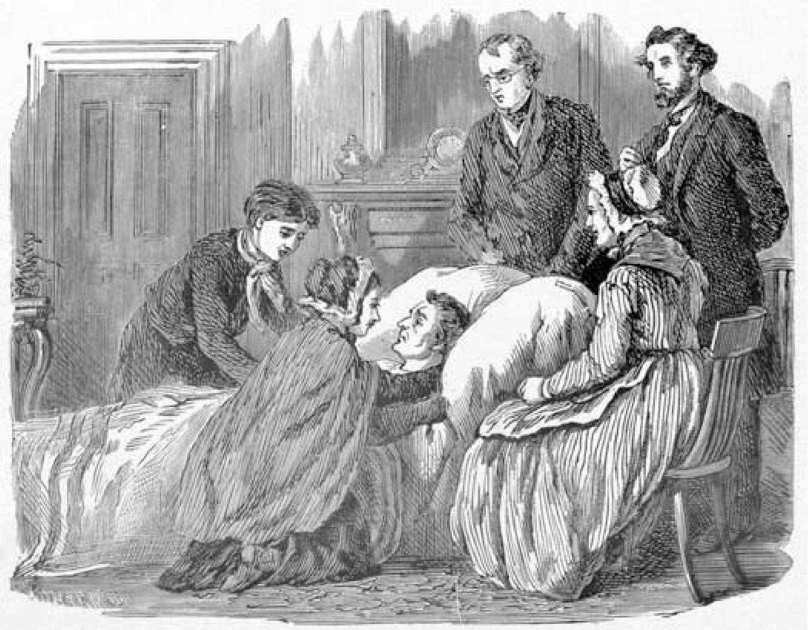
"Is he—will he—"

Poor Maggie could not ask the question she desired to ask, and she covered her face and wept.

"No, he won't," replied Lawrence, tenderly. "He won't die. The docthor says he's comin' out of it; but the para-*ly*-sis will bodther him for a long time."

Maggie was comforted by this reply, and she followed Lawrence up stairs to the chamber where André lay. He had been conveyed from Elinora's dressing-room to an apartment in the L, over the dining-room, where the banker and his friends smoked their cigars after dinner. He was lying on a lounge, covered with blankets, and the housekeeper was attending him.

"Poor *mon père*!" exclaimed Maggie, as she threw herself on her knees on the floor by the side of the sick man's couch, and kissed his pale, thin face.



POOR MON PÈRE.—Page 84.

Leo bent over his father's prostrate form, and clasped one of his silky hands, which now felt so cold that the touch chilled his heart. The doctor had just come in to pay his patient a second visit, and stood by the lounge, regarding with interest the devotion of the boy and girl.

André had "come out" of the fit, and recognized his children, as he always called them. He smiled faintly, and tried to return the pressure of Leo's hand, and to kiss the lips of Maggie, pressed to his own; but his strength was not yet equal to his desire.

"I think it would be better to remove him to the hospital," said the doctor to the housekeeper. "He will be well nursed there."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Maggie, rising and walking up to the physician.

Her idea of the hospital was not a very clear one, and she did not consider it much better than a prison; at least, it was to her a place where sick people who had neither home nor friends were sent; a place where other hands than her own would lave her father's fevered brow, and administer the cooling draught. To her it was sacrilege to permit any but herself to nurse him; and she felt that it was a privilege to stand day and night by his bed, and hold his hand, and anticipate all his wants. Her womanly instincts were strong, and she heard with horror the suggestion to take the sufferer to the hospital.

"Your father would be very kindly cared for at the hospital," said the doctor.

"But it would not be his own home!" pleaded Maggie. "O, he so loves his own home! He always staid there when he was not in the shop. It would break his heart to send him away from his own home when he is sick."

"Have you a mother?" asked Dr. Fisher, kindly.

"I have not; but I will nurse him by day and night. I will be mother, wife, and daughter to him. Do not send him away from me—not from his own home!" continued Maggie, so imploringly that the good physician had to take off his spectacles and wipe the moisture from his eyes.

"We will take good care of him at home," added Leo.

"Very well," replied the doctor. "He shall be removed to his own home, since you desire it so much. Lawrence, will you send for a carriage?"

"I will, sir," answered the servant, leaving the room.

André had turned his eyes towards the group, and appeared to understand the matter they were discussing. He smiled as he comprehended the decision, and made an effort to embrace Maggie, when she again knelt at his side; but a portion of his frame was paralyzed, and he could not move.

"Your father may be sick a long time," said Dr. Fisher.

"I'm so sorry! But I will take such good care of him!" replied Maggie.

"He needs very careful nursing."

"O, he shall have it! He would rather have me nurse him than any other person. I will watch him all the time. I will sit by his bed all day and all night," added she, with womanly enthusiasm.

"You will wear yourself out. You are not strong enough to do without your sleep."

"I am very strong, sir. I do all the work in the house myself. I know how to make gruel, and porridge, and beef tea, and soup; and *mon père* shall have everything nice."

The doctor smiled, and felt sure that no better nurse could be provided for the sick man.

"Where is your mother?" he asked. "Is she living?"

"I have no mother. Leo has no mother. We are not André's own children; but we love him just the same, and he loves us just the same."

"But who was your mother?"

"I don't know."

"Doesn't André know?"

"He does not."

"You have some kind of a history, I suppose," added the doctor, greatly interested in the girl.

"*Mon père* don't like to talk about it. He seems to be afraid that some one will get me away from him; but I'm sure I don't want to go away from him; I wouldn't leave him for a king's palace."

"Why do you call him '*mon père*'?"

"He taught me to call him so when I was little. André's father was an Italian, and his mother a French woman; but he was born in London."

"Where did he find you?"

"At the cholera hospital."

"Where?"

"I don't know. He always looked so sad, and his heart seemed to be so pained when I asked him any questions about myself, that I stopped doing so long ago. When I was five years old, he found me playing about the hospital, where hundreds and hundreds of people had died with cholera. I had the cholera myself; and he came to play with me every day; and when they were going to send me to an orphan asylum, or some such place, he took me away, and promised to take care of me. Ah, *mon père*" said she, glancing tenderly at the sick man, and wiping a tear from her eyes, "how well he has kept his promise! I can't help thinking he loved me more than any real father could. I never saw any father who was so kind, and tender, and loving to his child as André is to me."

"And you don't know where this hospital was?"

"No, sir; and I don't want to know. *Mon père* thinks my parents died of the cholera; but André has been father and mother to me. He would die if he lost me."

"And your brother—was he taken from the cholera hospital?" asked the doctor.

"No, sir," replied Maggie, rising and speaking in a whisper to the physician, so that Leo should not hear what she said. "André had to leave me all alone when he went to the shop, and he went to the almshouse to find a poor orphan to keep me company. He found Leo, whose father and mother had both died from drinking too much. He took him home, and *mon père* has been as good to him as he has to me."

"His name is Leo—the Lion?"

"No, sir; not the lion. *Mon père* called him Leopold, after the King of Belgium, in whose service he once was; but we always call him Leo. He is a real good boy, and will get the medal at his school this year."

"The carriage has come, sir," said Lawrence, opening the door.

The arrangements were made for the removal of the barber to his house. The hackman and the man servant came to carry him down stairs in an armchair, and the doctor was to go with his patient, and assist in disposing of him at his house. André was placed in the chair, covered with blankets, and the door opened in readiness to carry him down. Maggie kept close to him, comforting him with the kindest words, and adjusting the blanket so that the rude blasts of winter might not reach him.

"Lawrence!" called Elinora, in a petulant tone, from the dressing-room on the same floor.

Under the circumstances, Lawrence was not disposed to heed the call; but it was so often and so ill-naturedly repeated, that Dr. Fisher told him to go and see what she wanted, fearful that some accident had happened to her. The man went into the hall. Elinora had come out of her room in her impatience, arrayed for the party she was to attend. Another hair-dresser had been sent for to complete the work which André had begun; but the young lady was more than an hour late, and proportionally impatient.

"Are you deaf, Lawrence? The carriage has come," pouted Elinora.

"That's not the carriage for you, miss. It's to take the barber to his own place," replied Lawrence.

"That horrid barber again! I shall not get over the fright he gave me for a month! I will take this carriage, and he may have the other when it comes," said she, walking to the stairs. "Go down and open the door for me."

"If you plaze, miss, you can't go in this carriage. It's for the sick man."

"I don't care what it's for! I'm in a hurry, Lawrence. I must have the first carriage."

"Indade, miss, but we have the sick man up in the chair, ready to take him down the stairs. It's very bad he is."

"Let him wait! Go down and open the door, as I tell you."

"I beg your pardon, miss, but the docthor—"

"If you don't do what I tell you this instant, I'll ask pa to discharge you."

Dr. Fisher came out to ascertain the cause of the delay. He explained that the carriage had been ordered to convey the barber to his home, and he insisted that it should be used for that purpose. André was his patient, and he would not permit any further delay. Elinora pouted and flouted, and hopped back into her chamber.

André was borne carefully down the stairs, and placed in the carriage. Maggie and the doctor entered the vehicle with him, and they were driven to the barber's own home, where he was placed upon his bed in the front room.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAKE OR BREAK.

Maggie plied the kind-hearted physician with questions in regard to her father's condition—with questions which no man with merely human knowledge could answer. He thought André would be able to talk to her by the next day; but he feared the patient would not be well enough to resume his place in the shop for weeks, and perhaps months.

André appeared to be quite comfortable, and did not seem to be suffering very severely. The doctor had given him some medicine before he was removed from the banker's house, and the sick man went to sleep soon after he was put to bed in his own room. Dr. Fisher then went out into the rear room, and told Maggie that her father would probably sleep for several hours.

"I will come again in the morning, Maggie," said he. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing more, I thank you, sir," replied she. "I am very grateful to you for what you have done."

"I know nothing about your father's circumstances; but if you need any assistance, I hope you will make it known."

"Thank you, sir; I don't think we need anything," replied Maggie, a slight blush mantling her pretty face; for the idea of asking or accepting charity was painful to her.

"I fear it will be a long time before your father will be able to work again," continued Dr. Fisher, glancing around the room to ascertain, if possible, whether the singular family were in poverty or in plenty.

"I will take good care of him, whether it be for weeks or for months, or even for years. You don't know how sorry I am to have poor *mon père* sick; but you can't think what a pleasure it is to me to have an opportunity to do something for him. I wish I could tell you how good and kind he has always been to me; how tenderly he watched over me when I was sick; how lovingly he prayed for me; but I cannot, though it makes me happy to think I can now do something for him."

"You are a good girl, Maggie, and I don't see how André could have done any less for you," replied the doctor. "Who keeps house here?"

"O, I do that, sir."

"Then you must have to work very hard."

"Indeed, I don't! I have to keep busy almost all day; but it is such a pleasure to me to know that I am doing something for *mon père*, that I never think it is hard at all."

Everything looked so neat and nice in the house that the doctor could not decide whether any assistance was required or not. He was one of those good physicians who felt for the poor and the humble. Though he practised in some of the richest and most aristocratic families in the city, his mission was not to them alone. He visited the haunts of poverty, and not only contributed his professional services in their aid, but he gave with no stinted hand from his own purse to relieve their wants. When he died, the sermon preached on the Sunday after his funeral was from the text, "The beloved physician;" and no one ever went to his reward in heaven who better deserved the praise bestowed upon him.

In the present instance, he felt that his work was not alone to heal the sick. His patient was a journeyman barber, with only a boy, and a girl of fifteen, to depend upon. This same doctor often went among his friends in State Street, in 'change hours, to preach the gospel of charity in his own unostentatious way. All gave when he asked, and it was not a very difficult matter for him to raise fifty or a hundred dollars for a deserving family. He purposed to do this for those under the barber's humble roof, who, without being connected by the remotest tie of blood, were more loving and devoted towards each other than many whom God had joined by the ties of kindred.

The doctor never told anybody of his good deeds. Hardly did his left hand know what his right hand did; and one of his eyes, which followed not the other's apparent line of vision, seemed to be looking out all the time for some hidden source of human suffering. He was as tender of the feelings of others as he was of the visible wounds of his patients. He saw the blush upon the cheeks of Maggie, and he interpreted it as readily as though the sentiment had been expressed in words. He forbore to make any further inquiries in regard to the pecuniary condition of the strange family; but he was determined that all their wants should be supplied, without injury to their laudable pride. He went away, and Maggie and Leo were left to themselves.

"You haven't been to supper, Leo," said Maggie, when Dr. Fisher had gone.

"I don't seem to care about any supper," replied Leo, gloomily.

"You must eat your supper, Leo," added Maggie, as she placed the teapot on the table. "There are some cold sausages I saved for *mon père*. Sit down, Leo. We must work now, and we need all the strength we can get."

Then she crept on tiptoe into the front room, and looked into the face of the sleeper. He was still slumbering, and she returned to the table, seating herself in her accustomed place, near the stove. Leo looked heavy and gloomy, as well he might; for the sad event of that day promised to blast the bright hopes in which his sanguine nature revelled. He knew, and Maggie knew, that André Maggimore had made no preparation for the calamity which had so suddenly overtaken him.

It was Wednesday, and the wages of the preceding week were more than half used. He had no money, no resources, no friends upon whom he could depend, to fall back on in the day of his weakness. The barber was faithful and affectionate as a woman, but he had no business calculation, and his forethought rarely extended beyond the duration of a single week. While he owed no man anything, and never contracted any debts, he had never saved a dollar beyond what he had invested in furnishing the small house.

The dark day had come, and Leo was the first to see it. In another week, or, at most, in two weeks, every dollar the barber had would have been spent. It was plain enough to him that he could not continue to attend school till exhibition day came, and he would lose the medal he coveted, and for which he had worked most diligently. Maggie poured out his cup of tea, and handed it to him. He was eating his supper; but his head was bowed down.

"Leo," said she.

He looked up with a start, took his tea, and immediately lost himself again.

"Leo!" added Maggie, in her peculiarly tender tones.

He looked up again.

"What are you thinking about, Leo?" she continued, gazing earnestly at him. "I need not ask you, Leo. You are thinking of poor *mon père*."

"I was thinking of him. I was thinking, too, that I should lose my medal now," replied Leo, gloomily.

"Fie on your medal! Don't think of such a trifle as that!" she added, gently rebuking the selfish thought of her brother.

"You don't quite understand me, Maggie."

"I hope you are not thinking of yourself, Leo—only of *mon père*."

"I was thinking that he has worked for me, and now I must work for him. I must give up my school now."

"You must, indeed, Leo."

"We can't stay in this house unless we pay the rent. Father made ten dollars a week, and it took every cent of it to pay the expenses. What shall we do now?"

"We must both work."

"We can't make ten dollars a week if both of us work. But you can't do anything more than take care of father. I don't see how we are going to get along. Fitz Wittleworth has only five dollars a week at Mr. Checkynshaw's. If he gave me the same wages, it wouldn't more than half pay our expenses."

Maggie looked puzzled and perplexed at this plain statement. It was a view of the situation she had not before taken, and she could not suggest any method of solving the difficult problem.

"We can reduce our expenses," said she, at last, a cheerful glow lighting up her face as she seemed to have found the remedy.

"You can't reduce them. The doctor's bill and the medicines will more than make up for anything we can save in things to eat and drink."

"That's very true, Leo. What shall we do?" inquired Maggie, sorrowfully, as her ingenious argument was overthrown.

"I don't know what we can do. They say doctors charge a dollar a visit, and that will make seven dollars a week. The medicines will cost another dollar, at least, perhaps two or three. That makes eight dollars. Even if we save three dollars a week in provisions and such things, it will cost fifteen dollars a week. I might as well try to fly as to make that. I couldn't do it. It's half as much again as father could make."

"O, dear!" sighed Maggie, appalled by this array of financial demands.

"I suppose the doctor won't bring in his bill yet a while," added Leo.

"But we must pay him. *Mon père* would worry himself to death in a short time if he knew he was getting in debt."

"I don't see how we can do it."

Leo relapsed into silence again, and finished his supper. The problem troubled him. He sat down by the stove, and did not move for half an hour. Maggie cleared off the table, washed the dishes and put them away, creeping stealthily into the front room every few moments to assure herself that all was well with her father.

"Leo, don't worry any more. We shall be cared for somehow. Our good Father in heaven will watch over us in the future, as he has in the past. Trust in God, Leo," said Maggie, impressively. "I will not worry any more, and you must not."

"I will trust in God; but God expects me to do something more than that. He helps those who help themselves. I am going to do something!" exclaimed he, springing to his feet. "MAKE OR BREAK, I'm going to do my duty; I'm going to do my whole duty."

"What are you going to do, Leo?"

"I don't know yet; but, make or break, I'm going to do something. It's no use for me to work for Mr. Checkynshaw at five dollars a week, when it will cost us fifteen dollars a week to get along. I'm going to do something," continued Leo, as he took a lamp from the shelf and lighted it.

Then he stopped before Maggie, and looked her full in the face, his eyes lighting up with unusual lustre.

"Why, what's the matter, Leo? What makes you look at me so?"

"Maggie, André is not our own father; but he has done all that an own father could do for us. Maggie, let me take your hand."

She gave him her hand, and was awed by the impressive earnestness of his manner.

"Maggie, I'm going to do my duty now. I want to promise you that poor father shall never want for anything. I want to promise you that I will do all for him that a real son could do."

"Good, kind Leo! We will both do our whole duty."

Leo dropped her hand, and went down stairs into his workshop. The white mice were capering and gamboling about their palatial abodes, all unconscious that poor André had been stricken down. Leo gave them their suppers, and sat down on the work-bench. He was in deep thought, and remained immovable for a long time.

He was a natural mechanic. His head was full of mechanical ideas. Was there not some useful article which he could make and sell—a boot-jack, a work-box, a writing-desk—something new and novel? He had half a dozen such things in his mind, and he was thinking which one it would pay best to mature. His thought excited him, and he twisted about on the bench, knocking a chisel on the floor. The noise frightened the mice, and they made a stampede to their nests. He looked up at them.

"That's an idea!" exclaimed he, leaping off the bench. "Make or break, I'll put it through!"

CHAPTER IX.

MR. CHECKYNSHAW AND FAMILY.

We left Mr. Checkynshaw entering the house of Mrs. Wittleworth, in Atkinson Street; and, as he was a gentleman of eminent dignity and gravity, we feel compelled to beg his pardon for leaving him so long out in the cold of a winter night. Having made the barber as comfortable as the circumstances would permit, we are entirely willing to let the banker in, though the abode at which he sought admission was hardly worthy of the distinguished honor thus conferred upon it.

Mrs. Wittleworth cautiously opened the door, for those who have the least to steal are often the most afraid of robbers; but, recognizing the lofty personage at the door, she invited him to enter, much wondering what had driven him from his comfortable abode in Pemberton Square to seek out her obscure residence at that hour in the evening. Mr. Checkynshaw was conducted to an apartment which served as kitchen, parlor, and bed-room for the poor woman, her son having a chamber up stairs. A seat was handed to the great man, and he sat down by the cooking-stove, after bestowing a glance of apparent disgust at the room and its furnishings.

The banker rubbed his hands, and looked as though he meant business; and Mrs. Wittleworth actually trembled with fear lest some new calamity was about to be heaped upon the pile of misfortunes that already weighed her down. Mr. Checkynshaw had never before darkened her doors. Though she had once been a welcome guest within his drawing-rooms, she had long since been discarded, and cast out, and forgotten. When the poor woman, worse than a widow, pleaded before him for the means of living, he had given her son a place in his office, at a salary of five dollars a week. If she had gone to him again, doubtless he would have done more for her; but, as long as she could keep soul and body together by her ill-paid drudgery, she could not endure the humiliation of displaying her poverty to him.

Mrs. Wittleworth had once lived in affluence. She had been brought up in ease and luxury, and her present lot was all the harder for the contrast. Her father, James Osborne, was an enterprising merchant, who had accumulated a fortune of a hundred thousand dollars, on which he had the good sense to retire from active business. Of his four children, the two sons died, leaving the two daughters to inherit his wealth.

John Wittleworth, the father of Fitz, was a clerk in the counting-room of Mr. Osborne, and finally became the partner of his employer, whose confidence he obtained to such a degree that the merchant was willing to trust him with all he had. He married Ellen Osborne; and when her father retired from business, his son-in-law carried it on alone. At this time, doubtless, John Wittleworth was worthy of all the confidence reposed in him, for the terrible habit, which eventually beggared him, had not developed itself to an extent which seemed perilous even to the eye of affection.

A few years after the marriage of Ellen, Mr. Checkynshaw, then aspiring to no higher title than that of a simple broker, presented himself as the suitor of Mary, the younger daughter of the retired merchant. Mr. Osborne did not like him very well; but Mary did, and their affair was permitted to take its course. Only a few months after this alliance of the Checkynshaw and the Osborne, the merchant was taken sick. When it was evident that his days were drawing to a close, he made his will.

His property consisted of about one hundred thousand dollars. One half of it was invested in a block of stores, which paid a heavy rental, and the other half was in money, stocks, and debts. In settling the affairs of the firm he had taken John Wittleworth's notes for thirty thousand dollars, secured by a mortgage on the stock. In making his will, Mr. Osborne gave to Ellen or—what was the same thing in those days, when a woman did not own her own property—to her husband, all the money, stocks, and debts due from Wittleworth. He did this because his late partner wanted more capital to increase his business.

To Mary, the wife of Mr. Checkynshaw, he gave the block of stores; but, not having so much confidence in Mary's husband as in Ellen's, he gave her the property with certain restrictions. The income of the estate was to be hers—or her husband's—during her life. At her death the estate was to pass to her children. If she died without children, the property was to be her sister's, or her sister's children's. But Mr. Osborne did not wish to exhibit any want of confidence in Mary's husband; so he made Mr. Checkynshaw the trustee, to hold the block of stores for his wife and for her children. He had the power to collect the rents, and as long as his wife lived, or as long as her children lived, the money was practically his own.

Mary, the first Mrs. Checkynshaw, was in rather feeble health, and the doctors advised her to spend the winter in the south of France. Her husband complied with this advice; and her child, Marguerite, was born in Perpignan, and had a French name because she was born in France. The family returned home in the following spring; but Mrs. Checkynshaw died during the succeeding winter. Marguerite was a fine, healthy child; and to her now belonged the block of stores bequeathed by her grandfather, her father holding it in trust for her.

In another year Mr. Checkynshaw married his second wife, who treated little Marguerite well enough, though she felt no deep and motherly interest in her, especially after Elinora, her own daughter, was born. Mr. Checkynshaw called himself a banker now. He had taken Mr. Hart and another gentleman into the concern as partners, and the banking-house of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co. was a rising establishment.

The second Mrs. Checkynshaw was an ambitious woman, vain and pretentious. Her friends had been to London, Paris, Naples, and Rome. She had never been in Europe, and it galled her to be out of the fashion. When Elinora was only two years old, she insisted upon going abroad. Her husband did not like the idea of travelling with two children, one five and the other two years old. But he was over-persuaded, and finally consented to go. They arrived in Paris in July, and intended to remain there two months; but, before this period elapsed, the banker received a letter from Mr. Hart informing him of the sudden death of the third partner in their house. This event compelled him to return immediately; but Mrs. Checkynshaw was so well pleased with Parisian life, that she was unwilling to leave the city so soon. The voyage to her was terrible, and she had seen little or nothing of Europe. The family had taken apartments, and she was loath to leave them.

A friend of the banker, who with his wife occupied rooms in the same house, suggested that Mrs. Checkynshaw and her children should remain until her husband could return, two or three months later. An arrangement to this effect was made, and the banker hastened home to settle his business affairs. He had hardly departed before the cholera broke out with fearful violence in Paris. One of its first victims was the gentleman who had charge of Mr. Checkynshaw's family. His wife followed him, only a day later, to the cholera hospital.

Of course the banker's wife was terribly frightened, and instantly made her preparations to leave the infected city. Poor little Marguerite was the first of the family to take the disease, and she was hurried off to the hospital by the landlord of the house, who was very polite, but very heartless. This event would not have delayed the departure of Mrs. Checkynshaw, but she was stricken down herself before she could leave. The fearful malady raged with awful violence; hospitals were crowded with patients, and the dead were hurried to their last resting-place without a prayer or a dirge.

Little Elinora was taken by her nurse to the Sisters of Charity, and escaped the disease. Mrs. Checkynshaw recovered, and as soon as she was able, reclaimed her child, and fled to the interior of Switzerland, to a small town which the plague had not yet visited. When the panic had subsided, she returned to Paris. She bad been informed, before her departure, that little Marguerite had died of the disease; but, on her return, she visited the hospital, and made more careful inquiry in regard to the little patient. She was told that the child answering to her description had died, and been buried with a dozen others. It was then impossible to identify the remains of the child.

Mr. Checkynshaw returned to Paris in September. His wife had written to him and to Mrs. Wittleworth as soon as she was able, and her husband had received her letter before his departure from Boston. Poor little Marguerite! She was his own child, and he was sorely grieved at her death. He was not quite satisfied with his wife's investigations, and he determined to inquire further. With Mrs. Checkynshaw he went to the hospital.

"The child died the day after it was brought here," replied the director. "Here is the name;" and he pointed to the record.

The name indicated certainly was not "Checkynshaw," though it was as near it as a Frenchman could be expected to write it. The letters spelled "Chuckingham."

"Allow me to look at the book," said Mr. Checkynshaw.

"Certainly, sir; but I remember the case well. She was a little English girl," added the director.

"This child was American," interposed the anxious father.

"We cannot tell the difference. She spoke only English."

"What is this?" asked Mr. Checkynshaw, pointing to another name. "Marguerite Poulebah."

"That patient was discharged, cured."

"Do you translate English proper names?"

"Never!"

"What became of this patient?" asked Mr. Checkynshaw, deeply interested.

"I don't know."

The banker was satisfied that "Marguerite Poulebah" was his daughter; that the persons who had brought her to the hospital understood a little English, and had translated his surname literally from "chicken" and "pshaw." He investigated the matter for a week. The concierge of the lodgings where he had resided assured him he had not given the name as "Poulebah." At the end of the week he informed his wife that he had obtained a clew to the child. She had been taken from the hospital by the Sisters of Charity, and sent to Strasburg, that she might not have a relapse. Mr. Checkynshaw went to Strasburg alone.

On his return he assured his wife that he had found Marguerite; that she was happy with the Sisters, and cried when he spoke of taking her away. The devoted ladies were very much attached to her, he said; and he had concluded that it would be best to leave her there, at least until they were ready to embark for home. Mrs. Checkynshaw did not object. She had no love for the child, and though she had treated her well from a sense of duty, was rather glad to get rid of her.

The family remained in Europe till the next spring. Mr. Checkynshaw went to see his daughter again. The Sisters were educating her, and he declared that Marguerite was so very happy with them, and begged so hard not to be taken from them, that he had consented to let her remain at their school. Mrs. Checkynshaw did not care; she thought it was strange; but if the child's father deemed it best for her to remain with the Sisters, it was not for her to say anything. She did not say anything—Marguerite was not her own child.

When they returned to Boston, the friends of the Osbornes wished to know what had become of the child. Mr. Checkynshaw had not informed any one of the death of Marguerite when the intelligence came to him in his wife's letter, though Mrs. Wittleworth had received it direct from the same source. He had grieved deeply at the loss of the child. Yet his sorrow was not alone for poor Marguerite; the block of stores, every year increasing in value, must not pass out of his hands.

"The poor child had the cholera in Paris, and was sent to the hospital," was his reply. "When she recovered, Mrs. Checkynshaw was down with the disease, and the Sisters of Charity took her in charge. They treated her as a mother treats her own child, and Marguerite loves them better than she does my wife. I don't like to say anything about it, and will not, except to most intimate friends; but Marguerite was not Mrs. Checkynshaw's own daughter. They were not very fond of each other, and—well, I think you ought to be able to understand the matter without my saying anything more. The poor child is very happy where she is, and I had not the heart to separate her from such dear friends."

Everybody inferred that Mrs. Checkynshaw did not treat the child well, and no more questions were asked. The banking-house of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co. increased in wealth and importance, and had extensive foreign connections in England. Every year or two the head of the house crossed the ocean, partly, as he declared, to transact his business in London, and partly to visit his child in France.

CHAPTER X.

THE WITTLEWORTH FAMILY.

While everything appeared to be well with the banker, into whose exchequer the revenues of the block of stores flowed with unintermitting regularity, the affairs of the other branch of the Osborne family were in a far less hopeful condition. John Wittleworth drank to excess, and did not attend to his business. It was said that he gambled largely; but it was not necessary to add this vice to the other in order to rob him of his property, and filch from him his good name.

He failed in business, and was unable to reëstablish himself. He obtained a situation as a clerk, but his intemperate habits unfitted him for his duties. If he could not take care of his own affairs, much less could he manage the affairs of another. He had become a confirmed sot, had sacrificed everything, and given himself up to the demon of the cup. He became a ragged, filthy drunkard; and as such, friends who had formerly honored him refused to recognize him, or to permit him to enter their counting-rooms. Just before the opening of our story, he had been arrested as a common drunkard; and it was even a relief to his poor wife to know that he was safely lodged in the House of Correction.

When Mrs. Wittleworth found she could no longer depend upon her natural protector, she went to work with her own hands, like an heroic woman, as she was. As soon as her son was old enough to be of any assistance to her, a place was found for him in a lawyer's office, where he received a couple of dollars a week. Her own health giving way under the drudgery of toil, to which she had never been accustomed, she was obliged to depend more and more upon Fitz, who, in the main, was not a bad boy, though his notions were not suited to the station in which he was compelled to walk. At last she was obliged to appeal to her brother-in-law, who gave Fitz his situation.

Fitz was rather "airy." He had a better opinion of himself than anybody else had—a vicious habit, which the world does not readily forgive. He wanted to dress himself up, and "swell" round among bigger men than himself. His mother was disappointed in him, and tried to teach him better things; but he believed that his mother was only a woman, and that he was wiser, and more skilful in worldly affairs, than she was. He paid her three dollars a week out of his salary of five dollars, and in doing this he believed that he discharged his whole duty to her.

Perhaps we ought again to apologize to Mr. Checkynshaw for leaving him so long in such a disagreeable place as the poor home of his first wife's sister; but he was seated before the cooking-stove, and the contemplation of poverty would do him no harm; so we shall not beg his pardon.

The banker looked around the room, at the meagre and mean furniture, and then at the woman herself; her who had once been the belle of the circle in which she moved, now clothed in the cheapest calico, her face pale and hollow from hard work and ceaseless anxiety. Perhaps he found it difficult to believe that she was the sister of his first wife.

"Where is Fitz?" asked he, in gruff accents.

"He has gone up in Summer Street. He will be back in a few minutes," replied Mrs. Wittleworth, as she seated herself opposite the banker, still fearing that some new calamity was about to overtake her.

"I want to see him," added Mr. Checkynshaw, in the most uncompromising tones.

"Fitz says you discharged him," continued the poor woman, heaving a deep sigh.

"I didn't; he discharged himself. I could not endure the puppy's impudence. But that is neither here nor there. I don't want to see him about that."

"I hope you will take him back."

"Take him back if he will behave himself."

"Will you?" asked she, eagerly.

"I will; that is, if it turns out that he was not concerned in robbing my safe."

"In what?" exclaimed Mrs. Wittleworth.

"My safe has been robbed of some of my most valuable papers."

"Robbed!"

"Yes, robbed."

"Did Fitz do it?" gasped the wretched mother; and this was even a greater calamity than any she had dreaded.

"I don't know whether he did or not; that's what I want to find out; that's what I want to see him for."

Mr. Checkynshaw proceeded to relate the circumstances under which the safe had been robbed. Before he had finished, Fitz came in, and his mother was too impatient to wait for her distinguished visitor to set any of his verbal traps and snares. She bluntly informed her hopeful son that he was suspected of being concerned in the robbery.

"I don't know anything about it. I had nothing to do with it," protested Fitz. "There's nothing too mean for Checkynshaw to say."

"Don't be saucy, Fitz. Try to be civil," pleaded his mother.

"Be civil! What, when he comes here to accuse me of robbing his safe? I can't stand that, and I won't, if I know myself," replied Fitz, shaking his head vehemently at the banker.

"I haven't accused you of anything, Fitz," added Mr. Checkynshaw, very mildly for him. "I came to inquire about it."

"Do you think if I did it that I would tell you of it?"

"I wish to ask you some questions."

"Well, you needn't!"

"Very well, young man," said the banker, rising from his chair, "if you don't choose to answer me, you can answer somebody else. I'll have you arrested."

"Arrested! I'd like to see you do it! What for? I know something about law!" He had been an errand boy in a lawyer's office!

"Don't be so rude, Fitz," begged his mother.

"Arrest me!" repeated the violent youth, whose dignity had been touched by the threat. "Do it! Why didn't you do it before you came here? You can't scare me! I wasn't brought up in the city to be frightened by a brick house. Why don't you go for a constable, and take me up now? I'd like to have you do it."

"I will do it if you don't behave yourself," said the banker, beginning to be a little ruffled by the violent and unreasonable conduct of Mr. Wittleworth.

"I wish you would! I really wish you would! I should like to know what my friend Choate would say about it."

"How silly you talk!" exclaimed his mother, quite as much disgusted as her stately visitor.

"You may let him badger you, if you like, mother; but he shall not come any odds on me—not if I know it, and I think I do!"

"It is useless for me to attempt to say anything to such a young porcupine," added Mr. Checkynshaw, taking his hat from the table.

Mrs. Wittleworth burst into tears. She had hoped to effect a reconciliation between her son and his employer, upon which her very immunity from blank starvation seemed to depend. The case was a desperate one, and the bad behavior of Fitz seemed to destroy her last hope.

"I will give up now, Fitz, and go to the almshouse," sobbed she.

Fitz was inclined to give up also when this stunning acknowledgment was made in the presence of his great enemy, the arch dragon of respectability.

"I am willing to work, but not to be trodden upon," added he, sullenly; but his spirit for the moment seemed to be subdued.

"Mr. Checkynshaw wishes to ask you some questions, and it is your duty to answer them," said Mrs. Wittleworth, a little encouraged by the more hopeful aspect of her belligerent son.

"Ask away," replied Fitz, settling himself into a chair, and fixing his gaze upon the stove.

"Do you know Pilky Wayne?" asked the banker, who had a certain undefined fear of Fitz since the robbery, which, however, the immensity of his dignity prevented him from exposing.

"Know who?" demanded Fitz, looking up.

"Pilky Wayne."

"Never heard of him before."

"Yes, you have; you made an arrangement with him to rob my safe," continued the banker, who could not help browbeating his inferior.

"Did I? Well, if I did, I did," answered Fitz, shaking his head. "What do you think my friend Choate would say to that?"

"He would say you were a silly fellow," interposed Mrs. Wittleworth. "Don't be impudent, Fitz."

"Well, I won't be impudent!" said Fitz, with a kind of suppressed chuckle.

"There were, or you thought there were, certain papers in my safe which might be useful to you," added Mr. Checkynshaw.

"I don't believe there were any letters from my cousin Marguerite among them," replied Fitz, with a sneering laugh. "Marguerite must be able to write very pretty letters by this time."

"Be still, Fitz," pleaded Mrs. Wittleworth.

"Fitz, I don't want to quarrel with you," continued Mr. Checkynshaw, in the most pliable tones Fitz had ever heard the banker use to him.

"I thought you did. Accusing a gentleman of robbing your safe is not exactly the way to make friends with him," said Fitz, so much astonished at the great man's change of tone that he hardly knew what to say.

"I accuse you of nothing. Fitz, if you want your place in my office again, you can return to-morrow morning."

Mr. Wittleworth looked at his disconsolate mother. A gleam of triumph rested on his face. The banker, the head and front of the great house of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co., had fully and directly recognized the value of his services; had fairly "backed out," and actually entreated him to return, and fill the vacant place, which no other person was competent to fill! That was glory enough for one day. But he concluded that it would be better for the banker to come down a peg farther, and apologize for his abusive treatment of his confidential clerk.

"Certainly he will be glad to take the place again, sir," said Mrs. Wittleworth, who was anxious to help along the negotiation.

"Perhaps I will; and then again, perhaps I will not," replied Mr. Wittleworth, who was beginning to be airy again, and threw himself back on his chair, sucked his teeth, and looked as magnificent as an Eastern prince. "Are you willing to double my salary, Mr. Checkynshaw?"

"After what I have heard here to-night, I am," answered the banker, promptly. "I ought to have done it before; and I should, had I known your mother's circumstances."

That was very unlike Mr. Checkynshaw. Mr. Wittleworth did not like it. His salary was to be doubled as an act of charity, rather than because he deserved such a favor. It was not like the banker to want him at all after what had happened. There was something deep under it; but Fitz was deep himself.

"Perhaps you might help me in finding my papers. Of course I don't care a straw for the three hundred and fifty dollars or so which was stolen with them," suggested Mr.

Checkynshaw.

"Perhaps I might; perhaps I have some skill in business of that kind, though I suppose it doesn't exactly become me to say so," added Fitz, stroking his chin. "But if you mean to intimate that I know anything about them, you are utterly and entirely mistaken. I'm an honest man—the noblest work of God."

"I will give you ten dollars a week for the future, if you will return," said Mr. Checkynshaw, impatiently.

"Of course he will," almost gasped the eager mother.

Fitz was deep. The banker was anxious. It meant something. Fitz thought he knew what it meant.

"On the whole, I think I will *not* return," replied he, deliberately.

"Are you crazy, Fitz?" groaned Mrs. Wittleworth, in despair.

"Never a more sane man walked the earth. Mr. Checkynshaw knows what he is about; I know what I am about."

"We shall both starve, Fitz!" cried his mother.

"On the contrary, mother, we shall soon be in possession of that block of stores, with an income of five or six thousand a year," added Fitz, complacently.

"The boy's an idiot!" exclaimed the banker, as he took his hat, and rushed out of the house.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOUSE BUSINESS.

While Maggie Maggimore took upon herself the blessed task of nursing the barber, Leo charged himself with the duty of providing for the wants of the family. Each had assumed all that one person could be expected to achieve. It was no small thing for a girl of fifteen to take the entire care of a helpless invalid; and it was no small thing for a boy of fifteen to take upon himself the task of providing for the expenses of the house, and the medical attendance of the sick man.

It would have been much easier for Leo to fail in his assumed task than for Maggie to do so. Even a young man of so much importance as Fitzherbert Wittleworth, upon whom the salvation of the great house of Checkynshaw, Hart, & Co. seemed to depend, toiled for the meagre pittance of five dollars a week. Leo had some acquaintance with the late clerk in the private office of the banker, and he had listened with wonder to the astounding achievements of Fitz in the postal and financial departments of the house. Of course Mr. Wittleworth would be a partner in the concern as soon as he was twenty-one, if not before; for, besides his own marvellous abilities, he had the additional advantage of being a relative of the distinguished head of the concern.

Leo was abashed at his own insignificance when he stood in the presence of the banker's clerk. If such an astonishing combination of talent as Mr. Wittleworth possessed could be purchased for five dollars a week, what could he, who was only a mere tinker, expect to obtain? Half that sum would have been an extravagant valuation of his own services, under ordinary circumstances. But beneath the burden which now rested upon him, he felt an inspiration which had never before fired his soul; he felt called upon to perform a miracle.

He was born with a mechanical genius, and he felt it working within him. There was no end of wooden trip-hammers, saw-mills, and other working machines he had invented and constructed. Under the pressure of the present necessity he felt able to accomplish better things. Something must be done which would produce fifteen, or at least ten, dollars a week. It was no use to think it couldn't be done; it must be done. It looked like a species of lunacy on his part to flatter himself that it was possible to make even more than a journeyman mechanic's wages.

Leo had in his busy brain half a dozen crude plans of simple machines. Often, when he saw people at work, he tried to think how the labor might be done by machinery. As he sat in the kitchen, where Maggie was sewing or preparing the dinner, he was devising a way to perform the task with wood and iron. Only a few days before the illness of the barber, he had seen her slicing potatoes to fry, and the operation had suggested a potato slicer, which would answer equally well for cucumbers, onions, and apples.

Sitting on the bench, he was thinking of this apparatus, when fifteen dollars a week became a necessity. But the machine required more iron than wood work, and he had not the means to do the former, and no capital to invest in other people's labor. Then he turned his attention to a new kind of boot-jack he had in his mind—an improvement on one he had seen, which could be folded up and put in a traveller's carpet-bag. As this implement was all wood except the hinges and screws, it looked more hopeful. He could make half a dozen of them in a day, and they would sell for half a dollar apiece. He was thinking of an improvement on the improvement, when the stampede of the mice deranged his ideas; but they gave him a new one.

White mice were beautiful little creatures. Their fur was so very white, their eyes so very pink, and their paws so very cunning, that everybody liked to see them. Even the magnificent Mr. Checkynshaw had deigned to regard them with some attention, and had condescended to say that his daughter Elinora would be delighted to see them. Then the houses, and the gymnastic apparatus which Leo attached to them, rendered them tenfold more interesting. At a store in Court Street the enterprising young man had seen them sold for half a dollar a pair; indeed, he had paid this sum for the ancestral couple from which had descended, in the brief space of a year and a half the numerous tribes and families that peopled the miniature palaces on the basement walls.

At this rate his present stock was worth seventy-five dollars—the coveted salary of five whole weeks! In another month, at least fifty more little downy pink-eyes would emerge from their nests, adding twenty-five dollars more to his capital stock in trade!

Leo had already decided to go into the mouse business.

He was counting his chickens before they were hatched, and building magnificent castles in the air; but even the most brilliant success, as well as the most decided failure, is generally preceded by a vast amount of ground and lofty tumbling in the imagination. If the man in Court Street could sell a pair of white mice for fifty cents, and a beggarly tin box with a whirligig for a dollar, making the establishment and its occupants cost a dollar and a half, why would not one of his splendid palaces, with two or three pairs of mice in it, bring three, or even five dollars? That was the point, and there was the argument all lying in a nutshell.

Leo had faith. What would a rich man care for five dollars when he wanted to please his children? He had watched his mice day after day, and week after week, by the hour at a time, and had never failed to be amused at their gambols. Everybody that came to the house was delighted with them. If the man in Court Street could sell them, he could. There was money in the speculation, Leo reasoned, and it should not fail for the want of a fair trial.

He could make houses of various sizes, styles, and prices, and thus suit all tastes. He could stock each one with as many mice as the customer desired. He could make a pretty elaborate establishment in two days—five-dollar size; and of the smaller and plainer kind—two-dollar pattern—he could make two in a day.

The palace on the bench was nearly completed, and he went to work at once and finished it. It had a glass front, so that the dainty little occupants of the institution could not get out, and the foe of white mice, the terrible cat, could not get in. This establishment had been intended for Mr. Stropmore; but as that gentleman had not been informed of his purpose to present it, Leo decided that it should be used to initiate the experiment on whose success so much depended.

It was ten o'clock at night when the grand palace on the bench was finished. Leo put some cotton wool into the sleeping apartments, and then transferred three pairs of mice from the most densely populated house to the new one. He watched them for a while, as they explored their elegant hotel, going up stairs and down, snuffing in every corner, standing upon their hind legs, and taking the most minute observations of the surroundings.

Leo was entirely satisfied with the work of his hands, and with the conduct of the mice who had been promoted to a residence in its elegant and spacious quarters. If there was not five dollars in that establishment, then the rich men of Boston were stingy and ungrateful. If they could not appreciate that superb palace, and those supple little beauties who held court within its ample walls, why, they were not worthy to be citizens of the Athens of America!

Leo went up stairs. André still slept, and Maggie sat by the bedside, patiently watching him in his slumbers. He crept softly into the front room, and looked at the pale face of his father. His heart was lighter than it had been before since the news of the calamity was told to him. He was full of hope, and almost believed that he had solved the problem of supplying all the wants of the family.

"You must sleep yourself, Maggie," said he, in a whisper.

"Hush!" said she, fearful that the sleeper might be disturbed, as she led the way into the rear room.

"I will sit up half the night, Maggie."

"No, Leo; there is no need of that. I wake very easily, and I can sleep enough in the rocking-chair. You seem to be quite cheerful now, Leo," added she, noticing the change which had come over him.

"I feel so, Maggie. You say we shall want fifteen dollars a week."

"No, you said so, Leo. I might take in sewing; but I don't think both of us can make anything like that sum. I am very much worried. I don't know what will become of us."

"Don't be worried any more. I'm going to make that money myself. You needn't do anything but take care of father; and I'll help you do the housework," added Leo, cheerfully.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going into the mouse business."

"Into what?"

"The mouse business," replied Leo, gravely.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Maggie, puzzled as much by his gravity as by the unintelligible phrase he had used.

Leo explained what he meant, and argued the case with much skill and enthusiasm.

Maggie would have laughed if she had not been solemnly impressed by the condition of her father, and by the burden of responsibility that rested upon her as his nurse. She went into the basement, and looked at the house which Leo had just finished. It was certainly very pretty, and the mice in it were very cunning.

"You don't think any one will give you five dollars for that house—do you?" said she, as she joined him in the back room again.

"I mean to ask six for it, and if folks won't give it, they are mean. That is all I've got to say about it," replied Leo.

"But they won't."

"Why, the mice alone are worth a dollar and a half; and there is two days' work in the house, besides the stock and the glass. I certainly expect to get six dollars for the concern, though I shall not complain if I don't get but five. I can make from three to a dozen of them in a week, and if I don't make at least fifteen dollars a week out of the mouse business, I shall be disappointed—that's all."

"I am afraid you will be disappointed, Leo," replied Maggie, with a sigh, as she thought what a sad thing it would be when the brilliant air-castle tumbled to the ground.

"Perhaps I shall; if I do, I can't help it. But if this fails, I have got another string to my bow."

"What's that?"

"I shall go into the boot-jack business next; and I hope to get up my machine for slicing potatoes, and such things, soon."

"O, dear, Leo! You are full of strange ideas. I only hope that some of them will work well," added Maggie.

"I'm going to be reasonable, sis. I'm not going to give up if a thing fails once, twice, or nineteen times. I'm going to keep pulling. I've got half a dozen things in my head; if five of them fail, I shall make a big thing out of the sixth."

"I hope you will; you are so patient and persevering that you ought to succeed in something."

"O, I shall; you may depend upon that! Make or break, I'm bound to succeed in something."

"What do you mean by 'make or break,' Leo? It sounds just as though you meant to make money if you sacrificed everything."

"I don't mean that."

"I would rather go to the almshouse than be dishonest. I can't think of anything more horrid than being wicked."

"Nor I either. I don't mean to be dishonest, Maggie. I would rather be a good man than a rich one, any day; but I think a man can be both. A good man, with lots of money, is better than a good man without it; for he can do good with it. When I say, 'make or break,' I don't mean anything bad by it. I'll tell you what I mean, Maggie. It seems to me, when I get hold of a good thing, I ought to keep pulling till I carry my point, or pull away till something breaks. I don't mean to risk everything on a turn of the wheel of fortune; nothing of that sort. I mean to persevere and stick to anything so long as there's any chance of success—till the strings break, and the whole thing tumbles down. That's my idea."

The idea was satisfactory to Maggie, and she returned to her patient, while Leo went up to bed; but not to sleep for hours, for the "mouse business" excited his brain, and kept him awake.

CHAPTER XII.

LEO'S WONDERFUL PERFORMERS.

Maggie, at the sick bed of André, slept even more than Leo. She had a lounge in the room, placed near her charge, on which she rested comfortably, though she rose several times in the night to assure herself that all was well with her father. In the morning André seemed to be in the entire possession of his faculties. He had slumbered quietly all night, hardly opening his eyes after he took the doctor's prescription.

He awoke before his attentive nurse. He had but a faint remembrance of the events of the preceding evening; for, after he came out of the fit, he was in a kind of stupor. He had noticed Maggie and Leo at the house of the banker; but everything seemed like a dream.

"Maggie," said he, as he looked around the familiar apartment, and saw her lying on the lounge.

She sprang to her feet, and went to him, glad to hear the sound of his voice, but fearful that the call might be the prelude of another attack. He smiled as she approached him, and made an effort to extend his right hand to her; but he could not move it.

"Father!" exclaimed the fond girl, as she bent over him and kissed his pale face, now slightly flushed with fever.

"I have been very ill," he added.

"You have, indeed; but you are better now; and I am so glad, *mon père*!"

"Ah, *ma fille*, you are a good girl! You have been by my side all night. It was selfish for me to wake you."

"No, no! It was not. I'm glad you did. I am so happy to find you better!"

"What ails me? I can't move my right arm, nor my right leg," asked André, struggling to raise his limbs. "There is no feeling in my right side."

"The doctor will come by and by, and tell you all about it."

"My head feels very strange," added the sufferer.

"I am sorry, *mon père*. What can I do?" said Maggie, tenderly.

"Give me some cold water."

She gave him the drink, supporting his head with her arm. It was plain, even to Maggie, that André was in a very bad way.

"Go up stairs, and go to bed now, Maggie. You have been up all night," said he, with a loving glance at her.

"No, *mon père*, I have no need to go to bed. I have slept on the lounge nearly all night. I feel quite bright, only I'm so sad to think you are sick."

"I shall be well soon. I must be well soon," he added, looking anxiously at her.

"I hope you will be well soon; but it may be several weeks before you are able to go out," replied Maggie, wishing to have him reconciled to his lot as soon as possible.

"Several weeks, Maggie! O, no! I must go to the shop sooner than that."

"You must be very patient, *mon père*."

"I will be patient, Maggie; but I must go to the shop soon."

"Don't think of the shop yet."

"My poor children! What will become of you? I have no money. I must work, or you will starve, and be turned out of the house because the rent is not paid. Indeed I must go to the shop, Maggie."

"But you cannot. You are not able to lift your right arm at all, and you are so weak you could not stand up. Do be patient, and not think at all of the shop."

"I must do as you bid me now, Maggie."

"Then don't think of the shop, or anything but our nice little home, where we have always been so happy."

"How shall we pay the rent if I lie here? Where will you get food to eat and clothes to wear?" demanded André, with something like a shudder of his paralyzed frame.

"Don't think of those things."

"I must. I was wicked not to save up some money."

"No, you were not wicked; you were always as good as you could be. The good God will take care of us."

"They will send us all to the almshouse."

"No, no; Leo is going to make heaps of money!" replied Maggie, though she had not much confidence in her brother's brilliant scheme, or even in the inventions that reposed in his active brain. "Can't you go to sleep again, *mon père*?"

"I will try," replied he, meekly. "I will if you go to bed, and sleep. What should I do if you were sick?"

"I shall not be sick. I have slept enough. I will go and make you some beef tea, and get breakfast for Leo. I shall hear you if you call."

Leo had made the fire in the cooking-stove, and in a short time the odor of fried sausages pervaded the house; the beef tea was in course of preparation, and the coffee was boiling on the stove. Maggie was as busy as a bee; but every five minutes she ran into the front room, and asked André if he wanted anything. She went to the front door, where the baker had deposited half a dozen two-cent rolls, each of which was nearly as big as one sold for five cents now.

For a girl of fifteen, Maggie was an excellent cook; indeed, she would have been regarded as a prodigy in this respect in our day and generation. She had acquired all her skill from André, whose accomplishments were almost unlimited. When he first came to Boston, he had boarded out; but, when Maggie was eight years old, he had taken this house. At first he had done the housework himself, with what little help she could give him, till now she had entirely relieved him from any care of this kind. At this time he had taken Leo from the almshouse, to be her companion in his absence.

Breakfast was soon ready; and Leo was called up from the workshop, where he had already got out a portion of the stock for four small mouse-houses, each intended to accommodate a single pair of mice. He was still cheerful and hopeful, and went in to see André before he sat down at the table. He told his father he was sure he could make ten dollars a week by his splendid enterprise. He intended to take the palace he had finished up to State Street, for sale, at noon that day. The problem would soon be solved, and he was already nearly as well satisfied as though he had the price of his curious merchandise in his pocket.

After breakfast he returned to the shop. He was sad when he thought of staying away from school, and of giving up the medal he had set his heart upon; but, then, it was a very great pleasure to do something for his devoted father, who had been so good to him. It was a great sacrifice that he was called upon to make; but there was no help for it, and he tried to yield cheerfully to the necessity of the occasion. Gladly and hopefully he sawed and planed, and squared, and grooved, and mortised his work, and nailed the parts together.

At ten o'clock the doctor came. He was as gentle and kind as he had been the evening before. André was partially paralyzed on one side of his frame; but Dr. Fisher was quite hopeful of his patient, though it was not likely that he could go to work for some months. The physician was much pleased with Maggie, and when he was taking his leave he asked for Leo.

"He is in his shop at work," said Maggie. "Every one that comes here goes down to see his white mice; perhaps you would like to do so."

"I would," replied the doctor, with one of those benevolent smiles which all who knew him will remember to the end of their days.

Maggie conducted him to the basement, and then returned to Andre's chamber. The doctor examined the cages and palaces with wondering interest, though the mice were all asleep in their lairs. Leo put a little canary seed in the grand parade of each house, and this was quite enough to rouse them from their slumbers, and induce them to exhibit themselves to the astonished visitor.

"These are my performing mice," said Leo, pointing to a house in which seven full-grown ones were nibbling the seed.

"What do they perform?" laughed the doctor.

"I'll show you, sir."

Leo swept out the canary seed from the grand parade, so that the little actors should have nothing to distract their attention. Taking six little sticks—that looked something like guns—he rapped with his finger-nail on the floor of the house. The seven mice stood up on their hind legs, in a straight line, like a file of soldiers. He then gave each of the first six his musket, and to the seventh a sword.

"Shoulder—arms!" said he, with a movement of his forefinger, which probably had more effect than the words.

The mice, with becoming gravity, obeyed the order, and successively went through four movements in the manual of arms. Then one of the little soldiers was deprived of his gun, and Leo explained that he was a deserter, and was to be shot for his crime. At a movement of the boy's forefinger, the culprit took his station at one side of the grand parade, while his companions formed a line on the other side, with their muskets pointed at the deserter.

"Fire!" said Leo, at the same time dropping a torpedo on the floor of the house, which exploded.

The infamous wretch of a white mouse, which had basely deserted his flag, dropped upon his back, and lay as still as though he had actually suffered the extreme penalty of martial law. It must be added that the captain of the firing party was so frightened by the noise of the torpedo that he scampered away into his nest, much to the mortification of Leo; but he was recalled, and compelled to face the music at the head of his squad.

Leo rapped again on the floor, and the defunct mouse was suddenly resurrected. The tragedy completed, the squad was dismissed, and immediately became white mice again, snuffing about the parade, doubtless wondering what had become of the canary seed, which was choice food, served out only on extra occasions.

"That is really wonderful," said Dr. Fisher. "Did you train them yourself?"

"Partly; but my father did most of it," replied Leo, who proceeded to explain the method by which the little creatures had been educated.

"Leo," said the doctor, as he was about to depart, "your sister seems to be a very sensitive young lady. I wanted to ask her some questions; but I did not feel quite equal to it. I will ask them of you; but I wish you to understand that I do so as your friend."

The good physician then inquired into the circumstances of the poor barber. Leo told him the exact truth, but assured him the family were in no need of assistance, and did not feel like accepting charity. Modestly, and with much enthusiasm, he then stated in what manner he intended to support the family.

"Certainly there are plenty of people who would be glad to have some of your beautiful little pets, especially in these elegant houses you make," added the physician. "I would take one myself if I had time to attend to them." The doctor was a bachelor.

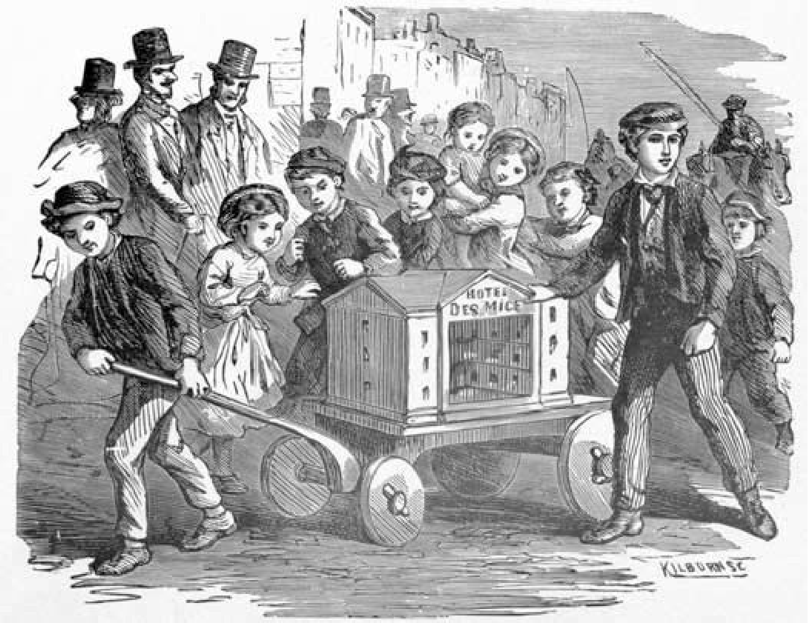
"I have no doubt I can sell them, sir."

"I hope you will not take it amiss if I mention the fact among my friends and patients that you have them for sale," added Dr. Fisher.

"No, sir; I'm sure I should not! I should be very much obliged to you."

"Then I will recommend your wares to those who are able to buy them; and I trust you will drive a large trade in the mouse business."

The doctor went away; and Leo, encouraged by the promise of the powerful influence of his visitor, resumed his work. At twelve o'clock, when Maggie called him to dinner, he had made considerable progress in the four houses in process of construction. When he had finished his noonday meal, he went out and found Tom Casey, an Irish boy whom he had befriended in various ways. Tom agreed to go with him to State Street; and the new "HOTEL DES MICE"—as it was labelled in large letters on the front gable—was loaded upon a little wagon of Leo's build, and they started for the busy street, attended by a crowd of curious youngsters, of both sexes and of all conditions.



LEO STARTS FOR STATE STREET.—Page 152.

The mice were astonished at the sudden revolution which was taking place in their affairs; and Leo was as anxious as though the fate of the nation depended upon his success.

CHAPTER XIII.

WITTLEWORTH *vs.* CHECKYNSHAW.

Mr. Checkynshaw did a rushing business on the day his papers were stolen from the safe; therefore he rushed out of the humble abode of Mrs. Wittleworth. It is more than probable that he was entirely sincere when he called Fitz an idiot; but whether he was or not, that young gentleman's mother was satisfied that truer words had never been spoken. The banker had actually offered to give him ten dollars a week, and Fitz had declined to return. It was a degree of lunacy which she could neither understand nor appreciate. She was both grieved and angry. She wept, and reproached the reckless youth.

"I must give up in despair, Fitz," said she, bitterly. "If I could support you, I would."

"I don't want you to support me, mother," replied Fitz, stung by the reproach. "If you will leave this matter to me, I will manage it right."

"Leave it to you, Fitz! That would bring starvation to our door."

"No, mother; you look on the dark side. Here's five dollars for my week's salary," he added, handing her the money. "I give you the whole of it this week."

"This may keep off the wolf for a week or two," sighed Mrs. Wittleworth.

"I shall get into another place soon, mother; don't worry about it."

"But why didn't you take the place when he offered it to you at double wages, Fitz? It seems to me you are crazy."

"No, I am not crazy. I know what I am about, and Checkynshaw knows what he is about. What do you suppose induced him to double my salary so readily?"

"Because he saw how poor we were."

"What does he care for that? There is no more soul in him than there is in a brickbat, mother. It wouldn't trouble him if you starved to death—though you are his first wife's sister. That wasn't the reason."

"What was the reason, then, Fitz?" asked she, curiously.

"Checkynshaw is afraid of me," replied Fitz, stopping in his walk up and down the room, and looking into his mother's face to note the effect of this startling announcement.

"Afraid of you, Fitz! You are losing your senses!" exclaimed she, with an expression of strong disgust.

"It's just as I say, mother. He's afraid of me."

"Why should he be afraid of you? You are not so very terrible as to alarm a man in his position."

"Mother, that block of stores ought to be yours. You should have had the income of it ever since Checkynshaw came from France with his wife. I tell you that child died of the cholera, when Mrs. Checkynshaw had it. That is just as plain to me as the nose on a man's face."

"Nonsense, Fitz! Do you suppose Mr. Checkynshaw would keep me out of it if it belonged to me?"

"I know he would. I know the man. I haven't been in his office two years for nothing. I keep my eyes open—*I* do," answered Fitz, holding up his head till his neck was stretched to its full length. "Checkynshaw may be an honest man, as things go; but you can't make me believe he would give up that block of stores while he could hold on to it by hook or by crook. He wants me under his thumb, where he can know what I'm about. He has lost his papers, and he feels nervous about them. In my opinion, there's something or other among those documents which would let the light in upon that block of stores. That's why he is so anxious to find out where they are. That's why he don't care for the money that was stolen. He knows what he is about, and I know what I'm about."

"What is the use for us to think anything about the block of stores? You don't know that little Marguerite died," added Mrs. Wittleworth, interested, in spite of herself, in the extravagant pretensions of her son.

"I don't know it, I admit; but I think we ought to find out. Checkynshaw says the child is still living with the Sisters of Charity, somewhere in France. We have nothing but his word for it."

"That's enough. He says the child is living, and he don't like to have her ill-treated by her mother-in-law. She is happy at the boarding school, and when her education is finished, doubtless she will come home."

"That's all bosh! Did any one ever see a letter from her? Did Checkynshaw ever write a letter to her? Does he ever send her any money?"

"But he goes to see her every year or two, when he visits Europe."

"Perhaps he does, and then perhaps he don't. Did any one else ever see the child? Has any one any knowledge of her existence except through Checkynshaw? I think not. Don't tell me, mother, that a man would leave his daughter in a foreign country for ten years, and only go to see her every year or two. In my opinion,—and I think my opinion is worth something,—the child died in the hospital. Checkynshaw keeps up this fiction because it puts five or six thousand dollars a year into his pocket. No one has ever claimed the block of stores, and of course he will hold on to it till some one does."

Mrs. Wittleworth could not help thinking, while starvation or the almshouse stared her full in the face, what a blessing that block of stores would be to her. If her sister's child was dead, it rightfully belonged to her. It was certainly proper for Mr. Checkynshaw to prove that Marguerite was still living, or at least to satisfy her privately on the point.

"What can we do, Fitz?" she asked.

"What can we do, mother? That's the question. When I was in Summer Street, this evening, I thought I would call upon my friend Choate. Choate is a gentleman and a scholar—he is."

"Pshaw, Fitz!" ejaculated the poor woman. "Why *will* you talk about your friend Choate? He is not your friend. He would not touch you with a ten-foot pole. He looks down upon you from an infinite height."

"Not he. Choate always treats everybody like a gentleman. He always treated me like a gentleman. I believe in Choate—I do."

"It is ridiculous for you to talk about his being your friend."

"He is my friend in very deed. I called upon him at his residence, in Winthrop Place, this evening. He treated me like a gentleman. He was glad to see me. He shook hands with me, and welcomed me to his house, as though I had been the governor of the state. Everett was there, and Winthrop came in before I left. I heard them speak of Webster, and I suppose he was expected. I was introduced to Everett and Winthrop."

"You!" exclaimed his mother.

"I, mother!"

"Poor child, they were making fun of you!" sighed Mrs. Wittleworth.

"Not they. Everett bowed to me as gracefully as though I had been the President. Winthrop was a little stiff; but what did I care for him, as long as Choate and Everett were on good terms with me?"

"Your head is turned, Fitz."

"No matter if it is, so long as it is turned in the right direction. Choate told Everett and Winthrop that I had formerly occupied a place in his office, and that he had a high regard for me. He smiled pleasantly, and so did Everett. Winthrop didn't take much notice of me. Choate asked me if I wanted to see him for anything particular. I told him I did; I wanted a little legal advice in the matter of Wittleworth *vs.* Checkynshaw. He smiled very kindly upon me; he smiled as only Choate can smile."

"What did he say to you?" demanded Mrs. Wittleworth, impatiently.

"He apologized for his inability to attend to the case at that time, as he was engaged upon a matter of politics with Everett and Winthrop; but he hoped he should find time to see me in the course of a week. Of course I didn't care about breaking up his conference with Everett and Winthrop; so I apologized for the interruption, and promised him I would call upon him at his office the next day."

"I suppose he was very sorry he could not attend to the case," added Mrs. Wittleworth.

"He appeared to be. He expressed his regrets; and, as he was attending to the affairs of the nation, I could not be hard on him, you know."

"Certainly not," said his mother, amused in spite of the weakness of her son.

"Choate is a good fellow—Choate is," added Fitz, rubbing his chin, and puffing out his lips. "When he gets hold of this case, he will make things fly, mother."

"What are you going to do, Fitz?" asked Mrs. Wittleworth, seriously.

"I'm not going to mince the matter any longer. I am going to bring a suit against Checkynshaw for the block of stores, and the income received from them for the last ten years," replied Fitz, magnificently.

"You are!"

"I am; that is, when I say I am, of course I am going to do it in your name, for I am the next heir to you. That will bring things to a head, and we shall soon find out whether Checkynshaw is ready to stand trial or not."

"We have no money to go to law with," pleaded the poor woman.

"We don't want any, mother. I have looked into this business, and what I don't know about it isn't worth knowing. I know something about law, for I used to keep my eyes and ears open when I was in the law business."

Mr. Wittleworth had been an errand boy in Mr. Choate's office!

"I don't think you can go to law without money, Fitz. I have always heard it was very expensive," added Mrs. Wittleworth.

"All we want, mother, is a copy of my grandfather's will. We attach the block of stores, if necessary. Under the will it belongs to you, unless Checkynshaw can produce your sister's child."

"Suppose he should produce her?"

"That's the very thing he can't do. If he does, of course our case falls to the ground; but he can't."

"But if he does produce the child, where is the money to pay the expenses?"

"The expenses won't be much. I shall say to Choate, 'Choate,' says I, 'here's a piece of property which belongs to my mother. You can go up to the Registry of Probate, and read the will yourself. Give my mother legal possession of it, and I will pay you five or ten thousand dollars'—I haven't just decided exactly what to offer him. He takes the case, brings the suit, and gets the property for you."

"Suppose he doesn't get it?"

"Then he will get nothing. When I was in the law business, cases were sometimes taken in this way."

Mrs. Wittleworth was encouraged by this hopeful statement, and disposed to let Fitz have his own way. Abject poverty was so terrible that she could not afford to lose such a chance. Mr. Checkynshaw's conduct in leaving his child in France, among strangers, for ten years, was singular enough to beget suspicion.

The conversation was continued till the fire went out, and the chill air of the room drove the intended litigants to their chambers. Fitz did not come down till breakfast time the next morning. He lay in his warm bed, building castles in the air, and thinking what a great man he should be when the block of stores and its revenues were reclaimed from the grasp of Mr. Checkynshaw. He thought it quite possible that he could then go into a barber's shop and be shaved without any one having the impudence to laugh at him.

Mrs. Wittleworth had thought a great deal about the property, but she could not quite make up her mind to take such decided steps as those indicated by her son. If the attempt was made, and proved to be a failure, Mr. Checkynshaw would never forgive her, and might injure her in revenge. When she came down stairs, she had decided to call upon the banker, and state the case to him. If he chose to satisfy her that Marguerite was still living, it would save trouble and future disappointment.

"You can see him if you like, mother. I have no doubt he will smooth you over. Checkynshaw is a plausible man—Checkynshaw is. He carries too many guns for a woman. I would call myself if it were not for letting myself down to his level," said Mr. Wittleworth, stroking his chin, when his mother was ready to go.

"Don't be so silly, Fitz!"

"Checkynshaw won't stand trial, in my opinion. He is shrewd—he is."

"I only intend to ask him what he means to do," added Mrs. Wittleworth.

"He means to hold on to the property—that's what he means to do, mother. He may try to buy you off—don't do it, on any account. Leave this matter all to me. Me and Choate will fix it right. Now, be careful what you do."

"I will not do anything," said his mother, as she put on her bonnet.

"I will see Choate to-day. Me and Choate will touch off a volcano under Checkynshaw's feet in the course of a week or two," he added, as his mother left the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CHECKYNSHAW IS LIBERAL.

Mrs. Wittleworth went directly to the door of the private office. She had her doubts in regard to the interview which was to take place. Mr. Checkynshaw had never treated her very handsomely. She had called upon him only once since the downfall of her husband.

The banker had listened very coldly to her story of hardship and suffering. He had taken Fitz into his employ at that time; but her reception was so cold, and the great man's manner so forbidding, that she had resolved that nothing but imminent starvation should induce her to repeat the visit.

Mr. Checkynshaw was a hard, selfish, money-getting man. He was not one whom a poor relative would willingly approach with a tale of suffering. Though this was not Mrs. Wittleworth's present errand, she dreaded the result almost as much as though she had been an applicant for charity. The banker was overbearing and haughty in his way. He bullied his social inferiors, and looked upon them from a height which was appalling to them. She opened the door and entered. The banker was alone, sitting in the stuffed arm-chair at his desk.

"Ellen?" said he, glancing at her with an inquiring look, probably satisfied that she had come to plead for the return of her son to the place from which he had been discharged.

It did not occur to him that human impudence could extend so far as to permit such people to bring a suit against him for their rights, however well defined or clearly established. If he owed them anything, or they had any claims against him, it was their duty to be solemnly impressed by the loftiness of his social position, and humbly to beg for what belonged to them.

"I thought I would come up and see you this morning, Mr. Checkynshaw," stammered the poor woman; and poverty had so subdued her, and so broken her spirit, that she hardly knew how to introduce the subject upon her mind.

"If you come to ask me to take Fitz back, it will do no good. You permit the puppy to insult me," replied the banker, in the most forbidding tones.

"I don't permit him to insult you. I did what I could to make him speak properly to you," replied Mrs. Wittleworth, meekly.

"It's all the same; it was bad bringing up. I can't have him in my office again," added Mr. Checkynshaw, though at that moment, for some reason best known to himself, he would have been very glad to forgive the young man's insolence, and take him back at double salary. "That boy has outraged my good-nature. When I saw how hard the times were with you, I was willing to give him double wages; but the ingrate only insulted me for it."

"He is very wilful; I wish he was not so headstrong."

"I can't take him back now; at least not till he has apologized for his impudence, and promised better things for the future," continued the banker, shaking his head, as though his mind was firmly made up for the issue.

"I did not come to ask you to take him back," added Mrs. Wittleworth.

"O, you didn't!"

"No, sir; he is not yet willing to come."

"What did you come for—to beg?"

"I don't come to you to beg," replied she with a little display of spirit.

"What do you want, then?"

"You mustn't be angry with me, Mr. Checkynshaw."

"I'm not angry with you. If you have anything to say, say it. I hate long stories," said the banker, impatiently.

"Fitz has taken it into his head that the block of stores which my father gave to Mary belongs to us," continued Mrs. Wittleworth, looking down to the floor, as if fearful that the great man's glance would blast her if she beheld it.

"Has he, indeed?"

If Mrs. Wittleworth had looked at the banker instead of the floor, she might have seen that his face flushed slightly; that his lip quivered, and his chest heaved; but, as she did not look at him, the banker had time to suppress these tell-tale emotions.

"He thinks so; and he seems to be determined that something shall be done about it," added the poor woman, still gazing intently at the floor.

"And you encourage such ridiculous notions—do you, Ellen?" said Mr. Checkynshaw, severely.

"I don't know that I encourage them. I can't help his thoughts."

"Probably you don't wish to help them. Well, you can do as you please about it. If you choose to get him and yourself into difficulty, I suppose nothing I can say will have any influence with you."

"I don't want to get into trouble, or to spend any money in going to law."

"I should judge, from the appearance of your house, that you hadn't much to spend in that way," sneered the banker.

"I have not, indeed. I said all I could to dissuade Fitz from doing anything about the matter; but he is bent upon it. He has been to see Mr. Choate about it."

"To see Mr. Choate!" exclaimed the banker, springing out of his chair; and now his face was deadly pale.

But in an instant Mr. Checkynshaw was conscious that he was revealing the weakness of his position, and he sat down in his chair again, with a placid smile upon his face.

"Am I to understand that Fitz and you intend to fight me in the law upon this matter?" demanded he, with a sardonic grin on his face, indicating both fear and malice.

"Fitz says there will be no fighting about it. We are to bring a suit to recover the property, according to the terms of my father's will, with the income for ten years."

"Fitz says so—does he?"

"He thinks Marguerite died when your present wife had the cholera. He says all you have to do is to produce the child. If you do, that will be the end of it; if not, the property certainly belongs to us."

"What makes Fitz think that Marguerite is not living?" asked Mr. Checkynshaw, more mildly than he had yet spoken.

"Well, he has his reasons," replied she, not quite certain that she might not say something which would compromise her son.

"What are his reasons?"

"I don't know that it is necessary to mention them. I think myself it is very strange that you haven't brought her home. She must be fifteen years old by this time."

"That is her age."

"I don't want any trouble about this business, Mr. Checkynshaw; so I thought I would come up and see you. Perhaps you can show me some letters from Marguerite, or something else that will convince Fitz that she is alive."

"I have no letters here."

"Have you any at your house?" asked Mrs. Wittleworth.

"Not that I am aware of. I never preserve any but business letters. If I understand you, Ellen, Fitz's modest claim is for the block of stores and the income of them for the last ten years."

"That's what he said."

"Are you aware of the amount of this claim?" asked the banker, nervously.

"I don't know, exactly."

"I suppose not," said Mr. Checkynshaw, pausing to reflect. "I don't wish to bring Marguerite home till her education is completed, and this thing may cause me some annoyance."

"I'm sure I don't want to annoy you," pleaded Mrs. Wittleworth.

"Perhaps you do not; but Fitz does. If you refuse to be a party to this suit, of course he can do nothing. He has no rights yet in the premises himself, and he is under age."

"I think myself the matter ought to be settled up somehow or other," replied Mrs. Wittleworth, timidly. "I am so poor I can hardly keep soul and body together, and Fitz has lost his place."

"I will give him his place, at ten dollars a week. I will see that you have a good house, properly furnished, and a sufficient income to live on. If I had known that you were so badly off, I should have done something for you before. Why didn't you come to me?"

"I don't like to ask favors; besides, we have been able to get along till times came on so hard this winter that I couldn't get any work."

"I don't wish to be bothered with this thing, and be compelled to go to France in the middle of the winter after Marguerite. Fitz saw that he could annoy me, and he has taken this means to vent his spite upon me. But the suit depends upon you. He can do nothing without you. Mr. Choate will have nothing to do with it. He doesn't take cases of this kind; but Fitz can find some unprincipled lawyer who will undertake the case, and compel me to derange my plans."

"Could you show me some letters from Marguerite, or some bill you have paid for her board or tuition?"

"Perhaps I may be able to find something of the kind at my house. I'll see. But I think we had better settle up this business between ourselves, without Fitz."

Mr. Checkynshaw looked troubled, and Mrs. Wittleworth could see it now.

"How can we settle it, if you have nothing to show me to prove that Marguerite is living?" asked the poor woman.

"Marguerite is living, or was eighteen months ago, when I was in France."

"Haven't you heard from her for eighteen months?"

"Of course I have; but that is neither here nor there. I don't wish to be annoyed in this way, or to have your son boasting that he has a claim on me. I don't choose to submit to that sort of thing any longer. Neither is it my intention to bring Marguerite home till she is eighteen years old. She is very much attached to the institution in which she spent her childhood."

"I should think you would wish to see her oftener than once in two years," added Mrs. Wittleworth, the remark prompted by her woman's heart.

"So I would. But you know just how it is. I can't bring her home without having trouble in my family; and she is perfectly happy where she is. I ought to have done more for you, Ellen, than I have; but I didn't know the world went so hard with you. I blame myself for not thinking more about it; but I am plunged in business, so that I hardly have time to think of my own family. I don't see how I can do it in any other way than by settling a fixed sum upon you at once. Then I can do all that I have to do at one time, and you will not have to depend upon my bad memory."

"I'm sure I've no claims on you of that kind," replied Mrs. Wittleworth, amazed at this outburst of generosity.

"I know you have no legal claims upon me; but you are the sister of my first wife. I have not forgotten her yet, and I never shall," continued Mr. Checkynshaw, with a gush of sentiment such as the poor woman had never before seen proceed from him. "Property from your father's estate came into my family, and it would not be right for me to permit you to want for the comforts of life, to say nothing of the necessities. I'm going to do something for you here and now—something so that you shall not be dependent upon Fitz, whether I forget you for the time or not. Do you think you could live on the income of ten thousand dollars a year? That would be six hundred dollars, or about twelve dollars a week."

"That is more than I have had for years," gasped Mrs. Wittleworth.

"Very well; I will give you a check for that sum; or I will invest it for you in the best paying stocks I can find."

"You are too good! I did not expect this!" exclaimed the poor woman, wiping the tears from her eyes.

"I shall do no more than my duty—what I ought to have done before," replied the banker, magnanimously. "And, by the way, it would be as well for you to sign a paper, so as to set this business at rest, and prevent Fitz from annoying me," said the banker, as he took down his check-book, and shuffled the papers about the desk with assumed indifference.

"What paper am I to sign?" asked Mrs. Wittleworth, beginning to open her eyes.

"I mean a quitclaim deed on the block of stores; but of course that has nothing to do with the ten thousand dollars I am to pay you."

Mrs. Wittleworth knew what a quitclaim deed was. It was a deed by which she relinquished all her right, title, and interest in the block of stores.

"I think I will not sign it to-day, Mr. Checkynshaw," said she, rather fearfully.

The banker urged her in vain. Fitz had warned her against such a step, and she had more confidence in Fitz's judgment at that moment than ever before.

"Very well; I will have the deed drawn, and fill out the check ready for you the next time you call," added the banker, more disappointed than his manner indicated.

Mrs. Wittleworth went home.

CHAPTER XV.

A SUCCESS IN THE MOUSE BUSINESS.

"Now, Tom, if you will draw the wagon, I will steady the house, and see that the mice don't get out and run away," said Leo, when he had drawn the chariot of the beauties a short distance.

"Small loss if they do," replied Tom Casey, who had already made up his mind that they were going on a fool's errand.

"Not a bit of it, Tom. These mice are worth fifty cents a pair," added Leo, as he placed himself by the house, and his companion took the pole of the wagon.

"Fifty cints—is it? Sure who'd give fifty cints for those bits o' crayturs? I wouldn't give fifty cints for a tousand of 'em, let alone a pair of 'em."

"When I come back with five or six dollars in my pocket, which I shall get for this establishment, you will change your tune, Tom."

"Well, the house is foist rate, and you may get five dollars for that. Sure I think it's worth it; but I wouldn't give two cints for all the mice that's in it."

"Perhaps you wouldn't, Tom. You haven't any taste for white mice."

"Taste—is it? Sure, would anyone ate 'em?"

Tom Casey was a recent importation from the Green Isle, and the emerald dust had not been rubbed off him by the civilizing and humanizing influence of the public schools; but he brought with him from Ireland a big heart, which was worth more than polish and refinement, though both go very well together. In spite of the grave responsibility which rested upon him, Leo laughed heartily at the blunder, and took the trouble to explain the meaning of taste in its artistic sense.

The procession—for the crowd of boys and girls was augmented continually when the mouse-car reached High Street—advanced towards its destination, and Leo had all he could do to keep the youngsters from crowding upon and upsetting the wagon, in their eagerness to see the mice and their magnificent dwelling-house.

"Just twig 'em, Jimmy!" shouted one who had tipped over half a dozen of his companions in his enthusiasm. "Their tails is as long as Seven's rope."

"Hotel dees mice," said another, spelling out the sign over the grand parade. "What does that mean, Billy?"

"They're going to take 'em to a hotel to make soup of. I guess there's some Chinamen at the Tremont. They say them coveys eats rats. Twig the red eyes they has!"

Leo kept the youngsters at bay as well as he could, and hurried Tom along, till they reached State Street, where he took a stand in front of the Exchange. A crowd of curious merchants, clerks, and curb-stone brokers immediately gathered around the palace to examine the structure and its inhabitants. It was a novel establishment, and excited no little attention.

"What have you there, my boy?" asked a well-dressed gentleman, working his way into the interior of the ring.

"White mice, sir," replied Leo.

"They are cunning little creatures," added the gentleman, bending down and looking into the grand parade, where the mice were now feeding on canary seed.

They had become somewhat accustomed to the crowd, and, as if conscious that they were for sale, put the best foot forward.

"What's the price of them?" asked the gentleman.

"Six dollars for the mice and house," replied Leo; but the words almost choked him.

"Six dollars!" exclaimed the questioner, edging off. "That's a very modest price, young man."

"The mice bring fifty cents a pair, and there's a great deal of work in the house, besides the stock."

"But you don't expect any one to give you six dollars for a trap like that, with half a dozen rats in it—do you?"

"I think it is worth that, sir. Do you wish to buy it?"

"I thought it would amuse my children; but I can't think of giving anything like six dollars for it," added the gentleman, shaking his head.

"What would you be willing to give for it?"

"I'll give you a dollar for it."

"No, sir, I couldn't think of selling it at any such price as that. I would give it away before I would sell it for that," replied Leo, indignant at having his work so grossly undervalued.

"I will give you two dollars for it. I have a little lame boy at home, who can't go out, and I am willing to give two for it."

"I will not sell it for less than five dollars, sir."

"Why, that's a rascally price!" exclaimed the proposed purchaser. "Five dollars for a mere rat-trap!"

"That's my lowest price, sir. If you don't want it, the law don't compel you to take it," added Leo, vexed to have the person run down his handiwork.

The gentleman backed out of the crowd, and disappeared. Leo thought he could not care much for his little lame boy, if he was not willing to pay five dollars for such an elegant establishment as the "*Hôtel des Mice*," which could not help being a very great pleasure to the invalid. Half a dozen others looked into the palace, asked questions about the habits of the mice, and inquired the price of the house and its inmates. Leo answered them all very politely; but they laughed and sneered when he mentioned the six dollars.

The "mouse business" did not seem so prosperous as Leo had anticipated. He had been confident that a dozen persons would want the elegant establishment, and he was not quite sure there would not be a quarrel among them for the possession of it at the price he named. He could not see why these rich merchants and bankers should haggle at six dollars if they had any children at home. His heart began to feel heavy in his bosom, for he had expected to sell his present stock of merchandise as soon as he named the price, and to find half a dozen more who would want them badly enough to give him advance orders.

There appeared to be a discount on the mouse business. The gentlemen in State Street were singularly cold and wanting in enthusiasm on the subject of white mice. It began to look like a failure, and Tom Casey seemed to be a true prophet. What an inglorious termination to his career as a mouse merchant it would be to drag the palace back to No. 3 Phillimore Court, and tell Maggie that no one would buy it, even at the moderate price of five dollars!

But Leo soon realized that he was becoming chicken-hearted; that he was almost in despair even before he had been half an hour in the field. This was not his usual style, and he was ashamed of it, as he considered his weakness.

"Make or break!" exclaimed he, slapping his hand upon his chest, and throwing his shoulders back, as if to stiffen his frame. "I'll stick to it till something breaks. This is a new business, and I must *make* the trade."

The effect of this slapping of the chest and this stiffening of the frame was immediately apparent in his demeanor, for they were the visible manifestations of a firm will. He was more cheerful, answered inquiries more briskly, and was less affected by adverse criticism of his handicraft. Men asked the price, sneered, and turned away. There were plenty to admire his workmanship, but as yet none to buy. While Leo was thus struggling against the tide of fortune, the crowd opened, and Mr. Checkynshaw appeared within the ring. He was a great man, and he showed it in his manner—perhaps more in his manner than in any other way.

Mrs. Wittleworth had taken leave of the banker an hour before, and since that time he had been alone in his private office, only occasionally interrupted by a business call. Mr. Checkynshaw was troubled. Fitz was a thorn in his flesh and a stumbling-block in his path. Doubtless it was very annoying for the father of Marguerite to break up the educational and social relations she had sustained from early childhood. Doubtless it was very wicked of Fitz to put him to all this trouble for nothing. Perhaps it was rash in him to discharge his clerk; but Fitz was so airy and impudent, that a decent self-respect would not permit him to tolerate his insolence.

Mr. Checkynshaw wrote a letter, upon which he labored for a long time; for the letter appeared to be full of difficulties. He finished it at last; but, instead of enclosing it in an envelope, he folded it up and put it into his pocket. Then he took his hat, drew on his overcoat, and went out. He visited a stationery store in the lower part of the street, purchased some French paper and envelopes, and walked up the street till he saw the crowd in front of the Exchange, which had gathered around the "*Hôtel des Mice*."

"What have you here, boy?" he asked, when he recognized Leo.

"White mice, sir. My father can't work now, and I am going to try and make something by selling them," replied Leo, cheerfully.

"What is the price?" demanded the banker, rather curtly.

"Six dollars, sir."

"I'll take it, boy," replied Mr. Checkynshaw, with a promptness which astonished the young mechanic.

The banker took the money from his pocket-book and handed it to Leo.

"Good on your head!" whispered Tom Casey, his eyes opening as wide as teacups when he saw the bank bills; and his dark prophecy was suddenly demolished.

"You know where I live?" interrogated Mr. Checkynshaw.

"Yes, sir."

"Take it up to the house, then," added the banker.

"I will, sir;" and Leo thought the great man, as his first customer, was worthy of his reputation.

Just then the gentleman who had the lame boy pushed his way into the middle of the ring.

"What's the lowest price you will take for the concern?" said he.

"It is sold, sir," replied Leo, triumphantly.

"Sold!" exclaimed the tardy customer, who appeared to think that no one could be foolish enough to buy such an establishment unless he had a lame son.

"Yes, sir; I just sold it."

"What did you get?"

"Six dollars."

"I bought it," interposed Mr. Checkynshaw, bowing to the other gentleman, as though he knew him.

"I'm sorry I didn't take it, for it would have pleased my boy."

"You are too late."

"But I will get up another for you," said Leo, exhilarated by this sudden improvement of the mouse business.

"When can you do it?" asked the gentleman, who was quite disappointed to find he could not purchase the establishment at his own price, as he had expected to do at a later hour in the day, after the young man had had an opportunity to consider the vanity of worldly hopes.

"That depends upon what kind of one you want. If you wish for one like this, I can't get it done before Monday. I can give you a two-dollar house, with one pair of mice, to-morrow," replied Leo, in the most business-like tones.

"I want the best one you can get up. I want one as good or better than this."

"I will build one as good as this. I will have it at your house on Monday; but the price will be six dollars."

"Very well. I thought I should be able to buy this one for two or three dollars before night, for I didn't think any one else would want it."

Probably the example of Mr. Checkynshaw had some influence on the customer. If white mice and their habitations were really articles of merchandise, he was willing to pay the market price. Leo wrote down his name and residence, and assured the gentleman that he should have the mice on Monday; or, if he got the house done, on Saturday.

"Don't you want an establishment of this kind, Baxter?" asked Mr. Checkynshaw of a busy person who had worked his way through the crowd. "You have two or three boys."

Mr. Baxter examined the palace and its denizens, and answered that he did want one, though not till the banker informed him that he had purchased one. It is wonderful how things sell after a great man has purchased. The new customer did not want any two-dollar palaces; he desired one as good as any other person had, and he gave his order accordingly. If Mr. Checkynshaw was fool enough to pay six dollars for such an establishment, Mr. Baxter could not suffer in reputation by doing the same.

Leo was as happy as a lord. It was make, and not break.

"Leo," said the banker, "how is your father?"

"Better, sir, I thank you."

"I think I will go down and see him. He has shaved me for years. By the way, is your sister—what's her name?"

"Maggie, sir."

"Is Maggie at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to see her very much," said Mr. Checkynshaw, walking away.

What could he want to see Maggie for? was Leo's thought, as he started his team—Tom Casey—up State Street.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LETTER FROM MARGUERITE.

Mr. Checkynshaw walked down to No. 3 Phillimore Court. It was very plain that he had business there, for it was not his style to visit a poor man who was sick. He was admitted by Maggie, who feared that his coming related to the robbery of his safe, and that Leo might be in some manner implicated in that affair.

"How is your father, miss?" asked the stately gentleman from State Street, as he entered the house.

"He is more comfortable to-day, sir; but I don't know that he is really any better," answered Maggie.

"I am very sorry he is sick. I miss him very much. He has waited upon me at the shop for several years, and I never let any other barber shave me, if I can have him by waiting an hour," added Mr. Checkynshaw, with a degree of condescension which he rarely exhibited. "You are his daughter, I believe."

"Not his own daughter; but it is just the same."

"I think I have seen you at the shop several times."

"Yes, I always carry up *mon père's* dinner at half past twelve. He can't come home at noon."

"*Mon père!* You speak French—do you?"

"Yes, sir. I speak French and English equally well. Won't you go in and see *mon père*!"

Mr. Checkynshaw would be very glad to see André, and Maggie conducted him to the front room.

"I am sorry you are sick, André," said the great man.

"Thank you, sir. It is very kind of you to call upon me," replied André, amazed at the gracious mien of one who had rarely spoken to him save in the tones of authority, addressing him as a menial and an inferior.

"I always feel an interest in those I see every day; but the fact that you were taken sick at my house probably brought the matter more directly to my attention. Are you comfortably provided for, André?" asked the rich man, glancing around the room.

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. I have everything I need," replied André, faintly; for he was not quite so sure of what he said as he wished to be, though his pride and independence revolted at any suggestion of charity.

"I saw Leo up in State Street. Your boy's name is Leo—isn't it?" asked the banker, just as though it derogated from his dignity to know the name of a poor boy like the barber's son.

"Yes, sir; his name is Leo," replied Maggie, taking up the conversation, so that the invalid might not be compelled to talk too much.

"He is driving quite a trade in white mice," laughed the great man.

"Has he met with any success, sir?" asked Maggie, who felt that everything depended upon Leo's exertions; and she hardly expected him to accomplish anything in the mouse business.

"Yes, he has been remarkably successful, I should say."

"I am so glad!"

"I bought the house he had with him for six dollars, and he has orders for two more just like it, at the same price. That will give him quite a lift, I hope."

"Indeed it will!" exclaimed Maggie, delighted with the good news. "Eighteen dollars for white mice, *mon père*," she added, turning to André.

"That is very good indeed!" said the barber. "Leo is a brave boy."

"Knowing that you had a family, André, and that your wages were not very large, I thought I would inquire into the matter a little. I should be very glad to help you."

"Thank you, Mr. Checkynshaw," replied André, in his feminine tones, weakened by his sickness. "I think we do not need any help—do we, Maggie?"

"No, *mon père*, especially as Leo is doing so well. I think we shall get along well enough."

"I am afraid you are too proud to be very poor," said the banker, glancing at Maggie.

"We have always got along very well, and I think we shall in the future. Leo says he shall do great things; and I hope he will."

"Then Leo is to support the family," added Mr. Checkynshaw, fixing his gaze upon the fair girl, who seemed to him altogether too delicate and refined to be a poor man's daughter.

"Perhaps I maybe able to do something by and by, when *mon père* gets better."

"What can you do?"

"I can sew, and do any work that I can take home with me."

"Ah, *ma fille*, you can take in no work. I shall soon be able to go to the shop again," interposed André.

"I have a great deal of spare time, *mon père*. I am able, and O, I am so willing to work for you!"

"Perhaps I may be of service to you," suggested Mr. Checkynshaw.

"Thank you, sir."

"You speak French, miss, I think you said," added the banker, with an assumed indifference.

"Yes, sir."

"Can you write it correctly?"

"Yes, sir, I think I can."

"Maggie is a very good scholar, and she writes French quite as well as she does English."

"Perhaps you will be willing to give me a specimen of your skill in translating."

"Certainly, sir, if you desire it."

Mr. Checkynshaw took from his pocket the letter he had written in his private office, and the French note paper he had purchased at the stationery store, and handed them to her.

"If you will sit down in the other room, and give me a translation into French of this letter, I can at once determine whether you would be of any service to us. If you are, we will pay you very liberally; but most of our work of this kind is translating French into English."

"I will try, sir," replied Maggie.

"I will stay here with your father while you do it."

Maggie went into the rear room; and in less than half an hour she produced a translation of the letter handed to her.

"That is excellently well done, miss," said Mr. Checkynshaw, when he had glanced at the translation. "You write a beautiful hand. It is even better than my daughter's."

"You are very kind, sir."

"I will keep this as a specimen of your work. Here are two dollars for the job," added Mr. Checkynshaw, as he gave her the money.

"Indeed, sir, you are too kind. I don't ask any money for that."

"Take it, Maggie; I always pay people that work for me, especially when they do their work as well as you have done this. Take it, miss, or I shall be offended."

It was not safe to offend such a munificent patron, and Maggie took the money, blushing as she did so.

Mr. Checkynshaw folded up the translation, and put it into his pocket; and, promising to send her some more letters in a few days, he took his leave. The banker went back to his private office. After ransacking his papers for a long time, he found an old letter directed to him, in the care of the firm, postmarked at Paris, with a French postage stamp upon it. Into the envelope of this letter he thrust the translation which Maggie had made.

The banker seated himself in his arm-chair, put his feet on the desk, and lighted a cigar. Mr. Checkynshaw held to the pernicious belief that smoking soothed the nerves of an excited man. He smoked and thought for a while, till his meditations were disturbed by the entrance of Mrs. Wittleworth and Fitz.

"I hope you will excuse me for coming again so soon, Mr. Checkynshaw," said Mrs. Wittleworth, timidly.

"I hope you'll excuse *me* too," added Fitz, thrusting his thumbs into the arm-holes of his vest, and pursing up his under lip, as he had a habit of doing when he particularly realized his own importance.

He stood with his hat on his head—a narrow-brimmed "stove-pipe," which young men were more in the habit of wearing at that period than at the present time. He was the impersonation of impudence and self-conceit, and the banker looked angry enough to annihilate him.

"I thought I would come and see if you had anything to show me from Marguerite," continued Mrs. Wittleworth, after the banker had bestowed a look of supreme contempt upon Fitz.

"I have something to show you," replied Mr. Checkynshaw, taking the old envelope which contained Maggie's translation from his pocket, and handing it to her.

Fitz was rather taken aback by this ready reply, and by the sight of the musty envelope. His nether lip actually returned to its normal position under the shock.

"This is from Marguerite—is it?" asked Mrs. "Wittleworth.

"It is from Marguerite," replied Mr. Checkynshaw.

"What is it, mother? Open it. Don't be humbugged," said Fitz.

The poor woman opened the letter, and looked blankly at its contents.

"It is in French," she added.

"Marguerite always writes her letters in French," added the banker.

"Because she knows you can't read a word of French," sneered Fitz.

"No impudence, young man!"

"Don't, Fitz!" pleaded Mrs. Wittleworth.

"Mr. Checkynshaw, this business must be settled between me and you. You will not be permitted to take advantage of a woman's weakness to impose upon her," added Fitz, magnificently.

"If you use any impudence in this office, young man, I shall kick you out to-day as I did yesterday."

"Mr. Checkynshaw, I have my own views and opinions on this subject, and I claim the privilege of expressing them as a gentleman should. I have been to see Choate on this business; and me and Choate will see that justice is done to the unfortunate."

"Be still, Fitz!" said his mother.

"I will not be still, mother," protested Mr. Wittleworth. "I will not stand still and have you imposed upon."

The banker sprang out of his chair, and his late clerk retreated a pace or two.

"Mr. Checkynshaw, I have only one word to say," he added, placing himself near enough to the door to effect a hasty retreat in case of necessity. "My mother is disposed to accept your offer of ten thousand dollars for a quitclaim deed of the block of stores. I don't intend that she shall do anything of the kind. I've been to my lawyer, sir—a gentleman recommended by Choate; for Choate is so busy that he can't attend to the case personally; and my lawyer says that none but a *non compos* would give a quitclaim deed to the property. If my mother sees fit to sign any such paper, my lawyer will take steps to restrain her, sir. Those are my views. I've nothing more to say, Mr. Checkynshaw."

Mr. Wittleworth tipped his hat over on one side, thrust his thumbs into his arm-holes, and pursed up his lips again, as though he had already set the river on fire. His mother was angry and disgusted with him, as she often had occasion to be.

"Is the quitclaim deed ready, Mr. Checkynshaw?" asked the poor woman.

"No; but it shall be ready, and the check with it to-morrow."

"Mother," exclaimed Fitz, in warning tones,—and he evidently did not place much dependence upon the restraining power of his lawyer,—"you promised not to sign any paper to-day."

"And you promised to behave yourself, Fitz, if I permitted you to come with me. I can't depend upon you, and I am going to accept Mr. Checkynshaw's offer," retorted his mother, sharply.

"You are?" gasped Fitz.

"I am; and if the paper was ready, I would sign it this moment. Will you let me take this letter home with me, Mr. Checkynshaw?"

"Certainly, Ellen," replied the banker, graciously.

"I used to read French a little when I was a girl, and I may be able to study out some of it."

"As you like; but when you come again, don't bring that boy with you."

Mrs. Wittleworth and her son retired. On their way home, an angry discussion ensued. Fitz raved at the weakness of women in general, and of his mother in particular; but she firmly declared, even if she was satisfied that Marguerite was not living, she would sign the deed. In the house, both of them examined the letter. Fitz did not know a word of French, and his mother could only make out "*Mon cher père*," and an occasional word in the letter.

"I will tell you what we can do, mother. André Maggimore, round in Phillimore Court, is a Frenchman, and can talk French like a Dutchman."

"But he is very sick, you said."

"So he is. Well, his daughter Maggie can read it. I will take it to her this evening."

After supper, Fitz, with the letter in his pocket, started for the barber's house.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LETTER FROM FRANCE.

Leo conducted his team to Pemberton Square, and knocked at the back door of the rich man's house. One of the kitchen girls answered the summons, and great was her surprise when she saw the palace of the mice. It was taken into the kitchen, and Mrs. Checkynshaw was called. She came down, accompanied by Miss Elinora. Leo explained that the banker had purchased the establishment, and that he had been directed to deliver it.

Elinora, though she had sat up late the night before at the party, and had been very ill-natured all day, was surprised into a smile of pleasure when she saw the cunning little creatures in their curious house. Leo gave them some canary seed, of which he carried a supply in his pocket, in order to induce the pets to exhibit themselves when desired. They had behaved very well thus far, and had produced a favorable impression upon all who had seen them.

Elinora was pleased with the mice because they promised to afford her a new sensation.

"I think I'll have them in my chamber, mother, where I can see them," said she, after she had looked at them a while.

"I wouldn't have them in my chamber, miss," replied Leo.

"Why, not?"

"They sleep in the daytime, and train in the night. They would rattle about the house so that you could not sleep."

"I will have them in my dressing-room, then," added she.

"That's not exactly the place for them," continued Leo, who had not a very clear idea of what the dressing-room was.

"Where would you keep them, then?" asked Elinora, petulantly.

"In the kitchen, or the back room."

"What, keep such a pretty cage as that in the kitchen?" exclaimed the rich man's daughter.

"You can see it just as well in the kitchen as in the parlor, and it is just as handsome in one place as another, miss. White mice are pretty little creatures, miss; but, like rabbits, squirrels, and other animals, they have an odor of their own which isn't pleasant, especially when they are shut up in a warm room," Leo explained, with a smile to soften the disparaging remark, for he didn't like to say anything against the pets.

"I don't want them, then," said Elinora, turning up her delicate nose.

"They won't trouble you if you have them well cared for, and keep them in a proper place. A horse is a very fine animal; but you would not find him agreeable in the parlor," added Leo. "There's a nice place for them;" and he pointed to the washroom, through which he had entered the kitchen. "You can come down and see them when you wish, and they won't trouble any one out there."

Mrs. Checkynshaw decided to have the house put up in the wash-room, as Leo suggested, and the young mechanic volunteered to do the work. He had brought with him a couple of wooden brackets and some screws, and, with the assistance of Tom Casey, he put them up, and placed the palace upon them. Mrs. Checkynshaw and her daughter watched the operation with interest, and asked a great many questions about the mice and their habits. Leo talked and worked, and by the time he had finished the job, he had explained all he knew of the little animals. He told the kitchen girl, who was to take care of them, how to feed them, and how to clean out the cage, admonishing her to do the latter every day.

The lady of the house was so well pleased with the zeal and pains displayed by the young mechanic, that she gave him half a dollar for the extra labor he had performed; and Leo and Tom left the house.

"It's a good job you've done the day," said Tom, as they walked down the square.

"I've done first rate, Tom. I've sold my work for a fair price, and got two more jobs. I'm lucky, and I'm very grateful, too, for my good fortune. Tom, I'll give you the half dollar the lady handed to me for your share of the work."

"Go way wid you! I won't take it!" protested the Irish boy.

"Yes, you must, Tom. You have helped me. I don't know how I should have got along without you."

"Niver you mind that. Your ould man is sick, and it's great need you'll have of all the money you can lay your hands on."

"But I have made six dollars besides this, and I'm not going to pocket all the plunder. Take this, and buy some book you need."

Tom was finally prevailed upon to accept the half dollar, though he did so under protest. Leo was happy—never so happy before in his life. Success had crowned his darling scheme, and he entered the house with a radiant smile upon his face. But, in the midst of his exultant joy, he did not forget that his father, for whose sake he had been stimulated to make this mighty effort, was very sick. As softly as a cat he opened the front door, and carried his wagon down cellar. He was disposed to go to work at once at his bench, and make the two palaces which had been ordered; but he could not resist the temptation to go up and tell Maggie what a splendid success he had realized.

"How is father?" he asked, in a whisper, as he entered the rear room, where Maggie was at work.

"He is about the same. He sleeps a great deal, and I hope he will soon be better," she replied. "So you have sold your mouse-house, Leo," she added, with a sympathizing smile.

"Who told you I had?" asked Leo, rather provoked that any one had robbed him of the pleasure of telling the triumphant news himself.

"Mr. Checkynshaw has been here," said she, laughing.

"Did he tell you how much he gave for the mouse-house?"

"Six dollars; and he said you had orders for two more at the same price. How lucky you are, Leo!"

"So I am; but I was almost discouraged before I found a single purchaser. If it hadn't been make or break with me, I should have given up, and come home. I feel good now, Maggie, I can tell you! If the market for white mice holds good, I shall make my fortune."

"I hope it will hold good, at least till father gets well. He was so delighted when he heard of your success!"

"I shall finish the two houses ordered this week, if I can, and that will make eighteen dollars—not in a week, but in three days."

"Twenty, Leo," added Maggie, with a smile.

"Twenty? Three times six are eighteen," laughed Leo.

"I made two dollars to-day by translating a letter for Mr. Checkynshaw; and he has more such work for me to do."

"How lucky we are!" exclaimed Leo; and he had not lived long enough, or seen enough of the world, to realize that the lucky ones are almost always those who are industrious and energetic—a lesson he was to learn in due time.

Leo went in to see André; and the barber declared, that with two such children as he had, he could afford to be sick, and that a terribly heavy load had been removed from his mind.

"The good God is kind to me," said he, reverently raising his eyes. "My children are taking care of me while I am helpless, as I took care of them when they were helpless."

André was patient and submissive—not as a philosopher, but as a Christian. The great calamity of want had apparently been turned from his door, and he was happy—happy in his heart, even while his frame was suffering. Blessed are they in whom Christian faith and hope have found a resting-place! In his care for these two children, André had long before been led to place his trust in things higher than earth, and in striving to guide them in the right path, he had found it himself.

Leo remained but a few moments in the sick room, and then hastened down to the workshop to commence the jobs for which he had contracted. Laying aside the four houses in which he had made some progress, he proceeded to "get out" the lumber for the others. On a paper, stuck up under the window, was the plan of the establishment he had sold to the banker, with all the dimensions written upon it. Under the bench he had several hundred feet of half-inch pine boards, which he had purchased with money earned by shovelling off sidewalks.

As the plan was already drawn, and he knew exactly how all the parts were to be put together, there was no delay in the work. He had sawed out all the lumber required for the two houses, and had nicely planed the boards, when Maggie called him to supper. He had worked very hard, but he did not feel tired. He was never weary of mechanical employment like this, even when doing it with no distinct end in view; but now that he was to keep the wolf from the door, there was an inspiration in the work which lifted him above bodily fatigue.

He went to his supper with a keen appetite; but he did not like to spare the time to eat it, and it seemed like a hardship to be compelled to leave the workshop. When he had finished his supper, and was hurrying down stairs, there was a knock at the front door. He hoped it was a customer come to order a mouse-house; but he was disappointed, when he went to the door, to find only Fitz Wittleworth there.

"Good evening, Leo. Is your sister at home?" asked Fitz, in his usual patronizing tones.

"She is," replied Leo, rather coldly, for he could not see what Fitz wanted with his sister.

"I should like to see her," added Fitz, loftily, as though his presence at the house of the barber was a condescension which Leo ought to appreciate.

"My father is sick, and Maggie is busy taking care of him," replied Leo, who felt that he was now the guardian of his sister, and he did not want any young men "hanging round," especially such young men as Mr. Wittleworth.

"I wish to see her on business," persisted Fitz, annoyed at Leo's answers, and the evident want of appreciation of the honor of his visit which the young mechanic exhibited.

"I'll speak to her. Won't you come in?"

Fitz would come in, and he did. He was shown to the rear room, where Maggie was clearing off the supper table. Fitz was a young "man of the world," and as imitative as a monkey. He had once moved in what he called "good society," and was familiar with all the little courtesies of life. He expressed his regret at the illness of André in the most courtly terms, and his sympathy with Maggie. Leo wanted to go to work, but he felt obliged to remain, and witness the interview.

"You will excuse me for calling at such a time; but I will not detain you long, Miss Maggimore. I understand that you are a French scholar. Am I rightly informed?"

"Yes, sir, I speak French," replied Maggie, beginning to expect another job in translating.

"And I suppose you read French."

"Yes, sir."

"I have really forgotten all the French I ever knew," continued Mr. Wittleworth, apologetically; and one would have supposed, from his manner, that the French language was the only thing in the world he did not know, and that it was intensely humiliating to acknowledge that he did not know that. "I have a letter from France, written in French, which it is of the utmost importance that I should read. I have taken the liberty to call upon you to beg the favor of a translation of the letter."

Mr. Wittleworth took from his pocket the letter which the banker had given to his mother.

"I shall be very happy to assist you," added Maggie, kindly.

"Thank you, Miss Maggimore. If you will give me the English of the letter, I will write down the important part of it," continued Fitz, taking a pencil and paper from his pocket, seating himself at the table, and handing her the letter.

"It is postmarked Paris," said she, glancing at the envelope.

"So I observed."

"Why, this is the very letter I translated into French for Mr. Checkynshaw to-day!" exclaimed Maggie, innocently, as she took the paper from the envelope.

"Ah, indeed!" replied Fitz, thoroughly illuminated by this flood of light.

Maggie's fair face was instantly covered with blushes. She was confident, a moment too late, that she had exposed some of Mr. Checkynshaw's business.

"You translated this letter into French for Mr. Checkynshaw—did you?" asked Fitz, taking the letter from her, and folding up his paper, as he rose from his chair.

"I did," replied Maggie; for now that the mischief, whatever it was, had been done, she could only tremble for the consequences.

"If you did, I needn't trouble you to translate it back again," added Fitz, as he took his hat and left the house very abruptly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE QUITCLAIM DEED.

"Mother, you are determined to be imposed upon," said Fitz, as he rushed into the house with the astounding intelligence he had obtained in Phillimore Court.

"Perhaps you can afford to refuse a gift of ten thousand dollars—I cannot," replied Mrs. Wittleworth. "I did not ask or beg anything of Mr. Checkynshaw. He volunteered to give it to me, rather for my sister's sake than my own, perhaps; but I feel that I ought to take it."

"Don't touch it, mother!" protested Fitz. "It will be the ruin of you if you do. Mother, you have no confidence in me. You are willing to trust almost any one rather than me."

"I judge for myself. It is better to take Mr. Checkynshaw's gift than to starve."

"O, nonsense, mother! Why will you be so absurd?" groaned Fitz. "Why will you persist in talking about starving?"

"Why will I, Fitz? Because we have hardly five dollars in the world, and both of us are out of work."

"But I shall get something to do in a few days. Will you let me bring the suit against Checkynshaw for the block of stores?"

"No, I will not, Fitz."

"I told you Checkynshaw was imposing upon you, and now I have proved it."

"What have you proved?"

"I have proved that this letter is a forgery, as I believed it was. It was translated into French this very day by the barber's daughter. It was not written by Marguerite, and I knew it was not!" replied Fitz, triumphantly; and he proceeded to describe in detail the result of his application to Maggie to translate the letter.

"It doesn't make much difference whether it is a forgery or not," added the poor woman, in whose mind ten thousand dollars overshadowed every other consideration.

"Doesn't it!" sneered Fitz, out of patience with his mother.

"Not much. Mr. Checkynshaw says Marguerite is living; and, whether he means to do right or wrong, he is a man of great wealth and influence, and we could make nothing by going to law with him. We haven't money enough to keep us out of the almshouse more than a fortnight longer."

"But don't I say we need no money to carry on the suit? All we have to do is to attach the property. Checkynshaw won't stand trial. He'll settle it; he'll give up the block of stores."

"You don't know him," sighed Mrs. Wittleworth.

"If I don't know him, I'd like to know who does. Haven't I been in the office with him for years? Choate couldn't attend to this business himself; but he recommended a lawyer, a friend of his, and I have been to see him. I am to call again to-morrow."

"I am willing to hear all that can be said, Fitz, on both sides," replied the poor woman, tired of the controversy, but still believing that "a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush." "I will go with you, and hear what your lawyer has to say."

"Go with me!" sneered Fitz. "Do you think I can't do the business alone?"

"You don't know as much as you think you do, Fitz."

"Perhaps I don't; but if I don't understand this case, then nobody does."

Mrs. Wittleworth was disgusted, and Fitz was disgusted; and both were silent, rather because there was no prospect of making any progress in the business than because either was satisfied. Fitz had been to see the attorney recommended by the distinguished orator—a young fellow, whose practice was mostly confined to the police court, and who was so weak and silly as to be an object of ridicule to his professional brethren. This gentleman was willing to look into the case. He went to the registry of probate, and read the will. So far Fitz was justified. The next morning the lawyer called on Mr. Checkynshaw. It was very unprofessional, but it was very prudent. He did not wish to annoy a gentleman in his position if there were no just grounds for a suit.

The banker was much obliged to him for calling. The banker was plausible, and the banker finally gave him a retaining fee of fifty dollars to act for the defence, in case a suit was brought against him. He had discharged Fitz for impudence, and he was merely seeking some way to annoy him. The lawyer was satisfied, and so was the banker.

In the course of the forenoon, Fitz, attended by his mother, called upon the attorney. He had looked into the case; he was satisfied there was no ground for an action, and he declined to undertake the suit. Fitz was confounded by this reply.

"I hope you are satisfied now, Fitz," said Mrs. Wittleworth, when they were in the street.

"I am sure I am not. That man has been tampered with! I'll speak to Choate about that. Does that man mean to tell me that we have no grounds for a suit?" replied Fitz, indignantly. "I shall find another lawyer, who will undertake the case."

"You needn't do anything more about it. I am going to Mr. Checkynshaw's now."

"Are you going to accept his offer?" almost gasped Fitz.

"I am."

"This is madness, mother."

"It would be madness not to accept it; and I will not let the sun go down again before I close the business, if Mr. Checkynshaw is still of the same mind."

"Will you give up a hundred thousand dollars for ten thousand?" groaned Fitz. "We can live in Beacon Street, and ride in our carriage, if you will only take my advice."

"I shall be more likely to ride in the Black Maria over to the almshouse, if I take your advice. My mind is made up, Fitz," replied his mother, very decidedly.

"I will go with you, mother," said Fitz, desperately.

"You needn't."

"I must be a witness of the transaction, for, in my opinion, it will be a swindle on the part of Checkynshaw; and if I can pick him up on it I mean to do so."

"Fitz, if you are impudent to Mr. Checkynshaw, he will put you out of his office."

"I will not be impudent to him unless he is impudent to me."

Mrs. Wittleworth led the way now, and Fitz reluctantly followed her. He was in despair. He actually believed his mother was selling out her inheritance, a princely fortune, for a mere song; that she was sacrificing the brightest hopes a person ever had. Indeed, he went a point beyond this, and believed she was selling out his hopes and expectations; that she was wronging him out of a brilliant future. But Fitz might have comforted himself with the reflection that he had vigorously opposed the sacrifice, and that it had been made on account of no want of judgment and forethought on his part.

Fitz followed his mother into the banker's private office. Mrs. Wittleworth herself was not entirely satisfied with the situation. She was not at all sure that Marguerite had not died of cholera ten years before. Mr. Checkynshaw's course rather indicated that he was playing a deep game. Why did he want a quitclaim deed, if his rights were clear? Why had he forged a letter from Marguerite, when he must have real ones, if the daughter was still living? And it was not like him to give ten thousand dollars to a person who had no claim upon him.

The poor woman's circumstances were desperate. Want or the almshouse stared her in the face. It was possible, nay, it was probable, that Mr. Checkynshaw was deceiving her; that Marguerite was dead, and that the block of stores rightfully belonged to her; but she had no chances of success in fighting a battle with wealth and influence. If she brought the suit, the ten thousand dollars would certainly be lost, and the chances of obtaining the block of stores were all against her. The money the banker would pay her would keep her from want for the rest of her lifetime. The income of it would support her little family comfortably.

"I will sign the deed, Mr. Checkynshaw," said she, walking up to the desk where the banker sat.

"Why did you bring that boy with you?" asked the great man, with a look of contempt at his late clerk.

"He insisted upon coming."

"I think I have an interest in this business," replied Fitz, loftily. "I will be civil, Mr. Checkynshaw, but I should like to ask you one or two questions."

"You needn't."

"But I will. Why do you give my mother a letter purporting to come from your daughter Marguerite, which was written by Miss Maggimore? That's the first question I want to ask," said Fitz, with the air of a conqueror.

The banker was a little startled; but he did not lose his self-possession—he seldom did in merely business transactions.

"The letter I gave you was a true copy, Ellen," said he.

"It makes but little difference to me whether it was a true copy or not," she added.

"The originals of Marguerite's letters were in my safe, and were stolen with other papers. If your son knows Pilky Wayne, he may be able to recover them."

"I scorn the insinuation, Mr. Checkynshaw," replied Fitz, indignantly.

"I speak a little French, Ellen, but I do not read it very readily; and I had translations made of Marguerite's letters," continued Mr. Checkynshaw, without noticing the irate young man. "One of these translations I had rendered back into the French rather to give employment to the barber's daughter than for any other reason."

Mrs. Wittleworth felt no interest in the translation. Probably the banker was imposing upon her credulity, but she did not care if he was.

"Are the papers ready, Mr. Checkynshaw?" she asked, timidly, fearful that he had altered his mind in regard to the money.

"They are."

"I am ready to sign the deed."

The banker produced the document, and the check, and laid them upon the desk.

"Will you witness your mother's signature, Fitz?" asked Mr. Checkynshaw.

"No, sir. I will have no part in this transaction," replied he, sourly. "It will become my duty, at no distant day, to rip up the whole thing."

"Burnet!" called the banker, opening the window.

The taciturn cashier appeared.

"Witness this signature," added Mr. Checkynshaw.

Mrs. Wittleworth signed the quitclaim deed, and took the check. The cashier saw the act, and wrote his name in the proper place on the deed.

"Take the acknowledgment," said Mr. Checkynshaw to the cashier, who was a justice of the peace.

"You acknowledge this to be your free act and deed, Mrs. Wittleworth?" added Burnet.

"I do," replied the poor woman, or rather the rich one now, in the most decided manner.

"Have it recorded," continued the banker; and the cashier left the room with the deed in his hand.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Checkynshaw," said Mrs. Wittleworth. "You have been very kind and very liberal to me."

"Liberal!" sneered Fitz. "He has given you ten thousand dollars for a hundred thousand.

It's the best trade he ever made."

"Ellen, I am glad you are satisfied with what you have done. I give you the ten thousand dollars for the reason I stated yesterday—not because you had any claim upon me."

"I know you did, sir; and I am very grateful to you," replied Mrs. Wittleworth.

"After what I have done, it is not right that I should be annoyed by your son," added the banker.

"He shall not annoy you if I can help it."

"That's enough, Ellen. I forbid his coming here again on any pretence whatever."

"You needn't trouble yourself," replied Fitz. "I shall not come near you again if I can help it. I am rather particular about my associates."

Mrs. Wittleworth left the office, followed by Fitz. The fact that his mother had ten thousand dollars in her pocket did not seem to comfort him. He offered to draw the check for her, but his mother preferred to transact her own business. She presented the check at the bank upon which it was drawn, and deposited the money at another. She went home with a light heart, feeling that the wolf was slain, and that she was secured against grim want for the rest of her life.

Mr. Checkynshaw smiled when Mrs. Wittleworth had gone. Perhaps, as Fitz suggested, he felt that he had made a good trade. Apparently he had disposed of the only person who had the power to annoy him.

No one did annoy him. Constable Clapp came back from New York; but He brought no tidings of Pilky Wayne. The banker offered a reward of five hundred dollars for his valuable papers; but week after week passed away, and nothing was heard of them. The banker concluded that the rogue had burned them, so that no clew should be had to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

Leo worked till a late hour in the night, on the day that he received the orders for the two mouse-houses. At eleven o'clock Maggie went down to the shop, and entreated him not to wear himself out. Very likely he would have worked all night if her friendly warning had not sent him to bed. The next day he stuck to his bench till nine o'clock in the evening.

On Saturday afternoon the two houses were finished, and put up at the residences of those who had ordered them. His wildest dream had been more than realized, and there was more money in the house over Sunday than there had ever been before. The prospect was still hopeful for the future. The good physician had kept his promise, and Leo had orders enough to keep him at work for two weeks. He finished the four small houses, and disposed of them at two dollars apiece, and two like that sold to the banker at six dollars apiece, during the coming week; and this made twenty dollars.

This extraordinary run of good fortune, however, did not continue long; for, during the third week, he sold but twelve dollars' worth of his merchandise, and the stock was accumulating on his hands. At the end of the fourth week he had six houses unsold; but the average proceeds of his sales had been over fifteen dollars a week.

Leo was enterprising, and with some of his funds he purchased half a dozen pairs of rabbits, and enlarged the sphere of his business. He built very tasty houses for each pair of these animals, with wire netting in front, so that they could be seen. They were provided with proper nests, with conveniences for keeping them clean. These establishments found a ready sale, at remunerative prices for the rabbits and the work.

Then he enlarged the business still further, adding guinea pigs and doves to his stock, till the basement of the house became a menagerie of pets. The dove-houses were made to be placed on sheds, or fastened to the sides of buildings, generally in front of back attic windows, where they could be readily reached. The good doctor, the banker, and his other customers had thoroughly advertised his business for him, and purchasers came every day to see his merchandise. He was continually inventing new patterns for houses, and could now keep a variety of them on hand, to enable those who patronized him to select for themselves.

Leo Maggimore worked very hard; but his business was profitable, and he had every encouragement to persevere. His net proceeds were generally twenty dollars a week; and, after paying for lumber, hardware, glass, and wire netting, his average gains were fully up to the standard he had fixed. Perhaps the young mechanic did not realize the fact, but it was none the less true, that he was largely indebted to powerful friends for the extensive sales he made. Probably many persons bought his wares solely for the purpose of assisting him in his self-imposed task of maintaining the family. Dr. Fisher, while attending the barber, stated the case to at least a hundred of his patients and friends.

The spring came, and Leo's business was as good as ever. He was making his fifteen dollars a week right along, to which Maggie sometimes added two or three more. All this time André had been steadily improving. He was now able to go out every day, and had almost recovered the use of his limbs. He was not yet in condition to use a razor, which requires a very steady and delicate hand; but he was able to do a great deal of work about the house. He helped Leo, and became general salesman for all his merchandise. The affairs of the family had been improving from the very day that André was stricken down by his malady. The only misfortune over which they mourned was, that the young mechanic had been taken out of school.

At the end of three months, when the barber felt quite able to go to work,—and Cutts & Stropmore were very anxious to have him do so,—the family were never in a more prosperous condition. There was actually about a hundred dollars in the exchequer, though Dr. Fisher's bill had not been paid; but they need not have troubled themselves about that, for the physician would no more have carried in a bill than he would have cheated one of his neighbors; and that was quite impossible for him to do.

Leo went up to see the master of the school as soon as his father was able to go to work; and it was decided that he should immediately resume his place. The teacher was confident that, with extra study, it was still possible for him to obtain the medal. Leo went to work upon his studies with the same energy and determination he had brought to bear upon the mouse business.

"Make or break!" said he; "I will catch up with my class."

Of course he succeeded, though between the shop and the books he had nearly "broken;" for there was still a demand for mice, doves, rabbits, and guinea pigs, and he added several dollars a week to the income of his father. He worked too hard; and Maggie, seeing that he was likely to "break," took upon herself the care of the menagerie and the sales, in addition to the housework, which was really quite enough for a girl of fifteen.

Maggie was a good housekeeper. Mindful of the traditions of the elders, as the spring came on she commenced the semiannual operation of house-cleaning. She went through the performance in the front room first, and then devoted herself to the chamber over it, which was Leo's room. According to her custom she took everything out of the closets, bureau, chest, and table drawers. In the course of this ceremonial she came to the chest in which Leo kept his clothes.

At the bottom she found the papers deposited there by "Mr. Hart," or possibly Pilky Wayne, for it was not certainly known who committed the robbery. There was quite a large bundle of them; and Maggie, inheriting the propensity of Mother Eve, was, of course, anxious to know what they were. She laid them on the table with other articles, and then opened one of them. She saw the name of Mr. Checkynshaw.

She was terrified when she remembered that the banker's safe had been robbed, and that Mr. Checkynshaw had come to the house with the detective to see about it. She was not quite sure of the fact, but it seemed to her that Leo had been suspected of being concerned in the robbery. Here were the valuable papers, hidden away very carefully at the bottom of Leo's chest. They must have been there at least three months, and of course her brother knew they were there.

The longer she considered the matter, the more terrified she became. It was awful to think that Leo had been concerned in a robbery. She was not willing to believe it. If there were any good boys in the world, Leo was one of them. He would cut his right hand off before he would do a wicked thing. It was impossible for her to charge the dear fellow with anything that looked like a crime.

She turned the papers over again. They were strange documents to her, with great seals on them, and no end of legal phrases. Perhaps, after all, they were not good for anything. They could not be the papers which Mr. Checkynshaw had lost. Probably they were some old and useless documents, which the banker had thrown away when they were of no further consequence. It was quite likely that Leo, who was always studying up methods of doing business, had saved them from the dirt barrels in the streets, so as to learn the forms of making out such papers.

This explanation was not quite satisfactory, though it was plausible, to her. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when she found the papers. Leo had gone to school, and her father would not return till night. She was so impatient to know whether the documents were of any value or not, that she was unwilling to wait till noon. At first she thought she would take them up to Mr. Checkynshaw himself, and ask him if they were good for anything; but she did not exactly like to do that.

Then it occurred to her that Fitz Wittleworth, who had been a clerk for the banker, could tell her just as well as his late employer, and he lived only a short distance from Phillimore Court. Mrs. Wittleworth, with a portion of the money received from the banker, had purchased a small house near her former residence. Fitz had not yet found another place, and probably both he and his mother would have come to want before this time, if she had taken his advice. Maggie went to the front door, and called Tom Casey, whom she had seen in the court from the window.

Tom was one of the gallantest young Irishmen in the city. He was a fast friend of Leo, and spent much time in the shop with him. Tom made no mental reservation when he declared that Maggie was the "purtiest gurl in the wurruld;" and he was only too happy to oblige her when she asked him to request Fitz to step in and see her for a moment. In ten minutes Mr. Wittleworth made his appearance, as grand as ever, for three months' idleness had not taken any of the starch out of him.

Maggie showed him the papers with fear and trembling. Fitz rubbed his chin, and pursed his lips, as he examined them, looked wise, and finally, after much sage deliberation, declared that the papers were of the utmost importance.

"O, dear!" groaned poor Maggie.

"What is the matter, Miss Maggimore?" demanded Mr. Wittleworth.

"What shall I do! How came those papers in my brother's chest?"

"I haven't the least idea, Miss Maggimore. I can only say that the papers are very valuable, and that Checkynshaw offered a reward for them. Now I remember! Your brother was with the man that robbed the safe."

"That's what troubles me," gasped poor Maggie.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Maggimore. It is very fortunate that you called me to attend to this delicate business. If you had not done so, they might have thrown your brother into jail. Checkynshaw has no more consideration for a young man than a mule," said Fitz, patronizingly. "Leave it all to me, Miss Maggimore. I will see that the papers are restored to the owner, and that no harm comes to Leo."

"You are very kind," replied Maggie, hopefully.

"I am always glad to do what I can for those who are in need of assistance. It is fortunate you called me in. It will be best for you not to mention to any one that I have taken them."

Maggie thought so too, and she was very glad to have her visitor take the papers away from the house. She felt as though a contagious disease had been removed as soon as the door closed behind Fitz. Was it possible that Leo had been concerned in the robbery? If so, sooner or later he would ask what had become of the papers. The man that stole the papers had come to the house with Leo, she then called to mind for the first time; but her thoughts were confused, and instead of this circumstance affording a satisfactory explanation to her of the presence of the package in Leo's chest, it had just the opposite effect.

Fitz Wittleworth went home with the papers; went up to his room with them; examined every document in the bundle. There was a copy of his grandfather's will among them, but nothing else relating to the block of stores, and nothing which related to Marguerite—not even the letters which Mr. Checkynshaw had declared were stolen with the papers.

Mr. Wittleworth went up to the banker's office. He was civil, and Mr. Checkynshaw asked him, very sternly, what he wanted.

"You offered a reward of five hundred dollars for the recovery of the papers taken from your safe, Mr. Checkynshaw," Fitz began, pompously.

"I did."

"I claim it."

"The money is ready; where are the papers?" asked the banker, promptly.

"I have them here," replied Fitz, producing the package.

"Where did you get them?"

"That is what I must decline to answer," added Fitz, decidedly.

"Must you? Then I suppose I am to understand that you were a party to the robbery, as I have suspected from the beginning."

Mr. Wittleworth thought this was a very unreasonable view to take of the case. He decided to leave, and conduct the negotiation for the reward in some other manner. He turned to go, but the banker seized him by the collar and held him.

Mr. Wittleworth was in hot water.

CHAPTER XX.

AN AVALANCHE OF GOOD FORTUNE.

Mr. Wittleworth was more astonished than he had ever before been in his life. This was the gratitude of great men! Mr. Checkynshaw did not seem to be at all rejoiced to find his papers, and was so mean as to send for Constable Clapp.

"Didn't you offer a reward of five hundred dollars for your papers, Mr. Checkynshaw?" asked Fitz.

"I did; and I am willing to pay the reward the moment you have explained to me where you got them," replied the banker, as he pitched his prisoner into a chair to await the arrival of the officer.

"I came here in good faith, and I didn't expect to be treated in this manner," growled Mr. Wittleworth.

"I am not yet willing to pay you for stealing my papers and money, or for employing another person to do it for you," added Mr. Checkynshaw, dryly.

"I did not steal them."

"Then you cannot object to telling me where you obtained them."

Mr. Wittleworth did object. He had undertaken to manage this business, and he expected to make at least a commission out of it. His plan was to pay Maggie fifty or a hundred dollars of the reward, and keep the rest himself. It was not probable that the barber,—who was ill at the time,—or his family, had read the newspapers, and it was not likely that they knew anything about the reward. Maggie, or even Leo, would be entirely satisfied with the fifty dollars, and ought to be exceedingly obliged to him for managing the matter so well for them.

Constable Clapp arrived in a few moments, and the case was stated to him.

"How much money was stolen with the papers?" asked the officer.

"About three hundred and fifty dollars," replied the banker.

"Very well; if this young gentleman will restore the papers and the money, he may take the reward; and then we shall be ready to attend to the criminal charge. That will make a balance of one hundred and fifty dollars in his favor," chuckled the officer.

"I am entirely willing to pay the reward I offered," added Mr. Checkynshaw, magnanimously.

"Where did you get the papers, Mr. Wittleworth?" asked the detective.

"I didn't steal them."

"I don't say you did. Where did you get them, was the question I asked."

"Of course I don't wish to expose anybody. They came into my possession in consequence of an accident."

"Exactly so!" said the officer, taking the papers from Fitz, and producing a pair of handcuffs. "In consequence of an accident, I shall be obliged to put these irons on your wrists, and take you over to the jail."

"Me!" gasped Fitz, the iron entering his lofty soul. "I should like to know what my friend Choate would say to that!"

"In one word, will you wear the bracelets, or will you tell where you obtained the papers? Of course Mr. Checkynshaw will pay the reward. He is an honorable man, and does all he agrees. You will want the money to pay your friend Choate for keeping you out of the State Prison. What will you do?"

Fitz thought for a moment. The disgrace of being marched through the streets by a person so well known as Mr. Clapp, and with a pair of irons on his wrists, was intolerable to think of, and he decided to inform the officer where he had obtained the papers. He then related the particulars of his interview with Maggie.

"Then you did not find the papers yourself?" said Mr. Checkynshaw, with a feeling of relief, for it would have galled him sorely to pay the five hundred dollars to one he disliked so much.

"I did not," replied Fitz.

"Then the reward does not belong to you."

"It is hardly necessary for me to say that I was doing the business for Miss Maggimore."

"But it was hardly necessary for you to conceal her name."

The banker was really overjoyed to find his papers, and at once drew a check for the amount which he had offered as a reward.

"We will go down and see Maggie," said the banker, putting the check into his pocket.

"I think the case is plain enough," added the constable. "When I ascertain where the papers were found, I shall be better satisfied."

Mr. Checkynshaw called a carriage, and they went to Phillimore Court. No further notice was taken of Mr. Wittleworth; in fact he was utterly ignored from the moment he had told his story. He was permitted to depart in peace. He did depart, but not in peace; for he was not entirely satisfied. The reward ought to have been paid to him, and he should have had the lion's share of it. This was his feeling as he retired from the office.

Maggie was fearfully frightened when she saw the banker and the constable. The roses fled from her cheek, and she was pale and trembling. That awful officer had come to bear Leo away to the jail. She was almost sorry that she had not burned the papers, instead of sending them back to the owner.

"You have come for poor Leo!" exclaimed she, in terror, when she opened the door.

"Don't be alarmed, Maggie," said Mr. Checkynshaw, in a tone which was gentle for him. "We come to inquire about those papers you found."

"I knew you did!" gasped Maggie in despair, as the two gentlemen followed her into the rear room.

"Where did you find them?" asked Mr. Clapp, in a gentler tone than the banker could speak.

"In Leo's room," stammered she. "I must tell the truth; but I hope you won't harm poor Leo."

"Will you show us just where you found them?"

"I will, if you will come up stairs," she added, leading the way. "You won't put poor Leo in jail—will you? I'm sure he didn't intend to do any wrong."

"I don't think he did," replied the officer, moved by the distress of the poor girl.

"I found them at the bottom of Leo's chest," said Maggie, as she pointed to the place where she had discovered them. "I was cleaning house, and I cleared out all the closets and drawers. I took all Leo's things out of his chest, and I found those papers under his summer clothes."

"Did Leo know they were there?"

"I'm sure I don't know whether he did or not. I don't believe he did. He never stays in his room only when he is asleep. All the clothes he wears in the winter are in the top of the chest."

"I looked into that chest when I searched the room on the day the safe was robbed," added the officer. "I put my hand down into the clothing; but I suppose I didn't reach the bottom. Where is Leo now?"

"He is at school."

"Can you send for him?"

"You won't take him up—will you? It would break his heart," pleaded Maggie.

"I don't think it will be necessary to arrest him," replied the constable, rather cautiously. "The man that stole the papers came to this room, and I have no doubt he put them there to get rid of them."

"Send for Leo; I will promise you he shall not be taken up," added Mr. Checkynshaw, taking the responsibility upon himself.

Maggie wrote a note, and sent Tom Casey to the school with it, the gentlemen having taken seats in the front parlor. In a short time Leo appeared, trembling lest his father had had another attack of paralysis. He was not a little surprised to find the banker and the constable awaiting his arrival.

"Leo, what do you keep in that chest of yours, up in your room?" asked the officer.

"My clothes, sir," replied Leo, astonished at the strange question.

"What else?"

"Nothing else."

"Don't you keep any white mice in it?" said the constable, smiling.

"No, sir."

"Don't your mice get out of their houses down stairs, and come up?"

"I have seen two or three of them in the kitchen."

"But don't they go up in your chamber?"

"I never saw any up there," answered Leo, puzzled by these singular inquiries.

"What would you say if I told you that a couple of them had made a nest in your chest up stairs, and had a litter of little ones there?"

"I don't know what I should say. I don't know that it would be very strange."

"Should you deny it?"

"If you saw them there I should not, though I don't see how they could get into the chest. The lid is always closed."

"But you might have left the lid up some morning, and the mice might have crawled down to the very bottom of the chest, and had a family there. Could this have happened?"

"It could; but I don't think it is very likely it did happen."

"Why not?"

"I should have smelt them," laughed Leo.

"Shouldn't you have seen them?"

"I don't think I should. Maggie puts my shirts and stockings at the top of the chest, and I hardly know what there is at the bottom. She takes care of my things."

"Is there anything in that chest besides your clothes?"

"Yes; I believe there is a piece of brass chain, a ball, some marbles, and a top in the till."

"Anything else?"

"There may be some other things of that sort in the till. I don't remember; if you want to know, I will go up and show you."

"Are there any papers there?" demanded the constable, sharply.

"Yes, sir, there are two or three newspapers."

"Any written papers?"

"Not a paper."

"Have you had any papers there at any time?"

"No, sir; I don't remember that I ever did. I keep my papers in the table drawer in the kitchen."

"Didn't you know there was a package of papers in the chest—such as bonds, deeds, and notes?"

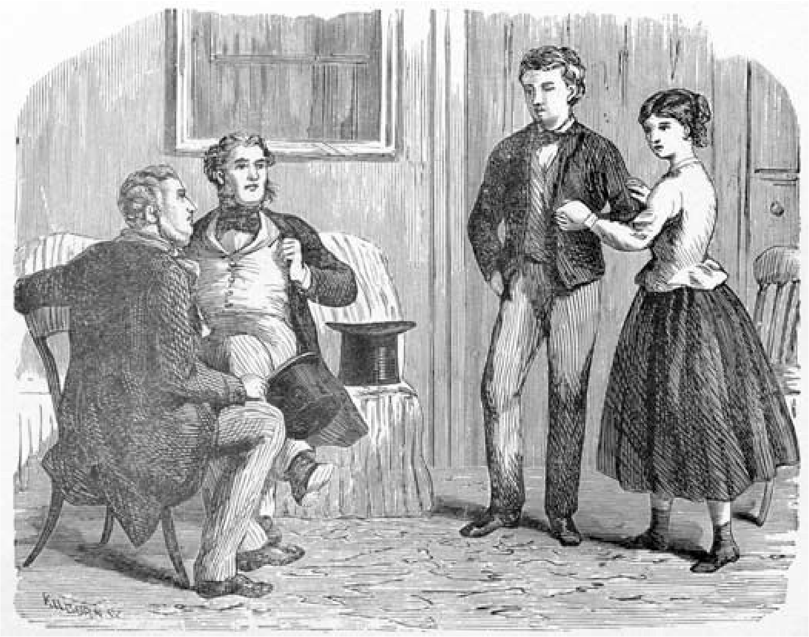
"No, sir, I didn't know it. I never saw anything of the kind there," replied Leo, still puzzled, but satisfied now that something serious had happened.

"Have you overhauled the contents of your chest lately?"

"No, sir; not since last summer, that I remember."

"Leo, in your chest were found the papers which Mr. Checkynshaw lost."

"Then that Mr. Hart, or whatever his name was, put them there!" exclaimed Leo, his face turning red. "I never saw them, and didn't know they were there."



LEO ANSWERS FOR HIMSELF.—Page 248.

"I am satisfied," interposed Mr. Checkynshaw.

"So am I," added Mr. Clapp.

The truth as it was had been correctly discerned.

"Maggie, I offered a reward of five hundred dollars for those papers," continued the banker. "I would have given five thousand rather than not have had them."

"Then I am very glad you have found them," replied the fair girl, now entirely relieved of all her fears on account of her brother.

"But you found them, Maggie, and you are entitled to the reward. Here is my check for the amount. Your father can draw the money for you."

"I don't deserve the reward!" exclaimed Maggie, blushing deeply, as she took the check. "It is reward enough for me to find that Leo is as good as I always believed him to be."

"You found the papers, and I am indebted to you for their preservation. Another might have destroyed them."

"But I only took them out of the chest. I didn't know what they were. I almost made up my mind that they were good for nothing, and that Leo had saved them from the dirt barrels to learn how to write such papers from. I didn't know what to do, and I sent for Mr. Wittleworth to tell me whether they were good for anything or not. He said they were very valuable, and told me it was fortunate I sent for him, and then kindly undertook to return them to you."

"Very kindly!" sneered the banker. "He claimed this reward."

"He did?"

"Yes; but I am very glad it goes to you, instead of to him."

Maggie objected to taking such a vast sum of money for so slight a service; but Mr. Checkynshaw's mandate was imperative, and he departed, leaving her bewildered at the sudden fortune which had come down like an avalanche upon her. Leo went back to school, as delighted at her good luck as his own in finding himself entirely freed from the charge of being concerned in the robbery.

As usual, Mr. Wittleworth was the only person who was not satisfied. He had again been "left out in the cold." He wanted to know what had happened at the house of André, and after dinner he called there; but Maggie had gone to the barber's shop with her father's noonday meal, and he found the door locked. In the evening he went again, when both André and Leo were at home.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. WITTLEWORTH's WRONGS.

Maggie, fluttering with delight, had taken Mr. Checkynshaw's check to her father when she carried his dinner. The barber was astonished as well as pleased with the gift, and, having drawn the check, deposited the money in the Savings Bank, as a provision for dark days, like those through which they had passed at the beginning of André's illness.

After supper the family gathered around the cooking-stove in the kitchen. Never before had they been so happy as now, and never before were they so strongly attached to each other. They had passed through the storm of privation and trial—they had triumphed over adverse circumstances. Leo tried to study his lesson, while André and Maggie were talking about the great event of the day, and comparing their present situation with the first days of the barber's illness, when all of them were trembling for the future.

"God has been very good to us, my children, and I hope we shall always be grateful to him for his mercies," said André, as a tear, which he could not repress, stole down his pale cheek.

"I'm sure I never felt so good before in my life; and I know my prayers mean more to me now than ever before," replied Maggie.

"We have been faithful to each other, and God has been faithful to all of us, as he always is, even when we forsake and forget him."

"Ah, *mon père*, how could we help being faithful to you, when you were always so kind to us!" exclaimed Maggie, as she rested her hand on André's arm. "And Leo—he has really been a lion! You don't know how brave he was; how he worked, and how he persevered! It was all *make*, and no *break*—wasn't it, Leo?"

"It has been, so far," replied Leo, less demonstrative, but not less delighted than the other members of the family. "I think we can do anything we make up our minds to do. I have made up my mind to take the Franklin medal this year, and, make or break, I'm going to do it."

Leo bent over his slate again, and seemed to be determined, make or break, that he would attend to his lessons, whatever happened in the room. Unfortunately, in this instance, it was at least a partial break, for a very imperative knock was heard a few moments later at the front door. André answered the summons, and admitted Mr. Wittleworth.

"I hope I don't intrude," said Fitz, as daintily as Paul Pry himself could have said it.

"Take a seat, Mr. Wittleworth," added Maggie, giving him a chair at the stove.

"Thank you. I don't often go out evenings, for mother is alone. My friends groan and complain because I don't visit them; but really this is the first time I have been out of the house of an evening for a month," continued Mr. Wittleworth, as he seated himself in the offered chair, expecting the barber's family to appreciate his condescension in this particular instance.

"The last time I went out of an evening," he added, "I called on my friend Choate—you know Choate? Of course you do, Mr. Maggimore."

"I have not that honor," replied the barber, modestly.

"Choate's a good fellow—Choate is. He is the most gentlemanly person I ever met, not even excepting Everett, who, by the way, was at Choate's when I called upon him. Winthrop was there, too; but Winthrop is rather stiff—Winthrop is. Of course I haven't anything to say against Winthrop. He is a great man, talented, a good speaker, and all that sort of thing; but you see he hasn't that companionable way with him that Choate has. Of course you will not mention what I say to Winthrop, for I don't want him to know but what I think as much of him as I do of Choate or Everett."

André very kindly promised not to mention any disparaging allusion he might make in regard to the honorable gentleman.

"In a private conversation one does not like to be held responsible for remarks dropped without much reflection," continued Fitz. "I have nothing against Winthrop, only he is not just like Choate. Choate is my idea of a perfect gentleman—Choate is. But perhaps I am prejudiced in Choate's favor. I used to be in the law business myself—in the same office with Choate. Well, really, I didn't come here to talk about Choate, or any of the rest of my friends. Isn't it singular how a light remark, casually dropped, leads us off into a conversation which occupies a whole evening?"

André acknowledged that it was singular how a light remark, casually dropped, leads us into a conversation which occupies a whole evening; but he hoped no light remark of Mr. Wittleworth would be expanded to that extent, for his room was better than his company, now that the family were at the high tide of happiness and prosperity.

"I suppose Miss Maggimore has informed you that she sent for me this morning, in order to obtain the benefit of my advice," continued Fitz.

"Yes, sir, she did," replied André.

"The case was rather a singular one; and being alone, she needed the counsel of some person of experience, and of extensive knowledge. She sent for me, and I came," added Mr. Wittleworth, rubbing his chin and pouting his lips, as was his habit when his bump of self-esteem was rubbed; though it was a notable fact that he always rubbed it himself—nobody else ever appeared to do so.

"It was kind of you to come when I sent for you," said Maggie, willing to give him all the credit she could.

"I came; I saw—" but he did not conquer. "I saw the papers, and I undertook to manage the business for Miss Maggimore. I was willing to give her the full benefit of my knowledge and experience, though my doing so came very near involving me in a painful difficulty."

"I am very sorry for that," interposed Maggie.

"It was all on account of my own excessive expenditure of good-nature. I wished to do you a good turn, and Checkynshaw a good turn. So far as Checkynshaw was concerned, it was a mistake; I am willing to confess that it was a blunder on my part. I confided in his honor. I might have known better, for Checkynshaw is a cur—Checkynshaw is."

Mr. Wittleworth slipped lightly over the "painful difficulty" in which he was so nearly involved. He was willing to give Maggie the benefit of his knowledge and experience in negotiating the strictly business matter in relation to the reward; but Checkynshaw basely calumniated him, and bit the hand that was extended to serve him.

"Mr. Checkynshaw came here, with the constable, and inquired into all the circumstances attending the finding of the papers," said Maggie, tired of Mr. Wittleworth's tedious exordium. "He was entirely satisfied with what we had done."

Maggie then explained the manner in which the papers had come into Leo's chest; that they were concealed there by "Pilky Wayne."

"Mr. Checkynshaw was very good and very kind," she added, with enthusiasm.

"Checkynshaw?" exclaimed Fitz, incredulously.

"He was, indeed."

"Checkynshaw don't know how to be good and kind—Checkynshaw don't. It isn't in him."

"Indeed, he does!" protested Maggie.

"So he does!" chimed in Leo, who was very grateful to Mr. Checkynshaw for buying his merchandise and recommending it to his friends. "I blow for Checkynshaw!"

"Mr. Checkynshaw has been very kind to us, and we feel grateful to him for his goodness," added André, in his mild, silky-toned voice.

"I know Checkynshaw. I've summered him and wintered him; and you have to summer and winter a man like Checkynshaw before you know him. My friend Choate knows him. Me and Choate both know him. Checkynshaw is mean; Checkynshaw has a small soul. You could set up two such souls as Checkynshaw's on the point of a cambric needle, and they could wander about till the end of time without coming within hailing distance of each other."

"Mr. Checkynshaw is not mean," replied Maggie, her pretty face red with excitement and indignation.

"Excuse me, Miss Maggimore, but you don't know him."

"I think I do know him. He gave me the reward of five hundred dollars for returning the papers to him," said Maggie, warmly; and the banker might have rejoiced to be defended by so fair and spirited an advocate.

"Checkynshaw!" ejaculated Mr. Wittleworth, springing out of his chair.

About the same instant Leo closed his book savagely, and sprang to his feet, his manly face wearing a decidedly belligerent look.

"See here, Fitz; you have said just about enough," Leo began, both fists clinched. "Mr. Checkynshaw is a friend of ours, and we are not going to sit here and have him abused."

"Don't be angry, Leo; he isn't worth minding," whispered Maggie in his ear.

"Then he gave you the reward?" added Fitz, sitting down again.

"He did," replied Maggie.

"Well, that is the only white spot on the general blackness of his character."

"No, 'tisn't!" protested Leo.

"You will excuse me, Miss Maggimore, if you think I speak too plainly; but candor is one of the attributes of a gentleman."

"It's not necessary for you to be so very candid," suggested Maggie.

"I know the man," said Fitz, pompously. "Did I ever tell you how he treated me and my mother? I never did. Well, I will."

"Nobody cares how he treated you and your mother," interposed Leo.

"Allow me to contradict you, Leo. I care; my mother cares; and every person who loves justice and fairness cares."

In spite of several very pointed hints from André, Maggie, and Leo, that they did not care to bear the story, Fitz persisted in telling it, and did tell it. He declared it was his solemn conviction that Mr. Checkynshaw had wronged his mother out of the block of stores, and ten years' income of the same, for which he had paid her the petty consideration of ten thousand dollars. Fitz had heard from his mother the narrative of the second Mrs. Checkynshaw's sickness, and of the sickness of little Marguerite, who had been taken to the cholera hospital; and he related it all in the most painfully minute manner.

"That child was the heir of my grandfather's property," continued Fitz, eloquently; for he was still burning under the sense of his own wrongs. "If that child died, the block of stores, according to my grandfather's will, was to come to my mother. That child did die, in my opinion."

"What makes you think so?" asked André, interested, in spite of himself, in the story.

"What makes me think so?" repeated Mr. Wittleworth, magnificently. "Am I a man of ordinary common sense? Have I lived to attain my present stature without growing wiser with every day of life I lived? Of what avail are my judgment, my knowledge, and my experience, if I cannot penetrate a sham so transparent as this? What makes me think so? Does a man of wealth and influence leave his own child among strangers, in a foreign land, for ten years? No! I repeat it, no!"

"You say the child was sent to the cholera hospital?" asked André, nervously.

"She was; but in my opinion she died there."

"O, she died there—did she?" said André, with apparent relief.

"Checkynshaw says she did not die; I say she did."

"Why should he say she didn't die, if she did die?" inquired Maggie, very innocently.

"Why should he? Why, indeed?" repeated Fitz, amazed at her obtuseness. "Don't you see that, if the child died, the block of stores belongs to my mother? But it makes no difference now," sighed Mr. Wittleworth, "for my mother, contrary to my advice, contrary to my solemn protest, sold out all her right in the premises for a mere song."

"But where is the child now?"

"Dead!" replied Fitz, in a sepulchral tone.

"Mr. Checkynshaw does not say so," persisted André. "What does he say about the child?"

"He says the child was taken by the Sisters of Charity, and that he found her in one of their nunneries or schools; but of course that is all bosh."

Mr. Wittleworth had told his story, and having done so, he tore himself away, leaving André very thoughtful.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TWO MARGUERITES.

When Mr. Wittleworth passed out into the street, the excitement of the argument subsided. He felt that he had thoroughly and completely demolished Mr. Checkynshaw, and that nothing more could be said in the banker's favor after what he had said against him. The great man need not attempt to hold up his head again, after that.

Mr. Checkynshaw had actually paid the reward to Maggie. It was strange, but it was true; and the saddest part of it was, Mr. Wittleworth had received no share of the money. He had given his valuable advice to the barber's daughter, and his late employer had received the full benefit of it. If he, Mr. Wittleworth, had been so vicious and depraved, so lost to the high instincts of a gentleman, as wilfully and maliciously to have given Miss Maggimore bad advice—advice not based on his experience and knowledge of the world; in a word, if he had told her that the papers were good for nothing, the young lady would doubtless have destroyed them.

Instead of this, he had been upright and conscientious; he had given good, wholesome counsel, worthy of his knowledge and experience. Miss Maggimore had actually asked him if the papers were good for anything; and he had actually informed her that they were very valuable, thus saving them from a devastating conflagration in the cooking-stove. Miss Maggimore had actually been paid five hundred dollars for opening that chest, and taking therefrom the package of papers; while he, who had furnished the intelligence, supplied the brains, and even the physical power by which the papers had been conveyed to the banker's office, had not received a cent!

There was something wrong, in the opinion of Mr. Wittleworth. The reward should be at least equally shared between him and her. In the morning he had made up his mind that fifty dollars would pay her handsomely, while the four hundred and fifty would not be an over-adequate compensation for the brains of the transaction. His calculations had been set at nought. He knew the value of those papers, but he had given the banker credit for integrity he did not possess, and had lost all. The world was always hard on Mr. Wittleworth, and at this time it seemed to be peculiarly savage towards him, especially as he had been out of business three months, and needed money badly.

It would be useless for him to represent his redeeming agency in the affair to Mr. Checkynshaw. The great man refused to acknowledge his shining abilities. Mr. Checkynshaw was prejudiced—he was. But the barber was a singularly simple-hearted man. He would not rob a flea of the mite of warm blood needed for its supper. Maggie was known throughout the neighborhood as a good little girl, and Leo was a mere tinker. These people might be brought to see the justice of his claim, and to acknowledge that through his advice and influence the papers had been saved from destruction, and restored to their owner; or, to put the matter in its most direct form, that he had enabled them to obtain the reward. They were indebted to him for it, and it would be exceedingly stupid of them if they could not see that he was fairly entitled to at least one half of it.

The next evening Mr. Wittleworth, to the consternation of Leo, paid another visit to the humble domicile of the barber. The young student was disgusted. His lessons were behind, and he could not afford to be interrupted; and as soon as Fitz came in, Leo retreated to his chamber—a movement which suited the visitor quite as well as the scholar.

"Mr. Wittleworth, I am very glad you called," said André, "for I wished to ask you something more about Mr. Checkynshaw's daughter."

"Any information which I possess I will most cheerfully impart to those who need it; but I ought to say that I came on business, however," replied Fitz, rather anxiously.

"Very well, Mr. Wittleworth; we will attend to the business first, if you desire."

Mr. Wittleworth did desire, and it took him about an hour to go over the argument which had passed through his brain the night before; but he made it appear, to his own entire satisfaction, that he had been the sole instrumentality in enabling his auditors to obtain the princely reward.

"But I hadn't the least intention of burning the papers," protested Maggie. "It is true I almost wished I had burned them; but it was when I was afraid they would get Leo into trouble."

"Exactly so; and it was through my advice, personal influence, and personal efforts, that the papers were restored to Checkynshaw."

"What portion of the reward do you claim, Mr. Wittleworth?" asked André, very mildly.

"I should be satisfied with one half of it, at this stage of the proceedings; though, when I consider that it was entirely through my advice and discreet action that the papers were saved, I think I should be justified in claiming four fifths, or even nine tenths of it. As it is, you having already received the money, I will be content with half of it; though this is rather hard on me, considering the personal indignity and the injury in my feelings to which I was subjected."

Maggie looked at André, and André looked at Maggie. Mr. Wittleworth was modest in his demand, and it was plainly useless to discuss the question.

"We understand your position, Mr. Wittleworth," said André. "It takes us rather by surprise; but we will consider your demand, and return you an answer in a day or two. We may wish to consult Mr. Checkynshaw about it."

"No!" said Fitz, very decidedly. "After what I have said to you about Checkynshaw, it would be absurd for you to consult him. Checkynshaw is rich, and he is prejudiced against me—Checkynshaw is. This is a question of abstract justice, not of personal feeling or personal prejudice. I only ask for justice."

"We will think of it, Mr. Wittleworth, and give you an answer to-morrow or next day," repeated André. "I am very much interested in what you said about Mr. Checkynshaw's first child."

"In a question of abstract justice, André, it is hardly necessary for an honest man to wait a single day before he does his duty. I prefer to settle this little matter at once," added Fitz.

"But I have not the money in the house. I put it in the Savings Bank," replied the barber, anxious only to defer the final answer.

"But you can determine your duty in regard to my claim, and inform me of your intentions."

"I have no intentions at present, and you will pardon me if I decline to say anything more about it to-night."

Fitz began to think he was overdoing the matter. André appeared to be slightly ruffled, and he deemed it prudent to proceed no further.

"Very well, André; if you do not see the justice of my claim, I will not press it. You are an honest and a just man. If I had not known you as such, I should not have troubled you. Of course my future opinion of you must depend very much upon your decision in this matter. Not that I care so much for the money, but I love justice. If I can afford you any information in regard to Checkynshaw's child, I shall be glad to do so."

"Mr. Wittleworth, I was in one of the cholera hospitals of Paris at the time that child died—I think you said ten years ago."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Fitz. "It was ten years ago last August."

"Do you know in what hospital the child was placed?" asked André, with breathless interest.

"I do not, but my mother does. She has a letter written to her by the present Mrs. Checkynshaw, in which she informed her that Marguerite had died in the hospital. But

Checkynshaw looked the matter up afterwards; and he says the child did not die; that she was taken away by the Sisters of Charity. That was all bosh."

"Could I see your mother?" asked André.

"Certainly; you can walk over to my house and see her if you like."

"I do not ask from an idle curiosity," added André. "The foreign residents in Paris were generally taken to the same hospital, in the Rue Lacépède. I was then the valet of an English gentleman, who died there of cholera. While I was there—for, after the death of my employer, I was engaged as a kind of interpreter for the English patients who did not speak French—the *Hôpital des Enfants Malades* was full, and a portion of our establishment was devoted to foreign children. I well remember two children of the name of Margaret; and I have reason to remember them;" and André glanced tenderly at Maggie. "One of them died, and the other is my Maggie."

"But what was the other name of the one that died?" asked Fitz, nervously.

"Marguerite Chuckingham. I suppose there were other Marguerites there; but I did not know them. They could not find the dead child's parents; they were dead themselves. I would like to see your mother's letter," added André.

Accepting Fitz's invitation, the barber and his daughter walked over to "his house," and were introduced to Mrs. Wittleworth. André repeated his story about the two Marguerites, and she was quite as much interested in it as her son had been.

"I have the letter," said she. "I thought the property was mine, and that the letter might be of use to me; so I have carefully preserved it."

She went to the bureau, and produced the letter. It contained a pitiful account of the sufferings of Mrs. Checkynshaw during the cholera season, and the announcement of little Marguerite's death at the hospital in the Rue Lacépède.

"That's the place!" exclaimed André, much excited.

"What became of the child?" asked Mrs. Wittleworth, not less agitated.

"It must have been Marguerite Chuckingham, for that was as near as a Frenchman would be likely to get the name."

"But it may have been the other Marguerite," suggested Mrs. Wittleworth.

"No!" exclaimed André, with something like a shudder at the thought of having Maggie taken from him, even to dwell in the palatial home of the banker.

"Why may it not have been?"

"Because I traced the parents of my Maggie to their lodgings, and both of them had died of cholera. The *concierge* identified the clothing and a locket I found upon her neck. Besides, Maggie spoke French then, and the other child did not. I have no doubt the child that died was Mr. Checkynshaw's."

"André, your hand!" said Fitz.

"I don't wish to harm Mr. Checkynshaw," protested the barber, taking the hand involuntarily, rather than because he was interested in the act.

"You love truth and justice; you have the reputation of loving truth and justice, all over the world—you have. You are a noble-minded man," continued Fitz, eloquently. "Now you can see what Checkynshaw is, and now you can see what I am."

"Don't be foolish, Fitz!" interposed Mrs. Wittleworth.

"Foolish! Mother, have I not furnished wisdom for our family? Have I not told you from the beginning what Checkynshaw was? I told you the child was dead. Now it is proved."

"No matter if it is. It makes no difference now."

"It is matter; it does make a difference. Mother, you know how earnestly I protested against your signing that quitclaim deed. Now I am justified. Now you can see that I was right, and you were wrong."

André and Maggie had no interest in this discussion, and they hastened their departure as soon as the atmosphere began to look stormy. The barber was sorry he had said anything. Simple-minded man as he was, he had not foreseen that he was getting Mr. Checkynshaw into trouble, and he determined to say nothing more about it.

Fitz stormed furiously when it was proved that "wisdom was justified of her followers." He declared that Checkynshaw had cheated his mother and himself out of their inheritance, and that justice should be done, if the heavens fell.

"What can we do? I have signed the quitclaim deed to the block of stores."

"No matter if you have. Checkynshaw deceived you. You signed the deed only because he said the child was living. We shall prove that the child is dead. The proceeding will be in equity; all that has been done can be ripped up as easily as you can tear up a piece of paper. I know something about law. Me and Choate have talked over cases in equity."

How long this tempestuous debate would have continued none can know, for it was disturbed by the ringing of the door bell. The person admitted was John Wittleworth himself, the husband and father, who came to his family clothed and in his right mind, from the House of Correction, where he had served a term of four months as a common drunkard. He was cordially welcomed, for he was himself; and there, on his bended knee, he promised, and called upon Heaven to record his vow, that he would never again taste the intoxicating cup.

He had been discharged that afternoon, and had been endeavoring till that late hour to find his wife and son. He had finally traced them to their new home. In the course of the evening, after the past had been fully discussed, Fitz brought up the matter of Mr. Checkynshaw's child, and all the facts which had been developed were fully stated to him.

Fitz found a warm supporter of his views in his father, who declared that the quitclaim deed was not valid, because he had not joined her in making it. Within three days proceedings in equity were commenced against Mr. Checkynshaw.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GOLD LOCKET.

Mr. Checkynshaw was astonished and disgusted at the conduct of the Wittleworths. The block of stores did not appear even yet to be securely in his possession. It was true he had the quitclaim deed of the contingent heir, but this did not seem to be of much value under the circumstances. Mr. Wittleworth, senior, had again appeared upon the stage. He had not before considered him in making his calculations; for he was a miserable sot, before whom, and at no great distance from him, yawned the drunkard's grave.

John Wittleworth, in his right mind, was an able man, and his reappearance explained the decided action of the family. He had joined the temperance society, and he was now a stumbling-block in the path of the banker.

Mr. Checkynshaw was indignant. He had paid ten thousand dollars for that quitclaim deed, or rather he had given it in charity; and this money was to pay the expenses of the suit brought against him!

He went to see Mrs. Wittleworth, and only hoped that he should not see John or his son. Unfortunately, Fitz was at home. Fitz was airy, Fitz was grand, Fitz was magnificent. His views and opinions had come to be appreciated; they had risen where the froth on the beer rises, to the top of the mug. To use his mother's homely but expressive saying, "you couldn't touch Fitz with a ten-foot pole."

"Ellen," said Mr. Checkynshaw, solemnly, "it *did* seem to me that I had done my whole duty to you, when, three months ago, I placed you out of the reach of want for the rest of your lifetime. I confess my grief and surprise, after what I have done for you, that this suit should be brought against me."

"If the matter had been left to me, the suit would not have been brought against you," replied Mrs. Wittleworth, who was really much confused and abashed at the reproaches of the great man.

"But, Ellen, I must hold you responsible for it. If you had not consented, it could not have commenced. It is done in your name."

"Hold me responsible, Mr. Checkynshaw," interposed Fitz, placing himself before the banker, and stroking his chin with the most elegant assurance.

Mr. Checkynshaw utterly ignored Fitz, took no notice of him, passed him by in silence.

"The consideration mentioned in the quitclaim deed, Ellen, was ten thousand dollars," continued the great man. "Of course you are ready to pay this back."

"Not at all, sir; we are not ready to pay it back," said Fitz; "but we are ready to give you a receipt for it on account."

"It is hardly right, Ellen, that I should furnish money for you to carry on a suit against me. I gave it to you to keep you from the almshouse, and that you might be independent of any neglect on my part in the future. This money is now to be wasted in idle litigation—in paying the expenses of a lawsuit brought for the sole purpose of annoying me."

"The suit is brought in the name of justice and humanity," shouted Fitz, eloquently, and with a spread-eagle gesture. "The palladium of our liberties—"

"Be still, Fitz—don't be silly!" interposed his mother.

Fitz's elegant speech was nipped in the bud.

"I don't like to do it, Ellen, but I must insist that the money be paid back to me immediately," added the banker. "It is not right for you to spend money given to keep you out of the poorhouse in annoying your benefactor."

Mr. Checkynshaw looked injured.

"I am willing to pay the money back as soon as I can," added Mrs. Wittleworth.

"We are not willing to pay the money back, mother. That would not be proper or business-like, when Mr. Checkynshaw owes us at least fifty thousand dollars for back rents of the block of stores," Fitz protested.

"I shall have to sue you at once, unless the money is paid," said Mr. Checkynshaw, mildly. "Your husband brought the suit against me without giving me any notice. I wished to take a more Christian course with you; but I can stay no longer to be insulted by this puppy!" And the banker nodded his head in the direction of Fitz.

"Puppy!" yelled Mr. Wittleworth, throwing back his head. "Puppy!"

"Be still, Fitz!" said his mother.

"Be still, and be called a puppy!"

"Mr. Checkynshaw, I can only say that I meant to do right," added Mrs. Wittleworth.

"Puppy!" howled Fitz, pacing the room violently. "Puppy!"

"You meant to do right!" exclaimed the banker.

"I did. You told me that Marguerite was alive and well, and that I was—"

"A puppy! That's an insult!" soliloquized Mr. Wittleworth.

"That I was not the legal heir; that I had no claim upon you."

"And you have not," replied Mr. Checkynshaw.

"The blood of the Wittleworths boils!" stormed Fitz.

"But Marguerite is dead—died ten years ago."

"What nonsense is this!" said the banker, in disgust, though his face was a shade paler than usual.

"We have the means of proving that Marguerite died at the time your wife wrote me the letter to that effect."

"Yes, sir; we can prove it, sir!" added Fitz, forgetting for the moment that he was a puppy. "We can prove it by good and reliable witnesses, sir."

"Ellen, this is absurd," continued Mr. Checkynshaw "My wife did write you a letter; but you know what Paris must have been when the cholera was cutting down men, women, and children by the hundred daily. Marguerite had the cholera, and my wife had it. Is it strange that they were separated? Is it strange that the child was reported to be dead? Is it strange that, at such a time, my wife believed the report? She was mistaken. I found the child, and hastened to correct the false rumors."

"We can prove, by a credible witness, that the child, called Marguerite Chuckingham, died," foamed Fitz.

"Who is the witness?" demanded the banker, turning suddenly upon Mr. Wittleworth, and for the first time, apparently, conscious of his presence.

"By André Maggimore, a good man and true, who was employed in the Hotel de Saltpetre, in the Ruee Saleratus," replied Mr. Wittleworth, triumphantly.

He had been reading a book on Paris, where mention was made of the *Salpêtrière*, a great almshouse; but the street he named was doubtless his own corruption of the *Rue Lacépède*, of which he had only heard in André's narrative.

Mr. Checkynshaw was really troubled now. Another of the recipients of his bounty had proved faithless; one renegade beneficiary had played into the hands of another. André had shaved him for years, but had never said a word about the hospitals of Paris to him; indeed, André had never said anything to him, except in answer to his own questions.

In reply to his inquiries, Mrs. Wittleworth stated that the barber had called upon her, and repeated what he had said, in evidence of the truth of her assertion that Marguerite was dead.

"Perhaps André means to be truthful, and to assert only what he believes to be true; but he is mistaken," said Mr. Checkynshaw, nervously. "Do you think I should not know my own child when I saw her?"

"Of course you would; but André is very positive your child was the Marguerite Chuckingham that died," added Mrs. Wittleworth.

"This matter is too ridiculous to take up my time for a moment. I am ready to abide the decision of the court," continued the banker, taking his hat and moving towards the door. "I hope you are equally ready to do so, Ellen."

"I wish to do only what is right," replied she. "Will you see my husband?"

"No; I will not," answered Mr. Checkynshaw. "If he wished to see me before he commenced this suit, it would have been proper for him to do so. I shall not run after him."

"And he will not run after you," interposed Fitz. "Justice and humanity—"

"Be still, Fitz."

"We shall retain Choate in this case. Me and Choate have talked the matter over, and—"

Mr. Checkynshaw bowed stiffly, and left the room before Fitz had time to say what terrible things "me and Choate" intended to do. The banker was evidently in the most uncomfortable frame of mind. He was nervous and uneasy. His step in the street was quick and sharp, as he walked to Phillimore Court. He did not expect to find André there, and he did not. But Maggie was a remarkably intelligent girl, open and truthful, and she would be less likely to veil any designs from him than one who had seen more of the world.

The banker tried to think what motive the barber could have for arraying himself against one who had done so much for him—one who had voluntarily paid his family the reward of five hundred dollars. It was possible that the Wittleworths had been at work upon André; that they had induced him to give evidence in support of their assertion that Marguerite was dead. Mr. Checkynshaw was a shrewd and deep man, in his own estimation, and he was confident, if any such scheme had been devised, he could fathom it. He rather preferred, therefore, to see the members of the family separately, and Maggie was the best one to begin with.

Mr. Checkynshaw was admitted to the parlor of the barber's home, and Maggie was the only person in the house with him; for Leo was at school, still determined, make or break, to obtain the medal. The fair girl blushed when she recognized the visitor, and, having heard that the Wittleworths had instituted the suit, she trembled with fear; for she suspected that the great man's coming related to that event.

"Maggie, I am sorry you and your father have been giving bad counsels to those Wittleworths," the banker began, in solemn tones, but apparently more in grief than in anger.

"Why, sir! Bad counsels?" exclaimed Maggie.

"I have given the Wittleworths money enough to keep them comfortable for the rest of their lives; but they are ungrateful, and are now seeking to annoy me as much as possible."

"I am very sorry."

"I thought I had done enough for your family to make you all my friends; but it seems I was mistaken," added the great man, sadly reproachful in his manner.

"I am sure, sir, we are very grateful to you, and would not willingly do anything to injure you," protested Maggie, warmly.

"Why did your father tell the Wittleworths, then, that he was employed in the cholera hospital in Paris?"

"Because he was employed there," replied Maggie, who deemed this a sufficient reason for saying so.

"Was he, indeed?" asked the banker, who had been sceptical even on this point.

Maggie told the whole story of the two Marguerites, as she had heard it from her father.

"One Marguerite died, and you were the other," said Mr. Checkynshaw, musing.

"Yes, sir; and I don't know to this day who my father and mother were; but I suppose they died of cholera. I was told they did. *Mon père* traced them to their lodgings, and identified the clothing and a locket I wore."

"A locket?" asked the banker, curiously.

"Yes, sir."

"What was the locket?"

"It was a gold one, with the miniature of a gentleman on one side, and a lady on the other, with locks of hair. I suppose they were my father and mother."

"Where is the locket now?"

"*Mon père* has it. I don't know where he keeps it. He tried to find my parents before he came to America, but without success. I saw the locket once, when I was a little girl; but *mon père* don't like to talk about these things. He loves me, and he only fears that I may be taken from him."

"But he talked with the Wittleworths about them."

"He couldn't help it then," pleaded Maggie, "when he heard the story of your child from Fitz."

Mr. Checkynshaw abruptly left the house, and hastened to the shop of Cutts & Stropmore. He had a long conversation with André, and finally they went to Phillimore Court together.

The banker insisted upon seeing the locket, and André showed it to him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ME AND CHOATE.

"A puppy!" hissed through the teeth of Fitz, when the door closed behind the great man. "The blood of the Wittleworths boils!"

"Then you had better let the blood of the Wittleworths cool off, my son," added his mother, who had no taste for the grandiloquent.

"He called me a puppy—called *me* a puppy!"

"You shouldn't bark so loud, then. I don't know that any but puppies interrupt people who are busy in conversation. When will you learn to keep still, Fitz?"

"When! When justice and humanity no longer require me to speak in tones of thunder against oppression! Mother, we have struck the enemy a fatal blow! Didn't you see him cringe?"

"No, I didn't see him cringe. I am only sorry that I consented to have this suit brought against Mr. Checkynshaw."

"O, mother! After all, you are only a woman!"

"Stop your nonsensical talk, Fitz! Why don't you go out and try to find a place to work?"

"A place to work!" sneered Fitz. "In a few weeks—be it a few months, if you please—we shall be in possession of that block of stores, with fifty thousand dollars in the bank. What need have I of a place? Besides, I have this trial to look out for."

"I think your father can attend to that better without you than with you."

"Father means well, and I trust he will do well," added the hopeful son, patronizingly. "But father's infirmity has weakened him. He is only the ghost of what he was."

"Are you not ashamed of yourself to speak of your father in that way, Fitz? Don't you make another such remark as that; if you do, you shall not stay in the house with him. Your father has more knowledge and experience in one hair of his head than you have in the whole of your silly brain."

"Was I not right about this affair? Have I not persisted, from the beginning, that the child was dead?"

"That remains to be proved."

"I think I understand this business better than any other man; and if you are beaten in the suit, it will only be because father does not take my advice. I have studied the case. I have given my whole, my undivided attention to the matter for several weeks."

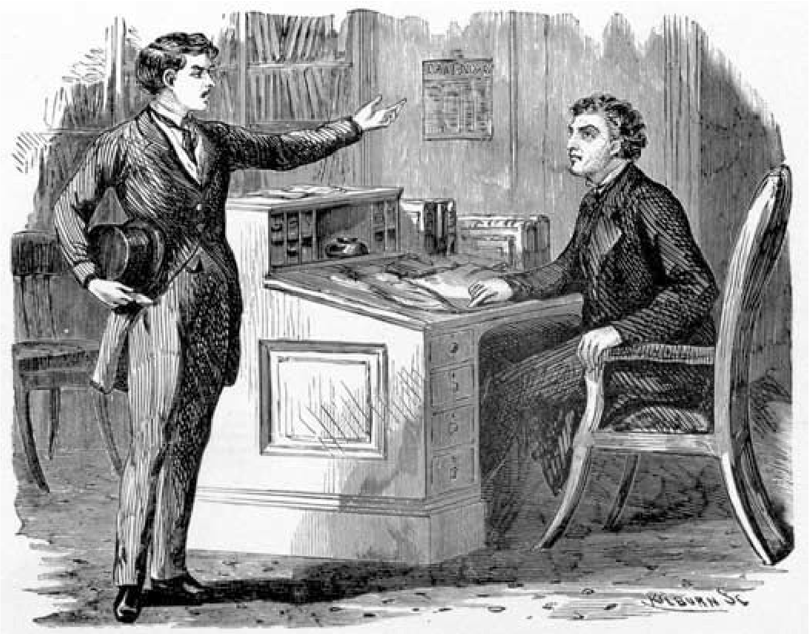
"It would have been better if you had given your undivided attention to something else."

"Mother, I see that you are bound to follow after foolishness rather than wisdom. But I cannot forget that I am your son, and that you are my mother. I shall not willingly permit your interests to be sacrificed. I advised father to retain Choate. He has not seen fit to do so. This shows that he don't understand the matter; that he does not comprehend the difficulty in fighting a man like Checkynshaw, who is both wealthy and influential. Choate can carry the case. Choate is a friend of mine—Choate is; and I am going to see to it that Choate don't stand in a false position before the country in this great case."

"You silly fellow! What are you going to do now?" demanded Mrs. Wittleworth.

"I'm going to see Choate," replied Fitz, putting on his cap.

His mother protested against any and all steps which her son might take; but Fitz left the house. He had a supreme contempt for the every-day practical wisdom of his father and mother, and believed that failure could result only from their neglect to hear and heed his sage counsels. He actually went to the office of the distinguished gentleman who stood at the head of the legal profession, and who had been a member of the United States Senate. Mr. Choate was a very gentlemanly man, affable and kind to all, to whatever sphere in life they belonged. He spoke with gentleness and consideration to the boy as well as to the man.



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Fitz had been the errand boy in the office of the eminent lawyer, and, of course, had practically experienced the kindness of his nature and the gentleness of his manner. Fitz "felt big," and put on airs, even when he was a smaller boy than now. Mr. Choate appreciated genuine humor, and it is more than probable that he enjoyed the "big talk" of the office boy. Perhaps he was more familiar with him on this account than he otherwise would have been.

Fitz did not find the distinguished gentleman in his office the first time he went there; but he repeated the call till he did find him. The eloquent advocate received him very graciously, as he did everybody who had any claim upon his attention. Fitz stated his business as briefly as he could.

"I cannot attend to the case," said the great lawyer, very kindly, but very decidedly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Choate; but this is a case of no little importance. Ever since I was in your office, I have had the highest opinion of you, both as a man and a lawyer."

"I thank you for your favorable consideration," replied the eminent orator, soberly.

"If there is any man on the earth whom I respect and esteem above all others, that man is Mr. Choate."

"I hope always to prove worthy of your regard."

"I come to you now, sir, as a friend—for I am proud and happy to consider you as such. You were always very kind to me."

"I trust I have always recognized your great merit."

"You have, sir; and the boast of my life will be, that I have been associated with you in your office."

"You do me honor; and I shall always hold in grateful remembrance the distinguished service you rendered us here."

"It is glorious to be appreciated, Mr. Choate. You are appreciated, Mr. Choate. Folks know you, and look up to you. They believe you are *some*."

"I am grateful for their and your appreciation. But, really, Mr. Wittleworth, I must beg you to excuse me, for I have important business before me," added the lawyer, nervously turning over a bundle of papers, covered with strange characters, which no mortal man could read; for they were more inexplicable than Chinese and Syriac to a Yankee farmer.

"Pardon me for detaining you yet a moment longer," pleaded Fitz, placing himself in the centre of the room, with his hat under his arm. "This is a case of wrong and injustice, of oppression and usurpation. My mother is the rightful heir to a block of stores in this city, which the greed of avarice withholds from her. Me and father have taken up the matter. We have been foully wronged;" and Mr. Wittleworth threshed his arm, and waxed eloquent. "The heel of injustice has been placed upon our necks. Mr. Choate, you are the people's advocate. Rising superior to all hopes of fee or reward, you raise your eloquent voice in behalf of the widow and the orphan. You plead at the bar of justice for the rights of the down-trodden. Your voice is like a trumpet, and—"

"So is yours; I beg you will not speak so loud. What do you wish me to do?" interposed Mr. Choate.

Fitz explained what he wished the great orator to do—to raise his voice in behalf of the oppressed, meaning his mother and himself; and he soon became quite stormy again. His single auditor, evidently amused by this display of rhetoric, permitted him to go on.

"Who has the block of stores now?" asked Mr. Choate, when Fitz began to be out of breath.

"Mr. Checkynshaw, the banker."

"Ah, indeed! I am very sorry, but I am already retained on the other side."

"On the other side!" gasped Fitz.

"I am; and really, Mr. Wittleworth, you must excuse me now.

"On the other side!" repeated Fitz. "Can it be that the mighty name of Choate is to be linked with injustice and oppression? I will not believe it! I counted something upon your friendship for me, Mr. Choate."

The great orator was evidently trying to read some of the strange characters in the manuscript before him, and, regardless of what Fitz was saying, had relapsed into a fit of abstraction, which effectually placed him out of the reach of Mr. Wittleworth's reproaches. The sheets looked as though a fish-worm had come out of the inkstand, and crawled over the virgin page. It was doubtful whether he was able to read anything he had written, and possibly he was trying to remember what he had intended to commit to the paper.

Fitz, finding that the distinguished gentleman took no further notice of him, put on his hat, and marched in stately grandeur out of the office. The great man had sunk considerably in his estimation, though, as a matter of history, he was never pained by having the fact brought to his knowledge.

Mr. Wittleworth had a great deal of confidence in abstract right and justice. If Mr. Choate pleaded the cause of Mr. Checkynshaw, he would in this instance be beaten. It would be a good lesson to the great lawyer, and Mr. Wittleworth magnanimously hoped that he would profit by it. He was to lose all the glory, honor, and immortality to be gained by being on the right side in the great case of Wittleworth *vs.* Checkynshaw; but it was not Mr. Wittleworth's fault. He had given him an opportunity to enlist under the banner of truth and justice, and he had refused to do so. It was his own choice, and he must abide the consequences. Mr. Wittleworth rather pitied him, for he always had a very tender regard for the reputation of his friends.

Mr. Wittleworth was compelled to rely upon the skill and knowledge of the legal gentleman whom his father had employed to conduct the suit; but he had faith that justice was on his side, and must prevail in the end. He waited—he could not do anything but wait—until the day assigned for the hearing of the case arrived. Mr. Wittleworth took a seat with his father and mother within the bar, on this, as it seemed to him, most momentous occasion the world had ever seen.

Mr. Checkynshaw appeared by counsel, and asked for a continuation of the case for a reasonable time to enable him to bring his daughter from France. The banker's business lawyer said a few words in making the request, and then Mr. Choate, who had been employed by the banker, as well as retained, added the weight of his personal influence to the application. To the intense disgust of Mr. Wittleworth, it was granted so promptly that he hardly knew what had happened. Another case was called, and the Wittleworths went home.

Though Mr. Checkynshaw had threatened to sue them for the money he had paid, nothing more was said or heard from the action. Fitz assured his father and mother that the banker could not produce his daughter, and that the case would not come to trial. If they were only firm and decided with him, Mr. Checkynshaw would give up the block of stores, and pay over the back rents. He must do so, or his reputation would be blasted forever. He must stand before the world as a knave and a swindler, unless he did full and ample justice to the widow (who had a husband), and the orphan (who had a father and mother); for Mr. Wittleworth, when he waxed eloquent, had a habit of confounding terms.

About a week after the hearing which had been cut short so suddenly, Fitz, deeming it his duty to look after the witnesses in the great case of Wittleworth *vs.* Checkynshaw, thought it advisable to call one evening at No. 3 Phillimore Court. The door was locked, and the house was dark. He repeated the call every evening for a week, but with no better result. Then he went in the daytime. No one answered his knock, and the door was as unyielding as a rock of granite.

Mr. Wittleworth was bewildered. Mr. Checkynshaw had done this! He had spirited away the chief witness. Fitz went to the barber's shop, and inquired for André. He had left his place ten days before. Fitz met Leo on the street one day, a month later.

"Where do you live now?" he asked.

"I am boarding in Gridley Street."

"Where are Maggie and your father?"

"Gone to France with Mr. Checkynshaw after his daughter," replied Leo, hurrying on his way; for, make or break, he intended to be at school in season.

Mr. Wittleworth scratched his head and looked foolish. Mr. Checkynshaw appeared to be flanking him.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ELEGANT YOUNG LADY.

Leo still slept at the house in Phillimore Court, though he took his meals in Gridley Street. It was necessary for him to go two or three times a day to his shop to look after his stock of mice, rabbits, pigeons, and guinea pigs, in which he still carried on a tolerably lucrative commerce in supplying his old friends and customers. Every moment of his time was occupied from six o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night. He did everything "upon honor," and he carried this rule into his lessons as well as his mercantile speculations. What he learned he really learned, and never left the subject till he had fully mastered it.

Though he had been absent from school over two months, he stood so well in his class, that, with the severe exertion he made, he was able to regain the position he lost. As soon as his father began to improve in health, and there was a prospect that Leo might again take his place in school, he devoted himself to his studies, and followed up his geography, history, and arithmetic with a zeal which promised the best results. He called upon the master, and received directions for the conduct of his course. There are always plenty of good people to help those who are willing to help themselves, and Leo had all the friends he needed.

Everything was going on well with Leo, even after the sudden disappearance of André and Maggie, whom, no doubt, he greatly missed in their absence. If he knew anything about the reason for their abrupt departure, he kept his own counsel, especially in the presence of Fitz Wittleworth, who, since he had discovered that "*his* witness" had been tampered with, had become the tormentor of the young mechanic. Fitz placed himself at the corner of Gridley Street almost every day, intent upon worming something out of Leo. The latter was too busy to waste any time on such a fellow as Mr. Wittleworth, and used to avoid him, as far as he could, by taking a round-about way to his boarding-house. But sometimes Fitz blundered upon his victim.

"I want to see you, Leo," said he one day, when he had by a happy scheme outflanked him.

"I'm in a hurry, Fitz; I can't stop now. My mice haven't had their dinner yet," replied Leo, uneasily.

"They won't starve just yet. Hold on! I've got something for you," persisted Fitz, when the victim began to move on.

"I don't want anything."

"Did you know your father had got himself into a scrape?"

"No, I didn't," answered Leo, who was interested in this intelligence.

"He has; and he'll have to answer to the court for clearing out. I suppose you never read law, and don't know anything about the subordination of witnesses. I'll tell you."

"I can't stay to hear it now," replied Leo, laughing, for he knew the difference between "subordination" and "subornation."

"I want to talk with you about half an hour some time."

"What about?"

"About your father. Checkynshaw has bought him up."

"What do you mean by 'bought him up'?" demanded Leo, indignantly.

"I mean that Checkynshaw has paid him to keep out of the way in our great case of Wittleworth versus Checkynshaw," added Fitz.

"I say he hasn't."

"Hasn't he cleared out?"

"What if he has? He's coming back again."

"Don't tell me! I know something about law."

"I won't tell you, and you needn't tell me. If you'll keep your side of the street, I'll keep mine. If you mean to tell me that André Maggimore has done anything wrong, or means to do anything wrong, you don't know the man."

"I say he has. He was summoned as a witness for our side, and he has sold out to the enemy."

"He hasn't done anything of the sort."

"What has he gone to France for, then?"

"That's his business, not yours."

"Yes, it is my business; I manage our suit, and you had better tell me all you know about it."

"I guess not! In the first place, I don't know much about it; and in the second, if I did, I wouldn't tell you."

"If André Maggimore commits perjury—"

"That will do, Fitz Wittleworth. I don't want to quarrel with you, and I don't mean to do so; but you can't talk like that to me without getting a broken head. So you can't talk to me at all. If you speak to me again, I won't answer you."

Leo turned abruptly from Fitz, bolted into a run, and did not slacken his pace till he reached the house. He was tempted to pitch into Fitz; his fists had involuntarily closed; and he felt that if he listened any longer, he should not be able to control his wrath. Leo stuck to his text, and when Fitz attempted to speak to him, he dodged him as though he had been an unclean beast. Of course Leo knew why his father and his sister had gone away; but he did not intend to give the Wittleworths the benefit of his knowledge. He had an occasional letter from Maggie, and about a week before the exhibition, he received one informing him that she and her father would sail for home in the next steamer, and expected to be present at the exhibition.

The great day of the school year arrived. The examination for medals had taken place, and Leo confidently expected this crowning distinction of his school life, though no one could know who were to be the happy recipients of the medals until their names were called on the great day. There was only one damper upon his enthusiasm as the eventful occasion dawned upon him. The steamer bearing André and Maggie had been expected the day before, but she had not arrived; and Leo felt that half his pleasure would be lost because they were not present to witness his triumph.

The exercises of the exhibition proceeded, and Leo spoke his piece, and carried through his part in the original dialogue to the entire satisfaction of all interested. The silver pitcher had been presented to the "beloved teacher," and the chairman of the district committee had risen to deliver the medal speech, when the crowd at the doors was opened by the gentlemanly policeman in attendance to allow the passage of some favored guests. Leo was in a flutter of excitement; for, shortly after the exercises began, the school-house being located near the bay, he had heard the two guns which announced the arrival of an English steamer, in those blissful days when Boston was favored by the Cunard line.

Through the crowd came Mr. Checkynshaw, followed by a young lady of remarkable beauty, who was most elegantly dressed; and behind her came André Maggimore. They were provided with seats, and the exercises proceeded. Everybody seemed to pay more attention to the beautiful young lady than to the excellent chairman, whose *forte* certainly was not speech-making. The fashion of her dress was a season ahead of the ideas of other ladies present, and was of the most costly material.

Some of the people thought they had seen her before, but they were not quite sure. Leo was certain that he had seen her before, and he found it hard work to keep his seat during the solemn and impressive remarks of the worthy chairman of the district committee; and it was only when he began to call the names of the successful candidates for the medal that the whole attention of the aspirant was given to him.

"Leopold Maggimore," called the chairman for the sixth name, which would have been the first if Leo had not been absent so long.

There was some applause bestowed upon each of the recipients; but that which greeted Leo's name was warm and enthusiastic. André smiled, and the beautiful young lady in the elegant dress smiled; and even Mr. Checkynshaw was so far in sympathy with the occasion that he smiled too, when the blue ribbon was put upon the neck of Leo. After that, the time hung heavy upon all our characters who were present, especially as the distinguished gentlemen who had been invited to make a "few remarks" were unusually long-winded and prosy.

The exhibition was finished at last, and the elegant young lady flew to the seat of Leo, the silk fluttering like a summer tempest, grasped both his hands, and actually kissed him before the assembled multitude. There were several scores of nice young men present, who envied Leo now more than when the blue ribbon was placed on his neck; and it ought to be added that Leo bore his martyrdom with remarkable fortitude. André then grasped his hand, and the tears stole down his pale face. Even Mr. Checkynshaw condescended to take the hand of the young man, and congratulate him upon the distinction he had won.

The party left the school-house. There was a carriage waiting at the door for the banker, which bore them to Pemberton Square. It is not of much consequence what happened there, and we need only say that the elegant young lady was rather sad, and seemed to cling more to André and Leo than to the lofty man who entertained them, or to his family.

The great case of Wittleworth *vs.* Checkynshaw had been twice postponed during the absence of the defendant, and it was called for the fourth time only a few days after his return. All the parties were present this time. Mr. Fitz Wittleworth did not seem quite as confident as before. There were indications of a "gigantic conspiracy," as he expressed it, against the majesty of justice as represented by the Wittleworths. It was alleged that the defendant had his daughter in court—and a beautiful young lady she was; but Mr. Wittleworth insisted that this person—elegant and richly dressed as she appeared—was an impostor, employed to personate the deceased child of his powerful rival, and thus enable him to retain the block of stores and the back rents.

Mrs. Checkynshaw and Elinora were in court; so were André and Leo. Mr. Choate was there, and Mr. Wittleworth cast a reproachful glance at him; but it was fortunate for the distinguished orator that he did not know how much he had fallen in the estimation of one "who had formerly been in the office with him."

Certain dry formalities were solemnly passed through; the counsel for the plaintiff made a statement, during which he read extracts from the will of Mr. Osborne. It was plain enough to everybody that the block of stores belonged to Mrs. Wittleworth, unless the trustee and defendant could produce his daughter. She was produced; but Fitz was still hopeful. The elegant young lady was no other than Miss Maggie Maggimore. It was evident enough to him that she had been engaged to play the part in the farce. Mrs. Checkynshaw was the first witness called. She told the whole story about the cholera in Paris; that Marguerite, her husband's daughter, had the disease first, and was reported to have died with it; that she was taken with the terrible malady shortly afterwards; and that the child wore, at the time she was taken to the hospital, a gold locket, which contained portraits of her father and mother, and a lock of the hair of each. This locket was handed to her, and she identified it.

Fitz began to be alarmed.

André was called next. He had been employed as an interpreter in the hospital in the Rue Lacépède. He had frequently seen the child whose name was entered on the books of the establishment as Marguerite Poulebah. He was informed that her parents had died, and that she had no friends to whom she could be sent. He became very much interested in her, and when something was said about taking her to an orphan asylum, he had invited her to go home with him. He kept her there a few days, and became so much attached to her that he was not willing to give her up. His landlady took care of her till he embarked for America, where he soon found employment as a barber and had ever since retained her. He identified the locket as the one worn by the child when he took her from the hospital. He confessed that he had done wrong in not using greater efforts to find the friends of the child; but they were so much attached to each other that a separation would have been insupportable to either.

André finished his direct statement, and the counsel for the plaintiff immediately opened upon him so fiercely that Fitz began to feel that the day was not wholly lost.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER.

"Where were you born, Mr. Maggimore?" asked the Wittleworth lawyer.

"In London," replied André.

"Are you a Frenchman?"

"My father was Italian, my mother French."

"Did you ever learn the barber's trade, or did you pick it up yourself?"

"I was apprenticed to a barber in London, and served seven years."

"Have you always worked at the business?"

"No, sir. I used to shave an English gentleman who had a stiff arm, and I finally went into his service as his valet. I remained with him till he died of cholera in Paris. I lived with him fourteen years," answered Andre, meekly.

"Have you ever told any person that Marguerite Checkynshaw died at the hospital?" demanded the attorney, sharply.

"I have, sir."

"Was it true?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you say so, then?"

"Because I thought it was true."

"What made you think so?"

"The last name of the Marguerite that died was so like Checkynshaw."

"What was the name of the other Marguerite?"

"Poulebah."

"Did you make any effort to find the parents of the child you adopted?"

"I did; I found the lodgings they had occupied, and the *concierge* identified some clothing and the locket which I carried to him. He told me that the parents of the child were both dead. He only knew that they were English. I have no doubt now that he was a bad man, and that he told me what he knew was not true in regard to the child."

"Why so?"

"I think it is probable the Chuckinghams left some property in their rooms which he desired to keep, and because I have learned from Mr. Checkynshaw that the house I visited was not the one occupied by him. The *concierge* told me two falsehoods—that the clothing and locket belonged to the child of his lodger, and that she spoke French."

The lawyer twisted the matter about in various ways; but André was as clear as light itself, and he did not materially contradict himself. Mrs. Checkynshaw was called for the defence; but, to the astonishment and disgust of the legal gentleman and his employers, she testified, in the most positive manner, that the elegant young lady in court was Marguerite Checkynshaw. She had taken care of her as a child, and she could not be mistaken. Mrs. Wittleworth was put upon the stand, with the letter announcing the death of Marguerite in her hand; but, poor woman, all her evidence was against herself. She identified the locket, and was in the end very sure that the beautiful young lady was her niece.

Mr. Fitzherbert Wittleworth was utterly disgusted, though he could not help believing that the young lady was his cousin. Not a doubt was left in the mind of any person, and of course Mr. Checkynshaw won his case; but the great man was very far from satisfied with himself, or with the position in which the trial left him. It was apparent to all the world that he had attempted to defraud Mrs. Wittleworth out of the block of stores, and ten years' income upon it; but the banker was not a man to bend before the storm of popular opinion. He took the trouble to define his position, and to explain away what was dark and unsatisfactory. He did not believe his child was dead. He was satisfied that Marguerite Poulebah was Marguerite Checkynshaw, though he could not find her. The director of the hospital said the Sisters had taken her, and he was sure she was living.

Besides, it would have been wicked to hand the property over to Mrs. Wittleworth for her drunken husband to squander away, and make her a beggar a second time. He intended, in due time, if his daughter did not appear, to pass the property to the rightful heir when it could be safely done. The integrity of his intentions could not be doubted, for had he not given Mrs. Wittleworth ten thousand dollars? The quitclaim deed, he declared, was only to save himself from being annoyed by Fitz and his father. Of course he intended to make it all right in the end.

Mr. Checkynshaw did not forgive the Wittleworths for the mischief they had attempted to do. He hinted at steps for compelling them to restore the ten thousand dollars; but Maggie protested, in her way, against such a course, and nothing was ever done.

Marguerite Checkynshaw went to live in Pemberton Square; but she was not happy there, and every day she visited the house at No. 3 Phillimore Court. Poor André was actually miserable. He had lost his darling child, and it was little comfort to know that she dwelt in the midst of luxury and splendor. Though he saw her every day, he was sad, and almost disconsolate.

Maggie tried to be happy in her new home, but her heart was not there. Mrs. Checkynshaw was cold and distant to her, and Elinora was a little, petulant, disagreeable tyrant, who lived for herself alone. She tried to love her, but she tried in vain. Her father was kind and indulgent to her; yet she saw but little of him. Maggie went to school for two years, and was busy with her studies and her music lessons; but not an evening passed without her going to see her foster-father, after he left the shop. About nine o'clock Leo walked home with her; but he seldom entered her father's house.

In the choice of a pursuit for life, Leo won the day, and went to learn the machinist's trade. He did not give up the "mouse business" entirely, but found time to make new houses; and there were customers to purchase them, adding quite a sum to the income of his foster-father. A housekeeper was employed to take Maggie's place; but home was never the place it had been after Maggie went away.

John Wittleworth kept his solemn promise, and continued to be a steady man. He obtained employment in a wholesale grocery, and served so faithfully that he won the esteem and regard of the firm. His former ambition returned to him, and when he spoke of going into business on his own account, with a portion of his wife's money as his capital, he was admitted as a partner in the firm that employed him. He was a man of excellent abilities, and in time he acquired a handsome property.

Fitz never amounted to much. His ideas were too big for his station. He obtained several situations; but, as he aspired to manage his employers' business without their aid, he was often out of a place. When his father went into business, he was taken as an entry-clerk; but he was such a trial that even parental solicitude could not tolerate him, and he was sent away. He was not a bad boy; but self-conceit was the rock on which he wrecked himself. He found another situation, and another, and another; but his stay in each was short. And so he went from one place to another, achieving nothing, until he was twenty-five years old, when he married a lady ten years his senior, whom even the twenty thousand dollars she possessed did not tempt any one else to make a wife. Fitz is a gentleman now; and though his lot at home is trying, he still maintains his dignity, and lives on his wife's property. He is not dissipated, and has no bad habits; but he does not amount to anything. People laugh at him, and speak contemptuously of him behind his back; and he is, and will continue to be, nothing but a cipher in the community.

In the little smoking-room in the house in Pemberton Square, three years after Maggie went to live there, on the very sofa where André Maggimore had lain, was stretched the inanimate form of another person, stricken down by the same malady. It was Mr. Checkynshaw. The two gentlemen with whom he had been conversing when attacked by the fit had placed him there, and Dr. Fisher had been sent for. From that sofa he was conveyed to his bed, still insensible. His eyes were open, but he knew none of those who stood by his couch.

The doctor came; but the banker was out of the reach of human aid, though he survived a day and a half. Maggie watched over him, as she had over André; but vain was her care, and vain were her hopes. Her father died. A few days later a long funeral procession left the house, and Mr. Checkynshaw was borne to his last resting-place at Mount Auburn. Mrs. Checkynshaw was bewildered and overwhelmed; Elinora was so nervous that she required an attendant constantly; and Maggie had little time to weep herself, so devoted was she to the wants of others.

By the death of her father, everything was changed with Maggie. There was little sympathy between her and the other members of the family. Mrs. Checkynshaw decided that the house should be sold, and that she and the two daughters should board with a relative of her own. Maggie did not like this arrangement, though she was prepared to accept it if no better one could be suggested. She stated her objection in the gentlest terms; but her step-mother was cold, and even harsh, and Maggie realized that the future was to be more unhappy than the past. In this emergency she consulted her old friend, Dr. Fisher, who was familiar with all the circumstances of the family.

"I cannot live with Mrs. Checkynshaw and Elinora, now that my father is no longer with us," said she, sadly. "I do not like them, and they do not like me."

"It is not necessary that you should live with them," replied the doctor.

"Couldn't I live with André again?" asked she, eagerly.

"Certainly you can. Leave this to me. I will see your father's executors, and tell them your wishes."

"Thank you, doctor."

"The block of stores yields a large income, besides your share of your father's property; but, Maggie, you are under age, and you must have a guardian to take charge of your property. Your own wishes in this matter will be consulted."

"André!" exclaimed she, with enthusiasm.

The doctor smiled, and shook his head.

"Why not?" demanded she, her face looking sad again.

"André is a very good man, but he does not know much about business."

"There is nothing to do at present but to collect the rents on the block of stores. I could not name any one but André for my guardian."

"Perhaps the court will not approve of him if you do," added the doctor, with a smile.

"I'm sure André is honest and true, and will be faithful to the end. He knows enough about business to take care of the property."

Maggie argued like a woman, and the doctor promised to do what he could to meet her wishes. Mr. Checkynshaw's executors were opposed to the plan; but, at the earnest solicitation of Maggie and the doctor, they at last consented to recommend it, and André was appointed guardian of the rich man's daughter. If ever a man was amazed and bewildered, André was, when he found himself the keeper of such a vast property.

Maggie had a plan of her own. André was to be a barber no longer. A nice brick house in Harrison Avenue was hired, and furnished in good style, and the strange family were once more united. Leo sold out the mouse business to Tom Casey, and was as happy as a lord in his new home. The executors paid Maggie's share of her father's estate to André, in accordance with the provisions of the will. The ex-barber was not a business man; but this fact rendered him all the more cautious in handling the property intrusted to his care. He had shaved men of dignity and substance for so many years, that he had no lack of friendly advisers. With fear and trembling he discharged his sacred duty.

But André's duties as guardian were abruptly terminated one day, before Maggie was twenty-one. A remarkably good-looking young lawyer, Mr. Charles Harding, the partner of an older legal gentleman who had done André's business, relieved him of his charge by marrying his ward. Everybody said he was a splendid fellow, and Maggie knew he was. No one seemed to be astonished except Leo, who thought the affair had come off rather suddenly. He did not exactly understand how Maggie could have fallen in love with any fellow—he never thought of such things.

"So Maggie is married," said Mr. Fitz Wittleworth one day, when they met in the street.

"Yes; and a capital fellow Harding is, too," replied Leo, warmly.

"It was rather sudden—wasn't it?"

"Well, it was rather sudden; but when I think what a beautiful girl Maggie was, and when I think what a good girl she was, I am not at all surprised—not a bit."

"But, Leo, I always thought you would marry Maggie," added Mr. Wittleworth, stroking his chin.

"I!" exclaimed Leo, opening his eyes. "Why, I never thought of such a thing."

"The more fool you, when you could have done it."

"What, marry my sister!"

"She isn't your sister, any more than I am."

"Well, it's all the same thing, and I could never look upon her as anything but a sister," replied Leo, as he hastened to his work.

Leo was satisfied; for he could still love Mrs. Harding as a sister; and he had certainly never thought of her in any other relation. Perhaps he did not think of anything at that time but machines and machinery. Both he and André remained with Mrs. Harding, for she would not consent to their leaving her. And her husband liked them because she did.

When Leo was twenty-five, his inventive genius had laid the foundation of his fortune, and his "royalties" soon made him independent, for he had the business ability to profit by his inventions. When he was married, the "strange family" was separated, but never in spirit. André goes from one house to the other half a dozen times a day, and is honored as a "grandpa" by four little boys and girls.

Leo has always been the determined and persevering individual he was in his youth, when engaged in the "mouse business." As an apprentice, as n journeyman, as a master machinist, and as an inventor, it has been "MAKE or BREAK" with him; and, though the parts of his machinery often did break, and the apparatus failed to do its expected work, he did not give up; and he conquered in the end, whatever trials and difficulties interposed.

Mrs. Harding is superlatively happy in her husband, her children, her foster-father, whom she still lovingly calls "*mon père*" and in her noble brother. She calls, at long intervals, upon Mrs. Checkynshaw and Elinora; and peace reigns between the two houses of Checkynshaw and Wittleworth. Though she was never happier than when she knew no other relation than that of the poor man's daughter, she has every reason to be thankful, and is thankful, to God for the blessings which have come to her as THE RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER.

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