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George Manville Fenn

"A Little World"

Volume One—Chapter One.

Duplex Street.

"Some people are such fools!" said Richard Pellet; and, if public judgment was right, he knew what a fool was as well as any man in the great city of London. He was a big man was Richard Pellet, Esq., C.C., shipper, of Austin Friars, and known among city men as "the six-hundred-pounder;" and he knew a fool when he saw one. But whether at his office in the city, or down at his place at Norwood,—"his little place at Norwood," where he had "a morsel of garden" and "a bit of glass," and grew pine and melon, peach and grape, and had a fat butler in black, and a staff of servants in drab, trimmed with yellow coach-lace,—no matter where Richard Pellet might be, he could always see in his mind's eye the greatest fool that ever breathed—the man whom he was always mentally abusing—to wit, his brother Jared.

But Jared Pellet always was a fool—so his brother said; and he was continually filling the foolish cup of his iniquitous folly fuller and more full. He was a fool to be tyrannised over by his brother when a boy, and to take all the punishment that should have fallen to Richard's share; he was a fool to marry Lizzie Willis, who had not a penny, when Richard would have given his ears to stand in his shoes; he was a fool for being happy—loved and loving; he was a fool to have such a large family; he was a fool for being a poor struggling man, while his brother was so rich; in short, taking Richard Pellet's opinion—which must have been correct, seeing how wealthy, and stout, and clean shaven, and respected he was—there was not a bigger fool upon the face of the earth!

Just as if it was likely that a man could get a living in Clerkenwell by mending musical instruments in so unmusical a place; doctoring consumptive harmoniums; strengthening short-winded concertinas; re-buffing a set of hammers, or tuning pianos and putting in new strings at one shilling each.

However, living or no living, Jared Pellet rented a house in Duplex Street, Clerkenwell; and there was a brass plate on the door, one which Patty Pellet brightened to such an extent that when the sun did shine in Duplex Street—which was not often—it would kiss the bright metal and then shoot off at various angles to dart into darksome spots where, directly, he seldom or never shone.

It was a bright plate that, and a couple more years of such service would have oiled and rotten-stoned and rubbed and polished out the legend, "J. Pellet, Pianoforte Tuner;" for at this time there was but little of the original black composition left in the letters, and as for the corner flourishes, they were quite gone. But there was a board up over the front parlour window, bearing, in gold letters, much decayed, the self-same legend, with the addition of "Musical Instruments Carefully Repaired;" while, so that there might be no mistake about the indweller's occupation, a couple of doleful-looking, cracked, and wax-ended clarionets sloped from the centre hasp to either side of the said front parlour window; and where by rights there should have been one of those folding-door green Venetian barred blinds so popular in the district, there graced the bottom panes—"The Whole Art of Singing," "Beaustickski's Violin Tutor," and "Instructions for the Concertina"—fly-stained and dust-tarnished books, that had been put in on Monday mornings and taken out again on Saturday nights, in company with the cracked clarionets, ever since Jared Pellet had hired the place, and determined upon keeping it private on Sundays.

There was nothing else very particular about the house save that it had once entered into the heart of its owner to have the front stuccoed, ever since which time it had suffered severely from a kind of leprosy which made it shell and peel off abundantly; and that the top pane of the parlour window had once been cracked by a tip-cat, forming a star whose rays extended to the putty all round, starting now from a round dab of the same material. Jared did not have that pane mended, saying that it would soon give way, and then they would have a fresh one put in; but that starred and puttied pane bore a charmed life, having outlived every one of its eleven brethren, who had all gone to the limbo of broken glass, while it still remained. It may perhaps be mentioned, though, that there were some rusty iron railings laid horizontally beneath the window, forming the kitchen into a cage, and just sufficiently far apart to allow of playthings of every description being dropped into the area; when would come the ringing of the door-bell to ask for

restitution of the treasure. At intervals, too, there would be the trouble of some child or other getting its foot firmly fixed between the bars, to remain the centre of a commiserating crowd until the arrival of its incensed parent, and the extrication of the imprisoned member, minus shoe or boot, which of course followed the example of Newton's apple, illustrating the force of gravity for the benefit of Jared's children.

There was a watchmaker's next door to Jared's on the right, and a watchmaker's next door on the left, and watchmakers in front, all along the street. In fact, it was altogether a very mechanical place, although Richard Pellet said that no one but a fool would ever have thought of living there.

But Jared's house had an inside as well as an out: the rooms were neither light, airy, nor large, and it was probably from sanitary ideas that Jared refrained from filling his apartments with furniture, and from covering his floors with hot, thick carpets. But, well or ill-furnished, the place was scrupulously clean, and possessed an ornament that a prince might have coveted in the shape of Patty Pellet, the eldest daughter of the household. Talk of classic types, noble features, chiselled nostrils, or heads set upon swan-like necks, until you are tired, and then you will not produce a word-painting worthy to vie with blushing, down-bloomed, soft-cheeked Patty, with her brown wavy hair half hiding her little pinky ears, which seemed to be continually playing in and out from behind two of the brightest curls ever seen. As for her forehead—well, it was a white forehead, and looked nice and pure and candid, while beneath it her eyes were laughing and bright; and her lips—well, it was a fact that many a quiet old-fashioned man wanted to kiss them, innocently and pleasantly too, without feeling a blush of shame for the wish, for Patty's lips seemed as if they had been made on purpose to kiss, and more than one thought that it would be a sin to neglect the opportunity.

What further description need be given more than to say that she was like the best parts of her father and mother combined, that she was just eighteen, and washed all the children every morning before breakfast.

Volume One—Chapter Two.

Jared at Home.

Jared Pellet sat in the front parlour—*pro tem*, his workshop—while, to keep the sun from troubling him, Patty had been pinning up the broad sheet of a newspaper over the window, and now descended by means of a chair. For jared was busy working a curious-looking pair of bellows with his foot, and making a little tongue of metal to vibrate with a most ear-piercing but doleful note in the process of being tuned, before being returned to the German concertina, where its duty was to occupy the part of leading note in the major scale of C.

"Hum-um," sang Jared, checking the current of air, and striking a tuning-fork upon his little bench. "Hum-um; a bit flat, eh, Patty?"

"Just a little," said Patty, looking up from her work.

"But there, only think!" cried Jared, dropping his tuning-fork, leaving his task, and crossing over to an old harmonium, over whose keys he ran his bony fingers; "only think if I could—only think if I could get it! Fifty pounds a year for two practices a week, and duty three times on Sundays. Black, of course, for your mother; but what coloured silk shall it be for you, eh, Patty?"

"Silk?" said Patty wonderingly, and her eyes grew more round.

"Yes, silk—dress, you know," said Jared, jumping up again from the harmonium, and walking excitedly about the room. "Only think if I could get it—Jared Pellet—no, Mr Jared Pellet; or ought it to be esquire, eh, Patty? Organist of St Runwald's. But there," he continued, with a grim smile, "this is counting the chickens before they are hatched, and when there has not been one solitary peck at the shell. Heigho, Patty, if the wind has not been and blown down my card house."

"Is any one at home?" said a high-pitched, harsh voice, as the door was quietly opened, and a little yellow-looking Frenchman entered, a tasselled cane in one hand, a cigarette being held between the fingers of the other, but only to be changed to the hand which held the cane, that its owner might raise the pinched hat worn on one side of his head, and salute gravely the two occupants of the room.

"Aha! the good-day to you bose. The good Monsieur Pellet is well? and you, my dear child, you do bloom again like the flowers."

Patty smiled as she held out her hand; the little Frenchman gravely raising it to his lips, and then crossing to where Jared had stood, looking ten years older, till, reseating himself at his bench, he began to make the metal tongue vibrate furiously, sending a very storm of wind through it, so rapidly he worked his foot; now making the note too sharp, now too flat, and taking twice as long as usual to complete his task.

"No, no, mon ami; he is too sharps—now too flats again. Aha, it is bad!" exclaimed the visitor, dropping cane and cigarette to thrust both fingers into his ears as Jared brought forth a most atrocious shriek from the tortured tongue.

"My ear's gone completely, I believe," exclaimed Jared, looking in a bewildered way at his visitor.

"Ah, no, no; try him again—yais, try him again;" and the visitor leaned over the performer. "*Ta-ta*" he hummed, nodding his head, and beating time with a finger. "Better—yes, better—better still—one leetle touch, and—aha, it is done—so!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as the little note now sounded clear and pure.

"And now I must have two string for my violin. They do wear out so fast." Which was a fact, and nothing could have

more fully displayed Monsieur Canau's friendship than his constant usage of Jared Pellet's strings, best Roman by name, worst English by nature. "Why do you not come to-day?" he continued, as Patty opened a tin canister, and emptied a dozen of the transparent rings of catgut upon the table.

"I could not leave," said Patty, hastily. "We are anxious about the organ."

"Yes, oui, of course; and the good papa will get it?"

"He has not written yet," said Patty, dolefully.

"But he is méchant! Why do you not write? Eh! what—you are going to? It is good; then I will not stay. But write—write—for you must have it. What! you shake your head. Fie; you must have it. And you, ma fille—I will take these two—and you will come to us soon, for the poor Janette is triste, and longs for you, and the birds pine; but he goes to write. Adieu."

The little Frenchman kissed his hand to both in turn, and, with his yellow face in puckers, stole out of the door on tip-toe, turning back for an instant to make a commanding gesture at Jared, who rose from his bench and went slowly towards the table.

For, be it known, that the post of organist to St Runwald's was vacant—the church that everybody knows, situated as it is in a corner, with houses all round, turning their backs as if ashamed, and hiding it, lest people should see what a patch Sir Christopher Wren made of the fine old Gothic building when he restored it, squaring the windows, putting up a vinegar-cruet steeple, padding, curtaining, brass-rodding, and cushioning the interior to make calm the slumbers of miserable sinners; and, one way and another, so changing it that, could the monks of old once more have gazed upon the place, they would have groaned in their cowls, and called Sir Christopher a barbarian.

But the only groans proceeding from cowls were those which were heard upon windy nights, when showers of blacks were whirled round and round and then deposited in the corners of the window sills, or against the lead framing, whence they could filter through in a dust of the blackest, which would gather upon the pew edges in despite of the pew-opener's duster, ready to be transferred to faces by fingers, or to rise of itself and make church-goers sneeze and accuse the old place of being damp, the churchwarden of being stingy with the coals, the pew-opener of not lighting the fires at proper time to air the church, and the vicar of spinning out his sermons, finishing off by accounting for the smallness of the attendance by declaring that it was impossible for a parish to be religious where there was such a damp church. And all this through the sootiness of the neighbouring houses, for St Runwald's was as dry as a bone—as the bones of the old fathers who lay below in the vaults, placed there hundreds of years ago, when Borgle's yard was occupied by a monastery, and matins and vespers were rung out from the tower of the church.

Jared Pellet in after times could have told you it was not damp, in spite of the words of Sampson Purkis, the beadle, who said that there were "sympsons" of it, else why did the steel fastenings of the poor-boxes grow rusty? unless—but thereby hangs a tale. Jared could have told you the place was not damp by the organ, for would not the stops have stuck, and the notes refused to speak, had there been moisture? But at this period he was in ignorance, for, incited thereto by his wife, his daughter Patty, Mr Timson, the churchwarden, and Monsieur Canau, professor of the violin, Jared Pellet was about to offer himself as a candidate for the vacant post of organist, to perform which task he had now settled himself at a table—some four or five small faces that had come peeping in at the door having been warned off by divers very alarming looking frowns and shakes of the head.

But it was no easy task to write a letter at Jared Pellet's. True, there had been a pennyworth of the best "cream laid," and envelopes to match, obtained for the occasion; but the ink in the penny bottle was thick, and when thinned with vinegar to prevent it from coming off the nibs upon the paper in beads, it looked brown and bitty. Then the pen spluttered, partly from rust, partly from having been turned into a tool for raising the tongues of silent harmonium notes.

So fresh pens and ink had to be procured, when Jared wrote one application, and smeared his name, and then said, "Tut-tut-tut!" He wrote a second, but that did not look well, for there was a hair in the pen, and he put two n's in candidate. He then wrote a third, but only to find that he had done so with the paper upside down, when he exclaimed—

"There never was a letter yet that didn't get more and more out of tune—I mean didn't get worse—the more you tried."

Patty did not speak, only looked sympathetic, and as if she would gladly have written the letter herself. But Jared tried once more, and this time a proper missive was written, passed round, and approved by both Mrs Pellet and her daughter. Then the postage stamp was affixed to the envelope with paste, for Jared had managed to lick off all the gum; and at last, when the important document had been safely posted, its writer recollected half a score things he ought to have said, and after fidgeting all the evening, went off despairingly to bed, feeling certain that the post of organist could never be his.

Volume One—Chapter Three.

Organic.

A busy day at St Runwald's. Mrs Nimmer, the pew-opener, in a clean cap, like a white satin raised pie. Mr Purkis, the beadle—of "Purkis's Shoe Emporium," in private life—in full uniform and dignity. He had cuffed Ichabod Gunnis, the organ-blower, for spinning his top in the porch, and sent that young gentleman howling up the stair leading to the

loft, where he thrust off his big charity-boy shoes, and stole down again in his soft, speckled-grey worsted stockings, to where from a darkened corner he could catch sight of his portly enemy, and relieve his mind by turning his back, doubling down, and grinning between his legs, distorting his face after the fashion of the corbels of the old church, the tongue being a prominent figure as to effect. For quite five minutes Ichabod showed his utter contempt for the church dignitary in question, who was all the time in a brown study, calculating the amount he would probably receive by way of what he called “donus,” upon the appointment of a new organist—a train of thought interrupted by the consideration of the verses he should distribute at the coming Christmas, the last set having been unsatisfactory, from having been used by the beadle of the neighbouring parish, “a common man and low.”

But there was soon an interruption to this second train of thought, for people began to congregate, and he had to lend his aid to Mrs Nimmer, and assist the worthy old lady in imprisoning the new-comers in the big old pews, where if they could not see they would at all events be able to hear, this being the day for the organ competition.

People assembled under the impression that they were about to hear something unusual, eight competitors having been selected from a very host of applicants; for the post, without taking into consideration the fifty pounds per annum, was one of honour, St Runwald’s being an organ with a name.

Through the influence of the churchwarden and his medical friend—only a slight return on that gentleman’s part, for Jared had been a good friend to him—the Clerkenwell music cobbler, as he called himself, was one of the select, and now sat in nervous guise where the vicar and churchwardens were assembled to elect the new performer.

Eight competitors, with testimonials to prove that though there might have been Mozarts, Beethovens, and a long roll of worthy names in harmony, yet there never had lived such able, such enthusiastic musicians as Edward Barrest, Mus. Doc., Oxon.; Philip Keyes, Mus. Doc., Cantab.; Herr Schtopffz; Handel Smith, R.A.; and Corelli Sweller. There were two other names read, but Mr Timson, the vicar’s churchwarden, bungled so that Jared Pellet could not catch them; but his ear-drum vibrated when his own was given out, and he shivered horribly. There were stout and important men there, and men thin and insignificant, but conspicuous for his shabby aspect was Jared Pellet.

The testimonials did not have their due weight, for the vicar’s churchwarden, Mr Timson, tea-dealer, a short, stout, peg-top style of man, threw himself into a violent perspiration by trying to keep each man’s papers separate, as he turned them over and over with a peck here, and a peck there, and laid them in heaps, just as if he were sorting tea-papers for pounds, halves, and quarters; and at last, what with confusion and his formidable double eye-glass, which was rather weak in the back and given to shutting up when it should have kept open, he worked himself into such a knot that he did what was best for him under the circumstances, handed the paper chaos over to his brother official, who hurriedly put on his gold-rimmed spectacles, and did not read a word.

The vicar, the Rev. John Grey, a ruddy, genial old man, then in his turn read aloud, for the benefit of those in the vestry, the list of the candidates.

“And now, then, gentlemen,” he said, “preliminaries being adjusted, and matters in train, we will proceed to the organ.”

“We” meant the candidates; for the vicar took possession of a pew, where he looked very much out of place, seeing that reading-desk and pulpit were both empty; and then there was a little bustle and confusion in the old church, as Jared slowly, and with sinking heart, followed the great musicians to the organ loft, from whence he could see Monsieur Canau taking snuff furiously, and Mrs Pellet, Patty, and a pew full of little Pellets anxiously waiting “to hear father play.”

“Ten minutes each, gentlemen,” said the vicar loudly from below, when, the Oxford doctor’s name being first upon the list, he took his seat.

Ichabod Gunnis loudly moistened his hands, and bent to his task, pulling up the bellows beam, and then sprawling across it to bear it down again with his own weight. While unrolling a piece of music, the doctor informed those around that it was his own composition, and played it through in a most admirable manner.

But the effect of the doctor’s composition was spoiled, for just in the midst of the finest *forte* Ichabod Gunnis had fished a “boxer” top from the pocket of his yellow leather tights, and, lost in admiration of its peg, forgotten his task and slackened his efforts, so that the wind failed in the chest, and in place of a series of grand chords there came from the old organ such doleful howls, as of a dying tune, that the organist thrust the fingers that should have been upon the keys into his hair, and grinned at himself in the reflector like a musical fiend.

“Try again,” whispered a competitor, loftily, and the Oxford man re-played his piece; but though he got through it this time without mishap, the doctor felt that unless his testimonials told strongly in his favour, his had been but a fruitless journey that day.

Next came the Cambridge doctor, with a noble march, which brought forth murmured applause from those who listened. Then followed Handel Smith, who confined himself to the works of his great namesake, and now won plaudits, softly given, for his masterly performance of the great “Hallelujah Chorus.”

As this last performer left his seat, Jared glanced down into the church, where, amidst the fast increasing audience, and occupying the most prominent place he could secure, stood Richard Pellet, with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his white vest, as he leaned back in portly guise against the pew front, and frowned acceptance of the last man’s musical incense, which he seemed to consider entirely in his own honour. But now he caught sight of brother Jared, and as eye met eye, Richard’s frown deepened, and his bottom lip protruded, as he appeared contemptuously to say, “Some people are such fools.”

At all events, Jared Pellet seemed to feel the words, and to think them true. He glanced round the church, as if

seeking an opportunity to escape from the moral custody in which he found himself; but there was refreshment for him in the bright eyes of Patty, and an encouraging smile from Mrs Pellet at her side.

The competition progressed. Mr Timson gave vent to his opinion that Herr Schtopffz—a gentleman who appeared to be all fair hair, cheeks, and spectacles—almost made the organ speak; while in their turns the other competitors played admirably. A buzz of conversation ensued, as people warmly discussed the merits of the various performers; the churchwardens looked at one another, as if to say, “What next?” and Mrs Pellet and her daughter began to fidget in their seats, both impatient for Jared to begin, since it had been their decided opinion that he should have been the first to play.

But the buzz of conversation suddenly ceased, for the vicar rose in his pew and exclaimed loudly—

“Another candidate yet, gentlemen—Mr Jared Pellet.”

Volume One—Chapter Four.

Jared’s Piece.

For the last half hour Jared had been wishing himself in Duplex Street, and for the last five minutes he had indulged in a hope that he would be passed over and forgotten. But as his name was uttered, he started and mechanically left his seat, while Patty turned pale, and Mrs Pellet had what she afterwards described as a rising sensation in her throat.

Anything but a formidable competitor seemed Jared Pellet as he rose from his seat, gazing with a lost and wandering look round the old church, and wiping the perspiration from his brow, till what with abject air, want of confidence, and his anything but bright costume, poor Jared’s aspect was pitiable to an extent that made one of his brother’s feet work as if it wanted something to kick.

After the first glance, the audience resumed their conversation, and the rival candidates, making common cause against their opponent, raised their brows, tightened their lips, and shrugged their shoulders, especially Herr Schtopffz, who quite covered his ears as he took a pinch of snuff.

Jared gave one more glance round the church, as if he expected a miracle to be performed in his favour, and that one of the stone angels by a neighbouring tablet would suddenly whisk him off. He then stepped slowly towards the vacant seat, rubbing his long bony fingers together so that they crackled again.

The appearance of the organ was enough to make Jared approach it reverently; and he shuffled on to the long stool, pressing down the lowest pedal key as he passed, so that it gave forth a deep shuddering rumble. This mishap seemed to add to his confusion, which, however, culminated as he felt in his pocket for the roll of music from which he was to have played. He felt in the next pocket, then in his breast, and lastly looked in his hat, as if expecting to see it there. Then he gazed in the faces of his fellow-candidates, as if to say, “What’s become of it?” But the roll was not forthcoming; and in despair, he now glanced at himself in the glass reflector above the key-board. But nothing was to be seen there but a doleful, hopeless-looking face, seeming to tell him that every chance of success was gone.

But as Jared sat there, in full view of the whole church, he felt a slight vibration in his seat, and heard the air rushing into the wind-chest as the boy toiled on at his task to keep it filled and make no more mistakes, for already, in anticipation, he was suffering from a cut or two of Beadle Purkis’s cane.

Jared gazed up at the towering pipes above his head, down at the keys and stops on either side; and then seemed to come over him the recollection of many a pleasant practice in a dim old church, where he had forgotten the troubles of the present in the concord of sweet sounds he had drawn from the instrument. He grew more agitated, his hands trembled, his cheeks flushed, and his eyes brightened—his whole form seemed to dilate, and he thrust his long fingers through his hair, as if seeking to add to the oddity of his appearance, while the audience ceased their murmuring hum of conversation as they witnessed his strange gestures.

He pulled out a stop here and a stop there, tenderly, as if caressing something he loved. Then pushing off his boots, he thrust in every stop, seized them sharply to draw nearly all out, and struck so wild and thrilling a chord, that his hearers started and craned forward to catch the next notes.

Now there was silence, save the dying vibrations of the chord heard in the distant corners and groinings of the roof, for not a whisper was audible amongst the many listeners assembled.

Still silence, as Jared Pellet sat motionless before the great instrument while you might have counted thirty, for the player was lost in the crowd of recollections the sounds had evoked from the past Competition, the audience, all had faded from his mental vision as once more he leaned forward; and fingers were held up to command silence.

“He’s a lunatic, sir,” said one of the listeners to Mr Timson, as Jared Pellet again bent over the keys.

“Then I should like to be at a concert of such lunatics, sir,” answered Mr Timson, who then gave forth an audible “Hush!” as, in a rapid rolling passage, the huge pedal pipes thundered forth a majestic introduction; when again for a few moments there was a pause, and the organist’s fingers were held crooked in mid-air, till with a spasmodic effort he brought them down upon the keys, to pour forth crashing volley after volley of wondrous chords, from end to end of the key-board, and with the full power of the mighty pipes.

Again a rest, and again crashing forth with wondrous rapidity came the spirit-thrilling passages, till, with suppressed breath, the listeners leaned forward as though overpowered; while, after another slight pause, came wailing and sobbing forth so sweetly mournful, so heavenly a strain, that there were some present who were moved to tears, and

two, seated in a pew surrounded by children, joined hands and listened with bended head. So sweet an air had never before pealed through the old aisles of St Runwald's, and made to tremble the woodwork of the great pews with which it was disfigured; for now the melody was wild and piercing—now subdued and plaintive, to rise soon to the jubilant and hopeful: it was the soul of the true musician pouring forth through the medium of the divine art its every thought and feeling.

Again a pause, and the seven rivals, with parted lips, eagerly clustered round the man who saw them not, who ignored church, audience, self, everything but the majestic instrument before which he was seated; and again and again, although the ten minutes had long expired, the audience listened to the bursts of harmony which swayed them as one man, floating around until the air seemed quivering and vibrating with the songs of a multitude of heaven's own choristers. Louder and louder, chords grander and more majestic, then softly sweet and dying away, while, after one sweeping crescendo passage, Jared ended with a mighty chord which no other man could have grasped, and the audience seemed to be released from the spell which had bound them, as, stop by stop and interval by interval, the chord was diminished, until the pedal key-note alone vibrated shudderingly through the church.

"Rather warm work that, sir," said the little churchwarden, leaning over into the vicar's pew.

"Hush, Timson," said the vicar; "he has not done."

But he had, though for a few minutes there was a silence that no one cared to break, till, forgetful of place—everything but the strains they had heard—from the vicar downwards, all joined in one loud burst of applause; while, dull, lustreless, spiritless, Jared Pellet responded to the congratulations of his rivals—one and all too true lovers of their art to withhold the palm where they felt it to be well deserved.

Down in the nave, too, there was a pompous, bustling man, talking loudly to those around, giving people to understand that the performer was his brother—the man who, without hesitation, was elected to the post—and for once in a way, Richard Pellet went and shook hands with Jared, and, as he warmly asked him to dinner, forgot to tell him that he was a fool.

Volume One—Chapter Five.

Saint Runwald's.

There were grand rejoicings in Duplex Street when Jared obtained official announcement, under the hand and seal of Mr Timson the tea-dealer, of his appointment to the post of organist of St Runwald's, with a salary of fifty pounds a year. To be sure, it was settled before; but Mrs Jared said they might run back, and, after the many disappointments they had had during their married life, it was dangerous to reckon on too much. But now that there was an official appointment in Mr Timson's round, neat calligraphy, she had no words to say, save those of thankfulness.

Proud! Ay, he was proud, was Jared, for that was an organ to be proud of. It was none of your grand new instruments, full of stops bearing a score of unaccountable names, miserably naked, skeleton-looking affairs, like a conglomeration of Pandean pipes grown out of knowledge, and too big for the society of their old friend the big drum—beggarly painted things, with pipes in blue and red and white, after the fashion of peppermint sticks of the good old times. Why, I hardly believe that Jared, unless prompted thereto by the wolf Poverty, would have struck one of his mighty chords upon them.

But there would have been nothing surprising in Jared's refusal, since the instrument now placed under his charge was a noble organ in a dark wood case, one which grew richer of tone year by year, while the carved fruit and flowers that clustered around pipes, reflector, music-stand—in fact, wherever a scrap of carving could be placed—were worthy of inspection, without taking into account the shiny Ethiopie cherubs that perched upon their chins, and spread their wings at every available corner.

No; Jared's was no common organ, as would be declared by any one who had seen the great pipes towering up into the gloom of the roof, and their gilding shedding a rich sunset hue into the farthest corners of the old church. People came miles to hear that organ as soon as Jared became its ruling spirit, and Mrs Nimmer grew hot on Sunday mornings in her endeavours to find sittings for the strangers who flocked in. But the old vicar, the Rev. John Grey, used to chuckle, and think that all was due to his sermons, and wonder whether there could ever be a second St Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed.

Purkis, the beadle, used to wink—that is to say, he would draw a heavy lid over one of his lobster eyes—and say, "I know!" For Jared, in spite of his poverty and large family, had commenced his musical reign by a "donus" of three half-crowns to the beadle, who would boast that he (the beadle) could give people a better service than they could get in any other church in London; and "as to the orgin, why they'd better come and see, that's all."

And truly it seemed that Jared could make that instrument thrill beneath his touch, till every passion of the human heart had its representative amongst those notes. You might hear it sob, and wail, and moan in the most piteous manner, whisper and die away in sweet sighing melodies amongst the old pillars, or far up in the carven corners of the chancel, where the notes made the glass to tremble in the lead as they seemed striving to pass through the painted windows. Hear it thunder too, like a young earthquake, and rage, and roar, and growl, till the very pew doors rattled and chattered; and however thick and soft your cushion, you could feel the deep-toned diapasons shuddering up and down your spine. There were love sighs, joy, rage, contending armies, the warring elements, with the rolling billow and crashing thunder, all to be heard from those organ-pipes when Jared Pellet touched the keys; and matters grew to such a pitch, that, partly out of pity for Ichabod Gunnis, and partly because people would not be played out, Mr Timson limited Jared's voluntaries to a duration of ten minutes.

Mr Purkis's dinner grew cold; but he did not mind it, for he loved music, and would sit with mouth open and eyes upturned, swallowing the sweet sounds which floated in the air; but Mrs Nimmer, who was not musical, and who, alternately with Mr Purkis, locked up the church, did mind. Hints were of no use; the people would stop, while Ichabod Gunnis heartily wished that he might do the same, for it was a close and confined space where he laboured at the handle of his wind pump, until Jared's afflatus had been dispersed.

Mr Timson stopped all this with his ten minutes' law—ample time as he said; and as Jared Pellet never thought of opposing anybody, the voluntaries were reluctantly brought to an end. For Jared's behaviour at the competition was but a sample of his future proceedings, and when once he began to play, and the organ was in full burst, there was no Jared there, only his body see-sawing from side to side, with shoeless feet working at the pedals, and fingers, bony almost as the keys themselves, nimbly running from flat to natural and sharp, and back again. Jared was not there, he was in the spirit soaring far away upon musical pinions, and in another state of existence, wherein he was freed from the cares and troubles of this life, and felt them only indirectly, as they affected others with whom he seemed to weep or smile, as the character of the music was grave or gay.

Jared Pellet had just finished a morning practice, for he had had to work hard to reduce his wild, semi-extemporised style to the requirements of a regular choir. He had pushed in the last stop, and left his long stool, closing the organ with a sigh, before opening the locker in his seat and depositing therein his book and manuscript. He had drawn the red curtains along the rod when he had entered, and on leaving drew them back again, so that he stood confessed before Ichabod Gunnis; and for a stranger to see Jared Pellet stand confessed after one of his ethereal musical flights, was like taking him from the seventh heaven and putting him under the pump. It was worse than going right into fairyland at the back of the stage on pantomime night, and staring dismayed at the dauby paint, canvas, and confusion.

Ichabod and the organist stood face to face, and whatever the failings of the latter, the former was no pattern of personal beauty; for as to his appearance, he had been rightly named, had there ever been any glory to depart; but the sole reason for the boy bearing his quaint cognomen was, that at the workhouse where he received his early gruel, the authorities had worn out the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, while the number of Abels, Davids, Solomons, and Jonathans who had left their walls was something startling, so they had tried Ichabod for a change, the Gunnis being an after addition.

Ichabod's leather garments have already been delicately hinted at, but it has not been said that they badly fitted his fourteen year old limbs, neither have his blue bob-tail coat and his vest, ornamented with pewter buttons, been mentioned—buttons bearing a large capital "G." There was no star of merit upon the left breast of Ichabod, but a pewter plate was stitched on, close to his heart, to keep him from being smitten by the pity of those who saw his absurd garments, and also to act as a label, and to show that he was number fifty-five in the list of scholars belonging to that most excellent gift of charity—Gunnis's, which, every one who knows London will tell you, is a school where so many boys are educated, and made moral scarecrows; and Ichabod being a "fondling"—as he was called by the workhouse nurse—was entered at last, to the freedom of his parish, already overburdened, and became one of Gunnis's boys.

"Six o'clock, Ichabod," said Jared, "and don't be late."

"No, sir," said 'Bod, as he was familiarly termed; and then he began to spin his muffin cap by the tuft of coloured wool on the top.

"Don't do that, my boy, or you'll pull off the tassel," said Jared, as he prepared to descend the stairs, while the young gentleman addressed, evidently perceiving how disfigured his worsted cap would be without its red tuft, tossed it high in the air, to nimbly catch it again upon his head, though rather too far over his eyes for comfort in wearing. Then listening to the descending footsteps, he threw off his coat, and went down upon the boards in a sitting posture, but not of the common kind; for, though one leg was down in a normal position, the other was stretched out far behind, so that it appeared as if the joint had been reversed.

Up again; and now one leg was thrust over his head, to the great danger of his leather pants; then the other leg was tucked over, and the boy down prostrate upon his chest, so that he wore the appearance of a dislocated frog, though his countenance beamed with satisfaction.

"Ichabod!" cried Jared from below.

"Comin', sir," shouted the boy, trying hard to untie himself, but in vain, although, after a couple more calls, he could hear the reascending steps of his employer. He twisted, he turned, he struggled, but he was like a mouse in a wire-trap; it was easy to get into his present state, but extrication seemed impossible.

Higher came the steps, and the boy struggled more violently than ever to free himself, till, just as Jared reached the door of the organ loft, the unpractised tumbler rolled over upon his back and stared with upturned eyes over his forehead at the organist.

"Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed Jared, "what a dreadful contortion. The boy must be in a fit."

"No, I ain't," blubbered 'Bod. "I'm only stuck."

"Stuck!" exclaimed Jared.

"Yes, stuck," whimpered the boy. "Can't get my legs back 'cause I've got shoes on."

"Stuck—shoes on," repeated Jared, in a puzzled way.

“Yes, sir,” wept ’Bod, “and if you’ll pull down one, I can do t’other myself.”

Jared stared at the imp for a few moments as if he took him for a sort of human treble clef, then seizing the uppermost leg, he set it at liberty, and the boy reduced himself to ordinary proportions, standing erect, with one arm raised ready to ward off the expected blow.

“How dare you play such tricks as that in the church, sir?” cried Jared. “Suppose that you had become fixed—what then?”

Ichabod evidently did not know “what then,” so he did not say; but snivelled and rubbed one eye with the cuff of the coat he was about to put on.

“There, go on down first,” said Jared, smiling grimly to himself, “and mind and be punctual; there’s a good boy.”

The good boy, now that the danger was past, went down grinning, and darted out of the porch, forgetting in less than five minutes all that had been said to him about the practice.

Jared’s must have been a more than usually patient disposition; for the same evening he arrived at the church at the appointed hour to find that Ichabod had not come, nor did he make his appearance when his master had opened the organ, and seated himself to wait while gazing dreamily in the old reflector before him.

Not the first time this, that Ichabod had failed; but Jared Pellet had spent the whole of his life accommodating himself to circumstances; and now, as had often before been his wont, he gave unbounded freedom to his thoughts. The mirror before him was dim, for the night was closing in, and besides, the old church was always in a state of twilight from the stained glass windows; but as he looked he could just distinguish the pulpit, dimly shadowed forth, and the screen before the chancel. Soon these seemed to fade from the reflector, and Jared was gazing upon the scenes of his early life—scenes now bright, now shadowed—which passed rapidly before him as if actually mirrored in the glass;—the day that his brother and he were left orphans; their school days, when he was always fag and slave; scene after scene, scene after scene. That mirror had grown to be Jared’s opium—his one indulgence, and, seated alone in the dark church, he had gone on dreaming of the past, and building up fancies of the future, until a habit was formed that it was not easy to shake off.

There was a strange life history to be read in that reflector, as Jared dreamed on, recalling his first severe illness, and its following weakness, for many months solaced by the attentions of the usher’s little girl, whose father had taken charge of him when he was removed from school. Here it was that he had laid the foundation of his dreamy future, as he read aloud to his fair little companion. This had been a pleasant oasis in his life journey, in spite of long weary months of suffering, during which he never left his reclining position, succeeded by a long sojourn in a London hospital, and all from an unlucky blow given by his tyrant brother.

Many dreams had Jared in that old church: of early manhood, and years passed as usher in his old school, while his brother was prospering in town; his love for his old playmate, Lizzie, and the bar of prudence which stayed their marriage; the failure of the school, and his efforts to gain a living by teaching music, eking out his income by the trifling salary he obtained as organist of the little town church—an accomplishment taught by love, for Lizzie Willis had been his instructress, and now gave up the duty in his favour.

At such an hour as this, back too would float the times when he had leaned against one of the old pews listening while she played some grand old tune.

Floating before him always, scene after scene: his application to his brother for help when he first reached London in search of a more lucrative post; the refusal; and the subsequent rage of Richard when he found that Jared, the despised, had married the woman who had but a short time before rejected him, Richard, the prosperous. Then his coming up to London with his wife, and their happiness together, even though, on the second day after their arrival, the bankruptcy of a firm threw Jared out of the employment he had gained.

He recalled, too, his despondency over the disappointment, and then his determination to fight it out; how, struggling on, he had obtained a tuning job here, and some repairing there; now taught a little, and now obtained a commission to purchase some instrument; and one way and another obtained a living, in spite of the way in which Mrs Jared seemed to look upon him as a sort of human camel, adding to his burden year after year with the greatest of punctuality; and still his back was not broken, though twins, as he often told his wife, must have been fatal.

Volume One—Chapter Six.

Patty’s Mistake.

Matters wore a rather serious aspect at Duplex Street; for a whole month Jared had been enjoying all the sensations known only to the wealthy. He had been congratulated by his family, who looked upon him as a sort of musical god, or as, at least, a musician worthy of ranking with those fiddling and trumpet-blowing angels they had seen once upon a holiday, smiling benignantly in a cloudy heaven upon the ceilings at Hampton Court Palace.

He had been congratulated too by Monsieur Canau, who had been in the habit of occasionally bringing his violin for an evening duet; and, as has been already stated, he had been congratulated by his brother, who invited him to dinner, and then put him off twice, ending though by announcing his marriage with the wealthy Mrs Clayton, widow of a merchant captain, and, desiring that bygones might be bygones, requesting that Jared, with his wife and daughter, would spend the afternoon and dine with them at Norwood on Christmas Day.

Jared had said “No;” but Mrs Jared “Yes;” for even if it spoiled their own homely day, no opportunity ought to be passed over which promised reconciliation between brothers, for whose estrangement her woman’s tact told her she was partly to blame.

So arrangements were made for the flock in Duplex Street, Janet, *protégé* of Monsieur Canau, readily undertaking to be shepherdess for the occasion. Clothes were compared, and, what Mrs Jared called, made the best of; Jared himself devoting quite an hour to the brushing and nap-reviving of his old black coat and trousers. Many an old scrap of half-forgotten finery was routed out by Mrs Jared for her embellishment, after long discussions; while as for Patty, when did a fair open-countenanced young girl look otherwise than well in virgin white, even though it was but a cheap book muslin, made up at home, with very little regard to fashion?

At the appointed hour, a cab deposited the party from Duplex Street at the door of Richard’s “little place,” at which door they arrived after a drive along a gritty gravel sweep. The stout and gentlemanly butler was there, and received them with frigid courtesy, two doors being flung open by as many gentlemen in drab and coach-lace, which tall parties indulged in a laugh and a wink behind their hands at the expense of Jared, though number one—the under-butler—afterwards told number two—the footman—that “the gal wasn’t so very bad.”

And now the brothers had met, and Jared the poor been introduced by Richard the wealthy to his wife, late the widow of Captain Clayton, of the merchant service.

There was another introduction though, performed by Mr Richard Pellet in a condescending fashion, namely, of his stepson Harry Clayton; who, however, seemed to forget all the next moment, as he made his step-father frown upon seeing the attentions paid by the frank, earnest young undergraduate to his blushing niece. Jared too felt troubled, he did not know why, for he dwelt with pleasure upon the young man’s face as it shone in opposition to the darkened countenance of the elder.

The conversation rose and flagged; but it was evident to Jared that there was a cloud overshadowing the meeting, though the young man heeded not the glances of father and mother, as he chatted on to the fresh happy girl at his side.

Doubtless to a grandee of the London season Patty would have seemed slow and backward in conversation; but to the young collegian there was something fascinating in the naïve, ingenuous girl; and in spite of looks, hints, and even broad remarks, which turned Jared’s morocco-covered chair into a seat of thorns, Harry laughed and chatted on through the dinner.

There was everything at Norwood requisite for the spending of a pleasant evening—everything, with one exception. There was what Jared afterwards called in confidence to his wife, “the fat of the land;” but though the said fat was well cooked and served, and there were luscious wines to wash it down, yet was there no geniality, and the visitors partook of portions of their meal in the midst of a chilly, though exceedingly well-bred silence.

Jared was not at his ease, and he could not help flinching from the ministrations of the men in coach-lace, while he felt quite hot when the gentlemanly butler asked him in stern tones if he would take champagne.

Not that conversation was entirely wanting on the part of the elders, for at intervals Jared listened to thrilling narratives of his brother’s speculations, and of how much money he had made in different ways; he learned, too, something new—what a fine thing cash was, how powerful it made its owner, and how he enjoyed its possession. Then Richard pitied kindly Jared’s want of business tact, hinted how much more might have been made had both been business men, and concluded by wishing him better days, and drinking his health in a glass of port—a port purchased at Mr Humphrey Phulcrust’s sale, as he informed Jared, at one hundred and twenty shillings a dozen; Jared thinking the while that it was very strong and harsh, and flavoured of the sloes he had gathered as a boy, while a dozen of the ruddy fluid would have paid a quarter’s rent in Duplex Street, so that altogether he quite trembled, and felt as if he were injuring his wife and family as he sipped and sipped, like a man who was engaged in swallowing sixpences.

When Richard Pellet was not frowning upon his stepson, he was very active in promoting the comfort of his guests, after the same fashion in which he had flavoured his brother’s wine, telling them how much port was in the soup, how much he paid for the turbot in Billingsgate, and how he gave a crown for the lobster. As for the turkey, that was five-and-thirty shillings, and bought on purpose for their coming. Many other things were equally expensive, so that Jared and his family thoroughly enjoyed the epicurean feast, thinking all the while of their own humble board. Home would keep rising to his mind, so that before the dinner had half dragged through its slow length, Jared was wishing himself back in Duplex Street, having a duet with Monsieur Canau, while Janet and Patty played at forfeits or blind man’s buff with his tribe, watching the while that they did not meddle with any of his musical concerns.

Money and business, business and money, were Richard Pellet’s themes, and on the golden string they formed when twisted he harped continually. But it was not only in speech that you felt the money, for it was peering out of everything, from the mistress of the house, with her massive gold chain and large diamond rings, down to the very carpet on which she trod. There were books in gilded bindings that had never been opened; a piano of the most costly kind that was rarely touched; there was every luxury that money could purchase; while, lastly, the very essence of his cash, grey-headed, bushy and prominently browed, very smooth and glossy, and always chinking a few sovereigns in either pocket, there was Richard Pellet, looking down with a pleasant patronising smile of contempt upon his guests.

“Some people are such fools,” he seemed to mutter to himself as he pitied poor, comely Mrs Jared, who appeared to be neither surprised nor disappointed, but took all with a quiet, well-bred ease, and did not in the least allow stout Mrs Richard to sit upon her—metaphorically of course—in spite of her violent flame-coloured moiré; neither did she seem to be crushed by the conversation, which varied little between the weather and the dinner.

But however full of constraint the repast might have been for the elders, to Patty it was a scene of enjoyment, for Harry Clayton, awake now to their meaning, laughed at his mother's remonstrant looks, and ignoring those of Richard, was more than ever attentive to the bright-eyed girl, who in her light-hearted innocence chatted merrily with him, listening eagerly to his account of college life, both thinking nothing of the wealth around them in the thorough enjoyment of the hour.

It was, of course, very provoking; but in spite of all hints to the contrary, when they were in the drawing-room, Harry would linger by Patty's chair.

"Would she play?" Yes, she would play. "And sing?" Yes, and sing too. The first skilfully; the latter in a sweet, little, silvery, gushing voice, that was bird-like in its purity and freedom from affectation. For Patty was Jared's own child, with her father's zest for music, the art which he had loved to teach her, at times too when often and often called away to perform some simple domestic duty.

Richard Pellet seemed surprised, and listened in silence. Mrs Richard forgot herself so for as to clap her hands and call Patty "a dear little darling." But, gazing upon the group at the piano with the eyes of her lord, she felt that this sort of thing would not do. Apparently, too, acting upon a hint from Richard, she kept framing blundering excuses for getting the young man to her side—excuses, though, so trivial, that Harry only laughed good-humouredly, and then made his way back to their young visitor.

It was nearly time for tea, and Harry had coaxed the artless girl into the little drawing-room to show her some sketches, and the photographs of the elders. Jared and his brother had their backs to them, hard and fast in a discussion upon money,—Richard telling his brother what a deal a sovereign would make,—Jared the while in a state of doubt, from old experience how short a road it went, whether there really were as many as twenty shillings in a pound. As for Mrs Jared, she was seated in a low chair by the fire, and being beamed upon by Mrs Richard, who had exhausted the weather, finished the dinner, and was now at a loss for a fresh subject.

The sketches were very interesting, so much so that Harry was obliged to explain them in a low, subdued tone, when, taking advantage of their position, he with a heightened colour took from the wall a sprig of mistletoe, and held it before Patty's eyes.

"No, no," she whispered in a low tone—so low that he probably did not hear it. "No, no; that is only for children."

"The licence of the season," Harry whispered, as with one hand he held up the sprig, and then drew towards him the yielding girl.

Well, Patty was very young, very natural, and quite unused to worldly ways; and Harry was somewhat rough and wilful. Patty had listened that night to words new to her, and where her parents had seen but pride and ostentation, she had had her eyes blinded by a *couleur de rose* veil, drinking deeply the while of the honied draught the young fellow in all earnestness pressed upon her.

All was so sweet, and new, and delightful. He must mean all he said; while being Christmas-time, with a scrap of the pearl-hung parasite to hallow the salute, how could she scream or struggle, as was, of course, needful under the circumstances? Patty did not resist, for being ignorant and natural, she thought that she would like it, and so allowed her soft cheek to rest for a moment where it was drawn, while the little red half-parted lips hardly shrank from the kiss they received.

"Harry!" roared Richard Pellet, leaping from his chair, for he had been seated opposite to a glass which betrayed every movement of the young people. "Harry!" he roared, and the young man with eyes cast down, but raised head, stood erect and defiant before him; "come here!" he exclaimed, striding towards the door, while as the delinquent followed him from the room, Jared and his wife distinctly heard the words, "That beggar's brat!"

Volume One—Chapter Seven.

The Lover's Petition.

An hour later and the party were back in Duplex Street, having travelled home in silence, with Patty weeping her sin the whole way, while she now sat sobbing by the fireside almost heedless of her mother's consoling words. Jared had looked stern and troubled, but not cross; in fact, he had been talking the matter over to himself on the way back, and himself had had the best of the argument by declaring that it was only a custom of the season; that Harry Clayton was a fine handsome young fellow, and Patty as sweet a little girl as ever breathed; and that, though the matter had turned into an upset, the young folks were not so very much to blame.

Jared was beaten by himself, that is to say, by his own good nature, and what was more, he seemed so little put out in consequence, that he rode home the rest of the way with his arm round his wife's waist—but then, certainly it was dark.

"There, there!" exclaimed Jared at last; "go to bed, Patty, and let's have no more tears."

He spoke kindly; but Patty could not be consoled, for she told herself that she had been very, very wicked, and if dear father only knew that she had almost held out her lips to be kissed, he would never, never, forgive her. So she sobbed on.

"Why, what is the matter?" exclaimed Jared at last, for Patty had thrown herself on her knees at her mother's feet, and was crying almost hysterically in her lap. "What are you crying for?"

“Oh! oh! oh!” sobbed poor Patty, whose conscience would not let her rest until she had made a full confession of her sin, “I did-id-id-n’t try to stop him.”

“Humph!” grunted Jared, and the eyes of husband and wife met over their weeping girl, whose sobs after confession grew less laboured and hysterical.

The next day Harry Clayton called at Duplex Street, and the next day, and again after two days, and then once more after a week, but only to see Mrs Jared, who never admitted the visitor beyond the door-sill. She was civil and pleasant; but he must call when Mr Jared Pellet was at home, which he did at last and was ushered into the front parlour.

Jared was in his shirt sleeves, and had an apron on, for he was busy covering pianoforte hammers, and there was a very different scent in the place to that in Mrs Richard’s drawing-room, for Jared’s glue-pot was in full steam.

Had Mr Harry Clayton received permission from his parents to call? This from Jared very courteously, but quite *en prince*, though his fingers were gluey.

No, from the young man, very humbly, he had neither received nor asked permission; but if Mr Jared would not let him see Miss Pellet before he went, he should leave town bitter, sorrowful, and disappointed; for there had been a great quarrel at home, and though he was of age, Mr Richard Pellet wished to treat him like a child.

Only a shake of the head from Jared at this.

Would Mr Jared be so cruel as to refuse to let him bid Miss Pellet good-bye?

Yes, Jared Pellet would, even though his wife had entered, and was looking at him with imploring eyes. For Jared had a certain pride of his own, and a respect for his brother’s high position. And besides, he told himself bitterly that it was not meet that the stepson of a Croesus should marry with “a beggar’s brat.”

So Jared would keep to his word, and Mrs Jared could only sympathise with the young man, holding the while, though by a strange contradiction, to her husband.

Harry gave vent to a good deal of romantic saccharine stuff of twenty-one vintage, interspersed with the sea saltism of “true as the needle to the pole,” and various other high-flown sentiments, which mode of expressing himself, tending as it did to show his admiration for her daughter, and coming from a fine, handsome, and manly young suitor, Mrs Jared thought very nice indeed; but she diluted its strength with a few tears of her own.

Jared was obstinate though, and would not look; he only screwed up his lips and covered pianoforte hammers at express speed, making his fingers sticky and wasting felt; for every hammer had to be re-covered when Harry had taken his departure.

Harry was gone, with one hand a little sticky from the touch of Jared’s gluey fingers, as he said, “Good-bye,” and one cheek wet with Mrs Jared’s tears, as he saluted her reverently, as if she had been his mother.

“But a nice lad, dear,” said Mrs Jared, wiping her eyes.

“Yes; I dare say,” said Jared, stirring his glue round and round; “but mighty fond of kissing.”

Then husband and wife thought of the strange tie growing out of the new estrangement, and also of the fact that they must be growing old, since their child was following in their own steps—in the footprints of those who had gone before since Adam first gazed upon the fair face of the woman given to be his companion and solace in the solitude that oppressed him.

And where was Patty?

Down upon her knees in her little bedroom, whither she had fled on hearing that voice, sobbing tremendously, as if her fluttering heart would break—her handkerchief being vainly used to silence the emotion.

Poor Mrs Jared was quite disconcerted by her child’s reproachful looks when she told her that it might be but a passing fancy, that their position was so different, that years and distance generally wrought changes, and she must learn to govern her heart.

Just as if it were possible that such a man as Harry Clayton—so bold, so frank, so handsome, so—so—so—so—everything—could ever alter in the least. So Patty cried and then laughed, and said she was foolish, and then cried again, and behaved in a very extravagant way, hoping that Harry would write and tell her, if only just once more, that he loved her.

But Harry did not write, for he was a man of honour, and he had promised that he would not until he had permission; while Jared, thinking all this over again and again in his musing moods when sitting before his reflector, felt convinced that he had acted justly, and time alone must show what the young people’s future was to be.

The breach remained wider than ever between the brothers; for Richard Pellet said grandly to his wife—standing the while with his back to the fire, and chinking sovereigns in his pockets—that it was quite impossible to do anything for people who were such fools, and so blind to their own interests; and Mrs Richard, who was on the whole a good-natured woman, but had not room in her brain for more than one idea at a time, thought her new relatives very dreadful people, for they had driven her poor boy away a month or two sooner than he would have gone, though in that respect Richard did not show much sympathy, since he was rather glad to be rid of his stepson.

Volume One—Chapter Eight.

Little Pine and her Teacher.

Carnaby Street, Golden Square, where the private doors have their jambs ornamented with series of bell-pulls like the stops of an organ, and the knockers seem intended to form handles that shall lift up and display rows of keys; but generally speaking, the doors stand open, and the sills bear a row of as many children as can squeeze themselves in. The population is dense and the odours are many, but the prevailing smell is that described by a celebrated character as of warm flat-irons, the ear corroborating nose and palate, for an occasional chink hints that the iron—not a flat one—has been placed upon its stand, while the heavy dull thump, thump, tells that some garment is being pressed. For this is one of the strongholds of the London tailors, and the chances are that the cloth cut upon the counter of Poole has been built into shape in Carnaby Street.

It was in the first floor back, and in two small rooms, that Tim Ruggles—always Tim, though christened Timothy—a steady-going, hard—working, Dutch clock kind of man, carried on the trade popular in the district, with his family of a wife and a little girl. He considered the two rooms ample—the larger serving for parlour, kitchen, workshop, and bedroom for little Pine, the other being devoted exclusively to sleeping purposes.

But you might have entered Tim’s room a score of times without detecting little Pine’s bed, which was an ingeniously contrived affair like a cupboard, that doubled up and doubled down, and creaked and groaned and sprawled about when in use, and had a bad habit of bursting open its doors when closed, and coming down when least expected in the shape of a bedding avalanche. But these accidents only occurred when Mrs Ruggles had ventured upon the doubling up of that piece of furniture, for Tim was the only person who thoroughly understood its idiosyncrasies, and possessed the skill and ingenuity to master its obtrusiveness. In effect, the first thing to be done was to make the bed, which Tim did regularly; then when all was well tucked in, to double back clothes and mattress, and with one rapid acrobatic evolution, performed in all its intricacies without a moment’s hesitation, to kick its legs from beneath it as you seized it at the foot, force your knee vigorously into its stomach, and then, as it folded, to drive all before you back into a state of collapse, banging to and bolting the doors in its face before it had time to recover; for if you were not rapid in your motions, down you went with the recoil, to be pinned to the floor by an incubus of wood and sacking. But, manage the matter as did Tim Ruggles, taking care that no corners of sheet, blanket, or quilt stood out between cracks, and to all appearance that bed might have been a secretary.

Tim was not a large man, either in person or ways; in fact, cross-legged upon his board, he often seemed half lost in the garment he was making. Dry he was, and shrunken, as if overbaked—a waster, in fact, from Nature’s pottery. The effect of the shrinking was most visible in his face, whose skin seemed not to fit, but fell into pucker, crease, and fold, above which shone, clear, white, and firm, his bald forehead and crown, fringing which, and standing out on either side, was a quantity of grizzled, frizzly, tufty hair, imparting a fierce look that was perfectly unreal.

Tim had just fetched his hot iron from the fire, and gone back to press off the garment he was completing; he had run his finger along the bars of a canary cage, and had it pecked by the bird within; gazed at the eternal prospect of back windows, cisterns, and drying clothes; sighed, wiped his nose upon a piece of cloth kept for the purpose, and then sat, sleeve-board in one hand, sponge in the other, the image of despair, as smothered cries, the pattering of blows, and half-heard appeals, as of one who dared not cry out, fell upon his ear.

As Tim Ruggles sat over his work with a shudder running through his frame, there rang out, at last, in thrilling tones—

“Oh! oh! oh! please not this time—not this time. Oh! don’t beat me.” Now louder, now half smothered, till Tim twisted, and shuffled, and writhed as if the blows so plainly to be heard were falling upon his own shoulders; each stroke making him wince more sharply, while his face grew so puckered and lined as to be hardly recognisable.

“I can’t stand it,” he groaned at last; and then he gave a start, for he had inadvertently placed his hand upon his hot iron.

Then came again the anguished appeal for pardon, accompanied by cry after cry that seemed to have burst forth in spite of the utterer’s efforts to crush them down, till Tim, as he listened to the wailing voice, the whistling of stick or cane, and the dull thud of falling blows, seemed to shrink into himself as he turned his back to the sounds, stopped his ears with his finger and a wet sponge, and then sat crouched together regardless of trickling water making its way within his shirt-collar.

At last the cries ceased, and the silence was only broken by an occasional suppressed sob; but Tim moved not, though the door opened, and from the inner room came a tall, hard, angular woman, rigid as the old whalebone umbrella rib she held in one hand, leading, or rather dragging in a child with the other. She was a woman of about forty, such as in a higher class of life would have been gifted with a mission, and let people know of the fact. As it was, she was but a tailor’s wife with a stiff neck: not the stiff neck of a cold which calls for hartshorn, friction, and flannel, but a natural rigidity which caused her to come round as upon a pivot when turning to address a speaker, at a time when with other people a movement of the head would have sufficed.

“Tim!” she cried, as she stepped into the room, opening and closing her cruel-looking mouth with a snap.

Tim heard the meaning cry, and, starting quickly, the next moment he was busily at work as if nothing had happened.

Mrs Ruggles said no more, but proceeded to place her whalebone rod upon a perch over the fire-place. Her back was turned while doing this, a fact of which Tim took advantage to kiss his hand to the cowering child, when, save at distant intervals, she ceased to sob.

“I don’t think you need beat poor Pine so,” said Tim at last, in a hesitating way, “What was it for?”

“Come here,” shouted Mrs Ruggles to the child; “what did I whip you for?”

With the cowering aspect of a beaten dog, the child came slowly forward into the light: sharp-featured, tangled of hair, red-eyed, cheek-soiled with weeping. Tim Ruggles winced again as he looked upon her thin bare arms and shoulders, lined by the livid weals made by the sharp elastic rod of correction, ink-like in its effects, the dark marks seeming to run along the flesh as the vicious blows had fallen. The poor child crept slowly forward, as if drawn by some strange influence towards Mrs Ruggles, her eyes resting the while upon Tim, whose face was working, and whose fingers opened and closed as if he were anxious to snatch the child to his heart.

“Now, ask her what she was whipped for,” shouted Mrs Ruggles. “Tell him. What was it for?”

“For—for—taking—”

“Ah! what’s that? For what?” shouted Mrs Ruggles.

“For—for—for stealing—for—for—oh!—oh!—oh!” cried the child, bursting into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing, “I didn’t do it—I didn’t do it!”

And there she stopped short: the words, the sobs, the wailing tone, all ceased as if by magic, as Mrs Ruggles snatched the whalebone from its supporting nails.

“Yes, yes,” the child shrieked in haste, as the rigid figure and the instrument of torture approached—“for stealing the cake from the cupboard.” And then teeth were set fast, lips nipped together, hands clenched, and eyes closed, and the whole of the child’s nine years’ old determination seemed to be summoned up to bear the blow she could hear about to descend. The whalebone whistled through the air, and, in spite of every effort, the cut which fell upon the bare shoulders elicited a low wail of suffering.

A deep sigh burst from Tim Ruggles’ breast, and he bent lower over his work, moving his iron, but over the wrong places, as he closed his eyes not to see the child fall upon her knees and press both hands tightly over her lips to keep back the cry she could not otherwise conquer; her every act displaying how long must have been the course of ill-treatment that had drawn forth such unchildlike resolution and endurance.

“Now,” cried Mrs Ruggles, “no noise!” though her own sharp unfeminine tones must have penetrated to the very attics as she spoke. “There, that will do. Now get up this minute.”

“But,” said the little tailor, humbly, “you should always ask before you punish, Mary. I—I took the piece of cake out of the cupboard, because I hardly ate any breakfast.”

“Tim—Tim—Tim!” cried Mrs Ruggles; and as she spoke, she looked at him sideways, her eyes gleaming sharply out of the corners. “You false man, you! but the more you try to screen her that way, the more I’ll punish. How many times does this make that I’ve found you out?”

“Times—found out?” stammered Tim.

“Yes—times found out,” retorted Mrs Ruggles. “But I’ll have no more of it, and so long as she’s here, she shall behave herself, or I’ll cut her thievish ways out of her.”

“But, indeed,” said Tim, pitifully, “it was me, upon my word. It was me, Mary. Just look—here’s some of the crumbs left now;” and he pointed to a few splintery scales of paste lying upon the board.

Mrs Ruggles gave a nod that might have meant anything.

“I am sure you should not beat her so,” whimpered Tim. “Beating does no good, and may hurt—”

“Didn’t I say I wouldn’t have her talked about?” exclaimed Mrs Ruggles, in threatening tones. “And how do you know? If she didn’t want whipping this time, it will do for next. Children are always doing something, and a good beating sometimes loosens their skins and makes ’em grow. You never had children to teach.”

“’Tain’t my dooty to have children,” muttered Tim.

“What’s that?” shouted Mrs Ruggles. “Now don’t aggravate, you know I can’t abear nagging.”

“I only said, my dear, that it wasn’t my dooty to have children, but yours.”

Mrs Ruggles gave her husband a look composed of half scorn, half contempt—a side look, which, coming out of the corners of her eyes, was so sharpened in its exit that though Tim would not look up and meet it, he could feel it coming, and shivered accordingly.

Meanwhile Mrs Ruggles took a bonnet from a peg, and putting it on, tied the strings tightly as if in suicidal intent, snatched herself into a shawl, and rummaged out a basket, preparatory to starting upon a marketing expedition.

“Now then, don’t grovel there, but go to your work,” she shouted to the kneeling child, who bent before her as if she were the evil deity presiding over her fate.

Then the child’s hands dropped from before her mouth, as she flinchingly rose, and taking a copper lid from a side table, began with a piece of dirty rag to rub and polish the already bright metal, giving at the same time stealthy, furtive glances, first at Tim and then at Mrs Ruggles; while, in spite of every effort, a sob would swell her little breast,

beat down her puny efforts, and burst forth, to make her shiver in dread of further blows.

Volume One—Chapter Nine.

The Ninth Part of a Man.

The room door closed upon Mrs Ruggles' rigid figure, her loud step, indicative of the woman's firmness, was heard upon the stairs, and then Tim and little Pine ceased from their tasks, and listened till an echoing bang announced the shutting of the front door, when, half rising and leaning forward, Tim dashed down the garment he was making, opened his arms—the child gave a series of bounds, and the next moment had buried her face in Tim's breast, winding her little bare arms about his neck, wringing her thin fingers as she clasped and unclasped them, moaning piteously the while.

"Just what I expected," exclaimed Mrs Ruggles, in hard, sharp tones; and starting up, the guilty couple found that she had stolen back and softly opened the door. But the next instant the child had seized lid and rag, and Tim was busily stitching away at a piece of lining which belonged nowhere, as he looked confusedly in his wife's face.

"Call yourself a man!" exclaimed Mrs Ruggles, with that peculiar bitterness so much used by women of her class. "Ah! I've a great mind to!" she exclaimed again, looking sideways at little Pine, and making a dash at the whalebone; "but I don't know which deserves it most."

The child set her teeth hard, and shrank towards the wall, while Tim drew a long breath, and clutched the big iron by his side, though without the slightest intention of using it for offence or defence.

Mrs Ruggles again spoke—

"Don't let me come back again, that's all," she exclaimed; and if his looks were a faithful index of Timothy Ruggles' mind, his heart evidently just then whispered, "I wish to goodness I could take you at your word."

Then the door was once more closed, the step heard again, the bang down-stairs, and then there was silence in the room, broken only by the half-suppressed sobs of little Pine, and the impatient, restless pecking of the bird in the cage.

Five minutes passed, and still there was silence, when Tim softly took up a yard-measure from the board, stole nimbly off on to his shoeless feet, opened the door, and peered through the crack, and then, reaching out one hand, he touched a bell with the yard-measure, making it ring loudly twice over. Then he softly closed the door, replaced himself and his measure upon the board, before leaping boldly and noisily off to cross the room, open the door loudly, and trot down-stairs to answer the bell, the child earnestly watching his motions the while.

Down the stairs trotted Tim, and along the passage to the front door, to open it, look out, and peer up and down the street, when, apparently satisfied, he closed the door once more, his face wearing an aspect of full belief as he muttered, "A runaway ring."

Had Tim Ruggles made his descent a minute sooner, he would have seen the graceful form of his lady some half-a-dozen doors lower down, as she stood in conversation with a neighbour; but now, no one being in sight, he hurried up-stairs again, climbed upon his board, placed his work ready to hand, and then, and then only, he held out his arms to the child, who was sobbing the next instant upon his breast.

"Don't—don't cry, my pet," he whispered, puzzling the while a couple of real tears which had escaped from his eyes, and finding no friendly handkerchief at hand, were dodging in and out amongst the main lines and sidings and crossings and switches of the course of life as mapped out in Tim's face, till one tear was shunted into his left ear, and the other paused by the corner of his mouth.

"Don't cry, my pet," said Tim again, caressing the child with all a woman's tenderness. "But come, I say, you must cheer up, for see what I've been making for you. But there, don't cry, my darling;" and he pressed his cool, soft, womanly hand upon weal and burning sore. "Now look," he continued, and from under a heap of cloth patches he produced a quaint-looking rag doll, evidently the work of many a stolen five minutes. "Now, then!" he cried, in the tone people adopt towards children, "what do you think of that?"

Then there was silence, while Tim eagerly watched the child, whose little mind seemed to be struggling hard between the ideas natural to its age, and those of a forced and premature character. First she looked at the doll, then at its donor, and then, half laughing, half crying, she looked pitifully in Tim's face, before once more throwing herself, sobbing loudly, in his arms, where she clung tightly, as the little man patted her head, and smoothed and caressed her.

"I thought she'd have liked it," muttered Tim, looking down upon the little head in a disconcerted way, his face growing more and more puckered as he rocked himself to and fro, humming the snatch of some old ditty, treating the suffering little one as though she were a baby. By slow degrees the sobs ceased, and Tim seemed more puzzled than ever, when the child raised her head, and gazed in his face, her little wan aspect seeming to make her years older as she kissed him, saying—

"Please put it away now."

Tim stared hard at the little thin face, as with one hand he reluctantly placed the doll beneath the cloth shreds, holding her tightly with the other, till, in a strange old-fashioned way, she kissed him again, saying—

“It was very kind of you.” And then she slipped out of his arms, crossed the room to the glass, and smoothed her hair, wetted Tim’s sponge, and removed the tear marks from her face, placing too the cool grateful water against the smarting weals upon her arms. Afterwards she returned to her task and went on polishing the metal lid, a sob rising at intervals to make Tim Ruggles flinch.

Tim’s work was again in hand, but progressing very, very slowly as he then sat musing, and wondering whose child the little one was; also whether she would be fetched away, a proceeding which he dreaded, in spite of the pain it gave him to see her suffer. “I’ve no spirit to stop it,” he muttered, “though it nips me horribly. I suppose it’s from stitching so much that I ain’t like most men. It’s all right though, I s’pose; she knows best.—Here, I say, though, my wig and pickles, we shall have the missus home directly,” he cried, fiercely, “and no work done. Now then, bustle; polish away;” and he set the example of industry by snatching up the trousers in course of making, and sewing more fiercely than ever.

Volume One—Chapter Ten.

My Duty towards my Neighbour.

“Now then,” said Tim Ruggles, “we mustn’t have no more sobbing and sighing, you know, but get on with working, and eddication, and what not, before some one comes home, and goes off. Now what were we doing last, my pretty?”

“Reading,” said little Pine, absently.

“Mistake,” said Tim. “It was cate—cate—well, what was it?”

“Chism,” said the child; “catechism.”

“Right,” said Tim. “Now, let’s see; it was duty towards my neighbour, and if we don’t look sharp as a seven—between we shall never get through that beautiful little bit. Eddication, my pretty, is the concrete, atop of which they build society; and if I’d been an eddicated man and known a few things—”

“But you know everything, don’t you?” queried Pine.

“Well, no, my dear, not quite,” said Tim, rubbing one side of his nose, and gazing in a a comical way at the child.

“But you are very clever, ain’t you.”

“Oh, dear me, no; not at all,” said Tim; “leastwise, without it’s in trousis, and there I ain’t so much amiss. But come, I say, this won’t do; this is catechism wrong side out, so go on.”

Then slowly on to the accompaniment of the metal polishing—the lid being by this time succeeded by a brass candlestick—and the sharp click of Tim’s needle, the portion of catechism under consideration progressed till it was brought to a full stop over the words, “Succour my father and mother,” when Tim was, to use his own words, quite knocked off his perch by the child’s question—

“Who is my mother?”

“Why—er—er—why, mother, you know,” replied Tim.

The child shook her head thoughtfully, and now speaking, now stopping to rub at the bright metal, said—

“No, no! not her—not her! My own—my own dear mother could not, would not beat me so. I think it must be some one who comes when I’m half asleep, and I can see her blue eyes, and feel her long curls round my face when she kisses me, and then it is that I wake up; and,” she continued dreamily, “I’m not sure whether she does come, for she is not there then, and when I whisper, no one answers; and do you know whether she comes, or whether I dream she does, that must be my mother, for no one else would come and kiss me like that.”

“Why, I do,” remonstrated Tim, “lots o’ times.”

“Yes, yes! you do!” said the child, smiling, “but I know when it’s you, and I can’t help thinking—”

“Here, I say,” exclaimed Tim, “this isn’t catechism. This won’t do, my pretty, you mustn’t talk like that. Now, then, go on,—‘Succour my father’—”

“Succour—succour,” continued the child, “my father and mother. Is she gone to heaven, and does she come to look at me in the night, and kiss me? I don’t think that she would whip me so, and—and—oh! pray don’t beat me for it. I can’t help it. Oh! I can’t help it,” and then once again, the little thin hands were pressed upon the quivering lips to thrust back the bitter heart-wrung wail that would make itself heard. No child’s cry; but the moaning of a bruised heart, forced and rendered premature in its feelings by the long course of cruelty to which it had been subjected. A stranger might have listened, and then have gone away believing that his feelings had been moved to pity by the anguished utterances of a woman in distress.

Tim hopped from his board, half bewildered, and quite in trouble, to kiss and caress the child, smoothing her hair, patting her cheeks, and holding her tightly to his breast.

“Come, my pretty,” he whispered, “you mustn’t, you know. It does hurt me so, and ain’t I as good as a father? And didn’t you promise me as you’d love me very, very much? And now you’re raining down tears, and melting all the

sugar out of a fellow's nature till you'll make him cross as—Polish away, my pretty."

With two bounds Tim was back in his place, and little Pine again bent over her task; for there was a heavy step upon the staircase, and as it stopped at the door, Tim grunted, and slowly shuffled off his board to replace his iron in the fire after giving it a loud clink upon the stand.

"Now, my dear," said Tim, loudly, "we ain't getting on so fast as we oughter. 'Bear no malice.'"

"'Bear no malice,'" repeated the child, looking up at him, with a quaint smile upon her little pinched lips.

"'Nor hatred in my heart,'" said Tim; and then dolefully, "why don't you look at your work?"

"'Nor hatred in my heart,'" said the child, whose little face, then again upturned, showed that, if there were truth in looks, malice or hatred had never entered her breast.

"Louder, ever so much," whispered Tim, "and don't yer get whipped whilst I'm at Pellet's, there's a pet. 'Keep my hands from picking and stealing,'" he continued, aloud.

"'From picking and stealing,'" said the child, softly.

"She'd better, that's all I can say," came from the doorway; and Mrs Ruggles closed the portal, and then swung round again, right about face, and confronted her husband, "perhaps some one else will keep his tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and so on."

"I'm blessed," muttered Tim, "that's rather hot."

"Of course it is," exclaimed Mrs Ruggles, who only caught the latter part of the sentence, and applied it to the fire. "Such waste of coals. I suppose that girl's been shovelling them on as if they cost nothing."

"No, my dear—me—it was me," said Tim, who well enough knew that the fire had been made up by Mrs Ruggles herself: but he was a terrible liar.

"Then you ought to have known better."

"Yes, my dear," said Tim, humbly, glad to have averted the current of his lady's wrath.

"Are those trousers nearly done?" said Mrs Ruggles.

"Very nearly, my dear," replied Tim, throwing his iron duster, and some more scraps over the spot where lay the doll.

"Because you have to go to Pellet's, mind, this afternoon."

"Thinking about 'em when you was on the stairs, my dear," said Tim, and this time he spoke the truth.

Volume One—Chapter Eleven.

Homely.

This was a busy day in Duplex Street: in fact, most days were busy there, and Mrs Jared and Patty were in a state of bustle from morning till night. For, being a poor man's wife, Mrs Jared had grown of late years to think that doing nothing stood next door to a sin, and consequently she worked hard, early and late.

But this was a Saturday—a day upon which all the juveniles rose with sorrow in their hearts, since it was washing day. Not the washing day when the copper was lit in the back kitchen, and Mrs Winks from the Seven Dials came to work with crimpy hands by the day, making the house full of steam and the cold mutton to taste of soap, but a day when there was a family wash of the little Pellets. Mrs Jared's task had of late years grown to be rather heavy, the consequence being that she had become on her part more vigorous of arm, more bustling of habit. Certainly during these weekly lamb-washings there used to be a good deal of outcry—Mrs Jared being the washer, and Patty undertaking the head-dressing and finger and toe-nails of the smaller members, bringing to an end her part of the performance by carrying them up pig-a-back to bed like so many little sacks. But in consequence of numbers, the first washed had of necessity to go very early to rest—a fact productive of much crowding and getting behind one another, the strongest in this case going to the wall, and thrusting the weaker before them.

Mrs Jared had been very busy all day—at least what should have been all day—though in consequence of a heavy fog, and the neutralising lamp-light, it seemed to have been all night. She had made a mistake that morning, and risen two hours before her customary time, the consequence being that cleaning matters were the same period of time in advance; and in place of the lavations taking place after tea, they were all over before, and the shining faces, that had lately been screwed up, were once more beginning to look happy and contented, though, by some strange fatality, their owners seemed to be always in Mrs Jared's way.

Everything about the place shone clean and bright: the comfortable front kitchen was in order, and tea time was near at hand, when Jared Pellet would descend with Tim Ruggles, grown by long working quite a friend of the family—coming for so much a day and his meals, and ready to do anything, from curtailing the goodly proportions of Jared's old trousers, and making them up for smaller members of the family, and contriving caps out of waistcoats, to acting in various ways as a regular tailor-chemist in the new and useful combinations he could contrive for the little Pellets, of whom one never knew for certain how many Jared had, for if you tried to count them there were always two or

three fresh little heads peeping out at you from among Mrs Jared's skirts, like chicks from the wings of a hen.

Tea time at last, and things in a satisfactory state of preparation, though, as a matter of course, work was never ended in Duplex Street. Mother and daughter had taken it in turns to change gowns, and to smooth hair; and then Patty had made that pleasant home-like clinking noise so familiar to every Englishman, formed by the setting out of the cups and saucers, and the placing of the spoons in their normal positions.

"Ah-h-h! who is touching the sugar?" cried Mrs Jared, in what was meant for the tone of an ogress; but from so pleasant-faced a little body anything like an ogreish sound was out of the question.

But the voice had its effect; for a little, plump, sticky fist was snatched from the sugar-basin, though not without drawing with it the depository of sweets, when a large proportion of the sandy-looking necessary was thrown down upon the newly-swept piece of drugget, amidst a violent clattering of teacups, and a buzz of small voices, as though a score of wasps had been attracted to the cloying banquet.

"Oh, Totty, Totty!" exclaimed Mrs Jared, popping the baby down upon the old chintz-covered sofa—there always was a baby at Jared's—and then charging the culprit, and a couple more, who had gathered round the spoil. "Oh dear, dear! and Mr Ruggles will be down directly to tea. O Patty, why didn't you mind Totty? See what mischief she has been in; and here's Dicky with quite a handful now."

"She was here just this minute," cried Patty from the back kitchen, "and I did not miss her."

In fact, it was rather hard to mind Jared's progeny, who, from being confined in a small house, were exceedingly restless—climbing, falling, upsetting candles, cutting fingers, or rolling from the top to the bottom of the kitchen stairs, so that the rag-bag was always in requisition, and tied-up fingers, sticking-plaistered or bruised heads, and abrasions in general were matters of course.

"Totty yikes oogar," said the sticky cause of the mischief, in treacly tones.

"Totty yikes oogar," exclaimed Mrs Jared, angrily imitating her juvenile's limping speech, and forgetful that she herself had crippled the words while teaching the little one its first steps in language; "Totty's a very, very naughty girl, and ought to be well whipped." And then the troubled dame busied herself in gathering up the spilled saccharine treasures with a spoon, while Totty, elevating her chin to make the passage straight, gave vent to a doleful howl, rubbing the while her sticky hands all over her clean face. Patty tried to look cross because she had been scolded—an utter impossibility on account of the dimples in her cheeks, which seemed as though a couple of kisses had been planted there by loving lips, and the downy, peachy skin had flinched with the contact, and never since risen—nursing up the sweet impressions, and holding them as treasures of the past. Then numbers odd wept for sympathy, as Mrs Jared scraped and scolded, heedless of the facts that the Dutch clock had given warning for five, and that the tea was not yet made, the toast not cut, and the bloaters not down to cook. For, as it had been a Saturday's dinner —*i.e.*, scrappy—"snacks," in honour of Tim Ruggles, were in vogue for tea.

But troubles never come singly; for now the baby having made up its mind to see what was the matter, contrived to wriggle about until its nine-months'-old bundle of soft bones, gristle, and flesh rolled off the sofa, bump on to the floor, where, as soon as it could get its breath, it burst forth into a wail of astonishment and pain at the hard usage it had received.

Patty rushed to seize the suffering innocent; Mrs Jared, with her skirts, knocked down the origin of the mischief; the kettle boiled violently, and spat and sputtered all over the newly-blackleaded grate and bright steel fender, adding as well a diabolical hydrogenous smell; and in the midst of the trouble down came Jared Pellet and Tim Ruggles, punctual to five o'clock, on purpose to refresh themselves with the social meal.

"There—if I didn't expect as much!" cried Mrs Jared, snatching the kettle off the fire with one hand, and hushing Totty with the other; rushing the children into their ready-set chairs, and Tim Ruggles into his place, Jared quietly taking his own by the fireside, where he could set his tea-cup on the oven top. Then Patty set to work toasting; the little Dutch oven, containing four "real Yarmouths at two for three halfpence," was placed before the fire, and sent forth a savoury odour; the tea was made with two spoonfuls extra, and Jared was set to caress the sticky Totty, now planted upon his knee.

By the end of five minutes that tyrant of the household—the baby—had subsided into an occasional sob, and was given over into the care of one of Patty's juniors—both being well bread-and-buttered, the baby having a wedge in each hand—and sent up into the front room, the nurse *pro tem* being strictly ordered not to touch anything. The paraffine lamp was lit instead of a candle, the fire poked; and now, after so many preliminaries, the meal was commenced, the tea being fragrant, the toast just brown enough, the butter better than usual, and the bloaters prime; Totty declining to abdicate the throne she had ascended, one where she reigned supreme—her father's knee, to wit; and at last there was peace in the front kitchen in Duplex Street.

"Did you ever hear such a noise, Mr Ruggles?" said Mrs Jared at length, her face now all smiles.

"Not my way often, ma'am," said Tim, "at least—that is—we do have noises."

Mrs Jared looked significantly at her husband, and then sighed, when, after fidgeting in his chair, Tim said, "A little more sugar, if you please, ma'am."

"Totty yikes oogar," exclaimed the chubby delinquent, displaying her sorrow for her late act of piracy by making a grab at the hard roe upon her father's plate—a delicacy but just set free from overlaying bones, but the plate was hot, and the little fingers suffered a sharp pang, when there was another outcry; but with that exception, the meal progressed in peace to the end, when Jared threw himself back in his chair, and set himself to amuse Totty, by

turning his inflated cheeks into drums for that young lady to belabour with sticky fists.

But it was at supper time, when the little ones were in bed and Jared and Tim had concluded their tasks, that there was the real peace. For now, up-stairs by the fireside, a pipe was produced for Tim, and two weak glasses of gin and water were mixed—Mrs Jared indulging in occasional sips from her husband's portion, while, under the influence of his own, Tim grew communicative respecting his own home, and the present Mrs Ruggles, and on Patty making some enquiry respecting little Pine, he laid down his pipe, rubbed his hands softly together, and looked very serious as he replied to her question.

"For my part," said Mrs Jared, "I don't hold with such sharp correction of children as you say Mrs Ruggles administers."

Tim did not speak, but his eye fell upon a small cane above the chimney-piece. His glance was detected by Mrs Jared, who exclaimed:

"You need not look at that, Mr Ruggles, for it is never used, only talked about; at least," she said, correcting herself, "very seldom. I don't think it right to be harsh to children, only firm; and if you begin with firmness, they will seldom require further correction."

"Spare the rod, spoil the child," said Tim, softly exhaling a column of smoke.

"Stuff!" said Mrs Jared, sharply; "do you mean to say that my children are spoiled, Mr Ruggles?"

"No, ma'am," said the little tailor, earnestly; "I never saw a better behaved family.—Nor a bigger," he said to himself.

"But Solomon said so, my dear," said Jared, drily.

"Then Solomon ought to have been ashamed of himself," said Mrs Jared, tartly; "and it must have been when he was nearly driven mad by some of his own children. He said plenty of good things, but I don't consider that one of them; and besides, with all his wisdom, he was not perfect. Between ourselves, I wonder, Mr Ruggles, that you allow it. When the little thing came after you the other day, even her little neck was marked, and as to her arms—why Patty went up—stairs and cried about them. I'm only a plain-spoken woman, and really, sometimes, I wonder that you ever married again, and you must excuse me for saying so."

"I often wonder at it myself," thought Tim Ruggles, as he sat poking at his frizzy hair with the stem of his pipe, and looking very intently into his gin and water: all at once, though, he exclaimed:

"I'll tell you how it was!"

But before telling them how it was, he refilled and lit his pipe, sat thoughtfully for a few minutes, and then refreshed himself with a sip of his gin and water.

Volume One—Chapter Twelve.

Tim's Ditty.

"You see, ma'am," said Tim Ruggles, looking very mysterious, "that little one's name was Prosperine or Propserpine, I'm not sure which, unless I look at where we've got it written down. I'm not sure it ain't Proserpine; but at all events it's a long awkward name, and we took to calling her Pine. I married the present Mrs Ruggles to take her in charge and mind her. And she does take care of her, and brings her up in the way she should go. You should hear her say her Catechism," said Tim, looking proudly at Mrs Jared.

"I'd rather hear her say she loved your wife, Mr Ruggles," said Mrs Jared, quietly.

Tim was disconcerted, but not beaten.

"But she does, ma'am, and me too, wonderful, for Mrs Ruggles is only just a little too strict, and I don't like to interfere; for you know, ma'am, that's a child of mystery—that is, like Fatherless Fanny, as maybe you've read of; and no doubt she'll come to be in a big spear of life. She—that's Mrs Ruggles, you know, ma'am—says that we'll do what's right by the child, ma'am, and what can I say against that, when Mrs Ruggles is such a clever woman?"

"I don't quite like such cleverness," said Mrs Jared.

"You see I want to do what is right, ma'am," said Tim, "and somehow that's rather hard sometimes. But I was going to tell you, ma'am, we used to live in South Molton Street, and though I've no children of my own now, ma'am, when my poor first wife was alive there used to be one regularly every year, and the wife that proud of it, she didn't know what to do for a few months; and then a time would come when we'd stand side by side looking at the little weeny, waxy features, lying in the bit of a coffin, and the wife fit to break her heart because they were all taken away again so soon. Not one lived, ma'am; and though we were poor, and at times very much pushed for a job and a little money, that used to be our greatest trouble, and I've seen my poor wife look that hungry and envious of a lodger on the first floor—quite a lady she was—who lived alone there with her baby, that nothing could be like it.

"But she was a good woman, God bless her!" said Tim, in a low voice, and as he spoke he put his hand to his bald head, as if raising his hat; "and sometimes I think, ma'am, that there aren't such a wonderful number of good women in this world. I never knew what money we had, and what money we hadn't, but used to put it in her hands as I brought it home from the shop, and I always knew that she'd make it go as far as money would go, and I didn't want

no more. Nothing like letting your wife keep the purse, sir," he said, turning to Jared—"always makes her feel proud of the confidence.

"But it came to pass at one time, ma'am, that we were so put to it, that I couldn't put a bit of confidence in Mrs Ruggles, ma'am—my first—for times were that hard with strikes that there was not a stroke of work to be got for anybody. We tried all we knew, and I scraped and pledged and sold, till it seemed that the next thing to do would be to go into the workhouse, when one day came a knock at our back-room door, and we both started, feeling sure that it was the landlord to tell us we must go, for we were behindhand with the rent. But no; who should come in but the first floor lodger, with her little one; and to make a long story short, what she wanted was for my lass to take care of her, because she was going abroad with her husband, and my wife was to be paid for doing it.

"And do you think she would? Why, she snatched hungrily at the little thing; and poor as we were, would have been glad to do it for nothing. Perhaps I had my objections, and perhaps I hadn't, ma'am; but we were almost starving, and when five pounds were put on the table for the present, and an address written down where we were to go when that money was done, why, one could only look upon it as a Godsend, and promise all the poor lady wished.

"Then came the cruel time, ma'am, when the poor woman had to leave it, and I was glad to go out of the room, so as not to see her sobbing and breaking her heart, and snatching the poor little baby to her breast, and running to the door with it, and then coming back and giving it up to my wife, kissing her, and kneeling down to her, and begging of her to love it, when my poor lass was worshipping it as hard as ever she could.

"I stopped out of the room till she was gone, poor lady, and then I came back, pretending to look jolly; but I only made a fool of myself, ma'am, when I saw the wife crying softly over the little thing in her lap, for I knew what it all meant. Oh, so much, ma'am, for they were the tender motherly tears of a woman who had never been able to pour out all the love of her heart upon one of her own little ones. And as I stood there, I seemed not to like to speak, as I saw her lips quivering and face working. But, in spite of all her sad looks, there was one of pleasure in her face; for there was the little thing looking up and crowing and laughing as if it knew that it was in good hands; and while my poor wife stayed on this earth, ma'am, no little one could have been more tenderly treated.

"But there came a time when I was anxious and worried, same as I had been often before; and then I couldn't believe it at all, and wouldn't have it that it was true; for it all seemed like a dream, till I found myself sitting with little Pine in my arms, keeping her with me because she was something poor Lucy loved; and then it seemed to come home to me that it was my poor wife's cold, smooth forehead that I had kissed, as she lay still and sleeping with another little waxen image upon her breast; but it was all true, ma'am, and I was alone—all alone."

Poor Tim Ruggles made no secret of the fact that he was crying, as he laid down his pipe, and pulled out his thin red cotton handkerchief to wipe his eyes; and, for some reason or other, Patty's face was very close to her work, and Mrs Jared had altered her position.

"Time went on," said Tim, continuing his narrative, "till one day I was sitting, nursing the little thing, as took to me wonderful, when there came a sharp knock at the door, and in came the child's mother to snatch it out of my arms, and kiss and fondle it as only mothers can. She seemed as if she couldn't speak, but held out one hand to me, and pressed mine and tried to smile; but only gave me such a pitiful woe-begone look that it was quite sad to see.

"Then there were steps on the stairs once more, and the next moment there was a tall hard-looking woman, and a stout man in black like a doctor, both in the room.

"'Ellen,' said the tall woman, in a sharp, cross way; but the stout man was all fidgety, and nervous like, and did not seem to know what to do; but he says, 'Hush! hush! don't let us have any scene here.'

"'Let her come quietly with us, then,' says the woman; but the poor thing only held little crying Pine to her breast, seeming in sore trouble that the child should not know her, but struggle and try to get away. Then she gave me the child, and the man says, 'Take her away. Stop that crying child.'

"But I had no occasion to do anything, for she stopped crying directly I took her, and besides I wanted to see the end of this strange scene, and it seemed as if the little one's mother gave herself up like a prisoner to the tall woman, who took tightly hold of her arm, and then they hurried out of the room, the stout man all in a perspiration and looking scared, and as if afraid I was going to interfere, and I would, too, only Pine's mother went so quietly, just smiling, and kissing her hand to me and the little one as she left the room, and then I heard their steps on the stairs.

"I did not see any more, but one of the lodgers told me afterwards how they all went off together in a cab that was waiting at the door. And I never knew any more, only what I told you was the child's name, and that the money's paid regular by a lawyer for her keep; and nobody never asks any questions, nor wants to know anything about her; and though I once tried, I couldn't find anything out, and excepting that I've ten shillings a week with her, she might be my own little girl.

"And what could I do without some one to help me, ma'am?" continued Tim to Mrs Jared. "I went four years with women to do for me, and housekeepers, and the last one I had was the present Mrs Ruggles, ma'am, who took so kindly to the child, that I thought it would be all for the best; and we moved to Carnaby Street, ma'am, and it took a deal of doing, but I married her. My sister's husband says she married me: perhaps she did, ma'am. I don't know; but it all seems to come to the same thing."

"And did you never see anything more of the little thing's relations?" asked Mrs Jared.

"No, ma'am," said Tim, "never—never. Of course I felt a bit curious after that strange visit; but I was too full of my own troubles to do anything then; and when, some time afterwards, I said something to one of the lawyer's clerks, he asked me if I was tired of my job, because plenty more would be glad of it.

“That sent me out of the office like a shot, ma’am. It didn’t matter to me that I heard the clerk laughing, for I’d sooner have given them ten shillings a week to let me keep her than have given her up. And I don’t love her any the less now, ma’am; but I do sometimes wish she was away.”

“The old story,” said Jared; “they evidently don’t want the little thing, and pay to keep it out of sight.”

“Something more than the old story, sir, I think,” said Tim, humbly, as he tapped his forehead. “There’s something wrong about the poor mother, depend upon it, as well as the child.”

“So I think, Mr Ruggles,” said Mrs Jared, “and though perhaps I have no business to interfere, I cannot help saying again, that I don’t at all like the way in which it is treated, poor child,—I don’t think you ought to stand by and let it be beaten.”

“Well, I don’t know, ma’am, I don’t know,” said Tim, humbly. “I’m afraid to interfere, to tell you the truth; for I’m out a deal, and if I were to say much, I should only make Mrs Ruggles the little thing’s enemy. Really, ma’am, I try to do what’s for the best; and I don’t think if I tried ever so, I should make any better of it. As I said, I almost wish sometimes that she was gone, but it always nips me afterwards; for somehow, ma’am, that child seems to be all I have to love now, and you know how children will wind themselves round you, and make a home in your heart. I hope none of yours, ma’am, may know what it is to have a step—that is,” said Tim, stammering, “ever be—er—ever—ever—suffer, you know, ma’am.”

Tim Ruggles hid his confusion in his red handkerchief, as soon as he could prevail upon it to quit the depths of his pocket; after which he found out that it was quite time for him to take his departure, and hurried away.

“I can’t help taking an interest in the poor little thing,” said Mrs Jared, when they were alone; “but it seems a strange story.”

“Very,” said Jared Pellet.

Volume One—Chapter Thirteen.

Patty among Friends.

Brownjohn Street, Decadia, on a bright summer’s morning, when improvements had not made the neighbourhood a little less dingy than of old; when the pleasant district named after, but, all the same, a perfect disgrace to, a certain patron saint, had not recovered from the vast and clean sweep to which it had been subjected.

So early in the day, there was peace. There was no fight in progress before either of the palaces famed for the dispensing of gin; the police were not binding some fierce, dishevelled, and blaspheming virago to a stretcher, and then patting their hair or whiskers in tender spots from whence locks had been ravished by the handful, previous to bearing the drunken scold to the X station, attended by a train of howling creatures, in human form, but debased by “the vitriol madness”—the poison mental and bodily sold to them by the name of “Cream of the Valley”—“of the Shadow of Death,” might well have been added. The courts of the palaces were quiet as yet, and brawny-muscled bar and potmen were brightening counters, polishing plate-glass and mirrors, or burnishing brass, ready for the night, when the gas should be in full blaze. Men and women slink in and out now—coming in a dark secretive way, to partake of “pen’orths,” or, as they were here facetiously termed, “coffin nails,” to rouse the spirits, flagging from the effects of the previous night’s debauch. Burglars and pickpockets—night-birds both—slept in their lairs, hiding from the light, and waiting in drunken sleep for the darkness that was to them their day.

But Brownjohn Street was full of life: young men and women of the Decadian type—not children, though their years varied from five to ten—span the celebrated Decadian top, or sent pointed instruments, known as “cats,” darting through the air; halfpenny kites were flown with farthing balls of cotton; and one select party waltzed, fancy free, around a street organ, what time a young gentleman of about twelve, who had already attained to the dignity of greased sidelocks, performed a castanet accompaniment upon two pairs of bones, and another of the same age, whose costume consisted of one rag, one pair of trousers, secured beneath the arm-pits with string, and a great deal of dirt, stood upon his head, swayed his legs about as if in cadence with the air played by the organist, and occasionally beat together the soles of his bony feet. Altogether it was a happy party, and the Italian ground away and showed his white teeth; the children danced; and the whole scene might have been Watteau-like, but for the streets and the dirt.

Vehicles seldom passed down Brownjohn Street; the warning “Hi!” was rarely uttered by the driver, and the children ran in and out of the burrows of the human warren, wild and free, until old enough to be trained to prey upon their fellows. But they partook more of the rat than of the rabbit in their nature, for they were small-sized, careworn street Arabs, whose names would yet become famous in the “Hue and Cry,” or, under the head of “Police Intelligence” in the morning papers.

Dense, dismal, close, swarming, dirty, with the flags broken, and the gutters heaped up with refuse—such was Brownjohn Street; for dandies no longer escorted beauty homeward to such and such a number, in a sedan-chair, with running footmen and link-bearers to clear the way. But, teeming with population as was Brownjohn Street, those swarms were not all of the *genus homo*—the place upon this bright summer morning, when the sun was struggling with the mists and foul exhalations, was a perfect *rus in urbe*. The sound of the Italian’s organ was drowned by the notes of birds, as lark, canary, and finch sang one against the other in glorious trills, telling of verdant mead and woodland grove, as they hung in cages by the hundred outside dingy windows high and low.

The shops were full of birds from floor to ceiling. One place had its scores of wooden cages, some eight inches

square, each containing its German canary-immigrant, another window was aviary and menagerie combined; but no shop displayed so great a variety as the one bearing the name of “D. Wragg, Naturalist, Dealer in British and Foreign Birds.”

Grey parrots shrieked, bantams crowed, ferrets writhed and twisted like furry snakes, rabbits thrust their noses between the bars of a parrot’s cage, a pair of hedgehogs lay like prickly balls in the home lately vacated by a lark, and quite a dozen dogs were ranged outside over the area grating, in rabbit-hutches, to the great hindrance of the light and the washing of Mrs Winks, then being carried on in the cellar-kitchen.

There was a door to D. Wragg’s shop, if you could get through it without hanging yourself in the chains, with collars attached, swinging from one post, and avoid knocking down the dragons which watched from the other side.

Not that these last were inimical monsters, for they were but dragon-pigeons, watching with an anxiety in their soft eyes which told of expected food or water.

It was different though with the dogs, since they snapped openly at trousers’ legs, out of which garments, they had been known to take pieces, in spite of a general reputation for harmlessness.

The pinky cockatoos also possessed a firmness of beak that was by no means pleasant if they could manage a snip. But once past the door, and you were pretty safe amidst the wonders which met your eye: a couple of knowing-looking magpies gazing at you sideways; a jay, the business of whose life seemed to be to make two hops with the regularity of a pendulum; squirrels and white mice, which spun round their cages and fidgeted and scratched; a doleful owl blinking in a corner; a large hawk, which glared with wicked eyes from cage to cage, as if asking who would die next to make him a meal, as he stood on one leg, and smelt nasty, in another corner; squealing parroquets and twittering avadavats; bullfinches which professed to pipe, but did not; and a white hare, fast changing its hue, which did tattoo once on the side of its hutch.

And even when you had seen these, you had not seen all, for in every available or unavailable place there was something stowed, living or dead.

Love-birds cuddled up together, budgerigars whistled and scratched, while in one large wire cage, apparently quite content, about fifty rats scurried about or sat in heaps, with their long, worm-like tails hanging out in all directions from between the wires, as if they were fishing for food, and snatched at the chance of getting a bite. One sage grey fellow sat up in a corner, in an attitude evidently copied from a feline enemy, whom he imitated still further as he busied himself over his toilet, pawing and smoothing his whiskers, like an old buck of a rat as he undoubtedly was, and happily ignorant that before many hours were past he would be sold with his fellows by the dozen, and called upon to utter his last squeak while helping to display the gameness of one of the steel-trap-jawed terriers, trying so hard to strangle themselves, and making their eyeballs protrude as they hung by their collars, tugging in the most insensate way at chains that would not break.

And here, amidst trill, whistle, screech, squeak, coo, snarl, and bark—amongst birdseed, German paste, rat and mouse traps, cages, new and secondhand, besides the other wonders which helped to form D. Wragg’s stock-in-trade, was Patty Pellet, whose bright, bird-like voice vied with those of the warblers around, and whose soft, plump form looked as tender, as lovable, and as innocent as that of one of the creamy doves that came to her call, perched upon her shoulder, and—oh, happy dove!—fed from the two ruddy, bee-stung, honeyed lips, that pouted and offered a pea or a crumb of bread to the softly cooing bird, which seemed to gaze lovingly at the bright face, the brighter for the dark framing of misery, vice, and wretchedness by which it was here surrounded.

Patty was enjoying herself that morning, seeing, as she called it, to Janet’s pets; for in spite of the vileness of the neighbourhood, she was often here, in consequence of her strange friendship for the adopted daughter of Monsieur Canau, who lodged on D. Wragg’s first floor. The acquaintanceship had originated in the visits of the Frenchman and his ward to the house in Duplex Street in quest of violin-strings, and through similarity of tastes, had ripened into affection between the girls, in spite of something like dislike evinced at first by Jared Pellet, and something more than dislike displayed by his wife, who, however, ended by yielding, and treating in the most motherly fashion the object of Patty’s regard, and of late many pleasant evenings had been spent by Canau and Janet in Jared Pellet’s modest parlour, on which occasions the little house resounded with wondrous strains, until the children were so wakeful that they rose in revolt, and the instruments had to be silenced.

Patty’s friend had just left her visitor and gone up-stairs in answer to a summons from Monsieur Canau, while the proprietor of all this wealth sat in his back room, a pleasant museum of stuffed departed stock-in-trade. He was smoking his pipe, and spelling over the morning’s paper, taking great interest in the last garrotting case—merely called, in those days, a violent assault—so that Patty, left alone, was enjoying herself, as was her custom, in dispensing seed, red sand, chickweed, and groundsel, and other food—with water unlimited—to the hungry many.

“Have you brought me anythink to do for you, my dovey?” said a voice, and a round red fat face appeared from somewhere, being thrust into the shop between a parrot’s cage, and a bunch of woolly and mossy balls, such as are supplied to young birds about to set up housekeeping.

“Nothing this morning, Mrs Winks,” trilled Patty.

“Not nothink, my dovey? no collars, nor hankychys, nor cuffs? The water’s bilin’, and the soap and soda waitin’, so don’t say as you’ve brought nothink as I can wash.”

“Nothing—nothing—nothing,” laughed Patty; “but be a dear old soul, and fetch me a pail of clean water, so that I can fill the globe for Janet before she comes back.”

“Of course I will, my pet; only fetch me the pail, or I shall be knocking of something down if I come any further.”

Patty handed the pail as requested to Mrs Winks, correcting very mildly a spaniel that leaped up at her as she did so. She then disappeared for a few minutes, to return bearing in her little hands a large globe, in which were sailing round and round half-a-dozen goldfish, staring through the glass in a stupid contented way, as their bright scales glistened and their fat mouths opened and shut in speechless fashion. Then, as she set the globe down upon the counter, there came a loud panting from the passage—a heavy rustling—and the next moment it was evident that Mrs Winks had made her way to the front, for she now puffed her way in at the shop-door, bearing the well-filled pail.

“Oh, how kind!” cried Patty; “I could have taken it in at the side.”

“You look fit to carry pails, now, don’t you, you kitten; it’s bad enough to let you come here at all,” said the stout dame, smiling; and she stood, very tubby in shape, and rested her pinky, washing-crinkled hands for a moment upon her hips; then she wiped her nose upon her washed-out print apron; and lastly, as Patty stooped to pour the water from the globe, and replenish it with fresh, Mrs Winks softly took a step nearer, and just once gently stroked the young girl’s fair glossy hair, drawing back her hand the next instant as Patty looked up and smiled.

“Ah, my dovey! why, here’s Mounseer just going out for his walk!” exclaimed Mrs Winks, as the little, shabby yellow-faced Frenchman squeezed into the shop through the side-door, his shoulders hoisted nearly to his ears, and his hands occupied the one with a cigarette, the other with a tasselled cane.

“Ah! tenez then, dogs,” he cried, thumping his cane upon the floor, for he had been saluted with a barking chorus. “Janet will soon be down,—and how is my little one?”

Patty held out her hand, when, laying his cigarette upon the counter, the old man took off his hat, placed it in the same grasp that held his cane, and then, with the grace of an old courtier, kissed the little round fingers that were extended to him. Directly after, he replaced his hat, but only to raise it again in salute to Mrs Winks, who acknowledged the act of courtesy by shortening herself two inches, and then rising to her normal height and breadth.

“I was just going to say, Mounseer, that if all people were as polite as you, how easy we could get along; and that if I was like Miss Patty here, people wouldn’t be so rude and queer when one goes round with the basket.”

“Aha! they are rude, then, those people in the galleree?”

“Rude ain’t nothing to it, Mr Canau; they makes way fast enough for the man with the porter, but when I’m coming with my basket of apples, oranges, biscuits, ginger-beer, and bills of the play, they goes on dreadful, a-sticking out their knees and grumbling, and a-hindering one to that degree, that you’ve no idee what a heat I’m in when I’ve gone down a row; and never gets half round before the curting rises again, let alone their remarks about being fat—just as if I made myself fat, which I don’t; and, as I says to one hungry-looking fellow, I says, ‘If I was as thin as you, I’d be a super still, and you admiring of me, instead of my having to supply people’s nasty animal wants, and being abused for it.’ For—I put it to you now, Mr Canau—can people do without their apples, and oranges, and things, when a play’s long and heavy? and I’m sure I’ve helped many a noo piece to a success, when it would—Oh, if there isn’t the water a-bilin’ over!”

With an agility and lightness almost corklike, Mrs Winks, warned by a strong and pungent odour steaming up between the boards, hurried down below; the little Frenchman lit his cigarette, kissed his hand to Patty, and then shuffled in his well-worn and cracked Wellington boots from the shop.

Patty, quite at home, refilled her bright bowl with water, and bore it through the side-door, and then returned to continue supplying the many wants around; but only to be interrupted by a fresh comer—a barefooted, round-faced, ragged man, smoking a short black pipe, but bent almost double beneath the heavy basket he bore, one which required a great deal of manoeuvring to get it past the cages, in addition to a great many low adjurations, in a husky voice, to “come on then!” or to “get out!” But at last it was safely deposited beside the counter, when the bearer made quite an Indian salaam, bending low in salutation to the smiling girl.

“That’s the werry last noo bow, Miss. I larnt that of my friend Jammesie Jeejeewo, what plays the little tom-tom drum with his fingers outside the public-houses of a night, and sings ‘Fa-la-ma-sa-fa-la-ta;’ and sells scent-packets, and smiles like a nigger all day long in Oxford Street. He’s own brother to the opium-eating cove as has allers got the cold shiver and freeze, and sweeps the crossin’ at the Cirkis. That’s it, Miss,” he said, bowing again with outstretched hands. “Blame the thing! what are you up to?” he shouted, shaking and snapping his soft fingers, one of which had come in contact with the cage of a hungry parrot, and been smartly nipped.

“Well, Dick!” said Patty, kindly.

“Well, Miss, but where’s Miss Janet? But, there! love and bless your pretty face, Miss, it’s a treat to see you here. Why, you makes the shop full of sunshine, and the birds to sing happier than if they was far away amongst their own woods and fields. But now to business, Miss,” he exclaimed, as, stooping to the basket on the floor, he brought out, piled one upon the other, a dozen freshly-cut, green, round, cheese-plate-like clover turves. “Tuff’s is getting werry skeerce, Miss; and will you tell Miss Janet as they’ve riz another penny a dozen? Penny a mile miss, accorden’ to Act of Parlyment. Every mile I goes farther away, I puts on a penny a dozen. They won’t let you cut ’em anywheres; and I got these four mile t’other side Pa’an’ton. I’m blest if there’ll be a bit of country soon, or a blessed scrap of chickweed or grunsel, or a tuff to cut anywheres. There wouldn’t be no water-creases if people didn’t grow ’em a purpose; and that’s what I shall have to do with grunsel—have a farm and grow it by the acre. You know, Miss, the bricks and mortar frightens the green stuff; and it goes farder and farder away, till it costs me a pound a year more for shoe-leather than it did a time ago.”

“Come, Dick, business,” said Patty, smiling at his earnestness; “I’m mistress just now.”

“To be sure, Miss—business,” said Dick. “Grunsel, Miss; there you are. Chickweed, green as green, and fresh as a

daisy; plantain—there's a picter—there's fine long stalks, as full of seeds as Injin corn, and 'most as big; but blow my rags, if I don't think this here's the werry last to be got."

As he spoke, the man placed the various bunches he had enumerated upon the counter, and then looked up smiling in Patty's face as she spoke.

"Why, Janet says you tell her that story, Dick, every time you come," laughed Patty, as she paid him the money, obtained from the inner room, while every coin the man took he rubbed upon his eyelids for luck, as he said, before wrapping them all in the piece of dirty rag which served him for a purse.

"Well, Miss, I know I've often said so; but really things is now growing to a pretty pass, and you've no idea the miles I have to tramp. Now, look ye there! What do you say to that, Miss Patty? That's for you and Miss Janet, poor lass. She love flowers, she do. Them sorter things don't grow amongst scaffle-poles and mortar-boards and contractors' brick-rubbidge. Why, I had to go—"

"O Dick! O Dick! you good fellow! Oh, how sweet!" exclaimed Patty, with sparkling eyes, as the rough fellow brought from out of his basket, with the dew yet heavy upon their petals, a bunch of wild-flowers—late violets, blue-bells, primroses, and the peachy wood-anemone.

She took them from him with almost childish joy, smelt them, kissed them, and then for a moment held them to her breast, but only to dart into the back room for a little common vase, to fill it with water, and then carefully place the flowers within it.

"I thought as you'd like 'em," said the man, as he watched her with glittering eye; "but they're getting werry skeerce, Miss; and what with the building and 'closing commons, and shutting up of Epping Foresses, there soon won't be no more flowers for poor people, only in shop winders and grand ladies' bonnets, and of course they won't smell. You mark my words, Miss; afore long, London'll get to be so big that it'll fill up all England, and swaller up all the country, so that they'll have to build right out all round into the sea, and get their grunsel and chickweed for singin' birds from furrin parts."

"It was very kind of you, though, Dick, to think of us," said Patty; and she held out her hand with a coin or two half-hidden therein; but the rough gipsy fellow shook his head, as he struggled against the temptation, for it was hard work to refuse money; then stooping, he occupied his hands with the straps of his basket.

"I don't want no payin' for 'em, Miss. I ain't forgot the many a good turn she done my poor missus. I aint half outer debt yet. Besides, I'm flush just now; got a good two bobs' worth o' stuff, if I'm lucky, and here goes to sell it. Miss Janet all right?"

As the answer came in the affirmative, the man guided his basket out, and commenced singing in a sonorous minor key—

"Chickweed and grunsel for your singin' birds!" as he turned to go down the street, rubbing his eyes with the knuckles of one hand. "Might ha' been like her, if she'd on'y ha' lived," he muttered; and then, giving his eyes another rub, the dirty knuckles of his hand glistened as if with moisture, as he gave his strap and basket another hitch before going any farther.

Chickweed Dick was gone; but he only gave place to one Chucky, who drew a donkey-cart to the door, and brought in a basket of red sand. Then came boys to ask the price of guinea-pigs and white mice; boys to offer squirrels or hedgehogs for sale—miry and dusty boys, with the marks of the shires upon their shabby garb, to indicate long tramps, as bits of hay and straw whispered of nights passed beneath some friendly stack; but the proprietor of this Noah's ark was already overstocked, and, in spite of references made by Patty, there was no dealing.

Patty meanwhile sang on as she fed the rest of the stock; and as if in emulation, the birds whistled loudly, darting eagerly at their cage bars, as she distributed the green food brought by Dick; but her song suddenly ceased, as did that of the birds, when a heavy-looking gaol-typical young fellow, in a sleeved vest, entered the shop, breathed hard, and then, staring offensively at Patty the while, asked to look at some finches.

Patty, glancing at the room door to see if any one was coming, lifted down a cage containing perhaps a score; but the gentleman seemed hard to please, pointing out failings here and there in the various birds, till he seemed to fix the poor girl with his stare, though she kept striving to master her trepidation, and to hide from her unpleasant visitor the fact that his presence caused her dread.

"I say," he whispered, suddenly; "I say," and he leaned across the counter.

The movement seemed to break the spell, for Patty now made an effort to retreat to the back room; but, in a moment, the fellow had stretched out one long, gorilla-like arm, effectually barring her way, when hawk and dove seemed to stand in the naturalist's shop, eye to eye, the weak quailing before the strong.

A loud rustle of a newspaper within ended the scene, for, starting at the sound, the rough visitor turned his attention to the birds once more, and re-commenced his fault-finding, giving Patty time to recover herself, and to redden with anger at what she was ready to call her cowardice when there was some one in the next room.

"You see it ain't for myself," said the fellow, once more fixing his gaze on Patty, but turning the cage round the while; "it wouldn't matter if I wanted it; but he'll have to come and pick one for hisself. I don't think I'll take one to-day."

Patty was about to take back the cage, but with a grin and a repetition of the hard breathing, the fellow drew it farther away.

There was again the rustling of the newspaper. A moment after, the proprietor was heard to rise, and then he jerked himself into the shop, to attend to the customer.

Patty, glad to get away, hurried into the back room, when a sharp piece of bargaining ensued between customer and dealer, ending, as might have been foreseen, in the former finding all possible fault, and then declining to purchase, as he went outside to stand staring heavily through the window, ostensibly at its contents, but really to see if Patty returned.

Volume One—Chapter Fourteen.

Janet.

Mr D. Wragg rented the whole of the house in Brownjohn Street, and his lodgers were confined to Mrs Winks and the little Frenchman, the attics being used for store purposes—old cages, birdseed, bundles of herbs, bags of feathers, cobwebs, and dust.

These attics formed a part of the house rigidly tabooed by the dealer, who only gave a comical twitch to his countenance, and jerked his body from head to heel when Mrs Winks complained that she had not had a bit of sleep for the howlings of some dreadful dog there confined.

Patty did not return into the shop, but began slowly to ascend the stairs, pausing at the first landing to fall into an attitude of attention, holding the balustrade and listening eagerly, as from below came the twittering of birds, and from above—in long-drawn, nerve-thrilling tones—sounds that seemed to have a strange effect upon the girl, as she stood in the full light of the landing-window, her eyes half-closed, her face upturned, and her lips parted, as though to give passage to a sigh.

But there was no sigh, no utterance, no motion; only the same strained aspect of attention, as still, from above stairs, came the sounds—now low, almost to fading away, now powerful and loud—but always with the same effect, that of chaining Patty to where she stood.

She might well listen as if entranced, for from above, with every note given with a feeling that seemed to find its echo in the listener’s ears, came floating softly down, the melody of “Ah, non giunge!” evidently played upon a violin of fine and sonorous tone, every bar sweet, pure, and clear, and softened by the distance into a strain which seemed to have floated into the dingy house from some brighter region.

Then, after a pause of a few moments, there was a change, the player turning off into a wild and eccentric variation upon the theme, now loud and sparkling in the major key—now plaintive and thrilling in the minor.

But this lasted only a short time, for as Patty once more began to ascend the stairs, the violinist dashed off into a French mazurka, with such spirit and brilliancy, that the notes seemed to be trilling out in joyous laughter, setting Patty’s head nodding to the gay refrain.

The next minute she had opened a door and stood in the presence of the player, who put down her instrument upon the table, and moved slowly across the room to catch the young girl’s extended hands, and apologise for not coming down again.

Canau’s room was bare and cheerless; a table, a few chairs, a couple of roughly-made music-stands, and a pile of torn, stained, yellow-leaved, printed, and manuscript music, were the principal objects that met the gaze; but Patty—whose presence lent a brightness to the blank place—seemed to have no eye for aught but the swarthy, deformed girl, whom she kissed affectionately.

Perhaps no greater contrast could have been seen than the sweet happy face of Patty, with her bright brown hair and peachy complexion—peachy with its soft down, and contrasts of creamy white and delicate pink; and that of Janet—she was known by no other name—the dark, deformed girl, who had been brought up by Monsieur Canau, the little French musician, now taking his morning promenade and indulging in his only extravagance—his second cigarette—a pinch of the commonest tobacco, rolled in one of the gummed squares of tissue-paper prepared for him by the girl who shared his poverty and had been taught his art.

The vital spark of life was bright and vivid, shooting keenly now from two dark eyes; but as for the fleshly case that held this vital spark, the wonder was that it should possess any shape at all, so fearful a moulding must it have received in its early plastic days, and not that the poor girl’s head should be close down between her shoulders, and that in form she should be diminutive and shrunken.

“I was tired of waiting, and had been listening ever so long,” said Patty, drawing a little white finger across the violin-strings. “I wish I were clever, too, and could play.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed the other, harshly. “I’m ashamed of it sometimes. It isn’t a woman’s instrument; but it pleases him for me to play, and I get to like it now; one seems almost able to make it speak and tell one’s feelings—sending them floating away into the air,” she continued, dreamily gazing before her. “It makes one think and think, and seem to be living another kind of life; and I am far away from here, Patty, sometimes when I am playing,—perhaps along with you and the little innocent children, and your father and mother,—perhaps far away in the country, amongst the flowers, where there’s no noise in the streets, no shouting, shrieks, oaths, nor misery, nor dirt. There!” she said, suddenly, as if she had been brought back to the present, “I know what you are thinking.”

“Indeed!” laughed Patty.

“Yes; you think I’m odd and strange in my way. Ah! I wish I were like you.”

“And sometimes,” rejoined Patty softly, turning very serious, and stooping to pass one arm round the deformed girl, and bending so that her cheek touched the other’s dark sallow face,—“sometimes, Jenny, I wish that I were like you—oh! yes—so much—so much; for I’m not happy, Jenny—not happy!”

She repeated these words in a quiet thoughtful way, sinking at last upon her knees by the other’s side, when, laying her hand, long and bony of finger, upon the bonny little head, Janet pressed it closely to her misshapen breast, from which burst sigh after sigh, till, waking as it were from her dreamy thoughts, Patty forced a smile, and springing up, kissed Janet again and again.

“There! what nonsense!” she cried, lightly. “I’m crying too, and pray what about? Let’s see how these goldfish are. Why, quite lively,” she exclaimed, drawing her friend to the window, where, half-screened by a faded curtain, the gorgeous little pets sailed round and round in their crystal prison.

“Do you ever think it childish of me, liking to keep them?” said Janet, after a pause, during which, as they clung together, the two girls had been watching the fish, one of which rose to the surface, and, with its little gasping lips touched lightly the pinky finger-tip Patty placed beneath the water.

“Sometimes,” continued Janet, “it is so dull, so lonesome, in spite of the busy noises coming from the street. Wragg is kind, and so is poor old Mrs Winks; but—but,” hesitated the girl, “there are times when I don’t wish to be with them. He is often away for hours together, and one cannot always be at music; and then it is that I like to go down-stairs, and be with the little prisoned birds and things. And somehow they seem to know me, and flutter and leap to welcome me when I come. But you don’t think it childish?”

“Childish? No!” was the reply, as Patty again dipped a finger to have it saluted by the fish. “I love to come and feed the birds myself; but I would take them, if I could, all far away into the bright happy country, and then open the cage-doors and set them free one by one—one by one. How they would leap, and dart, and flutter as they felt the soft air waiting for them! I think it would be real happiness to see the little things leave off beating their breasts as they tried to get out; and then to listen to them singing from some tree!”

“Or else see some cruel hawk come and seize one,” said Janet, bitterly.

“Heigho! perhaps yes,” sighed Patty; “there’s always something to make life unhappy.”

“I like the goldfish,” said Janet, without seeming to heed the sigh. “They always put me in mind of lying there—just there!” and she pointed to a corner by the window, “when I was little and could not walk, but only lay there all day with my back aching, as I stretched out my hands to touch one of the little bright things as they sailed so easily round and round. I must have been very very little when he bought the first to please me. But Patty, Patty!” she exclaimed, as she peered in the other’s eyes, “what made you sigh, and say that there was always something to make you unhappy?”

Patty was silent, and gazed thoughtfully at the fish, as another, seeking the food so often given, rose and touched her finger.

“What did you mean?” said Janet again, bending forward to gaze in the soft grey eyes. “It was not because I spoke of the hawk?”

Patty shook her head.

“Well, perhaps not altogether—I mean, I don’t know,” she said, in a slow hesitating way. “But really I must go home now; I promised not to be very long.”

Janet watched her eagerly, then, as if to change the subject, kissed her affectionately, and thanked her for what she had done below, ending, at Patty’s wish, by putting on her bonnet and accompanying her friend back to Duplex Street, D. Wragg being charged with a message for Monsieur Canau, who, according to custom on such occasions, came for his adopted daughter in the evening.

Volume One—Chapter Fifteen.

Husband and Wife.

Nimrod may have been a mighty hunter in his day, but he was never anything to compare with Jared Pellet, who for twenty long years—that is to say, years of the ordinary length—had engaged in the chase of one savage, long-fanged, dire, snarling brute of a wolf, a hungry grinning wretch, grey and grim, and ever licking his thin gums. Old and lank he was, but a very giant in endurance; and very often circumstances were reversed, the hunter becoming the hunted, when it took all Jared’s strength and courage to keep the wolf at bay.

That wolf had lain down his long, lean, hungry form at Jared’s door when he married, and, on and off, he had been there ever since. What were Nimrod’s feats to hunting or keeping at bay a wolf for twenty long years? Jared Pellet had done all this, and was ready to keep up the struggle with the wolf Poverty so long as he had breath left in his body.

They were busy in Duplex Street as usual. Jared was wax-ending a cracked clarionet, pausing every now and then to apply the reed to his lips and breathe out such a wail as would have produced goose-skin upon a stranger. Here, though it had no effect upon Mrs Jared, who was stitching hard, nor upon Patty, bending over her work, there was

another present who winced slightly, namely, Janet, who was paying one of her many visits to her friend; and as each wail arose, she drew in her breath between her set teeth and slightly knitted her brow. Then catching Patty's eye, the latter smiled and rose, and the two girls left the room to husband and wife.

"Ah!" said Mrs Jared, as soon as they were alone, "I do wish poor Canau would leave that horrid place."

"Used to it, and won't," said Jared, supplementing his speech with a dismal "too-hoo" from the clarionet.

"I don't like to be unkind to poor Janet," said Mrs Jared; "but I'm always in dread of something happening when Patty goes there."

"Too-hoo, too-roo, roo-roo," blew Jared from the half-cobbled instrument. "Hen's anxiety about her chicks!"

"Chicks! yes;" said Mrs Jared with a sigh, her thought's current turned. "It is such a drawback having so many children, as well as the anxiety; what with the doctor and the nurse, and dear, dear, the extravagance of the old things, it is really dreadful; and when I'm up-stairs and can't help myself, I do so fidget about the expense. The tea that goes when Patty is not there is really infamous. I'm sure it's never used. And when you buy black at three shillings, and green at four, Mr Timson's best, it worries you terribly. If ever—you know what I mean—and I wanted one again poor Mrs Nimmer had promised to come, if I'd set her free on Saturdays for dusting, and, of course, on Sundays, and now she's ill."

From the wail which now arose from the clarionet it might have been supposed that Mrs Nimmer had been dead, but Jared did not speak.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs Jared, "if we did not have so many children!"

"What's the good of grumbling?" grunted Jared; and then there was silence, only broken by the clicking of needle against thimble.

"When was she taken ill?" said Mrs Jared then.

"What? Mrs Nimmer?—last week. Break up, I think. She's past seventy."

Mrs Jared sighed again, and then Jared took up the ball as he went on busily cleaning the keys of the instrument.

"Children are expensive luxuries. Costly; they do eat so furiously; and I don't believe there ever were such children as ours to eat—bless 'em. Poor folks' children ought to be born without appetites, instead of coming into the world with a double share. Some people do, I think, reckon the poor to be a different race to their noble selves; and if they are to be so looked on, it does seem a pity that Nature don't take the matter up and cover them with feathers or wool. What a saving it would be if they'd only moult every year and come out in a new suit!"

"Jared, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said his wife.

"So I am, my dear," said Jared, screwing up his face; "but it was you who grumbled. 'Like as the arrows in the hand of a giant;' and 'Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them.' That's it, isn't it? But they didn't pay rent and rates and taxes in those days, and every man had his own freehold in the land of Israel. Ah! there was no Duplex Street in the land in those days."

"Nor no Decadia," said Mrs Jared, tartly.

"No," said Jared, "nor no St Runwald's. By the way, I wonder who used to mend their musical instruments at that time."

Here Jared gave a loud nasal "whang-whung" upon the clarionet.

"There were the trumpets they blew before Jericho, you know," he continued. "They must have got cracked some time or other. They couldn't have had organs though, and Ichabods wern't invented to blow. 'To repairing clarionet, ninepence,'" he muttered, writing a little entry in a pocket-book. "Never mind the expense, my dear. Look at the breed: not such children anywhere. Talk about arrows: sharp as needles. I wish, though, you'd ask that little one of Tim's here to play with them a little oftener. I like the child, and—and well there, I believe it's really an act of kindness."

"Poor little thing, yes," said Mrs Jared; "but she's not like a child; she's so old and strange, and don't seem to mix with them. Mr Ruggles came this afternoon just as Janet came up to the door."

"Tim Ruggles—what did he want? I don't owe him a penny."

"Don't talk in that way, dear, just as if all the people who came to the house wanted money."

"Well, don't they?" said Jared.

"No, dear, of course not, not all; and I don't think you ought to speak like that."

"Consequences of long habit, my dear," said Jared.

"And besides, Mr Ruggles never troubled you for money, though it has been owing to him sometimes till I've been ashamed to see him."

"That beautiful wife of his has though," said Jared, nursing one leg by the fire as he stirred the glue now melting in

the little pot, preparing for some fresh piece of music cobbling.

Mrs Jared winced and looked uncomfortable.

“Bullied me terribly one day for two and ninepence. Bother the Jezebel! I hate her, if it’s only for the way in which she ill-uses that child. ’Pon my soul,” exclaimed Jared excitedly, “I feel sometimes as if I could take the little thing away.”

Here Jared stirred the glue so viciously, that a portion fell over into the fire, and a vile savour arose in his nostrils.

“But it was about her he came to-day,” said Mrs Jared, nervously.

“What! little Pine?”

“No; about Mrs Ruggles,” said Mrs Jared, speaking very hurriedly. “He says there is no doubt about poor Mrs Nimmer never being able again to perform her duties; and he wants you to use any little influence you may have with Mr Gray and Mr Timson.”

“What for—mending?” said Jared.

“No, no; to back Mrs Ruggles in trying to get the appointment of pew-opener.”

“What! Mrs Ruggles?”

“Yes, dear,” exclaimed Mrs Jared, laying down her work.

“I’ll see her—”

“And if you will,” continued Mrs Jared, hastily interrupting her husband, whose glue was again in the fire, “he says that she will not mind the distance.”

“I shouldn’t think she would,” exclaimed Jared. “Why, she’d scourge us all. Why, I hate her and she hates me, and has done ever since I spoke about her ill-using the little one. Why, before I’d stir a step to get the nasty old cat the post, I’d—”

“And Mr Ruggles says, if you would speak for her, he thinks her having occupation away would make it pleasanter for those at home, and little Pine would be more left to him; and it would be conferring an obligation upon him that he would never forget.”

“Bother the fellow! why did he put it like that, so as to make a man eat his words? Why, I hate to see the nasty one-sided looks of the woman; and I know if I help her into the church, she’ll do me an ill turn for it some time or other.”

“Nonsense,” cried Mrs Jared. “Depend upon it the woman has some good qualities.”

“Ah! it’s all very fine!” said Jared. “You’d take the very devil’s part, if you saw him in trouble.”

“Hush!” exclaimed Mrs Jared; “and now you’ll do your best now, won’t you, and do Mr Ruggles a good turn?”—the Mr was slightly emphasised. “I promised him you would.”

“Men are lords of the creation,” muttered Jared; “man is a free agent. Ah, well! are we going out to-night?”

“Yes, and to see Janet home,” was the reply; and soon after, Mrs Jared stood, big basket in hand, and ready, for it was marketing night, and there were the wants of the household to supply.

Volume One—Chapter Sixteen.

Purkis’s Emporium.

“I’m always glad to get out of this place,” said Mrs Jared; and she hurried her steps as they turned out of Brownjohn Street, where they had left Janet in safety, Monsieur Canau being absent at his theatrical duties; but they had seen D. Wragg, who had insisted upon Jared taking back a couple of unfortunate sparrows in a paper-bag. “Just to please the children,” the dealer had said. They had also seen Mrs Winks, and made an appointment with that lady concerning soap and soda: and now the providing had to be attended to in the busy street to which they made their way.

It was sharp work that providing, now at the butcher’s, now at the greengrocer’s, and now at the grocer’s that was not green; then they went to get a piece of the very fine prime old Cheshire from the next shop, with five eggs for sixpence, and butter and lard. Then the big basket began to grow heavy, and there was no more room in Jared’s pockets, nor yet under Mrs Jared’s shawl; and their steps were directed, as Jared supposed, homewards, as he groaned beneath his load.

For Jared Pellet always was loaded. No sooner did he take a weight off his shoulders than one asserted itself upon his mind. But it did not matter, he said, so long as he did not get so much more than his share. Upon the present occasion he felt like a man carrying a sheet of plate-glass down Fleet Street; for he had apples in the same pocket with the eggs, and that pocket being disposed to bulge, people would keep coming in contact, even though he used a market bunch of greens as the “ease-her-stop-her” boys do the fenders on the “Citizen” steamers to soften collision or contact with pier.

Then, too, there was Mrs Jared to protect in the crowd, for she was a very little woman; and though she would not

own to it, that big basket bothered her sadly, being a regular tyrant, and, in spite of the coolness of the night, keeping her in a profuse perspiration.

It really was a brute of a basket—one of those wicker enormities with a cross handle, two flaps, and a large interior. Plenty of room when you could get anything inside; but an abomination of obstinacy, which seemed to like to have goods carried half in and half out, top-heavy fashion, with the flap lids cocked up and in the way of the handle.

And so it was upon the night in question; nothing would pack in as it should. The potatoes certainly did dive in properly when the scale was turned up; but the beef would not enter in spite of all the coaxing and contriving bestowed. No; it would not go in, but broke the wedge of fine old Cheshire all to crumbs; and there it was being carried home with the rough, red, freshly-sawed bone sticking out, and anointing with wet marrow Mrs Jared's second-best shawl. Even the tea-paper was broken, and "Timson's fine old family mixture" escaping in secret amongst the potatoes. However the moist sugar was safe, for it was being carried is a brown paper cone, balanced inside Jared's hat, to the serious alarm of the two sparrows, till Jared stopped for a moment at a street corner and let them fly.

Any one with sympathetic feelings will easily understand that homely shopping under such circumstances was rather trying to the temper. Mrs Jared's temper was tried, but it only displayed itself in slight compressions of her lips; and even this outward and visible sign of something wrong soon passed off, giving place to an air of anxiety as they passed through a by-street, where she suddenly arrested her husband.

The stopping-place was at a liberally painted shoemaker's shop, over which, in large letters, shone the golden words, "Purkis's Boot and Shoe Emporium," while the gilt flourishes and bands upon the board seemed to remind the beholder strangely of the beadle's uniform and wand of office.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jared, waking up from a dream of Farmer's *Gloria in Excelsis*, "What do you want here?"

"Only to tell Mr Purkis to send for Totty's little boots," said Mrs Jared.

Jared was satisfied, and they entered, sending a small bell hung upon the half door into a very rage of ringing, to summon attendance, although the owner of the establishment was ponderously taking the measure of a customer's foot, by means of a long slip of paper and a sliding rule, slowly the while making entries upon the said white slip, and afterwards smearing them out and re-writing them. The next minute, though, he had fallen into a state of doubt, and measured again, till, in his confusion, he not only made himself extremely inky, but blotted his customer's white stockings.

But at last Mr Purkis had finished, sighed relief, dismissed the measured lady, with a promise very doubtful of fulfilment, taken off his glasses, and then turned to welcome his visitors, Mr Jared Pellet, organist of his (Mr Purkis's) church, being a customer held by him in some reverence.

A very warm, moist man was Mr Purkis in all weathers, and during conversation he was always busy dabbing his forehead, or wiping his neck or hands, even continuing the desiccating process sometimes within his shirt-collar; but his broad face was wreathed with smiles, and a Chesterfield could not have been more polite to his visitors as he responded to Jared's inquiries about his health.

"Not very well, sir," said Mr Purkis, taking up a huge clump-soled boot. "I've been a deal worried to-day, sir, over this boot. Mr D. Wragg's, sir, as you recommended to come to me, and that leg of his as is shorter than the other never seems to keep the same length two days together, and I can't get the sole thick enough, even now. But he's a good customer all the same, and I thank you ever so much for recommending me to him. Make that dark gi—young lady's boots too, I do, sir; her as comes with the little Frenchman; but where he picks up *his* boots, I don't know."

Here Mrs Jared cut a long story short by speaking about Totty's shoes.

He would send for those little shoes first thing in the morning, without fail; but would not Mr and Mrs Pellet step in.

Jared thought not, but Mrs Jared took the opposite, for she had other thoughts than shoes upon her mind; so declaring herself to be tired, she followed Mr Purkis into the back room, where Mrs Purkis left off ironing to dust a couple of chairs, and drew a small black saucepan, simmering upon the hob, a little farther from the cheery blaze.

"Poor Mrs Nimmer's dead and gone, sir," said Mr Purkis.

"Indeed!" said Jared and his wife together.

"Yes, sir—went very suddenly—only this very afternoon, sir. Forty year had she been pew-opener at St Runnles—twenty year before I took the beadleship."

The conversation had taken the very turn Mrs Jared desired; in fact, she had dragged Jared round in order to enlist Mr Purkis upon their side—at all events, to prevent him from trying to run a friend of his own. She was somewhat shocked at the suddenness of the beadle's announcement, yet she felt that, for the sake of a family friend, so good an opportunity must not be lost.

"Who is to be the new pew-opener, Mr Purkis?" she said, after a while.

"Who, mum?" said Purkis, after a good wipe; "I don't know, mum, I'm sure. I should like the Missus there to try, but she says she won't."

"Not if I know it, Joseph," exclaimed his lady, as if in doubt whether she might commence the undertaking in ignorance. "Not if I know it, Joseph," she exclaimed, polishing an iron with a duster, after giving it a vicious rub in the

ashes. “If a married woman hasn’t enough to do to mind her own house and bits of things, it’s a pity. The church has got you, and has you a deal away from the business with weddings and such; and besides, I never opened pews, and I’m too old to learn now.”

“Perhaps Mrs Purkis will think better of it,” said Mrs Jared.

“Better of it! No, ma’am; nor worse, neither. I shall never commit myself by doing of it, as I’ve told Joseph a score of times.”

“Then, under those circumstances, perhaps Mr Purkis would not mind helping a friend of ours to obtain that post?”

“Friend of yours, mum?” said Purkis, eagerly; “I’d do all I could in my way, mum, though that wouldn’t be much. But,” he exclaimed, as a bright thought seemed to strike him, “I could keep other people away.”

“But that would hardly be fair,” observed Mrs Jared.

“Perhaps we had better not go into that part of the business, mum,” said Mr Purkis, with dignity. “Elections is things as ladies don’t understand; and those in elections have to serve their own friends, and serve out their enemies. What we want to do is to remember Mr Pellet’s kindness.”

“Which we shall never forget,” chimed in Mrs Purkis, looking up from her ironing in support of her husband’s allusion to Jared’s “donus,” and a timely loan supplied at a time when Mr Purkis had got himself into what he termed “a mess” by obliging a friend in a bill transaction.

“’Taint every one as will put himself to inconvenience and help them as is pushed,” said Mr Purkis.

“Which it’s well enough we know that, Joseph,” chimed in Mrs Purkis, halting in her task, and burning the mark of the flat-iron into the garment being smoothed.

“There! I must go, if you are going to keep this on,” exclaimed Jared, rising from the chair in which he had been fidgeting about until it scraped upon the floor. “I can’t stand this, you know,” and he glanced from Purkis to his wife, who was wiping her eye upon the corner of her apron.

“Don’t go, sir, please,” exclaimed Purkis; “for I was going to say—to ask, you know—that is, if you wouldn’t mind—”

Here he made a telegraphic signal with one arm to his wife, and in one sweep indicated “Clear away and lay the cloth.” The signal having the effect upon Mrs Purkis of making her dab down an iron and raise the saucepan lid.

“We’re very homely, Mr Pellet, sir,” she said, as she diffused a savoury odour through the little room; “but if you wouldn’t mind?”

Jared did not wish to stay, but Mrs Jared did, and she had her way, when, over a snug little supper, the pew-opening business was discussed in all its bearings, though frequently during his stay Jared was ready to get up and leave the place in consequence of the beadle’s allusions to his kindness.

It was very plain, though, that Purkis and his wife looked up to their visitors as people far above the ordinary run; and after their departure, Mr Purkis dabbed himself for five minutes, and then, bringing his hand down upon his counter with a loud spang, he exclaimed, like a monarch bestowing dignities—

“She shall have it, that she shall.”

“But, Joseph,” exclaimed his wife, deprecatingly, “whatever you do, don’t commit yourself.”

“Don’t talk stuff,” exclaimed Purkis, fiercely.

“But it wouldn’t be stuff, Joseph, if you was to commit yourself,” whimpered Mrs Purkis.

“Mrs Purkis, ma’am,” said the beadle, donning imaginary robes, “Mr Pellet has asked for the post for a humble friend of his. Mr Pellet’s humble friend shall have it, ma’am, or I’ll know the reason why. Mr Pellet, ma’am, is our friend; and what’s more, or what isn’t more—I won’t say as to that—Mr Pellet, ma’am, is an ornament to my church, for he’s the finest organist in London.”

Volume One—Chapter Seventeen.

Mrs Nimmer’s Successor.

There was no very great difficulty in the matter. Jared Pellet, under protest, wrote a note to the Rev. John Gray, the vicar, telling him that a friend—he haggled a great deal over that word “friend”—would be glad to undertake the duties of pew-opener in the place of the defunct Mrs Nimmer; and the vicar mentioned the matter to his friend Mr Timson, churchwarden and tea-dealer, and both agreed that they would be most happy to oblige Mr Jared Pellet in the matter.

Then Mr Timson had an interview with Jared, and told him personally he would be glad to give his weight to the matter, if Jared’s friend was a worthy suitable woman.

Now there came a hitch in the smoothness, for Jared went home and told his wife that that red-faced old humbug Purkis had played double; and, in fact, he had gone head-dabbing into the presence of the vicar and churchwarden to

tell them he should be glad if the post lately occupied by Mrs Nimmer could be conferred upon a friend of his.

But explanations followed: the two principal candidates were found to be one and the same; and Mrs Tim Ruggles was duly appointed to a post, for whose proper filling she seemed to have been specially manufactured by Dame Nature.

She, that is to say Mrs Tim Ruggles, glided, as it were, into the correct rut upon the very first Sunday—coming to St Runwald's in a mournful-hued dress—a shot putty and soot, while a tightly-fitting cap crowned her head—a cap like a white sarcenet raised pie, all tiny bows and tuckers—none of your fly-away servant-girl style of headdress, but firmly tied beneath her chin with silken strings. Then, too, a prim-white muslin handkerchief encircled her neck, with ends pinned across, and descending to be hidden away and protected by exceedingly stiff, dark-coloured jean stays, whose presence was manifested to the ear of the world at large by divers creaking cracklings, when, by rare chance, Mrs Ruggles slightly bent her fierce body—to the eye, by a little peephole, afforded where one hook in the back of the dress had an antipathy to its kindred loop.

She might have been pew-opener for twenty years from the way in which she performed her duties, even trenching upon Mr Purkis's dominion by frowning at small boys. It was a sight to see the way in which she performed her task, pouncing upon dubious-looking strangers who stood tasting their hats just inside the doors, and, as she could tell in a moment whether or not they were disposed to be generous, placing them in comfortably cushioned seats, where such miserable sinners could not fail to be eased in their consciences. Sometimes she morally took the poor things into custody, and then, like some savage warder, shut them up in cold wooden cells—in corners where it was dark, in black places just below the galleries, in spots beneath the organ, where they sat with a sensation as of liquid thunder being poured upon their heads, or behind pillars where they could not catch a glimpse of the reading-desk, and had to look round the corner at the pulpit. A select few she treated worse than all the rest, shutting them up in the great churchwarden's pew, where they were completely out of sight, Mr Timson monopolising all the hassocks so as to peep over the edge.

A very moral hedgehog was Mrs Ruggles, treating the congregation as if they were so many little Pines intrusted to her charge, and evidently annoyed that she was not allowed, like Mr Purkis, a cane to use *ad libitum*. Had she been in office at a ritualistic church, brawlers would have paused ere they attempted to desecrate the structure. If you went into the church, she looked at you sidewise, and calculated your value in an instant; when, if you obeyed the glance of her eye, well; if not, she held up a finger at you, as if to say, "Come here, sir!" and then—stay away if you dared.

Why! the pew doors never screaked and scrawked when she opened them. She never shut in your coat-tails, or the voluminous folds of a lady's dress; but she punished you severely if ever you attended St Runwald's without books; for she would glide along the aisle like a religious ghost, and thrust a dreadful liver-coloured, dog's-eared, S.P.C.K. prayer-book under your nose, so that you were obliged to take it, and then pay her sixpence as you went out for what you would rather not have had. For, if you had been accustomed all your life to a delicately bound diamond edition, it was not pleasant to stand up in good society holding the sore-edged, workhouse-looking book, while you dared not thrust it out of sight, for she was sure, in that case, to bring you another, to your lasting shame and confusion. It was almost a wonder that people so served ever entered the church again; and the probabilities are that they never would have done so, had not Jared Pellet drawn them thither with his music.

The best way to meet Mrs Ruggles was to be prepared with a pocket edition of the liturgy, when, if it were your custom to stand with hands joined and resting upon the pew-edge, under the impression that you were quite at home in the service, down she would come, for a certainty, her crackling stays heralding her approach. Then the plan was to be ready for her, and, as she rigidly made a thrust at you with the most disreputable book in her collection, ward off her attack with one of Jarkins & Potto's little bijous.

The assertion cannot be authenticated, but it was said that Mrs Ruggles, soon after her appointment, went round to the bookstalls in Holywell Street, and bought up the old prayer-books out of the tea-chests, labelled, "All these at twopence;" and these brutal, loose-leaved, mildewed affairs she used to keep in a box in a corner pew ready to hand, making pounds out of them in the course of the year—a sort of private church-rate of her own.

It was almost startling to hear her, when it had grown too late for fresh comers, when the church was completely filled, and a portion of the congregation was sitting in aisle and nave upon camp-stools and chairs fetched out of the vestry. She would join then in litany and communion, startling the clerk, and getting right before him, so that the congregation would turn and look at her, in admiration or otherwise, but without ruffling in the least the perfect calm of her demeanour.

If a douceur was given to old Purkis, he bent a little, or touched his cocked-hat, or in some way gave you to understand that he was grateful; but not so Mrs Ruggles: she seemed to demand the money of you as a right, and you paid it under protest, feeling somehow obliged to do so, although, when she took it, she seemed to ignore you and your coin at one and the same time. Some people said that she must have paid fees to physicians in her day, and so have learned something of their ways; but how she ever continued to get the sixpences and shillings into her pocket, remains one of the great unsolved mysteries, for she never bent in the slightest degree.

Mr Purkis never took to her, for he declared her to be a woman without a soul for music, since she seemed to make a point of leaving all the dust and cobwebs she could about the organ loft, neglecting it shamefully; which the beadle said was not the thing, seeing who had been the means of getting her the post.

Volume One—Chapter Eighteen.

Official.

“A most valuable woman, Timson,” the vicar said to the churchwarden; “most suitable person. You never see her flurried when a great many people are waiting for seats.”

“Never,” said Mr Timson, gruffly.

The conversation took place in the vicar’s snuggery, where he and his friend indulged in these unclerical comforts, pipes, gin-and-water, and cribbage.

“Very stiff and formal she is certainly,” said the vicar; “but, somehow, she never seems to give offence.”

“Yes, she does,” said Mr Timson, gruffly; “she offends me; I don’t like her. Wish Mother Nimmer was alive again.”

“Pooh! nonsense! stuff! prejudice!”

“Shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo!” ejaculated Mr Timson. “I haven’t a bit of prejudice in my whole body.”

“I mean,” said the vicar, taking not the slightest notice of the interruption, “she never seems to give offence about people’s sittings; for her’s is a delicate task, and one not easy to manage. I can assure you that I have not had a single complaint as yet, and they used to be constant in Mrs Nimmer’s time.”

“’Fraid of her,” suggested Mr Timson.

“I do wish that you would talk rationally, Timson,” said the vicar.

“Well, that is rationally,” said Mr Timson.

“The church fills uncommonly well now,” observed the vicar, after a pause, so as to start a fresh subject; for Mr Timson was looking red and choleric, and his short hair was standing up all over his head. “The people seem to like those historical sermons. I think I shall continue them.”

“I think I should,” said Timson, drily; “perhaps it might be as well, at the same time, to stop some of the music, or give Mr Pellet a holiday.”

“Why?” said the vicar, sharply.

“Make more room in the church,” said Timson.

“There, there! I won’t quarrel with you Timson,” said the vicar, with some asperity; “but I can understand your allusion, though I won’t notice it. But, to return to the subject, don’t you think that Mrs Ruggles’ salary might be a little raised?”

“No,” said Mr Timson, stoutly; “I don’t think anything of the kind. Why, what for, pray? when the woman has the same as poor old Mrs Nimmer, who was worth a dozen of her.”

“Well, Timson,” said the vicar, quietly, “if you are not disposed to discuss the matter in a liberal spirit, why it had better drop; at least, I think so.”

“So do I,” said the illiberal Timson; and consequently the matter did drop, with the advantage to Mrs Ruggles of making her appear an ill-used woman, much persecuted, in the vicar’s eyes.

For the old gentleman most thoroughly believed in her, from her conduct being so exemplary. Always the same quiet, prim woman, ready at proper times to do her duty; to arrange hassocks at a christening, or to point out the positions for the actors at a hymeneal sacrifice. The vicar was loud in her praise, so loud, indeed, that when with his crony Timson, Mrs Ruggles grew to be quite a bone—or rather bundle of bones—of contention, over which at times they almost quarrelled, for Mr Timson, either from a spirit of opposition, or from genuine dislike, invariably took part against the woman. So near were they to quarrelling at times, that had they been people of a more secular turn, it might have been said that they quite fell out.

The vicar told Timson so more than once, though he would not believe it; for in spite of his friendly feeling and genuine respect for his nominator, the churchwarden could at times be as obstinate as the proverbial pig.

In short, there was a division in the church, for and against Mrs Ruggles, and Purkis told his wife in confidence, that he “couldn’t see it at all; and if it hadn’t been for Pellet—he knowed”—What, he did not say; but he shook and nodded his head a great many times, as he concluded by telling Mrs Purkis that if she had been ruled by him, Mrs Ruggles would never have had the post.

“And you’d never have had a decent bit of hot dinner o’ Sundays,” retorted his lady.

“She’s a deceitful one, that’s what she is,” said Mr Purkis; “and she ain’t going to meddle and interfere with my dooties; so come now!”

“I shouldn’t bemean myself to speak to her, if I was you, Joseph,” said his wife.

“You might just as well have took the place, and gone comfortable to church with me, and come back with me comfortable,” said Mr Purkis, ignoring his wife’s last remark.

“And, as I said before, you never knowing what it was to have hot dinners on Sundays,” retorted Mrs Purkis. “No, not if I know it, Joseph. We’ve been man and wife now turned of thirty year, and never once yet did I give you a cold Sunday-dinner. If I don’t know my duty as a wife by this time it’s a pity.”

Mrs Purkis turned very red in the face as she spoke, and, after the fashion of her husband, shook her head and nodded it, till Mr Purkis, who, if he did not make a god of his gastric region, certainly yielded it the deference due to a monarch, owned that there was something in what she said, when her face resumed its natural hue, which was only a warm pink.

“But it would have been a deal nicer for some things,” said Mr Purkis, who still hung about the subject.

“And a deal nastier for other things, Joseph,” retorted his wife; “and that makes six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.”

“Just so, my dear,” said Mr Purkis, making his first and last attempt at a joke—“six of one in pounds, and half-a-dozen of the other in shillings—six guineas a year, and what you could have made besides, and a very nice thing too.”

“And you growling and grumbling because your Sunday-dinner was always cold,” said Mrs Purkis, resorting once more to her carnal fortification.

“But I don’t know, now, but what that would have been better,” said the beadle, indulging in a habit which he had learned of a stout alderman and magistrate, who believed in its awe-inspiring qualities, and often tried it on small pickpockets, while Mr Purkis was so pleased with it that he always wore it with his beadle’s uniform, and practised it frequently upon Ichabod Gunnis, though with so little effect that the said young gentleman only imitated him as soon as his back was turned, frowning, blowing out his cheeks, and then letting them collapse again. “I don’t know, my dear,” said Mr Purkis, “but what it would have been better than to have had that woman always pottering about in my church.”

“And never even had the decency to call in and thank us for the pains we took,” said Mrs Purkis, “or to drop in occasional for a friendly cup o’ tea, and a mossle of toast, as anybody else would; or come in and sit down sociably as poor Mrs Nimmer would, and ready at any time to take up a bit o’ needlework, or a stocking, and have a quiet chat.”

“Well,” said Mr Purkis, whose thoughts were evidently running quite as much upon Sunday-dinners as upon pew-openers, “it’s of no use to grumble, for what’s done can’t be undone. But when Christmas comes, if she pushes herself forward so much, I’ll let her know—see if I don’t I’m not going to put up with so much of her interference, I can tell her.”

“The more you give way, the more give you may,” said Mrs Purkis, rhythmically.

“Why, she’ll want to be beadle next, and clerk too,” said Mr Purkis, indignantly, and growing so warm that he had to wipe inside his shirt-collar as well as dab his head; “says all the Amens now, she does, louder than the poor old gentleman—reg’lar drowns him in the litany, and makes herself that conspickyus that it’s a wonder Mr Gray can’t see through her, instead of taking her into favour. Not that I mind a bit—not I. Mr Timson don’t like her, though; and you see if he gives her a Christmas-box, same as he used Mrs Nimmer—pound o’ best black, and a quarter o’ green—he always give her reg’lar.”

“Ah! same as he gives us,” sighed Mrs Purkis, “and as good tea as ever stood on a hob to draw.”

Volume One—Chapter Nineteen.

Richard’s Secret.

Time glided on, and the brothers Pellet did not meet. There was estrangement too between Richard Pellet and his stepson, who came up during his vacations, but only to leave home again in disgust. For the fact was, Richard Pellet looked upon him as being in the way,—a manner he had of considering all those who were not of present use to him in his designs. So Harry Clayton saw but little of Norwood.

He made calls in Duplex Street at intervals, but always in vain, for Jared remained inflexible, and received the young man in a way which chilled him, and sent him away declaiming against people’s hard-heartedness. Never once was Patty visible, for she followed out the rôle she had been taught, and had in consequence many a bitter cry in secret.

Would she have liked to see Henry Clayton? That, too, she kept secret; and fate seemed to fight on Richard Pellet’s side, for somehow the young people never encountered, in spite of the long hours which Harry loitered about Clerkenwell, till he knew every brass plate by heart in the neighbourhood, without counting the signboards that he read till he was weary.

The effect of all these crosses upon Harry Clayton was to quite change the young man’s disposition; from being light-hearted and cheerful, he grew stern and quiet, almost morose. He determined at last, in a fit of anger, after a call at Duplex Street and a vain application to Richard Pellet for money, that he would turn dissipated, and began at once.

His first plunge was into billiards, but he gave the game up at the end of a week. Rowing followed, and he almost lived upon the river in gaudy-coloured flannels. But that soon palled upon him, and at the end of a month a cold business-like letter from Richard Pellet, advising him curtly to take to business, for his late father’s settlements would not permit of the expenses of a college life, settled the affair. The consequence was, that. Harry knit his brows, went down to Norwood, and announced his intention of staying up at Cambridge and reading for honours.

The result was a quarrel, and Richard Pellet slammed the door as he went out, bound for the city. Mrs Richard kissed her son, and said she hoped he would be a good boy and obey Mr Pellet, who was all that was wise and clever, and then Harry said good-bye, and went off with an aching heart to make a last call at Duplex Street.

It was the old story; Jared received him kindly, and shook hands when they parted, but there were no ladies visible.

Harry looked sterner, and felt sterner of purpose as he came away, and these troubles were the turning-point in the young man's career, for henceforward he seemed to cast youth and its frivolities behind, so as to be untrammelled in the firmer purposes of life.

He was wandering slowly and thoughtfully along, wondering as to what the future would bring forth. He told himself that he was certainly very fond of Patty, and though she had perhaps never since given to him a thought, yet he would be true to his intentions, and in spite of her humble position, if she proved to be as he believed she would, no difference of station should interfere.

"No," he said, half aloud; "not even if I get to be senior wrangler,"—of which, by the way, there did not seem to be much probability. Then his thoughts turned to Richard Pellet, and it seemed to him that his father's affairs had somehow got into a state of strange confusion. He could get no satisfactory explanation. One thing was evident, and that was that Richard Pellet had full influence over his wife, and that nothing save recourse to law would enforce a full declaration of how matters stood.

"And I can't do that," muttered Harry. Then he began going over once more his mother's marriage, and wondered how she could have been so weak as to marry one so hard, and close, and cold.

Just then he saw a Hansom cab stop a short distance from him, out of which stepped Richard Pellet, who paid his driver, and, without seeing his stepson, strode off hastily, making his way through the gloomy streets of Pentonville.

Harry hesitated for a while, feeling half tempted to follow, but he turned off the next moment to seek his hotel.

Meanwhile Richard Pellet hurried on, his way lying through streets that seemed to be the favourite playgrounds of the roaming children of the neighbourhood. And here he walked as if he felt a peculiar spite against every child he passed. He kicked this one's top half across the road; he purposely obliterated the chalked-out hopscotch marks with his feet; nearly knocked down a boy carrying a shawl-swathed infant,—not that there was much force needed, for the weight of the shawl-swathed nearly overbalanced its porter; and he ended by treading upon a thin girl's toes.

Another turn or two, and he was in a pleasant street rejoicing in the name of Borton, at whose end there was a pleasing glimpse to be obtained of the great jail with its blank walls, and the low hum of Tullochgorum Road murmured on the ear.

Richard stopped at a dingy sleepy-looking house, with its blinds down, and knocked a slinking kind of double knock, as if afraid of its being heard by any one outside the house. It was a double knock certainly, but it had a mean degraded sound about it, beside which a poor man's single thump would have sounded massive and grand.

After waiting for a reasonable space he knocked a second time, when, after fidgeting about upon the door-step, glancing up and down the street, and acting after the fashion of a man troubled with the impression that every one is watching him, he was relieved by the door being opened a very little way, and a sour-looking woman confronting him.

Upon seeing who was her visitor, the woman admitted him to stand for a minute or two upon the shabby worn oil-cloth of the badly-lighted passage before ushering him into a damp earthy-smelling parlour, over whose windows were drawn Venetian blinds of a faded sickly green, the bar-like laths giving a prison aspect to the place.

"Send her down?" said the woman, shortly, as she removed a handkerchief from her face and looked toothache.

"Yes," was the curt gruff reply; but the woman held her handkerchief to the aching tooth and remained waiting, when Richard Pellet drew out his pocket-book and passed a piece of crisp paper to the woman.

The paper was taken, carefully examined, and then seemed to have an anodyne effect upon the toothache of its recipient, who folded it carefully small and then tied it in a knot in one corner of the dingy pocket-handkerchief, after the fashion of elderly ladies from the country who ride in omnibuses, and then seek in such corners for the small coin wherewith to pay the fare. In this case, though, the tying-up was followed by the deposit of the handkerchief in its owner's bosom, the act been accompanied by a grim nod which said plainly enough, "that's safe."

The woman left the room; there was the sound of the key being drawn from the front door, pattering of steps on the oil-cloth, and then she re-appeared.

"'Taint my fault, you know," she said, in a hoarse voice; "it's him—he made me write. I'd keep her to the end, but he says that we won't have it any more. It's a fool's trick, for she never leaves her room."

"It's plain enough," said Richard, contemptuously, "you want more money."

The woman smiled grimly. "He says he won't have it any more," was all she said.

"What reason does he give?" said Richard, sharply.

"Oh!" said the woman, "he says that it has got about that we keep a mad woman in the house without having a license; and the neighbours talk, and there will be a summons about it some time or another. He hates to go out, he says—just as if that matters. Don't you think it might be managed after all? I don't want to part with her."

"Yes—no," said Richard Pellet, correcting himself. "You've thrown up a good thing, and now I shall make another arrangement."

“Well,” said the woman, in surly tones, “I was obliged to write—he made me. But you’ve no call to complain; she’s been here now best part of nine years, and always well taken care of, and at a lower rate than you would have paid at a private asylum. You ought to have let me have the child as well. No one could have kept her closer.”

“What?” said Richard, harshly.

“Well, that was only once; and I took precious good care that she did not play me such a trick a second time. She wasn’t away long, though,” said the woman, laughing.

“There! send her down,” said Richard Pellet, impatiently.

“I don’t mind telling you, now,” said the woman, not heeding the remark, “she’s very little trouble; sits and works all day long without speaking.”

“Humph!” ejaculated Richard Pellet; “now that there’s no more money to be made by contrary statements, you can be honest.”

“Well,” said the woman, “other people may find out things for themselves. Nobody taught me.”

Then she left the room.

A few minutes elapsed, and then a pale, dark-haired woman, with a pitiful, almost imploring aspect, entered the room, clasped her hands tightly together, and stood gazing in Richard’s Pellet’s face.

“I’m going to take you away from here, Ellen,” he said.

For a few moments the pale face lit up as with some show of animation; the woman exclaimed—“To see my child, Richard?”

“I’m going to take you away from here,” he replied, coldly; “so be ready to-morrow.”

The light faded from the countenance of the woman in an instant, to leave it dull and inanimate. She pressed her hand for an instant upon her side, and winced as if a pain had shot through her. Then slowly drawing a scrap of needlework from her pocket, she began to sew hastily.

“I have made arrangements for you to stay at an institution where you will be well cared for,” he continued; “that is, provided that you behave well.”

The faint shadow of a sad smile crossed the pale face as the woman glanced at him for a moment, and then sighed and looked down.

“Do you hear what I say?” said Richard, roughly.

“Yes, Richard,” she said, quietly, and as if quite resigned to her fate; “I never do anything that you would not wish, only when—when—when my head gets hot and strange. I am quite ready, but—”

“Well?” said the great city man.

“You will let me see my little one before I go, Richard? I won’t let my head get hot. You will not mind that. I will do all that you wish. But why not let us be together? She is not mad; but that would not matter. Let me have her, and go away from here. She is so little, I could carry her; and we would never trouble you again. Indeed, indeed—never, never again!”

If he could only have placed faith in those words, what a burden Richard Pellet would have felt to be off his shoulders! But no; he dared not trust her; and in the few moments while she stood with her wild strange eyes gazing appealingly in his face, he saw her coming to his office for help, then down to Norwood, declaring that she was his wedded wife, and trouble, exposure, perhaps punishment, to follow, because, he told himself, he had declined to let this poor helpless maniac stand in the way of his advancement.

Richard Pellet’s face grew darker as he turned to leave the room.

“But you will let me see her once, Richard—only once before I go? Think how obedient I have been, how I have attended always to your words—always. I know what you mean to do—to shut me up in a dreadful madhouse, and all because—because my poor head grows so hot. It was not so once, Richard.”

She dropped her work upon the floor, and elapsed her hands as she stood before him.

“Only once, Richard,” she exclaimed again; “only once, for ever so short a time,” and the voice grew more and more plaintive and appealing—the tones seeming to ring prophetically in Richard Pellet’s ears, so that he found himself thinking—“Suppose those words haunt me at my deathbed!”

He started the next moment.

“Be quiet,” he exclaimed, harshly, as he might have said “Down!” to a dog; when, rightly interpreting his words, the woman uttered a low wail, letting herself sink upon the floor, as she covered her face with her hands, and convulsively sobbed. But the trembling hands fell again as she shook her head with the action of one throwing back thick masses of curling hair, and looking sharply up, she listened, for the sound of a bell fell upon her ear. The cause was plain enough, for Richard Pellet stood before her with the rope in his hand.

Then she slowly rose, sighing as she closed her eyes, and stood motionless until the woman of the house came into the room and laid her talon-like hand upon her shoulder. But though the prisoner shivered, she did not move from her place; she only opened her eyes and gazed once more imploringly at Richard, who avoided her look, and, walking to the window, peered through the bar-like blinds.

“Ellen!” said the woman, in a harsh voice, which seemed to grate through the room, and then unresistingly a prisoner, for the sake of Richard Pellet’s prosperity, she followed her gaoler from the room, Richard Pellet waiting with knitted brows till the woman came back.

A long and somewhat angry conversation ensued, in which Richard Pellet tried very hard to make out whether the woman he had employed for so many years as his wife’s attendant was in earnest concerning the written desire to give up the charge, or whether it was merely a bit of business-fencing to obtain a higher rate of payment. He left at last, boasting of the ease with which he could make fresh arrangements for “Ellen Herrisey’s” reception. “But I will not take any further steps till I hear from you again,” he said, while the woman watched him as he left the room with a strange meaning smile.

“Another twenty pounds a year will do it,” said Richard, as he walked away. “He won’t let her give up the money.”

“You’re like the ostrich we read about,” muttered the woman, as she watched her visitor down the street. “Do you think I don’t know you’re married again, you brute? Ellen Herrisey, indeed! It shall be fifty pounds a year more, or I’ll know the reason why!”

Volume One—Chapter Twenty.

Startling.

Mr Richard Pellet was back at Norwood Station at about the same time as his stepson reached the terminus at Shoreditch, where he caught the express, and ran back to Cambridge, to find a letter which made considerable alterations in his arrangements, of which more after a while. As for Richard Pellet, he had all the cares upon him that night of a great dinner-party, for Mrs Richard, in happy ignorance of all that might work to her mortification, had, in obedience to Richard’s commands, issued her cards to a select circle of city magnates, of course including their wives and daughters—men who matched well with Richard Pellet, some of them worth a plum—golden drop, no doubt.

The stout butler and the men in coach-lace were hard-worked that evening, for the best dinner-service was in use, the choice plate, too, had been taken out of green baize bags, from green baize-lined boxes; the three extra dark-hued leaves had been fitted into the dining-table; the large epergne was filled with flowers and waxlights. Bokes the butler had turned eighteen damask dinner-napkins into as many cocked-hats, all crimp, crease, and pucker; prepared his salad—a point which he never yielded—and decanted his wines. Two men in white had been down all day from Gunter’s, driving cook and kitchenmaid out of their senses, as they declared again and again that there was nothing in the kitchen fit for use, and that it was quite impossible for a decent dinner to be prepared. They vowed that the great prize kitchener was a sham; the patent hot-plate good for nothing; the charcoal stove and warm cupboard, abominations both; stew-pans, saucepans, and kitchen fittings generally, a set of rubbish; and ended by asking how they were to be expected to work without stock. There would have been no dinner if Mrs Richard, upon hearing the twentieth complaint, had not taken the butler into her counsel, and urged him to allay the disorder. The consequence was that Mr Bokes went into his pantry, and from thence into his kitchen, which was hotter, morally, than ever. Then he mysteriously signalled with his thumb to the two men in white, and shortly after installed them in a couple of chairs in the cool shades of the pantry.

As if performing some mysterious ceremony, Mr Bokes made the cork of a port-wine bottle “skreel” as he tortured it by forcing in a screw, and then brought it forth with a loud “fop,” holding it out, wet and blood-stained—grape—for the senior Gunterian to sniff at, and afterwards to the lieutenant, when the following solemn dialogue took place:—

“Twenty!” whispered Mr Bokes, solemnly.

“Twenty!” exclaimed the Gunterians, in duet.

“Twenty!” repeated Mr Bokes, with additional solemnity; and then he added, “Five bin.”

Speech ceased for a few moments, while Mr Bokes armed his guests with large claret-glasses, afterwards tenderly pouring forth the deep-hued generous mixture.

“Seeing as you’re both gentlemen,” said Mr Bokes, confidentially, “as goes into the best of society, I thought I should like to hear your opinions.”

“But you’ll join us?” said Gunter One to the speaker.

“Well, raylly, gentlemen,” hesitated Mr Bokes.

Gunter One set down his glass and pursed up his mouth, looking at Gunter Two, who also set down his untasted glass, folded his arms, and looked fiercely at the butler.

“Well, raylly, gentlemen,” said Mr Bokes, “if that’s it, I suppose I must;” and helping himself to a glass, the three took wine together, after the most approved fashion, but perhaps with an additional dignity.

Gunter One thought it a tolerably fruity wine.

Gunter Two considered that it wanted more age.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Gunter One; “for a light-bodied tawny wine, it’s fairish.”

“I think I’ll take another glass,” Mr Bokes, said Gunter Two, Gunter One following his example; and the butler filled their glasses, not forgetting his own; after which there was a discussion upon crust, and bees-wing, and vine-disease, when Mr Bokes dropt a hint about the finest glass of Madeira to be had in or out of London being likely to be on the way when the dinner was over.

The conversation was stopped by the ringing of a bell, and as James, footman, and Thomas, under-butler, were busy over other matters, Mr Bokes went to respond to the summons.

Five minutes had elapsed before the butler returned, in time to find the bottle perfectly empty, and the Gunters smacking their lips over the last drops in their glasses; when, no more being forthcoming, the gentlemen in white returned to the kitchen, sufficiently good-humoured for Number One to smile affably upon the cook, and Number Two to address the kitchenmaid as “My dear,” in asking for a wooden spoon.

The full resources of the Norwood establishment were brought out that night, and Jared Pellet of Duplex Street would have looked less dreamy, and rubbed his eyes, as he turned from the duet he was having with Monsieur Canau, with Janet, little Pine, and Patty for audience, could he have seen the dinner served in a dining-room that sparkled with candles, plate, and glass. Even the most ill-disposed of the guests acknowledged the repast to be a success, that is, as far as appearances went. There was only one failure—the smash made by one of the men of a dish of meringues, leaving a blank place upon the table. Wines, ices, attendance, all were good. There could not be a doubt of Mr Richard Pellet’s wealth, nor of the high position he occupied, not only in the city, but in the pleasant suburban district of Norwood.

The ladies had risen, and, amidst a pleasant rustling of silks, swept up-stairs; the gentlemen had drawn their chairs nearer together for the convenient passage of port-decanter and claret-jug, when Mr Bokes, the Norwood Pharaoh’s chief butler, whispered to his master that he was wanted.

“Indeed,” said Mr Richard Pellet, loudly, for he was delivering his opinion upon City affairs, “unless a similar crisis should arise, I give you my word of honour that it must be—Now, Bokes,” in an undertone, “what is it? What the deuce do you mean—at such a time? Who wants me?”

“Tall, stout woman, sir.”

“Lady?”

“No, not lady—woman, sir. Says she must see you, sir.”

“Must!” exclaimed Richard, scowling.

“Yes, sir, and will.”

“Tell her to call to-morrow; I’m engaged.”

Mr Bokes bowed and left the room, and his master continued—

“Limited liability companies generally, gentlemen, are becoming the ruin of our land. I don’t believe in them. You never see my name down anywhere as a director. Why, I’ve had no less than four applications—no less than four, gentlemen—to sell my little bit of a business, so that it may be formed into a company, with your humble servant to act as manager, with a noble price, a noble salary, and no end of shares into the bargain. But no, gentlemen; I am determined—Now, Bokes,” impatiently, “what is it?”

“Woman, sir—will see you, sir,” whispered the butler; “says I was to say ‘Borton Street,’ sir, and ‘Gone!’”

So strange a pallor overspread Richard Pellet’s face that it was observed by all his guests, as, rising with a forced attempt at a smile, he asked them to excuse him for five minutes.

“If she should only have made her way here to-night!” ejaculated Richard Pellet, as he passed the dining-room door, perspiring profusely the while. “If she were but dead—if she were but dead!”

“What’s wrong?” whispered Alderman Espicier to his neighbour. “Pellet’s bank gone to the bad?”

“Writ, more likely,” said the other, charitably; and then they made a few pleasant comments upon the wine they were drinking, calculated its cost per dozen, wondered whether the epergne and ice-pails were silver or electro, but hardly liked to seek for the hall-marks, in case the host should return and find them so engaged. In short, during Richard Pellet’s absence, they looked upon everything in a truly commercial spirit, that might not have been quite agreeable to their host had he been aware of the proceedings.

Meanwhile, taking up a chamber candlestick, Richard Pellet had hurried into the library, where he found Mrs Walls, the woman from the Borton Street house—Ellen’s gaoler.

“Now!” he harshly exclaimed, “what is it?”

“Gone!” said the woman, abruptly.

“Who—what—Ellen?” stammered Richard, for he had clung to the doubt. “How?—when?”

“Do you want all that answered at once?” said the woman, in a cool insolent tone—the voice of one who might have taken her last cheque from her employer, or felt herself safe of her position.

“There! speak out; I’m busy—company,” exclaimed Richard, excitedly.

“Well,” said the woman, “I’ve nothing more to tell you, only that she is gone, and I don’t know how she managed it. Of course, my responsibility was at an end after the notice I had given you, and I considered that she was only staying to oblige you. But I never thought she would slip away, or I’d have watched her. P’raps she’s off again to see the little one—she has been talking to herself about it a good deal lately.”

“And you never watched her!” hissed Richard, standing with knitted brows and clenched fists before the woman.

“No,” she replied, coolly. “You took care only to pay me up to this morning, so it’s your affair now, *Mr Herrisey*.”

The last word was said with a meaning emphasis, which made Richard wince.

“How did you know I was staying here?” he said, more quietly.

“How did I know that you lived here!” laughed the woman; “you told me—at least, you took care to drop one of your cards one day, and to sign the cheque one day as Richard Pellet. Of course, when it was money, I wanted to know which was right—Herrisey or Pellet. It didn’t much matter to me, but I thought I’d know while I was about it. You may call yourself Smith if you like.”

Richard Pellet glared at the woman, as he thought of the trouble he had been at to keep a little separate banking account solely for this purpose, and then, unknown to himself, force of habit had made him make one payment according to custom. He was at the woman’s mercy, in spite of the precautions he thought he had taken, and no doubt she knew the whole of his affairs. Well, money would buy her, he thought; and then he was brought back from his short musing by the woman’s hard voice.

“If you choose to be mean, you must put up with the consequences; and what’s more, you ought to thank and pay me for coming to put you on your guard.”

“Do you think she—she knows that I live here?” said Richard, in a hoarse whisper.

The woman smiled contemptuously, as she replied—

“No, she don’t know it, poor mad thing! at least, I don’t think so. She kept to the name, too, right enough, and wouldn’t answer to the name of Pellet.”

“Of course not,” exclaimed Richard, fiercely; and then the two stood gazing in each other’s eyes for a minute before the woman spoke, saying, maliciously—

“Perhaps she may find her way here though, after all; these mad folks are very cunning when they are after anything.”

“Here! go now,” exclaimed Richard, hurriedly thrusting some money into the woman’s hands. “You must not give her up, Mrs Walls. We’ll make a fresh settlement, and—and we’ll talk it over to-morrow when I come.”

The woman smiled as she made her way out of the library, and Richard Pellet stood for a few moments wiping the cold dew from his forehead, before rejoining his guests.

The city gentlemen heard no more that night respecting limited liability companies, when, after giving the strictest orders that, if anybody else should come, *she* was to be shown into the library, Richard Pellet returned to the assembled company, and took coffee, unaware that the two gentlemen in coach-lace had thrust their tongues into their cheeks at one another, after a fashion meant to express the extreme of derision; and then, as soon as they were at liberty, went and related the affair in large text, with redundant flourishes, in the servants’ hall.

“If she had chosen any other day it would not so much have mattered,” said Richard Pellet to himself, as he probed a lump of sugar at the bottom of his half-cold coffee: “but to have come to-day!”

It was no wonder that, until the last guest departed, Richard Pellet’s eyes were turned anxiously towards the door every time it opened, when, Nemesis-like, he expected to see enter the tall, pale figure he had looked upon that day in Borton Street, his heart too much crusted with gold to allow of a single tender thought for the afflicted woman, who was sure enough to clasp her hands and ask that she might be with her child.

Volume One—Chapter Twenty One.

Trimming the Lamp.

“There you are,” said Tim Ruggles, shaking up a bottle, and carefully pouring out a dessert-spoonful of cod-liver oil into a wineglass, previously well wetted round with the thin blue fluid which the Carnaby Street people bought under the impression that it was milk. “There you are,” said Tim, as he sat cross-legged upon his board; “and now look sharp, and get a lump of sugar out of the basin, and take your oil before she comes back.”

“Brayvo! capital! and never made one ugly face,” exclaimed Tim, as little Pine drank the contents of the glass, but not without a slight shudder. “That’s the thing to bring you round, little one—bring you round and turn you round,

and make you round as a little tub. Oil turns into fat, you know, and fat keeps you warm in winter. Fat's Nature's greatcoat, you know, for quilting and padding people's ribs, and wants no stitching on, nor pressing down. That's the way to—scissors—thank you, my pet—the way to trim the—trim the—now my twist and a short needle—that's him—to trim the lamp of life, that is; and you only want to swallow a long skein of cotton and light one end, and then you'd burn. My eye! what a go it would be for her to come home and find you burning! But come, I say, put that bottle away before she comes back."

Tim was very particular that the cod-liver oil bottle should be put away before Mrs Ruggles' return from marketing; for though the dispensary doctor had ordered that medicine twice a day for the child's cough, and a reasonable quantity was supplied, Tim had an idea of his own that if it were taken twice as often, it would act with double rapidity. So he used to invest all his very spare cash in the purchase of more of the nauseous medicine, and kept a private stock, out of which he replenished the bottle in the cupboard, so that it should not appear in Mrs Ruggles' eyes to disappear too quickly.

"Does seem such a thing," said Tim to himself, "to see any one suffering when you can't do anything to help them. There's her poor little cough getting worse and worse, and them fits coming on, and I can't help her a bit. It's dreadful, that it is. If one has to rub, or hold, or lift, or do something, it don't seem half so bad; but to stand and do nothing but look on is the worst itself. Never saw such a child as she is, though; and it makes me shiver when she gets looking in that far-off way of hers, as if she could see more than any one else. Takes her stuff without a word; but I'd sooner see her kick and cry out, and then have a good laugh after, when I talk rubbish about trimming the lamp. I don't know what it's a coming to—for she ain't like no other child—ain't like a child at all, that she ain't."

It was not once that Tim would mutter in that fashion over his work, but often and often; and in spite of his words, he did know in his heart what was coming, though, stitching away there upon his board, early and late, he tried to shut his eyes to the ray of light that fell upon them—a ray of pale wondrous light, as from another world; light which shone with a cold lustre in upon his heart, to tell him that something must soon come to pass.

For little Pine had of late grown quieter day by day; dull and heavy, too, at times, falling asleep in her chair, and more than once upon the bare floor, where Tim had found her, and gently raised her head to place beneath it the list-tied roll of newly-cut cloth for a pair of trousers, and then covered her with his coat.

As the days lengthened, a hectic red settled in her little cheeks, and a cough came on to rack her chest; when, night after night, would Tim creep out of bed to give her lozenges and various infallible sweets which he had purchased to allay the irritating tickle that kept her awake hour after hour.

"'Pon my word," Tim would say, "I don't think I should take more notice of that child if she was my very own; but somehow I can't help this here."

And it was plain enough that Tim could not help "this here;" and, intent as he seemed upon his work by day, his thoughts were fixed upon the poor child, whom he watched hour after hour unnoticed by his domestic tyrant.

"I don't like it," muttered Tim; "it's all rules of contrary. That there cough ought to make her pale and poorly, and it don't, for it makes her little cheeks red, and her eyes bright; and it ain't nat'ral for her to not eat nothing one time, and to eat savage another; and I'm 'most afraid to say anything to her, because she's so old and deep."

"Am I going to die?" said the child one day, suddenly, as she left off work to gaze up earnestly in Tim's face.

"Eh! what? Going to which?" exclaimed Tim, startled.

"Am I going to die, and go away?" said the child again.

"I'm blessed!" muttered Tim; "who's agoing to answer questions like that? Why, we're all of us going to die some day, my pretty," said Tim, aloud, and in quite a cheery voice, whose fire he directly after damped by singing, in a peculiar reedy, cracked voice—

> "Oh! that'll be joyful!
> Joyful, joy-yoy-ful, joy-hoy-ful!"

but in so melancholy a fashion that it was evident that Tim Ruggles did not look forward to the joyful event with much pleasure.

"Yes, I know that," said little Pine, dreamily; "but am I going to die soon, and go to my own mother? Mrs Johnson, who lived up-stairs, used to take cod-liver oil, and she soon died."

"Bother Mrs Johnson!" exclaimed Tim, fiercely. "I say, you know, you mustn't talk like that, my pet; it makes one feel just as if cold water was running all down one's back. You ain't Mrs Johnson, and you're taking that there stuff to make you strong and well. Now, come on, and let's say catechism."

"No, please, not this morning," little Pine would say; "my head does ache so, so much, and catechism makes me cough;" and then the sharp little elbow would rest upon the thin knee, and the child lay her head upon her hand, and listen to the tailor as he tried to tell her stories raked up piecemeal out of his memory, where they had rested for so many years that they had grown rusty, and hardly recognisable. Puss would somehow manage to get into the wrong boots, and perform wonders in the famed seven-league pair; a sensational story would be compiled out of the exploits of Jack the Giant-killer, Jack Sprat, and the hero of the bean-stalk; while to make out from Tim's description where Robinson Crusoe's adventures began, and Sinbad the Sailor's ended, would have puzzled the most learned.

For, after the fashion of his craft, Tim would baste one piece on to another, and fit in here, and fit in there, according

to the circumstances of the case; the invariable result being that little Pine would begin to nod; when Tim would steal softly off his board, and closer and closer to her till he could let the weary little head rest against his breast, kneeling there in some horribly uncomfortable position until the short dose was over, and the child would once more start into wakefulness, to gaze up in a frightened way in his face. Then, seeing who held her, she would smile, and close her heavy eyelids, nestling down closer and closer, within the open waistcoat, the little thin arms trying to clasp her protector tightly; Tim anxiously watching the while, with contracted brows, the painful catching of the child's breath, and the spasms of pain that contracted her little features.

The church duties took Mrs Ruggles much away now, to the softening of these latter days of the poor child's life; and many and many an hour would Tim spend in the way described—hours which he had to work far into the night to redeem, when others were sleeping; so that the item of paraffin became so heavy in the domestic economy that Tim had to replenish the can on the sly, after the manner of the cod-liver oil bottle; and the consequence was, that his ordinary moderate amount of beer-money seldom found its way to the publican's.

How swiftly sped those minutes spent with poor little Pine! and how slowly would the hours crawl on, when, with his shaded lamp throwing its glow upon his work, Tim would sit stitching patiently away like what he was—a little, shrunken, shrivelled tailor!

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Two.

Tim Seeks Sympathy.

"I don't know what to make of that child, ma'am," said Tim, on one of his visits to Duplex Street. "I'm afraid she's in a bad way, and that we ought to see another doctor;" and as he spoke he gazed vacantly at a guinea-pig on the hearth, a present from Monsieur Canau to one of the children, and brought from Decadia.

"Then why not take her to one, Mr Ruggles?" said Mrs Jared, rather tartly, for she strongly disapproved of Tim's obedience to his better half.

"Expense—expense—expense, ma'am," said Tim. "You see, Mrs Ruggles keeps the purse, and has her own ideas about money. Wonderfully clever woman; but I don't quite think she sees how bad poor little Pine is."

"Mr Ruggles, I don't like your wonderfully clever women," said Mrs Jared; "they are not worth much generally. I like to see a woman clever enough to do her duty to her husband and family; and if she knows that, and does it well, she is quite clever enough to my way of thinking."

"Gently, my dear, gently," said Jared; for Mrs Pellet was growing rather warm, and—as is peculiar to the female sex—loud; but Jared's words acted like oil, and his wife's feathers grew smooth directly.

Some time had elapsed since Tim Ruggles had made his appearance in Duplex Street, for the trousers trade had been brisk, and he had been busy enough at home, while messages from the foreman of the shop for which he worked were constantly being borne to Carnaby Street to know "whether Ruggles meant to wear out that last pair of trousers as well as make them;" or, "if he did not mean to make those last two pair, to send them back and let somebody else." "When, you know," said Tim, "at my place it was all board; I had my breakfast on the board, my dinner on the board, my tea on the board, my supper on the board, and for two or three nights the only sleep I had was an hour or two when I lay down on the board; and once I dreamed that I was a sewing-machine, and that Mrs Ruggles was turning my handle, when she was only shaking my arm because it was morning, and time for me to be up and at work again."

There was peace in the domestic grove at Duplex Street; the little ones were all in bed; Patty was thinking of Janet and her goldfish, and sometimes of Harry Clayton, as she sewed on buttons and strings where small garments needed them; and Mrs Jared was industriously embroidering a workhouse-window pattern upon one of a basketful of stockings, some of which strongly resembled the Irishman's knife, for it was a difficult matter to make out any portion of the original hose, so covered were they with Mrs Jared's darnings.

Jared himself was busy with his glue-pot, the constant companion of his leisure evenings. That glue-pot was to Jared Pellet what a pocket-knife is to some people, and a ball of string to others—it was a perfect treasure, and with it he performed feats strongly allied to those of Robin, Houdin, or Wiljalba Frikell, without taking into consideration the money it earned him. Boots and shoes were renovated to a wonderful extent; wall-paper torn down by tiny mischievous fingers was replaced; broken chairs had their limbs set; in fact, Jared looked upon glue as a panacea, even going so far as to pop scraps in his mouth, though it cannot be avowed that he swallowed them, and it may only have been for the purpose of cleaning his fingers. And yet, it was a nasty little pot, being of a vicious character, and given to boiling over and covering Mrs Jared's hobs and polished black bars with a nasty sticky slime that would not come off; while, when she remonstrated with Jared, being naturally proud of her black-leading, he quietly told her that it was of the nature of glue to stick, and that the little pot ought to have been watched. Just as if it was of any use to watch the treacherous little object; for one moment it would be calm, and the next in a state of violent eruption, hissing, bubbling, and sending forth noxious jets of steam to an extent which made it unapproachable.

Tim Ruggles sat very silent after Mrs Jared had spoken, for he entertained a most profound respect for her expressions of opinion; and the upshot of that conversation was, that, in spite of his wife's opposition, he took little Pine to a doctor—a hint, however, which he dropped at home relative to the possibility of a cessation of certain payments, in the event of what he called "anything happening," somewhat softened Mrs Ruggles' opposition. The next time, too, after that conversation that Tim went to Bedford Row to draw the bi-monthly payment, he ventured to suggest that a little medical advice was necessary for the child, when the gentleman who took his receipt said, "Oh!" in a quiet manner, as much as to say, "I quite agree with you; and you think so, do you?"

“Her cough tears her poor little chest terrible, sir,” said Tim, respectfully.

“Indeed!” said the legal gentleman, who was very pale, smooth, and cool.

“Her sleep’s broken a good deal, too, sir,” said Tim, warming to his task.

“Ah!” said the legal gentleman, with a quiet, well-bred smile, which no amount of torturing would have turned into a laugh.

“It wherrits me to hear her, sir—awful,” said Tim; “and I think if them as belongs to her knowed, they’d—”

“Give instructions? eh!” said the legal gentleman. “There, there! she’s in capital hands—couldn’t be in better. Try a little magnesia, or dill water, or squills, or what you like. Good morning, Mr Ruggles. You have the note, I think. This day two months, mind.”

“But, sir,” exclaimed Tim, eagerly, “if you was to put it to them.”

“Exactly,” said the legal gentleman; “Parker & Tomlin’s abstract on office-table. Coming!” he exclaimed, replying to some imaginary call. “Good morning, Mr Ruggles; this day two months.”

Tim found himself the next minute in the entry, holding the money he had received very far down in his pocket with one hand, as if every one in Bedford Row and its vicinity was intent upon garrotting him, and bearing off his cash.

“Squills, indeed! magneshy!” muttered Tim, indignantly; “I’d like to give him magneshy—a brute. It’s my opinion as they wouldn’t much mind if something was to happen, and this sorter thing could be dropped;” and he left hold of his money, drew forth that hand and slapped his pocket; but only to thrust back the hand and once more hold tightly to his treasure, for he told himself that some of it should go in comforts for the child, or he’d know the reason why.

Tim crossed Holborn, and made his way into a retired street, where he gave vent to a deep sigh, and, as if continuing his interrupted train of thought, he muttered—

“I can’t say as I shall only go once, or whether it’ll be twice, or a hundred times, to fetch this; but it’s my opinion something will happen.”

The thought of “something” happening seemed to cut Tim to the quick, for as if to force back the rising grief, he crushed his hat down over his eyes, and hurried through the streets to his abode, where he found Mrs Ruggles waiting to take charge of the money.

“Of course not,” exclaimed that lady, as soon as Tim, taking advantage of the child having dropped into one of her short slumbers, had related his conversation with the lawyer. “What would they care? Glad of it, as hundreds more would be; but we’ll disappoint them; they’re not going to get off so easy as they expect.”

Tim hugged himself in secret as he saw the effect of his words; for after that, for a season, Mrs Ruggles was very particular in seeing that the child took her medicine, and was at the dispensary regularly at the proper hours for receiving advice.

But this did not last long; Mrs Ruggles declaring that she thought, after all, there was not much the matter, and returning to her old ways, though even her hard fierce nature shrank from treating so severely as had been her former custom the poor suffering child surely fading away before her eyes.

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Three.

Harry’s Employ.

The letter which Harry Clayton found at his chambers was in answer to an advertisement in the *Times*; for, finding himself somewhat straitened for money, and, in his pride, determined not to apply to Richard Pellet, Harry had offered his services to read with some young patrician preparing for college. The result of the ensuing correspondence was, that he became what he termed bear-leader to one Lionel Redgrave, son of a wealthy baronet; the affair being quickly settled, and the old baronet, who had been favourably impressed by Harry’s frank, manly bearing, warmly expressed his confidence that the result would be highly advantageous to his son.

Harry knew that his expectations were good; but a growing distaste for the life at Norwood had kept him away more and more, so that, save for occasional visits paid for the sake of seeing his mother, there was very little communication kept up; and, judging from Richard Pellet’s behaviour, it seemed likely that there would be less still in the future. So Harry eagerly made his arrangements, and a short time after, the young men were together in town, where Lionel Redgrave had determined to have chambers for the present, an arrangement in nowise distasteful to Harry Clayton, who passed his days in a state of feverish anxiety at Cambridge, in spite of his determination to read; telling himself that, after all, if he expected to win Patty, he ought not to cease to strive to see her, however unlucky he had hitherto been.

He was to meet her soon though, little as he expected it, and in a way that should take him by surprise, so much so, that he returned from his encounter bitter and annoyed.

It was evening, and the roar of fashionable Regent Street came incessantly through the entresol window.

Harry Clayton was reading, and Lionel Redgrave—a tall, well-made young fellow—was lolling back in his chair, smoking with all his might.

Three or four times over the latter impatiently shifted his position, going through the performance of one who is terribly bored; but his fidgeting attracted no attention till, in a bluff loud voice, he exclaimed—

“My dear Harry, what a serious old cad you are! Throw away those books.”

“My dear Li, what a groomy individual you do make yourself! Throw that cigar away, and let’s have a quiet evening’s reading.”

“Likely! I shall just have another cigar, and then we’ll go and see something. Open that window—there’s a good fellow,” and he leaned back in the lounge of their handsomely furnished room.

Harry rose, opened the low window, admitting the loud rattle of the traffic, and then returned to his seat, which he drew nearer to his companion.

“Look here,” he said; but there was no reply; the young man only lay back with half-closed eyes, lit a fresh cigar, and luxuriously watched the blue rings of smoke curling up towards the ceiling.

“Look here, Lionel,” said Harry again, after a pause; this time eliciting for response, the one word—

“Bother!”

“I really cannot stand this sort of thing any longer,” said Harry, without noticing the other’s coolness. “You know why I am here—you know why your father wished me to be with you; and really I cannot consent to go on, week after week, in this unsatisfactory manner.”

“Why not?” said the other, coolly emitting a puff of smoke.

“Why not? Because I feel as if I were robbing him. A month gone to-day, and what have we done?”

“Done! Seen no end of life, my boy—studied from nature. What more would you have?”

“Life!” exclaimed Harry, bitterly; “do you call that wretchedly artificial existence that we have seen by gaslight, life? If I were a moralist, I should call it the well-lighted ante-chamber of the pit; but I won’t preach.”

“No, don’t, that’s a good fellow. Daresay you’re quite right, but it’s a very pleasant way of getting down to the pit all the same. But I say, Harry, don’t bother; you’ve been very jolly so far. Let’s go on just the same.”

“And your father?”

“Bless his old heart! what about him? Sent me a cheque, this morning—extra, you know—and hoped we get on well together. He’s got a first-rate opinion of you. By the way, write and acknowledge the cheque, and say we get on first-rate.”

“But, Redgrave, pray be serious.”

“So I am,” exclaimed the other, pettishly, as he dashed his cigar out of the window, and suddenly rose to a sitting posture. “Now, look here, Clayton. I like having you with me, ’pon my soul, I do; you act like ballast to me, you do indeed. I’m given to carrying too much sail, and if it was not for you, I should be like my little yacht, the *Kittiwake*, in a squall, and on my beam ends in no time.”

Harry tapped the table impatiently with his fingers.

“Now, look here, Harry,” continued Lionel; “as to robbery, don’t you be a fool. You’re saving the governor no end by keeping down my expenses; for you know, Harry, I am rather afraid of you, I am indeed; but I want you to stop with me all the same. Don’t speak; it’s my turn to preach now. As to reading, and all that sort of thing, studying, and working up—I can’t read, and I won’t read. I’m not clever, and classics are no use to me, and never will be, with my income. What the deuce do I care about Homer and Virgil, and all the rest of the Greek and Roman humbugs? It’s right enough for a clever fellow like you—all brains. But, ’pon my soul, Harry, if you bother me any more, I’ll swear, and then I’ll bite, so there’s an end of it.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders, and then in despair closed the book at his side, gazing the while, with a serio-comic look of chagrin, in the handsome Saxon face of the speaker.

“’Taint your fault, Harry; so just hold your tongue and have a cigar, and pitch me over another, for I’m dog tired.”

Saying which, he contrived to catch the roll of tobacco leaf, lit a fusee on the sole of his boot, and then threw himself back, but only—as there came a smart rap at the door—to yell out impatiently—

“Come in!”

The door was opened, and a smart-looking maid brought in a letter, which was evidently for the master of the chambers; but as his hands were locked together behind his reclining head, and the exertion of loosening them seemed to be more than he cared to encounter, Harry took the missive from the girl, and glanced at the superscription.

“For you,” he said, as the girl retired.

“’Taint from the governor, I can see at this distance,” said Lionel. “Open it and see what’s inside, there’s a good fellow. Tailor’s bill I’ll be bound.”

“No,” said Harry, turning the note over uneasily; “it is evidently a lady’s hand.”

“Lady’s hand! Gammon! Who’d write to me?”

“Lady’s hand—evidently French,” continued Harry, and then he read from the envelope—

“To Mr—Mr L.R., 70 Regent Street.”

“Why, it’s an answer to the advertisement,” cried Lionel, bursting into a loud laugh. “Read it out, old boy.”

Harry seemed as if he were attracted by the delicacy of the handwriting; for, instead of tearing open the missive, he took out a penknife and cut the paper, heedless of Lionel Redgrave’s sneering laugh.

“What a model of care you are, Harry,” he exclaimed; “fold your clothes up every night when you go to bed, I’ll swear.”

Harry smiled, and then read aloud:—

> “Honoured Sir,—Seeing your advertisement in to-day’s *Times*, I believe I know a gentleman who was followed by a dog answering the description of your bull-tarrier; so I will do myself the honour of waiting upon you this evening, at eight o’clock.—Your obedient servant,
>
> “Fancy.”

“Your obedient servant,” repeated Lionel.

“’To command’ scratched out,” said Harry.

“That’s a rum sort of letter to come in a lady’s hand, and in French style—isn’t it? Is it spelt right?”

“Perfectly, and the writing is exquisite.”

“Dog-stealing cad safe, and he has got some one to write for him.”

“He’ll be here directly, if he keeps his appointment,” said Harry, referring to his watch; “it only wants a few minutes to eight. What shall you do? See Mr Fancy, or hand him over to the police?”

“See him, of course! What’s the good of handing him over to the police? Cost me just as much money, and I should not get my dog.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders, while Lionel lay back a little farther on his lounge, so that he could hold up and admire the set of his close, groomy-looking, drab trousers.

“Not a bad fit, are they, Hal?” he said, after a pause.

“Excellent for a stable-helper,” was the sarcastic reply.

“H’m! Perhaps so. But they are like the real thing, though, ain’t they? Bilstob’s an out-and-outer for taking up an idea, if you give it him.”

“Stably ideas, I suppose,” said Harry.

“Yes, if you like,” said Lionel, rather sulkily; and then the young men smoked on in silence, till, forgetting the sneers of his companion, Lionel again spoke.

“Wonder whether this chap will turn up, Clayton? Try another advertisement if he don’t. I wouldn’t have lost that dog for twenty pounds.”

“And I would give twenty pounds sooner than keep the ugly wretch,” said Harry.

“Perhaps so; but then you see you can’t appreciate breed. Don’t be cross, old chap,” he continued, laughing. “You must be bear-leader, and lick me into shape.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

“There! turn up the gas a little higher, Harry; and do, for goodness’ sake, give up that confounded French shrug; and, I say, Hal, if this cad does come, leave me to manage him. His won’t be a classic tongue, old fellow, and I know how to deal with these fellows so much better than you. By Jove, though, here he is! Come in!”

For there had been another knock at the door, and the maid once more appeared.

“Plee, sir, there’s a man down-stairs, as says he have an appointment with you, sir. Is he to come up?”

“Yes; send him up, Mary; that is, if he’s fit.”

“Fit, sir?” said the girl, looking puzzled.

“Yes; clean—decent,” said Lionel, laughing, and the girl withdrew.

A minute later, a heavy, halting step was heard upon the stairs, and the visitor, none other than Canau’s landlord from Decadia, was ushered into the room.

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Four.

“D. Wragg, Nat’ralist.”

“Sarvant, gentlemen,” said the new-comer, who must now be fully introduced. He made four steps forward into the room, each step being accomplished by the planting of a heavy boot with a club-sole, some six inches thick, a couple of feet forward, when, with a bow and a jerk, the other leg was brought to the front, and the man stood upright, took another step, bowed, and again jerked himself into the perpendicular—each effort of locomotion being accompanied by an automaton flourish of one arm, similar to that of a farming man sowing turnips broadcast.

He was a wiry-looking little fellow, with sharp ferrety eyes, and short bristly hair standing up at the sides of his head, giving him the look of a fierce Scotch terrier—the resemblance being heightened by an occasional twitch of the facial muscles, which might have been taken for displays of annoyance at the workings of troublous insects beyond the reach of teeth or paws.

“Sarvant, gentlemen,” he said; “and if so be as it ain’t a liberty—”

He paused in his utterance, jerked himself back to the door, opened it, peered out as if seeking a rat—if not smelling one—closed the door again, jerked himself back, and laid one finger beside his very small nose, saying—

“I’ll make all snug afore I begin.”

This was evidently in completion of his sentence; and then, while in a half-amused, half-contemptuous manner, Lionel Redgrave watched his actions, the man leaned his body first on one side, then on the other, as if, with ultra caution, he were endeavouring to peer behind the two occupants of the room; peeping beneath the table; and finishing the performance by tip-toeing, and straining his neck to look here and there in the most mysterious way imaginable.

“Confound you! why don’t you look up the chimney while you are about it?” cried Lionel, at last. “What the deuce does the fellow mean?”

“It’s all right, gentlemen,” said the man, taking a handkerchief out of his hat, wiping his face, and then placing the very tall head-covering upon the floor, while out of a shabby old dress-coat pocket he dragged a copy of a newspaper.

“Which of you gents is L.R.?” he continued, when, after much jerking and fumbling, he had contrived to open and refold the paper to his taste, and with one extremely dirty finger to fix, as it were, the advertisement.

“Never you mind about that,” said Lionel, gruffly. “Have you brought the dog?”

“Brought the dorg, gentlemen? Now, is it likely?” was the answer, in tones of remonstrance. “Not likely! How could I bring the dorg when I hadn’t got it? It was only through seeing that ad. in the paper, that I says, says I, ‘Why that there’s just like the dorg as I see Mr Barkles with’—a dorg as he said follered him ’ome lars night’s a week.”

Lionel growled, and the visitor jerked himself a step forward.

“So I says to our Janet, I says, ‘Jest drop a line,’ I says, ‘to that pore gent as has lost his dorg,’ I says; ‘and I’ll see if I can’t be the ’appy mejum of gettin’ on it back for him.’”

“Look here, my man,” said Harry, regardless of his pupil’s frowns; “bring the dog back, and my friend will pay the offered reward.”

“Bring the dorg back here, sir! Well no, that ain’t likely. How do I know what might happen? Don’t you make no mistake about me, sir. I’m a respectable tradesman, and that’s my card, ‘D. Wragg, Nat’ralist, Dealer in Br’ish and Furren Birds, and setrer, 12 Brownjohn Street, Decadia.’”

As he spoke he held out a dirty, glazed, worn-edged card to the last speaker, who motioned to him to place it upon the table, which was done with a great deal of jerking and twitching, Mr D. Wragg pushing the piece of pasteboard well into view, and then, apparently not satisfied, standing it up on edge against a book before continuing—

“I’m good for what you like, gents, from a dorg down to a pegging finch. Do you want a ’arf dozen o’ rats to try a terrier? send to me. Is it a good blackish ferret? I’m ready for you. It were only last week I had a badger. I’ve squirrels as’ll crack nuts, fit to give to any lady in the land. Do you want a few score o’ blue rocks for ’Ornsey or Battersea? I’ve got ’em;—’arf a ’undred o’ sparrers—a hedge ’og—a toy tarrier—or a poll-parrot as wouldn’t say swear to save its life, and I’m your man. That’s my card, ‘D. Wragg, Nat’ralist, Dealer in Br’ish and Furren Birds, and setrer, 12 Brownjohn Street, Decadia.’ And what’s more, make it a tenner, and I’ll undertake to say as I’ll wurk the gent as your dorg follered, so as you can come on to my place to-morrer, put down the stiff, and bring your dorg ’ome again.”

Mr D. Wragg, the “nat’ralist’s,” countenance had been a study as he delivered himself of this harangue, jerking, twitching, and showing his teeth, as if he were constantly about to make at an obtrusive fly settled upon his nose, but never achieving thereto. But now, stooping, he took his handkerchief from the hat upon the floor, put the newspaper in its place, and then indulged in a good wipe, as his sharp ferrety eyes gazed inquiringly from face to face.

“Now, look here, you, sir,” said Lionel, roughly; “I offered a fiver for the dog, because that’s what he’s worth. I believe him to have been stolen; but never mind about that. I’ll give five pounds to have him back, and there’s an end of it. If you like to earn the money, bring the dog back; if not—cut!”

“Now, just a minute, gentlemen. See here now;” and resting his elbow upon his hip, the visitor stretched out one open palm, and patted it softly with the other; but instead of looking at any one, his restless eyes wandered from the sporting prints to the ballet-dancers upon the wall, and from them again to the cigar-boxes, pipes, and other evidences of the owner’s tastes. “Now look here, gents; don’t you make no mistake. I’m a respectable tradesman, and if it rested with me—there’s your dorg. I don’t want no rewards for doing what’s right. I get my reward in making a good customer. But, don’t you see, it’s a gent as has got the dorg. It follered him, and he’s took a fancy to it. He’s a reg’lar customer of mine, and he says to me, he says—‘I wouldn’t part with that dorg,’ he says, ‘for ten pound, I wouldn’t. He polished off ten rats in two minutes this very morning,’ he says.”

“That’s the dog and no mistake,” cried Lionel, excitedly.

“Toe be sure it is, gents,” said D. Wragg, with his eyes twinkling; “and that there gent as has got him, sir, is a man as I never knowed to break his word. I says to him, though, I says—‘Suppose,’ I says, ‘as the real owner of him was to turn up; you’d let him go then?’ I says. ‘Well,’ he says, ‘if he were a real gent, ’praps I might; but sech a noble beast as that ere didn’t ought to be in anybody’s hands.’”

Lionel looked, half-amused, half inquiringly, at Harry, who, however, only turned over the leaves of a book and avoided his gaze.

“What do you say to it all, Hal?” said Lionel at last.

“Ring the bell and send for a policeman,” was the laconic reply.

“Was that there meant for me, sir?” said D. Wragg, with a snap which must have dislodged the fly had it been present, and giving himself a doggy twist that plainly indicated a tormenting flea. “Well, gents, if it’s coming to that, I’m off. There’s my card—that’s me—D. Wragg, Nat’ralist. But don’t you make no mistake; I aint a running away because of the police, which is a body of men as I despises, and well they knows it, too. I aint got your dorg—’taint likely; and you may search my place if you like with all the police in London; and if you can get your dorg back, why all I can say is, as you’ll be luckier than most gents is; so goodnight to you.”

D. Wragg jerked himself down, picked up his hat, and was about to put it on; but he dropped it the next moment, for with a bound Lionel leaped from his chair, and before Harry Clayton had recovered from his astonishment, D. Wragg was seized by the throat and being forcibly shaken, as the young man hissed between his teeth—

“You scoundrel! What have you done with my dog?”

Harry Clayton leaped up in his turn, and, partly by force, partly by entreaty, made Lionel quit his hold upon the trembling man, who once more picked up his hat and endeavoured to plant it in its proper place; but, what with his shaking hands, and the roughly folded paper inside, the attempt proved a failure.

The danger being removed, the confidence of D. Wragg began to return, and with an amount of jerking and twisting that was almost frightful in the way it threatened dislocation of sundry members, even if it did not break the man’s back, he took the paper from his hat, and contrived to stuff it into one of the tight coat-pockets; then the head-piece was thrust on defiantly, and its owner began to jerk himself towards the door, shaking his fist the while.

“Here! confound you, stop!” roared Lionel, who was hot and excited. “Name your time and I’ll come and fetch the brute. I know that it is a stealing case. I can see that, though you think I’m a flat; but I’m not going to put myself to trouble, so I tell you at once.”

“Don’t you make no mistake,” cried D. Wragg, defiantly; “and don’t you call things by no hard names. I didn’t steal your dorg. I’m a respectable tradesman, I am; and if you want a score—”

“Confound you! what time?” roared Lionel, angrily, as he once more started to his feet.

“Any time before one, gents—any time in the morning; but don’t you make no mistake about me. And look here, gents, I know that there party well as has got your dorg—leastwise,” he added, with a wink, “if it is the same dorg—and he’s one of them suspicious sorter parties, that, if so be as he thought as there’d be any gammon—”

“Gammon! what do you mean?” cried Lionel, for the man paused.

“Dodges, gents, dodges; such as suspecting on him of having stolen the dorg, and getting of his name dirty. Why, if there was any of that sorter thing, that there dorg would never be seen again; and as to bringing the police, either uniform or plain clothes, it’s my belief as he’d smell ’m a mile away, sure as my name’s D. Wragg, nat’ralist; so don’t you make no—”

“There, there! we’ve had enough of that,” growled Lionel; and apparently bearing no malice for his rough treatment, now that there was a prospect of the reward being paid, the little man jerked himself to the door, turned, winked solemnly at Harry, and the next moment he was gone.

“What do you think of that, Harry?” said Lionel, as the heavy step was heard descending the stairs.

“Shall I tell you? You will not be offended?”

“Offended! Not I. Say what you like.”

“Better not,” said Harry, bluntly; “for my thoughts run upon self-government, and the way in which some part with their money.”

Lionel did not seem to understand the allusion, for he only whistled softly as he set light to another cigar; while Harry raised his book, but not to read, for he began to think of the letter received that night, and to compare it with the appearance of D. Wragg, ending by dismissing the matter from his thoughts, with the remark, beneath his breath, that it was very strange, and a hope that it was not a trap.

“Perhaps I can act as friend, as well as tutor,” he said to himself, with a smile; and then his thoughts roved off to Patty Pellet.

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Five.

An Encounter.

“Brownjohn Street? First to the left, and secun’ to the right. Better button up your pockets,” said a policeman, setting his neck in his shining stock, and looking hard at the inquirers of the way, who nodded thanks, and then strode leisurely on, the younger making loud remarks to his companion concerning the appearance of those whom he termed “the natives,” and returning in a cool insolent way the unfriendly looks of divers slouching gentlemen engaged in shoulder-polishing the street corners, or hanging about doorsteps to converse with slatternly girls.

Not observing that they were followed by the policeman, the inquirers took the “first to the left, and secun’ to the right.” And then referring to a card which he took from his pocket, the younger man stopped short in front of D. Wragg’s, looked eagerly at the dogs, and afterwards with his companion entered the shop.

“By jove, Harry, where are we?” exclaimed the first, aloud. “Look at that! who would not be a dove?” Then, fixing his glass in one eye, he stared rudely at Patty Pellet, who, taken by surprise, stood motionless for a few moments, with scarlet face, upon a low pair of steps, the dove she had been feeding still resting upon her hand and pecking softly at her lips.

“Allow me!” exclaimed Lionel, advancing as if to assist the astonished girl to descend; but the next instant she had bounded down, to stand with brightened eye at bay in one corner of the shop, her gaze being now directed at Harry, the recognition being mutual, though the latter was so completely taken aback that no word passed his lips.

The next moment Harry had taken all in at a glance—the shop, the trade, Patty evidently quite at home there. His heart beat fast; and in spite of himself, as he thought of his companion, he felt, “What shall I do if she claims acquaintanceship?”

He felt ashamed of himself for harbouring the thought; but Patty made no sign, and the short silence was broken by Lionel.

“Prudish; eh?” he said, coolly, and he took a step forward.

“Recollect yourself,” whispered Harry, sternly, and he laid his hand heavily upon the young man’s shoulder.

“Oh! all right,” was the rejoinder, and Lionel laughed, while Harry, still struggling with his feelings, wondered what was to come next. He called himself coward and cur one moment, and the next he rejoiced that Patty totally ignored their former meeting; while, immediately after, strange thoughts assailed him, and he felt a bitter sting as he realised the fact that the bright little flower who had proved so attractive to him at Norwood, should have its habitation amidst such squalor and surroundings of evil. He was a coward, and he knew it, as he mentally exclaimed, “I can’t know her here before him!”

These thoughts passed like a flash; but Harry was not alone, for swift fancies passed through Patty Pellet’s mind, each one leaving a bitter sting, as she felt that what the old people had said was right—there was too much difference between their stations, and that Harry Clayton was ashamed to know her before his friends.

“And I am ashamed to know him as well,” she concluded, defiantly, as Harry in a suppressed voice, exclaimed, “I did not expect—”

Then he stopped and recovered himself, trying hard to arrange his ideas, his mind wandering from the Norwood drawing-room to Duplex Street, and from there to the strange place they were in.

“Had Lionel noticed the half recognition?” he asked himself, as fresh sordid ideas sprung up. “If he had, how could the present post be retained with comfort to himself? and he could not afford very well to throw it up. He would be lowered in the young fellow’s eyes directly—it was terribly unfortunate.” Love was getting, for the moment, his wings terribly bruised in the encounter.

Then he stepped forward himself, and said, calmly, as if addressing a stranger—“I think this is Mr D. Wragg’s place of business, is it not?”

The words had hardly left his lips before he was burning with rage and bitterness. What I had he been seeking her for months, and now that they had met, was he ashamed to know her before Lionel Redgrave, because he was a patrician, and the poor girl was here, when, scores of times, he had thought of her as his heart’s queen? But why was she here? What did it all mean?

These thoughts passed like lightning through his brain; but before Patty could answer, a response came from the

back room.

“All right, sir, all right, I’m D. Wragg—that’s my name,” and the owner thereof began to jerk himself forward, while, with a slight bow, Patty glanced from one to the other, and then disappeared.

“Is this the Decadia, Harry?” said Lionel meaningly, “or are we at court? But what the devil’s that fellow staring at?” he exclaimed, as he turned his glass fiercely upon a lowering face glaring in at the door, as, with his hands in his pockets, an ill-looking ruffian stood watching the two strangers.

“It’s all right, gents, it’s all right,” exclaimed D. Wragg; “that’s only Jack Scruby, and he’s nobody. It’s all right, gents!” and he jerked his arm here and there. “There’s rats, gents, aint they? There’s dorgs, aint they! What do you say to as nice a toy tarrier as was ever give to a lady?”

“Who’s the young lady who was here just now?” said Lionel, coolly.

D. Wragg’s face changed slightly, as looking sharply up into his visitor’s face, he said, bluntly—

“Oh, never mind her; she’s a visitor—girl up-stairs. We was talking about dorgs, wasn’t us?”

Lionel was checked for the moment; but seeing Harry’s eye fixed keenly upon him, he said, roughly—

“There, there! I want no toy tarriers. Where’s Luff?”

“It’s all right, sir; don’t you make no mistake. When I says as I’ll get a gent his dorg, I mean it; and—there now!” he exclaimed, with a voice of the most intense disgust. “I did think as I was dealing with gents as would keep their word. I calls that shabby. But just as you like, though; I’m ready.”

“What do you mean?” said Harry Clayton; for the little man had thrust his hands into his pockets, and leant back against a parrot’s cage, whose occupant immediately buried its beak amongst the wiry hair that ornamented D. Wragg’s scalp.

“What do I mean? Why! didn’t I give you both a hint about the suspiciousness of the gent as had the dorg? Didn’t I tell you what might be the consequences? Didn’t I tell you as they was a body of men as I despises? And yet you both has the meanness to go and bring one along with you. That ere aint the way to get dorgs back as is lost. Don’t you make no mistake, gents. You may depend upon it as the party as that dorg follered home has gone right chock away in disgust long enough ago.”

“Police!” exclaimed Lionel. “Why, the man’s mad!”

“Looks like it, don’t it,” said D. Wragg, coolly. “Only don’t you make no mistake. I’ve had dealings in dorgs afore now, gents; and I don’t think, as you’ll find, I aint fledged.”

The young men turned as the speaker pointed towards the door, and gave quite a start as, in place of the heavy features just before the occupants of the door-frame, they saw peering in the impassive inquiring countenance of a policeman.

But the next moment the constable had sauntered on, muttering first the word “rats,” and after walking a few steps, “or pigeons.”

Harry directly recognised in him the constable who had directed them, and turning to the dealer, he said, quietly—

“My friend here is a gentleman, Mr Wragg. He gave you to understand distinctly last night that he should not employ the police.”

“Then what was that there Bobby a looking in for, then?” said the dealer, in an injured tone.

“On my honour I don’t know, unless it was from simple curiosity,” replied Harry. “We asked him to direct us in a street a short distance away.”

“Honour bright?” said D. Wragg.

“I gave you my word,” said Harry, with ill-concealed contempt; and there was something so straightforward in the young man’s countenance, that it immediately carried with it conviction, for the dealer brightened up, and directly thrust out a hand in token of amity.

Smiling the while, Harry Clayton took it, Lionel looking on with an amused expression.

“I beg your pardon, sir—I beg your pardon. Don’t you make no mistake. I aint a mean, contemptible cageful of suspicion, I aint. I beg your pardon. That there’s a hand as never did nothing wuss yet than help to get a gent back his dorg, so as to oblige a regular customer. Plenty of gents trust me, and comes to me when they’ve had their dorgs foller other people; and I acks as mejum and commissioner, and does my best for both parties.”

“’Pon my soul, this grows highly amusing,” said Lionel, laughing. “Why, Harry, I’m right; we must have come to court. May I ask if the young lady of the house will again be visible, so as to go through the same performance?”

Harry looked annoyed, and D. Wragg gave Lionel a sharp, searching sidelong glance, which the other missed.

“Let’s settle the business at once, gents,” said D. Wragg. “Let me see, sir,” he continued, jerking himself round the counter. “I’ll trouble you for two fivers.”

“But where’s the dog?” said Lionel.

“Don’t you make no mistake, sir. You hand over the money, and you shall have him in five minutes.”

Lionel hesitated for a moment, and then drew a couple of crisp notes from his pocket-book, and handed them to the dealer.

“I suppose you will give me a receipt?” said Lionel.

“Never put pen to paper in my life, gents, and never means to,” was the reply. “It’s been the ruin of thousands. But you shall have a receipt for buying a dog, if you like. Here,” he said, stumping to the inner door, and speaking to somebody within; “you won’t mind coming to write out a receipt for ten pound for me, will you? If you won’t, I must call Janet down. That’s right, my dear; come and do it while I go and see if that there party’s brought the dorg.”

To Harry Clayton’s great annoyance, Patty came slowly and timidly from the inner room, her face flushed and her eyes wandering from one to the other.

She quickly took pen and paper from a drawer and began to write, while D. Wragg jerked himself out of the door.

“Why, Harry,” said Lionel, staring hard at the fair little writer the while, “depend upon it that old chap has cut with the money, and we shall never see him again. But never mind; he has left us a jolly little hostage, and we can take her instead.”

Harry Clayton bit his lips, for his fingers itched to seize Lionel by the collar, and shake him till he could not speak; but he felt that he could do nothing now but suffer for his want of frankness, as he saw the pretty little head bent down over the paper.

“What a charming handwriting!” continued Lionel, in the bantering tones, for he had seen Harry’s annoyance. “What well-shaped letters! By the way, my dear, what boarding-school were you at?”

Patty’s crimson face was raised to his for an instant, but her eye fell beneath his bold stare, and she went on writing with trembling hand.

“I shall place that receipt amongst my treasures,” said Lionel, “and—”

“Have the goodness to recollect where you are,” said Harry, angrily. “Your banter is out of place and offensive.”

Lionel stared, laughed, and elevated his eyebrows, as, without bestowing upon him another glance, Patty took the slip of paper she had written, and handed it to Harry, meeting his eyes for the moment fully as she said in a low voice, “Thank you!” and then she passed out of the shop.

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Six.

Good Advice.

“Your receipt, Lionel,” said Harry, quietly, as he passed the paper to his companion.

“Thanks! yes. A saucy little prude! she knows how to play her cards. We’ve got the receipt, and he’s got the ten pounds; but I don’t mean to go without value for my cash, if I take one of those scrub-tailed old cockatoos, and—Ah! what, Luffy, old boy—what, Luffy! Down there, down there, good dog! What! you know your old master, then? There! down, down!”

“There, gents, that’s about it, aint it,” said D. Wragg, stumping in after the dog, and stooping to unfasten the collar round his neck, as the delighted animal bounded upon its master, licking his hand, pawing him, and displaying his unbounded canine pleasure at the meeting, to the great endangering of D. Wragg’s stock-in-trade.

“And now, is there anything more as I can do for you, eh?” said D. Wragg, rubbing his hands, and jigging about as if freshly wound up. “A few rats for the dorg? A couple o’ score sparrers for a shot? Send ’em anywheres! Don’t you make no mistake. You won’t get better supplied in the place. Not to-day, gents? Well, another time perhaps.”

“Yes; I’ll give you another look in,” said Lionel, gazing hard the while at Harry.

“Werry good, sir! werry good!” said D. Wragg, rubbing his hands and jerking himself as if another set of springs had just been brought into use. “I hope as you will. Gents often do come to me again when they’ve been once. Let me give you another card. Here, Janet, bring me another card for the gents. Oh! she aint there. Would you mind giving me a card off the chimally-piece, my dear, for these gents?”

Lionel, who had reached the door, returned; and Patty, now quite composed, brought out a card, and avoiding the young man’s outstretched hand, she passed it to D. Wragg.

“Give it to the gentlemen, my dear; don’t be ashamed. There’s nothing to mind. Don’t you make no mistake, gents; she’s young and a bit shy.”

Patty did not look up as the card was taken from her hand; and though Harry tried hard to meet her eyes once more, so as to ask forgiveness for the slight he had offered to her, she turned back into the room, and the young men passed out of the shop.

“That’s a good dorg, gents, a good dorg!” whispered D. Wragg, from behind his hand, as he followed them to the door. “You’d better keep a sharp eye on him. I’ve got my bit of commission out of this job; but honour bright, gents. As gents, I don’t want to see you here again arter the bull-tarrier—not just yet, you know—not just yet. Good-day, gents. Don’t you make no mistake; you know, about me. Good-day!”

“Bye-bye! old chap,” said Lionel, lightly, as they strolled on. “Wish we’d bought a chain and collar, Harry; I shouldn’t like to lose old Luff again, in this abominable maze. Let’s go back!”

“No, no; there is no need!” exclaimed Harry, hastily. And then flushing slightly at the eagerness he had displayed, he continued firmly—“If you’ll take my advice, Lionel, you will go there no more.”

“Perhaps not, Reverend Harry Clayton,—perhaps not,” laughed the young man, eyeing his companion sideways. “But don’t you make no mistake,” he continued, mimicking the voice and action of the man they had just left; “I may want a toy tarrier for a present, or a few rats, or a score or two of sparrers, or—eh, Harry?—to see the lady go through the dove performance. Don’t you make no mistake, friend Harry, for it’s quite within the range of probability that I may go there often.”

“Perhaps once too often!” exclaimed Harry, impetuously, for he could not control the passion within him. As Lionel spoke, each word seemed to be freighted with bitterness, armed with a sting and a sense of misery such as he had never before felt, and which seemed to crush down his spirit. Visions of Patty smiling welcome upon Lionel floated before him, filling him with a new feeling of rage; and it was all he could do to hide it from his companion, who began to whistle, and then said lightly—

“Perhaps so—perhaps so! As you say, I may go there once too often; but that’s my business, Master Harry, and nothing to do with reading classics. What a cad!” he exclaimed, as he returned the fierce look bestowed upon him by a heavy-browed young fellow in a sleeved waistcoat; nodded familiarly to the policeman; and then, making a point of coolly and insolently returning every loiterer’s stare, he passed on out of the region of the Decadian, thinking all the same, though, of Patty.

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Seven.

An Alarm.

Mrs Winks was bound under contract to spend the next day at Duplex Street; but she made known just now her presence in the Dials, being busy enough in the lower regions of D. Wragg’s; for the smoke and steam of her copper altar, erected to the goddess of cleanliness, rose through the house, to be condensed in a dewy clamminess upon handrail and paint. It was the incense that rose thickly to the nostrils when she stuck in a wooden probe to fish up boiling garments for purification’s sake.

The inhabitants of D. Wragg’s dwelling took but little notice of Mrs Winks’ washing-days, inasmuch as they were inured to them by their frequency. D. Wragg, though, must be excepted; for when some bird would sneeze and evince a dislike to the odorous moist vapour, he called to mind the deaths of three valuable cochins by croup—a catarrh-like distemper which, with or without truth, he laid to the charge of Mrs Winks’ washing.

So that good lady busied herself over what she called her own and Monsieur Canau’s “toots,”—meaning thereby divers calico undergarments—till her playbill curl-papers grew soft in the steam. Mrs Winks was interrupted but once, when, aroused by the plunging in of the copper-stick and an extra cloud from the sacrifice, D. Wragg stamped with his heavy boot upon the shop-floor, and shouted an inquiry as to how long Mrs Winks would be before she was done, and whether she knew that there was company in the house?

To this query the stout lady returned the very vague response of “Hours!”

For D. Wragg was now shop-minding, and, as he called it, busy—that is to say, he was going over his stock, stirring up sluggish birds with a loose perch, administering pills composed of rue and butter to sickly bantams, which sat in a heap with feathers erect, and refusing to be smoothed down.

Here and there he would pin a newspaper before the cage of a newly-captured finch, fighting hard to escape by breaking its prison bars, beating its soft round bosom bare of feathers against the cruel wires, but with a fair prospect before it of finding relief for its restless spirit, if not for its body, and flight—where?

Then there were the “tarriers” to look after, some of which justified their name by not finding customers.

Here D. Wragg seemed quite at home, looking, as he stooped and tightened a chain or shortened a string, much like one of the breed Darwinised, and in a state of transition.

D. Wragg’s ministrations were needed, for since the shop had been left by Janet to his care, there had been sundry vicious commotions amongst the dogs. One slight skirmish had ended in a spaniel having an ear made more fringe-like in character. Then the restless little animals had executed a *gavotte* upon their hind-legs, maybe a waltz, ending in a general tangle, and an Old Bailey performance, caused by the twisting together of string and chain into a Gordian knot, which puzzled D. Wragg into using a knife for sword in its solution—the dogs the while lying panting, with protruding eyes, and a general aspect of being at the last gasp.

At last, though, the canine fancy were reduced to order, so far as was possible; for chained-up dogs are always moved by a restless spirit to reach something a few inches beyond their nose—canine examples, indeed, of human discontent; and if small and restless of breed, hang themselves upon an average about twelve times *per diem*—

possibly without suicidal intent, though, from their miserable state, one cannot avoid suspicion.

D. Wragg had growled almost as much as his dogs in reducing them to order; but he turned at last to go over other portions of his stock, pinching protruded rats' tails to make them lively; thrusting a hand down the stocking nailed over the hole in the top of the sparrow-cage, and taking out one panting black-cravatted cock-bird from amongst his scores of fellows, to find it naked of breast, with its heavy eyes half-closed, dying fast, and so escaping the sportive shot of the skilled marksman in some sweepstake—"so many birds each, shot from the trap."

D. Wragg did not approve of waste, so taking the half-dead bird to one corner, he opened the cage, wherein, fixed and glaring with its yellow eye, sat a kestrel, which sluggishly dropped from its perch, and, with a good deal of unnecessary beating of its pointed wings, seized the hapless chirrupper in one quartette of yellow claws, returned to its seat, and then and there proceeded to strip the sparrow, sending a cloud of light downy feathers into the cage of its neighbour, a staring barn-owl, which had opened its eyes for a few minutes, but only to blink a while before subsiding into what appeared to be a ball of feathers. A pair of bullfinches were then roused, by a finger drawn rapidly across the cage bars—the effect being decidedly startling, while the next object upon which the dealer's eye fell was a disreputable-looking, ragged-coated, grey parrot, busily engaged in picking off its feathers, as if, out of spite for its imprisonment, it wished to render itself as unsightly and unsaleable as possible.

"You're a beauty, you are!" growled D. Wragg, poking at it viciously with the perch; but, nothing daunted, the bird seized the end of the assailing weapon with its strong hooked beak, and held on fiercely, screaming a loud defiance the while.

With a dexterous jerk, the stick was withdrawn—a strategical movement evidently taken by the bird as a token of defeat; for it stood upon one leg, derisively danced its head up and down, and then loudly cried out—"Quack—quack—quack!" an accomplishment learned of a couple of London-white Aylesbury ducks, located in a small green dog-kennel, whose door was formed of an old half-worn fire-guard.

Apparently satisfied, D. Wragg withdrew to a corner which he specially affected, and turned his back to door and window while he drew forth his dirty pocket-book and carefully examined the two crisp bank-notes, replaced them, and buttoned them up in his breastpocket, as he muttered, softly—

"More yet, my lad, more yet! I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you turned out a mint to some on us afore we've done with you. And why not?" he muttered again, as he glanced uneasily over his shoulder. "What's the good o' money to such as him. If he likes to come on the chance of seeing her here, 'taint my doing, is it? I wish she was here always, I do."

D. Wragg frowned as he proceeded to refresh himself with another pipe, and a renewed spelling over of his paper. Then he cocked his head on one side, magpie fashion, and listened, for a light step was heard, and the closing of a door, and the next minute, without waiting for her friend to descend, Patty was up-stairs, where Janet was watching her goldfish.

The latter turned as soon as she saw Patty, and seeming to read trouble in her face, she wound her arm round the little waist and drew her close.

"I came down to the shop," said Janet; "but you were writing something for him, so I took advantage of it and came back. But don't do it, Patty; I don't like you to go in there."

Patty did not answer, but stood looking, dreamy and thoughtful.

"Are you keeping something from me?" said Janet, pettishly.

"No—no—no," said Patty, starting, and smiling once more; "I was only dull without you. Now, let's talk. Some one came this morning—two some ones—they were there when you saw me writing—they spoke to me, and—and—and—"

Patty's face reddened, and then grew worn and troubled as she spoke.

"I did not like it," she continued; "and—and—there! what stuff I am talking! We shall have no French to-day. Let's go down, and when Monsieur comes in, get him to paint a partridge's beak and legs, and I'll help you to do it. There! pray, come down."

Janet had her arm still round Patty's waist, and for a few moments she stood gazing up at her in a strange thoughtful way. She did not speak, though; but keeping close to her visitor, walked with her to the door, muttering softly, "Patty has secrets—Patty has secrets; and I guess what it means."

Hand-in-hand they began to descend the stairs, but only for Patty to turn back and lead the deformed girl into the room.

"What is it? what ails you?" said Janet, gazing wonderingly at her. "Are you ill? Do you feel faint?"

"No—no; it is nothing; I—I thought—I thought I had seen one of them before."

"One of them!"

"Yes, one of the customers; but it was nothing—nothing," she said, sadly; "I must have dreamed it. Janet, do you believe in fancying things?"

"Fancying things! What are you talking about?"

“In feeling that things are to take place—in being as if something whispered to you that there was to be trouble by and by, and misery, and heartaches—that the hawk was coming to seize a miserable little weak pigeon, and tear, and tear it till its poor heart was bleeding.”

“No; stuff!” ejaculated Janet.

“I feel so,” said Patty, slowly, “and sometimes I believe it. O Janet! if one could be rich and nice, and live where people would not be ashamed to see you, and—Ah! I’d give anything—anything to be rich and a lady. But there,” she cried, impetuously, “do come down.”

“Riddles—talking in riddles; like people speak in their sleep,” said Janet, as she wreathed her long arm round Patty. “Perhaps you ought not to come and see me here, for it is horrible; but I am used to it, and I could not live without you now. They don’t like you to come?”

“No,” said Patty; “but they think it would be unkind for me to stay away. They like you, and my father is fond of Monsieur Canau, and loves the musical evenings. You ought to come and live near us.”

“In fashionable Clerkenwell, eh?” said Janet, laughing. “No; he will not leave here—we are used to it, and we are poor, Patty,” she added, with a sigh.

“Lean on me,” said Patty, lightly; “and don’t let’s be miserable;” and they now began to descend the stairs; but only to be met by D. Wragg stumping and jerking up to meet them.

As the dealer came up, he gazed earnestly for a moment at Patty, and there was a hesitating air about him; but he seemed to chase it away, as, with an effort, he exclaimed—

“Here don’t you make no—Here, Miss Pellet, my dear, you’re wanted.”

“Wanted!” said Patty, instinctively shrinking back, while Janet’s dark fierce eyes gazed from one to the other.

“Yes; wanted—in the shop,” said D. Wragg. “You don’t mind coming, do you? Don’t stop her, Janet; it may mean money, you know.”

“But who—who wants me?” faltered Patty, one of whose hands tightly pressed the long restraining bony fingers of Janet—“who wants me?”

“It’s one o’ them swells as come about the dorg!”

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Eight.

The Alarm Quelled.

By nine o’clock in the morning of the day succeeding that of his dinner-party at Norwood, Mr Richard Pellet, eager and anxious, was in Borton Street. He would have been there hours before, but Mrs Richard Pellet had been suffering from over-excitement, which was her way of describing a sharp fit of indigestion, brought on by over-indulgence in the good things of the table. So Mrs Richard Pellet had been faint and hysterical, and violently sick and prostrated. She had consumed nearly a half-bottle of the best Cognac; the servants had been, like their master, up nearly all night; and the consequence was, that about five o’clock, Mr Richard Pellet had lain down for an hour, which in spite of his anxiety extended itself to three. He awoke under the impression that he had been asleep five minutes, when he smoothed himself, hurried to the train, took a cab, and arrived at Borton Street two hours later than he had intended.

If he could have made sure that, now she was gone, he would see no more of Ellen Herrisey, he would have ceased from troubling himself in the matter; but, as he would have expressed himself, in his position the dread of any exposure was not to be borne.

It would never have done for his name—the name of Mr Richard Pellet—known everywhere in the city; down, too, in so many lists amongst the great philanthropists of the day, to be brought forward in such a connection, and then to be dragged through the mud and laughed at by those who had grudged his rise. Why! his name was held in honour by all the great religious societies, whose secretaries invariably sent him reports of their proceedings, and they did no more for what Richard called the “nobs.” So by nine the next morning he was at Borton Street, hot, angry, undecided, and uncomfortable.

No doubt, he told himself, by putting the police upon her track, he would be able to find her; but such a proceeding would involve confidences, and partake to some extent of the nature of an exposure, which he could not afford. No, it must be done quietly; so, with the intention of having it done quietly, he gave a sneaky, diffident, hang-dog rap at the door, as he glanced up and down the street to see if he was observed—such a knock as might be given by a gipsy-looking woman, with her wean slung at her back, and a bundle of clothes-pegs for sale in her hand.

But Richard Pellet’s humble no-notice-attracting knock had as little effect inside the house as in the street at large, and, in spite of the giver’s fidgety manner and uneasy glances up and down, no one answered the summons.

There was no help for it; so the early caller gave another rap at the door—a single rap; for, from the effects of an ordinary double knock, he saw in imagination a score of heads at the open doors and windows of the densely-populated street, gazing at and looking down upon him as the doctor and ordainer of strait-waistcoats for the woman said to be insane, and kept so closely for years past in a room at Number 804.

Quite five minutes now elapsed without his venturing to knock again, while he pretended to be absorbed in the contents of the newspaper he held in his hand. But at last his position grew painful, for a small boy bearing a big child came and sat himself upon the step, and looked at him; then two more children came and cricked their necks as they gazed up in his face, and a woman across the way also lent her attention.

Richard Pellet was turning all over into a state of the most profuse perspiration, and had his hand once more raised to the knocker, when he heard a door open, apparently beneath his feet, and he started as a shrill voice from the area shouted, “What is it?”

The important city man’s perspiration from being cold now grew to be hot; but he felt that it was no time for being indignant, as he looked down from his height, moral and literal, upon a little old-faced wrinkle-browed girl-of-all-work, almost a child, who was rubbing her cheek with a match-box.

“Missus ain’t down yet,” she replied, in answer to Richard’s interrogations.

“I’ll come in then and wait,” said the city man, peering down through the railings; but the girl shook her head.

“She said I wasn’t to let no one in. There’s so many tramps and beggars about.”

“There!” exclaimed Richard, impatiently, as he threw down a card. “Take that up to her, and I’ll wait here; or, no—give me that card back,” he said, for the thought struck him that it was impossible to say where that card might go.

The girl tried to throw the card back, and succeeded in projecting it, twice over, a couple of feet, to come fluttering down again, when she caught it, and stood shaving and scraping the dirt off her cheek with its edge, evidently finding it more grateful than the sandpaper of the match-box.

“There! never mind,” said Richard. “Go and tell her Mr Norwood is here.”

“Mr Norwood?” said the girl.

“Yes, Mr Norwood,” exclaimed Richard, angrily; and the girl disappeared, Richard employing himself the while in peering furtively about for observers.

He had turned his back to the area, and was wondering whether the potman, coming down the street, with what appeared to be a gigantic bunch of pewter grapes upon his back, was intent upon his own affairs or watching him, when he started, for a shrill “I say!” ascended from the area, and looking round, he found the diminutive maid presenting him with his card, which was stuck amongst the hairs of a long broom, whose handle enabled the child to elevate the piece of pasteboard to within its owner’s reach.

“I thought I could do it,” said the girl, laughing.

“Go—and—tell—your—mistress—Mister—Norwood—wants—her,” hissed Richard Pellet, savagely; as, with one action, he seized the card, and shook his fist at the girl.

“Hadn’t you better call again,” said the imp, “and leave the paper? She never pays fust time, and you ain’t been before.”

“Go—and—”

Richard Pellet got no further; for, alarmed at his fierce tones, his auditor vanished as he began; there was a scuffle and a banging door, and he was left alone, pending the delivery of his message.

Another five minutes elapsed, when the door-chain was taken down, the key laboriously turned, and Richard Pellet was admitted by the dirty-faced girl, and shown into the parlour, where, staring the whole time, the child polished a chair for him with her apron, her nose upon her arm; and then, wondering why the black-coated important visitor had no rate-books sticking out of his pocket, she announced that “Missus” would be down directly.

Fuming and frowning, Richard Pellet seated himself upon the rubbed chair; but only to bound from it at the end of a minute, in a state of nervous perturbation, caused by some urchin suddenly and furiously rattling his hoop-stick along the area railings. But Richard Pellet was somewhat unstrung; he had been drinking during the night of wakefulness more than was good for him, to allay the annoyance and harass to which he had been subjected, and now the potent spirit was reminding him of the transgression.

But as he once more seated himself, he determined, upon one thing, and that was, should he obtain a clue by whose means he could trace and overtake Ellen, he would not leave her again until he had seen her safely back with Mrs Walls.

“I’ll make all fast, so that I shall know that she is safely at home for at least two years; for once there again, I know she will be tame and quiet as—Curse her, though! why did she play me such a trick as this? She must be after the child. I wish it was—”

Richard Pellet did not finish his sentence, but started up, and stood staring at the figure which now entered the room.

“Why—why”—he stammered; “I thought you had gone off.”

“Gone!” said Ellen, with a weary smile,—“gone! no, no; I only went to see her little face once more, and she was not there. You had taken her away, and I came back, Richard, for I knew you would be angry; and I said that perhaps you would forgive me, and let me see her again, and tell me where she is. Only once, Richard! only once—just for a

minute!” and the clasped hands went up towards him once more in supplication.

But a worldly feeling was strong upon Richard Pellet; in that hour his spirits rose, and he felt elate, for the danger was past, and knowing full well this woman’s truthful candid nature, he knew that it was as she said. She had been to the house, and then returned; and there was no exposure now—nothing to fear, and his heart grew hard as flint as he sneeringly said—

“You are confoundedly obedient all at once,” and then, with a half laugh, “why didn’t you stay away altogether?”

“Obedient, Richard!” she sobbed; “was I not always your slave? did I not always do as you wished? and now, but this one little request—this one prayer—”

She paused, for her gaoler entered the room.

“Ho!” said the woman, “you know all about it by this time, I suppose. I found her back again when I got home. Perhaps you’d better”—Here she whispered.

Richard Pellet’s hand went reluctantly into his pocket, for though he was generosity’s self with his money when he could see returning interest—or at least show—in other matters, he grudged every shilling he spent; but the woman’s demand was satisfied, and she left the room, taking with her Ellen, while upon her return in a few minutes without her charge, fresh arrangements were made, and the bars of Ellen Herrisey’s prison grew closer than ever.

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Nine.

Nurse or Doctor.

“You ought to have been a woman, Mr Ruggles,” said Mrs Jared, one Sunday, when Tim came to see them after church, bringing with him little Pine. “He had taken her for a treat,” he said, “to hear Mr Pellet play the organ;” and now, having accepted Mrs Jared’s pressing invitation to dinner, he had been explaining to that lady the various plans he had adopted for keeping the child warm, for Mrs Jared had been taking quite a motherly interest in the gentle little thing, and recommending flannels and wrapping.

But Tim had forestalled her, as he triumphantly showed, for there was flannel in various forms, neatly stitched and adapted. The little jacket the child wore was built by Tim, and in various ways he displayed how thoroughly he loved his charge.

Sundays were glorious days for Tim and little Pine, since Mrs Ruggles would spend so much of her time at St Runwald’s. Sometimes Tim would take the child to church, and sit as close to the organ as possible, that Pine might catch a glimpse of Jared through the curtains, and listen to the strains he made the grand old instrument pour forth; for Jared kept to the old fashion of playing a symphony between each verse of psalm or hymn, at times, too, forgetting himself and lengthening out his extempore scraps to a strange extent. But vicar and congregation murmured not; Mr Timson was the only objector, and when he found fault, Jared always apologised so pleasantly, that the most rigid of churchwardens ought to have been satisfied, though Mr Timson was not, for he would say to the vicar, “Why, he’ll forget all about it by next Sunday;” and Mr Timson was quite right.

But little Pine used to say it made her think, and would lay her head against the boards, and close her eyes as though in rapt attention.

“It makes me think about her,” she would whisper to Tim, if he rose to go before Jared had finished his voluntary; and then Tim would look mournful, as he reseated himself, and took hold of the little wasted hand raised to make him stay.

And then what walks they would have—those two—now to Regent’s, now to St James’s Park—walks of toil for Tim, whose heart would sink as he found the child less and less able to bear the exertion; stopping occasionally to rest, or looking pitifully up in his face to say—“Don’t walk so fast, please.” I wonder how many miles Tim would carry that child upon a fine Sunday? Day of rest! It was a day of hard labour for Tim; but it was a labour of love. If the day were cold, he would trudge along merrily; while, if it were warm, he would still go on, his face shining with pleasure, and the perspiration standing in beads amongst the wrinkles. “If we could only manage a kerridge,” he had said once; but little Pine flinched from the idea.

“It would look so childish for me to ride in one,” she said, wearily, and Tim gazed wonderingly at the strange old look upon the child’s face, as she passed a finger across her forehead and temples to smooth back the stray hairs, now on this side, now on the other, where they lay lightly on the broad blue-veined expanse.

One of Tim’s favourite spots was the lodge in Hyde Park, where curds and whey were sold; but the little invalid did not seem to care much for the treat, as Tim called it, but she used to sit, spoon in hand, and sip and sip, looking longingly the while at the flowers.

It must have been on account of this love that little Pine showed for flowers that Tim braved Mrs Ruggles’s displeasure by becoming terribly enamoured of them himself, buying pots of musk and geraniums, and little rose trees, which all brought a light into the child’s eye, though in that close room in Carnaby Street the plants soon lost their bloom, fading day by day, now dropping a blossom, now a leaf, in spite of such fresh air as could be obtained, watering, and placing them in the sun so long as it shone on the back-room windows.

“They wants more fresher air,” Tim would say; and then, as he threaded his needle, he would look across the room at little Pine, and sigh softly to himself as he thought of how she too seemed to want fresher air, such as he could only

give her once a week, while, if it happened to be a wet Sunday, though he would willingly have staggered along, carrying the child, with an umbrella held over her, he dared not take her into the damp air, but sat at home to tell her wondrous stories of the good old times, or read her what he considered to be entertaining and instructive scraps from *The Weekly Despatch*. Some people might have considered his selections unsuitable; but they proved beneficial to the child, for they invariably sent her to sleep.

Poor Tim anxiously watched and trimmed that little lamp of life, whose flame wavered so whenever the cold easterly winds blew down the streets or drove the choking smoke back into the room. Oil, oil, oil, and more oil, and more oil, and then for a while the flame would brighten, and so would Tim, and chuckle and rub his hands, and stitch on night and day as if trying to do without sleep. No mornings were too dark or too cold for Tim, who could wake to five minutes, at three, four, or five o'clock in the dark; and there he would be with open waistcoat, cross-legged upon his board, glasses mounted and lamp shaded, stitch—stitch—stitch, hour after hour, to make up for the time lost with little Pine.

How he reckoned minutes and hours between times, so that the medicine should be administered to the moment—an observance which he held to be absolutely necessary to ensure efficacy; and more than once he was almost in agony for fear that Mrs Ruggles should have administered a couple of doses too closely together. Never did doctor have nurse so exact in carrying out his instructions, and, could attention have ensured it, little Pine would soon have grown strong.

But it was not to be; the little eyes grew brighter, and the fragile form more thin day by day; day by day a weary listlessness crept over the child, while, as if compassionating her sufferings, Nature was kind, and continued to soothe her often with a gentle loving sleep.

More oil, and more again, and then a flicker and a leap up of the flame that had for days been sinking slowly. But the flashes, though bright, were evanescent, and he who trimmed so diligently oft felt his heart to sink.

But Tim's despondency never lasted long. "She'll be better soon as the wind changes," he would say; but the wind changed, and still Pine sank.

"Oil's not so strong as the last," then Tim would say; and the next time the stock grew low he would trot off to a fresh chemist's, whose medicament would have no better effect than the last. So poor Tim would try, in his anxiety, another and another, until he had put every chemist within range under contribution, but with no more satisfactory result.

"I'm sure it ain't so strong," he would exclaim half-a-dozen times a day; and then he would bring out his own stock from under a little pile of cloth shreds, remove the cork, and apply the bottle-neck first to one and then to the other nostril, shaking his head afterwards in a most learned manner, and vowing that it was the most cruel thing he knew to adulterate a medicine.

Tim would even go so far as to feel the child's pulse after the fashion of the dispensary doctor, when, having no watch, he would attentively gaze the while at the swinging pendulum of the old Dutch clock. And though it is extremely doubtful whether he could tell any difference in the regularity of the beats, yet he always seemed to derive a great deal of satisfaction from the proceeding.

But little Pine seldom complained, and then only softly to Tim, as she crept to him for comfort. She never hesitated to take from his hands her nauseous medicine, and day after day Tim carefully, anxiously trimmed the little lamp, which, in spite of all his care, burned lower and lower, flickering in the socket, until such time as a harsher blast than usual should beat it out.

End of Volume One.

Volume Two—Chapter One.

The Poor-Boxes.

Mrs Ruggles thought that it was her place, and said so; but Mr Purkis was of opinion that it was his place, and he said so—bringing forward, too, the fact that he had looked after them ever since the new ones had been placed inside the north and south doors. And, in spite of Mrs Ruggles' opposition, the beadle still continued to polish the quaint imitation antique steel hinges and claspings of the two little oak poor-boxes, while, to his great annoyance, Mrs Ruggles used to go and rub them over again.

Very proud was Mr Purkis of those boxes and their meandering steel-work and corners, of which there was so much that but little of the wood was left visible; and nearly all that was covered by the guards round the keyhole and slit through which the charitably-disposed of the congregation were in the habit of dropping their contributions.

"You see the place is so damp, sir," Mr Purkis said to Jared; "and it's not in my constitooshun to let a woman like that Mrs Ruggles go about and grin like a dog in the city, and sneer because there's a speck on the ornyments, and then pretend that she's so ashamed of their state that she's obliged to polish them up herself. But they're a mortal trouble to keep bright—they're as hard to keep bright as a man's conscience, sir; they tarnish like gold lace, although I've tried everything I know of, beginning with sand-paper, sir, and going down to Bath bricks and emery powder. Do you know, sir," he said, mysteriously, "it goes agen me to speak of her, she being, as it were, one of us; but, sir, it's my belief as she damps and moistens the steel on the sly, or spits upon them, o' purpose to aggravate my spirit and make the things rust. In fack, I caught her agen one, about a week ago. Every respect to you, sir, but I wish now as Mrs Purkis had took the post, sir; for Mrs Ruggles makes herself very okkard, and altogether she's a woman as Mrs

Purkis don't like, and I can assure you as a fack that when my missus takes a dislike to any one, that person ain't worth much.

"You see, sir, she's a dry sort of a woman, and very hard; and if she was my wife, I should never expect as there'd be any gravy with the meat for dinner. That's one of the great differences in wives, sir. Ruggles wouldn't never have been so full of wrinkles and furrers in his face if he'd had plenty of gravy. Look at me, sir; I'm a hearty man, work hard, and do a rattling good business in boots and shoes, princip'lly ready-mades. I weigh seventeen stone, and I'm pretty happy, sir; and what's the reason? Gravy, sir, gravy! You never sit down to our table without seeing plenty of gravy on it. Even when it's cold-meat day, sir, there's always a little saved in a tea-cup to eat with your potatoes. My wife was a cook, you know, sir, when I married her, and she well knows the vally of gravy. She won my heart with it, sir, and keeps it too. It's the real milk, of human kindness. You never knew a woman who loved gravy, and liked to see others enjoy it, leather a child as that woman leathers that child of their'n. Ruggles thinks she's a wonder, and of course it would be a sin to undeceive him; but I'm pretty sure of one thing, and that is, that there's never any gravy to speak of on Ruggles' table."

And after his long speech, Mr Purkis, who had just come home very moist and oozy from the church, after having a good polish at the poor-boxes, handed Jared the church keys for him to go and practise.

It was not very far from Purkis's boot and shoe emporium to St Runwald's, and when Jared reached the gates, he stood looking round for his boy—the invisible Ichabod—who was of a very mercurial temperament, and, if first upon the spot, given to indulgence in overing tombstones or standing upon one leg on the top; walking, at the risk of being impaled, round the iron railings of the family vaults; swarming up the rain water-pipes, and turning himself into a living gargoyle; throwing stones into the mouths of the corbels and breaking the windows; carving his initials in the mouldering stone, where "I.G." could often be distinguished, more often, however, with another letter added, greatly to Ichabod's disgust, by evil-disposed street boys, who mocked at his costume generally, and pulled his "tawsel" cap. The consequence of this was that the word, "P.I.G." graced the walls of the church in several places. Before now Ichabod had been upon the roof, and marked out the size of his shoe with a knife-point in the soft lead, and had been upon the top of the tower and amongst the bells, and down in the vaults, where he told his schoolfellows he had seen a live ghost; and the only wonder was, that in all Ichabod's travels he had never been mutilated or killed.

Jared Pellett looked for him east and west, north into the porch, and south towards the street; but there was no Ichabod in sight, so he shook his head, and said to himself that Ichabod was a bad boy—a fact that he had taken into consideration scores of times before—and then applying the large key, he entered the church and swung to the door.

The moment after entering, Jared started as if alarmed, for there, close beside him, stood a figure in the dim aisle, but he recovered himself instantly upon seeing that it was only the old vicar, whilst behind him stood churchwarden Timson; and then it was that Jared saw that they had been emptying the poor-box.

"How do Mr Pellett? Nice day," said the vicar, cordially. Then turning to the churchwarden—

"Must be something more, Mr Timson; feel again."

Mr Timson lifted the lid of the little steel-bound chest and thrust in a fat hand, feeling about in all directions, as if chasing active coins into dark corners, for them to dodge through his fingers and escape again. His face was quite a study as he poked about, and at length he drew forth his hand, looked at it on both sides, and declared that there was nothing more.

"Tut, tut, tut!—how strange! Why I felt sure that I put in a sovereign myself. It must have been last time; and yet I felt so sure, and—and—yes—to be sure! here it is, 'Sunday, 24th day, one pound!' There!" he continued, triumphantly holding the pocket-book out to the churchwarden, "I knew I did; and yet there's nothing here but silver and copper. Are you sure that you felt well, Mr Timson?"

"Feel again," said the latter, good-temperedly; and again the fat hand went to work, and the face looked more solid, but without success.

"Must have been in the other box," he said at last. The vicar brightened up at this, and they crossed the church to the north door, but from the scraps of conversation Jared Pellett could hear from the organ-loft, it was evident that the quest was without result. Through waiting for the boy, Jared soon dropped into one of his dreamy moods, and became forgetful of things external, until the tardy Ichabod arrived, out of breath, as if he had been exerting himself strenuously to get to the church in time, when the edifice was soon resounding with strains which drowned the rattling of keys and snapping of locks, as well as the conversation of vicar and churchwarden upon the subject of the missing money; but for all that the conversation went on.

"There might have been a great deal taken," said the vicar.

"Heaps," acquiesced Mr Timson.

"For, of course," said Mr Gray, "this is an exceptional time; and in other instances I doubt whether I should be able to miss anything."

"Very true; quite agree with you," said Mr Timson. "Just as you say."

"Pounds might have been abstracted," said the vicar.

"Abstract, an epitome, a taking from," muttered Mr Timson; "yes, just so, pounds, very true, sir."

"Hang it all, Timson, don't be so aggravating," said the vicar, pettishly. "What is the good of agreeing with one in

everything, it can't do any good?"

"Just so, sir," said Mr Timson; and then, turning very red and hot, "No, sir, of course not; but can't do any harm."

"Then for goodness' sake come into the vestry;" and the vicar led the way towards the little robing room to count the offerings of the charitable.

"Now, are you sure about that sovereign?" said Mr Timson to the vicar, as they passed down the nave.

"Sure!" exclaimed the vicar, "have I not shown you the entry? But there! I must have made a mistake."

"Of course you have," said Timson, triumphantly.

"For it is impossible," continued the vicar, "for any one to have obtained access to the money; and surely no one would be so cruel as rob the poor, eh? What do you think? Calmly and considerately now?"

"Just—," Mr Timson cut off the "so," and rubbed the side of his nose, and looked mysterious. Then, resting one finger upon the vicar's black silk vest, he said, "Once upon a time my desk was robbed—over and over again—without being broken open, and I put in marked money, and still it went; but I found the party out by that plan. And how do you think they got at the money, sir?"

"Crooked wire through the crack," said the vicar.

"No, no—false keys!" said Mr Timson, wagging his head. "False keys, and it was some one that had constant access to my office that did it."

The vicar mused, and fidgeted his neck in his stiff cravat, as involuntarily he turned over in his own mind the list of persons who had private access to the church—clerk, pew-opener, beadle, curate, organist, organ-blower, churchwardens, himself; and then he shook his head again, and the pair proceeded to count the money over once more upon the vestry table, calculated the total amount of silver and copper, made entries, and then tied the money carefully up in a little bag, and all to the accompaniment of Jared's music, which ever and again made the windows of the little vestry to rattle loudly.

"Fine organist, Mr Pellet!" said the vicar, after listening in silence for a few minutes. "We were lucky in getting him, Timson."

"Very fine; quite agree with you," said Mr Timson. "Capital congregations we get, too, now—almost double what they were in old Harvey's time."

"Um!" ejaculated the vicar, with a curious dry look upon his features.

"Just so, sir," said Mr Timson. "You see, people like music, and will come miles to hear it."

"Well, yes, I suppose so," said the vicar, half sadly; "and ours certainly is a very fine instrument."

"And beautifully played," said Mr Timson; "not but what I think we have too much of it; but people say it is well played."

"Yes," said the vicar, absently, for his thoughts were upon the poor-box; "beautifully played, certainly. By the way, how startled Mr Pellet seemed when he came in!"

"Poor man! yes: he's nervous," said Timson; "those musical chaps generally are. Didn't expect us, you know. Might ask his opinion about the box."

"Yes, we might, certainly," said the vicar; and then, uneasily, "No, I don't think it would be of any use. Let it rest for the present, Mr Timson; perhaps, after all, we may be mistaken."

"Very true, sir," said Timson. "Not often that there is gold in the box. People are not very fond of giving to the poor and lending to the Lord, though that's all of a piece with their behaviour. They're not fond of lending to anybody. Seems to go against a man's nature."

"Not in all cases, Mr Timson," said the vicar, stiffly; "there are many exceptions,—yourself, for instance."

"Present company—present company, sir," said Mr Timson, "always left out of the question;" and Mr Timson looked very fidgety and uncomfortable.

"Not in a case of this description," said the vicar. "A shining light should never be placed beneath a bushel."

Mr Timson looked very unlike a shining light at this time, as he stared at the vicar, and then round the church, and then fidgeted from foot to foot, and held his hat first in one hand, and then in the other, as if in a great hurry to go. But Mr Gray would not come out of the vestry, and Mr Timson had to go in again, for he could not be spared yet. In fact, asking him for the bag once more, the vicar again carefully went through the amount of small change—copper, threepenny and four-penny pieces, sixpences, shillings, and half-crowns—to see whether, after all, his sovereign might not be there, explaining the while to Mr Timson that some gold was very pale, and in dim lights, like that where they were, sovereigns looked almost like shillings.

But though he carefully examined every shilling, and turned it over, there was not one that could for an instant be taken for a sovereign; so, with a sigh, the vicar slowly told up the total, replaced the money in the bag, and tied it exceedingly tight, before once more handing it to the churchwarden, when together they passed down the nave,

listening to Jared’s harmonies.

But the vicar seemed uneasy: the music had lost its charm; and instead of following his usual custom of sitting down in some comfortable pew to listen for half-an-hour, he softly followed the churchwarden into the street, and went homewards shaking his head,—that head being, the while, sorely troubled with thoughts of sacrilege and the missing sovereign.

Volume Two—Chapter Two.

Grit in the Wheel.

“You are precious quiet, Harry,” said Lionel, as they strolled on till they reached Trafalgar Square, almost without a word having been spoken.

“I was only thinking,” was the reply, and then they walked on again in silence; for Harry Clayton was indeed thinking, deeply too, of his position. There was a vague sense of danger, of disappointment, troubling him. One moment he felt ready to hurry back to the wretched street, and beg Patty to grant him an interview; the next he shrank from it, and asked himself how he could expect her, if she had any proper sense of pride, to listen to him again. Now, too, came a growing feeling of dislike to Lionel. He told himself that life with him would now be insupportable, and he fell to wondering again what the young man had seen. Would he jeer and banter him, and torture him by endeavouring to excite jealousy? However, he felt that he must let matters take their course.

How his thoughts ran riot, though! From time to time the busy traffic of the London streets faded from before his eyes, for a bright little vision to occupy the place—always a fair young face bent towards a dove, the startled look of confusion, and then the subsequent scene.

It was nothing new that it would come—that face; try as he would to drive it from him, there it was again and again, soft, gentle, and pleasing. He told himself that it was absurd; that he had seen in different society hundreds of sweeter faces, but no one had ever so impressed him before.

“Could she have been acting?” he muttered; “but what a place, and what associations!”

He could not have analysed his thoughts had he tried, for they were strangely mingled, and involuntarily he gazed uneasily from time to time at the careless frank-looking young fellow at his side, apparently now too much occupied with his dog to heed aught beside.

Harry roused himself at last, though, from his reverie as Lionel spoke.

“See you at dinner, I suppose, old fellow?”

“Are you going away? Anywhere in particular?”

“No—no—no!” was the reply. “May perhaps take the dog in the Park for a swim. Change for him, poor fellow!”

Harry hesitated, as if about to speak, and then they parted, taking different directions, but with thoughts centring at the same spot.

Involuntarily Harry glanced over his shoulder, when he had gone about fifty yards, and then he bit his lip with annoyance, for he had turned to encounter the sharp glance of Lionel, who was also looking back.

The young men then walked hastily on, each moody and frowning, and thinking that the possibility of their continuing to be dwellers beneath the same roof was hourly diminishing; for though Harry would gladly have stayed, there seemed to be a rock springing up between them, momentarily dividing more and more their course; and Harry began now to recapitulate the past, and to recollect that Lionel had during the last fortnight been growing more impatient of the slight control placed upon him.

“I shall be answerable to the father for the escapades of the son,” muttered Harry. “He trusts me, and I cannot shut my eyes to all the follies I shall be called upon to witness.”

He bit his lip again here, and asked himself if he were not becoming a hypocrite, and drawing too largely upon the future?

“We shall have to part,” he said, half aloud. “I can’t help it—we shall never get on together now. What a fool! what a weak idiot I am growing!” he exclaimed. “It will take very little to bring about a rupture now. Well, the sooner perhaps the better!” he added, moodily; and then he walked on and on, with the threatening rupture nearer at hand than he thought for, as, in spite of himself, he made his way back to Brownjohn Street, eliciting from D. Wragg the words uttered at the end of a previous chapter—

“It’s one of them swells as come about the dorg!”

D. Wragg accompanied his words with a great deal of pantomimic gesture, as he stood smiling at the two girls, heedless of the fact that Patty was shrinking from the encounter.

“It is not to see me—I cannot see anybody!” she stammered, crimsoning the while. And then a few hurried questions were put by Janet, and replied to by D. Wragg, the result being that hand-in-hand the young girls entered the little back-room,—Patty’s face flushing a still deeper crimson upon finding that Harry Clayton was already there, and

standing with his back to the window.

“I was so completely taken by surprise,” exclaimed Harry, eagerly advancing with outstretched hand, “that I hardly knew—”

He stopped short, for he saw in the manner in which Patty drew back how thoroughly she read his heart. He was ashamed of his past weakness, that would not own her before his friend; and with burning face and beating heart, Patty, ready to burst into tears though she was, held herself aloof. “He would not know her then,” she said to herself; “he should not know her now.” It was all at an end, and the old childish dream must be forgotten altogether.

What Patty would have said, what more Harry Clayton would have whispered in excuse, it is impossible to say; for while Janet scanned first one face and then the other, D. Wragg whispered, from just inside the shop, where he had gone to respond to a summons, “Here’s your friend come back. I ain’t told him as you’re here. Don’t you make no mistake; but shall I ask him in, too?”

For a moment Harry Clayton’s face was troubled, but the next instant he had recovered himself.

“Yes, Mr Wragg,” he said, quietly, “ask him to come in,” and the rough head of the dealer was drawn back into the shop.

If possible Patty’s flush grew deeper, and lines began to make their appearance in the forehead of Harry Clayton, as he scrutinised the young girl attentively, while a few words were heard in the shop.

Directly after, in a cool, insolent fashion, and with a smile upon his face, Lionel Redgrave sauntered in; but the smile faded on the instant as he saw who stood beside the door. The blood mounted to his boyish temples, and for a while youthful ingenuousness had the full sway.

He soon laughed it off, assuming the cool easy way of the man-about-town, and speaking lightly, he exclaimed—

“Quite a *contretemps*! I am rather late in the field, it seems. I was not aware that Mr Harry Clayton was turning gay. Not the first saint who has carried the world beneath his sackcloth. Good morning all!”

“Stop,” cried Harry, hastily, and he struggled to speak all he knew, and tell of the previous meeting at Norwood, but his courage failed. “Stop a moment! My visit here was for the purpose of giving advice.”

“Cheap, and always plenty on supply,” sneered Lionel.

”—Of uttering a few words of warning.”

“Exactly; to practise the part of mentor to the young. Rather selfish, though, Harry—rather selfish. Shouldn’t have thought it of you!”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh! nothing—nothing at all,” said Lionel, lightly—“nothing surprising in *my* coming; but for you to be here! Ah! Harry, I’m afraid the study of the classics is making you light and wild.”

It was now Harry’s turn to look conscious, for his heart seemed to whisper to him that the shafts let fly by his companion were not so badly aimed; and for a few moments he strove vainly for the composure he needed to carry on the wordy warfare with effect.

“Perhaps we had better bring this interview to a close,” he said at last; for, in spite of Lionel’s talk of withdrawing, he still stayed.

Clayton looked round as he spoke, to find Janet’s fierce dark eyes fixed upon him as if they would read his every thought. Then bowing to Patty, he turned as if to leave, hesitating though as he reached the door.

“Oh! I’m ready,” said Lionel, superciliously, as he rightly interpreted the other’s uneasiness. “Good morning, ladies.”

Then closely following Clayton, he once more passed through the shop, followed by the head-shakings of D. Wragg, and encountering the offensive stare of the heavy young man outside, who now followed the friends until they reached the streets traversed by a more respectable class than those who favoured the Decadian.

No words were spoken—the young men walking side by side—the one careless and indifferent, the other anxious and troubled in mind—more so even than he cared to own to himself.

Volume Two—Chapter Three.

Separation.

On reaching Lionel’s chambers, a show of cordiality was kept up; but during the walk back, Harry, filled with bitterness, had decided upon his future course—rashly enough, he knew—but he was determined to put an end to what he told himself had been but a mad dream after one who was not worthy of his regard.

The young men lunched, walked out, and dined together, after which, with their coffee and cigars, they sat by the open window, where Lionel, who had evidently been turning something over in his mind—suddenly exclaimed—

“I don’t want to quarrel, Harry; but I have been thinking over that meeting this morning.”

“Hear me first,” exclaimed Harry, almost fiercely. “You spoke in a strangely supercilious way, Lionel—a way that cut severely; and I feel it due to myself and to my position to declare solemnly that my visit to that place this morning was prompted by the purest motives.” He hesitated for a moment, but the feeling of weak pride even now restrained him from telling Lionel who the object of this conversation was. “By a desire for the well-being of one who struck me as—”

“Oh, yes!” burst in Lionel, “of course. I know what you would say. So was I moved by the purest motives.”

“Listen to me, Lionel,” said Harry, rising. “I am not blind. I am, for all my quiet life, perhaps as worldly wise as yourself. Do not think me so simple as not to see that you have a *penchant* for that young girl. And now, Lionel Redgrave, I ask you, as a gentleman and a man of honour, to give me your word that you will go there no more.”

“Pooh! rubbish!” exclaimed Lionel, angrily. “Do you think that I am blind—or a child—a little boy with his tutor, to be taken to task for every word and look. Perhaps we are both worldly wise—perhaps not. At any rate, I am going to bind myself by no absurd promises. Perhaps you had better yourself go there no more.”

“I do not intend!” said Harry, quietly.

“Frankly, then,” said Lionel, hotly, “I do. I told you that I should before, and—by Jove, where’s Luff? Why, I’ve not seen him since we came back. He was with me when I entered that shop the second time, I’ll swear, and then all this confounded humbug put him out of my mind. There! you see,” he continued, with a laugh, “I must go there again to enlist the services of Mr D. Wragg. Don’t you make no mistake, Mr Harry Clayton; I’m not going to lose my ‘dorg,’ if I can help it. But there, Harry, old fellow, as I said before, I don’t want to quarrel, and I’m quite out of breath now with this long-winded speechifying; only don’t be such a confounded nuisance.”

Harry Clayton, who was greatly moved, took a turn up and down the room.

“Here, shake hands,” cried Lionel, “and let’s have no more of it. Let’s be off out and see something. Why, stop! here! —where are you going?”

“To my room,” said Harry, speaking very slowly and seriously, as he took the hand held out to him.

“What for?” said Lionel.

“To write to your father!”

“Ha—ha—ha! Ha—ha—ha!” laughed Lionel, half angrily dashing away his companion’s hand, half with contempt. “Are you going to tell him that I have been a naughty boy, and to ask him to come up with a stick?”

“No!” said Harry, quietly, almost sadly, “but to ask him to relieve me of my responsibility;” and then he left the room.

“A confounded prig!” cried Lionel; “he grows insufferable.” Then throwing his half-smoked cigar from the window in his impatience, the lighted fragment struck a heavy-faced man who was leaning against a lamp-post, and staring up at the window of the well-lighted room.

The man dashed his hand to his face, growled, muttered, shook his fist at the window, and then stooped, picked up the piece of cigar, knocked away the few remaining sparks, and deposited it in his pocket, when he gave another glance upwards as he said, audibly—

“Look out, my fine fellow!—look out!”

Lionel lit a fresh cigar and strolled up and down the room for a few moments. “Coming to a nice pass,” he muttered. “Just as if one couldn’t indulge in a little piece of innocent flirtation without being taken to task like that!”

“No, Master Harry!” he said, after another turn or two. “I’m not blind either, saint as you look—St Anthony if you like. She really is uncommonly pretty, though. I liked that dove-scene, too; natural evidently—but she can’t be that old rag-and-famish dog-stealer’s daughter. The idea of Harry flying out like that! The beggar was jealous, I’ll swear. Well, let him go if he can’t act like a man of the world.”

Harry Clayton did not mutter as he went to his room, but thoughts of a troublous nature came quickly. It was only by an effort that he composed himself to write a calm cool letter to Sir Richard Redgrave, stating nothing relative to what had passed, but merely asking him to make fresh arrangements respecting his son, if he still wished him to have the counterpoise of a quiet companion, since it was the writer’s wish to return immediately to Cambridge.

“Like giving up the fight—a complete coward!” said Harry, as he read over his note, and then he sighed and closed it up so that he might not falter in his determination. Then he sat by the window thinking, but not as had been his wont, for strange thoughts would intrude themselves in spite of each angry repulse; and when at last he retired, it was not to rest, but to lie tossing in a fevered manner, fighting with fancies which he could not control.

The rising sun, as it gilded chimney and house-top, found Harry pale and wakeful as he had been through the night, and he rose to sit by the open window, gazing out upon the quiet streets, clear now and bright in the early morning, and with hardly a wayfarer to be seen; but even the calmness of the only quiet hour in London streets failed to bring the peace he sought.

In due course came a letter from Sir Richard Redgrave, expressing sorrow that Harry should so soon be obliged to return to the University, but wishing him all success in his studies, ending with a hope that the writer would see him

high up in the honour-list, and hinting how gratifying it would have been could he have inoculated Lionel with a little of his application.

That same morning Harry had a hard fight with self.

“I’ve done all I could,” he exclaimed; “I’ll go back and forget.”

An hour after he was with Lionel, who could hardly at the last bring himself to believe that Harry was in earnest; but the affair was serious enough he found, as he accompanied his friend to the Shoreditch Station, staying upon the platform till Harry had taken his seat, and then, with rather a formal hand-shake, the young men parted.

They were not to separate, though, without Lionel sending a sharp pang through Harry’s breast, as he said, mockingly—

“Any message for Decadia?”

Harry Clayton’s reply was a cold, bitterly reproachful look; but as the train glided out into the open air, he threw himself back, smiling sadly as he gazed with a newly-awakened interest at the dense and wretched neighbourhood on either hand, with its thronging population, and roofs devoted often to the keeping of birds, many of which were also hung from miserable poverty-stricken windows, whose broken panes were patched with paper or stuffed with rags.

On went the train, momentarily gathering speed, till, as he saw one iridescent pigeon alight cooing upon a brick parapet, Harry Clayton’s brow wrinkled, and he compressed his lips as if with pain.

An instant and the train had glided by, and the pigeon was lost to view; and as he mused upon the troubles of the past, his broken home at Norwood, and his determination to leave London for a time, the young man whispered to himself softly—

“It’s a dream—a dream of folly and weakness, and it was time that I was rudely awakened.”

Volume Two—Chapter Four.

Jared’s Home.

“Well, Mr Ruggles, and how is little Pine?” said Mrs Jared, entering the room in Duplex Street, where industrious Tim was busily at work.

“Don’t know what to say, ma’am,” said Tim; “but somehow I fancy she’s better since I changed her oil. This one seems to agree with her different to what the last one did. Oils varies a deal.”

“No doubt,” said Mrs Jared, smiling; “but I should have more faith in keeping her well wrapped up and out of the night air.”

“I do keep her out of it, ma’am,” said Tim, talking away, but busy still over his work. “I take all the care I can of her; but what we want is warm weather to bring her round. Summer weather’s what we want; and there’s such a very little of it yet. It’s like everything else in London, ma’am—terribly adulterated. The oil’s adulterated, the milk’s adulterated, bread’s adulterated; everything is, ma’am, more or less, that we poor people buy; and I know we pay ten per cent, more for our things, ma’am, than the rich do; while, because things ain’t bad enough for us, we get our fresh air stale and fouled with blacks. As for our summer, what we get of it, that’s all adulterated with cold biting easterly winds. Summers seem to me, ma’am, to get shorter every year; but, for all that, I shall be glad when the summer does come.” And then, to give emphasis to his remarks, Tim brought his iron down thump upon the floor where he was seated.

Then there was a busy pause, during which time Jared was inspecting the lungs of a concertina, and, by means of his glue-pot, affixing soft patches of leather inside where failing spots were visible, Mrs Jared dividing her time between helping Patty over some garment and nursing the youngest Pellet, who sat watching Janet, staying with them for the evening.

“Strange thing this—terribly strange thing this about our poor-box, isn’t it?” said Jared. “Seems that there’s no mistake about it; but that it has been robbed again and again. Mrs Ruggles told you, I suppose?”

“Yes, sir, yes,” said Tim; “quite startled me, it did. But there! Lord bless you, sir, there’s people in this great London of ours would rob themselves, let alone other people, or church, or poor-boxes.”

“Ah!” said Jared, “it is startling. Mr Timson’s been talking to me about it. Sovereign of the vicar’s one time, half-a-crown another, crown-piece another. No doubt about it, for it seems Mr Gray’s been trying experiments.”

“Experiments!” said Mrs Jared.

“Yes; setting traps to find out the offender.”

“But, surely, it must be a mistake,” said Patty. “No one would be so wicked as to rob a church.”

“Well, I don’t know, my dear; money’s money,” said Jared; “and your Uncle Richard says it’s everything. There are plenty of people who value money more than religion.”

Jared was silent for business reasons now, since he was holding a piece of leather in his mouth, his hands being occupied by the concertina-bellows and glue-brush.

“You’re about right, sir,” put in Tim, who was busy over a shrinking operation upon one of Jared’s waistcoats, a proceeding which left room for the elision of the worn parts, so that it might fit a small person. “No idea, I s’pose, of who it could be, sir?”

“Not the slightest,” replied Jared, after placing his piece of leather *in situ*, and then preparing, with his scissors, a scrap for another part. “Glad if I had, for the rascal deserves to be punished. A man who would rob the poor, would rob—would—would do anything. Stir the fire under the glue-pot, Patty, my dear. Puts one in mind of a camp-kettle, don’t it?” he said, as the young girl stirred the glowing coals, and made the flame dance about the little vessel, hung from a hook in the chimney.

The little iron kettle began to sing, and Tim raised his eyes above his spectacles to peer round the room before taking a fresh hold of the garment upon which he was employed.

“Ah!” said Jared, after an interval of silence, “it’s a strange thing about that money. Poor Mr Gray’s in a sad way about it. He named it to me—says it’s so grievous, and that he thinks more of the crime than of the value of the money twenty times over.”

Volume Two—Chapter Five.

Timson’s Consistency.

Jared Pellet was right. Mr Gray was in a sad way about the affair, for it was a problem that he was not likely to solve. At first he had made a point of keeping the matter secret, but as months slipped by, and no discovery was made, he ceased to be reticent. Nothing was learned as to the cause, but the effect was plain enough—the money still went. He held long consultations with Mr Timson, and together, more than before, they set to and suspected everybody connected with the church, beginning, jestingly, with themselves, and then going downwards through the other churchwardens, Jared, the clerk, Purkis, Mrs Ruggles, Ichabod Gunniss, and the bellringers, who never entered the church. But, though every one was suspected in turn, no accusation was made; for, said the vicar—

“Timson, I would not, in my weak, short sighted way, be guilty of an act of injustice to any man!”

“Why not set the police to work?” said Mr Timson. “A detective would furridge the matter out.”

“No,” said the vicar, “I don’t like the idea. I would not care if they’d rob me, Timson, but they will not; and this business is something I really cannot get over. If I put more in the box to make up what I reckon may be the deficiency, it seems to make no difference; and though your advice may be good, I don’t feel as if I could take it. I have acted upon some of your hints, but still we don’t find anything out.”

Mr Timson shook his head, and said, “Just so,” which might have meant anything.

After smoking a pipe or two, the churchwarden always left, declaring that he had got hold of the right end of the thread, and that he intended following up the clue, telling it mysteriously, and promising news by his next visit; for, being old and single, the vicar thought it no shame to play nightly at cribbage with his churchwarden, and in his company to smoke long clay pipes and drink whisky and water. But the only result of Mr Timson’s clue-following was the getting of himself into a tangle, and, to the vicar’s great disgust, he would seriously settle the offence upon a fresh head each time.

“I tell you what it is, Timson,” he one day exclaimed, pettishly, after listening for some time to the rumbling of the churchwarden’s mountain, and then being rewarded with no grand discovery, but a very mouse of an information,—“I tell you what it is, Timson, you are getting into your dotage.”

“No, I ain’t,” said Timson, gruffly; for Mr Timson’s life had two phases—as Mr Timson, tea-dealer, and Mr Timson, vicar’s churchwarden. In trade he metaphorically wore his apron fastened by a brass heart and a steel hook, and said, “Sir” to the world at large; while, as Mr Timson, the worthy old bachelor, who could have retired from business any day, and who smoked pipes and played cribbage at his own or the vicar’s residence, he was another man, and as sturdy and independent as an Englishman need be. “No, I ain’t,” he said, gruffly. “I’m sure now as can be that it’s old Purkis—a fat, canting, red-faced, hypocritical old sinner.”

“Don’t be so aggravating, Timson,” said the vicar. “How can you accuse him!”

“Why what does he mean by always hanging about the boxes, and polish, polish, polishing them till the steel-work grows quite thin?”

“That proves nothing,” said the vicar.

“Don’t it?” exclaimed the churchwarden. “It proves that he has always been hanging about, till the money tempted him, and he could not resist it.”

“Nonsense!” said the vicar, crossly, as he broke a piece off his pipe. “Why, the very last time you were here, you were quite sure that it was Pellet.”

“Well, and so I’ll be bound to say that it was,” said Timson. “I was sure of it last week, only you would not have it that I was right.”

“Of course not,” said the vicar, “when you declared only two days before that it was the organ-boy, whom you had caught spending money. How much did he spend, by the by?”

“Well, only a halfpenny at a potato-can, certainly,” said Timson; “but he must have been flush of money.”

“Pish!” ejaculated the vicar, contemptuously,—“nonsense!”

“Ah! you may say ‘Pish,’” exclaimed Timson, angrily; “but it isn’t nonsense. The money goes, don’t it? and they’re all in it, every man jack of ’em. It’s a regular conspiracy.”

“I never in all my experience met with a less consistent man than you are, Timson,” said the vicar. “I believe you would accuse me as soon as look at me, and then give some one else into custody for the theft.”

“No, I shouldn’t,” grumbled Mr Timson. “We should have found it all out by this time, only you will be so obstinate. I’d soon find it out if I had my way.”

“I do wish you would have a little more charity in you, Timson,” continued the vicar, taking up and dealing the cards. “I honestly believe that if it had not been for me, you would have made two or three homes wretched by accusing people of the theft.”

“No business to steal poor-box money, then,” said Mr Timson, through his nose, for his hands being occupied with his cards, his lips were tightly closed over the waxy end of his pipe. “It was Pellet, I’m sure.”

“No more Pellet than it was Purkis,” said the vicar. “I never knew a more quiet, respectable man.”

“Nor a better organist, if he wouldn’t be so long-winded,” said Mr Timson, coolly.

“Nor a better organist,” acquiesced the vicar. “Fifteen—six, and six are a dozen,” he continued, throwing down his cards.

“Three, and one for his nob,” said Mr Timson, following the example of his host; “and that’s what I should give him, Mr Gray, if I knew who it was.”

“Humph!” ejaculated the vicar, thoughtfully.

But in spite of his thoughtfulness he came no nearer to his point, and in the course of time the Rev. John Gray was distant, and then, in manner, apologetic, to all the church officials. He even went so far as to send the little asthmatical old razor-faced clerk a present, so as to set his own mind at rest for having judged him hastily. He had fresh locks placed upon the boxes—locks with cunningly-devised keys, which the maker assured him it was impossible to imitate; but a fortnight had not elapsed before the boxes were plundered again—the culprit apparently growing bolder with success.

The vicar grew more and more anxious. He was in dread now that the communion-plate might be taken, and, lest a raid should be made upon it, he watched it himself to and from the churchwarden’s house.

At times, too, Mr Gray would feel almost disposed to take his friend’s advice, and call in the aid of the police; but even then he did not feel certain of success, and he shrank from such stringent measures on account of the publicity they would entail; besides, he wished to discover the culprit himself, and take him to task, for he considered that his own conscience would be sufficient punishment so soon as he was detected.

In Duplex Street, the vicar’s words were well taken into consideration, and the whole affair was canvassed with animation, Tim Ruggles the while listening attentively, and giving his opinion when asked, otherwise perfectly silent, until, to use his own words, “he was set going.”

“I like clergymen sometimes,” said Tim, “and sometimes I don’t; but this vicar of ours seems a man worth knowing. Mrs Ruggles says, sir, it’s a pleasure to have anything to do for him, and she’s a great judge of character, sir. But there are some parsons I never could like, for they’re as easy and plausible as country solicitors, and that’s saying a great deal. But really it does seem a wonder that this little matter is not found out I’ll talk to Mrs Ruggles about it again to-night—wonderful woman—I like to hear her opinion; full of point and keenness. Authority for saying so,” muttered Tim, beneath his breath, for he had been taking himself to task for his frequent usage of this his favourite expression.

Conversation was here stayed by a terrible vocal explosion up-stairs, accompanied by cries for mother, the cause being that a juvenile member of the Pellet family had choked himself with an angular fragment of pudding, given to him by Mrs Jared to keep him out of mischief—a cold heavy pudding of a most economical texture, frequently made in Jared’s establishment, and called by him “extinguisher” from its wondrous power of putting out appetite to the last faint spark.

A due amount of patting and shaking sufficed to place the little sufferer in his normal state; and mother and father once more descended, to find Tim Ruggles ready for starting homeward, after exhibiting a newly-made pair of trousers—his first—upon the young gentleman for whom they were intended.

“Yes, sir,” said Tim, taking up, in a most unexpected manner, the principal subject of the evening’s conversation, “I’ll have a long talk to Mrs Ruggles about it; and if I might ask it as a favour of you and Mrs Pellet, sir, please don’t send anything any more for little Pine. I’m so much obliged, and thank you kindly; but Mrs Ruggles, sir, is a little bit particular upon some points, and just perhaps the least touch proud. I know you won’t be offended with me for telling you.”

Mrs Jared, who had on several occasions sent little delicacies that she thought the child might fancy—poor-people's delicacies—promised, and Tim left; and probably from the sharp look-out kept by Mrs Ruggles after the conversation she had with her husband, for quite a month the vicar enjoyed peace of mind, from a feeling that the poor-box had not been disturbed.

"And a good job, too," said Mr Timson, one evening; "for I'm quite sick of hearing sermons and texts about pieces of money—'render unto Caesar,' or 'current money of the merchant,' or Achan's covetousness, or the Judas pieces of silver. You know they only did harm, acting like charity-sermons, and making people get money ready, expecting to see a plate held at the door, and then, only naturally, dropping it into the poor-box, so as to give more plunder to the thief, who has been laughing at you all the time."

"For shame, Timson!" said the old clergyman, sternly. "Don't you think that even thieves have consciences?"

"Humph! well, I don't know," said Timson, "perhaps they have, but they don't keep them from stealing. But I thought you said you would keep the subject out of your sermons?"

The vicar did not reply, but his eyes twinkled, and a dry little crease or two appeared at the corners of his mouth.

Volume Two—Chapter Six.

Mrs Jared's Management.

No doubt, if little Patty had been more highly educated, more refined, and had no more engrossing occupations than reading and paying visits, she too would have worn a Mariana-like aspect, and sighed more frequently. But though she often wept in secret, hers was so busy a life that she had but little time to mourn, and though she sighed to herself, and suffered too most keenly, her cheeks somehow would not grow pale or less sound, and the sorrow was hidden away deeply in her heart.

Mrs Jared knew a great deal, and kept finding out more and more; but the subject was tabooed, and though her tender heart yearned to condole with Patty and try to comfort her, yet long talks with Jared had schooled her to be silent, and poor Patty had no comforter save Janet, and even with her she refrained from fully opening her heart.

"Poor girl! I know she feels it keenly," said Mrs Jared to her husband on one occasion.

"Not she," said Jared. "It must be nearly forgotten by this time."

"Did I forget you, years ago?" said Mrs Jared, severely.

"Too good a memory, my dear," said Jared, smiling.

"Then don't talk such nonsense," said his wife. "What ideas you men do have of women's hearts, just because now and then you meet with some silly, flighty, coquettish thing, not without a heart, certainly, but with one that is worthless. Do you suppose that all girls' hearts are counterfeit coin?"

"Not I!" said Jared; "but it won't do. It is just as I thought at the time, and it always is the case with those red-hot sanguine fellows. All very well at first, but they cool down gradually, and then it's all over. You see we hear nothing at all of him now."

"I'm afraid he's ill," said Mrs Jared; "there must be something wrong."

"Wrong! well, yes, I suppose so," said Jared; "if it's wrong to get rich, it was wrong of him to talk to our poor girl in the way he did; and it's wrong of her to dream of it, if she still does, and it was wrong of you to expect that anything would ever come of it but sorrow, and it was wrong—"

"Wrong of you to go on talking in that way," said Mrs Jared, impetuously; "and, for my part, I don't believe that it is as you say. There's some misfortune or something happened to him, or—"

"Don't, for goodness' sake, talk in that way to her," said Jared, "or you'll complete the mischief. It's as well as it is, and the sooner she forgets it all, the better. Nothing could ever have come of it, and I should never have given my consent, even if he had kept to his professed determination. Richard would always have been against it; and, goodness knows, there's estrangement enough between us without our doing anything to increase the distance. Look at us: poor people, with poor-people friends,—old Purkis and Tim Ruggles, and those aristocrats in Decadia; and then look at Richard and his—"

"Richard's a selfish—"

"Hush! don't, please, dear," said Jared, with a pained look; and he laid his hand gently upon his wife's lips, when, smoothing her forehead, she exclaimed—

"Well, I won't then; but it does make me angry when I think of his money, and then of how poor we are, while somehow the poorer we get, the more tiresome the children grow. You've no conception how cross they are at times."

"Haven't I?" said Jared, drily.

"No," said Mrs Jared, impetuously; "how can you have?"

“Did you wash the little ones this morning, my dear?” said Jared.

“Wash them! Why, of course; at least Patty did, the same as usual.”

“Notice anything peculiar between their shoulders, either of you—any strange sprouting growth?”

“Goodness, gracious! no,” exclaimed Mrs Pellet, with a shudder. “Why, what do you mean? Surely there’s no dreadful infectious thing about for which they are sickening? Surely Patty has brought home nothing from that dreadful place of Wragg’s? What do you mean?”

“Oh! nothing,” said Jared, coolly; “only you seemed under the impression that the little ones were, or ought to be, angels, and I was anxious to hear of the advent of sprouting wings.”

“Stuff!” ejaculated Mrs Jared; and then, directly after, “just look here at Totty’s boots.”

“Well, they are on the go,” said Jared, turning the little leather understandings in his hands.

“On the go!” said his wife; “why they’re quite gone. It does seem such a thing when he’s rolling in riches!”

“Who? Totty?” said Jared, innocently.

“Stuff!” said Mrs Jared, in her impetuous way. “Why, Richard, to be sure. He could buy oceans of boots, and never feel the loss.”

“Very true,” said Jared, without pausing to think what number of pairs would form oceans. “But then, my dear, he’d have no Tottys to put in them.”

“And a good thing, too,” said Mrs Jared, “seeing what an expense they are.”

“I don’t know that, my dear,” said Jared, softly. “They are an expense certainly, and it does seem hard upon us; but I don’t know, after all, but what ours is the happier home.”

“The man came for the poor-rate to-day,” said Mrs Jared, melting, but still frigid.

“That’s nothing new, my dear,” said Jared; “he’s always coming. Our little ones are healthy and strong and happy.”

“Have you thought about the rent being nearly due?” said Mrs Jared, who would not give in yet.

“Yes,” said Jared; “I have thought about it, for I never get a chance of forgetting it, my dear. It always seems to me that there are eight quarters in poor-people’s years. But, as I was saying about the children, they are happy and merry, and the doctor comes seldom—that is,” he said, with a comical look, “with exceptions, my dear—with exceptions.”

Mrs Jared tried to knit her brows and frown, but she could not, for the corner of a smile would peep out at one angle of her mouth; and, somehow or other, as they sat alone by the fire that night, Jared’s arm crept round his wife’s waist, and her head went down upon his shoulder.

“Plenty,” said Jared, “certainly; but I don’t think you would like to part with any one of them.”

“Oh! how can you!” ejaculated Mrs Jared; and she quite shivered at the thought.

“And I never saw you obliged to make chest-warmers for them because they were delicate, or compelled to get cod-liver oil for them because they were thin and weak, and—”

“Oh! don’t talk so, pray,” exclaimed Mrs Jared. “That poor child! it gives me the heartache to see her, when Ruggles brings her with him. I’d give almost anything to have the poor little thing here for the short time she’s for this world.”

“Think she’s so bad as that?” said Jared.

“Oh! yes; her poor little bones show so dreadfully. I don’t think she’s neglected, for Ruggles is too good-hearted for that; but that horrid woman would almost keep her from getting well. Now, if we had her with ours, and—”

“Didn’t you say the collector called to-day?” said Jared.

“Yes,” said his wife;—“had her here with ours, and Patty and I attended well to her, she might get through the winter, and—what did you say?”

“I didn’t speak,” said Jared. “I was only thinking about the rent.”

“And, besides,” said Mrs Jared, “as she is so young—”

“How much would a pair of boots cost for Totty?” said Jared.

“Really, it is too bad!” exclaimed Mrs Jared; “and I can’t help thinking about the poor little thing.”

“And how well and hearty our own are, even if we are poor,” said Jared.

So Mrs Jared sighed, and contrived to put a patch on the side of Totty’s boots, and they lasted another week.

Volume Two—Chapter Seven.

Between Friends.

For quite a month, as far as the vicar could tell, the poor-boxes had rest, and Mr Timson's ears were not so much troubled with the objectionable money texts. Divers games of cribbage were played, and divers pipes and glasses of gin-and-water enjoyed, as the late robberies were discussed. During these discussions the vicar would enlighten his crony upon the subject of the various plans he had adopted to see whether the boxes had been opened.

The matter was also freely discussed at Purkis's and Ruggles's, as well as at Duplex Street; the same verdict being arrived at in each house—namely, that it was very strange.

Mrs Purkis thought she could fit the cap on the right head if she had to do with the matter, and Mr Purkis told her to hold her tongue. Mrs Ruggles, too, gave a sidewise look at her husband, and told him that it was not her business, but she could give a very shrewd guess at the culprit; though, when pressed on the subject, she only nipped her lips very tightly, and said, "Never mind."

As for Mrs Jared, she only declared it to be very sad, and then the matter was allowed to drop.

The vicar, too, seemed to have almost forgotten the matter, until one morning when he hurried into Mr Timson's counting-house, looking so much put out that the churchwarden directly guessed what was the matter, and before his friend could say a word, exclaimed—

"You don't mean it, sir?"

"But I do mean it, Mr Timson," said the vicar; "and really," he continued poking at the inkstand with the ferule of his umbrella—"and really, I should be glad if you would not treat this matter so lightly, sir. It grieves me very, very deeply, Mr Timson, I can assure you."

"Mind the ink, sir," said Mr Timson, placing the bright metal stand out of his visitor's reach. "I don't treat it lightly, sir. It's no joke, and I'm as much put out as yourself. You don't think I want the poor-boxes robbed, do you, sir?" and he spoke with a puffing snort between every two or three words, as if getting warm.

"Now don't be rash, Timson—don't be rash. I'm not angry; only, really, you know, it is so worrying, so aggravating—deuced aggravating, I should say, if I were a layman, Timson, I should indeed. There, there! now don't bristle up, there's a good fellow; but tell me what to do."

"Take that umbrella ferule out of my ink, that's what you'd better do," said Timson, gruffly; for, in an absent fashion, the vicar was still thrusting at the metal stand, to the great endangering of an open book or two upon the table.

"There, there, there!" said the vicar, impatiently, as he placed the obnoxious ferule upon the floor, and pressed it down there with both hands. "Now, then, tell me, Timson, what had I better do?"

"How the devil should I know what you ought to do?" exclaimed Mr Timson, for he was out of temper that morning with business matters connected with a sudden rise in teas, just at a time when his stock was low, in consequence of his having anticipated a fall, and the vicar, in his impatient mood, had applied the match which exploded Mr Timson's wrath, when, metaphorically taking off his apron, he spoke up.

"Don't swear, Timson," said the vicar, sternly; "'Swear not,'—you know the rest."

"Shoo—shoo—shoo—shoo—shoo—shoo—shoo!" ejaculated Mr Timson. "Who did swear?"

"Why you did, sir," said the vicar; "and don't deny it."

"But I didn't," exclaimed the churchwarden; "and I won't be spoken to like that in my own house. Because we have been friends all these years, John Gray, you presume upon it, and abuse me. I didn't swear; I only said, 'How the devil should I know?' and I say it again. Shoo—shoo—shoo! the devil's in the poor-box."

"If you make use of such language, Levi Timson, I must leave your office," said the vicar, severely.

"What language?—what language?" exclaimed the churchwarden.

"Why, such as yours, sir," retorted the vicar; "introducing the father of evil every moment."

"Not I!—not I!" exclaimed Timson. "Introduce him! Not I. Who brought him into the room? Who began it? Who said it first?"

"But only in a modified form," said the vicar, humbly; "I qualified it strongly with an 'if.' But I was wrong, extremely wrong, Timson; and there! I beg your pardon, Timson. I was put out and annoyed, and spoke hastily," and he held out his hand.

"No, sir; no, sir; you don't beg mine," said Timson, taking the vicar's hand. "I beg yours, sir. I know I spoke hastily, for I was angry and put out, for teas are gone up, confound 'em!"

"But I was in the wrong, Timson," said the vicar. "As a clergyman, I ought to have governed myself, and known better than to be hasty."

"I won't give up in my own premises, sir," exclaimed Timson. "Now, don't smile, sir; they're mine, bought and paid

for, and there are the writings in that safe. I was in the wrong; but teas are up horribly this morning, and I'd been reckoning on their going down."

Peace was ratified at once, for the two old men shook hands very solemnly for quite a minute.

"I'd give something, though, to find out about that money," said the vicar, "for, you see, it's going again."

"I can assure you, sir," said the churchwarden, "that I've slept night after night with those poor-boxes in bed with me, and yet I can't see through the thing anyhow. By the way, I have read of such things. You don't happen to be a somnambulist, do you? You haven't been of a night and emptied the poor-boxes in your dreams, scraping together a store, and hidden it away for your heirs, administrators, executors, and assigns to find out?" and as the old man spoke, he glanced round the room, as if seeking a likely spot for such a purpose.

"No, Timson, no," replied the vicar, smiling sadly. "You were present when my will was signed; and if there's anything more than is set down on that piece of parchment, I freely give it to you, old friend."

"Verbal gifts don't go down with executors, sir," said Timson, with his eyes twinkling; "and besides, I don't think it would be the thing for me to stick to a hoard that you had filched from your own poor-box."

"There, there, there!" ejaculated the vicar. "You are talking nonsense, Timson."

"Mr Gray, sir," said the churchwarden, seriously, and with some feeling, "a glass of sherry with you, sir; and, though toasts have nearly gone out, I shall drink to your long life.

"Yes," continued the churchwarden, after a busy little pause, "it is a good glass of sherry. It is one of my weak points to have a decent glass in the house, and I don't know anything that I like better."

"Except a glass of hot toddy," said the vicar, smiling.

"Well, well, well, sir," said Timson; "suppose we put that aside, or we shall be getting into cribbage and pipes, and all sorts of other weak points."

"True," said the vicar; "but really, Timson, I'm not ashamed of those little weaknesses, even if I am a clergyman. I'm a very humble old fellow, with few friends, and fewer relatives. I don't belong to society, Timson, but keep to my quiet, old-fashioned, country ways, which I brought up with me out of Lincolnshire. I'm not a fashionable parson, Timson, but I try to do my best for those amongst whom I have to teach."

"You do, sir, you do," said the churchwarden, warmly; "and you make me disgusted with myself for being put out with your anxiety about this poor-box. Now let's set to and go over it all, quietly and methodically. What's to be done?"

"I don't know—I don't know," said the vicar, despondingly; "but we shall find him out to a certainty some day."

"Him!" exclaimed the churchwarden,—"him, sir?"

"Well, yes; him, or her, or it. I would not care if I could get just an inkling of who it could be. But I'm determined upon one thing, Timson, and that is, if there is much more of it, I will do away with the poor-boxes altogether, and preach an extra charity-sermon every quarter;" and the vicar tucked his umbrella beneath his arm, as if ready to go.

"But I say, sir," exclaimed Mr Timson, "I would not bear it in mind quite so much."

"What do you mean, Timson?" said the vicar.

"Texts, sir, texts!" said Mr Timson, drily.

"Well, Timson, I won't—I won't, really; though, between ourselves—as friends—as old friends you know—I don't mind telling you, that I had been making up the heads of a discourse for next Sunday upon the parable of the lost piece of money. But I'll take your advice, and try something else."

"Do!" said his friend, "and let the matter rest. Don't show that you notice it, sir; be quite quiet, and we shall put them off their guard; I've my suspicions yet!"

"No, you have not, Timson," said the vicar, laughing, "not you. You're not a suspicious man, and never were."

"Nor you neither," said the tea-dealer, shaking hands. "Good morning."

And as his old friend went through the busy portion of the house, raising his hat in reply to the salute of clerks and warehousemen, the churchwarden muttered to himself, "A thorough gentleman!"

An opinion from which some people differed.

Volume Two—Chapter Eight.

The St Runwald's Mystery.

Gentlemanly or ungentlemanly, to blame in making a friend of the churchwarden, a tea-dealer, or not, the vicar was thoroughly conscientious, and this constant plundering of a little store intended for the poor of the parish was a sore

and festering thorn in his side. It may be questioned, though, whether the poor really were sufferers by the thefts. More probably they were gainers; for, ignorant of the amount pilfered, and feeling that to a certain extent the little fund was in his charge, the vicar would often drop a sovereign or two into the little heap when the boxes were emptied, in order to make up the deficiency, which might, perhaps, in fact, be not more than a few shillings.

But it was in vain that the good vicar fidgeted and fretted, rubbing his hair into all sorts of shapes, and especially that of a silver flame issuing from the top of his head. The pilfering went on, now ceasing for a while, now re-commencing, while the simple expedient of emptying the boxes after each service was never thought of by any one.

Mr Purkis grew warm, and perspired as he sand-papered the steel bindings, making the boxes glisten to an extent that would never have been reached, had there not existed the little jealousy between Mrs Ruggles and himself.

Not that Mr Purkis loved work, for his was the kind of constitution that would bear a large amount of ease, and he always felt himself to flourish most when clothed in his robes of office, and basking in beauty's eye as he ornamented the church porch, striking with awe the boys from Gunniss's, his duties appearing to consist of an occasional wag of the head to the pew-opener, when some stranger required a sitting, and a majestic roll as far as the iron gates and back.

He would wag his head mysteriously at his wife when she was brushing him down on a Sunday morning, and removing every speck of dust from his blue robe, to which she used a hard brush, while the broad scarlet velvet cape, with its deep gold-lace trimming, was daintily smoothed and dusted with a brush of the softest. Then Mrs Purkis would hand her lord his cocked hat and white Berlin gloves, gazing up in his face and looking him over with the greatest veneration. For some ladies are fond of seeing their lords and masters in uniform, and Mrs Purkis was one of these, and she would stand at the door to see her husband go down the street, exclaiming too, angrily, to herself, "Drat them boys!" when some evil-disposed irreverent young scamp would shout after the portly officer, "Beadle, beadle, threadle my needle;" though she consoled herself with the recollection that, "Boys allus was full of their sarse," ready to laugh at any of our noble British institutions. Especially if relating to law and order, beginning with the majestic policeman, and ending with the Lord Chief Baron in his swaddling clothes.

But if Mr Purkis looked sagacious, it seemed probable that, like other people, he only had his suspicions; such too as he could not confirm, though a slight frown and a shake of the head, particularly if accompanied by nipped-together lips, imply a great deal; and your heavy-cheeked solid-headed judge will carry a weight with the public that his keen-witted and sharp-featured subordinate will lack.

Mr Purkis obtained the credit of knowing a great deal, but if he did, he kept the knowledge to himself; and Time, the inexorable, slipped on, Jared discoursing with his organ, and the great congregation at St Runwald's listening patiently to the vicar's quiet practical little sermons.

Mr Gray kept his promise to the churchwarden, and there were no more texts for some time touching upon the subject of money; but Mr Timson scratched his head violently one day as he sat in his pew and heard the vicar dwell upon the rich men dropping their gifts into the treasury, and the poor widow's mite; adroitly introducing his opinion that it was as great a sin to steal the widow's mite as the more imposing gifts of the wealthy.

"But I wouldn't really, you know," said Timson, the next time they met; "as I've told you before, it's only putting the thieves on their guard, and can do no good."

"Might work on their consciences, Timson, eh? Startle them into better ways and feelings." But the churchwarden shook his head. "Think not, eh?" said the vicar; "conscience makes cowards of us all, as Milton says."

"Shakespeare, Shakespeare, sir," said Timson.

"My memory's failing fast, Timson," said the old man, sadly; "but I thought it was Milton. You don't read the poets?"

"Never, by any chance," said Timson; "but I know I heard those words at old Drury, and I know they don't put Milton on the stage."

"I believe you're right—I believe you're right, Timson," said the vicar. "And so you really would not say any more about it publicly?"

"Not a word," said Timson, firmly.

"But it was neatly introduced, eh?"

"Yes, ye-e-e-s," said Timson; "but it does no good, depend upon it, sir. The man who takes money from a church won't be frightened because you tell him it's wicked."

"Think not?" said the vicar.

"Sure of it," said Timson.

Timson was right, for the money still went, week after week—shillings and half-crowns, and sixpences and florins. Purkis groaned and grunted as he polished off the rust that would collect on the steel-work, as much at the labour as at the losses; but he could not see the money take to itself wings and fly away. Jared and Ichabod came and went, and the harmonies flooded the old church, but they saw nothing. Vicar and churchwarden gazed about as they came and went, and shook their heads at the boxes, but they went away as wise as they came. Neither did Mrs Ruggles unravel the mystery when she came on Saturdays to set open the doors, and swept and dusted, and punched pulpit pillows, and walloped (Ichabod's own term) pew cushions, and banged hassocks in the porch, finishing her duties by perversely shifting people's prayer-books and church-services from pew to pew, starting them upon voyages round

the church—trips which some times occupied whole months—while, more than once she obtained rewards, when, by request, she hunted out and restored the missing volumes.

But though the officials saw not the thief, some of those fat-cheeked, half-dressed, trumpet-blowing angels must have beheld, and, herald-like, might have proclaimed the offender with the sound of the trump.

The marble effigy of the statesman who stood with scroll in outstretched hand, as if in debate, must have seen the culprit; while Edward Lawrence, citizen of London, and Dame Alys, his wife, intent though they were in prayer upon their marble cushions, might have stolen one stony glance upon the sacrilege committed.

Why! there were effigies poised and planted everywhere about the old edifice, which the good knight and architect, Sir Christopher Wren, had restored when it was crumbling and dilapidated inside—restored most fully, according to the sublime taste of his period; but none of these effigies told tales, not even David, who stood within three feet of one box, and busily harped away, so busily indeed, that he had lost his garments, probably in the heat of the work, for there was no Michal at hand to take him to task.

Time did not tell either, at least not at this period of the story, though he, too, commanded a good view of the church, as he stood upon a bracket on one side of the chancel-arch, mowing away with a broken scythe, like a ragged Irishman in the haymaking season, his hour-glass being slung at his side, after the fashion of Pat's bottle.

Grim Death, in skeleton form, who stood as counterbalance to Time on the other side of the arch, pickaxe in one hand, dart in the other, also maintained a stubborn silence, perhaps because offended, for though most people considered that he held a pickaxe for grave-digging purposes, there were others who insisted upon its being a cross-bow with which he was armed.

As for the stained-glass cherubim and seraphim, playing guitar, bass viol, cornet, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, they seemed to be too busy with their heavenly harmonies to notice such mundane matters as pounds, shillings, and pence. Judas, the bag-bearer, was not visible, or—on the principle of "set a thief to catch a thief"—he might have told tales; but painted on the ceiling were Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—well painted too, though the artist's evangelical emblems of bull, eagle, and lamb were not quite up to nature.

But none of these pointed out the offender, and the old vicar walked disconsolately up and down his church, pausing here and there as if lost amidst the different surmises which flooded his brain; but there was no information to be gained. The mystery was not concealed amongst the carved oak window draperies, and cottage pattern wood-work, which hid the stone tracery of the old east window; it was not behind the spindle balustrade communion rails, nor the iron-barred workhouse-window-like rood-screen, nor in the brass-nailed, red-curtained, soft-cushioned, high-sided pews, where City folk loved to snooze on Sundays.

The mystery continued, but it was invisible, and though poor Mr Gray looked appealingly at the cross-legged Templar upon his back, and at the brasses rescued from trampling feet to be fixed in the wall, neither father nor mother, nor right or left, one of the steplike regular sons and daughters, brazen-faced as they were, whispered him a word more than did the black, fork-tongued, barb-tailed, huge-clawed, ancient stained-glass devil, so busy watching the Virgin and Child in the clerestory window.

So the Reverend John Gray sighed, and softly rubbed his hands, and the poor-boxes were still robbed.

Volume Two—Chapter Nine.

The Love of Nature.

Harry Clayton had been gone three months, and, clothed in a perfect Joseph's coat of a dressing-gown, Lionel Redgrave lolled upon his sofa, talking pettishly to his landlord, who stood before him holding a slip of paper in his hand.

"Cert'nly, sir, it goes again the grain," said Mr Stiff; "but what am I to do, Mr Redgrave, sir? Here's the cheque again from your 'pa, and there's the receipt, all as regular as the month comes round, which is more than can be said of some people with titles and who calls themselves officers. You see, you know, sir, I rent the whole of this upper of the people who has the shop, and I'm bound not to do nothing as shall annoy them in their business."

"Bother!" growled Lionel, fidgeting about, while Mr Stiff went on—

"I wouldn't part with you, sir, only you see, if so be I don't, why, they'll part with me."

"But it's a nuisance, man, and I should have to look out for fresh chambers," said Lionel; "and the place suits me. I don't want to go."

"Well, you see, sir, that's where we agree. But you see, things can't go on like this. *One* dog we didn't like, but we'd say nothing about it, though he don't do no good to the cushins; but look there, sir—there's your bull-tarrier on the couch—your Skye wiry on the heasy-chair—your spannel under the table, as vicious as stinging nettles; and them two pugs on the hearthrug."

Lionel made a hasty gesture.

"Can't help it, sir; it ain't no good for you to be cross; I must speak. Then there's the Cunnle as has the second floor—Cunnle Mart'nitt, sir—says if that there parrot don't go, he will; for it's a shrieking and swearing from morning to night. Not as I must say as ever I did hear it say anything worse than 'Corpus backus,' which may be wickedness in

Greek or some other furren tongue; like an old master of mine who was a major in the Indian army, and came back eat up with curry, and bad liver—yellow as one of his own guineas, sir. Well, he'd swear at me, sir, hawful I do believe; but then as it was all in Hindoo, and I never understood a word about what it meant, it never used to fidget me a bit more than if it was all blessings. But parrots will swear, sir, I know; for I've heard two in a cage go on at one another worse than—"

"Do you want me to set to and swear at you, Stiff?" said Lionel.

"No, sir, as you'd be too much of a gentleman, I'm sure."

"Pish!" ejaculated Lionel.

"Then the Cunnle says, sir, as the singin' birds is getting a perfect nuisance; but the squirrel and the ferrets, he says as he don't mind. But now I'm speaking, sir, I must say as I do; for I put it to you, sir, are they sootable for a first-floor in Regent Street? I know what gents is, sir, having lived in good families till the wife and me retired on her savings and took to letting; and I must say, sir, as I never in all my experience see anything like this here before; while the worst of it is as we never know what's coming next. It drives my missus a most wild, it do indeed, sir, to see that little foxy old chap with the thick boot come jigging and grinning up to the door as if he'd got a hingin inside to work him, and now bringing a bird, or a hanimal, or something else to wherrit us."

"Nearly done?" growled Lionel, angrily.

"Not quite, sir," said the landlord, desperately; for he had been lectured into speaking to his perverse lodger, and he knew that the ear of his lecturer was at the keyhole. "You see, sir, my wife says as we must have an alteration. She says only last night, 'James,' she says—it was after we was in bed, sir—'how do we know what Mr Redgrave'll be a havin' next? He's a makin' a reg'lar Wombwell's show of that drawing-room, as we shall have to re-furnish as soon as ever he's gone, what with tobacco-smoke, dirty feet, and wild beasts. We shall be having a helephant or a monkey next; and with a monkey in the house,' she says, 'I won't put up. For, if there is a ojus thing as I can't abear, it's a monkey. What does a gent like him, with his father a barrynit, want with tortushes a-scrawming about the room, and under your feet, and giving you a turn as sends cold shudders all down your back?'"

"Now, look, here!" burst out Lionel; "I'm not going either to stand or to believe all this, so I tell you. You want to raise the rent, Stiff. Now that's it."

"Which it just ain't nothink of the sort, Mr Redgrave!" exclaimed a corroded voice—sharp, worn, and acid—and a new actor appeared on the scene, in the person of Mrs Stiff, the landlord's lady. "I wonder, sir, at a gentleman—a nobleman's son—bemeaning himself to insult honest people in this way. We don't want the rent raised, sir; but what we do want is a halteration, or else our rooms empty, or let to some one else, as there's plenty of gents as would be glad to have them; though, if you was to go, no one would be sorrier than I should, to lose you, sir."

Lionel made a gesture of dismay, throwing himself farther back upon his lounge, with every token of succumbing to this fresh attack, as he stared grimly at the ceiling.

"You see, sir," said Mrs Stiff, for her husband, literally as well as metaphorically, had now subsided into the background, "ever since Mr Clayton, as was as nice and pleasant a gent as ever walked in shoe-leather, has been gone, things has been growing worse. We ain't the folks, sir, to take notice of late hours, or smoking, or friends to supper, as won't go in Hansom cabs without a noise, and a bit of racketing now and then—of course not. We know our place, sir, and what gents is—young and old—as lives in eligibly-situated bachelor chambers, overlooking one of the best streets in the metropolis; but I put it to you, sir, as a gent of sense, is *that* right—and that—and THAT?"

Mrs Stiff's forefinger was pointed at first one and then another quadru- or bi-ped intruder.

"Ever since Mr Clayton's been gone, sir, here you've had these things a coming in. And now, is it right, sir? Is tortushes—six of 'em—proper things to be a-scrawming over a Brussels carpet as cost us six-and-six a yard, without the planning and making? And let me tell you, sir, as six-and-sixes to buy yards of carpet ain't scraped out of the gutters; let alone the other expenses of furnishing a house, with upholsterers and furniture shops thrusting veneer down your throat when you go in for solid; and if, to save your money, you go to one of the auction-rooms, you're a'most ragged to pieces by the Jew brokers; and if you won't employ 'em, them a-running up things and bidding against you shameful. Furnishing a house don't mean marrying a lady and putting her in it, I can tell you, Mr Redgrave, sir; and when it's your own Brussels as you're a walking on, and your own sofas as you sit on, you won't destroy 'em with all sorts of nasty filthy animals, as is that full of insecks as makes it miserable to come in the room."

"Now, look here!" exclaimed Lionel, whose countenance wore a comical aspect of trouble and despair,—"look here!" he exclaimed, starting up; "I don't want to go—I don't want the trouble. There, I'll promise you, I won't buy any more, will that suit you?"

But the long-suffering Mrs Stiff was now fully roused, and determined to hold the ground which she had gained. She said, and very justly, that she could not afford to go on upon such terms, as the result must be notice to quit from their own landlord. She was determined now to have a thorough clearance, or Mr Redgrave must get apartments where people did not mind having their rooms made into a "wild beast show."

This being the climax of Mrs Stiff's speech, that lady flounced out of the room, the centre of an aërial vortex raised by her voluminous garments, leaving Lionel Redgrave and his landlord staring very hard at one another.

"I say, you know, what's to be done?" said the young man, at last.

Mr Stiff shook his head as solemnly as a sexton welcoming a fully furnished funeral, when, leaping up angrily, to his

landlord's great astonishment, Lionel threw up the window, and then, though not without some difficulty, set at liberty the whole of his birds, the parrot rewarding him for his kindness by nipping a piece out of his finger.

"There, now!" said Lionel, binding a handkerchief round his bleeding finger, after directing a blow right from the shoulder at the offending parrot, which, it is hardly necessary to say, missed its aim—"there now! take those empty cages away, and send the girl to sweep up the bits."

Mr Stiff winked to himself as he obeyed, and rattled out of the room with quite a load of cages, but only to return at the end of five minutes.

"Well," said Lionel, inquiringly, "what now?"

"About them there ferrets, sir?" said Mr Stiff.

"Oh! take them away by all means," said Lionel, impatiently.

"Yes, sir, in course; but what shall I do with them?"

"Wring their necks—sell them—send them down the drains after the rats," exclaimed Lionel; and the wire-fronted box, containing the furry, snakey animals, was carried down; but only for Mr Stiff to return at the end of ten minutes, hot, henpecked, and nervous, to encounter Lionel's savage glances.

"Well, what next?" cried the young man to the troubled ambassador, who, open to receiving both fires, had now come charged with a message which he hardly dared to deliver, for, after the sweep made of birds and cages, he felt that it was rather dangerous to ask for fresh concessions, and therefore he remained silent until Lionel fiercely repeated his question.

"Please, sir, there's them tortushes," said Stiff, at last.

"*Con*-found the tortoises!" cried Lionel; "give them to some of the street boys." And, moving to the window, he hailed a doctor's boy passing with his medicine-basket. "Catch, my lad," he shouted; and he threw him down—one after the other—three of the sluggish little reptiles, with heads and legs drawn within their shells so as to be out of danger. "Now, I hope you are satisfied," he said to his landlord; who, after a good hunt had continued to discover in out-of-the-way corners the other three offenders.

Mr Stiff's only response was a shake of the head—a motion kept up until he reached the lower regions, whence he returned, more hot and flustered than ever, to be greeted with a storm of abuse from his angry young tenant.

No, he would not give up the dogs, that he wouldn't, and Mr Stiff might go and tell his wife so. He had already thrown away above thirty pounds' worth of things to satisfy them. He gave twelve pounds for that parrot, he said, and now they wanted him to part with his dogs. Why! he had only got back the bull-terrier after paying ten pounds one day, and five the next, through losing it in Decadia, let alone the heavy sums he had paid for the others. Part with his dogs! No, that he wouldn't, so there was an end of it; and if Mr Stiff came bothering him again, hang him if he wouldn't serve him as he had served the tortoises.

There might have been an end of it, so far as Mr Stiff was concerned; but when he returned to the kitchen, he was soon sent back to the drawing-room, with fresh diplomatic charges, which he delivered in spite of the window-throwing threat; but, still failing to make satisfactory arrangements, he was accompanied in a further visit to the first-floor by the irate landlady herself—hot, out of breath, and voluminous in her discourse.

And now the wordy warfare recommenced, charge after charge being made by Mrs Stiff, to the discomfiture of Lionel Redgrave, till a truce had been agreed upon: the young tenant was to retain his chambers on condition that he brought no more "wild beasts" or birds—so Mrs Stiff put it—and did not, as, one by one, the four dogs he was allowed to keep were lost, either try to recover them, or supply their places with fresh favourites.

"Confound the pair!" cried Lionel, as they left the room; and, according to custom, proceeded to solace himself with a cigar.

"I don't care," exclaimed Mrs Stiff, as she reached her best kitchen, and sat down panting; "we ought to have persevered, and then we should have had the house clear of his rubbish. How do we know how long the silly young noodle—all money and no brains—will be before he loses even one of his dogs?"

"Don't you fret about that," laughed her husband; "that won't be long first. Why, he never hardly goes out now without some ill-looking vagabond dodging him; and there's one in particular follows him home as regular as clockwork. Do you think he's always slinking about for nothing? Not he. You wait a bit, and you'll see."

Volume Two—Chapter Ten.

Mutterings.

D. Wragg was out on business, down by the docks. He had left home directly after breakfast, telling his lodger, the little Frenchman, that he was "good to buy five hundred of zebras, or a hundred of grays, or a miskellaneous assortment of anything fresh brought over;" and he tapped his breast-pocket as he spoke, winking and jerking himself up and down.

"Dessay I could find a customer for a monkey, if I brought one home."

A sharp glance was directed at Patty by Janet, as the dealer spoke; for Wragg's absence being likely to last the whole day, while Canau's engagements would occupy him for a considerable portion of it, Mrs Pellet had been persuaded to let Patty come and bear her friend company during the time when she would otherwise have been left alone in charge of D. Wragg's stock-in-trade.

"Coming back," said D. Wragg, "I shall see about the four-wheeler, so as we can go down comfortable. What time shall we start?"

He looked at Janet as he spoke, but she was thoughtful and silent; coming back though into the present, upon being again addressed.

"All right, then!" said D. Wragg; "to-morrow morning, directly arter breakfast, say half arter eight, and that will be nine; and you and Mother Winks will be sure and get a basket all ready."

D. Wragg took his departure, after an affectionate glance all round at the birds and the rest of his stock-in-trade, while the little Frenchman stood lighting his cigarette with the match handed him by Janet.

"You will stay with Janet?" he said to Patty, as he turned to go.

"Yes; she has promised," said Janet, quickly; "but you will be back in an hour to paint the birds?"

"Good! yes, in one hour;" and raising his hat, he replaced it, old and pinched of brim, very much on one side, and sauntered out.

The two girls, left now alone, stood silently in the shop for a few minutes, and then entered the back-room, where, in a quiet, pre-occupied manner, Janet commenced arranging cardboard, gum, and various packets of feathers, upon the table; an operation interrupted almost directly by a loud tapping upon the shop-counter.

Patty turned to answer the summons for her friend, but, on reaching the glass-door, she started back, looking pale and anxious.

"Oh, pray go!" she whispered to Janet, whose dark eyes were fixed maliciously upon her.

"So it is the gay cavalier, is it?" laughed Janet, in a harsh angry fashion.

"No, no!" whispered Patty, "but that dreadful man. He follows me, and always comes to the shop when he thinks I am here."

"I'll answer him," said Janet, fiercely; and then in a whisper, "should you have turned back if it had been some one else?"

Patty's sole reply was a look of reproach, one, though, that spoke volumes, as the deformed girl left the room to encounter the heavy, surly-voiced young man, who, upon being sharply asked what he wanted—

"Didn't quite know. Perhaps it were a bird, or it might be a ferret; but he wasn't quite sure. How-so-be, *she* wasn't the one as was in the shop the other day. Where was the other one? Oh! she was busy, was she? Then p'raps he'd call again;" after which the heavy gentleman loitered slowly out of the shop, to hang about the window, glancing in at the birds and chewing straws.

"He's gone!" said Janet, returning to the room. "He's a hideous wretch, ugly as I am. Such impudence! He did not want to buy anything. But what a little coward you are!"

"Yes," sighed Patty, "I am—I know I am. Ah! Janet," she continued, after a short pause, "I wish I were a lady!"

"For the sake of the gay cavalier, of course," laughed Janet, sneeringly, and then she looked angrily across at her companion, who bent her head, whispering to herself—

"She won't believe me—she won't believe me."

Janet's long fingers now grew very busy over her work, as she nimbly arranged the wing, tail, back, and breast feathers of a partridge, with gum, upon a stiff piece of card, following, with an accuracy learned of the birds amongst which she had so long dwelt, the soft curves and graceful swellings of the natural form, making up pair after pair of ornaments, destined, after being finished off by Canau, and prettily mounted, to be disposed of by D. Wragg at a profitable rate.

Punctual to his time, the little Frenchman returned, and, quite at home, sauntered into the room.

"Good girls! good girls!" he said, lightly. "Now the colours and the brush. Did the Madame Vinks bring the music she said she would borrow from the *chef d'orchestre*? No? Ah! then, but I am disappoint, and must wait. Janet, that bird is too big—round—plump—too much like the Madame Vinks; but we will paint his beak and leg. He does look fit for the *chef*—the cook—and not for the ornament."

Then taking up cakes, first of one colour and then of another, he moistened a camel's hair pencil in the gum, and, with the skill of a finished artist, gave the finishing touches, beaks, eyes, legs, to the young girl's work.

In the midst of the operation, though, there was again the sound of a step in the shop.

Patty rose and left the room, for Janet's fingers were busy with the feathers, and she determined this time not to let cowardice prevent her from doing her friend the little service. The deformed girl's manner, however, evinced but little

gratitude for the act, for she sat with bent head, but flashing eyes and distended nostrils, eagerly listening to catch the slightest word.

And eager whispered words those seemed to her to be, but replied to only in monosyllables, and at last, when she raised her head and gazed through the open door, she winced as if she had been struck, on seeing a be-ringed hand stretched across the counter, and tightly holding one of Patty's little white palms.

Janet did not heed that the young girl seemed to be vainly trying to release that hand, as she stood right back against the cages at the side of the shop.

It was a bright hot summer day, with window and door open, so as to catch every wandering breeze that might lose itself in the vast maze of bricks and mortar; and as Janet had that one glance in at the shop, the door of communication banged loudly, and her view was cut off.

For a moment the girl's face was contracted by pain; then a fierce malicious look swept over it as she rose to re-open the door.

"No, no—no, no, *mon enfant*; let the door rest," said Monsieur Canau. "Wait till I have finished this one bird. Patty will be here directly."

Janet shrunk back into her chair, craning her neck forward, though, as she tried in vain to make out the words that were spoken. Her teeth gnawed her lip, and her nails seemed to be pressed into her hands, while the twitching of her wide nostrils told of the agitation that moved her so strongly.

Twice she made as though to leap up, determined not to bear longer the restraint put upon her, but only to subside again into her eager listening attitude, as Monsieur Canau still painted on, humming softly an operatic air the while, as from time to time he stood to watch the progress of his work.

He was evidently totally ignorant of what was taking place in the shop, his occupation for the time being completely filling his mind, so that neither did he notice the agitation of Janet, which grew each moment more marked and decided in character.

At last the girl sprang sharply up, and walked towards the door, but only to be stayed by Canau.

"A moment, little one!" he said; "the Indian ink is not here. Reach it down for me from the closet."

With trembling hands, Janet crossed to the cupboard, and strove to find the cake of paint; but it was beyond her reach, and she had to take a chair before she could find it and return to the table.

"Good! Now mix me a little upon that saucer; not too much."

Janet obeyed without a word, and still Canau did not notice her agitation.

At last, though, she was free; and with eyes glittering, she made towards the door, just as she could hear now some hurried words, uttered in a low tone, as if some one were pleading importunately.

Then a few quick broken sentences followed, and one of the cages was slightly moved from its place.

Another moment, and Janet's hand was upon the fastening of the door, and she had thrown it open in time to see Patty's drawn farther and farther over the counter in spite of her resistance, and there it was held.

There were more words—hurried, eager words—a faint cry of remonstrance, and then Patty's hand was snatched away with a violent effort, and she rushed, hot and excited, into the room.

"Aha! there, mind, my child," said Canau; "but you will make the feathers fly. What is it? Has one of the little dogs got loose, and have you hunted him? Eh? Ah, *ma foi*! but you are hot and red-faced, and angry! Has any one dared—but what is this?"

Monsieur Canau uttered this last query in fierce tones, for, following rapidly upon the entrance of Patty, there was the dislodging a cage or two, the rattle of some chains, and a general fluttering amongst D. Wragg's feathered possessions, as Lionel Redgrave, in full pursuit, forced his way into the little room.

Volume Two—Chapter Eleven.

Lionel's Check.

"There! I told you I would," cried Lionel, who had hurried round the end of the counter, but not quickly enough to arrest the fleeing girl. "You know I met Wragg—"

He stopped short upon finding himself face to face with Monsieur Canau, who, reading at a glance, from Patty's flushed and troubled face, the meaning of her retreat, started angrily to his feet, saying—

"Monsieur is in error; he makes a mistake. This room is private, and he will instantly retire."

Taken by surprise, and half abashed for the moment, Lionel shrank from the shabby little figure before him. For the Frenchman, sallow and seamed of countenance, appeared to brighten up, and his breast began to swell, as he stepped towards the intruder.

But Lionel's discomfiture did not last a minute. Waiting until Canau was close up to him, he exclaimed—

"And pray, who the devil are you?"

"Who am I, sir?" exclaimed Canau, fiercely; "I, sir, am a gentleman, the protector of these ladies. In my country, sir—in La France—it is not money, but birth, and the habits of a gentleman, that serve to make the aristocrat. You are in error, sir; and you will directly leave this room."

Lionel was perfectly astounded, and each moment he grew more confused, hardly knowing whether to be amused, or to think that he was in some other part of the world.

Was he dreaming? he asked himself, or was this really Decadia?

But his short reverie was made even shorter, as, quite in an agony, Janet clung to Canau's hand, whispering imploringly, as she gazed in his face—

"Oh! for my sake, pray, don't! Do not be angry."

"Hush! hush! my little one," said the Frenchman, softly, a most benignant aspect overspreading his poor worn countenance. "Be not afraid—it is nothing. You, sir," he continued, calmly turning to Lionel, "you are young, and you make mistakes. In my country satisfaction would have been asked; but this is not La France, and I forget. But monsieur will leave at once."

In spite of himself, angry even at what he chose to call his weakness, Lionel felt that he was overmatched by his little adversary. He knew that they were standing upon different bases, and that while the one occupied by the Frenchman was solid and substantial, his own was rotten and untrustworthy. Above all, too, it would keep striking him as being startling, that there, in that low, wretched street, which he told himself he had visited for the purpose of carrying on a vulgar amour, one should start up with all the grand courtesy of a gentleman of the old *régime*, to rebuke him, and to call him to account for his flagrant breach of etiquette.

He could do no other; and at last, stepping over the threshold, half annoyed, half puzzled, he suffered himself to be backed into the shop, and then to the door, Monsieur Canau putting on his hat as he progressed, but only to raise it with grim courtesy to the young man, who, frowning and humiliated, involuntarily raised his own, before walking fuming away.

"This young man, this foolish boy—do you encourage him to come here, Janet?" said Monsieur Canau, angrily, as he returned to the room to find both the young girls in tears.

Her answer was a shake of the head, while Patty came forward and placed both her little hands in his, as she thanked him for his conduct, and begged him not to speak angrily to Janet.

"It is well," he said, nodding his head many times, "and I am not angry with Janet. But this must not be: he must be stopped: he must come here no more."

He paused, for a loud sob from Janet took his attention, and turning, he found her with her face buried in her hands as she bent down, weeping bitterly.

"Poor child!" said Canau, tenderly, "she is soon alarmed. The scene has been too much; but we will go up to our own room and have some music. It will greatly soothe and calm this troubled spirit. But no—not so; we must wait for Wragg—we must not leave till he comes; and Patty, my child, you must no more be in the shop alone. It is not right for you. But enough—enough of this. I will stay with you now, and we will finish the birds."

Turning to the painting, he sketched on as if nothing had happened, conversing lightly in French, till seeing once more that the tears would flow, he raised his brows slightly, shrugged his shoulders, rolled up and lit a cigarette, and strolled into the shop, muttering, as he left the girls to each other's sympathy—

"But this must be stopped: he must come here no more."

Very thoughtful was Monsieur Canau, as he stood there in the shop, his gaze lighting here and there upon bird, beast, or fish. But he saw them not, for his mind was filled with the recollection of the incident of that morning, and his seamed countenance grew more full of line and pucker as he sent the blue vapour from his cigarette, eddying out upon the air in furious puffs.

Then he walked to the door to look up and down the street, considering within himself the while what he should say to the dealer on his return; then he wondered whether it was the little man's doing that Lionel Redgrave had gone there while Janet and her friend were in charge, and he frowned again and again as the thoughts came thick and fast. But at last, muttering to himself these words—"He must come here no more," he was about to turn into the house, when he became aware of a low surly face close to him, apparently watching his every motion.

Volume Two—Chapter Twelve.

D. Wragg's Day Out.

If there is one thing more loved of your genuine Londoner than shell-fish, it is what he calls an "outing."

We leave it to the statistician to decide upon the number of bushels of whelks boiled and consumed, after deposition

in little white saucers, and peppering with dust; the loads of mussels, the great spongy-shelled oysters, and the barrows and baskets full of periwinkles stewed in Billingsgate or Columbia coppers, sold in ha'porths, and wriggled out with pins, and then luxuriated upon—while we turn to outing. Outing—whether it be by rail, boat, 'bus, van, or the various paintless, age-dried, loose-tired, nondescript vehicles forced into requisition for the purpose.

They are not particular, these Londoners, where or how they go—the very fact of there being the fresh air, green trees, and sunshine, that they miss at home, is sufficient; and all the dwellers upon suburban roads can attest to the air of tired satisfaction to be seen in the faces of many of those who come wearily back after that hardest of hard day's work—an outing. Tired, but happy all the same, and bearing now flowers, perhaps only lilac or hawthorn; later on in the season, bunches of green or ripening corn—treasures to be placed in water, or suspended dry over glass or picture, to bring back for months to come the recollection of the bright day spent in the country lanes.

The four-wheeler of which D. Wragg had spoken was at the door at the time appointed, ready to take the whole party, including Patty, who had been persuaded by Janet to obtain permission to accompany them, not without some reluctance on her own part; for after yesterday's scene she felt that she would have preferred the quiet protection of her own home. It was a very shabby, sun-blistered green vehicle, whose appearance suggested a thorough knowledge of every road out of London—the kind of carriage that, give it motive-power, would be sure to find its own way home, in spite even of an obstinate horse. It looked as if accustomed to stop almost of its own accord at road-side public-houses, for its drawer and occupants to drink, while it rested its creaking springs and jangling iron, fetching its breath for another dusty run, as it longed for one of those wayside horseponds through which it might be driven to the easement of its thirsty joints and badly-fitted wheels, almost now disposed to moult the spokes which rattled musically in their freedom from paint.

The four-wheeler was drawn by a curved-nosed beast of an angular nature, whose character was written in his sleepy eye and bended knees, worn by contact with hard or dusty roads. His vertebrae stood up like a minor chain of Andes, extending from his mangy neck to the tableland dominating the cataract-like tail of scrubby hair. To complete his description, he was a horse of a most retiring aspect, whose presence caused dogs to sniff, and cats to run a red rag-like tongue over their white teeth and skinny lips, as they thought of the barrow, and the three small slices upon a skewer.

Mrs Winks was in a state of moist and shiny excitement. She had already placed a fair-sized flat basket beneath the seat, and quite destroyed the appearance of her print apron, by rolling it up and folding it into fidget-suggested plaits.

But it was with no envious eyes that Mrs Winks gazed; for London, she said, was quite big enough for her, and contained all she wanted. Them as liked might go into the country for her, which she was quite sure could show no such flowers, fruits, or vegetables as Common Garding. She liked to see others enjoy themselves, though, and her face beamed with good-humour as she held a chair for Janet to stand upon and climb to her seat, when Canau led her out with as great care and courtesy as if she had been a duchess of the French court.

Patty, although the visitor, had insisted upon giving up to Janet the place of honour beside D. Wragg, who was already seated, and was making the angular horse toss its head in response to the unnecessarily jerked reins.

Then came Patty's turn to be helped into the back-seat—a bright little blossom with petals of white muslin—and Canau took his place by her side, both he and D. Wragg being perfectly stiff in the board-like white waistcoats, got up for them expressly by Mrs Winks.

That lady received divers admonitions respecting the administration of more water to the stock-in-trade; and a stern order "not to make no mistake; but if that party came about the little spannle, it warn't the same, and he'd best call again."

"Hooray! give's a copper, guv'nor," shouted a small boy, as D. Wragg now energetically jerked the reins, and cried, "P'st!" and "Go on then!" for the horse would not move, evidently considering that D. Wragg had cried "Wolf," in his previous jerkings of the reins; but at last the brute ambled off slowly, only, though, to be checked at the end of half-a-dozen yards, for his driver to shout to Mrs Winks—

"Here, I say! them there sparrers, I won't let 'em go at the price Pogles offered. Don't you make no mistake: I don't get my sparrers for nothing—p'st!"

They went on a few yards farther, but only for D. Wragg to recall something else—which made him pull up short and wave Mrs Winks forward with the whip.

"I didn't give them there bantams their mixter this mornin', and their combs is white as lather. Give 'em a few drops in their water."

"Now, do go on, there's a good soul!" cried Mrs Winks, impatiently; "just as if I couldn't mind the place as well as you!"

"I don't think as there's anything else I want to say," said D. Wragg, rubbing his nose—what there was of it—with the shaft of the whip.

"No, I shouldn't think there was," said Mrs Winks, pettishly; "*so* now go on."

Mrs Winks turned to re-enter the shop, but she was calculating too much, for D. Wragg did not set her at liberty until he had called and recalled her to the very end of the street, to warn her about the rats—about that there pair of fancy rabbits—and lastly, to tell her to be sure and not forget about the spannle.

“Now, don’t you make no mistake about that there dorg, for that there’s the particularist part of it all.”

“There! drat the man! what does he mean dragging me away like this?” puffed the dame, fiercely; and, heedless of a shouted order sent flying after her as the four-wheeler turned the corner, she made her way back to the shop, while D. Wragg urged on his horse, working hard at his driving, so as to reach the country for a day of pleasure.

The pleasure was in anticipation, but there was a shade on the brow of both girls, as they seemed to feel the coming of what was to be to one a stroke that should make a tender heart to ache with bitter misery—to bring forth confession upon confession, and to waken both to the fact that there are dreams of the day as well as dreams of the night—dreams of our waking moments as well as dreams when the body is steeped in sleep.

But now, they were still in Decadia, with D. Wragg—no very skilful driver—urging on his horse as he applied the whip and jerked the reins, telling it “not to make no mistake, for he was behind it.”

“Come on, will you?” cried D. Wragg, to increase the speed. Result: the angular horse wagged its tail.

On he went, however, stumbling slowly along, bowing his head in sympathy with a halting leg; and they proceeded through the least frequented streets, D. Wragg being influenced in his choice of them by his want of confidence in himself as a driver.

On still, past the parts where the shops began to look new, but blighted as to trade; where the houses were more thinly scattered, until they had attained to their object of being in the country, when the horse was allowed to take its own pace.

It was not a pleasant pace; for there was, when he went slowly, too much turning of the head, and dragging along of one of the hind legs; while, when apparently startled to find that he was doing but little more than keeping up with the pedestrians on either side of the road, he started off for a hundred yards in a sharper trot, it was made unmusical by the clink, clink of shoe against shoe as the poor brute overstepped itself.

But in spite of these failings, the party in the four-wheeler seemed perfectly content, for they were progressing; suburban residences, with their pleasant green parterres and shrubberies, were gliding by them on either hand, so that there was always something new to notice; and besides, were they not leaving behind the misery, the dirt, and squalor of the Great City?

Learned in such matters, from his connection with the bird fancying and catching professions, D. Wragg had made up his mind to the most countrified spot he knew within easy range of London, the result being, that at mid-day the party were dining *al fresco* in the pleasantly wooded region beyond Woodford Bridge; and then in the afternoon, Patty and Janet were wandering hand-in-hand—children once more in thought—along by sweet hedgerow and waving corn.

Now they would rest for a while upon some stile to listen to the familiar note of a bird, which seemed more joyous here, though, in a state of freedom; now pausing to mark the busy hum of insect life; then wandering on again, speaking little, but revelling in the sweetness of the country—doubly dear to these prisoners of the great city.

It was their way of enjoying such trips as this; D. Wragg, for his part, taking solitary rambles for the purpose of combining profit with pleasure—clearing his “ex’s” he called it—by hunting out suitable spots for his bird-catching clients, by the side of shady grove, or upon some pleasant common, where feathered prey might be inveigled and melted down into silver,

Canau, on his part, would take his thoughtful walks about, with his little screwed-up cigarette; it being an understood thing that at a certain hour they were all to meet at the little inn where the horse was resting, partake of an early tea, and then face homeward.

Pleasant fields, with here and there a farmhouse or villa, with its closely-shaven lawn and trimly-kept garden full of floral beauties, but presenting no greater attraction to the two wanderers than did hedge and bank rich with darkening leaf, berry, and flower; and on they strolled, both very quiet and thoughtful, forgetting D. Wragg, Canau, and Babel itself, in the enjoyment of the present.

Passing slowly along—picking a harebell or scabious here, a cluster of sweet honeysuckle, or the bugloss there—Patty and Janet wandered over the road-side grass, their steps inaudible, till they reached a high hedge and evergreen plantation, which separated them from the grounds of a pleasant residence, upon whose lawn a party was assembled, apparently engaged in some out-door pastime. They were so close that the voices were easily distinguishable: the light happy laugh of maidenhood mingling with the deeper tones of male companions. Now and then, too, through the trees the light floating drapery of more than one fair girl could be made out, as it swept over the soft lawn.

At first little notice was taken by Patty and Janet; but suddenly, upon hearing a remark to which a merry laughing response was given, the former stopped short, to crimson and then turn pale, as she dropped the flowers which she had gathered.

She stood perfectly motionless, as a laughing, girlish voice, exclaimed—

“No, no; it’s Mr Clayton’s turn now—he’s my partner!”

“Clayton—Harry Clayton; why don’t you come?” exclaimed a man’s voice; “why, I declare, if he isn’t proposing to Miss Rawlinson!”

Patty was pressing forward, parting the leaves with one hand, heedless of the thorns which pricked and tore her soft

fingers, before she was able to obtain a passing glance of dark, study-paled Harry Clayton, rising with a smile from the feet of a young lady seated upon a garden-chair—a maiden who, at that distance, seemed to Patty to be very beautiful in her light muslin dress, and framed as it were in the soft verdure around.

Then the listeners' ears were saluted by a merry burst of laughter, drowning the expostulating tones of a man's voice; while, with bleeding hands, ay! and bleeding heart, head bent, and the tears running from her great grey eyes, Patty turned and almost staggered away, closely followed by Janet; who, taking her arm, hurried her along, till, crossing a stile, they sat down beside the softly undulating corn.

The stillness was complete around, only broken by the cawing of a colony of rooks amongst some distant elms.

"Oh Patty, Patty, darling!" whispered Janet, taking the bended head to her breast, when, giving way to the desolation of her young heart in the fresh trouble that seemed to have come over her so suddenly, Patty wept long and bitterly, awakened as she was so rudely from a dream in which she had allowed herself to indulge.

"Oh Patty, Patty!" softly whispered Janet again, as, down upon her knees, she rocked the little head that rested against her to and fro—hushing her friend as if she had been a child, murmuring, too, as she bent over her—"And I thought so differently—so differently!"

"Let us go—let us go away from here," sobbed Patty, after vainly struggling to repress her feelings.

"Not yet—not yet," said Janet, as she played with the hair which fell upon her breast. "There is no one to see us here, and you are not yet fit for people to look at you. You must not think me cruel if I say I am glad to see you suffer—glad your poor breast can be torn and troubled; for I thought so differently, little one, and that it was the gay handsome boy who had stolen the little heart away; for I knew—I knew—I've known that there was something wrong for weeks and weeks; and I've been angry and bitter, and hated you; for, Patty, Patty," she cried, passionately, hiding now her own swarthy face, "I feel that if he would but take me, to beat me, or to be as his dog that he fondles so—to wait upon him—to be his slave—I could be happy. You don't know—you cannot tell—the misery, the wretchedness of such a heart as mine. Do you think I am blind? Do I not know that he would laugh and jeer at me? Would he not think me mad for looking up at him?" she cried passionately, as she struck her face—her bosom—cruelly with her long, bony fingers. "Do you think I don't know what a toad I am—how ugly and foul I must be in the eyes of men? And yet I have a woman's heart; and though I've tried not to worship his bold insolent face, I could almost have died again and again for one—only one—of those sweet words he has flung at you so often, when I have thought you were trying to lead him on. If I could but have had one word, to have lived on it for a few moments; even to have known directly after that it was false and delusive! Patty, Patty, darling! you must forgive me, because I have hated you for all this, and without reason. I have been madly jealous, and I believe that I am mad now. Oh! hold me! hold me! and help me to tear out this cruel love that is breaking my heart—killing me—but you cannot understand—even you cannot tell what it is to live without hope."

"Oh Janet!" sobbed Patty, reproachfully.

"I know, I know," cried Janet, passionately; "you love him and he is another's. But you are pretty; your face is fair, and bright, and sweet; and you will soon forget all this, and love again. But look at me—at this face—at this shape! Oh! why did I not die when I was little? instead of living to become such a burden even to myself? They say that the crippled and deformed are vain, and blind to all their failings; but do you think that I am? Oh! no; I could loathe and trample upon myself for being what I am; while he is so brave, and straight, and handsome."

She clung, sobbing passionately the while, to Patty's breast—clinging to her with a frightened, wild aspect, as if she almost feared herself, till, by slow degrees, the laboured sobs became less painful, and the flowers which she still clutched in her poor thin fingers withered away upon their bruised stalks.

The corn waved and rustled about them; the gaudy poppies nodded and fluttered their limp petals around; and here and there some cornflower's bright purple peeped out from amidst the tangle of pinky bear-bind and azure vetch. Now a lark would sing loud and high above their heads, or some finch or warbler, emboldened by the silence, would perch upon the hedge hard by, to jerk out a few notes of its song, and then flit to some further spray.

Peace seemed diffused around, and began by degrees to pervade the troubled hearts of the two girls.

"We must go," said Janet, at last, as she dried her eyes. "I am going back to London to love my old favourites—the fish and the birds."

Then, looking up in a quiet and compassionate way at Patty, as if she alone were in trouble—

"Come, darling," she said, "let's try and forget all this; but kiss me first, and say that you are not angry—not ashamed of me for what I have said. What makes you so silent? Why do you not answer?"

"I was thinking—thinking," said Patty, wearily, as she put her arms round Janet's neck and kissed her; "I was thinking that if I could have been like you I should have been happier, for I should have been wiser and known better."

"Hush!" said Janet, softly; "I am wise, am I not?"

Then taking Patty's hand as they rose, in an absent, tired fashion, they walked on toward the little inn, where Monsieur Canau was awaiting them.

The sun still shone brightly, and there was the rich mellowness of the early autumn in the atmosphere, tinting all around with its soft golden haze; but it seemed to the two girls that the smoke and ashes of London had fallen upon the scene, and they longed in secret for the time of departure to arrive.

Once, though, as they sat in the pleasant little inn-parlour, Janet saw her companion start from her abstracted mood, for voices were heard approaching, and it was evident that some of the party from the lawn were about to pass the window of the room where their evening meal was spread.

Janet pressed the agitated girl's hand beneath the table, as she saw the folds of the little white muslin dress rise and fall; but the act was unseen by the others; and soon afterwards D. Wragg went away to see about the horse, while Canau lit his cigarette, and strolled outside, leaving the girls alone.

They sat together on the back-seat going home, while the horse jogged slowly along, with Monsieur Canau buried in thought, and D. Wragg extremely quiet, save when he uttered some admonition to the animal he was driving.

Hardly a word was spoken, but heart seemed whispering to heart of the secrets that had been hidden until that day, when, as if with one impulse, they had both leaped forth into the light.

"What were you thinking about?" said Janet at last, softly, as she turned to gaze in Patty's face, so as to see that her companion was gazing up to where, clear and bright, the stars looked down upon the shadowy lanes.

"I was trying to read how it will all end—what is to be my fortune," said Patty; and she turned with a sad smile towards her questioner, and passed one plump arm round Janet's frail waist. "And you? can you read your fortune there?"

"No need—no need," said Janet, sadly. "There are no good fairies now, Patty, to touch the deformed with their wand and make them straight and bright. I know my fortune—to be looked upon with aversion to the end. But there must be no more trifling," she said, fiercely. "You must not come to us any more. He has been tempted into coming and spending his foolish money in the expectation of seeing you; but he must be kept away now."

They rode on in silence for some time, during which D. Wragg had his hands pretty full with the horse, which seemed to have taken a sudden desire to see whether the left-hand hedge was black-thorn or white; and baulked in his desire to investigate on that side, made a desperate effort to reach the right. This, however, was also checked, and he settled down once more into a slow jig-jog of the most somnolent nature for those who were behind.

"I am not so mad," said Janet, softly, after a while, "that I do not know what is just and right. He shall speak no more to my darling. For, in my strange, uncouth, wild way, Patty, I love you, not as I might a sister, but with something of the desire a mother must feel for her little one."

And then there was silence and sadness as the two girls sat hand-in-hand till the first straggling gaslights were visible, sitting with out another word till Monsieur Canau helped them to alight, and then saw Patty safely to the door of the Duplex Street house, where the end of Patty's day out was a sigh and many tears.

Volume Two—Chapter Thirteen.

Janet a Listener.

Janet went to her lonely room, sad and sinking of heart, to kneel upon a box by the window, gazing out above the house-tops, as if her wishes were far away in the country from which she had so lately returned.

An hour passed like this, and then from below there came the sound of voices in altercation, followed almost directly after by the noise of a struggle. Then, as she stood trembling, there were the panting, hard breathing, and half-stifled ejaculations of those who seemed to be engaged, and then utter silence.

Janet crept back to her box, for the sound of quarrel and fight was no uncommon one in Brownjohn Street, and again she knelt there thinking—thinking always, with her glittering eyes hot and aching. But now came the sounds again, and, startled and nervous, she ran to her door, which she opened, and then stood out upon the landing, for the voices seemed to come from down-stairs, at the street-door, and one of these she recognised as that of D. Wragg, the other belonging to the heavy young man who had of late taken so much interest in the contents of the dealer's shop.

"Now, look here, Jack Screwby," Janet heard D. Wragg exclaim; "don't you make no mistake; trade's trade, but I ain't cut my wisdom-teeth for nothing. So look here; if you come to my shop again, and speak to them gals as you did, and hang about here as you've hung, and talk about it like you've talked, I'll—well, there; just you look out and you'll see."

"Wot's he allus a hangin' about for, then," growled the other voice; "you wouldn't talk like this sort to him—no I ain't! I ain't drunk—so now then! P'raps I'm as good a man as he's, and got a bit o' money to go into the fancy with any time I like; and arter the good turns I've done you, if you were anything of a man, you'd say, Come and be pardners. I've done you no end of good, D. Wragg; and now, as I wants to be good friends, you're all wrong with a chap as is p'raps ekalls with them as does in dawgs."

"You *air* drunk, that's what you *air*!" exclaimed D. Wragg, indignantly, "or else you'd never come talking like that there! Pardner, indeed!" he continued, contemptuously; "there, get out!"

Then once more there came the sound of scuffling, evidently caused by D. Wragg supplementing his order with the efforts of his hands, Mr Screwby opposing with all the resistance he could bring to bear.

Before many moments had passed, it was evident that the owner of the mansion had gained the victory over his semi-intoxicated foe; for the scuffle was followed by two or three oaths, a clattering of heavy boots, and then the banging of the side-door; after which Janet stood ready to retreat, as she heard the "stump—stump" of D. Wragg's

lame foot coming along the passage.

“Pardner, indeed!” muttered D. Wragg, “pardner, indeed! He—he—he—he—he!” he sniggered; and then he seemed to stand holding by the bottom of the balustrade to indulge in a few minutes’ sardonic mirth. “He’s as drunk as an owl—a vagabond! Dursn’t tell tales, though, if I did kick him. Let him tell, though, if he likes; who’s afraid?”

Judging from the tones of his voice, though, an unbiassed listener would have been disposed to say that Mr D. Wragg was also rather far gone towards being inebriated; while, as to the fact of being afraid, if he were not in a state of fear—why did he speak so loudly?

The fact was, that after setting down his friends, D. Wragg had driven off with the rickety four-wheeler, whose problem still remained unsolved, to wit, how it had possibly contrived to hold together for another day. But held together it had, even till its return to the owner’s; and D. Wragg had made his way back to Brownjohn Street to finish the day with what he called a “top-off,” at one of the flaming gin-palace bars, where he had encountered Mr John Screwby, who then roused the dealer’s ire by certain references, one and all of which Mr D. Wragg had classed under the comprehensive term of “cheek!”

“Shall I stop him and speak to him?” thought Janet, as she listened to the heavy step; then, after a few moments’ hesitation, “No,” she said, “but I will keep watch.”

That Janet intended to keep her word was evident from the fact that she hurried back to her room, where the window was still half open, and looking out cautiously to make sure who was the man with whom D. Wragg had been in dispute, there, as she had expected, was Mr John Screwby in one of his favourite attitudes—that of leaning with his back up against a lamp-post, staring heavily at the house, and, drunk or sober, full of exuberant action, which manifested itself in nods and shakes of the head and fist. His anger could be heard, too, in low and ominous growls, similar to those emitted by caged wild beasts when their keeper forces them to display their noble proportions by stirring them up with a long pole.

At last, though, Janet had the satisfaction of seeing the brute slouch away, but not without turning once more to shake his fist at the door, as he said a few words which did not reach the listener’s ear, and then he was gone.

The words were loudly enough spoken, but they were drowned by the rattling wheels of a passing cart; the utterance, though, seemed to give Mr John Screwby the greatest satisfaction, promising to his animal heart the gratification of a grudge; for the words were—

“I’ll have it out o’ some on yer for this!”

Volume Two—Chapter Fourteen.

Brought Home.

Whish-ish! whoosh-oosh! over and over again, Ichabod had pumped the wind-chest full, till the handle came down heavily, and the boy had balanced himself upon it with the hard wood deeply impressing his stomach, and enjoyed the luxury of a ride down. Then he had seen the little leaden weight run up again, as the wind slowly filtered out. But though he repeated the process some half-dozen times, no stops were drawn out, no loud chords came pealing from the organ, and at last, tired out with pumping wind for nothing, Ichabod Gunniss spun the little weight about, and pulled at it until he broke the string, and saw the end disappear inside the organ-case, when he pulled out his pocket-knife, whetted it a while upon the sole of his ill-shaped shoe, and, for about the twentieth time, he began to carve that eternal “I.G.” upon the back of the organ-case. But, in spite of the whetting, the knife was blunt; and though, by going with the grain of the wood, Ichabod had no difficulty in making a capital I; yet, as soon as he came to the grand curves of the capital G, he found out the difficulty of his task, and after a few slips and slides, he gave the thing up in despair.

Jared was in the curtain-hung pew, but he had not been heard to move for quite half an hour. Perhaps he was composing a new voluntary, perhaps asleep; but all was perfectly still, so Ichabod looked about for something with which to amuse himself.

Now, it will be allowed that the interior of a church is not the place where you would expect to find many objects specially adapted for passing time in any other than a religious way, particularly if that church be empty as regarded its congregation. So, for a while, the boy looked round in vain: there were no flies to catch, for the weather was growing cold; there was not room to spin his top; it required smooth stones and moisture to work his sucker; pitching his worsted cap up in the air and catching it upon his head was all very well, but it was tiring; and though, on the whole, tolerably satisfactory, yet without appreciative spectators it was not lasting as a pastime. He could not indulge in the luxury of tying himself in knots bypassing his legs over his head; not that he was afraid of Jared coming, but on account of his being a fast growing boy, and given to filling his garments very tightly soon after they had been served out to him. In fact, at the present time, there was a good deal of wrist beyond the cuffs of his coat, and an interval between his vest and leather lower garments, which had of late fitted him so tightly, that, unknown to the world at large, Ichabod had treated them as an extra cuticle, and slept in them rather than toil for a quarter of an hour to get them off; while, now, to have attempted anything after the fashion of an elastic brother would have had the effect of making him shed his coat like a caterpillar, always supposing that Ichabod’s muscles were stronger than the charitable integument. Besides, if he got himself into such difficulties, he might be cuffed—not that Jared ever had cuffed him, but from Ichabod’s experience of human nature, he knew it to be given to cuffing, and it seemed quite possible that such a proceeding might intrude itself upon his gymnastic exercise, even from so quiet and long-suffering a person as Jared Pellet.

There seemed to be nothing of any kind to amuse the boy, though he looked with great interest at the largest pedal-pipe, and wished that he could get inside, and treat it as if it were a chimney. But it was out of his reach, so he scratched his head in despair.

“What’s the good o’ bringin’ a cove here if he ain’t a-going to play?” he muttered, rubbing his nose viciously, and then once more seizing the bellows-handle, and pumping at it until the wind-chest must have suffered from plethora, and been well-nigh to bursting, while the compressed air forced its way out again with an angry hiss. “He’s asleep, that’s wot he is,” muttered Ichabod.

The boy then had another look round for something fresh, but there was nothing more amusing to be seen than an old dog’s-eared S.P.C.K. prayer-book in half a liver-coloured cover, bearing the following legend:—

judgment dai
wil say
were is the book you stole awa
from Jane Muggins
hir book,
January 9, 1838.

- the rest being torn away, while the above was soon peeled off by the busy Ichabod, and scattered about the floor. He then, before returning the book to its place, ornamented the title-page with a fancy portrait of Mr Purkis, the beadle, that gentleman being indicated by a powerful cocked hat, which gave the sketch the appearance of a shoemaker’s half-moon knife, or straight-handled cheese-cutter. Then Ichabod yawned loudly and wonderfully, displaying an elasticity of facial muscle that was surprising, while it was evident that his mental faculties were busy at work devising some new *délassement*,—the piece of string with a button at one end, which he had in his pocket, and which was generally needed for spinning and setting up one of the immortal Decadia tops. These were in Ichabod’s day known to be bigger and better than any other tops in London, could only now be plaited, crochet-chain fashion, after flicking it like a whip to make it snap, and however much of a pastime to a young lady, it proved but tame to Ichabod, who only plaited it once, and pulled it out again with a snatch, chewed the end, and wound up his top. Then he struck a Greek statue sort of attitude as he made believe to spin it, but not without bringing his knuckles sharply into contact with the organ-case, and finding their skin more easily removable than the leathern garments, into whose pockets he now replaced the top and string, as, with both hands plunged deeply, he routed in their recesses for something fresh.

He brought forth his string of buttons and polished his leaden nicker—a flat disc that had evidently been moulded in the top of a brass weight. He counted the buttons, rubbing favourite specimens upon the sleeve or his coat, and admiring the crests upon the “liverys,” and the shanked and pearl buttons. Then he stripped them nearly all off the string to give place to a metal ornament with its great G, which, after a few minutes’ hesitation, he cut off his own coat, looking guiltily round after the deed to see that he was not observed. Then commenced the restoration or re-threading of the buttons, when the one bearing the great G looked so well in its pewter beauty, that Ichabod could not resist the temptation, but knife-armed, he carefully felt behind him, and cut the two ornaments from their abiding-place at his waist, where they had long reposed upon the back of his coat, just above the little tails; and then his itching fingers began to clutch at those in front, which he would have cut off also but for a wholesome dread of castigation.

But the three already appropriated were a great acquisition to his string, and when, according to size, the buttons once more occupied their places, and had been admired, and polished, and breathed upon, Ichabod sighed for something new, as he replaced the collection in his pocket.

Then the boy had another good pump at the bellows-handle, riding down upon it more than once; but there was still no demand for the air, so he had to devise some other occupation to satisfy the cravings of his restless spirit.

Those leather inexpressibles of his were almost inexhaustible in treasures, for now the lad’s face lighted up as he found something fresh to suit—a dirty, sticky ball of india-rubber, which, with a little masticating, became available for the purpose of pulling out, and then after the enclosure of a small portion of air, became the base of several little bladders, which would, when compressed between the thumb-nails, explode with a sharp crack.

But even that would not last for ever, and Ichabod next brought forth a squirt, but this unfortunately was useless without water, and had to be put back after a polish upon the coat-sleeve, when he again declared it to be a shame to bring him there when he “worn’t wanted;” and feeling more than ever certain that the organist was asleep, he began to creep on tip-toe towards where he could see through the curtains, and inspect the interior of the organ-pew.

“I knowed he was,” muttered Ichabod, relieving his feelings by making a grimace at his employer—one evidently copied from a carved corbel outside the church; for, drawing down his lower eyelids with his forefingers, he hooked the fourth digits in the corners of his rather too capacious mouth, and stretched eyes, and lips to their greatest extent.

The face produced was striking, especially as seen in the dim light of the old church; but Jared Pellet saw it not, though the boy altered his opinion as to the organist’s somnolency upon hearing something which sounded like a sob. For, with face buried in his hands, Jared was bending down over the keys, motionless, and evidently suffering from some bitter mental pang.

Ichabod, upon hearing the sob, darted back to his place in an instant, to seize the handle and pump more wind into the once again empty wind-chest; but hearing nothing more, he decided in his own mind that the noise he had heard was but a snore, and he stole forward to relieve his feelings with another grimace. But this time he tortured not his physiognomy; for, making some slight noise as he peered through the curtains, he encountered the full gaze of the

organist, who was looking up; and by some strange fascination, man and boy remained as it were fixed by each other's eyes, for quite a minute.

"Plee, sir, didn't you call?" said Ichabod, who was the first to break the silence.

"Call—call!" echoed Jared. "No, I did not call."

"Shall I blow, plee, sir?" said the boy.

"A blow!" murmured Jared, dreamily; "yes, a heavy blow—a blast from one of the storms of life!" and he once more buried his face in his hands, while Ichabod relieved his feelings by sticking his tongue into his cheek, and lifting up and putting down one leg; before he again spoke to ask if there was anything the matter.

"Go home, boy—go home," said Jared, slowly, and speaking as if he were half-stunned.

"Shan't you want to practise, sir?" queried Ichabod.

Jared made a negative movement of the head, and, waiting for no further dismissal, the boy caught up his cap, scuttled down the stairs, clattered out of the door, and was gone, whooping and hallooing with delight at his freedom, while the organist, slowly lifting his head, and looking about as if in a weary stupefying dream, took up a letter from the key-board, where it had lain, and where he had found it that day when he came to practise—a letter written in the vicar's bold hand, sealed with the great topaz seal that hung to his broad old-fashioned watch-ribbon, and directed to him, while it enclosed a little bright peculiarly-shaped key, which Jared remembered to have seen lying in his music-locker for weeks past, when he had come up into the loft, though, after the first time, when he had picked it up and turned it over, it had hardly taken his attention. But now, slowly and half-tottering, he rose, and left the organ-pew with the letter in one hand—an old-fashioned letter, written upon blue quarto paper, folded so as to dispense with an envelope—the key in the other, descended the stairs, crossed nave and aisle to one poor-box, where he tried the key, to find that it opened the lock with ease; then sighing as he closed it, without noticing that the vicar had removed the contents that morning when he left the letter for the organist upon the key-board of the instrument, Jared crossed the silent church to the other door, to try the box there, with the same result; when once more ascending to the gallery, he stood again in the organ-pew, looking towards the chancel, and then read his letter for about the sixth time.

Once only, he looked up: it was afternoon, and the sun streamed in at the great west window, illumining the chancel, when there, as if lit up especially for him to read, the golden letters of that particular sentence brighter than the others—bright and flashing, but stained by the sunbeams that pierced a painted pane of a fiery hue—there were the words—

"Thou shalt not steal."

Jared Pellet groaned as his eyes fell and rested upon the paper he held, and he began once more to read, muttering now and then a word or two or a sentence half aloud.

"No prosecution—came with a friend—wished to try the organ—found a false key amongst the music—knew wards—flashed upon him that it opened the poor-boxes—own conscience be my punishment—engagement terminate at Christmas—best for all parties—and may God forgive me."

"And may God forgive me," groaned Jared aloud, after a long pause. "Forgive me for what?" and then he stood turning over and over the key he held in his hand, scanning it again and again, as if it were indeed the key to the mystery of the robbery. He wiped his forehead, and looked about him trying to think, and wondering from whence came the key. He tried to determine in his own mind the day upon which he had first seen it, but without success; though even had he been sure of the date, the knowledge, he was obliged to own, would have been valueless. It seemed but too certain that an enemy had placed the key where it had been found, though he struggled long against the thought, saying plaintively to himself, "I have no enemies." And indeed, if his assertion were not absolutely true, he certainly had none of his own wilful making.

Then he sighed again bitterly, folded the key in the letter as he had first found it, took it out, and read the letter again, though he now knew every word by heart, and could repeat it with his lips, but it was, as it were by rote, and the meaning seemed hard to understand. It had come upon him with such a shock, he was so utterly unprepared, that when at last more than once the truth had forced its way home, he roused himself with an effort from the prostration it caused, and tried to find some grain of comfort in the letter, which, however, afforded it not. Again he folded the key inside the missive in a dreary absent way, replaced his books in the locker, and was about to drop the cushioned lid, when he recalled where he had last seen that key, and raised a few sheets of music to make sure that it was not still there, in the farther corner where it had slipped. But no; there was only a tuning-fork, and a little fluey dust mingled with scraps of paper. So he dropped the lid, and sat down for a few moments, with his hands to his forehead, but he raised himself again, opened the organ, then lifted the lid of the locker, took out a piece, and placed it upon the stand ready for practice; but remembering directly after that the boy was gone, he once more closed the instrument, and looked helplessly about, till, as if seized by some sudden impulse, he caught up his hat and hurried out of the church, forgetting to lock the door, but hastening back to do so when he had gone about a hundred yards.

Volume Two—Chapter Fifteen.

Prove it.

A quarter of an hour after leaving the church, Jared was at the door of the vicar's residence, where his summons was

answered by the old Lincolnshire woman who had come up to London with “Maister,” and filled the posts of cook and housekeeper.

Now, most people would have told their servants to say, “Not at home,” to such-and-such a person; but the vicar had his own ideas upon such matters, and the old woman was ready for the expected visitor, for she exclaimed—

“Maister said he wouldn’t see you, if you called, Mr Pellet; and if you wanted to say anything, you was to write.”

“But did he say”—ventured Jared.

“No; he didn’t say not another word,” said the old housekeeper; and Jared turned disconsolately away, walking down the street in a purposeless manner, until, moved by another idea, he roused himself and hurried in the direction of Mr Timson’s stores, where he found the head of the establishment, very stern and important, in his counting-house, but apparently ready to listen to reason.

“It’s all a mistake, sir; I’m as innocent as a child,” exclaimed Jared.

“Hadn’t you better shut the door first, sir?” said Timson, drily; when Jared hurriedly closed the glass-door of communication with the warehouse. “That’s better,” said he. “As well not to let all the world know.”

“It’s all a mistake though, Mr Timson,” again exclaimed Jared.

“Just so—just so, Mr Pellet, sir; but prove it;” and Timson thrust his fingers into his waistcoat, and then drew himself back as far as he could.

“That key has been in my locker for weeks and weeks now,” said Jared. “I saw it lying there, and thought it might have been left by somebody. It never occurred to me that it would open the poor-boxes.”

Mr Timson raised his eyebrows, and looked deeply into the account-book before him, and then he placed three fingers upon the three columns—pounds, shillings, and pence—and slowly and methodically thrust them up the paper, as if calculating the amount of all three at one and the same time. He muttered, too, several indistinct words, which sounded like the names of various sums of money, before he turned again to Jared.

“I always told the vicar it was false keys, Mr Pellet; but if we’ve put the saddle upon the wrong horse, or the boot upon the wrong foot, why the wearer must kick it off, sir.”

“But you don’t think that I did it, sir?” exclaimed Jared, pitifully.

“Well, I don’t know, Mr Pellet—I don’t know,” said the churchwarden. “I don’t know, indeed, sir. I don’t want to think it’s you; but what are we to do? Mr Gray comes to me, lays his hand on my shoulder, and he says—only last night, mind, sir”—(Mr Timson had his apron on, and therefore he said “sir”)—“‘Timson, I’ve found out the culprit’.”

“‘Then I hope you’re satisfied, sir,’ I said.

“‘No,’ he said, ‘no, not at all; I’ve found him out, but now I wish to goodness that I had not, for it seems a cruel thing.’

“‘Who is it, sir?’ I said.

“‘Oh!’ he said, ‘it’s poor Pellet I found a false key at the bottom of his book-locker when I took the organist of St Chrysostom’s to try our instrument.’

“‘Pooh!’ I said, ‘nonsense, sir! stuff!’

“‘What!’ he says; ‘why, you suspected him yourself, and said you were sure he was the culprit only the other day.’”

“Oh Mr Timson!” groaned Jared. “Now don’t you be in a hurry,” grumbled the churchwarden, pettishly. “Hear me out, can’t you. You young fellows always will be so rash.”

Jared raised his hands deprecatingly, and the churchwarden continued—

“‘Very true, sir,’ I said, ‘so I did everybody in turn; but, depend upon it, ’tain’t Pellet.’ Those were the very words that passed, Mr Pellet; and now you’ve got to prove yourself innocent, that is, if you can, sir; for, though I stuck up for you to the vicar, I must say that it looks very black against you. We wanted to find the key to the mystery, and we found it, sir, in your box, so you’ve got to prove yourself an honest man, and show how the key got there.”

“But I can’t, Mr Timson,” said Jared. “I’ve not the slightest notion.”

“Then it looks all the blacker against you, Mr Pellet, that’s all I can say—blacker than ever—Kyshow at the very least, without so much as a dust of green to relieve it.”

Jared groaned.

“Why, sir, not saying it was you,” continued Mr Timson, excitedly, “a man must be a terrible scoundrel to go and rob the poor, even if he was poor himself, when he was situated as you are, and knew that the vicar, or somebody else not far from you at the present time, might—I do not say would, sir—might have helped him out of a difficulty if he had been in a corner.”

Standing hat in hand, Jared looked at the churchwarden, while for a moment the little glass-enclosed office seemed to swim round him; but only for a moment; then came a choking sensation in his throat, and a blank dreary

hopelessness settled down upon him. He tried to speak, but the words would not come; he endeavoured to make up some defence, to think out some plan of action, but, blank, blank, blank—all seemed blank and hopeless, and it almost appeared to him now that he really was the thief they took him for.

“Prove it, sir—prove it,” resumed Timson, placing his thumb upon the edge of his desk, and pressing it down as if he had Jared beneath it, and was keeping him there until he proved his innocence. “I’m sorry, sir, very sorry, sir, and so is the vicar. Don’t you go and think, Mr Pellet,” he continued, in quite an indignant tone,—“don’t you go and think that we wanted the poor-boxes robbed; we didn’t, you know; and we didn’t want to find out that it was you.”

Jared waved his hand deprecatingly.

“Well, well, well, sir,” exclaimed Timson. “Prove it, sir, prove it—as I said before, prove it,” and he pressed the thumb down harder and harder.

“But, man, how can I?” exclaimed Jared, desperately.

“Shoo—shoo—shoo—shoo—shoo;—shoo—shoo!” ejaculated Timson. “Don’t raise your voice like that, sir, or I shall be indignant too. It won’t do, Mr Jared Pellet. You’re in the wrong, sir—you’re in the wrong.”

“I know, I know, Mr Timson,” said Jared, imploringly; “but what can I do?”

“Prove it, sir, prove it,” said Timson again. “I want to see you proved innocent; and if we are wrong, there’s my hand—leastwise, there it is when you’ve proved it;” and for fear that Jared should seize upon it, he tucked it under the tail of his coat, turned his back to the fire, and then stood looking fiercely at the dejected man before him.

But Jared had no thought of seizing the churchwarden’s hand, for as he stood there, bent and wrinkled of brow, he was going over, for the fiftieth time, the contents of the vicar’s letter, and then thinking of those at home, and the poverty that this loss of his situation must bring upon them. Then he thought of the disgrace, from which he felt that he must free his character; and in imagination he saw himself once more proud and erect in the presence of his accusers, but refusing with scorn the prayer of the vicar that he should continue to be organist. No! that would never be; he would fulfil the duties to the last, and then, once more clear in character, he would seek for some fresh means of subsistence for the family in Duplex Street.

No organ here—no glass reflector in Timson’s counting-house; but Jared was still dreaming of being cleared from the accusation, when he awoke with a start, as the churchwarden exclaimed again—

“Prove it, sir, prove it!”

“Ay! prove it; but how?” and desolate, despairing, and half broken-hearted, Jared Pellet left the office, seeing nothing external, but mechanically making his way into the streets, where he wandered about, hour after hour, aimless and dejected; his mind a very chaos of conflicting thoughts, save in one instance, where brightly and strong shone a ray from his clouded imagination, and that ray was before him always.

Other plans were made, broken, and confused, but this still stood out clearly before him—come what might, they must not know of this at home—for he felt that the secret lay almost in his own breast, since a few words to Purkis and Ruggles would ensure their silence.

Volume Two—Chapter Sixteen.

A Telegram.

Upon the principle that it never rains but it pours, trouble seemed just now to be rife, and Patty took upon herself more than her share. Janet used to say again and again that her friend must visit her no more, but sorrow only seemed to link them more and more together. Janet, however, was a good deal at Duplex Street, and there used to be some mournful old minor quartettes played. Patty presiding at the piano, while Jared scraped the bass out of an old violoncello, to Canau and Janet’s first and second violin.

But somehow, at this time, Decadia seemed to have a fascination for Patty, and though Mrs Jared was ready to complain, she saw that her child was suffering, and did not give utterance to her thoughts.

The consequence was that Patty was more and more at the dingy house, her light step passing, as it were, too quickly over the pollution around to take taint therefrom. There were times, though, when the incidents at the place seemed to repel her, and she would determine to stay away; but Janet’s troubles, and the unvarying kindness of Canau would have been sufficient to draw her there without the yearning look in Janet’s great pleading eyes when her friend had been longer away than usual. And when suspicion had fallen upon the house, let people think what they might, Patty told herself that it was her duty to cling to her friends the closer for their troubles.

Now, if in these nineteenth century busy hurrying days we were in want of a seer, we should hardly go to the ranks of the constabulary to seek him; but all the same it seemed as if police constable James Braid was right in his prophetic mind when, in allusion to various visits that he had seen paid by Lionel Redgrave to Decadia, he shook his head, and exclaimed, “You’ll go there wunst too often—wunst too often, my fine fellow.”

Police constable James Braid must have been right; for it came to pass one day that Harry Clayton was seated in his rooms with the “oak sported,” a wet towel round his weary head, and his mind far away in the antique, when there was a summons at the door, and his attendant placed a telegram in his hand. He took the envelope eagerly, for to a nearly friendless man, messages, even letters, were but occasional visitants; but his countenance rapidly assumed a

pained expression, as he comprehended more fully the meaning of the abrupt words he read, and associated them with the past.

The message was as follows:—

“From Richard Redgrave, Regent Street, to Harry Clayton, Caius College, Cambridge.—Pray come to me directly: Lionel has disappeared.”

For a few moments Harry stood with the paper half crushed in his hand, a flood of recollections, dammed back by hard study, now sweeping all before it, and causing him intense suffering.

“I feared as much—I might have known it would come to this,” he said, bitterly; and then he paced rapidly up and down his room, his brow knit and the face of Patty seeming to torture him, as he tried to drive it from his mind.

Within an hour, he was at the Cambridge Station, and in due time reached Lionel’s chambers in the Quadrant, to obtain the following brief information from Mr and Mrs Stiff.

That Lionel Redgrave had gone out one evening—this was the eighth day since—and had not returned. That they had waited three days, and then, feeling very uneasy, they had written down to Elton Court to Sir Richard Redgrave, who had immediately come up to town.

Sir Richard was now absent, but ten minutes later he returned, to greet Harry most warmly.

He was a tall, stern, military-looking, old man, but there was a mild, appealing look in his eye, and he seemed worn out with trouble and anxiety, for he was clinging to his last straw—to wit, the hope that Harry Clayton would remember enough of his son’s haunts to give some clue to his whereabouts, and thus relieve him of his horrible suspense.

“Sit down, Sir Richard,” said Harry, seeing his exhaustion.

The old man—as a rule, haughty and unbending—seemed as obedient as a child, and taking a chair, sat attentively watching the younger’s thoughtful face, as he rested his forehead upon his hand.

“He went out a week yesterday?” said Harry, after a few moments.

“Yes; this day makes the eighth.”

“Do you know what money he had?”

“Nothing for certain; but I sent him a cheque for fifty pounds in excess of his allowance, and at his wish, only two days before. See here!”

Sir Richard opened his tablets and showed Harry the memorandum.

“And look here,” continued the anxious father; “he had taken this off—roughly too,” and the speaker drew from his pocket the large old-fashioned signet-ring which the young man always wore, and which Harry well knew, from its tightness, to have been never off the young man’s finger.

Harry took the ring, and turned it over in his hand to find that it had been cut through in the thinnest part, evidently by the nippers of a bullet-mould, such as he knew to be in a pistol-case in the bedroom—a fact that he proved by opening the case, expecting that a pistol had been taken out; but though the nippers corresponded exactly with the cut, the pistol was in its place.

“He does not seem to have had any jewellery with him,” continued Sir Richard, “unless they are fresh purchases which I have not seen him wear. Watch, chains, solitaires, studs, rings, are all there, but no money.”

“Ring for the landlord,” said Harry abruptly; and, soon after, Mr Stiff entered the room, to stand mildly rubbing his hands, and smoothing a few greasy strands over the bald place on his head.

“Mr Stiff!”

“Sir to you,” said the landlord, arranging his head in his all-round collar, where it looked like a ball in a cup.

“Have you any reason to believe that Mr Redgrave had lately been in the habit of visiting either of the low districts—Decadia, for instance?”

Harry winced as he uttered these last words, but his brow was knit, and there was an air of determination in his face that told of a set purpose.

“Well, sir, I don’t see as I can say. You know what a gent he was for birds and things of that sort.”

“Yes, yes, exactly,” said Harry, eagerly; “and who brought them?”

“Well, you see, sir, sometimes one, and sometimes another; often it would be a little devil’s imp in breeches and charity-cap, as said his name was Ikey Bod; ketched him, I did, sliding down the French-polished bannisters more than once when I’d gone up with things to the drawing-room. Very often too it was that little lame man as come about the dog being lost. But there’s been nothing of that sort, sir, since my good lady, sir, Mrs Stiff, made a few words about Mr Redgrave having so much live-stock—tarriers, and ferrets and such—in the house.”

“That will do, Mr Stiff,” said Harry, quietly.

“But if I might make so bold as to say, sir—”

“That will do for the present Mr Stiff,” said Harry again; and the landlord wore quite an aggrieved aspect as he turned to leave the room.

“Do you think, then, that you have a clue?” exclaimed Sir Richard, eagerly, as soon as they were alone.

“I do not know—I hope so—I fear so,” said Harry, thoughtfully. “But stay a while—tell me first what steps you have taken.”

Sir Richard looked disappointed, but he went on speaking.

“I directly placed myself in communication with the police, but so far they have done nothing. But I am upon thorns—what do you know?”

“Nothing for certain, Sir Richard; but let me try alone—let me see what I can do,” said Harry, thoughtfully; for he was trying to arrange his plan of action, as he sought to pierce the cloud that seemed to be ahead. He knew but too well, from old associations, the character of the region which he now felt, from his own reasoning, Lionel had been in the habit of visiting, and with this thought came a sense of misery that crushed him.

He called up from the past a soft gentle face, and rage and jealousy seemed for a while to make him half mad, till they passed away to make room for a feeling of pity, as he muttered two words, “Flight—France!” and then wiped the cold dew of perspiration from his forehead.

In a few minutes, though, he was once more himself, and sternly devoted to the object in view.

“Yes,” he said, after a pause, during which Sir Richard had watched him as if life depended upon his words, “let me go first;” for he thought to spare the old man pain, and prevent more than one angry scene, if that which he surmised should prove to be true.

Sir Richard seemed too much prostrated with that which he had gone through during the past days to offer resistance to his plans, and, besides, he had great faith in the young man’s foresight and discernment. So, yielding at once, he consented to stay, while, with throbbing temples, Harry Clayton turned from the house and made his way through the labyrinth of streets which led to Decadia.

Volume Two—Chapter Seventeen.

In Quest.

Harry Clayton’s brain was very busy, for he was able to evoke from his imagination much of that which had in reality occurred. He did not give Lionel the credit of being worse than most young men of his age, but he could easily surmise that he would be sure to repeat his visits to Brownjohn Street, and now it was that he cursed his own weakness, and blamed himself as the cause of all that had happened.

“Had I acted like a man,” he groaned, “I might have saved her.”

Had he not had proofs from the landlord that a regular correspondence had been kept up with the shop in Decadia, and, as he argued, Patty would doubtless be often there, and feel flattered by the attentions of a baronet’s son. The purchases must have been made at D. Wragg’s shop, and Patty had been used as a decoy-bird.

The character of the people seemed to increase in iniquity, as he thought upon all the surroundings. Then he thought he would go to Duplex Street first, but he cast the idea aside.

“They are honest people, and doubtless I should find them broken-hearted,” he mused.

It was all plain enough—thought only strengthened the conviction—the Brownjohn Street shop had been used as a trap, and Patty the bait. The prophecy uttered had come true—Lionel had gone there once too often.

But what had been the result? Had he gone away—not alone?—or was there some dark deed here to be brought to light?

His thoughts changed the next moment, and, as he hurried along, he told himself that he was, after all, perhaps only exaggerating; that this was the nineteenth century, and that now-a-days people were not inveigled and entrapped; that robbery was certainly common, and often accompanied with violence; but that murder was rare, and, when committed, was for the sake of greater gain than could be obtained from a young man going to keep an assignation.

Harry winced as that last word occurred to him, and he strode on swiftly, as if moved by profound agitation. Then once more he slackened speed a little, his thoughts reverting to Jared and his wife. No; they would never encourage anything of the kind, he was sure. Whatever meetings had been held, must have been without their knowledge; and he had been fool enough to clear the way at the first rebuff! Or was he ashamed of the associations?—which was it?

Harry groaned as he strode on, and now began to try and cast aside his fears for Lionel’s safety, telling himself once more that his imagination was clothing the affair with a tinge of romance which it did not merit.

Brownjohn Street was as of old when he last visited the region. Idleness was rife; and, as if waiting for work to fall

into their hands, or, more likely, not waiting for it at all, there were stout, sturdy, soft-palmed young fellows loitering about by the score. Some were talking, others chewing straws, and again others engaged in gambling with halfpence on secluded portions of the pavement.

One and all had a sidelong glance for the well-dressed stranger passing along, and many a nod and wink was given as heads were turned, more than one of which attracted the notice of Harry; and he shudderingly wondered what would be the consequences if he were to come here frequently—perhaps by night—to visit some particular house, lolling insolently and carelessly along, as he had seen Lionel do, with a contemptuous defiant look in reply to every scowl?

Harry shuddered again as he wondered, and then he hastened his steps involuntarily till he reached the abode of Mr D. Wragg.

Without pause, he walked boldly in, to find all apparently as when he had seen the place last—birds, animals, all were there; but there was no dove-scene, and in place of the soft lineaments of Patty he encountered the swarthy face and harsh look of Janet, who was working behind the counter, her wiry little fingers rapidly continuing the work, although her eyes were fixed eagerly upon the new-comer.

It seemed to Harry that the girl gazed angrily at him from beneath her dark brows, and set her teeth firmly together as she unflinchingly met her visitor's gaze.

A dull heavy feeling of misery now seemed to press harder than ever upon the young man's heart, as his fears in one respect seemed to meet with confirmation. The next moment, sternly and angrily, he approached Janet, holding her as it were with his eye, and, leaning over the counter, he said in a low voice—

"I want his address!"

Janet did not speak, but stared at him wonderingly for a few moments, and then, in a puzzled way, repeated his words—

"You want his address—you want his address!"

"Yes," said Harry, hastily, "I want his address;" and as he looked he could see that, in spite of the bold way in which his eye was met, Janet was trembling.

Harry waited for an answer, but the only words that came were—"You want his address!"

"Yes!" exclaimed Harry, sternly. "Where is he—where has he gone? You need not be afraid."

"Afraid!—afraid of what?" said Janet, harshly.

"There—there! let us have none of this fencing," cried Harry, angrily—"afraid to tell me. Where is he? Has he taken her abroad? Look here! I do not want to go to her home, for they must be in trouble."

Janet burst into a mocking laugh; but Harry went on without heeding it—

"He has a father, and the old man is in despair. He fears that mischief has befallen him. We know that he is young and foolish, and that he has been here often to meet her."

"I do not understand you—what do you mean?" said Janet, coldly, though it was evident that she was greatly moved.

Harry saw it, and never for a moment relaxing his gaze, went on—

"If they have gone away together, at least let me know for certain that he is safe—that we may expect to hear from him again soon; and I will not press you further than for information that will prove to me the truth. I speak plainly, for this is a most painful case."

Harry paused, astonished at the change which had come over Janet, who, as the meaning of his words dawned upon her to their full extent, started back, and with one hand tore hastily at her throat, as if to check the strangling sensation that would arise. Then as she leaned towards him, as if fascinated by his eye, she gasped forth—

"Do you mean—do you mean?" she cried, hoarsely repeating her words, as her face assumed a livid aspect.

"Yes, yes; you know whom I mean—Mr Redgrave—"

"Mr Redgrave!" she said, hastily.

"Yes!" exclaimed Harry, "that gentleman who came here with me. He disappeared a week since. Tell me where they have gone, and you shall be rewarded."

Still her gaze was wild and fixed, and no words fell from her lips, till in his impatience, and feeling that she was playing with him. Harry seized one of the bony wrists, when, the touch galvanising her into action, she snatched her hand away, and, as if fleeing from the memory of some past horror, tottered into the back-room; but not to escape, for she was closely followed by Harry.

Volume Two—Chapter Eighteen.

Janet's Kindness.

Harry Clayton stopped short upon entering D. Wragg's parlour, as if he had been smitten, for he found himself face to face with Patty, who stood before him pale and trembling, but who met his gaze with a calm look that disarmed him.

For a moment he could not speak, but stood as if petrified.

"You here!" he exclaimed. "Thank God!" and then he was silent again, struggling with the emotion that troubled him—a mingling of pleasure and doubt. "Miss Pellet—Patty!" he said at last, regardless of the bent and desolate figure crouching at her side, and he caught the young girl's hand in his—"Mr Redgrave? he has been here a good deal lately to see you."

"I believe," said Patty, coldly, as she withdrew her hand, "Mr Redgrave has been sometimes, sir, to the shop."

"But," exclaimed Harry, earnestly, "do you know where he now is? If you do, pray tell me."

"I cannot tell you—I do not know. I heard all your questions. He has not been here for quite a fortnight."

"He was here eleven—twelve day since," said a voice.

Harry turned sharply, to find himself face to face with the little Frenchman, who courteously raised his pinched old hat.

"Twelve days since!" repeated Harry, "and for what purpose?"

"*Ma foi*!" exclaimed Canau, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Perhaps Monsieur will walk with me, and we will talk. Not here!" Puzzled and anxious, Harry followed the new-comer into the shop, where he stood amidst the noise of the restless birds and animals, as if ready to answer the visitor's queries.

But not at first; it was not until after some preliminary fencing, by which the shrewd little foreigner gained a little insight into Harry's object and character, though the young man was frank and open as the day.

Canau, suspicious at first, soon saw this, and in his turn seemed to meet the visitor upon his own ground, apparently speaking openly and to the point.

"But he is young—a boy—and foolish; he does not understand my girls—I call them 'my girls,' Monsieur. He makes mistakes; but we forgive him. She," he said, nodding towards the inner room, "is young too, and we like to have her here—to visit Janet. Perhaps it was to see her he came. But we forgive him, and he has not been much of late."

Harry looked fixedly at the little Frenchman, as he spoke in his strange halting fashion, meeting the young man's gaze with a shifting look. Were these words of truth, or was there something hidden? Was this man frank, or only an old deceiver, who could mask his face to suit any character when he was at war with society? Still there was such an air of candour in all that was spoken, and so much quiet dignity in the Frenchman's words, that it was with a feeling he could not have explained that Harry thanked him for what had been said.

"But you do not seem to realise the fact," exclaimed Harry. "He has disappeared so suddenly, and knowing him to have been a visitor here, we naturally looked towards this place with suspicion."

"Yes, yes, but I see," said Canau, quietly; "but he is not here. We do not know. This is a bad place round about, but we are quiet people here; and if they—these girls, knew anything, they would tell directly. I hope he has not been robbed. There are many here at night it would not be safe to meet. But there! he is young, he is gone upon some voyage, some travel; be at ease: he will return, and the old man be happy."

Canau's words were so calm, that forgetting place, and the Frenchman's abject appearance, Harry seemed to recognise in him so much of the gentleman that he raised his hat, the salute being as courteously returned.

"If you can give me any information, pray do so," said Harry, "for we are ill at ease respecting him."

He added the Regent Street address to his card, and handed it to the Frenchman, who seemed to brighten up and look elate as he spoke with Harry.

"My best endeavours shall be at the service of Monsieur," he said; and then in answer to a few more words, he gave an affirmative nod. Then together they entered the little room to find Patty bending over Janet, whose face was buried in her hands.

"I am afraid," said Harry, addressing Patty, "that I have startled her by my vehemence. I see now that I have been labouring under a gross misapprehension, and can only ask your forgiveness. Pray make my excuses to her when she grows more calm. I am very anxious about my friend."

He stopped, hesitated for a few moments, and approaching and taking Patty's hand, he said, huskily, "You say that you heard all my words, and in memory of old times, I cannot leave without saying more. I see that I was grievously in error. You must attribute it to ignorance; but I must ask you before I go, to forgive the injustice, the wrong I have done you."

Patty did not speak; she tried, but no words came to her lips. She looked anxious and troubled, and there was a feeling as of a great sorrow at her heart—a sorrow which made her bosom heave till she recalled the manner in which Harry had treated her before Lionel Redgrave, and what she looked upon as his false pride. Then came, too, the scene which she had witnessed upon the Essex lawn, and the words she had heard spoken, and it seemed to her that

he was mocking—insulting her.

She withdrew her hand, and just bent her head in reply, leaving Harry to quit the room with the scene photographed in his mind of Patty leaning down over the weeping girl at her side.

But could he have stayed, he would have seen Janet start up, wild and angry, to catch Canau by the arm, as she fixed upon him her wild dark eyes.

“What have they done with him?” she half shrieked. “You know—he knows. There is some foul play here, and mischief has been done for the sake of his wretched money. Oh! that I should stay here in this place, where such scenes are acted! But it shall not be; they shall be told where he is and what has been done.”

“But, my child, you are mad and wild, and do not know what it is you say. We do not know where this foolish young aristocrat can be.”

“What!” cried Janet, “has it not been shameful? Has not advantage been taken of his visits here, and he has been led on and on by Wragg, to get his money? Has it not been cruel, scandalous, abominable to her and our friends at Duplex Street? If they had known, would they have allowed her to come once? and you have not tried to stay it! But it shall all be made plain. She came here from her tender love for me, and that—that—that man took advantage of it, and has tried all he knew, constantly, to win her to stay in the wretched shop, so that he might sell some miserable bird. It is villainy—villainy!”

“Hush—hush, little one!” said Canau; “you talk at random—you speak wildly. Patty, my child, take her up-stairs; let her lie down and be at peace. We shall soon hear news of this unfortunate boy.”

Volume Two—Chapter Nineteen.

Flickered—Gone.

“But you’ll sit down, Mr Ruggles,” said Mrs Jared, kindly, as the little man stood with one arm resting upon the chimney-piece, heedless of the chair Patty had set for him.

“No, ma’am, not to-night,” said Tim, dreamily; “I must go now—I must go. I thought I’d just drop in for a minute to see how you all were. The little ones all quite well, I hope, ma’am—all strong?”

“Thank God, yes,” said Mrs Jared, softly, and the tears stood in her eyes as she spoke, and stood watching poor Tim as he leaned there brushing where the nap should have been upon his shabby hat, and then fidgeting and re-arranging the piece of glossy new black cloth which shone so conspicuously against the rusty head-piece.

For Tim Ruggles was in deep mourning, consisting of his Sunday-clothes, wrinkled and creased as his own worn face, the above-named band, and a pair of brand-new black cloth gloves.

“We have no troubles here, thank Heaven!” said Mrs Jared, and she glanced across at her husband, who grew deeply interested directly in the day before yesterday’s paper—there was no *Echo* in those days—while Patty turned away to hide her troubled face.

This was Friday, and for the whole week Tim had not done a stroke of work, but dressed himself in his best, morning after morning, and gone out,—Mrs Ruggles never knew where, but Mrs Jared guessed, and though the poor little fellow had carefully rubbed them, there were still earthy stains upon the knees of his trousers, that no amount of rubbing could remove—stains that were renewed afresh each day. And every night that week Tim had called in at Duplex Street, for he had thought nightly he would just drop in to see how they all were, and then stood gazing from child-face to child-face with a lingering eager look that was pitiful to see.

No one questioned Tim, for he had come in on the Sunday night just as Jared, Patty, Janet, and Canau had returned from St Runwald’s, where the latter had sat in the organ-loft, according to a regular custom of late, to aid his friend with the stops.

Poor Tim! he came in holding his black-banded hat before his breast, as if to shield his wounded heart, that was too sorely hurt for him to lay it before so many friends.

There was no thought there of Tim’s shabby mourning, where threadbare clothes were familiar; and pitiful as was poor Tim’s appearance, there was something in his hopeless look that made its way to Mrs Jared’s heart; so that in spite of his expostulating, “No, ma’am, no,” she would gently take him by the hand and press him back into a seat, where, with his eyes shaded, he would sit a while in silence.

There was no need for words—they all knew that at last a keener blast had put out the flickering little flame which Tim had so long and carefully screened; and respecting the blow which had fallen upon him, child after child was carefully schooled not to ask after, or press upon Tim some rough plaything for little Pine; while Mrs Jared knew that sooner or later their humble friend would ease his loaded heart by making them the confidants of his trouble.

It was indeed a genuine sorrow that bowed down the head of Tim Ruggles; and, save to sleep, for days past he had hardly rested in the home that now seemed so desolate. It was nothing to him that his wife spoke to him almost gently—his spirit revolted against the woman; and the first morning he tore the whalebone rib angrily from the wall, thrust and stamped it into the fire, watching it with a fierce delight, as it spat and crackled and writhed like a serpent in the glowing flame; and then hurried from her presence, to return though at night, worn and subdued. He hastened off again early the next morning, where Mrs Jared rightly guessed, but no one but the gatekeeper of Kensal Green

Cemetery could have told for certain.

On Saturday evening, Patty, agitated and anxious, had stolen down to Brownjohn Street, to find Janet feverish and restless, but thoughtful enough to insist upon D. Wragg seeing her friend to the better-lighted streets. She kissed Patty, though, as they parted, saying, “It shall all be made clear yet.”

Patty and Jared met upon the door-step, both too much troubled to notice each other’s pained face; and soon after entering, Patty hurried to answer the faltering knock at the door which betokened the arrival of Tim Ruggles. “Just dropped in to see how they all were;” while his poor seamed face looked more haggard than ever.

“Poor little man!” whispered Mrs Jared to her husband; “what did he do that he should have such a wife?”

Not that Tim was untidy, for he was as carefully dressed as his garments would allow. Clean shaved too was Tim; but there was a desolate look in his face that sorely troubled Mrs Jared, who more than once hinted to her husband that she hoped the poor man would not do anything dreadful, and then felt almost hurt at the apparent indifference of Jared, who, hardened by his own troubles, could not bring his mind to bear upon those of others.

Jared was right, though, when he said that there was no fear, for Tim’s was genuine unselfish sorrow, that in all earnestness he had bent his back to carry—bearing himself humbly, now that the first wild paroxysms of his grief were past.

The children were in bed, and Tim, as they left the room, had kissed most tenderly and blessed each one, as it came to say “Good-night.”

“Ah! Mr Pellet, sir,” he half moaned, “you’re a rich man, sir—a rich man, sir. God has been very good to you, sir. All strong and well—all strong and well!”

Jared winced as he tried to read his paper, but could not turn his eyes from one spot—a police report of a servant who had stolen money from her employer’s box, and he made no reply.

And now Tim stood in his old attitude by the chimney-piece.

“It’s coming to-night,” whispered Mrs Jared to Patty, and she, poor girl, had run out of the room to sob for a few minutes, and then returned, red-eyed and flushed, to sit down to her work.

“I hope I haven’t troubled you very much,” said Tim, gently. “I’ve been in many times, but I’ve not been myself, you know, and could not trust what was here to speak. It wasn’t me, Mrs Pellet, ma’am,” he continued, turning himself from Jared, so that it should only be a tender-hearted mother who read his quivering lips and tears; “it wasn’t me, but a poor broken-down wretch, who could not be man enough to fight against his troubles. You always said I ought to have been a woman, ma’am; and you were right—quite right. But I am better now, ma’am, and I shall be at work next week. Poor people can’t afford to be sorrowful, ma’am. Your rich folk can be in mourning every day, outside and inside, ma’am; we poor people can only do that once a week. I couldn’t sit on the board this week for thinking, ma’am. Come sorrow, one must fight it out—come hard times the same. But one’s as much as such a man as me can bear.”

Mrs Jared sighed, and worked on busily at some little domestic repair done with needle and thread.

“Had you not better sit down, Mr Ruggles?” she said.

“No, ma’am,” said Tim; “it is time I was gone.”

Then the room was once more very still, so that Jared almost started as Tim spoke again very slowly, for his thoughts were back at the organ-loft, and the question was troubling him once more, “What shall I do?”

“Week to-morrow since we buried her, ma’am—like my own child, ma’am, and not a soul to say good-bye to her but me—no father—no mother. Ah! it was cruel, cruel! and how those whom God has given children can leave them in strange hands to pine away and die, is more than I can understand. I would not own that she was so ill, ma’am, not to a soul. I told myself it wasn’t so; and all the time it was. ‘Grim death won’t come and take that gentle, loving-hearted girl away, Tim,’ I said, ‘when there’s your rough worthless old carcase close at hand.’ But that’s what he does, ma’am; he’s idle though he’s busy, is death; and to save blunting that scythe of his, he goes on mowing down the sweet, gentle, bright-coloured tender flowers, and leaves the dry, harsh, old stalks like me to be snapped off by the wind.

“But I knew it was coming, ma’am, faster and faster; and yet I couldn’t help thinking as there might be a change for the better. To have seen her, you might have hoped she was getting well, for she seemed to be easier towards the last, and for two or three days the pain was as good as gone, ’cept when her cough troubled her, and nothing wouldn’t stop that a bit. Never complained neither, she didn’t, but kept up dressed and about to the very last. I couldn’t help knowing that she was bad; but I didn’t think it was quite so bad; it’s a sort of thing that you can’t seem to believe, ma’am. It won’t come home to you until it’s too late, and then—then—then—”

Tim’s voice grew very husky here, and, as he broke off, his hand covered his eyes once more.

“I’m very weak, ma’am,” he said at last, apologetically. “It’s not like most men, I know, to take on so about that child; but, you see, my poor first wife loved her, and she seemed to be quite left to me to take care of; and now that she’s gone it don’t seem to me that I did my duty by her.”

Here Mrs Jared and Patty murmured strongly in dissent, and Jared cleared his throat with a loud hem, blowing his nose, too, violently the moment after.

“I can’t think that I did,” said Tim, “but I did try; and if I’d interfered more when Mrs Ruggles—wonderful woman, you know, ma’am—when Mrs Ruggles corrected, I’m sadly afraid that it would have been worse when I was away. I went twice—three times—four times to Bedford Row, and told them how bad the child was getting, and they said they would communicate, and that was all there; for—God forgive me if I wrong any man!—I believe him as owned my poor little darling wanted to hear that she was—”

Tim broke down and sobbed like a child for a moment, but he dashed away the tears and continued—

“I wasn’t satisfied with the doctor, because he shook his head and looked serious; and when I got another doctor, who smiled and chatted, and said pleasant things, I felt angry with myself because I had not gone to him sooner.

“What’s the good of earning money and trying to save up a few pounds, if there is not going to be health and strength, ma’am? But it was of no use, to any one but the doctor, ma’am, his coming; and the poor child got to be weaker and weaker; and though she liked to go, and I would have carried her all the way till she could have sat down on a seat in the Park, where she could have leaned her head against me, and watched the people go by, the doctor said to me she must not go out, for the days were getting too short and cold.

“So I made her a little sofy on my board, where she could lie and see me work, and thread fresh needles for me, and hold my twist, and wax, and scissors, and hand me fresh buttons. Then too she used to like to have a few flowers; but she would sooner go without them than me to leave her while I went to fetch them. But she used to get a good many; for Turfey Dick, who goes round with the chickweed, used often to bring us a bunch from out of the country, and—and God bless him for it!—he never took a penny, for he said he loved little ones, and wanted to bring her a bird.

“She did not seem to mind at all; but she must have known what was coming, and could not bear me out of her sight for a moment. While now it was, ma’am, that she showed what she felt towards some one else—shrinking and shutting those little soft eyes every time some one came nigh.

“I don’t believe in people’s hearts breaking, ma’am,” continued Tim, picking at the band of his hat; “but I could have held my head down and cried bitterly any time when she was so ill, and yet so still and uncomplaining.

“Night after night I lay down on the board so as to sleep by her, for it seemed to please the poor darling. ‘Let me hold your hand,’ she’d say; and when I gave it to her, she’d hold it tightly, and lay it on her pillow, and put her little hot cheek upon it till I took it away to get her cough medicine, and then held her up in my arms to take it. I don’t make a fuss, ma’am, about what I did—it only came natural; and I couldn’t have slept and known that her little lips were hot and dry for want of drink; while when I held her up like that, she’d nestle close to me, and creep her little thin arms under my weskit, and ask, in her pretty gentle way, whether she might stay so, because she could sleep there.

“And there she would sleep, only starting up now and then to look in my face, as if to see whether she was safe. Then she’d lay her head down again, and whisper to me that something kept pulling her away, and try to tell me about what she had been dreaming. But her poor little feverish head was all wrong, and her words broken and muddled like.

“‘Somebody’s calling—somebody’s calling,’ she kept on whispering to me the last day. ‘There!’ she’d say, with a start, ‘didn’t you hear somebody call “Pine, Pine!”’ and then she would call eagerly, ‘Yes, yes!’ and turn to me and whisper, ‘Was that my mamma?’

“What could I do, ma’am?—what could I do but bend my head down over the poor darling, and not let her see the hot tears come rolling down my cheeks. It was then that I felt most how I had been cheating myself and holding myself up with false hopes, and all the time that what she said was true; for though I was holding her tightly to me—tightly as she clung, it was all of no use, for something was drawing her slowly and surely away.

“I tried more than once to smile and say something cheery to her, but she only looked strange at me, and said, ‘Don’t, please;’ and then, soon after, she said, in a sort of dreamy way, ‘Tell me what it’s like, and whether I shall see my mamma there!’

“‘What what’s like, my pet?’ I says, shivering the while to hear her talk so.

“‘What heaven’s like, and all about going there!’

“What could I tell her?—what could I say, a poor ignorant man like me? I felt frightened-like, ma’am, to hear her so regularly talking about something drawing her away. I know now that it was from the dreamy troubled state of her head; while she always talked so about her mamma, and never said a word about him. I taught her to say that, you know, ma’am, for I hoped some day she would have been fetched into her proper speer, to be well off; and that’s why I did my best to improve her mind, and taught her catechism, and so on. And so she is well off, and better than she could ever have been here, and fetched into her proper speer, she is; for if ever there was a little angel here, it was my poor darling. But I couldn’t, bear to part with her, and it was not in that way I meant.”

Time after time Tim glanced wistfully from face to face, as if to see what effect his words had; and then he altered and re-arranged the mourning-band around his hat, smoothing it, brushing it with his gloves, and at last setting it upon the table.

“It seems to do me good telling you all about it, Mrs Pellet, ma’am; but for all that, the words seem to run and run; only I know that you all here used to like and take kindly to the little ill-used thing—for she was ill-used!” he exclaimed, passionately. “But anybody must have taken to and loved her; and do you know,” said Tim, solemnly, “that that’s why I think she was took away—because she was too good for the life below here. You don’t lose no little ones, ma’am, because they are happy and well off, and well treated. Nothing comes drawing of yours away, like it did my poor pet, as I can always hear whispering to me; and when I wake of a night for a few moments, I always seem to

feel her little hot hand nestling in my breast, and feeling after mine to put under her burning cheek."

Mrs Jared shivered, and looked as if about to run up-stairs and see whether her own little ones were all safe.

"But she was wanted," said Tim, sadly, "and I shall never forgive myself—never, never!" and sinking back in the chair behind him, Tim Ruggles gave free vent to his sorrow, bowing his head almost to his knees, covering his face with his hands to conceal its working and the tears. His sobs seemed to tear their way from his breast, as, heedless now of all but his overwhelming grief, he rocked himself to and fro in the bitterness of his anguish.

For some time nothing was heard but sobs in that common room. Mrs Jared and Patty crept closer together to weep in unison, Mrs Jared making it appear—though a piece of base dissimulation—that she was only comforting Patty; while Jared rose to rest a hand upon his visitor's shoulder, telling himself that his was not the only trouble in the world.

Tim wept on passionately, for the grief which had been thrust down and dammed back for days past, now burst forth with a violence that could not be stayed, as, still blaming himself for his weakness and lapse of duty towards the child, he groaned in the anguish of his spirit.

"I shall never forgive myself," cried Tim at last, leaping from his chair, "never! I lay down beside her for a bit that night, with her cheek upon my hand, and dropped off; but she moaned in her sleep, and it woke me directly. I gave her some drink, when, 'Please take me,' she whispered, and her little voice sounded, oh! so cracked, and harsh, and strange. So I took her in my arms—so light she was!—and then, having been watching night after night, I felt drowsy again. I propped myself with my back to the wall in the corner of the board, with that little hand nestled, as it had been scores of times, close against my breast. Her little arms were round me, and then I rocked her to and fro gently till she began to moan again quite softly, as she had often done of late in her sleep; and then, instead of keeping awake, I dropped off again, and slept for hours, till the light came peeping in through the sides of the blinds.

"Pale and cold and scaring looked the light that morning; and as I woke, cramped, tired, and stiff, a horrible thought flashed through me, tearing me so that for a long time I dared not move nor look down. I seemed to have known all that had taken place, and to have felt it all, just as if I had been awake all night. I didn't dream it, you know, ma'am, so I can't explain myself; but I knew well enough that while I had slept, the something that had been drawing the poor darling away for so long had come at last and borne her off.

"I knew it all well enough in an instant of time—that what I held so tightly in my arms as I sat there was not little Pine, but only her shape, and fast growing colder, colder, and colder—oh! so fast. And yet I could not move.

"There was no moaning now—no sigh—no rattling in her poor little chest—no twitching restless moving of her poor little hands—no starting wildly from a half sleep to kiss me—but one terrible stillness; and I'd have given all I had only to have heard once more the dreadful painful cough that was gone now for ever.

"I shall never forgive myself," cried Tim, with a fresh burst of emotion. "Only to think of it!—only to think that I could not keep awake to watch over her to the last!" and Tim buried his face once more in his hands.

Poor weary watcher that he was! he could not see the loving hand that had pressed down his burning eyelids, but accused himself angrily—the watcher alone through weary night after weary night—the watcher who had fought with all-conquering sleep till it could be resisted no more, and he was spared the sight of the last faint struggle!

"Yes," said Tim, after a pause, "a week to-morrow since we buried her, ma'am, and I'm going to begin work again on Monday. You said that I ought to have been a woman, ma'am; so you won't be so very hard upon me for what you have seen to-night. I'm better now, for that was there and wanting to come; and," he said, piteously, "you're the only friends I have in the world, and I wanted to tell you all my trouble, but couldn't before to-night."

No sooner had Tim left the house with Jared—heartsore himself, and glad of such companionship—to walk part of the way home with him, than Mrs Jared rushed up-stairs to kiss and cry over every one of her numerous progeny, as she satisfied herself that they were all safe. And sadly were the poor children disturbed by the process, for the light was cast upon their eyes, and Patty was consulted as to whether this one did not look pale, and that one flushed, which last was undoubtedly the case, for it had to be fished from beneath the bed-clothes, its unintelligibly mumbled words being taken for threatenings of delirium and fever.

Mrs Jared descended at last, and Jared vowed that she got up six times that night to go into the various bedrooms—and she herself owned to three—while Jared lay telling himself he ought to make a confidant of his wife, and tell her all; but he shrank from the task, as he said, "Poor thing! no; she has enough to bear as it is."

It was true, for Mrs Jared's trials were any thing but light, and she hid many a tear in her turn from Jared. But for all that, that night, after hours had passed, she had another to spare, as she thought of the dead child, and felt for it more than ever a strange yearning; while the tear that made wet her cheek was as much for it as for the sorrows of poor Tim Ruggles.

Tears—tears! there were many shed that night; for in her own little room Patty too lay sleepless, thinking of Janet and her trouble—of the missing man, and of poor Pine as well; but somehow, in spite of her sadness, her thoughts would veer round to him who had first made her heart to beat, and that was Harry Clayton.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty.

A Broken Reed.

Harry Clayton walked hastily back towards Lionel's chambers, his mind confused by what he had seen and heard. He was half pained, half pleased; at one moment he felt elate, and his heart swelled joyfully. He stopped once; should he go to Duplex Street? Then he would think of conflicting circumstances, and depression would ensue. Thoughts that he had believed to be crushed out were again asserting themselves; and so pre-occupied was he, that he did not see the peering curious face of D. Wragg, as it passed within a yard of his own, watchful as that of a terrier after a rat.

So conflicting were Harry Clayton's thoughts, that for a while, though not driven out, the recollection of the mission upon which he was sent was certainly dimmed. He had been so surprised—matters had turned out so differently to what he had anticipated; and he was so pleased to. And that he had been in the wrong that for a time he strode on pondering upon the pleasant vision he had left behind, till, rapidly approaching Regent Street, the thoughts of the missing man came back with full force, and with them a feeling of sorrow and remorse for what he was ready now to call his forgetfulness.

Rousing himself then to a sense of duty, he hurried up the stairs, but not so quickly that he had not time to think that there was not the slightest necessity for the people at D. Wragg's to be put to further trouble or annoyance. If ill had befallen Lionel on his way to or from Decadia, they were not to blame; and it was his duty, he told himself, to protect them. And after all, it seemed, as matters would turn out, that Lionel had been in some other direction.

But suppose, suspicion whispered, he had been too ready, after all, to trust to appearances; that the dark deformed girl was frightened because she knew that he was in search of his friend, and the old Frenchman was, after all, only an oily-tongued deceiver; while Patty—

There was a warm flush in his face as he strode up the few remaining stairs to the room where Sir Richard Redgrave was seated, ready to start up as the young man entered.

"Well," exclaimed the elder, "what news?"

"None, sir—at present," responded Clayton, gloomily. "I was leaning upon a reed, and I found that it was broken."

Two days after, the following advertisement appeared in the second column of the *Times*:—

"Two Hundred Pounds Reward.—Disappeared from his Chambers, 660 Regent Street, on the 6th instant, Lionel George Francis Redgrave, aged 24; 5 feet 11 inches high; muscular, fair open countenance, slight moustache, and the scar of a hunting-fall over the left temple; aquiline nose, light-blue eyes, and closely-curling fair brown hair. Supposed to have worn a black evening-dress suit, with light-grey Warwick overcoat. Whoever will give such information as shall lead to his discovery, shall receive the above reward.

"660 *Regent Street*."

"That will bring us some news, I hope, Clayton," said Sir Richard. "If it does not at the end of a week, I shall increase it to five hundred, and at the end of another week, I shall double it. Money must find him if he is to be found. But we will find him," he exclaimed, fiercely, "dead or alive—alive or dead," he repeated, with quivering lips. "With all his light carelessness, he never let a whole week pass without writing to me, and something fearful must have happened, I feel sure."

"Be hopeful, sir, pray," said Clayton, as he gazed in the worn and haggard countenance of the stately old gentleman.

"I will, Clayton—I will, as long as I can; but this is hard work; and if he is dead, it will break my heart. You ought never to have left him," he added, reproachfully.

"I would not have done so," said Clayton, "had I possessed the slightest influence; but during the latter part of my stay I found that he would not submit to the slightest restraint."

"Yes, yes!" said Sir Richard; "I know how obstinate the poor boy was," said the old man, in tremulous tones.

"*Is*, sir—*is*" exclaimed Clayton, laying his hand upon Sir Richard's arm.

"Yes, *is*—we will not yet despair," said Sir Richard; "but you had influence—the influence of your quiet, firm example. But did I tell you that I have had reward-bills *posted* about the streets?" he added hastily, upon seeing Harry's pained and troubled aspect.

"You did not, sir; but it was wisely done. And now it seems to me necessary that one of us should be always here in case of information of any kind arriving."

"I will stay," said Sir Richard; "it is my duty, though the inaction is extremely hard to bear; but I am weak and troubled, and unable to get about."

"You may be the first to get good news," said Harry, smiling.

"Perhaps so—perhaps so," was the reply. "I never knew before how old I had grown. You must carry on the search; but you will come back often, Clayton?"

"I will, sir," said Harry, gently, and soon after he left the house.

Harry's first visit was to Great Scotland Yard, where he was passed up-stairs to a quiet ordinary-looking person, in plain clothes, who, however, only shook his head.

“Nothing at present, sir,” he said; “but do you know, sir, I think Sir Richard Redgrave is making a mistake, sir—‘too many cooks spoil the broth!’ Better have left the matter entirely to us; we’re doing all we can. Private inquiries are all very well; and Mr Whittrick’s a good man—was here, you know; but he’s only good for a runaway-match or a slope, or anything of that kind. Sir Richard’s wrong, sir, depend upon it he is.”

“You must excuse it all on account of the old gentleman’s anxiety,” said Harry, quietly, as, after being told for the twentieth time that information should be forwarded the moment it arrived, he took his leave, so as to seek the renowned Mr Whittrick, of private-inquiry fame; but here the interview was very similar to the last; and he returned to Sir Richard to find him restlessly pacing the room with a telegram in his hand.

“News?” exclaimed Harry, excitedly.

“For you,” said the old man, kindly; “and I hope it is good.”

He handed the telegram, which had been sent down to Cambridge, and re-transmitted. It was short and painful. Richard Pellet was the sender, and he announced the sudden and serious illness of Mrs Richard at Norwood—Harry arriving at his mother’s bedside, but just in time to receive her farewell.

This was a check to future proceedings, for Harry was deeply affected at the loss. He could not recall the weak woman who had been flattered into marriage without proper settlements by Richard Pellet, but only the tender loving mother, who had always been ready to indulge his every whim; and till after the funeral he was too much unhinged to do more than quietly talk with Sir Richard, who had, on his part, little news to give, save the usual disappointments that follow upon the offering of a reward.

The last sad duties performed to the dead, Harry gladly returned to the task left incomplete, seeing in it relief from his oppressive thoughts, and an opportunity of serving one whom he looked upon as a benefactor.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty One.

At Austin Friars.

“What name?” asked a clerk.

“Pellet—Jared Pellet,” said the owner of that name.

“Pellet,”—repeated the clerk, hesitatingly; “I’m afraid he’s engaged;” and he looked hard at the shabby visitor to Austin Friars, as much as to say, “You’re a poor relation, or I’m no judge.”

“Tell him his brother would be glad of a few minutes’ conversation,” said Jared, desperately; and he stood gazing over his brother’s offices, where, over their gas-lit desks, some half-score clerks were busy writing.

It was a bitter day, with a dense yellow fog choking the streets, so that eleven o’clock a.m. might have been eleven o’clock p.m., save for the business going on around. The smoke-burdened vapour had even made its way with Jared into the offices; but the glowing fire in the polished stove was too much for it, and the fog soon shrank away, leaving Jared shivering alone, as much from a strange new-born feeling as from cold, as he was gazed at from time to time by some inquisitive eye.

“This way, sir, if you please,” said the clerk, and the next minute Jared was standing like a prisoner at the bar before his justice-like brother in a private room—standing, for Richard did not offer him a chair.

“I have come to you for advice,” said Jared, plunging at once into the object of his visit.

“If you had come sooner to me for advice, you would not have been in this plight,” said Richard, coldly, as he glanced at his brother’s shabby garments, and the worn hat he held in his hand. “But what is it?”

Jared stared, for, to the best of his belief, his brother had never given him any advice worth taking.

“Time is money to business people,” said Richard, for Jared remained silent.

“Yes, yes, I know—I know,” he said; and then he paused again, as if nerving himself for his task, till once more Richard turned hastily in his chair, and was about to speak.

“Bear with me for a few minutes, Dick, and I will tell you all,” exclaimed Jared. “I am in bitter affliction.”

“I suppose so,” said Richard, “or you would not have come. There! speak out; how much do you want?”

“What! money?” replied Jared; “none. But don’t be hard upon me, Dick—the world can do that.”

“The world is to any man his lord or his servant—a hard master or a cringing slave, whichever a man pleases,” sneered Richard. “Let him keep poor, and the world is his ruler; let him get rich, and the world will be ruled.”

“But I am in trouble—in great trouble,” cried Jared, pleadingly. “The poor-boxes at our church have been robbed.”

“Well!”

“Great endeavours have been made to discover the thief.”

“Well!”

“And by some means a key got into the locker of my organ-loft.”

“Yes!”

“And it was found by the vicar, who cruelly wrongs me with his suspicions.”

“Yes!”

“And I am accused, and dismissed from my post.”

“Well!”

“What shall I do? Help me with your advice. How am I to prove my innocence? What is best for me to do under the circumstances? I feel my head confused, and am at a loss how to proceed, for I cannot let it be known at home. The vicar seems to be so convinced of my guilt that he refuses to see me, and returns my letters. All I get from the churchwarden when I assert my innocence is, ‘Prove it, sir, prove it.’ I have thought by day and by night. I have struggled hard—I have done all that a man can do, but I am as far off as ever. I was not born, Dick, with your business head—I’m not clever. You know that I never was, and now I have turned to you—”

“To mix myself up in the affair?” said Richard, coldly.

“No, no; to advise me—to tell me what I should do,” said Jared.

“Who committed the theft?” said Richard, scowling.

“Indeed, indeed, I have not an idea,” replied Jared, humbly.

“No, of course not. Well, I can tell you, Some of your fine Decadia friends—that wretched fiddler, perhaps, that you disgraced yourself, your family, and *me*, by making a companion. And now you want me to get my name sullied, and the substantiality of my house shaken, and my credit disgraced, by being drawn into connection with a beggarly, low, contemptible piece of petty larceny? Do you think I am mad?”

“Oh, no, Richard.”

“Hold your tongue. I’ve heard you—now hear me. Do you think I have gone backwards into an idiot? Do I look childish, or in my dotage? But there—some people are such fools!”

To do Richard Pellet justice, he looked neither mad, idiotic, nor childish, but the image of an angry sarcastic prosperous man, as he threw himself back in his morocco-covered chair, and, stretching out his glossy legs towards the fire, scowled at his brother.

“O Richard!” groaned Jared, in despair.

“Look here, sir,” said the city man, in a deep voice—angry, but not such a one as could reach the clerks—“look here! We were born brothers, I suppose; we bear the same name—curse it since it is yours too. You have taken your path in life, and I have taken mine, and they are paths that grow daily more and more apart, never to join again. I have never meddled with you, nor asked your help. I have never troubled you in any way; while you—you—what have you ever been but a disgrace—a clog—a drawback to me in my every project to raise our name from the dust? I forget all this, and, to be brotherly try to heal all old sores. I ask you and your family to my house, and what do you do? You disgrace it not only by your appearance, but also by your behaviour, making my very servants to laugh in their sleeves; and as if that were not enough, your well-trained trull of a child must begin to set her snares and traps, acting with less modesty and decorum than the veriest creature of our streets, until she has by her artful tactics disturbed the peace of a happy family, driven a foolish boy from his home, and his sorrowing mother to a premature grave.”

At this point Richard seemed to consider that it would be effective to display a little emotion instead of anger; but he soon merged again into the upbraiding.

Jared started at the news, for he had not heard of his sister-in-law’s decease, but he had noticed a deep band round his brother’s hat—and noticed even the very stitches, as he stood there smarting and indignant. For a few moments the news of the death checked him, but his indignation began to assert itself, and he was about to reply. Richard waved him to be silent, and continued—

“And now—what now? You come to me with a lame pitiful tale, that I may employ counsel for you, have my name dragged into the public courts and papers to be the talk of the whole city—to be more disgraced by you than ever I have been before. I don’t know you. I hold no communication with you. You bear my name, but I renounce all relationship. I will not be dragged into the matter. It is no business of mine. Go and ask your French friend from Decadia, or the lame bird-fancier. You see I know your companions and associates, great musician as you are. You always were a fool, and now you have taken the step which lay between folly and roguedom. Leave my place at once and quietly. Dare so much as to speak an abusive or reviling word in the outer office, and I’ll have you given into custody for trying to extort money; and then, with your present character of thief, and the poor-box money behind, how will you stand?”

Richard Pellet, like many more bad men, was gifted with a tongue which, given an inch, took an ell, and said more than ever its owner had power or will to perform. It backed verbal bills that its master would never be able to take up; and now he had risen and stood glaring at his visitor, with his hand resting upon the heavy chair he had placed

between them. For, as he stood completely dumbfoundered before his brother, Jared had involuntarily taken up a ruler from the desk; but not to strike, he only handled and tapped it with his long pliant fingers. He could not speak; indignation and sorrow choked him; and he stood there panting, crushing down anger, bitterness, the whole host of emotions that rose.

Was this his brother—nursed at the same breast—the last of all men who should have turned against him—apparently snatching at the chance of erecting a greater barrier between them—a barrier that should last till the grave separated the living from the dead? This his brother, who most likely, by his business shrewdness and advice, could have cleared the way towards freeing him from his difficulty, employed some keen investigator in his behalf, and had the matter sifted to the bottom? The remarks directed against the man whom, for his musical talent, he had made his friend, also stung him, but not as did the insults hurled against poor Patty.

A groan almost burst from Jared's breast, but he smothered it as it rose. He would go on his path, let it lead where it would, and trouble his brother no more. He would bear his disgrace how he could—for how dared he, a poverty-stricken beggar, conscious though he might be of his innocence—how dared he appeal to the law to clear him? Had not the innocent been transported before now—suffered even unto death upon the gallows? while, if they had not felt sure of their array of evidence, would the vicar and churchwarden ever have accused him? What could he bring up by way of defence? Nothing but his bare word. He confessed to himself that the matter looked black against him. Perhaps his character for integrity ought to have borne him up in their estimation; but then, as he told himself bitterly, he was poor; and where money was concerned, the poor were always held to be liable to fall into temptation. The vicar had been merciful, and would not prosecute; should he then carry the matter before the face of justice, and have it investigated? He might be cleared, but he might fail; and then, as he would have forced the matter upon the vicar, and called in the aid of the law, what would be the consequences if the case went against him? He dared not think; but stood before his brother gazing vacantly about, till Richard spoke again—

"I would have helped you, and done anything, if you had acted like a brother; or had it been anything where you had not been dishonest."

"Sir, I have not been," exclaimed Jared, almost fiercely.

"Then prove it," cried Richard; "but now—there—there—there!" thrusting one hand into his breast, "you had better go."

"I am going, Richard," said Jared, meekly, as he gazed round at the luxurious office—at everything, in fact, but his brother—till the sharp "ting-ting" of a table-gong aroused him. "God forgive you, Dick!" he murmured; "we may never meet again."

"Show this person out," said Richard, harshly, as the clerk appeared; and then, throwing himself back in his chair, he made a violent rustle as he took up the *Times*.

This was the last cruel stab—one that brought forth a mild reproachful, even sorrowful look, from Jared—a look that made Richard wince more than would the most bitter scowl. Then the broken man walked slowly, and with bent head, till his hand could be laid upon the door-post, when turning to look upon his prosperous brother for the last time in his life, he took in the sleek portly form, the heavy insolent countenance; and then, in spite of the clerk's impatient, "This way, sir!" he said, in a low clear voice—

"God above, who knows my innocence, forgive you, Dick, even as I do!"

The heavy door closed, and crossing the office, Jared stood once more in the fog—mental and real—till, crossing the road, he turned for Duplex Street; while, though glad at heart to have rid himself of so troublesome an incubus as a poor relative accused of theft, there was a strange chill fell upon Richard Pellet. It might only have been the dread of another visitor whom he might receive, but he blamed the fog and denounced it heartily, but without effect, for it still hung gloomily over Austin Friars.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Two.

Friends on Failings.

"I'm getting soft and stupid and blue-moulded," said Mr Timson, as he stood warming himself with his hands under his coat, and twitching them tail-fashion before the fire; "but I've got it this time, and no mistake."

"Got what?" said the vicar, as he sat looking at the golden caverns amongst the coals.

"Got what! Why, the right man—down upon him regularly."

"Do not, pray, say any more, Timson?" said the vicar, sadly.

"But I will," said Timson; "and how it was that we never thought of him before's a wonder to me. 'Tain't Pellet, but that little French fiddler that's so often with him. My word, sir, if ever there was 'thief' written in any man's countenance, it's there. What business has he in our church? Why, the scoundrel is a follower of the scarlet woman, and sits on seven hills when he's at home, I'll be bound; and that's why he chose Decadia to live in."

"Tut, tut, tut!" ejaculated the vicar.

"I don't care; it's a fact," said Timson. "That fellow would light the fires in Smithfield again, as soon as look at you; he ought never to have been admitted into our church. Why, sir, he's one of those scoundrels who would think it a

meritorious act to rob our poor-boxes, and go and get absolution for *it* directly."

"O Timson—Timson—Timson!" sighed the vicar; "thou art sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

"You're another!" puffed Timson, angrily. "What do you mean?"

"Where is your charity, my friend? where is your charity?"

"Stolen out of the poor-box!" cried Timson, in a huff; "that's where. And you mark my words if they don't come true, and *you'll* find it out one of these days in Smithfield."

"Psh!" ejaculated the vicar, as near to angrily as he could get, and then there was silence till the effervescence had subsided.

"I don't like it—I don't like it," said Timson, after a pause. "There! I hate it. You may look, sir; but I've had that Pellet with me this afternoon, and I can't stand those sort of meetings. Why wasn't it some one else, and not that poor sensitive struggling fellow? I'm sure it was the French Papist. Why didn't we discharge old Purkis, or Mrs Ruggles, or the clerk? It was pitiful to see that poor fellow—pitiful! Why didn't you suspect and find out the Frenchman? I should like to see him in custody."

"Don't talk nonsense, Timson," said the vicar. "But it's a bad job!" and the old gentleman sighed.

"Bad job! Ah! I should think it is a bad job," said the churchwarden. "Now, what would it take to square the matter?"

"Square!"

"Yes! make up for what has been stolen."

"Nothing!" said the vicar, indignantly—"no amount. The sin is there, and we cannot remove it."

"'Spose not!" said Timson; "but if twenty or thirty pounds put in the poor-box on the sly would make you feel all right again, and let poor old Pellet off with a good bullying, upon my soul I should feel half disposed to find the money."

"Don't be irreverent, Timson; a man's words are never strengthened by an oath. I detest swearing."

"Swearing! That's not swearing," said Timson; "that's only being emphatic."

"Then don't be emphatic, Timson, but speak plainly, like a man."

"Humph!" ejaculated the churchwarden; and then followed a long period devoted to smoking.

"Only think of a man of his talent being a thief!" said the vicar, at last.

"What! the Papist?" exclaimed Timson; "why, you could see—"

"No—no—no—no!" said the vicar, testily; "you know whom I mean. He came here; but I would not see him—Pellet you know."

"Why not?" said Timson, bluntly.

"Because I'm weak, my friend—weak, and might be tempted to give way, when I know it would not be right."

"Well, 'tis hard—'tis hard," said Timson; "I was ready to give way myself; and I don't know now but what I believe the poor fellow is telling the truth."

"What did he say, Timson?" said the vicar, "for I won't see him. I would not believe in his guilt till it was forced upon me; but now I am fixed."

"What did he say! Why, that it's all a mistake."

"I wish it were—I wish it were," said the vicar, who seemed truly grieved; "but let him prove it—let him prove it."

"Just so, I quite agree with you," said Timson. "The very words I said to him. 'Prove it, Pellet,' I said—'prove it, and there's my hand;' and I thought then that he was going to snatch it, so I put it out of his reach."

"Such a musician!" said the vicar, "and to think of his proving a thief!"

"Just like 'em," said Timson. "Those musicians are all thieves. They steal one another's work, and call it inspiration. But don't you think we might put it a little milder? 'Thief' is an ugly word; and—er—er—er—"

"Well?" said the vicar.

"What do you say to embezzlement? Embezzled the moneys of the poor."

"Embezzlement!" exclaimed the vicar, indignantly; "why, sir, it's sacrilege—an abomination!"

"But you know it might turn out to be a mistake after all, and it would be better to have charged a man with embezzling than being a thief."

"Ah! Timson, I wish I could think so—I do indeed; but it can't be a mistake. You had your own suspicions of him."

“Well, yes,” said Timson, drily; “but I hadn’t then thought of the Papist. That’s the man, sir. Leadenhall Street to a China orange on it.”

“But you remember how confused he was in the church that day.”

“What! the Papist fiddler?”

“No, no—Pellet. I couldn’t help thinking something of it then. And, besides, look at the long hours he has been in the habit of spending in the church alone. I’ve known him to be there for hours, and not a sound escape from the organ—no boy there, in fact.”

“Ah!” said Timson, “I’d give five shillings or a pound of my best green for leave to give that boy a good sound quilting.”

“It all points to the fact that he has yielded to temptation when hampered by poverty,” said the vicar, without noticing the interruption.

“Well,” said Mr Timson, “it’s a bad job; but I’m glad that you don’t mean to prosecute.”

“You think with me then, Timson?”

“Of course—yes. Do you want to put the father of about a score of children on the treadmill? Why, they run about his house like rabbits; and if you do that, you’ll have them come and shriek in your ears for bread.”

“God forbid! I will hold to your way of thinking. I should never have done for a magistrate, Timson. They wanted me on the bench when I was down in the country; but I backed out; for I knew I should be too easy. No, Timson; I would not deprive the poor fellow of a chance of making an honest living in the future; for, you see, he is a man who has yielded once to temptation, and will repent to the end of his life. No, sir, I would not mar his future, for the world. I’m not one of those men who prosecute upon what they call principle. Perhaps I am wrong, but I am not unmerciful. I believe him to be a good man at heart; and I think, when he leaves, Timson, if we were to put say ten pounds a-piece, and send to him anonymously, it would be giving him a fresh start in life, eh? What do you say?”

“Good thing to do,” said Timson, “but better let him have it in tea. Say an annuity of so many pounds of tea per annum—mixed—for so many years.”

“Oh, no, Timson; it must be the money. The poor fellow was oppressed by poverty when he—er—er—took the money.”

“Then why didn’t he come like a man and ask me to advance him a few pounds, or let them have so much tea on credit?”

“The wrong sort of man, Timson—the wrong sort of man! But I’m sorry for him, very.”

“So am I—so will everybody be,” said Timson, gruffly; and then they had another long smoke.

“You won’t tell him at the very last that he may stop on, I ’spose?” said Timson,—“let him think, like, that he’s going to be hanged, and then at the last moment send him a reprieve? My wig, sir, what a voluntary we should have the next Sunday!”

“No, Timson, no. Duty is duty, and I should not be doing mine if I looked over so flagrant an offence.”

“But you won’t alter your mind?—you won’t prosecute?”

“No, sir, no,” said the vicar. “In spite of all, I respect the man and the way in which he has brought up his family. I am sorry, deeply sorry, for Mr Pellet and his wife and daughter; and really, sir, I’d give a heavy sum to have proved him innocent—I would, indeed;” and to give emphasis to his assertion, the old gentleman brought his fist down heavily upon the table.

“Mind the glasses!” said the churchwarden, in a warning voice, and he pushed them a little farther from his friend.

“It’s very sad, and with such a family, too!” said the vicar. “How many has he?”

“Scores!” said the churchwarden.

“Don’t be absurd, Timson—don’t be a fool,” said the vicar; “this is no laughing matter. Suppose that you were in the poor man’s position?”

“Shoo—shoo—shoo—shoo!” exclaimed Mr Timson. “What do you mean? who is absurd—who is a fool? I’m not one, am I? And what’s the good of supposing me the thief? Absurd, indeed!”

“I only said don’t be absurd, don’t be a fool, Timson,” said the vicar.

“I believe that’s prevaricating,” said Mr Timson. “I consider ‘fool’ a strange title to call an old friend, Mr Gray.”

“Sit still, Timson, and shake hands, and don’t be an ass,” said the old gentleman, warmly; and as he spoke he held out his hand, with the accompaniment of a look that wiped away the epithet that had escaped inadvertently during his excitement; for the churchwarden shook the hand as warmly as it was offered.

“But,” said Timson, just to show that it still rankled a little, “it seems too bad to pity the poor man now, when a little

assistance would have kept him from what *you* say he has done."

"What *we*; say he has done," replied the vicar; "for look at the proofs. Have I not my duty to perform as well as any other man?"

"But it does seem a very hard case," said Timson, "and I should let him off. I've none of your fine susceptibilities; they don't seem to go with tea-dealing."

"Won't do, Timson—won't do," said the vicar. "I'm a very homespun man, and have forgotten the greater part of my college polish. Half a life in rough Lincolnshire does not improve one; but I can't think as you do. I would that I could go to the poor fellow and say, 'Mr Pellet, it's a mistake—forgive me.'"

"I should like to go with you," said Timson.

"But not a word to any one else," said the vicar; "we won't have the finger of scorn pointed at him. Let him stay till his time's expired, and then go where he will, and begin life afresh, with what we send."

Timson nodded.

"If it becomes known, let the onus rest on himself. It shall not come from us. And besides, if we put it about, people would blame us for letting him stay out his time. I don't want to do him a mortal injury. Let him see the evil of his ways, and do better in future. Let him, as I said in my letter, seek forgiveness from Him whom he has sinned against!"

"Amen!" said Timson, solemnly; and then the two friends sat on far into the night smoking pipe after pipe, while the little kettle steamed away until it was quite dry, a fact discovered by Mr Timson just as he had placed more sugar and spirit in his tumbler, which he pushed aside with a sigh. The subject was brought up no more then, and there was no cribbage; but when Mr Timson rose and took his hat, and had shaken hands and said "good-night," he came hurrying back after taking half a dozen steps to tap softly at the door, which had the effect of bringing the vicar to the window.

Timson ran to the area rails and leaned over as far as he could, gesticulating furiously with one arm, as he exclaimed loud enough for his friend to hear—

"I couldn't go away without telling you I'm sure of it, sir. There! I'll take my oath it's the Papist."

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Three.

At Fault.

Harry Clayton was fortunate, for he was shown into the great Mr Whittrick's presence directly; and, as soon as seated, he had the pleasure of feeling that the private inquirer was mentally photographing him, though, all the same, his words were quiet and urbane. But it seemed as if Mr Whittrick made use of all his faculties at once; he talked to his visitor; he listened to him; he gazed at him tremendously at times; he seemed to be smelling him; and, from the motion of his fingers, he evidently had a strong inclination to feel his visitor, for purposes of future recognition.

"No, sir—at present, none; but we are doing all that is possible."

"But have you nothing definite to communicate?" said Harry, despondently.

"No, sir—at present, nothing," said Mr Whittrick. "But—if I might be so bold—there was an advertisement in the *Times* this morning, placed there of course by Sir Francis Redgrave. I was not consulted over the matter. I think, you know, sir, that Sir Francis is wrong. I see that he has the Scotland Yard people at work. Not a good plan, I think, sir. They are very able men there—Falkner's good; but too many cooks, you know, spoil the broth. Humble aphorism, but true, sir. However, Sir Francis may depend upon my doing my best."

Harry Clayton rose with a sigh and left the office, feeling very little hope of success in this direction. Jealousy was evidently at work, and he could not but own to himself that Sir Francis had taken a wrong step.

What should he do next? he asked himself. He had not been to Brownjohn Street the last day or two; why should he not go there again? He might obtain some news.

It was hardly worth while going, he thought, only it was possible he might see the bird-dealer himself, and perhaps obtain some little information likely to prove of use.

But D. Wragg was not in, when he reached Brownjohn Street; and in place of seeing either him or poor Janet, Clayton encountered the round pleasant playbill-rayed face of Mrs Winks, rising like a fleshy sun from behind the paint-cloudy counter, to the loud song of the larks; for Mrs Winks had just been stooping to hide the weakness which she kept for her own private use in a ginger-beer bottle. Mrs Winks' head was only to be seen without curl-papers when she attended the theatres by night, in the full-dress of curls and blue merino, ready to supply the mental and bodily wants of the frequenters of Drury Lane Theatre gallery. Upon this occasion, the playbill used had been one of the newest, the result being, that a good deal of ink had been transferred from the larger letters to Mrs Winks' forehead, giving it a somewhat smudgy look.

The good lady, though, was quite in ignorance of her personal aspect, and after laying aside her weakness, carefully corked, she was bringing out of a capacious pocket a saveloy, wrapped in another of the never-failing play-bills—the

delicacy being intended for her lunch—when the appearance of Harry Clayton arrested her, and, escaping from the paper, the saveloy slipped back to the depths of her pocket, to be kept warm till required.

Mrs Winks rose to meet the visitor with a smile, which gave place to a puzzled look upon his inquiring for D. Wragg, and then for Janet.

“I’ll go and tell her, sir,” said the old lady, and she puffed up-stairs to Janet’s room, whence she returned in a few minutes, saying—

“She’ve got a bad ’eadache, sir, and ain’t well; but if you’d leave any message?”

“No!” said Clayton, thoughtfully. “You might, though, tell the French gentleman that I called.”

“Which he really is a thorough gentleman,” said. Mrs Winks, enthusiastically; “as you’d say if you knowed more of him, and heard him paint and play on the fiddle. I mean—I beg your pardon, sir—seen him play on the fiddle and paint. He’s a gentleman, every inch of him, if he do lodge in Decadia, which ain’t nothing after all, is it, sir? But I’ll tell him when he comes back; and your name too?”

Clayton gave her a card, and then walked thoughtfully back, but not without stopping in front of a blank wall, where a knot of rough-looking fellows were reading a placard, commencing—“Two hundred pounds reward!” and then he shuddered, as one of the party said—“I ’spose they’d hand over all the same, if he happened to be a dead ’un?”

There was no news when he reached Regent Street, and though Sir Francis had but just concluded an interview with a police sergeant, the mystery seemed as far as ever from solution.

“I think I will go out now, Clayton,” said the baronet, in an excited and feverish manner. “It is so hard to stay in, walking up and down, as if caged, and waiting eagerly for every knock and ring. You’ll take my place—you won’t leave—you won’t leave, in case of a call while you are away.”

“You may trust me, Sir Francis.”

“Yes, yes, I know—I know,” said the old gentleman, wringing his hands, “I feel it! But, Clayton,” he said, anxiously, “if any people should come with information in answer to the advertisements, keep them till I come back.”

“I will, decidedly!” said Clayton; “but may I ask where you are going now?”

“Only to see if the bills are well posted; and, you know, I might see some one who had news,—it is possible.”

“I did see one bill posted up,” said Harry, but he did not mention the remark he had heard made.

“That’s well, Clayton—that’s well! and I hope and trust that this state of anxiety may soon be at an end.”

The young man walked with Sir Francis to the door, and felt shocked to see the way in which he had altered during the past few days; then, returning to his seat, he began to think over the strange disappearance, recalling, too, that evening when he had determined to part from Lionel—their visit to the dog-fancier’s, and the strange feelings that had been aroused; and now, troubled at heart and reluctant, he was pondering upon whether it was not his duty to place in the hands of the police the knowledge he possessed of Lionel’s many visits to Decadia. He could not quite reconcile himself to the task, for he knew that it must result in much unpleasantness to Janet; but it struck him suddenly that the behaviour of the deformed girl was strange, though it had not appeared so at the time. Could she know anything? Had the foolish young man been inveigled to some den, robbed, and murdered? and did the horrified aspect Janet had worn mean that she was in possession of the secret? He shuddered as such thoughts arose, and again and again asked himself what he should do, ending by coming to the determination that he would wait, at least until the following day, and then go to the house and warn them of what was about to be done. And yet, if anything were wrong, it would be putting them upon their guard. But their treatment of him seemed to demand that courtesy, and whatever was wrong, he felt that it would be hard for the innocent to be amongst the sufferers. He could not put them to unnecessary pain.

Then came again a cloud of doubt and suspicion, which hung over him till a couple of hours later, when Sir Francis Redgrave returned—pale, anxious, and tired—to look inquiringly at Harry, and receive for answer a shake of the head, the young man feeling the while that he was not acting openly with his elder, in keeping from him all he knew—information which he was unable to decide whether or not he should impart.

In the evening, as they were seated together—Harry thoughtful and silent, and Sir Francis with his face turned from the light—the baronet spoke—

“I cannot suffer this inaction much longer,” he said. “It is always the same answer from the police—‘Leave it in our hands, sir; we are hard at work; though, so far, we have nothing to show.’ They say that every—every deadhouse has been searched; the men at the water-side have been told to be on the look-out; hospitals have been visited; everything possible done; but who can be satisfied? We must begin on fresh ground to-morrow, Clayton. What’s that? Did some one knock?”

Mr Stiff entered to announce that there was a man below waiting to see some one respecting the reward.

Sir Francis started instantly to his feet.

“Show him up at once, Stiff!” he exclaimed; and then, not content to wait, in his anxiety he followed the landlord to the stairs, re-entering the room in a few minutes with the heavy-faced young fellow before introduced as Mr John Screwby.

“Now, my man, sit down; don’t stand there!” exclaimed Sir Francis, thrusting a chair forward; “now, tell us quickly.”

“Don’t keer to sit down, thanky,” said the fellow, surlily, taking a sidelong glance round the room, ending by fixing his eyes for a moment on the door, as if to make sure that there was a retreat open in case of need.

“Well, well!” exclaimed Sir Francis; “now tell us what you know, and why you have come. Did you see the advertisement, or one of those placards?”

“Bla’guards?” said the fellow, inquiringly.

“Yes, yes! the bills.”

“Yes; I saw a bill—two ’underd pound reward—and I’ve come for that there two ’underd pound reward.”

“But your information—what do you know?” broke in Harry.

The man turned and stared at him heavily.

“Ah! I didn’t know you at first, without no hat on; but I knows you now. You was with him once when he came down our way. I seed you then, and I ain’t forgot you. But, first of all, who’s going to pay this here money? Is it you, or is it him?”

“I’ll pay you—I’ll pay you, my man!” exclaimed Sir Francis; “and what is your information?—what do you know?”

“What I know’s worth two ’underd pound now,” said the fellow, winking at Harry; “but if I tells it, then, praps, it won’t be worth nothin’ to me.”

“You are dealing with a gentleman, my good fellow,” said Harry, “and you need be under no apprehension.”

“But how do I know as I shan’t be done?” was the offensive reply. “Nobody don’t trust me nothin’; and I don’t see why I should trust nobody. I’m a plain-spoke sort of a chap, I am; and I allers says what’s in my mind. So now, lookye here—you says as you’ll give two ’underd pound to them as’ll tell you where a tall young man’s gone—that’s it, ain’t it?”

Harry nodded.

“Werry good, then. I comes here, and I says, ‘’And over the stiff!’ ‘What for?’ says you. ‘’Cos I knows wheer he is,’ says I. ‘So, now then,’ I says, ‘hand over the tin.’”

Without another word, Sir Francis went to a small writing-case, opened it, and took from a book a ready-signed cheque for the amount.

“Stop!” exclaimed Harry. “Excuse me, Sir Francis; but your anxiety overleaps your caution. How do we know that this man’s information is worth having?”

“He says he knows where—where—you know what he says,” said Sir Francis, piteously.

“Yes,” said Harry; “but let him prove his words.”

“What! are yer agoin’ to run back from it, or are yer agoin’ to hand over the stiff?” said the man, uneasily.

“When you have earned it,” said Harry, almost fiercely. “Now, look here, my man, show us the value of your information, and restore this gentleman to his friends; and without any reference to such complicity as you may have had in the transaction, the two hundred pounds are yours.”

“But lookye here,” said the man, leaning towards him; “suppose as he’s—you know what?” and he whispered the last words.

“The money is yours all the same,” said Harry, in the same tone.

But the man was apparently still far from satisfied, muttering, biting pieces out of his cap-lining, and spitting them upon the carpet, till a bright thought seemed to strike him, to which he gave birth.

“Lookye here, gents. Let’s have the money posted fair for both sides. I knows a genleman down our way as keeps a beer-shop as’d see fair, and make all square. Now, what do you say?”

What would have been said was arrested by a sudden start, or rather jump, on the part of Mr John Screwby, who, following the direction of Sir Francis’ eyes, found that another person had entered the room, and taken a place at his elbow, where he had stood for some few moments listening to the conversation.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Four.

Screwby’s “Tip.”

Mr John Screwby’s face would have formed a worthy study for a painter; or, could some instantaneous photographer have secured his aspect, a *carte* could have been produced that would have made the fortune of any speculator in heads of eminent men. For, as he started away, his jaw half dropped, his eyes staring, and fists clenched, he seemed,

for the moment, turned into stone—a statue gazing at the quiet unmoved intruder upon the scene.

“How do, Jack?” said the new-comer, quietly, as he took a slight glance from the corners of his eyes at the informer.

“You’re werry civil all ’twunst,” said the fellow, recovering himself a little; “but you ain’t got nothin’ agen me!”

“Not I, Jack—at least, not yet,” said the new-comer, smiling. “But what brings you here? Smelt the reward?”

The man stared, sniffed, rubbed his nose viciously upon his sleeve, and shuffled uneasily from foot to foot; but he did not answer.

“He professes to hold the required information,” said Sir Francis; “and he is afraid that we shall not duly perform our part of the contract. He is suspicious lest we should withhold part of the money—my friend here thinking that he ought first to prove the value of his tidings.”

“Of course,” said the new-comer, with a commendatory nod of the head at Clayton; “he knows what business is, evidently. Not though, that our friend Jack Screwby here would do anything but what was of the most honourable description. He’s a gent who would scorn a mean action, and as to taking advantage of anybody, there, bless your heart, you might trust him with a baby unborn.”

“None o’ your gammon, now, can’t you?” growled Jack.

“Gammon! nonsense, Jack! It’s all straightforward and above-board. You shall be all right. Now, look here—what do you know? If it’s worth the two hundred pounds, you shall have the money clean down in your fist. I’ll see that you do. Now are you satisfied?”

“Fain sweatings,” growled Mr Screwby, who was apparently far from being in as confident a state as he could have wished.

“What does he say?” exclaimed Sir Francis.

“He means, sir, that he don’t want the reward money to be fiddled.”

“Fiddled?” said Sir Francis.

“Yes, sir—thinned down, and deducted from.”

“Oh, no! let him earn the reward, and he shall have it in full,” exclaimed Sir Francis.

“To be sure,” said the new-comer. “There, Jack, do you hear? All fair and above-board. Money down as soon as the gentleman is found—*by your information, mind*.”

“Well, never mind about no informations,” growled Screwby; “if I find him, eh?”

“Yes, if you find the gentleman.”

“Dead or alive?” said Screwby, brutally.

“Dead or alive,” said the new-comer, turning, as did also Clayton, to glance at Sir Francis Redgrave, who was very pale, but who remained unmoved, save for the corners of his mouth, which twitched sharply.

Mr John Screwby evidently had great faith in his own powers as a reader of physiognomy, for he glanced from one to the other, and allowed his eyes to rest long upon each face; then he had a long stare at the door, and another at the window, as if meditating flight, or probably from his foxy wild-beast-like nature, which prompted him to mistrust everybody, and to have both an avenue of entrance and another for escape. Then he took another vicious rub at his nose, and refreshed himself with a nibble at his cap, off which he evidently obtained a few woolly scraps; but at last he allowed his furtive-looking eyes to rest upon the new-comer, who had been all the time thoughtfully tapping his teeth with his pencil, and apparently taking not the slightest notice of him whatever.

The fellow then prepared to speak, by hitching himself closer to the stranger, who only gave him a nod, which was interpreted to mean—“Stay where you are!”

For Mr John Screwby stood shuffling from foot to foot, and then placed his hand before his mouth, to direct the flow of his discourse only into the stranger’s ear.

“Speak out, Jack!” said the latter, coolly; “you needn’t be afraid.”

“Who’s afeard?” growled Jack, sourly.

“Oh! not you, Jack, of course,” said the other; “you’ve a heart above that sort of thing, you know.”

“You’re gallus witty, you are,” growled Jack, below his breath.

“Well, speak up, Jack; the gentlemen would like to hear what you have to say, I’m sure.”

“Look ye here, then, Master Falkner,” said Jack, in a hoarse whisper, that sounded as harsh and grating as the sharpening of a saw,—“look ye here; that there young chap’s been hanging about D. Wragg’s crib for months past.”

“To be sure he has, Jack—to be sure; we know that; and what does it mean? Pigeons, or rats, or dogs, or something of

that sort, eh?”

Mr Falkner, sergeant of police, half closed his eyes as he spoke, and thrust his hands beneath his coat-tails, as, with head on one side, he waited to hear further news.

“Pigins—dorgs! Not a bit of it. He warn’t arter them,” said Screwby. “Gents like him don’t have no ’casion to come our way; ’cos why? Lots o’ dealers comes arter them, and’ll bring ’em any number o’ rats, or dorgs either, for the matter o’ that. You knows better nor that, Master Falkner. If I was to tell you as I come down here to make these here gents’ minds easy, you wouldn’t believe me, would you?”

“Well, not to put too fine a point on it, Jack Screwby,” said the sergeant, “no, I should not.”

“No,” said the fellow, chuckling, “in coorse you wouldn’t; and no more you don’t believe as he went down our way arter rats or dorgs.”

“Well, suppose he did not: what then?” said the sergeant.

“Don’t you hurry no man’s cattle; you may have a moke o’ your own some day,” said Screwby, with a grin. “I’m a coming to it fast, I am; so look out. Look ye here, governor,” he said in his hoarse whisper, and he craned his neck towards the impassive officer, “lars Chewsday night was a week as I see him go in theer all alone.”

“Go in where, Jack—in where?” said the sergeant, quietly, but with his eyes a little closer, his ears twitching, and every nerve evidently on the strain.

“Why, ain’t I a tellin’ on ye?—in theer!”

“To be sure, yes, of course,” said the sergeant, quietly, “in there—all right!”

“Yes,” continued Screwby, “in theer—in at D. Wragg’s; and,” continued the fellow, in deep tones, harsh, husky, and like a hoarse whisper sent through some large tube—“and he didn’t come out no more.”

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Five.

Taking up the Clue.

As the rough, brutal fellow uttered those, words, accompanying them with a low cunning grin of satisfaction at his success, the walls of the room seemed to swim round before Harry Clayton’s eyes; but recovering himself, he ran to the side of Sir Francis, just as he was staggering and would have fallen.

“It’s nothing, my dear boy—nothing at all,” he gasped; “only a slight touch of faintness. Ring—a glass of wine—a little water—thanks! I am a little overdone with anxiety—a trifle unnerved. Sergeant, you will see to this directly, we will go with you.”

“Better not, sir—better not,” said the officer, bluntly; “leave it in my hands.”

“Sergeant Falkner,” said the old man, piteously, “you are not a father, or you would not speak like that.”

“Ain’t I, by Jove, sir!” cried the sergeant, heartily; “I’ve got ten already, and goodness knows how many more to come. I’ve had butcher-and-baker on-the-brain any time this ten years, sir; let alone boots. But I beg your pardon, Sir Francis; I won’t say another word. Here, you, Screwby, go and sit in that chair,” and he pointed to the one farthest from the door. Then, walking across with the man, he to a certain extent seemed to seat him in the chair, the great hulking rascal being like so much plastic clay in his hands.

The next moment Sergeant Falkner was at the low window, which he threw open, and stepped out upon the balcony, but in an instant he came back—very hastily back—into the room, and hurried to the door, which he opened, to take the key from the outside and carefully lock it from within—the key being afterwards placed in his pocket.

A few seconds more, and, to the surprise of Sir Francis and Clayton, he was again in the balcony, where he uttered a low cough.

There was a pause of a few moments, when he stooped over, and leaning down, spoke to some one beneath.

Apparently satisfied, he re-entered the room, closed the window, unlocked the door, and began to walk up and down thoughtfully, tapping his teeth the while with the end of his pencil.

“For what are we waiting, sergeant?” said Sir Francis, anxiously.

“Cab, sir,” said the officer, curtly; “and here it is. After you, gentlemen!”

As he spoke, there was the sound of wheels grating against the kerb below; and a few minutes after the party was rattling through the streets, but only to stop before long at a quiet-looking office.

Springing out, the sergeant signed to a policeman, who seemed to be there by accident, but all the same was ready to take his place by the cab-door, adding nothing to the ease and comfort of Mr John Screwby, who was quite as fidgety when, after a few minutes, the sergeant returned, gave a few instructions to the driver, and they were once more rattling through the gas-lit streets.

“Rather a tight fit, gentlemen,” said the sergeant, “four in one of these cabs; but it won’t be for long.”

In effect, sooner than Clayton anticipated, the cab stopped and the sergeant again sprang out.

“Now, gentlemen,” he said, “perhaps you’ll have the goodness to follow at a little distance. It’s two streets off yet; but in this extremely pleasant and salubrious region, we don’t want to make any fuss. My dear friend Mr John Screwby and I will go on together, so as to show the way. You need not be afraid,” he whispered to Clayton. “Keep tight hold of the old gentleman’s arm, and bring him along quickly. There’s plenty of help close at hand.”

Clayton nodded, and then, as he drew the baronet’s arm through his own, he hastily glanced round to see once more the thronging types of misery and vice that he had encountered on his previous visits: there were the same hulking ruffians, short of hair, sallow of face, and low of brow—own brothers in aspect of the gentleman who had turned informer; there, too, were the same slatternly women, old and young; children who never seemed to have been young; and at nearly every corner the gin-palace in full levée, its courtiers thronging in and out as the doors swung to and fro.

Harry read this at a glance, and then followed the sergeant through the crowded streets, attracting as little notice as was possible; but from time to time the young man could see that some ruffianly head or another was turned to gaze after Screwby and his companion; intelligent nods and winks, too, were passed from one observer to another, and once Harry heard the whispered words—

“What’s up?”

No one seemed to care, though, to follow figures that were evidently well-known, and so great was the attention bestowed upon them, that little, so far as he could see, fell to the share of Sir Francis and himself.

They soon reached the shop of Mr D. Wragg, the shutters of which natural history emporium were up, but both side and shop doors were wide open, closing after them, though, by invisible agency, as it appeared, until Harry turned to find that, springing as it were from that invisible region they are said so much to affect when wanted, a couple of policemen were at his elbow, whose duty it had doubtless been to close the portals against the curious crowd, certain to collect as soon as it was bruited abroad that there was “a case on” at the house of “Mr D. Wragg, naturalist.”

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Six.

Not his Castle.

“Hullo! I say! what’s all this here about?” cried a familiar voice, and D. Wragg began to jerk himself fiercely into the shop. “Don’t you make no mistake. What! hullo! eh! I say!” he exclaimed, with a grin of delight taking the place of his surprise; “what! my lovely Jack Screwby! Nabbed at last?”

“No, I ain’t nabbed at last neither, Muster D. Wragg,” sneered the gentleman addressed; “and, as they says to me wunst—well, more ’n wunst, if you like,” he growled, as he caught the sergeant’s eye fixed upon him—“as they says to me, says they, ‘Don’t you be so jolly free with your tongue, ’cos what you says now may be used as evidence agen you.’”

D. Wragg’s features twitched furiously as he turned up the gas, and then, for the first time, he caught sight of Harry Clayton, and jerked violently, to the great delight of Screwby, who stood grinning and rubbing his hands, thoroughly enjoying the discomfiture of his enemy.

“Now, don’t you make no mistake, sir,” exclaimed D. Wragg; “the dog ain’t here this time, and I ain’t seen it, as I’ll take my Bible oath on it. There ain’t neither a bird, nor a hanimal, nor nothink o’ no kind as ain’t mine, and paid for down on the nail; so don’t you make no mistake now, come! You can do as you like, you know; only mind this here—there’s law for me, as well as law for you. You can think as I’ve got the dorg, if you like; only ’spectable houses o’ business ain’t to be entered at all times without things being made square.”

“There! why don’t you take advice when it’s given you, old chap?” said the sergeant. “You know what we’ve come about, though, I dessay?”

“Know what you’ve come about!” said D. Wragg; “why, of course I do. You’ve come about that there gent’s friend’s dorg, same as they’ve been together about it before, and I helped ’em into getting of it; but you’re in the wrong box this time, so I tell you. But what do you expect you’re going to do?”

“What’s the good of being a fool, Wragg? The game’s up; so you may just as well give in quietly, and not go into a pack of stuff about dogs.”

But D. Wragg protested again that he knew they must be come about some dog or another, till, assuming an injured air, he took out his pipe and lit it, and then stood with folded arms, jerking himself about, and muttering, while, without further ceremony, the police, accompanied in every movement by Sir Francis and Harry Clayton, thoroughly searched the house, beginning with the underground kitchen, and then proceeding upwards, but not until due precautions had been taken to prevent the escape of the inmates.

“This is all very well, sir, you know,” said the sergeant; “but of course we don’t expect to find anything more than a clue of some kind, and I’ve my doubts even about that. Old Wragg does not look so much like a foxy terrier for nothing. Whatever has been done, I don’t give the old chap credit for having bungled it; but, all the same, it seemed the thing to come—not quite regular, you know,” he added, confidentially, “but we’ll risk that.”

Room after room was examined, until the second floor was reached, and here Harry expected to find the abode of Canau. His heart accelerated its beating—perhaps though only with the ascent; but he thought, all the same, that here would Janet be, and perhaps with her Patty Pellet, for he knew how strong was the tie between them.

It proved to be as he anticipated, for Janet and Patty stood by the window, and with them Mrs Winks, who had hurried up-stairs at the first arrival of the visitors, to spare the girls from needless alarm.

“I trust you will not lay this intrusion to my charge,” said Clayton, approaching. “You gave me your word that you knew nothing of my friend’s disappearance, and I believed you.”

“And then to prove your faith, you brought the police here to search our rooms,” said Janet, fiercely, as she turned away.

“Do not be unjust,” said Harry; “information has been given to us that my poor friend was seen to enter this house upon the night of his disappearance, and was not seen to return.”

“Oh, my! good ’evins! what a horrid story!” exclaimed Mrs Winks; “when I was at home all that very night, bad with the tic, same as I am to-night, and no gentleman come here then, as I’ll take my oath on. And me abusin’ the tic all the while as was a blessin’ in disguise, for it’s glad enough I am to be at home this night, my dears. He never come anigh here that Chewsday night though.”

“Yes, he did now; so don’t you make no mistake. Come about a new dog-collar, he did, and took it away with him while you was up-stairs, Mother Winks.”

D. Wragg had spoken these words to the extreme delight of Screwby, who grinned and rubbed his hands down his sides upon hearing this voluntary corroboration of his evidence.

But the sergeant merely shook his head, feeling convinced that the lame gentleman who had jerked his body up-stairs was far too old a stager to commit himself by such an open statement unless he had good reason for so doing.

Meanwhile the master of the house looked on, while the police peered into all sorts of impossible places; passing over things that might perhaps have served as a clue, to stop to examine a scrap of paper or pieces of furniture that could not relate to the matter in hand. Walls were tapped, chimneys examined, cupboards peered into, and the light of bull’s-eye lanthorns was made to startle spiders in many a dark corner.

“This here wall’s hollow!” exclaimed one of the policemen suddenly, as he started upon finding a certain resonant echo to the blows he bestowed at one side of the room.

“Most likely,” said the sergeant, drily, “Why, where are your brains, man? Don’t you see that the staircase is behind?”

The man relieved himself of his hard hat, wiped his forehead, and then resumed his search, till the sergeant declaring himself satisfied so far, a move was made for the upper regions.

“There ain’t nothing up there; so now then,” cried D. Wragg, desperately; “I protest against all this here. You needn’t go up; and don’t you make no mistake; I ain’t agoin’ to stand having my place searched without a warrant. I’ll have it outer some on you for this.”

As he spoke, D. Wragg started to the foot of the attic staircase, and made as if he would have barred the way; but the sergeant laid one firm hand upon his shoulder, and D. Wragg seemed to shrink away from that touch like the leaves of a mimosa. He glided aside, as if in dread lest the hand that touched him should remain there, and his face grew ashy and careworn—abject too in the extreme—until he encountered the triumphant grins of Mr John Screwby, when he roused himself directly, and stared his tormentor full in the face.

“You see, my friend,” said the sergeant, upon whom not one of D. Wragg’s changes of countenance was lost,—“you see, my friend, now that we are up so high, we may as well go up a little higher—save coming again, perhaps.”

D. Wragg muttered uneasily, and glanced right and left, and then the creaking stairs were ascended, when he moved slowly off.

“Stop him there, will you!” cried the sergeant, who saw through the little dealer’s design.

“What d’yer mean? what’s all this?” cried D. Wragg, struggling with the man, who caught the wrist of his coat in a tight grasp. “If you’re going to take a fellow up, take him up; but don’t get playing at fast and loose. Don’t you make no mistake, I ain’t agoin’ to stand this sorter thing. I ain’t got his dorg, as I’ve told you ’arf a dozen times; but some on you shall pay for it, so I tell you.”

D. Wragg’s evasion being stayed, and his small person forced to the front, he was one of those who filled up the landing, close by a couple of doors—one strongly padlocked, and the other cobwebbed and dirty, as if it had not been opened for years.

“Now then, where are the keys of these doors?” said the sergeant.

“Break ’em open while you are about it,” cried D. Wragg, in tones that bordered upon a howl. “But don’t you make no mistake; I protest against this here, once more. I ain’t agoin’ to have my house sacked like this here for nothing. I should have thought as them gents would ha’ stopped it all; but never mind, I don’t care. It shan’t go to the bottom without some on you hearin’ of it.”

“Hold your tongue, will you, and give up the keys,” said the sergeant who looked just a trifle less impassive than

usual.

“What is it you all mean?” cried D. Wragg, excitedly, “what is it you are all thinking about? You don’t suppose as I’m giving up my respectable business of a nat’ralist to go in for burking and doctor’s work, do you? You don’t suppose as I know anything of the young chap as is gone. Don’t you make no mistake: I can see through it all. You’ve been crammed and filled up with all sorts o’ gammon; but I wonder at you, Sergeant Falkner, a-listening to what such a thing as *that* says.”

D. Wragg pointed as he spoke at Mr John Screwby, which gentleman had, from a scarcity of watchers, and from doubts as to the probability of his staying so long as he was wanted, been brought up from stage to stage, to stand now, shuffling from foot to foot, and staring first at the irate dealer, and then at the door which concealed the interior of the attic from his graze.

“Somebody shall pay for all this, though,” cried D. Wragg, “as I said afore, and as I’ll say half a score o’ times.”

As he spoke, he looked full at Sir Francis, as if identifying him with the “somebody” who should be made to pay, although at the present time no mean sum of the baronet’s money had made its way into his pockets. But at last, seeing that Sergeant Falkner would not be trifled with, and that in another moment the door or doors would be kicked down, he produced the keys with a great many protestations, ending at last in a perfect whine of misery, one that strangely reminded the eager bystanders of the dogs below.

But the keys produced, D. Wragg’s importance decreased on the instant; for though there were those present who trembled at the thought of the door being thrown back, the majority were devoured by curiosity—the morbid curiosity which used to take a crowd to an execution, and even at the present day attracts hundreds to the Old Bailey that they may catch a glimpse of the black flag, and imagine for themselves the horrors going on behind the grim black stony walls.

There were no stony walls here though—only a few slight boards between the gazers and the mystery whose solution they were so eager to read.

“Here! stop him, will you!” cried the sergeant. “Have you any brains at all, Smith?”

P.C. Smith raised his hand to his head, as if to feel whether those thought-producers—brains—were really there; but he contented himself with a vicious scratch, as he once more took hold of D. Wragg, that gentleman having made another attempt to limp away.

“Don’t you make no mistake,” half-whimpered the dealer, rubbing his hands together, bending down as if in pain, and limping about to the extent of his tether—to wit, his own arm and that of the policeman. “I’ll be squared for this; just you see if I ain’t.”

“Very well—very well,” exclaimed the sergeant, with something of excitement in his tones; “only don’t make quite so much noise about it. Now then,” he cried, as he unlocked the fastening, and threw open the rickety door, whose rusty hinges creaked dismally, while the door itself was stopped, when little more than ajar, by the warped framework, which forced one corner upon the floor.

“Now I hope you’re happy,” said D. Wragg.

“Not yet—not yet,” said the sergeant, “but we mean to get there soon. Now then, pass him here, Smith. That’s right. Now Mr Wragg, you go first, and we’ll follow.”

Again, there was the dealer’s strong resemblance to the ragged terrier brought out; for the sergeant treated him precisely as a keeper would a dog that he was about to place in some fox’s hole, D. Wragg being thrust forward into the room—going, though, most unwillingly, and had he suddenly broken out into a sharp wailing bark, no one would have felt much surprised.

The sergeant laid his hands upon D. Wragg’s shoulders as he forced him in, peering over the said shoulders into the dingy place ahead, and then he drew back for a few moments.

“Here, Smith, you take my place,” he said; and the constable went next, while his leader crossed the low landing to where, arm-in-arm, stood Clayton and Sir Francis. “Just a moment, please, sir,” he said to Clayton, in a low voice; and then aloud to the others present, “Stand back there, will you: I go next!”

“What do you want to say?” said Clayton, glancing uneasily at the sergeant’s stern face, as the latter turned his eyes for a moment to where they had left Sir Francis.

“Only, sir,” said the sergeant, in a whisper, “that if I was in your place, I should think it my duty at any cost to get him away.”

The young man shook his head, for he knew that the sergeant counselled an impossibility.

“Well, sir, I thought it my duty to advise,” said the sergeant.

“Quite right—quite right,” said Clayton, hastily; “but he would not stir an inch. Now, pray end this horrible suspense.”

Clayton looked round once more to see that the women were not within hearing, and then, with Sir Francis and the other constable, he passed into the low, dingy, sloping-ceiled room.

There had once evidently been a partition, but this had been removed, and the attics turned into one long place, so

that the whole of the top floor could be seen through at a glance, with its lumber of old cages, bundles of dried herbs, baskets of feathers, and broken furniture—chairs lame of one leg, halt and rickety tables, and an old wash-stand.

In three different corners, chained to staples in the wall, and each with its straw bed, were as many wretched captives, wasting their days in their lofty prison. But these were only three dogs, kept there for reasons best known to the occupant of the house.

“Nothing here,” was the mental remark of the sergeant, as he made his light play about the place, its rays falling strangely upon each of the dogs in turn, and eliciting howls that were doleful in the extreme.

That light, though, was allowed to rest longest upon the fourth corner of the room, where there were three well-filled sacks and a large flat basket.

“Look outside the window; there’s a parapet out there in the front. One of you had better crawl along a little each way, and see if you can make anything out,” said the sergeant, who directly after turned to another of his men. “Here, you!” he exclaimed, “climb up there,” and he pointed to a half-closed trapdoor in the ceiling.

His orders were obeyed, the bystanders watching eagerly the progress of events, till the man who had somewhat nervously forced his way through the trap came back covered with whitewash and cobwebs, which he brushed impatiently from his uniform.

“Well?” said the sergeant, as the man descended by means of the broken wash-stand and chair, which had been used for escalading purposes.

“No one been up there this side o’ six months ago, I’ll swear,” said the man; “the cobwebs would have told you that if you’d liked to look.”

The sergeant turned sharply upon his muttering subordinate, but his attention was taken off by the return of the man who had been sent outside to examine the gutter.

“Well?” said the sergeant again, as this man climbed back.

“Well, I ain’t seen nothing,” said the latter, dragging one leg after him into the room. “Quiet, will you?” he cried to a dog which bayed at him furiously. “You can go along out there for best part of a mile if you like, dodging in and out, for it seems to be a reg’lar rat’s run from winder to winder. There’s some nice games carried on, I’ll be bound, and any manner of thing might be done here or there, and hidden from place to place without us being a bit the wiser.”

“How many men would it take to make a good search?” said the sergeant.

“Hundred,” said his subordinate, gruffly, “would be nowhere. You’d want a man at every door, and at every attic window; and when you tried to stop ’em, they’d slip out somewhere else.”

The sergeant stood for a moment thinking, and then he made a step towards the sacks, looking curiously at the dog-fancier.

“Shouldn’t wonder if there was a tale hanging to every one of those dogs,” he said, grimly. “But what’s in these sacks?”

“Now look ye here—look ye here!” exclaimed D. Wragg, assuming not to have heard the last remark; “don’t you make no mistake. You’ve searched all from top to bottom now, gents, so let’s have an end of all this game.”

“Stand aside, will you,” cried the sergeant, roughly; and forcing D. Wragg back, he strode up to the sacks, threw them down one after the other, and felt through them.

“Pooh! corks!” he exclaimed, contemptuously, after a few moments’ examination. “Don’t know what you want with corks up here though, master. What’s in the basket? Tied down, eh?”

“Now look here, don’t you make no mistake—don’t now—I purtest agen it all.”

With a fierce rush, D. Wragg threw himself upon the great basket, clinging frantically thereto, and struggling viciously, and kicking with his club boot at the men who tried to drag him away.

A sharp scuffle ensued, for the dealer clung tightly to the great flat hamper, and it was not till after quite a battle that D. Wragg was dragged from his hold, to stand panting, hot, and glaring of eye, gazing from one to the other.

“Now do, sir—do take my advice,” said the sergeant, once more drawing Harry Clayton aside. “I tell you frankly, I don’t like the look of things; and only think of the old gentleman, sir, if anything should prove to be wrong. You’d better take him away—you had indeed.”

He left Clayton, and, as if seeking to make delays, went and spoke to the constables, and then threatened to handcuff the dealer if he did not quietly submit.

“I don’t care,” said D. Wragg; “you may handcuff me, and leg-cuff me, and put a collar round my neck if you like; but I ain’t agoin’ to stand still and see my place pulled all to pieces for nothing at all. Don’t you make—”

“There! hold your tongue!” cried the sergeant; and he turned round to gaze at Harry Clayton, who had slowly crossed to where Sir Francis was standing, pondering the while upon the detective’s meaning looks and words.

He laid his hand upon the old man’s arm, but Sir Francis, on hearing his words, although he shudderingly turned from

where lay the basket, sternly refused to go, and moved Harry aside as he grew more earnest and pressing.

Sergeant Falkner shrugged his shoulders, and muttered something about the obstinacy of old folks. Then he turned away, and, as a groan burst from D. Wragg, and he struggled with his captors, the basket was approached, the string that tied down the lid was cut; the said lid, set quite free, was dashed open, and then the sergeant stood gazing excitedly down into the straw which covered something with which the great wicker case was filled.

“Here! hold a lanthorn here, somebody,” cried the sergeant; and one of the men who were holding D. Wragg darted eagerly forward, making the rays of his bull’s-eye fall full upon the straw, when, after parting it a little, the lid was dashed down again, and the sergeant sat upon it, wiping his hot forehead.

“Pooh! what a fool I am!” he ejaculated the next instant; “but really for a while I thought—. Well, Mr Wragg, I think we’ve done up here for the present; but ’pon my soul, if I had a lot of stolen hams in my attic, I don’t think I should tell the police quite so plainly as you did that every one of them belonged to some one else.”

End of Volume Two.

Volume Three—Chapter One.

Disappointment.

Five minutes after, his brain in a whirl from the reaction that had taken place, when—wound up to expect some great horror—he had found nothing but that which was trifling and absurd, Sir Francis Redgrave was seated in the Frenchman’s room; for he had turned sick and faint, and brandy had been procured for him, Patty eagerly bringing forward glass and water, for Janet seemed completely unnerved, and had sunk down on a low seat with her face in her hands, as if stunned.

“You look young, and good, and pure-minded,” said the old man, feebly, as he looked fixedly in Patty’s fair young face, as she gazed sympathisingly in his countenance. “Listen to me, my child—for you are quite a child to me. Perhaps you know I am seeking my boy, my only child. I can see through it now. In his folly he was attracted here by you. I don’t reproach you; I say nothing harsh, only pray you humbly, as his father, to tell me where they have placed him. Is he dead? Has he been inveigled into some den for the sake of his money? Only tell me—only let me be at peace, and I will bless you. Do you know? Do not be afraid to answer. You shall be protected, even if it were for life, should it prove necessary. The man below has sworn that my son entered this house, and did not come out again.”

“Yes—Jack Screwby,” said the sergeant, interposing, and nodding his head as he spoke.

“Tell me then, my child,” continued Sir Francis, “and I will bless you, pray for you, offer up an old man’s prayers for your happiness—only set me free from this horrible suspense. Tell me even if he is dead.”

Patty sobbed as she gazed in the old man’s face, and then with an effort she exclaimed—

“It’s all false, every word. That man is a bad, cruel fellow, and the enemy of my friends here. What he has said is not true, I am certain of it.”

“You are in league with these people,” said the old man, turning from her.

“No—no—no! What I said is true—quite true,” sobbed Patty.

But the old man refused to hear her, and turned to speak to Janet; but she shrank from him, cowering in a corner with a childlike display of fear, and only glancing at him from time to time, as if horror-stricken.

“You see,” said Sir Francis, “she knows all, and dare not approach to tell it. That there is some fearful mystery here, I feel more and more convinced; but, doubtless, in God’s good time all will be brought to light.”

He rose as he spoke, and approached Janet, who shrank from him more and more, waving her hand to keep him off her, and each moment growing more frightened and hysterical.

“Come, my friends,” said Sir Francis, drawing back with a bitter sigh, as he saw the uselessness of pressing inquiry in Janet’s case, “let us go. Constable, you will sift this matter to the very bottom.”

The sergeant nodded shortly, and Sir Francis turned towards the door; but Patty flew to him, and caught one of his hands.

“Oh, sir!” she cried, “can you not believe me? Indeed, indeed, I have spoken the truth. Your son did come many times, I know; but I hate him,” she cried, naïvely. “I would not, though, nor would any one here, hurt a hair of his head. We could not help his coming; and if he were here on that Tuesday night, I did not see him when I came. I am sorry—indeed I am; and I pity you from the bottom of my heart, for we have our feelings even as you rich people have.”

“But not feeling enough to ease a poor old man’s heart,” said Sir Francis, coldly, as thrusting her back, he took another step towards the door.

“He does not believe me—he does not believe me!” sobbed Patty, clasping her hands together, and then, excitedly, she exclaimed—“Does no one believe what I say?”

“I do, Miss Pellet, from my soul,” exclaimed a deep voice, and, stepping forward, Harry Clayton caught her clasped hands in his, as the young girl joyfully met his gaze.

But this was but for a moment; the next instant had hardly passed before her eyes fell, she hastily drew back her hands, and, with a heavy sigh, she shrank back to where Janet cowered in her chair, and stayed there until, one by one, the others went out, leaving the two friends the sole occupants of the room.

“Are they all gone?” whispered Janet at last, from where she had hidden her face in Patty’s breast.

“Yes; all—all,” said the agitated girl.

“I could not bear to look at the suffering old man,” said Janet, huskily. “It seemed to me as if he would be able to read in my face all that I felt, and so I acted like a frightened child, and he must have looked upon me as almost an idiot. But it is very horrible, Patty; and I seem to see the poor boy always before my eyes, with his white forehead all dabbled in blood, and his face pale and ghostlike. I dream of him so every night, and I know I feel as if something dreadful had happened. But what does it all mean?”

“Oh, hush—oh, hush!” said Patty; while Mrs Winks, who had just returned, buried her face in her apron, and seating herself upon the floor, as more lowly than a chair, she rocked herself to and fro, in the true sympathy she felt for the distressed girls.

“Why did they come here at all?” cried Janet, fiercely. “We were happy in our poor way before that; and now they have made us wretched for life. But Patty, Patty, this sight—this horrid vision—which I always have before me;” and as she spoke, she looked straight before her with hot and straining eyes. “What does it mean? I feel sometimes that I cannot bear it.”

Patty tried hard to soothe her companion; but her efforts seemed to be absolutely in vain, so wild and excited had Janet grown. At times her hearers shuddered as they listened to her exclamations, Mrs Winks even going so far as to glance over her shoulder to make sure that nothing of the kind described was really present.

Then for a time the poor girl calmed down, and Patty began to hope that her soothing words had taken effect; but soon there came a repetition, and Janet raised her head to stare straight before her, as she exclaimed:—

“It seems, at times, as if I could not bear it—as if it would send me mad; for he is in pain, I know—I feel. He is wounded—perhaps dead; and oh, Patty,” she whispered, her face, her voice softening as she leaned her forehead upon her companion’s shoulder, “I love him so—so dearly.”

Kissing her tenderly, smoothing her hair fondly the while, Patty tried to whisper comfort to the fluttering aching heart, beating so wildly within that deformed breast.

But all seemed in vain; the troubled spirit refused to be comforted, for it knew its desolation, and that even if Lionel Redgrave were found to be living and well, there was no hope, no rest for her.

“Try not to cry so much, dear,” said Patty, simply. “It will make your head ache.”

“Better the head than the heart, Patty,” cried Janet, passionately. “Oh, I wish I was dead—I wish I was dead!”

“Hush, hush, dear! how can you?” whispered Patty. “Try, do try to keep it back.”

“Yes, yes,” said Janet, with a sigh that was more like a groan. “I will be patient, I will try and bear it, and you will try and pray with me, Patty, that he may be safe and well, and restored to the good old man, his father. Oh! how I longed to be near him—to go on my knees by his side; and when he asked me to come, it was almost more than I could bear. Something seemed to be drawing me to him, and again something was dragging me back. Patty, how do people feel when they go mad? Is it anything like what I have been suffering these last few days?”

“Did you not promise me that you would be calm?” whispered Patty, soothingly.

“Yes, yes, I know I did, and I am trying; but you will pray too, Patty dear, will you not?”

“Yes,” answered Patty, as she clung close to the poor suffering girl. “I will pray too.”

“But *he* believed you, Patty,” Janet exclaimed, suddenly; “and came to your side then, like a lover should. I was in trouble, but all the same I could see his proud look. He loves you—he loves you!”

“Oh! hush, Janet, hush!” cried Patty, wearily. “Am I not unhappy enough? It can never—never be! And besides,” she added, proudly, as her pale cheeks flamed up, “does he not love somebody else?”

“Here’s somebody a-comin’,” cried Mrs Winks, suddenly starting into life from the bundle of collapsed clothes that seemed to be heaped the minute before upon the floor. “Most likely it’s Mr Pellet come to fetch you, my dear; and oh! what faces we three have got!—all swelled up with cryin’ so as was never seen. What’s goin’ to come of us all? for, dear me, if it ain’t for all the world like a scene in a play, with the lovers all going crosswise and the others crooked; and I declare once if I didn’t think as the curtain was going to come down in a minute, and I should have to fetch my basket. But there! do wipe your eyes, my dears—there’s somebody a-comin’; and it’s glad I shall be when it comes to the last act, and everybody’s made happy ever after—except Jack Screwby, as is the bad villin of the whole piece. Come, dry your eyes, do.”

Mrs Winks gave her own optics a most tremendous scrub with her apron as she spoke, drying them certainly, but at the same time making them far more red. Then she made an elephantine kind of movement towards the door,

holding it to with one hand, signalling with the other to her young companions to remove the remaining traces of tears, and nodding and frowning till there was a gentle tap, and a voice said from the outside—

“May we come in?”

“Ah!” exclaimed the stout dame, smiling, “I’m glad you’ve come home, Mr Canau,” as, on her opening the door, the Frenchman entered the room, closely followed by Jared Pellet, who raised his eyebrows as he saw the traces of the tears the girls had shed.

“I only wish you’d been here, Mr Canau, I do!” exclaimed Mrs Winks; “for it’s dreadful, people coming and going on as they do and half fainting away for brandy.”

Jared looked serious as he heard the narrative of what had taken place, and then he glanced uneasily from one to the other, ending by sighing as he thought of how much trouble there was in the world; and soon after Patty and he were hurrying through the streets, with the poor-box uppermost in Jared’s thoughts, so that he had not a word for his child.

Volume Three—Chapter Two.

Confidential.

D. Wragg seemed to think that, in spite of his words, the mistake might be on his side if he made any complaints about the treatment he had received from the police. Once or twice he bristled up, and seemed to be making ready for a grand eruption; but second thoughts always came in time to calm him down, and those second thoughts, as a rule, related to the three dogs in the attic, the sacks of new corks, and the large flat hamper of Westphalia hams, respecting the possession of which goods he would not have liked to be too closely questioned.

That the police still had an eye upon his place he was sure; for he had many little quiet hints to that effect from friends outside, who knew a policeman in plain-clothes quite as well as if he were in uniform, and who, in consequence, were rather given to laughing at the popular notion that plain-clothes officers were able to mix here and there unknown with any society they might choose. But as the police seemed disposed to confine their attentions to a little quiet surveillance, and in other respects left him quite at peace, D. Wragg did not conceive that it would be advisable to beard the lions of the public order in their dens; so he winked to himself, watched anxiously every bystander who struck him as being at all like a policeman in *mufti*, and contented himself with talking largely to his confidential friends, though how far he was placing confidence in them remains to be proved.

“Look here, you know,” he said to Monsieur Canau one morning, when they had met on that neutral ground the passage, and adjourn ed to the shop, where they stood looking at one another in a curious distrustful fashion,—“look here, you know; we’re old friends, and you’ve lodged with me goodness knows how many years. I don’t mind speaking out before you. But don’t you make no mistake; there ain’t nothing kept back by me. As to them dorgs, how could I help about the dorgs when friends comes to me and says, ‘My dorg ain’t quite the thing to-day; I think I’ll get you to give him a dust o’ your distemper powder.’ And another one says, ‘I wish you’d take my dorg for a bit, and see if you think it’s mange as is a-comin’ on;’ while directly after comes another with a skye wiry, and says as he isn’t satisfied with the sit of his dorg’s ears, nor the way he sets up his tail. Well, in course I has to see to these things for ’em, my place being a sorter orspittle; and that’s how them dorgs come to be up-stairs; and the way they’ve come on since I’ve had ’em is something wonderful.”

Monsieur Canau nodded, and began to roll up a cigarette with clever manipulating fingers, keeping his eyes half closed the while, and smiling in a strange reserved way, that might have meant amusement, contempt, or merely sociability.

D. Wragg saw it, and became directly more impressive in his manner.

“Look here, you know,” he continued, earnestly; “I don’t mind speaking out before you. Don’t you make no mistake; we’re old friends, and this is how it is. Don’t you see, it’s all a plant as that there Jack Screwby got up because I as good as kicked him out—a vagabond! Wanted to come sneaking here after—but there!” he jerked out, throwing himself into quite a convulsion of spasmodic kicks, and scattering imaginary turnip-seed by the handful;—“I won’t talk about that no more. Only look here, you know; you’re my lodger, and I like my lodgers to look up to their landlord with respect; so don’t you make no mistake, and go for to think as them corks ain’t all square, because they air—square as square.”

Canau nodded, and lit his cigarette.

“Look here, you know,” continued D. Wragg; “it’s like this here—A man comes to you and he says, ‘I want two score o’ blue rocks’—pigeons, you know, for trap-shooting, a thing as you furriners can’t understand, though you may come to some day. Well, he says, ‘I want two score o’ blue rocks, and I ain’t got no money, but I’ve got corks;’ and corks, you know, is money, if there ain’t no money, same as, when there warn’t no money, people used to swop. Well, then, we settles it in that way—wally for wally—he has blue rocks, and I has corks; and he’ll sell his blue rocks for money to the swells, and I shall sell my corks for money to a chap I knows as makes ginger-pop. And now, what’s the matter? No one can’t say after that as them corks ain’t square, can they?”

“But there was the ham,” said Canau, apparently disposed to cavil.

“Don’t you make no mistake about that. That there ham’s sweet enough; nothing couldn’t be squarer. We like ham, we do; and Mother Winks is mortal partial to a rasher. That’s why I laid in a stock.”

“Um!” said Canau, exhaling a thin cloud of smoke; “and about—about the young man?”

“Well,” said D. Wragg, looking sidewise out of his little eyes, “perhaps I worn’t quite square over that; for you see the young chap was all on the stare about little Pellet; and as he seemed ready to buy half the shop if she was likely to be here, I did think we might as well make a few pounds extry; for times is werry hard, you know, Mr Canau, and expenses is werry great: things runs up ’orrid.”

Canau smoked fiercely, his yellow forehead growing knit and angry-looking; but he did not speak.

“She didn’t like it, though,” continued D. Wragg; “and don’t you make no mistake: I was sorry for it afterwards, and called myself a bumble-footed old beast when I see her a cryin’. But don’t you make no mistake; as soon as I see she didn’t like it, why, bless her little heart, I says, ‘Don’t you go in the shop no more than you like, my pet,’ I says; and, bless her, she said she done it for poor Janet’s sake.”

D. Wragg seemed to be so affected by his recollections that he drew out a pocket-handkerchief and removed a faint drop of moisture from the corner of one eye, and another from the right side of his nose with the stem of his pipe, Canau nodding satisfaction the while many times over—seeming, too, more tranquil of spirit, for the puffs of smoke from his cigarette were evolved far more slowly, and went curling gently upwards towards the ceiling of the shop.

“I like natur, Mr Canau,” said D. Wragg, “and being a spoiled child of natur myself, I always did like natur. That little Pellet’s like, as you may say, natur’s cream, all served up together. Dorgs is natur, and all these here’s natur.”

D. Wragg paused, inserted his left thumb in the armhole of his vest, and with the other hand gracefully waved round the stem of his pipe, indicating in turn the caged prisoners around.

“I loved natur, Mr Canau, when I was a boy, and went birds’-nestin’ and ketchin’ frogs instead of goin’ to school, and took to the serciety of bird-ketchers, which is men of nat’ral habits, as is in some things a pleasure to know. It was my love of natur, Mr Canau, as fust set me beginning trade—selling ’edge-hogs and greenfinches and nesties of young birds in the streets; and it was natur as made me to prosper and get into this here large way of business. I’m a London man bred and born, though justice worn’t done me in either case—for I’m wideawake to what’s wrong with me; but I’ll back myself in nat’ral history to tell anything you like, from a ork down to a tom-tit, and t’other way from a mouse up to a helephant—if so be as they’re all English. For, you see, I never went travelling, only once, when I went round for a whole year with Wombwell’s nadgery, feeding the wild beasties, and helping to put the carrywans straight,—and all from a love of natur, Mr Canau, though you did get rather more natur there than you liked, ’specially as regards smells, and bein’ kep’ awake of a night by the hyenas a laughin’, or them great furrin cats letting go like hooray—let alone the other things. And that was why I left it and took to dorgs,—selling washed pups at carriage-doors, warranted never to get no bigger. And look here,” he continued, with a grin; “if ever you should take to that there trade, I’ll put you up to a breed as the pups is the werry smallest in natur, and washes the whitest in natur; but as for the size they grows up to in a swell’s house, where they’re fed up like bloated haristocrats, with their chicking and weal cutlet, and all that sorter thing, and the colour they gets to—my!”

Mr D. Wragg chuckled loudly as he described this freak of “natur;” but it was observable that the puffs of smoke from Canau’s cigarette came swiftly, as he still watched the dealer with a strange indescribable expression.

“I love natur, Mr Canau; and that’s how it is I always did love babies and little gals, for they is natur, the prettiest bits of all. I can always kiss them little soft bits of natur, babies—if so be as they’re clean, but to be dirty down here in Decadia, ’tis their natur to. But you see they ain’t werry fond o’ being kissed by me, not being no ways handsome. Natur never took no pains with me when she made me, you know. I don’t believe as I were ever finished, and ’cordingly I wear this thick boot. But this here set out’s quite upset me, Mr Canau, and I don’t think I shall have any more to do with dorgs. I’ll keep to birds only; for just fancy having the police in your house, and wanting to make out as you’ve got a young fellow burked away somewhere, and frightening them poor girls a’most to death! You know it’s nothing but that upset as has made poor Mother Winks slip out to get that ginger-beer bottle of her’s filled so many times. She don’t generally do more in that way than we do with our ’bacco.”

“I listen to all you say,” said Monsieur Canau now, for D. Wragg was almost breathless; “but this does not explain. Where is the young man?”

“How should I know?” snarled D. Wragg, fiercely. “You don’t suppose I’ve had any hand in it, do you? How should I know where he is?”

“But he came here, and he is gone,” said the Frenchman.

“Well, suppose he is,” said D. Wragg, sulkily. “He came here, and he is gone. How should I know where he is gone. Into the sewers or down the river for aught I know. Do you know where he is gone?”

“Who? who? do I know?” cried Canau, excitedly. “No, no—no, no! I know nothing. I have not seen him here or anywhere at all lately. I do not know anything about him—nothing at all.”

“No more don’t I,” growled D. Wragg, sullenly.

“You do not? You will swear you know nothing at all of the poor young man?”

“Course I will,” said D. Wragg, stoutly. “He’s got dropped on to by somebody; and no wonder. Dessay its part of Jack Screwby’s lot; but I ain’t going to blow upon anybody. He thought that he was very cunning in setting it down to my door so as to get it away from his; but he didn’t work much out of it anyhow. The young chap was safe to come in for it though, flashing about streets like these here with his gold watches and chains and rings, when there’s hundreds of hungry mouths about, and hundreds of fingers itching to snatch at ’em. And since you come to that, don’t you make

no mistake; I never does nothing as ain't honest. But, mind you, I don't say as Jack Screwby knows all about it. I'd just as soon say you do, for you know as you didn't like his coming."

"Who?—I?—I know? Not I—nothing at all," cried Canau, very heartily. "But I will take one more little pinch of tabaque, Monsieur Wragg," he said, with the extreme of cold politeness; "and then you will excuse—I go to my promenade."

D. Wragg gazed curiously at his sallow lodger, as he prepared himself another cigarette, till, as if feeling that he was watched, Canau stealthily raised his eyes till they encountered those of the dealer, when, for a few moments the two men stood, each trying to read the other's thoughts, till, lowering his lids, Monsieur Canau lit his cigarette, raised his pinched hat a few inches, and then slowly left the shop.

Volume Three—Chapter Three.

After the Search.

Upon several occasions when Monsieur Canau saw Patty home to the pleasant manufacturing shades of Duplex Street, he sought to open up this affair with Jared Pellet, so as to hear his opinion upon the subject; but it was only to find Jared dull and abstracted, and ready to return monosyllabic answers to all that was said. Twice over he had called too, bringing with him his violin; but upon those occasions weary-looking Tim Ruggles had been there, and no music had followed—no Mozart, not even one of Corelli's old sad-toned minor trios, with movements named after the dances of our forefathers, corantos and sarabands; funeral marches they ought rather to have been, unless it is that music grows mellow and sad-hued with age, changing even after the fashion of wine.

Monsieur Canau used to divine that there was trouble afloat, and refrained from hinting at the object of his visits, contenting himself with buying a couple of Jared's atrocious Roman strings, and then coming away.

"They have a bébé there," muttered Canau, "that is like a music-box; and I think they wind him up every night just before I go, for he is always cry."

It was as patent to Monsieur Canau as to D. Wragg that the Brownjohn Street house was under police surveillance, for there was often some stranger to be seen loitering about, one very ordinary-looking individual, trying very hard not to seem as if watching the former as he went out.

But D. Wragg was not deceived in the slightest degree, for beside his great experience of 'natur,' he had attempted to acquire something of art—to wit, police art—enough to enable him to point out, with the accompaniment of a peculiar wink, the plain-clothes officer to his French lodger, who had, however, only replied by a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, and a look in another direction.

But D. Wragg did not look another way, evidently bent upon wearing the aspect of utter defiance of the law. He stood now at his shop-door fiercely smoking, giving himself twitches and jerks that quite scared such of his stock-in-trade as were in close proximity, and sent his dogs shrinking back, snapping and snarling, whenever he turned their way.

Mr John Screwby and he had encountered more than once—the former gentleman making a practice of insulting the dealer; and, as if out of revenge for his non-success in obtaining the two hundred pounds reward,—staring up at the front of the house, or making believe, with a grin, to peer down into the cellar,—movements which made D. Wragg, under the idea that he was gnashing his teeth like an ordinary mortal, snap and snarl like a flea-bitten terrier.

Upon this day, it was fated that, as soon as Monsieur Canau was out of sight, Mr John Screwby should appear loafing along the opposite side of the road, so far from upright in his conduct, that he rubbed his right shoulder here and there against wall and window-frame as he passed. His cap was drawn down over his ears, a piece of straw in his mouth, and his hands right above the wrists in his pockets, and their owner staring heavily here and there after something fresh, till he came in sight of D. Wragg. Now he grinned spitefully, and, walking slowly on, stopped at last opposite the dealer's house, to stare heavily up at the attic windows, shading his eyes, leaning a little on this side and a little on that, as if eagerly searching for something to be seen. Then, according to custom, he crossed the road to gaze for a moment through the cellar-grating, holding one hand to his ear as if listening attentively; and then fixing his eyes upon the dirty sash of the window seen through the grating, he began to walk slowly backwards and forwards, totally ignoring the presence of D. Wragg the while.

"There'll be a row directly, Mr Jack Screwby," said the dealer, with a sharp snarl, as he stood watching his enemy's actions.

Mr Screwby took not the slightest notice of the speaker, only stopped short as if he had caught a glimpse of something.

"I wonder wot they've done with the pore chap!" he said at last, in quite a loud voice. "I shouldn't be a bit s'prised if they've berried 'im in the kitchin."

"If I could have my way with you, young fellow, I'd serve you out for this!" said D. Wragg, shaking his fist, to the great amusement of a small crowd fast collecting.

"What 'ud you do with me, eh?" said Screwby, with a grin. "Burke me, like the pore chap as come arter his dorg, eh?"

"You wouldn't dare to talk like that there, Jack Screwby, if I was a man of your own size and age," said D. Wragg, viciously.

"P'raps I should—p'raps I shouldn't," sneered Screwby. "But how about the pore young man?"

D. Wragg made a terrier-like movement, as if about to rush at a bull-dog, to the great delight of the crowd, especially as at that moment the thick new boot, freshly completed by Mr Purkis, caught in the grating, and D. Wragg nearly fell.

“Don’t let him come a-nigh you,” said Screwby, grinning, “or he’ll serve you same as he did the pore young man.”

Here there was another shout, and the popular feeling seemed to be growing so strong, that, raging within himself, D. Wragg began to think it would be prudent to retreat, and he did so, followed by a loud jeering laugh.

But even now he was not to have peace, for he had hardly reached the sanctuary of his own room before a couple of small boys, probably incited thereto by Mr John Screwby, thrust their heads in at the shop-door, to roar, at the utmost pitch of their shrill treble—

“Who burked the boy?” fleeing the next moment as if for their very lives, on hearing the scraping of the dealer’s chair.

This is merely a sample of the unpleasantness that the little dealer was called upon to bear; for Mr Screwby was exceedingly bitter against the house of Wragg, inasmuch as there had been no discovery made—not even the trace or tiny ravelling of a thread sufficient to commence a clue; and what was more, Sergeant Falkner had strongly negatived the necessity for rewarding him, even in the slightest degree—though, unseen by the police, Clayton had slipped a sovereign into the man’s hand.

But what was a sovereign as compared with the golden heap that two hundred would have made? And then what things it would have bought! Mr John Screwby had already gloated over several articles—notably a brown fur cap, dyed catskin, which he coveted hugely; but now the whole of his air-built castle was swept away; and to make matters ten times worse, he had been requested by the sergeant not to show himself anywhere near a certain number in Regent Street any more.

This last was rather a serious command, for it was indeed a special order, although couched in the form of a request. To a gentleman in Mr Screwby’s circumstances, matters might turn out very unpleasantly if he slighted the sergeant’s impressive words.

Under these circumstances, though not caring a jot for the fate of Lionel Redgrave, Mr John Screwby, failing money, determined to have the full measure of his revenge, brimming over, if it were possible, and therefore he joined himself heart and soul to the party whose every effort was directed towards the elucidation of the mystery which had prostrated Sir Francis. For after striving most manfully to fight against bodily weakness, the old baronet lay at his son’s chambers in a state upon which the medical men consulted declined to give a decided opinion.

To a bystander Sir Francis seemed weak and perfectly helpless, but a few words relating to information would galvanise him into life once more; and so it was that one afternoon, when a rough, waterside-looking fellow presented himself, Sir Francis immediately ordered him to be shown up.

Volume Three—Chapter Four.

The New Clue.

“He’s been out again, sir,” said Mr Stiff to Clayton, as he entered the passage.

“What! Sir Francis?”

“Yes, sir. A man came from down Bermondsey way, and said he had some news, and I daren’t refuse him. You know, sir, it might be valuable, and it would not do for me to be shutting off the very bit of information that might be worth anything.”

“What kind of man was it?” asked Harry.

“Poor Jack sort of fellow, sir, from river stairs; and I told Sir Francis, as he told me to tell him of everybody who called only this morning again, and I showed the man up. Then they went off together in a cab, and he’s just come back, sir.”

“What madness—in his state!” exclaimed Harry, and he hurried up the stairs to find Sir Francis seated on a low chair, with his face buried in his hands.

Sir Francis looked up as the young man entered, to gaze at him in a confused, dazed way, as if he did not quite comprehend the meaning of his coming.

“Was not this rather foolish of you, Sir Francis?” said Harry, gently. “Indeed you are in no condition for going out. I see how it is, though, and I feared it when you put in the advertisement; the very name of the chambers in Regent Street was enough to bring down a host of reward-seekers. Why did you not take my advice, and refer them to the police?”

“I couldn’t, Clayton—I couldn’t,” groaned Sir Francis. “You do not know what I feel, or you would not speak to me as you do. Poor lad!—poor lad!”

Harry was silent for a few minutes, and then he spoke again.

“It was, of course, a useless quest, sir?”

“I can’t tell—I don’t know,” said Sir Francis, feebly. “I am confused and troubled in the head, Clayton, and I have been trying hard to recollect what it all was, and what I did; but as soon as I grasp anything, it seems to glide from me again.”

“Lie down, sir,” said Harry, gently, and he passed an arm beneath that of the old man.

“Not yet—not yet—not yet, Clayton. I think I have it now. Yes, that is it—I have it. The man came and said they had found some one by the river-side, and I went half-way with him; and then I suppose I must have fainted, for I can recollect no more, only that I was brought back—or no, I think I must have found my way back by myself. This weakness is a cruel trial just now.”

“You must put your strength to the test no more, sir,” said Harry, firmly. “Try and believe that I will do all that is possible. Indeed, I will leave no stone unturned.”

“I know it, Clayton—I know it!” exclaimed Sir Francis; “and indeed I do try, but this suspense is at times more than I can bear.”

At the young man’s persuasion, he now went to lie down, giving up in a weary vacant manner the effort to recollect where the man had been about to take him. He tried once to recall the names, till Harry felt a dread of delirium setting in, and it was only by his promising to follow up the clue that had been freshly opened out, that he kept the afflicted father to his couch.

Once more alone, Harry rang for Stiff, who, however, could only repeat what he had before said, and his querist was puzzled as to what should be the next steps taken.

The problem was solved by the waterside man himself, who came, he said, to see if the gentleman was well enough to go now.

“He turned ill in the cab, did he not?” said Clayton.

“Yes, sir; would go in a cab, he would. I don’t like ’em—ready to choke yer, they are; but he wouldn’t come on a ’bus. ’Fore we’d gone far, he turns as white as his hankychy, and shuts his eyes curus like, and gets all nohow in what he was a saying; but he says, he does, ‘Take me back, and come agen.’ So I brought him back, and now I’ve comed agen.”

“And now, what is your news?” said Harry. “The gentleman has placed it in my hands.”

The man looked curiously at him for a few minutes, and then rubbed the bridge of his nose with a rough hand.

“But you see, sir, this is a matter o’ offring rewards for some one as is missing, and I’ve got a mate in this here job. For, you know, as soon as ever there’s a notice up o’ that sort, my mate and I begins to look out, so as to try if we can’t find what’s missing, and get what’s offered. Now, I ask your parding, sir, but I should like to know who you may be, and what you’ve got to do with it at all? S’pose I leads you to it, shall we get the ready?”

“You may deal with me precisely as you did with the gentleman you saw before. You know for yourself that he is too ill to leave the house, and he has deputed me to act for him, as I told you.”

“True for you, sir—I did see it; and as you seem to be a gent as is all right, let’s go.”

A cab was brought, and, not without a glance at his unsavoury companion, Harry followed him into the vehicle.

“Hadn’t yer better let me ride outside, sir?” said the man, looking at the stuffed and cushioned interior with an aspect of disgust.

“No,” said Harry; “I want to know what more you have to say respecting this affair.”

The man gave a tug at an imaginary forelock, and then waited apparently to be questioned, while Harry took in his outward appearance at a glance.

He was rough and dirty enough to have passed for the veriest vagabond in existence, but all the same he did not seem as if he belonged to that portion of society that has been dubbed “the dangerous classes;” for there was a good open aspect to the brown face, and though the Bardolphian nose told tales of drams taken to keep out the cold river mists, on either side a frank grey eye looked you full in the face; while, greatest test of all, the fellow’s palms were hard and horny, and ended by fingers that had been chipped, bent, bruised, and distorted by hard labour.

“Well, sir,” said the man, “I ain’t got much to tell you; only that, seeing the reward up, my mate and me thought we might as well have it as any one else, so we set to and—”

“You found him?” exclaimed Harry, eagerly.

“Well, sir, that’s for you to say when you sees him. My mate generally sees people about these sorter things, but I come to-day; and a fine job I had to get to know where you lived, for I’d forgot the number; but I found out at last from a gal cleaning the door-step close by. It don’t do for us, you know, to go to no police—they humbugs a man about so; and I don’t know now whether they ain’t been down on my mate, ’cos you see we didn’t want to say nothing to them till as how you’d been and seen it.”

Harry shuddered at that last word “it;” there was something so repellent, though at the same time expressive, in the one tiny syllable *it* now, not *him*; and again he shuddered as he thought of the ordeal through which he had to go. He roused himself at last, though, to ask a few questions as the cab drove on, the driver making his way over the river to the Surrey side; and, as soon as they were in the comparative silence of the narrow streets, Harry learned that during the past night his companion had been successful in his search, and that what he had sought lay now in a boat-house far down the Thames in the low-lying district where wharf and dock and rickety stairs, or steam-boat pier, alternate with muddy-pile and drain, with bank after bank of slime, over which the water of the swift tide seemed to glide and play, here and there washing it up into a foul frothy scum, compounded of the poisonous refuse daily cast into the mighty stream.

It was a long ride, down deplorable looking streets, where wretched tumble-down tenements, with frowsy aspect and dingy, patchy windows, were dominated by lordly warehouses, with great gallows-like cranes at every floor—floors six, seven, and eight stories from the ground—from whose open doors men stood gazing down as coolly as if they were on *terra firma*, though a moment’s giddiness must have precipitated them into the street below.

Harry saw all this as they rode slowly on, in spite of the pre-occupation of his thoughts, as he tried to nerve himself for the task to come. Probably his brain was abnormally excited, and the pictures of the panorama passing the cab-window seemed to force themselves upon him. Now he was apparently interested in the places where the ship-chandlers hung out their wares; the next minute, the gate of a dock, with its scores of labourers waiting for a job, took his attention; or low public-houses and beer-shops, with their lounging knots of customers, half labourer, half sailor, or lighterman, with the inevitable brazen, high-cheeked, muscular woman. A little farther on, and he would be grazing at a clump of masts rising from behind high walls. Then came comparatively decent dwellings with a vast display of green paint, and to the doors brass knockers of the most dazzling lustre. In nearly every parlour-window he saw was a parrot of grey or gaudy hue swinging or climbing about. In front of more than one house were oyster forts with sham cannon; while others again had flagstaff’s rigged up with halyards, vane, and pennant, looking down upon the bruised figure-head of a ship which ornamented the neighbour’s garden.

Maritime population with maritime tastes, the houses of trading skippers and mates of small vessels. Sea-chests could be seen in baxrows at every turn, along with the big bolster-like bag that forms the orthodox portmanteau for a sailor’s kit. Here and there he passed, in full long-shore togs, the dwellers in the sea-savouring houses—passing along the pavement with one eye to windward, and the true nautical roll which told of sea-legs brought ashore.

On still, with the rattling of the wretched cab and its jangling windows seeming to form a tune which repeated itself ever to his ears. The man, from watching his companion, had taken to drumming the top of the door with his hard fingers, blackened and stained with tar, while from time to time he thrust out his head to give some direction or another to the driver, whose eccentric course seemed as if it would never end.

At last, though, the guide seemed to grow excited, giving his orders more frequently, the cab being slowly driven in and out of rugged, tortuous lanes, from one of which it had to back out, so as to give place to a waggon laden with ships’ spars and cables. Narrow ways seemed the rule, and down these the cab went jolting, till the driver drew up short at the end of a wretched alley.

Here the guide dismounted.

“Can’t get no furrer with cabs here, sir,” he said; “we must walk the rest on it.”

Harry told the driver to wait; and then, in a troubled state of mind, he followed his conductor in and out by wharf and crazy waterside shed, where paths were wet and muddy, and the few people seen looked poverty-stricken and repulsive. Tall walls heaved upward to shut out the light and air from the low, damp dwellings. A few yards farther and there was the din of iron as rivets were driven cherry-red into the plates of some huge metallic sea-ark. And again a little farther, and they were where corn ran in teeming golden cascades out of shoots to lighter or granary. Farther still, and the rap, rap, incessant rap, of the caulkers’ hammers were heard as they drove in the tarry oakum between the seams of the wooden vessels.

Iron-workers, black and grimy, painters, carpenters, rope-makers, all were busy here. Steam hissed and roared and shrieked, as it escaped from some torturing engine in white wreaths, like the ghost of dead water hurrying to its heaven of clouds far above the grimy earth. All forced itself upon Harry Clayton’s brain, as he followed his conductor to where there were loose stones and mud beneath his feet, the black rushing river on his left hand, and on his right slimy piles, black and green and brown, with the bolts protruding, and iron rings hanging from their sides, all eaten and worn away.

There was a channel leading to some dock close by, and foul water was babbling noisily down through a pair of sluice-falls, and this too struck him painfully as the plashing fell upon his ear.

All passed away, though, but the one shudder-engendering idea of that which he had come to see; for a rough harsh voice, proceeding from another amphibious muddy being, said:—

“You’ve found some one, then?”

“Ay!” was the response from Harry Clayton’s conductor; and making to the right, the young man found himself beside a low, wet, half-rotten shed.

Volume Three—Chapter Five.

What the Shed Held.

Harry Clayton felt his breath come thick and fast as he caught sight of the low place by his side. It was a boat-house evidently, and was roughly built of the hole-filled planks torn from the side of some ship taken to the breaker's yard. The door was secured with a large rusty padlock, and the amphibious-looking man, now introduced as "my mate," had evidently been doing duty as a sentry, seated upon a post, and smoking a long clay pipe, troubled not in the slightest degree that within a few feet, dripping, soddened, battered by contact with pier and pile, lay the nameless dead, separated from him only by that badly-hung door facing the river, and through whose rifts and cracks and treenail-holes the interior could easily have been viewed.

The strongest of nerve might have shuddered as the man who had been keeping guard noisily unfastened the padlock, drew it from the staple, and was about to throw open the door of the hovel, when Harry abruptly arrested him.

"Are you sure that this answers to the description given?" he said, hoarsely.

"Sure on it! Oh yes, sir; that's right enough. You needn't go in without you like: you may take our word for it. But as soon as you're saddersfied, we must go and tell the perlice, or else there'll be a rumpus. They won't like it as it is, and'll be wanting to go in for the reward; but we looks to you, sir, as a genleman, to make all that right."

"I'll see justice done you," said Harry, still hesitating.

"Thanky, sir! You see, about them police, there's the inquiss, and the doctor, and the jury, and all of them to see it; but you may take our word for it as it's all right: it's him, sure enough."

"How—how do you suppose it happened?—by accident?"

"Well, sir," said the first man, "it don't look very accidental when a poor chap's got two knife-holes in his chest, and a cut across the head enough to do for any man. You may call it a accident if you like, but accidents don't turn a chap's pockets inside out, and take his watch and ring."

Harry glanced again shudderingly at the door. Should he go in, or should he stay? It was cruel work, but he had promised the father, and the duty must be performed. He could not help dreading to gaze upon the fair frank face that he knew of old; and as he thought, he recalled it, with its insolent smile of triumph, when they parted at the station. And now, barbarously mutilated, sullied with mud and water, perhaps it would be so changed as to be beyond the power of recognition.

And yet he knew that it must be done—that it was impossible for him to take the men's judgment, which must needs be of the most partial character.

There was nothing else for it, then, but to go, and he motioned to the man to throw open the door.

"I don't know as I'd go, sir, if I was you," said the man who had been his guide. "Give it up, sir, and take our word for it. We're used to this sorter thing; but it ain't pleasant to look at I wouldn't go in, sir, if I was you."

The man became so importunate at last, on seeing Harry's firmness, that the latter grew angry, for he had now nerved himself for his task; and without waiting to hear more, he muttered the two words, "Poor Lionel!" threw back the door, and strode in.

Almost as soon as he had crossed the threshold the door swung to behind him, leaving the place in semi-obscurity, for it was only illumined by the faint pencils of light that streamed in through the treenail-holes of the old planks,

But there was light enough to show Harry that he was standing in a place whose floor was of muddy shingle stones, with a plank laid down the centre, worn and furrowed by the long coursing to and fro upon it of the iron keel of some boat. A few broken oars and a small skiff's mast were leaned against the side in company with a boathook and a rude pole. Upon a peg hard by was a coil of rope and a grapnel; and again, in other parts, coils of rope and four-fluked, sharp-pointed grapnels, which made the visitor shudder as he thought of their purpose. Pieces of old iron, fragments of chain, scraps of rope, a ragged old ship's fender, and some pieces of drift wood, muddy, sodden, and jagged with old red water-corroded nails, were all that remained to take his attention, as his eyes wandered round the place, studiously avoiding and leaving to the last that which he had expressly come to see.

Oars, boathook, mast, cordage, they were all there, but where was the boat's sail? It was not in the boat—that he had seen when outside with the men.

Harry Clayton felt as if his mind were divided, and one portion were set in array against the other, questioning and responding, for the response was plain enough, and he knew that answer, though he had not seen that sail—could not see it now.

As he stood gazing upon the faint rays streaming down from between two loose tiles, falling here straight, there aslant, but all to cross and form a curious network of light with the rays pouring in from the side, he told himself that he was a coward; but the defensive part of his intelligence whispered in return, had this been the body of a stranger lying at his feet he could have calmly and sadly gazed upon the dead. But it was the dread of looking upon his friend —upon the man whom of late, but for a hard battle with self, he could have struck down as an enemy—to look upon him cut off in the flower of his youth, and by some dreadful death, in the midst of a wild freak, perhaps of dissipation.

Clayton paused, and he repeated these words—

"Had it been the body of a stranger!"

Then, as if a flash of light had illumined the meaning of those words, he started. "Had it been the body of a stranger!"

Why, after all, might it not be the earthly clay of some one unknown. It would be horrible still; but if he could bear back the tidings to that stricken old man that Lionel might still be living—that this was not he—how he could fervently say, “Thank Heaven!”

He stepped forward to where an old patched sail lay covering something in a pool of mud and water. The sailcloth was stained and dabbled with the mud; and a strange sense of shrinking seized upon Clayton as he stooped to lift one end.

He knew which to lift, for through the bare old cloth the human form could plainly be distinguished. It was not much to do to raise that cloth at the end for a brief moment. He could recognise Lionel in an instant; and nerving himself once more, he stooped hastily, raised the covering, and dropped it again, to mutter—nay, to exclaim loudly, with a fervour of tone that bespoke the intensity of the speaker’s feelings—“Thank God!”

Harry turned hastily away, and forced open the door to admit the light of day, and to confront the bearer of the tidings and his mate; for his glance had been but a momentary one. He had stood at the back, as he raised the sail, and in that moment’s glance he had seen no horrors—none of the distortions left sometimes by a fearful death; he had seen but one thing, and that was—

The man’s hair was black!

Volume Three—Chapter Six.

River-Side Hopes.

Harry Clayton hurriedly made his way back to the chambers, where he found Sir Francis hastily walking up and down the room.

“Ah! you are back!” he said, impatiently. “I fell asleep for quite two hours, and then I should have come after you, only the address the man gave had quite glided from my memory. It seems, Clayton, as if my head were so full of this one trouble that it will hold nothing else. But what news?”

“None, sir,” said Harry, quietly. “It was, thank Heaven, a mistake.”

“I don’t know, Clayton—I don’t know. This suspense is almost more agonising than the knowledge that my poor boy had really been found dead. I feel, at times, that I cannot bear it much longer. You saw this—this—”

“Yes, sir; I saw the body of some poor creature lying in a boat-shed; but it was not the one we seek.”

“Are you sure? You were not mistaken? You really did look to make sure?”

Harry smiled faintly, as he thought of his irresolution, and the way in which he had held back; and then he answered, calmly—

“Yes, Sir Francis; I made perfectly sure.”

It was pitiful to see the old man’s trouble—the constant agitation, the anxious gaze, the nervous restless motion of his hands—as he turned over some communication—some letter professing to give information respecting a young man in some far-off part of England or Wales—every despatch exciting hopes that were soon found to be perfectly baseless.

At length, after much persuasion, Sir Francis agreed to lie down, on the condition that Clayton would stay, ready to answer any communication that might arrive.

“You know, my dear boy, these things always will arrive when we are absent,” he said, pitifully.

“Trust me, Sir Francis,” was the reply. “I am indeed doing everything possible to lead to a discovery.”

The old man did not trust himself to speak; but wringing Harry’s hand, he despairingly left the room.

In the meantime, Harry’s sudden departure from before the boat-shed, far down on the muddy banks of the Thames, had not been allowed to pass uncanvassed by the two rough men, the seekers for such ghastly waifs and strays.

“Suv’rin,” said the one who had acted as guide, in answer to a query,

“Air you sure as there worn’t two?”

“I am,” said the other, with a wave of his pipe-stem. “Why, if there’d been two, wouldn’t you have heard ’em chink when he stuffed ’em in my hand?” said Sam, not at all relying upon the known integrity of his character for refutation of this sideways charge that he had kept back portion of the reward. “There’s what he give me,” he continued, holding out a sovereign in his horny palm; “and we’ll get it changed as soon as you like.”

“Yes,” said the other, speaking indistinctly, on account of the pipe between his lips; “we’ll get it changed afore we go on to the station.”

As he spoke, he carefully chained and padlocked the door of the shed, smoking coolly enough the while.

“I ain’t seen anything else up—no notice, nor nothing,” said Sam; “and we mustn’t wait no longer before givin’

information, or there'll be a row."

"No, there ain't nothing up," said the other, pocketing his key, and removing his pipe to expectorate. "I've been looking, and there's ony a bill up about a woman. He was precious pertickler. Why wouldn't this one do? All they wanted was some one to give a decent Christun buryin' to; and this here poor chap would ha' done as well as any other one, to ease their minds with."

"But you see he's got black hair, and on the bill it says fair curly hair," said Sam. "I was half afeard it wouldn't do."

"Yah! what does the colour of the hair matter?" grumbled the other. "I mean to say its reg'larly swindlin' us out of two 'undred pound. He'd ha' done as well as any other; and they might have 'ad their inkwist, and sat on him, and sworn to him, and said he was found drowned; and there'd ha' been a comfortable feelin', and they needn't ha' troubled themselves no more."

"Well, let's go and give notice; and then we'll change this here, and have a wet—eh, lad?"

"Ah! may as well," said the other, removing his pipe to draw an anticipatory hand across his mouth. "Let's see—tall and fair—curly hair—eh, Sam? Well, perhaps something may turn up yet time enough for us. That 'ere would have done safe enough if his hair had been right colour. Better luck next time—eh, lad?"

"Ah! dessay," said Sam, forcing the sovereign right to the bottom of his pocket. "Two 'undred pound reward! We ought to have had it old man; but who knows but what something mayn't turn up yet?"

Volume Three—Chapter Seven.

D. Wragg.

There was far from being peace in the house of Wragg, for the place had gained a most unenviable notoriety. Wrong-doings were prevalent enough in Decadia, but they were ordinary wrong-doings, and those who were guilty of peculiar acts were, as a rule, patted on the back by the fraternity. In fact, if 'Arry Burge, or Tom Gagan, or Micky Green was taken for a burglary or robbery with violence, there would always be a large following of admiring companions to see the culprit off to the station, to be present at the hearing, and to give him a friendly cheer during his handcuffed walk to the black van. They had no very great objection to a murder, and more than once a good hundred of neighbours had waited all night outside Newgate to see Bob, or Ben, or Joe, die game at eight o'clock in the morning. But this mysterious disappearance work was something not to be tolerated. There was too much of the Burke and Hare, and body-snatching about it; and consequently the name of Wragg stank in the nostrils of the clean-handed dwellers in Decadia, and the house in Brownjohn Street enjoyed for the time being but little peace.

D. Wragg could not show himself outside; and as for Canau, he had been mobbed twice, to return storming and angry, ready to threaten all sorts of vengeance upon his persecutors, foremost amongst whom was Mr John Screwby.

This gentleman seemed to have devoted himself heart and soul to the task of keeping alive in the Decadian mind the fact that Lionel Redgrave had been seen to go into the Brownjohn Street house, and had not been seen to come out; though all this rested on Mr Screwby's assertion, since he brought no corroborative evidence to bear—only spoke of the matter right and left, even haranguing excited mobs, who would have needed but little leading to have made them wreck D. Wragg's dwelling, and administer lynch-law to its inhabitants.

In fact, instead of the matter being a nine-days' wonder, and then passing off, interest in the mystery seemed to be ever on the increase; and a feeling of dread more than once seized all the members of the household lest some terrible evil should befall them.

"I tell you what it is, young fellow," said P.C. Brace one evening to Mr John Screwby, whom he had warned to move on, just at a time when he was haranguing a pack of boys,—"I tell you what it is, young fellow; if you get opening your mouth so wide about all this here, people will begin to think as you know as much about it as any one else."

Mr John Screwby's jaw fell, and he stood gazing speechlessly at the policeman, as that worthy wagged his head expressively, to indicate the words "Move on;" and then, without uttering another syllable, on he moved, rubbing his jaw with one hand, pulling his cap a little more over his ears, and in various ways acting as if not quite at peace within himself.

It was impossible for those within the house not to observe how they were looked upon by their neighbours. The trade of the shop had dropped off day by day, till there was absolutely nothing doing, although D. Wragg sat hour after hour smoking his pipe behind the counter, and muttering to himself.

Even Mrs Winks looked troubled and scared, coming up one morning from the cellar-kitchen, with her curl papers all limp, to declare in confidence to Janet that she "dursen't go down no more, for she had heard a noise;" and then, in a very low whisper, she declared her conviction that there was something wrong.

This was soon after daybreak one washing-day; and from that time Mrs Winks decided in favour of the central portions of the house, refusing absolutely either to ascend to the attics or descend to the basement.

"But is it not foolish?" said Janet to her, one day. "What can there be up-stairs or down-stairs to hurt you?"

"There! don't ask me, child," exclaimed Mrs Winks. "I don't know; I only know what I think. There's something wrong about the place; and you can feel it in the air; and if it wasn't for you, child, I wouldn't stop another day—see if I would!"

That day passed in a cheerless, dreary way, but not quite in peace, for more than once a rude shout or laugh made Janet start from her seat, and stand trembling for what might be to come. But the demonstrations proved to be harmless, and no more offensive than they could be made by jeering words, and the hurling into the shop of a few stones and broken ginger-beer bottles, occasioning a vast amount of fluttering amongst the birds, and a fierce yelping from the prisoned dogs.

The night came at last, and D. Wragg was heard stumping and jerking about the house, as if busy examining all fastenings, and putting out the gas; and then there was a knock at the outer door—a well-known tap—to which Janet hastened to reply, and admitted Canau, who entered sideways, with the door only opened a few inches, and then closed it hastily, as if in dread of pursuit, when he stood looking at Janet, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead with an old silk handkerchief.

“Is there any news?” he faltered, looking hard at the deformed girl the while.

“No,” she replied, hoarsely; “there is no news.”

D. Wragg opened the back-room door at this moment, to glance out hastily, when seeing who it was, he re-closed the door and waited till his lodgers had gone up-stairs, when his head once more appeared like that of a rat from its hole, and he listened till all was still before again closing his door.

Silence fell upon the house at last; not, though, that all its inmates were at rest, for Canau lay for long enough sleepless, and turning over thought after thought. D. Wragg, too, was rather uneasy that night, while to Janet the hours dragged heavily on.

At last, though, in spite of her agitation, Janet was sleeping soundly, while, soon after daybreak, D. Wragg was astir, to gently draw up his blind and inspect the morning, a proceeding that did not seem to prove highly satisfactory, for he groaned more than sighed, shook his head, jerked about as he crossed the room, and then, without his boots, he stepped into the passage, and began to climb the stairs, pausing, though, upon each landing, to listen whether any one else were stirring.

But as far as he could judge, every one was sunk in that sound slumber of early morn,—Mrs Winks loudly announcing her state as he passed her door.

There seemed to be a great deal of indecision, though, in D. Wragg’s movements; his haltings were many, and the cautious manner in which he peered about seemed to indicate that the errand upon which he was bound was one of no trivial import.

At last, though, he climbed to the top, stood listening for awhile, and then entered the attic, closing the door carefully behind him, but apparently taking no steps to make it fast.

D. Wragg had not been out of sight five minutes, before there was the soft grating noise of a key turning in the wards of a lock; then there was a loud crack, and a door below opened to give exit to Monsieur Canau, who stood in the doorway listening for a few moments, and then, shoes in hand, descended softly and swiftly to the bottom of the house. On reaching the cellar-kitchen, he lit a candle, and after unbolting a door, passed under the area grating, with his pinched old hat held lanthorn-wise over the candle; and then, drawing open a second door, he entered a large cellar, in one corner of which was the small stock of coals in use for the house, and in another the ashes and refuse.

But Monsieur Canau had hardly a look for these; he merely glanced round the place, and then drew back the fastening of the inner cellar, one which seemed to extend far beneath the street.

His candle flickered here, and burned dimly for a few moments, as he walked backwards and forwards in the cobwebbed, vaulted place, holding his candle low down, and examining the reeking floor, particularly in one spot—the furthest corner from the door. This he scraped a little with his hands, then stamped upon several times; held the candle down to see what impression his feet had made; and then, taking up a rough piece of wood, he carefully drew it backwards and forwards over where he had stamped, and lastly, extinguished his candle. He then closed the cellar doors, crossed the area, and, after leaving all below as he had found it, hurried up-stairs once more, but, in spite of his years, with all the activity of a boy.

He stopped by his own room, entered it for a few moments, and then reappeared, to step up softly to the attic landing, where he again paused to listen attentively for fully five minutes. But though Mrs Winks was as stertorous as ever in her breathing, not another sound was to be heard in the house; and laying his hand upon the attic latch, Canau raised it very gently, not the eighth of an inch at a time, coaxing the door, as it were, to open without noise, till, by slow degrees, he had pressed it back sufficiently far to allow the passage of his head, when, cautiously inserting it to peer round, the door was pressed back upon his neck, holding it between the edge and the door-jamb, while, within a few inches, and gazing malignantly into his eyes, he found himself suddenly confronted by D. Wragg.

Volume Three—Chapter Eight.

Jared’s Trouble.

“And the box not been touched since,” muttered Jared Pellet,—“not been touched since;” and he repeated the words which he had heard from Mr Timson but a few days before, as he stood in the porch of the old church, looking straight before him in a hopeless dreamy way. He had had no occasion to be there, no business to be there; for he had conducted the service for the last time, and on the next or the following day he would be called upon to give up his key. But that organ seemed to draw him there, so that he dreamed over it, clung to it, as he recalled that he must

so soon give up his duties, and in such a fashion.

They knew nothing, suspected nothing at home; they only said that he practised oftener than ever,—that he hurried through little jobs to get to the church, where he spent long hours gazing in the reflector, and dreaming of the past and future, or making the passengers in the street pause and listen to the grand old strains. At times, he could scarcely bring himself to believe that it was true; but the inexorable crept on, till he could feel that he was only there upon sufferance, and blamed his want of pride in not giving up before.

The Reverend John had ceased to preach monetary discourses, and bowed austerely when once he encountered Jared, who shrank back, although he had fully determined to address him. Mr Timson, too, gave him no further opportunities for conversation, but passed him at a half-trot, with both hands under his coat-tails, giving him short, sharp, defiant nods. Even old Purkis grew strange and constrained, backing away from him, and bursting forth into a dew of perspiration which entailed no end of mopping and wiping. As for Mrs Ruggles, she never had been in the habit of bending to sociability, so that her stiff formality was passed unnoticed.

No; there was no keeping away from the old place now; and day after day, Ichabod grew richer with the many coppers he earned as Jared tortured the instrument into the giving forth of wondrous wails and groans; no jubilant strains, but all sorrowful, and in harmony with his broken spirit.

Twelve o’clock! Ichabod dismissed, and the hour just struck by the old church clock in a halting broken-winded manner, as if the job was too much for it, while an ordinary listener would have been tired out before it reached half-way. But Jared listened, and shivered and shuddered too, as, after beating laboriously its heaviest task, it set in motion certain hammers which knocked “Adeste Fidelis” out of the bells, beaten out notes that came in a jerky, disjointed fashion, and muddled up with their rests—now one in its place, now three or four blundered together, as if in a hurry to finish a performance of which they were heartily ashamed.

But Jared stood it out, telling himself that most likely it was for the last time. Then he tried the church-door to make sure that it was fast, and afterwards slunk off slowly, and apparently believing that people could read the crime of which he was accused branded upon his forehead. Perhaps that was why he crushed his hat down over his eyes, and bent his head so as to encounter neither scowl of avoidance nor pitying glance.

In Duplex Street at last! and pausing to pull his face three or four different ways so as to get upon it a pleasant expression before inserting his latch-key; and, entering, to stand rubbing his feet upon the worn old mat, which had to be held steady with one foot while the other was cleaned, and had been so affected by time that, hydra-fashion, it was fast turning itself into two mats of a smaller size. Then, it took some time, to take off the old black kid-gloves, which Jared had cut down into mittens in consequence of finger dilapidations, or, as he said, to keep his hands warm when playing in the fireless church.

But there were cheery voices ascending the stairs, so putting away his last sigh, like his umbrella in a corner, he descended to the kitchen, and tried to enter, but the door handle only turned round and round, and would not move the latch. Directly after, though, there came the sound as of some one wriggling it back with a knife-blade.

“There, don’t touch me,” cried Patty, “or I shall flour you all over.”

The warning came too late, for Jared had already taken her in his arms to place a couple of kisses upon her blooming cheeks.

“There, I knew I should,” she continued; “and if I touch it I shall make it worse. But, father dear, I’d have that lock mended, or we shall all be fastened in some day.”

“Ah!” said Jared. “Now, if it could be repaired with glue, I might manage it myself.”

But as that seemed impossible, Jared began to hum a tune, his thoughts the while hanging upon the subject of his dismissal, as he wondered whether they had yet any inkling of the secret which oppressed him.

“Time enough for them to know when all is over, and I’ve given up the keys,” he muttered; “for even yet something may be found out. If not,” he thought, bitterly, “we must starve.”

“Has the vicar been or sent?” he said, in husky tones, but assuming all the indifference possible.

“No,” said Mrs Jared; “I’ve been thinking about him all the morning. Isn’t he late?”

Jared thought he was, and said so. But all the same, he had not expected him, only a cheque for his last quarter’s salary—money always heretofore paid to the day, though it was not likely that upon this occasion the vicar would follow out his old pleasant custom and bring the cheque himself. But Jared tried to persuade himself that even that was possible, for drowning men are said to clutch at straws, and Jared was drowning fast. He had kept his head above water a long time, but now all seemed at an end, and the waters of tribulation appeared about to close over him.

Mrs Pellet and her daughter continued to be occupied in domestic affairs, while now, as if Jared’s misery were not great enough, the straw seemed to be snatched from the drowning man as there came the terrible thought—Suppose that the vicar should not send at all? suppose that, taking into consideration how he had refrained from prosecuting, he should consider the quarter’s salary as forfeited?

Not a heavy sum certainly, but to Jared the want of it would be ruin piled upon ruin, a cruel heel crushing the head already in the dust.

“They told me to clear myself, to prove that they were wrong—and what have I done? But, there! absurd! They could not keep back the money; it would not be legal.”

But suppose that, legal or illegal, they kept it back to make up for the missing money, how then? The vicar would not do such a thing, he was too kind-hearted; but Timson might prompt him—Timson, who had always been so ready with his suspicions. He would go and tell him to his face of his cruelty to a wronged man. He dared meet him, though he now shrank from encountering the vicar. But no; he was too hasty; the money was not legally due until he had formally given up the organ-key. But if they did keep it back—that twelve pounds ten—could he not take legal proceedings for its recovery? How, when they had been so lenient to him?

“Lenient!” his brow grew wrinkled as the word flashed over his mind. Was he not innocent, unless indeed he had committed the theft in his sleep—walked to the church from sheer habit? But absurd! he was innocent. “Prove it, sir—prove it,” rang in his ears, and he seemed to see before him the stiff figure of the little churchwarden, with his hands stuck beneath the tails of his coat. “Prove it, sir—prove it,” and how was he to prove it?

Jared Pellet was a good actor, schooled in adversity; but on that day he was about worn out, and a less shrewd person than his wife would have seen that something was wrong. She noted it before he had been in long, and attributed it to the fact that they had not a penny in hand. He tried to laugh and be cheery, but his attempts were of so sorry a nature that Mrs Jared looked hard at him, when he seemed so guilty of aspect, that he was glad to call in the aid of a pocket-handkerchief, and make a feeble attempt at a sneeze.

“You won’t mind a makeshift dinner to-day?” said Patty, intent upon her task of preparing the repast.

Needless question to one who had practised the art of making shift for so many years, and to whom a good dinner was an exception to the rule.

“Been wanted while I was out?” said Jared, after declaring that he should enjoy the makeshift above all things. “Been wanted?” for it was a pleasant fiction with Jared that he did a large business in the musical instrument line, and that it was not safe for him to be away for a minute, though it was not once in a hundred absences that he was required; but the question sounded business-like, and he asked it regularly.

The answer was just what he expected—in the negative; but it came in so dreary a tone that Jared stared.

The reason was plain enough: Mrs Jared had caught his despondent complaint, and was rocking the baby over the fire as she counted up the holes that the expected cheque was to stop in connection with unpleasant demands for money, which she would have to answer meekly and with promises. The tears rose to her eyes as she thought of it all—tears reflected the next moment in those of Patty.

“What would they say if they knew all?” groaned Jared to himself as he saw the tears. But he felt that he must stave it off a little longer, as he planted a child on either knee so as to have something to do, and then declared himself to be ravenous for want of food.

Poor Patty finished her preparations. She brought out the scrap of cold mutton, and took up the potatoes and plain boiled rice-pudding, but her merry smile was gone. She too had her troubles, and it took but little to upset her. As she caught sight of her mother’s sad face, she had hard work to keep her own tears back; for the chill that seemed to have come upon their home had struck to her heart, schooled as it had lately been to trouble.

Volume Three—Chapter Nine.

Expectancy.

It was a bitter day without, and now it seemed as cold within. The very fire in the bright little grate appeared to have turned duller, and the air more chill. As to the cold scraps of mutton, they were perfectly icy, and the fat flew off in chips and splinters. A cloud had settled down upon the house, so that there were even great tears round the potato-dish. As to piercing the cloud, all Jared’s efforts were in vain, for as fast as he tried to shine in a warm and genial manner to disperse this oppressive mist of adversity, he encountered one of Mrs Jared’s looks, which he interpreted to be suspicious—doubtful; and, one way and another, the meal was cold, not merely to a degree, but to many.

There was no work to do that afternoon; no musical cripples to doctor orthopaedically; no cracked instruments to solder, putty, or wax-end; no bellows to mend, hammers to refit, or false notes to tune in accordion or concertina. Trade was at a standstill, and Jared wondered how he should get through the afternoon till the hour when he had appointed Ichabod to meet him at the church for a last long evening practice at the old organ.

But the dinner was hardly over before the postman came by. Jared knew his legs as they passed the area grating, and ran up-stairs to see if he were coming there. For a wonder, he was, and as may be supposed, he left a letter.

Strange hand, and yet familiar. It must be from the vicar. But no; it was not his hand, Jared knew that too well to be mistaken, and his fingers involuntarily felt in his breastpocket for the missive which contained the key—a missive that he had of late told himself he ought to have taken to a good solicitor for advice, instead of quietly sitting down beneath the slur.

But perhaps, under the circumstances, the vicar had felt disposed to let some one else write to him. It must be the cheque; there could not be a doubt about it. No one else would write to him unless—unless—

Jared’s brow grew moist, as, in the ignorance of such matters, he stood trembling with the letter in his hand. Might not the vicar have taken legal proceedings, and sent him a summons, now that his time had expired?

That was a dreadful thought, and embraced innumerable horrors—the felon’s dock, police-van, cells, convicts, servitude, and worse, infinitely worse than all—a starving wife and children. Jared had a hard fight to recover his

composure before going down again to the kitchen, where he tore open the letter.

Mr McBriar, the landlord, had sent his compliments, and a reminder, that though the rent for the quarter ending at Christmas would be due in a few days, that for the quarter ending at Michaelmas had not yet been paid.

Jared doubled the letter again very carefully, so as to hit the right folds, replaced it in the envelope, and handed it to his wife, who had the pleasure of taking it out and reading it, when Jared saw a tear fall upon the paper, and make a huge blot, turning the sheet of a darker colour as it soaked in.

Tears breed tears, and two bright drops sprang to Patty's eyes as she thought of her own sorrows, of the troubles overhanging the Brownjohn Street house, and the way in which poor Janet was suffering. Then came thoughts of Harry Clayton; at times soft tender thoughts, at times those of indignation; and she told herself that he could not love her, or he would never have been ashamed to own her before his friends.

Did she love him? She asked herself the question, and replied to it with burning cheeks that she thought she did;—no, she was sure that she loved him very, very much. Oh I how gladly would the poor girl have gone up-stairs, and thrown herself upon her bed, to have a long, long, girlish cry.

"Would not Richard lend you a few sovereigns?" said Mrs Jared to her husband in a whisper.

"No, no; don't, please," cried Jared, in a supplicating voice. "Anything but that." For in an instant he had conjured up the figure of his angry brother, and his disgrace. That brother calling him villain, thief, and scoundrel; upbraiding him once more for bringing disgrace upon the name so honoured amongst the money-changers of the great temple of commerce. "You know how I have asked him before, and what has been his reply. I can't do it again. But there!" he said, in as cheerful a tone as he could command, "don't fidget; things will come right. They always do, if you give them time enough; only we are such a hurried race of beings, and we get worse now there are steam-engines and telegraphs to work for us."

To have seen Jared then, it might have been supposed that he was in the best of spirits, for he began to hum scraps of airs, beginning with "Pergolesi," and ending with "Jim Crow."

Having no work of his own, he attended to the fire, to clear away its dulness; but he never well succeeded, for the coals were small, and the stock very low.

Then he nursed the baby for ten minutes; in short, he tried every possible plan to raise the bitter temperature of the place. "Let it come in its own good time," he muttered; "there's no occasion for them to meet the trouble half-way."

Six different times, though, was Jared at that window, watching, with beating heart, figures dimly seen through the grating bars—figures which had slackened pace, or stopped, as if about to call. Once Jared turned with a deceptive smile, declaring that an old gentleman had passed, so like the vicar that he was not even sure that it was not he gone by in mistake.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs Jared, sadly, rejecting the comfort intended for her. And no one called at Jared's house, while he felt that it would be impossible for him to ask for the money. Had he been differently circumstanced, he would have refused it altogether; but with a wife and large family, debts, and no regular income, it would have been madness.

Once he had decided that he would tell all, and be out of his miserable state of suspense; but the next minute, with a shiver, he had again put off the disclosure, and moodily began to think over the treatment he had received where he had asked counsel and advice, the hot blood rising to his cheeks as he recalled the manner in which the behaviour of his child had been interpreted.

Five o'clock, and no vicar, no money; and Jared to some extent rejoiced, for he dreaded the vicar's coming, lest the reason of his leaving should be mentioned. And now he brightened up with the thought that it might be possible to conceal the true cause of his leaving the church from those at home, for, instead of looking there for advice and comfort, he shivered with dread lest it should come to their ears. As to Purkis, and the Ruggleses, he would move—go somewhere where he was not known, and where his friends could not find him, making what excuse he could.

"Business could not be worse," muttered Jared to himself; and then he turned to the social meal, resting his hand for a moment upon the head of Patty, who was deepening the hue of her cheeks by making toast, half sitting, half reclining upon the little patchwork hearthrug, in an attitude which bespoke strait-waistcoats and padded rooms for any artists who might have seen her. For, if Patty's face was not beautiful, the same could not be said of her figure, wrapped by the fire in a rich warm glow, which caressed the smooth long braids of her rich brown hair, and flashed again from her eyes. And all this ready to be Harry Clayton's for the asking. Well might Patty sigh that there was no Harry there to ask.

"There's some one now," cried Jared, excitedly, as the scraping of feet was heard upon the bars of the grating, and then a footstep stopped at the door, followed directly by a heavy knock which reverberated through the little house. "Here, Patty, show a light."

But before Patty could get half-way up the kitchen-stairs, she heard the front door opened, and a gruff voice exclaimed—

"For Mr Morrison, and wait for an answer."

"Next door," said Jared, in a disappointed tone.

"Why don't you get yer numbers painted over again, then?" grunted the voice, which seemed to consider an apology

as a work of supererogation. “Who’s to tell eights from nines, I should like to know?”

“No message for any one of the name of Pellet, eh?” said Jared.

The visitor muttered something inaudible, and then came the noise of a heavy thump on the door of the next house, when Jared sighed, closed his own door, and turned to meet Patty.

“I would not have that man’s unpleasant disposition for a trifle, my child, that I would not,” said Jared; and then he descended to find his wife in tears, Patty trying hard the while to keep her own back; and, do what he could, Jared Pellet, organist of St Runwald’s, could not pull out a stop that should produce a cheerful strain where all seemed sadness and woe.

The tea was fragrant, though weak; the toast just brown enough without being burned; while the children ate bread and dripping, just as if—Mrs Jared said—it grew upon the hedges.

But the social meal was now unsocial to a degree. Mrs Pellet hardly spoke, while Jared drank his tea mechanically—three cups—and would have gone on pouring it down for any length of time, if a reference to the Dutch clock had not shown the time to be a quarter to six.

Jared hurriedly rose, to keep his appointment at the church, and prepared to start.

“If—if,” he said, “the vicar, or a messenger, should come, don’t let him in, but send him to me at the church.”

Volume Three—Chapter Ten.

In the Church.

Out into the keen night air went Jared Pellet; but as soon as he was outside his own door, his heart seemed to sink down, heavy, heavier, heaviest, for he was going for his last practice. The old church was to peal with chords from his hands for the very last time; and, filled with bitterness, he strode on, thinking of the day of his triumph, when, in preference to so many, he was chosen organist; of the bright visions of prosperity he had then conjured up, all now faded away, leaving nothing but desolation. There had been a heavy fall of snow, and the streets were hushed and still, even the wheels of the few vehicles seemed muffled.

He shivered with the cold, and at the silence, which seemed oppressive. There were few people about, and though, as he saw them coming, the sight was welcome, Jared Pellet shrank away lest they might divine his misery. He could hardly believe in such sorrow as now seemed his lot; while he was ready to utter maledictions upon the head of his brother, who heeded them not, but upon whom he laid the blame of making him flinch from telling his wife and daughter the whole story. Was he not now a suspected thief—a beggar? and should he not soon be looked upon at home as a hypocrite and deceiver? Well might he, in his abstraction, be hustled and jostled by those he met, for at times his gait was almost that of a drunken man.

Six o’clock was striking as he reached St Runwald’s, but there was no Ichabod waiting, neither was he overing the little fat tombstone that had sunk so far into the earth, nor making snowballs in the path; so Jared kicked the snow from his boots, unlocked the great door, walked in, and, in an absent fit, locked himself into the great gloomy church. Not that it mattered, for Ichabod Gunnis had forgotten the practice, and at this time, in company with three or four birds of a feather, he was lying in ambush in a cour at a little distance, whence he could throw snowballs at the drivers and conductors of the various ’buses.

So Jared Pellet told himself that it was for the last time that he was standing in the gloomy edifice; and rapping his teeth with the key, he slowly made his way to the organ-loft, where, after five minutes’ fumbling, he found his match-box, and lit the single candle by which he practised, abstaining from touching the blower’s dip, till such time as that functionary should arrive.

And there sat, with bended head, the desolate man, the centre of a halo of light, which dimly displayed his music, the reflector, and the keys and stops. Above him towered the huge, gilt pipes; while from every corner looked down the carven cherubim, here and there one with a flush of light upon its swollen cheeks. The building was very dark, for the light from street lamp or shop shone but faintly through the windows. The snow from without sent in a ghastly glimmer, sufficient to show the black beams and rafters high up in the open roof, where dust and cobwebs ruled supreme. The tall aisle pillars stood in two ghostly rows; while upon the funereal hatchments between, lay here and there a streak of light, shot through some coloured pane, to lend a bar sinister never intended by the heraldic painter. Now it was the tablet-supported napkin, draped over a carved angel, that caught the light, and stood out strangely from the surrounding darkness, while all below was black, deep, and impenetrable—a sea of shadows, with pew-like waves and a holland-covered pulpit and reading-desk for vessels, to stand out dimly from the surrounding gloom.

Patchy and ill diffused was the light; as if tired and worn with its efforts to struggle through the wire-protected, stained-glass windows, it rested where it fell, to peer down grimly upon the darkness in the nave.

Four times over, eight times over, times uncounted, had the chimes rung out the quarters, and stroke by stroke the hours were told, vibrating heavily through the church, and still Jared sat in the organ-loft in his old position. He was alone, for no Ichabod had come to rattle the handle and kick the big oaken door. But Jared thought not of cold or gloom, for his soul was dead within him as he mourned, in the sadness of his heart, for the poverty and misery which clung to him, and his inability to ward them off. He could tell himself that he had struggled manfully, hiding his sorrows from those who were dear to him; but now he felt that he was beaten, conquered—that the hard fight had

gone against him, and that he must give up.

But where had that money gone? Who had taken it? Had they still watched and tried to find the thief, or rested satisfied with their discovery? He knew not, though strenuous efforts had been made by more than one; but, excepting in a single case, the money marked and left in the boxes had not been taken—a fact which vicar and churchwarden interpreted to mean that the guilty party was found. They had now therefore ceased watching, believing that the treasure was no longer interfered with; though had they once more examined the money, they would have found that two marked half-crowns and a florin had been extracted, as if the thief had seized his last chance of appropriating a portion of the little store.

“What will become of me? Where are we to go?” muttered Jared; and then he wrung his hands, and pressed them to his aching head. “And if they prosecute, what then?”

Jared Pellet shivered as he asked himself the question, while in fancy he could see reflected in the mirror before him every horror with which for days past he had been torturing himself, beginning with the bar of a police court, and ending with masked convicts in prison yards, toiling at some bitter task, and, like him, dreaming—dreams within dreams—of wives and children shivering at a workhouse door. He knew that he was making the worst of it, but he excused himself upon the plea that it was the first time that he had done so, and that never until now had he given up, for he was very miserable, and he again wrung his hands until the bones cracked.

“What—what shall I do?” groaned the wretched man. “The cheque will not come now; and if they should have sent to arrest me now upon this last day!” And then again in that reflector he conjured up before him the summons at his own door, the eager step of Patty, expecting a messenger from the vicar, and then the poor girl’s horror to find the police were upon her father’s track. He could see it all plainly enough in that old mirror, and he covered his face with his hands, and groaned again—“What shall I do? What shall I do?” in a helpless, childish fashion.

“Curse God and die,” seemed hissed in his ears; and Jared started and roused himself. He had read and heard of men being tempted into rebellion against their Maker; he had known of those who, in their despair, had been seized by some horrible impulse which had led them to rush headlong into the presence of the Judge—men rich in this world’s goods, high in the opinion of their fellows—men to whom high honours had been awarded in the temple of fame,—and yet unaccountably attacked by that dread horror which so often tempts the wretched prisoner to shorten the term of his punishment. Might not this be akin? Was not this some temptation? Oh! that wandering imagination—that too faithful mirror! Jared shuddered as in it he pictured more than one fearful termination of his career, and saw his wretched wife upon her knees beside something—something against which he closed his eyes, and upon whose horrors he dared not gaze.

Yes, this was some such temptation; but he was a man who could defy it; and starting forward, he seized two or three stops on either side of the instrument, and dragged them out, before running his fingers rapidly along the keys; but the next instant he paused and shuddered, for in place of the organ’s swelling tones came the low dull rattling bone-like sound of the keys, to rise and fall and go floating through the silent nave of the old church in a strangely weird, dumb cadence.

He gazed before him into his mirror, but it was a black depth, which gave but one reflection—his own ghastly face. Again he leaned forward and swept his fingers over the keys, as if engaged in playing one of his favourite voluntaries; but he ran through only a few lines, for the low soft rattle again floated through the church, and then he shuddered as he drew back his hands, for the scrap of candle in the sconce fell through, darting up one sharp blue flame, by whose rays the keys of the instrument seemed to grin at him like the teeth of some huge monster. Then all was silence and gloom, suited to his morbid imaginings, and the visions seemed to float before him once more in the mirror—old dreams—new dreams—old dreams with fresh incidents—dreams of his brother, mocking and jeering at his poverty, and in his prosperity ever crushing him down—dreams of misery—dreams of happiness, wooing and wedding, and joy-bells clashing out jubilant and merry—dreams—dreams—dreams pictured in the depths of that old mirror, and then darkness—a blank.

Cold and shuddering, he started up, for it seemed that a cold breath of air passed across his brow; then he was listening to a noise as of a closing door; then there was the soft pat as of footsteps—a rustling—the creak of a pew-door turning upon its hinges; and slowly turning his head, Jared Pellet sat with dilated eyes, there in the darkness and silence of the old church—listening.

Volume Three—Chapter Eleven.

“Was it Ghostly?”

“Was it ghostly—was it spiritual?” Jared Pellet asked himself, as he sat with strained nerves eager to catch the slightest sound. But now all was silent, and he listened in vain. Cold, almost numbed, he rubbed his hands together and left his place slowly, descending into the body of the church, confused as one just awakening from a state of torpor. Once he halted upon the stairs for a minute or two and listened; but he heard nothing, and continued his descent, telling himself that his imagination was wild and overstrained. Then pausing suddenly upon the matting which covered the nave, his heart’s pulsation seemed checked, for from the direction of the north door came all at once, loud and distinct in the empty church, a sharp metallic click; and then, at short intervals three more sounds each clear and sharp in the silence, as of money falling upon money.

At any other time Jared would have ridiculed as absurd the idea of being alarmed by supernatural visitations: the church at midnight was the same place to him, but for its darkness, as the church at midday; but now, broken, unnerved, and trembling in every limb, he stood by the south door as if fixed, listening eagerly.

For a while there was silence, so that he could hear his own heart beat, and he tried to make out what all this could mean. Was it—could it be—some strange influence of the mind caused by constantly dwelling upon the abstraction of the poor-box money? or had he really heard the chinking of falling coin? He was beginning to think, from the silence that reigned, that it was all a delusion. He strained his eyes in the direction, but they could not penetrate the thick darkness, and at last a bitter smile crossed his features, as he thought that his mind was becoming disturbed with trouble, and that while he was yet able, he had better seek home and try to rest. Should he walk across the church to the other door and see if there was anything? Pooh! it was but fancy—a rat, perhaps, under the flooring of the old pews.

Jared felt in his pocket for the key of the door, but it had slipped through into the lining. His hands were numbed with the cold, and he could not extricate it, for the wards were entangled with the rags.

But *that* was not fancy, *that* was no stretch of the imagination. There was a faint rustling noise, similar to that which he had heard at first, and now, apparently, coming towards him.

Jared Pellet was probably as bold as most men of his condition; but now, freshly awakened, as it were, from a strange stupor, in a dark church, at probably midnight, his blood seemed to freeze, and his teeth chattered with horror. What did it mean? What could it be—that invisible thing, that softly rustling noise, coming nearer and nearer? He could not even see the pew by his side. Should he go? The door was locked, and he could not get the key from his pocket; and besides, in the horror of that moment, he had stretched out his hands to keep off that something strange and rustling that came nearer and nearer, till he fancied that he could hear breathing, and then the rustling ceased, to be succeeded by a low dull beat, which he knew directly after to be that of his own heart.

But at last, as with a flash, a ray of light crossed his mind, which chased away all superstitious fancies. Here now, almost within his reach, was the robber of the poor-boxes returning from his unholy errand. The click he had heard was that of falling money; and the blood flushed to his face as he felt that now was the time for action—now was the moment which should decide his fate. How he longed for a light. The night before had been clear and moonlit, so that he could have seen distinctly; but from the snow-clouds, the darkness was intense. What should he do?

“Whoever it is shall not pass out of the church while I have life,” he thought, as he smiled at his superstitious folly. But, for all that, as he stood there, with arms outstretched in the intense darkness, his heart still beat violently. Whoever it was had evidently taken the alarm, and was listening intently. But now came once more the rustling, accompanied by a sound that Jared made out to be that of a hand drawn along the sides of the pews.

Closer, closer—he could hear the breathing distinctly; but again there was a halt, during which Jared remained motionless, till the rustling began again, and a hand touched his own.

All the blood in his body seemed to rush to his heart as he felt the contact of that icy hand; the superstitious dread came back; but he threw, himself forward, nerved, as it were, by despair, and clutched an arm, but only to be dashed violently back, trip over a hassock, and strike his head a sickening blow against one of the stone steps of the font.

That fall drove out the last dread of a supernatural visitation, and, springing up, Jared gave chase to the rustling figure, which he now heard half-way down the south aisle.

It was slow work in the dark, but Jared pushed on, now striking violently against some pew-door, now stopping half confused in the dark as to where he was; but there was the rustling noise in front, and as well as he could he followed up one aisle and down the nave, then along the other aisle, but apparently losing ground. The flying one was as corporeal as himself, that was plain enough, for more than once there was the noise of collision with open pew-doors, which banged to and then flew open again, ready for him to strike against violently.

Twice had pursuer and pursued made the circuit of the church, when, feeling that he had neared the flying figure, Jared sprang forward to grasp—nothing, for the noise suddenly ceased. He stopped to listen, but the only sound he could detect was the beating of his own heart.

This was unexpected. He listened again; no sound. He ran his hand along by the sides of the pews, first here and then there; he went forward, panting heavily the while; he came back, but he was still at fault. The quarry had doubled somehow, and escaped him for the time, and would perhaps reach one of the doors; and in dread of losing his opportunity, Jared ran hastily towards the south door, but only to recollect that there were the north, west, and chancel doors, through any one of which the fugitive might escape while he guarded the south. Then it struck him where he had been at fault: the enemy of his peace must have crept softly into an open pew and allowed him to pass. That was it, no doubt; and hurrying back, he was in time to hear the rustling noise very softly at the end of the north aisle, as though his enemy were stealing away. Swiftly as the darkness would allow he hurried on, and once more the chase began. They had passed round the church again, and Jared felt that he was gaining ground, when he caught his foot in the matting where it had slightly turned up, and fell heavily, to gather himself up again just in time to feel once more the rush of cold air upon his cheek, and hear the door locked just as he came up.

Jared’s hands trembled with agitation as he tore at his pocket to free the key, dragging out the lining; and then, as he held the cold iron in his hand, he could hardly find the hole, so that quite a minute had elapsed before he had dragged the heavy door open, stood amongst the drifted snow in the porch, and taken up the pursuit.

There, in the faint glimmering light, were the deep impressions of footsteps to the church gates, and Jared grimly smiled as he muttered to himself, “A heavy step for a ghost;” but no sooner was he outside the gate than his power of tracking his enemy was gone, for the snow was trampled with footprints crossing and re-crossing, while, though he looked up and down the street, there was nothing to be seen but the glimmering lamps, nor to be heard but the sighing of the cold night wind.

Suddenly he fancied that in the distance he saw a figure crossing the road, and dashed after it as hard as he could

run. It turned down a street that he knew well, and, by taking a short cut, Jared felt that he should meet his enemy, if it was the object of his chase; so running down first one street and then another, he neared the bottom outlet of the place he sought, paused a moment to listen, and then could make out the dull deadened sound of coming steps in the snow, apparently nearing him slowly.

To dart round the corner, and grasp the new-comer, was the work of an instant, but it only resulted in his being grasped in return, for the organist was in the hands of the police.

“What time is it?” queried Jared, in a confused manner, as soon as he could open his lips.

“Time you was in bed, I think,” said the policeman; and Jared shrank beneath his suspicious looks.

Volume Three—Chapter Twelve.

Another Missing.

“One o’clock, mum,” said Mr James Chawner, cordwainer, and member of the society of Campanological Brothers, commonly known by the *soubriquet* of Beaky Jem, tenor in St Runwald’s peal. “One o’clock, mum; it’s better nor ’arf past. But if you and Miss here is so wery oneasy, I’ll get one of my mates to rouse up and search the place; that is, if *you* like,” thereby clearly indicating that he—Beaky Jem of the Roman nose—did not much approve of the task.

“It is so very strange,” said Mrs Jared; “he left here to go to the church, and he must be there.”

“Why, bless your ’art, mum, he ain’t been there, or we must have heerd him in the belfry.”

“You’ve been there all the evening then?” said Mrs Jared.

“Ah! that we have, mum—’leven of us, practising for Chrismus. We pulled grand-sire caters, ’sire tribbles, and s’perlative s’prise major. Never had a finer night, nor more beer up in my time.”

“But could you have heard the organ up in the belfry?” said Patty, who had been escorted home by Monsieur Canau quite late in the evening from the shadowed house in Decadia.

“Heard it! bless your ’art, yes, Miss, a rooring away sometimes loud enough to put yer out, and drown the one that leads and cries ‘go,’ when we makes the change, you know. That there organ ain’t blowed a note, nor there ain’t been no light in the church this side o’ eight o’clock. And besides, I seed the pleece a kickin’ and a cuffin’ of young Leathers for shyin’ snowballs at the busties.”

“Who?” exclaimed Mrs Jared and Patty in a breath.

“Young Charity, mum, young Ikey Gunnis. Howsomever, if it’s a coming to who’ll go, I’ll go, you know; but I’m afeard most of our chaps is about tight—just a little sunny, you know,” he added by way of explanation, “for the beer did run free to-night, and no mistake—and I hardly know who else to get, without it’s a pleeceman, and they’re so precious ’ficious. You see, people’s abed now; and I should ha’ been there myself if the young missus hadn’t come and roused me out. I was asleep aside the kitchen-fire when she come, for there was a sight o’ beer up the belfry to-night sewerly.”

“I still think that he must have gone to the vicar’s,” said Patty to her mother. “I knocked as loudly as I could at the church-door, and there seemed to be no one there.”

“Perhaps, after all, we had better wait another half-hour,” said Mrs Jared.

“Let me go with Mr Chawner,” said Patty, eagerly. “The Purkises may have come back now, and they would not mind giving us the keys. I dare say Mr Purkis would go with us, late as it is. He would have gone with me before, I am sure, had he been at home.”

“I don’t like disturbing people so late; but it makes me very uneasy. Do you think the little ones would be quiet while we both went?”

The suggestion now offered by Beaky Jem, that the governor might be “a bit on,” was, when interpreted, scouted with indignation; and it was at last determined that Patty should stay, while Mrs Jared and Beaky Jem went to Purkis’s for the keys, and then searched the church, with or without the beadle’s aid.

“Which he won’t turn out of his warm bed, bless you,” said Mr Chawner; “he’s too—”

He did not finish his sentence, for as Mrs Jared, bonneted and shawled, stood with the others in the passage, there came a buzz of voices at the front door, and, directly after, a gentle double knock.

“There’s something wrong, Patty,” gasped Mrs Jared, holding her hand to her side, while the one apostrophised admitted Mr Timson, the vicar, and Purkis the beadle, all very muffled and snowy.

“Something struck me that you wouldn’t be in bed,” began Mr Timson; but he was stopped by the vicar, who brushed by him just in time to catch Mrs Jared as she was staggering to fall.

“Is—is he dead?” she gasped, recovering herself by a strong effort.

“Who? who?” exclaimed the vicar.

“My husband,” panted Mrs Jared.

“God forbid!” ejaculated the vicar, piously; “no, where is he?”

“He went out before six to the church, and he has not been back,” cried Patty, in agitated tones. “They were going now to search for him. Here—here he is!” she cried, as Jared made his appearance, pale and scared-looking, while Patty flung her arms round his neck.

“There, there, there! shut the door,” cried Timson, hastily; “it’s all right, it’s all right! And now, what do you want here, you sir? You’re one of the bell-ringers, ain’t you?”

“Right you are, sir,” said Beaky Jem, staring with all his eyes.

“Just so—just so. And now you’re not wanted, are you? No one wants you—eh? There then, take that, and be off.”

Mr Chawner took “that,” and went off—“that” wearing very much the appearance of a warm half-crown from Mr Timson’s pocket.

But before Mr Chawner was outside the door, he was muttering, “I knowed he was a bit on; but there was a sight o’ beer up our way to-night, sewerly.”

“We should have been here hours ago,” said the vicar, “but the train was stopped by the snow.”

“And he wouldn’t have come on till the morning, if it hadn’t been for me,” broke in Mr Timson.

“Let me speak, Timson—let me speak,” exclaimed the vicar.

“I won’t, I’m—blessed if I do,” exclaimed Timson, excitedly, altering the run of his sentence. “It was my doing, and Purkis’s here; and you know I made you come on to-night.”

The temperature was bitter, but upon Mr Purkis being referred to, he grunted as he stood behind the door busily wiping the perspiration from his head and neck.

“I won’t give up to nobody,” exclaimed Timson, pushing past one and then another into the little parlour, so that he might get to Jared.

“There, sir,—there, Mr Pellet! It’s all right, sir!—it’s all jolly, sir; and there’s my hand,—there it is. There’s both of them, sir, and hang the grammar. Shake hands, sir,—shake hands! There’s four honest hands together, and God bless you, sir!” and old Timson shook the tears into Jared’s eyes, while his own brimmed over from a different cause. “Now you may talk to him, sir,” said Timson, who, to further relieve his feelings, caught Patty in his arms and kissed her three times,—once on each cheek, and once upon her lips.

“I only meant one, my dear, but they were so good,” cried Timson, who seemed half mad, for he now shouted, “Hooray!” and tossed up his hat, kicking it, as it fell, right into the window, to the total destruction of the cracked pane of glass, with the dab of putty in the centre.

“I say, ‘Amen!’ to my eccentric friend Timson’s remark, Mr Pellet,” exclaimed the vicar, seizing the disengaged hands, and shaking them warmly. “Mr Pellet, sir, you have been an ill-used man, and I beg your pardon. The sinner is found. God bless you, Mr Pellet! I hope you forgive me.”

“O Mr Gray, sir! how could you suspect me?” cried Jared.

“Weakness, sir, weakness. I am but an erring man. We all err; and but for my faithful old friend Purkis, I should have gone on erring.”

Mr Purkis grunted again, and continued dabbing himself.

“He set me right,” continued the vicar, still shaking at the organist’s hands.

“And me,” broke in Timson. “I helped, to put him right. But there’s my hand, Mr Pellet—there it is, sir, and I’m glad to shake hands with you once more. I always wanted to; but I kept my hands to myself on principle, sir. But I always said it wasn’t you—I told him so, sir, scores of times, but he wouldn’t believe me.”

“O Timson, Timson!” said the vicar, reprovingly; “you know that you were one of the first to suspect him.”

“Well, how could I help it, when it looked so suspicious?” cried the churchwarden, fiercely. “Don’t get putting it all on my shoulders, John Gray—don’t, please.”

“Shake hands, Timson—shake hands; and let’s say fervently, ‘Thank God, it is all found out at last.’”

“So we will,” said Timson, “so we will; but really, you know,” he said, “if I had given my honest opinion—honest opinion you know,” and his eyes twinkled,—“I should have declared that it was that old rogue of a beadle of ours in the corner.”

Mr Purkis ceased his dabbing, and stared.

“But we could not afford to lose so great an ornament to our church, eh? Mr Gray, sir, eh?” he chuckled; and, by that time, Mr Purkis saw through the joke, and chuckled too, though he had at first thought it rather a serious matter.

Jared was too agitated and too unnerved with the proceedings of the past few hours to do more than shake hands again and again with his visitors. He wanted to tell them of his adventure at the church, but he could not speak; and besides, there were Mrs Jared and Patty looking perfectly astounded as they tried to interpret the meaning of the scene.

“There, there, there!” exclaimed the vicar, kindly, “It is late, and they want to be alone, Timson. Let us go, for you are such a boisterous youth. Let them be, Timson, and come away. But tell me first that you forgive me for my injustice, Mr Pellet.”

“Forgive you, sir!” said Jared, in a choking voice.

“There, there!” said the vicar, shaking hands again. “What does it all mean, Mrs Pellet? What! don’t you know? More reason for us to go. Come away, Timson, come away. There! you’ll wake the children,” he exclaimed, as a wail came from up-stairs. “Come away, and let Mr Pellet set the heart of his wife at rest. That’s right, Purkis, go first. We should not have been so late; but I was in the country when these two came down after me; and then the snow stopped us.”

“And he said it was too late to come on to-night,” cried Timson, again; “but I would have my way. There’s my hand, Mr Pellet, sir. There it is, and—there, I never felt happier in my life.” And to prove it, Timson made a charge at Patty, who escaped him, however, by running up to quiet the children, who were like skittles, and upsetting one another till there was quite a chorus.

“God bless all here!” said the vicar, fervently, by way of benediction, as he stood in the passage; and then they would have departed, but for Timson, who turned back to shake hands once more with Jared, exclaiming—

“There’s my hand, Mr Pellet, sir: I always declared it wasn’t you.”

And again, as Jared stood at the door, watching the two down the street, Timson turned again to shout,—“I always said it wasn’t;” while the gentle, reproving voice of the old vicar was heard to ejaculate—

“Oh, Timson!”

Volume Three—Chapter Thirteen.

An Accident.

“No news,” day after day—day after day, till Harry was weary of repeating the words to the troubled father. Sergeant Falkner came often enough to repeat his story, that so far he had done everything possible; but that he had scent of something which he felt sure must turn out right.

At last Harry was wandering one evening towards Decadia, he knew not why, he said, but it always appeared to him as if elucidation of the mystery must come from that direction; and though he would not own to it, he made this surmise his excuse for going often to Brownjohn Street, seeing Janet but seldom—Canau often—quite an intimacy having arisen between the latter and himself.

Harry wandered thoughtfully on, till, nearing the end of St Martin’s Lane, he started back, for from out of a busy street there came a sharp rattling of wheels, a shout, a dull heavy sound; then the customary rush of sight-seers till a crowd had collected.

“There, that’s the seccun’ acciden’ I’ve seen at that there corner with my own blessed eyes,” said a man. “Them cabs comes cutting along fierce, never thinking as they’ve got anything to do but shout, and everybody’s to get out o’ the way in a instan’. If its panels as scratches, they pulls up; but if its human flesh and blood, drive on. It ought to be put a stop to—that it ought.”

There was a chorus of indignant acquiescent growls, though no one said what ought to be stopped; and Harry Clayton pressed forward through the swaying crowd, in the midst of which the shiny crown of a policeman’s hat was to be seen.

“Get a stretcher—Take him to the hospital—Poor creature!” exclaimed various voices; and then came a score of indignant commands: “Give him air!—Stand back, will yer!”—the speakers never seeing the necessity of themselves moving.

“Why don’t you look alive, and take him to the hospital!” exclaimed a strident voice again.

“Non—non! chez moi—chez moi!” groaned the sufferer.

“What’s he say? He’s foreign! Any one here understand Dutch? Anybody know who he is?”

“I do,” said Harry, pushing foward. “He wishes to be taken home,” just as, half insensible, the sufferer babbled a few words in his native tongue, to which he seemed naturally to revert; and then, under the young man’s guidance, poor Canau was borne to his lodgings, and a surgeon procured—one who came the more willingly upon Harry furnishing him with his address, and undertaking, if necessary, to defray all expense.

“I did try to get away; but I was confused, and stumbled; and ah! ma belle patrie!” muttered Canau, “I shall see thee no more.”

For the surgeon had made his examination, bandaged, and done all that was possible to ease the sufferer, and then

taken his departure.

“I am hurt—much hurt,” said Canau, feebly, as he reached out a withered hand to Harry; “but I should like just once —”

He turned his eyes towards a violin hung upon the wall; but when Janet eagerly reached it down, and Canau tried to raise the bow, his bruised muscles refused to act, and he shook his head.

“Had you not better try and sleep?” said Harry to the injured man, who seemed momentarily to grow more feverish and excited.

“Sleep!” he exclaimed, hoarsely, “sleep now? Shall I not soon sleep without waking? No, no—no, no! Look here! you are a gentleman—you have feelings. Listen! Years ago—many now—I fled from my country. I was sought for; I was called ‘traitor!’ But why? mon Dieu, why? Because I loved my rightful monarch, and would have seen him on the throne. But might is right, even as you say it here; and I fled to beggary and wretchedness amongst these poor—I, a gentleman—to drink at last to drown my misery, till I tried to live by my violin, and then I took to that poor child, saved her from misery and death, and now she loves me.”

Worn out at last, and half delirious with the fever from the injuries he had received, the Frenchman at last dozed off, when Harry rose to leave, wondering whether, after all, Canau knew what had become of Lionel, and hopeful that, if he did, his prostrate and weak state would offer opportunities for arriving at the truth.

As Harry reached the bottom, D. Wragg, pipe in hand, made his appearance, craning his neck, and thrusting his face forward in disagreeable proximity to that of his visitor, as in answer to Harry’s “Good night,” he exclaimed—

“I know!”

“Know what,” said Harry, sharply, his thoughts instantly reverting to Lionel, and the hope that if D. Wragg knew anything, now in his state of semi-intoxication, he might divulge some clue to the mystery that had troubled them for so long. But if D. Wragg possessed a secret, it seemed to be one from which he felt in no haste to part; for, with drunken solemnity, he merely shook his head a great many times, and then drew back softly into his shop, closing the door after him; but only to open it again a few inches, so as to allow the passage of his head as he muttered gruffly, throwing the words, as it were, at his visitor—

“Never mind!”

Volume Three—Chapter Fourteen.

A Question.

“Been here five minutes, sir,” said Sergeant Falkner, as Harry Clayton entered the passage of the Regent Street house. “Yes, five minutes exactly,” he continued, referring to his watch. “I’d allowed myself ten minutes to wait and see if Sir Richard woke up; and if he had not at the end of that time, I was off. But as you’ve come, sir, that’ll do as well, for I promised him I’d look in and state progress every day.”

“What news have you, then?” said Harry.

“I don’t know as I have any as yet, sir.”

Harry gave a fresh gesture of impatience.

“Slow and sure, sir, ’s my motto,” said the sergeant. “’Tain’t always that one can make a dead swoop down. I should have liked to have brought you word that I had found next day after getting instructions; but a case of this sort is like hatching chickens—it takes time. You’ve been thinking as the eggs are all addled, but p’raps you’re wrong, sir. I don’t know. I won’t say but what I might have heard one little thing beginning to peck inside, and one may have a good brood yet—who knows!”

“But have you anything authentic you can tell me?” said Harry, who was wearied out with these many purposeless visits, the endless consultations, the trivial information demanded, and after all the small result.

“Nothing, sir, as yet. Only I tell you this, I think I shall have something for you directly.”

“Hope deferred,” said Harry, bitterly.

“Maketh the heart sick—eh, sir? Exactly so, and good news is the physic as makes it well again. Have a little more patience with me, and you may be satisfied yet.”

Harry bent his head.

“Look here, sir,” said the sergeant; “just another word before I go. You’ve been very often to Decadia lately.”

“Yes,” said Harry.

“Well, sir, if you’ll take my advice, you won’t go there so often. Why not? you think. My answer to that is—We haven’t found your friend yet; and my experience of some parts of London is, that there are men in it who think a deal more of a pound or two than they do of a man’s life.”

Here Sergeant Falkner fixed a bold clear eye upon that of the young man for a few seconds, nodded sagely, and then departed.

Left alone, Harry stood thoughtful and half startled for a few minutes before going up to Sir Francis' room, where the baronet still remained sleeping, evidently under the influence of some sedative, for there was a graduated bottle upon the little table by the head of his couch, and a faint odour that reminded Harry of visits to a photographer's pervaded the room.

"Must be ether!" he said, softly, as he went on tip-toe to the bedside, and anxiously looked down on the pallid troubled face, whose expression—even in sleep—told of the tortured mind, and the pangs which the old man was called upon to suffer.

"Let him sleep," said Harry to himself, and he stole gently from the room to sit and think for a while, when, the hour being far too early for bed, he lit a cigar, and went out for half-an-hour's stroll before retiring for the night.

"I wonder whether we shall ever see him again?" thought Harry, as he turned down one of the quiet streets, intending to make a circuit and return to the chambers by another route. His thoughts were busy now,—he was running over in a half-troubled way the words of the sergeant that night, for they had left their impression; then he felt disheartened and sad, as he thought of Patty's intimacy with the Decadia people, and the way in which she was dragged into the affair, trembling, too, as it struck him that there might be legal inquiry, and she called upon to give evidence. At last he came to the conclusion that he would go and boldly beg of Jared Pellet to keep her away from the wretched district, and quickened his steps as if about to go at once, till he recollected the hour, and once more slackened his pace.

The street was perfectly empty, the lines of lamps looking in the distance like a vista of golden beads hung in the air.

Suddenly he was aroused from his musings, and, turning sharply, he was face to face with, and so close as to be even touching, his follower, who, with one arm upraised, was about to seize him by the neck, the gaslight falling full upon the features of Mr John Screwby.

Mr John Screwby had indeed been about to administer the garotter's hug, for he had followed Harry through the frequented streets till he had turned into one that was retired, and afforded an opportunity that this gentleman did not feel disposed to resist.

Times had been what he termed "hardish" lately. Buoyed up by the hope of obtaining the reward, he had fallen into the habit, while hope lasted, of boasting among his companions of the luck about to fall to his share. That luck, though, had never been his; and the failure of several little adventures had also tended to lower Mr Screwby's banking account. Hence, then, he had been on the look out for an unconsidered trifle or two.

The opportunity was excellent—the hour was late. A glance up and down the street had shown him that there was not a soul in sight, while as to the houses, for the most part the lights were now in the upper stories.

Mr John Screwby's teeth glistened brightly, and with rapid action he stepped forward, at the same time softly turning up his cuffs as if to strike.

It was a chance and no mistake, he thought. Nothing could have happened better—cash, a watch and chain, and a bit of revenge, all at one swoop. For if it had not been for this swell, the old gentleman would have written his cheque for the reward, and it would have been cashed, and there would have been an end of it.

A quarter—one half of the street had been traversed, and Screwby told himself that it was time to close. He gave another glance behind him—all right. If he had only had a mate now, how easy the job would have been. But then a mate would have wanted half the proceeds, and there might have been a row afterwards, and a split, so that it was better so.

Hunting—sporting of any kind—pooh! what could they be to such sport as this—so exciting, and dashed with a tinge of danger? And then the game was so profitable!

Mr Screwby licked his lips as, with head down and hands held in true pedestrian fashion, he pressed on.

Now was the time, he felt. He had closed to within a yard—a dash in and it would be done—the arm thrown round the victim's neck, a sharp twist, a kick at his legs, and he would be down upon the pavement, which would effectually stun him. Then a little rapid manipulation, and all would be right.

"Now for it, then!" he resolutely exclaimed, and he raised his arm.

Is there, or is there not, some instinct of coming danger—some strange, ethereal, electric wire of sympathy, along which, as rapidly as thought, speeds the warning "Look out!" What do psychologists say? Some are for, some against the possibility of such influences: take, then, your own experience and judge. See how often, as if feeling the *wind* of the coming peril, people have been known to swerve aside, or halt, or hurry on, or stay away scores of times, and escape. Instances innumerable might be cited of where the preyer has been balked of his quarry, even as here, when, just as Screwby was in the act of making his spring, Harry turned and faced his enemy, and both stood for a brief minute without moving.

The next moment Screwby drew back to gather force, then, with fingers crooked like a beast's talons, he leaped at Harry's throat, but only to receive full upon that flat and ugly nose a tremendous blow sent right from a desperate man's shoulder.

In itself the stroke seemed hard enough to have made the organ flat; but, joined to it, there was the force with which

Screwby was making at his destined prey—the two forces added forming a total whose result was a dull, unpleasant-sounding thud—a heavy, drunken stagger—and then Mr John Screwby seemed to collapse, his legs doubling beneath him, his whole body assuming a wavy motion, and he was upon the pavement in a curious heap, emitting as he went down a groan that sounded as if the collapse were total.

"'Ullo! what's up now?" greeted Harry's ears, as he stood binding a handkerchief around his bleeding knuckles, and gazing at his fallen assailant.

Harry turned to find that a policeman had made his appearance.

"This man attacked me, and I struck him down," replied Harry.

"Then you must come on, and enter the charge," said the constable. "Now, then rouse up here," he continued, giving Mr Screwby a shake which made his bull head tap the pavement in a most unpleasant manner, till in a confused fashion he rose to his knees, and then stood up, staring hard at the proximate area railings, as if he were in doubt as to where he was, and evidently took the iron bars for those of a very different place. A moment later, though, he saw more clearly his position, and, thrusting the constable back, he darted off, and would have escaped, but for the appearance of another officer from round the corner—the shouts of his fellow galvanising him into activity.

Then there was a rush, a struggle, and the rending off of buttons, the loud bang of a heavy hat falling upon the pavement, and but for the coming up of Harry and the other constable, Mr Screwby would once more have been on the way to his den. The reinforcements, though, prevailed, and the next instant the ruffian was prone upon his back, and swearing powerfully.

This time the ignominious bracelets of the ill-doer were produced, and a sharp "click, click" told that they were ornamenting the wrists for which they were destined.

"I'd put a pair round his legs if I had my will," growled the first constable. "What d'yer mean by falling in that ere way?"

The man took a great cotton handkerchief from his hat, and with it mopped his head hard, for he was tightly buttoned up in his coarse, heavy greatcoat.

"Yer might ha' known you'd ha' been ketched without coming these games," he growled again, taking it as a deep offence against his own dignity that the culprit had tried to escape after being "took."

But Mr Screwby did not condescend to reply with words. His responses were all looks, and those of a class that the second constable, who had found a dent in his hat, stigmatised as "gallows;" but whether deserving of that appellation or no, they were sufficiently evil, heightened as they were by a stained countenance and eyes swollen sufficiently to startle any one who met their gaze.

Mr John Screwby was caught and handcuffed, but he was not caged; but lay upon the pavement sullen and heavy, refusing to hearken to the voice of the charmer when requested to rise; even a playful tap or two from a staff, and a sharp twist of the handcuffs had no effect; the result being that one constable had to seek the station for more help, and Mr Screwby rode off in triumph, his chariot being a stretcher, and the paean of praise the mutterings and growlings of the perspiring police.

It was too late for there to be much of a popular gathering; such as there was, though, was decidedly of a sympathetic cast. Fortunately the station was near at hand, in which place of security Harry saw his assailant safely lodged, and then sought his temporary home, wondering the while whether a similar attack had caused the disappearance of Lionel Redgrave, and also whether the man was taken who could bring the affair to light.

Volume Three—Chapter Fifteen.

"Coming Events."

The morning dawned before Harry Clayton fell asleep. After an early walk, he met Sir Richard at breakfast, to find him pale, but calm and composed.

It was very evident to the young man that the father was losing hope, and that he was having a hard struggle to resign himself to what had fallen to his lot. Two months had now elapsed, and not the faintest trace of a clue by which Lionel could be traced had been found.

"I have been thinking, Clayton," said Sir Francis, as they sat over their meal, "that it would be cruel and unjust on my part to retain you here any longer. You have your career mapped out, and every day that I keep you is to your injury."

"Never mind that, Sir Francis," said Harry. "I am as deeply interested in the search as yourself, and I cannot give up hope so easily. When I feel despair creeping upon me I will give up—not before. But you are better this morning?"

"More resigned, Clayton—more resigned," said the old man, sadly. "It is time to try and bear it."

Harry reminded him that the sergeant was still hopeful, and also told him of the man's last words; but Sir Francis only shook his head sadly. He grew more interested, though, when Harry related his adventures of the past night, and also laid bare a few of his thoughts; but they seemed to make no lasting impression; and soon after, leaving the room, Harry made his way anxiously to the police court, for the feeling grew stronger that he had at last run the villain to

earth—this man whom he had recognised on the previous night as the informer, and also as the low-browed scoundrel who had watched them at the bird-dealer's.

Might not this be poor Lionel's destroyer? It was mere suspicion, but might he not have committed some foul deed, with Lionel Redgrave for victim, even as he had essayed on the previous night, for it was by the narrowest shade that he had himself escaped. Poor Lionel was perhaps caught in one of the vile purlieus of Decadia, and had been dragged away and hidden after being plundered; while to divert suspicion, with extra cunning—where no suspicion existed—this scoundrel had essayed to lay the blame upon the house of Wragg.

Suspicions these, certainly; but as Harry walked on, from being shadowy they gradually grew more solid and firm, so that he eagerly waited at the court the turn of Mr John Screwby, whose vile countenance, when placed in the dock, wore anything but an improved aspect, with the addition of a damaged nose and a pair of hideously discoloured eyes.

The case was plain enough as far as the attempt was concerned. Suspicion of other matters, of course, could not be raised. But there were several little ugly facts brought forward respecting Mr John Screwby's character—touching six months' imprisonment for this, three months' imprisonment for that, a year for something else,—altogether a total of four years for different offences that the warders of different prisons could declare to. Consequently, as Mr Screwby's name stank in the nostrils of the law, he was remanded, with the certain prospect of being committed for trial at the next hearing.

Weary and unsettled, Harry strolled down the next evening to Decadia. The first face he encountered was that of D. Wragg, who was seated behind his counter with the shutters up, and the gas turned down very low.

"Oh, yes! you can go up," said the little man, gloomily; "but don't you make no mistake, and think I ain't so sharp as I should be, because I've seemed a bit queer lately. It was all through a drop o' drink, and I shouldn't ha' taken that if it hadn't been along o' that friend o' yours. Cuss him! what did he want to go losing dorgs for, and come here bringing mis'ry into a pore man's home?"

D. Wragg ended his speech almost with a whine, wiping away two or three maudlin drink-begotten tears; when, seeing from the man's state that it would be of little avail to remind him of the cause of Lionel's first visit, Harry ascended to find Canau sitting up in bed, holding one of Janet's hands in his.

"Aha!" he said, softly; "then you have come again. What news of your friend? None? Aha! I suspect D. Wragg once, and he trapped me like one of his pigeons; but there—he is innocent; he has no secrets but about wretched dogs. He is not bad, but he is little—little at heart. He has no soul for a great crime. He hides away dogs in holes and cupboards and corners, and we hear mysterious cries, and think them dreadful, here in this house, and the good Madame Vink faints away. Then I go looking—to find what? Ma foi! dogs—dogs—dogs. Nothing more. There was nothing to find."

"Are you an arch-traitor?" thought Harry for a moment, as he sat gazing at the injured man. "If your heart could be laid bare, would it disclose anything?" The sad calm look upon the little Frenchman's face disarmed him, though, the next instant, and he felt half angry at the flash of suspicion, as Canau continued—

"We have strange ideas all of us; and we all suspect one another. I have often think D. Wragg knows where your poor foolish friend has gone, and he think the same of me; and the work-people outside say it is a judgment on me that I am struck down, and that it will save me from what they call 'scragg.' But no, no! I shall not be hung at Vieux Bailee. But they are *sots*—fools all."

Harry sat by the bed half-disposed to tell of Screwby's attack, but he refrained.

"Monsieur," said Canau, after a pause, "I think I shall be the better for this hurt. It has made me think of how I have let myself drift—drift away, when I ought to have fought, and been something better. There is only one thing that I have kept of the past, when I was another man, and that is my music. Janet, my child, when I am well, we will go from here and live otherwise: I have not been just to you. But D. Wragg has been good to me, and a friend when I was in despair with life; still I must change. Yes, we will go and live away from this wretched place. Pah! how could I have kept you here so long? Only let me get well, for I shall not die of this hurt. I wish that you too were glad and happy as I feel. Poor Janet, too, would be glad of heart did she know that your friend was found, and the old man his father at peace."

Janet listened eagerly as Harry spoke of the inutility of their search, and then the poor girl shrank back; but attention was drawn from her by a sharp cry of pain from Canau.

"Shall I fetch a doctor?" said Harry earnestly.

"No, no; I shall be better—well directly. The pain is sometimes sharp. But ah, bah! it is nothing. I shall live—I shall be well soon. I do not trouble myself at all. But hark! Mon Dieu! listen! Is there fresh trouble in the house? They will not search again—I cannot have it! Monsieur, I am weak."

Harry, as he started up, gazed curiously at the injured man, for there was a strange dread in his tones that again raised suspicion. But there was evidently something important on the wing. Amidst a good deal of noise, there arose the sound of voices in loud altercation; and as he opened the door D. Wragg could easily be heard as he exclaimed—

"Don't you make no mistake now; I'm not going to have my place searched again; so now, then!"

"Ah-h-h! Ma foi!" ejaculated Canau, and a spasm sent its trace across his features, while Janet, wild-eyed and strained, held tightly by his hand.

“There is something coming now!” thought Harry, and his heart beat painfully as D. Wragg’s voice was again heard.

“Yes; he is here! And if he is here, what o’ that? Don’t you make no mistake. There ain’t no harm in his coming here if he likes, is there? No one ain’t a-going to burke him. I’ll fetch him down, for I ain’t going to have no more searchings in my house.”

“Searching! Ah! I cannot bear it!” groaned the Frenchman.

Directly after there was the thump, thump, of D. Wragg’s heavy boot on the stairs.

“’Tis for me,” said Harry, turning to Canau. “There seems to be news;” and then, with a feeling of compassion, he continued, “but do you know anything of it all?—speak if you do.”

“I know! No, no; not a word!” exclaimed Canau, when, waiting to hear no more, Harry hurried excitedly to the door, to encounter Sergeant Falkner, while closely following him came D. Wragg, growling viciously, and tearing at his spikey hair, as he set his boot down violently upon each stair, as if crushing under it vermin in the shape of the police.

A few words, though, from the sergeant had the effect of setting D. Wragg off into a set of terpsichorean evolutions that were grotesque in the extreme. Certainly a triumphal dance was intended, with accompanying stamps of the thick boot and snappings of his fingers; but how he could possibly have contrived to jerk, and start, and jig as he did, and yet live, was a puzzle that brought down the far-famed Gordian knot into a contemptible cat’s-cradle of Berlin wool. Dislocation! It might have been thought that he was out of joint from head to toe, and india-rubber had taken the place of his muscles.

“I told you so—I told you so!” he shouted. “There! don’t you make no more mistakes, any on you, because—Hip—hip—hip—hooray! I say, though, Mr Canau, ain’t it glorious? But I say, sir, Mr Clayton, sir, is there any little thing in the shop? Don’t you make—there! ain’t I glad!”

Another triumphal dance succeeded D. Wragg’s burst of eloquence, when he stumped off, sowing turnips as he went, to find Mrs Winks; while Harry hurried back into the room to whisper one word—a word which made the Frenchman fall back upon his pillow with a sigh of content, as Janet turned to the window to hide her face from those who were too much engrossed with their own thoughts to think of the poor girl’s feelings.

“I am content now, Monsieur Clayton,” sighed Canau. “There will be no more suspicion, and you will come and see me when I am a different man. But I could not bear that there should be a slur upon the place where we have lived so long. But there! go—you are anxious;” and as Harry hurried from the room, Canau repeated, with brightening eye, that most important word which Harry had uttered, and that word was—

“Found!”

Volume Three—Chapter Sixteen.

Mr Purkis does his Dooty.

Mr Purkis stood in his shop carefully cutting out strips of white paper for the measurement of future customers’ feet, when he heard the pattering of feet, and anticipating trade for the establishment, he raised his eyes, slowly, and with due importance.

“What’s this, Mr Purkis, sir?” cried the visitor, rushing into the shop with a violence that made the little bell give tongue furiously—so furiously that it seemed as if disposed to compete with little Tim Ruggles, excited and hot as he was with running. “What does all this mean, sir? How is it—when was it—and how did it happen? I must know—must, indeed.”

Mr Purkis stood erect, with his hands beneath his black linen apron, and puffed out and collapsed his cheeks again and again, but without answering his visitor.

“I must know, Mr Purkis, sir,” cried Tim again, as he took off his hat, put it on, and walked about the shop in his excitement. “I’ve been to Mr Pellet’s, sir, and he won’t tell me a word, so I’ve come to you.”

“Well, you see, Mr Ruggles,” said Purkis, slowly, as if he sold his speech by the yard like shoe-string, after puffing and gasping three or four times like a fat old tench,—“you see—”

“Don’t say a word, Joseph—don’t commit yourself,” exclaimed Mrs Purkis, coming forth in a great hurry from the back regions, and busily rolling her arms up in her apron as she came, perhaps to hide their red and chappy state—perhaps from modesty or for comfort.

Mr Purkis looked at his wife, and then again at restless Tim, gave a gasp or two, puffed out his cheeks beadle-wise, and then opened his mouth as if to speak, but no words came.

“Don’t say a word—don’t say anything about it!” exclaimed Mrs Purkis again in a great state of excitement, but unrolling one arm to place it through her husband’s, as if for protection, as she looked defiantly at Tim. “You know what the pleece said to the boy when he took him up for stealing the list-slippers. What you say now ’ll be used in evidence agen you! You’re mixed up enough with it as it is.”

“Oh! please don’t stop him,” cried Tim Ruggles, in agony, as he wrung his hands and looked imploringly from one to

the other. “What does it mean?”

“Well you see, Mr Ruggles,” said Purkis, after another tenchy gasp.

“Now, Joseph, don’t,” cried Mrs Purkis.

“Hold your tongue, woman,” cried Mr Purkis, majestically—the beadle asserting itself over the husband.

“Don’t stop him; pray don’t stop him, Mrs Purkis, ma’am,” cried Tim. “What, does it mean? Mrs Pellet began to tell me, when Mr Pellet stopped her; and now Mr Purkis begins to tell me, and you stop him.”

Mrs Purkis shook her head fiercely, so that something, probably curl papers—for she was strong in crackers—rattled.

“Please tell me,” implored Tim. “It’s about that robbery at the church; and Mrs Pellet says that you, sir, saw Mrs Ruggles at the boxes, and then Mr Pellet wouldn’t let her say another word.”

“And so I did see her,” gasped Mr Purkis, rattling his halfpence as he spoke; “kiss the book and take my Bible oath I did—”

“Now, Joseph—now, Joseph,” cried Mrs Purkis, interrupting him; “don’t say another word, or you’ll never forgive yourself.”

“Hold your tongue, woman!” cried Mr Purkis again, more importantly, but without looking down at her, or taking his hands from where he had deeply thrust them—into his pockets.

“Don’t speak to me in that rough way before people, Joseph!” cried Mrs Purkis, indignantly, and she gave the arm to which she clung a sharp shake.

“Be quiet, then,” said Mr Purkis, importantly, and then he gave two or three more puffs out to his cheeks. “You see, Mr Ruggles,” he continued, “I’ve a great feeling of esteem for Mr Pellet, who is a fine musician, and not a better in London. It was through him, sir, that Mrs Ruggles got that there appointment of pew-opener, for if it hadn’t been for Mr Pellet, sir, *I* shouldn’t have stirred in the matter.”

“O Joseph!” whimpered Mrs Purkis, “I thought you would. You’re a committing yourself, and laying yourself open.”

“Be quiet, woman!” roared Purkis, looking his beadlest.

There was only Joseph Purkis of the boot and shoe emporium, in his black linen apron and shirt-sleeves, list-slippers, and, like a chain of office, a few slips of measuring paper over his shoulders, while he certainly had not been shaved for two or three days, and was consequently very stubbly; yet you could see a cocked-hat with broad gold lace in the pose of his large hair-streaked head; there was the broad red velvet and gold cape spreading over his shoulders, and his ponderous gilt mace of office seemed to recline in the hollow of his arm as he spoke. There was a majestic look about the man which told of habitual command, and he showed it in the way in which he crushed his wife with a side look.

“Mr Ruggles, you see, I felt hurt to see Mr Pellet in trouble, and losing his organist-ship on account of that poor-box being robbed, for I knew as he was going, being p’raps the only man as did; and it troubled me, sir, dreadful, being plundered again and again; and more than once I was that uncomfortable about it that I could have sent in my uniform to Mr Timson, sir, which would have shown as I meant to resign; only I knew as my enemy the greengrocer would have took the post, and worn that hat in triumph—too big for him though it was—sizes—and padded with brown paper. So I wouldn’t send it in, sir, though an independent man, and able to live on my business.”

“O Joseph, Joseph, Joseph!” whimpered his wife, “this’ll all be used in evidence; and you don’t know as the income-tax people ain’t listening, and you never paid a penny yet.”

“Hush-sh-sh!” ejaculated Mr Purkis, as if he were in the loft amongst the whispering boys of Gunnis’ gift of charity, and removing one hand from his pocket, he seized a lady’s slipper, and slapped the counter with the sole; while poor Tim Ruggles stood wringing his hands, and looking appealingly from one to the other.

“You see, Mr Ruggles,” said Purkis, waving the shoe, “having the cleaning and polishing of those poor-boxes, I felt as if I was answerable for them, and as if it was me as ought to know where the money went. They weren’t my tills, sir, but they was in my church; and the people as that there money was for was my poor people, as I’ve presided over in the giving of scores of doles at the vestry—people as respex me, sir; and, after a deal of consideration, I says to myself, I says—It’s some one as goes to the church on week days, and it’s either me—”

“O Joseph, Joseph!” cried Mrs Purkis, beginning to sob.

“Why can’t you be quiet, and let a man speak?” exclaimed Mr Purkis, in injured tones.

“But—but—you’ll be getting yourself into trouble about it,” sobbed Mrs Purkis. “Please don’t let him say no more, Mr Ruggles.”

“Women is so soft, Mr Ruggles,” said Purkis, benevolently.

“Not always, sir—not always,” said Tim, standing first upon one leg, then upon the other, and rubbing the nap off his shabby hat till there was quite a bald place. “Not always, sir; I’ve known them as was very hard.”

“So have I, sir,” said Mr Purkis, importantly, as a county magistrate pronouncing a sentence,—“so have I, sir; and I

says to myself—Joseph Purkis, you've been parish officer at St Runnle's a many years now, and with that there stain about the church, your uniform is a getting tarnished, and your sooperiors will look down upon you till you clear it away. Them boxes are in your charge, and therefore you owe a dooty to yourself to set all right. He didn't look at you at all last Sunday, the vicar didn't; and how do you know but what he suspects you, same as he may any innercent person? He may even now think as you have a hand in it, and be writing out your resignation for you. And really, Joseph Purkis, I says, it looks as if it were either you—"

"O Joseph—*Jo*seph!" sobbed Mrs Purkis.

"Be quiet, woman, can't you?" shouted Purkis. "Either you," he continued, slapping the counter with the shoe, "or some one else familiar with the place."

"Oh!" gasped Mrs Purkis.

"Now, just you go in there, and shut that door after you, Mrs Purkis, if you please," said the beadle, more importantly than ever; and, taking his other hand from his pocket, he opened the parlour door as if it had been a pew, and made way with a flourish of the shoe for his wife to enter; while that lady, whose society had now become too demonstrative to be pleasant, raised her hands appealingly to the Wellingtons hung around the shop, as if to ask them to bear witness that it was in spite of her advice Mr Purkis persisted in committing himself. But the next minute she was invisible, on account of the dingy muslin blind over the half glass-door, and Mr Purkis walked back Astur-like in his stately stride.

"So, Mr Ruggles," he said, "speaking as a man to a man, I felt it to be my dooty, for the benefit of all parties concerned, to watch, sir; and I did watch, sir, night after night, sir, day after day, sir; and where do you think I was, sir? Why, high up, sir, in the pulpit, with the door jest ajar, and a few cushions, to make the place a bit easy. Ah! sir, I've seen Mr Jared Pellet and Ichabod Gunnis come, sir, and go; and often, when that dog of a boy has come by himself a waiting for the organist, I've been at my wits' ends, sir, to see that there young dog a sliding down the bannisters of the gallery, or a swinging on the pew-doors, and my fingers have itched to that degree, sir, to get hold of my cane, that I ain't been hardly able to bear it. It's been orful, sir, sometimes—orful to see the wicked young villin! What do you think of a boy getting into the reading-desk, and beginning, 'Dearly beloved brethren,' and then going down to the clerk's desk and singing 'Amen,' just like our old man? Why, sir, one night I felt a'most ready to bust with indignation when he came down first, with Mr Pellet stopping up in the loft to think, I s'pose. What do you think the young dog did, sir? Why, he took the kiver off the font, sir, and then if he didn't go and commit sacrilege, and defame and disgrace the beautiful old stone thing by climbing up and standing upon his head, sir, in the font, and kicking his heels together, and playing up the what's-his-name's delight.

"Ah! he's a bad un, that boy. What do you think he did another night, sir? Put me in a cold prespiration he did, and then made me rise up with that big pulpit-cushion in my two hands. I should have heaved it and knocked him over like a skittle; only I knew it would not only upset him but all my plans as well; so I sat down again and filled my mouth full of pocket-handkerchief to stop back the indignation, for my pot was hot with thorns. What was he a doing of, sir? Why, I'll tell you. A dog! he'd got both his shoes off, and one in each hand, a walking all over the church backards and forrards and ziggery-zaggery, balancing hisself like a monkey the while. Not very wrong that you'll think, Mr Ruggles; but he was doing of it all on the narrow tops of the pews; and hang me, sir, if he didn't try to jump across the middle aisle, only he came down flop on his back, and got up whimpering, and limped out of the church as hard as he could go. Then, I've seen Mr—what, sir?"

"Pray put me out of my misery," implored poor Tim.

"I'm a coming to it fast, sir," said Purkis. "I've seen Mr Pellet come down and stop by the poor-box on the side where the door was open, and sigh bitterly, and go away again; and though I've watched a deal that way, I couldn't see nothing wrong out of the pulpit; so, to the utter neglect of Purkis's boot and shoe emporium, and to the constant annoyance of Mrs Purkis, which said it was no business of mine, I kep' on the watching, for I never give way, sir, in anything—not a peg. Why, sir, I'm a lion to that woman, sir; and as long as I'm a lion, why she's a lamb; but if I was to stop being a lion, sir, it's my belief she'd grow into a fierce tiger-cat, sir, and I should only be a mouse. Never give way to a woman, sir; they're made on purpose to be ruled; and if you don't rule 'em, sir, why, they'll know as there's something wrong, and they'll rule you.

"Well, sir, I took to t'other side then, and used to sit in the reading-desk; and there I never saw anything but aggravation. Young Ichabod playing pitch-and-nickem with buttons and nickers in the middle aisle, or turning summersets over the hassocks; and once, I declare solemnly, I could hardly bear it, for if he didn't get my mace, sir, and begin by walking up and down, and making believe it was me; then he must get to balancing it on his chin till he let it go agen one of the lamp glasses and cracked it, and I'll crack him for it now the thing's found out, with the very cane too as he took and stole out of mischief. But the worst of all was when he took and put that there staff across a couple of the free-seats, and began taking races and jumps over it, just as if he was in a playground instead of the Holy Catholic Church. Why, sir, it was enough to make the stone images on the monnyments tumble on him and crush him into the pavement—a bad dog!

"Then I tried the galleries; but I found out nothing there; and at last I took to the churchwarden's pew, for I was determined to keep it up; though I must own, sir, as a man as always speaks the truth—for the truth may be blamed but can never be shamed—and as one who may soon be on his oath, but who respex you, and is sorry for you, Mr Ruggles—that I should have found it out sooner if it hadn't been for the church being that bitter of a night that I was obliged to take a drop of something to keep the cold out of me for fear it might affect me so as to make me sneeze just at the most partickler time."

"Please, sir, do—oh! do go on," cried Tim, imploringly.

“Yes, yes! I’m going on,” said Purkis, solemnly. “So, sir, more than once I’m afraid I went to sleep in the big pew, same as I did on the night when I woke up and felt horribly frightened at hearing a something rattling about in the middle of the church; and for a time, sir, waking up fresh out of a long dream where I’d been heading a procession of thieves and poor-boxes, and policemen on the way to the Clerkenwell Police Court, I thought it had been something of what my old Scotch friend Sergeant Pike used to call ‘no canny.’ But there, sir, I soon shook that off, and rising very gently, I peeped over the edge of the pew, and I could just make out some one going along the middle aisle, and I knew the step as well as could be, besides a crackling staybone-and-busky noise as the figure made every time it stooped, while it never turned to the right or left without going altogether as if the neck was stiff.”

“Then it was a figure?” said Tim, wringing his hands.

“Oh yes, sir, it was a figure,” said Purkis, waving the slipper more and more; “a stiff figure, as went softly to first one and then the other poor-box; and I heard a key go and money chink after the figure had been well round the church. It sounded just like Mrs Purkis emptying out the till on Saturday nights.”

“But pray—” exclaimed Tim.

“Don’t interrupt, sir! Hush!” exclaimed Purkis pompously, as if he were frowning down a pack of boys, and making the chattering young dogs shake in their leather breeches; while gazing mournfully at him, as if he knew all now, Tim Ruggles, with his face full of wrinkles, waited to hear more.

“I knew the step, sir,” said Purkis, “and I could see the figure turn all round at once, sir, without moving its head; and then, in my lair, I watched and watched with my heart beating fierce, for I knew that the time was come for me to vindicate innocence, and to—to—er—er—wait Mr Ruggles, sir. And I did wait, Mr Ruggles, sir, till I heard the church-door shut softly, when all was so still that I couldn’t help thinking it might be fancy.”

“And it was fancy, Mr Purkis, wasn’t it?” exclaimed Tim, eagerly.

“No, sir, it warn’t fancy,” said Purkis, austerely, as he waved Tim back with the slipper. It was all true as true; and I slapped my knees and rubbed my hands, and then I looked up towards the old organ and nodded at it; for I thought of the vally of what I’d found out, sir, to a good man, and no end of a family of children. And then, when I thought I’d waited long enough not to be seen, I went and knocked up Mr Timson, our churchwarden; fetched him out of bed, for it was one o’clock and past; and when he got down to me in his dressing-gown, he began a bullying me like anything; for he thought, you know, I’d come boxing with my Christmas-piece.

“But, ‘gently, sir,’ I says; ‘don’t be rash—don’t be hasty.’ ‘Hasty!’ he says: ‘I’ll report you to Mr Grey. Get out, sir, you’re drunk: I can smell rum here.’ ‘And a good thing, too,’ I says, ‘for keeping cold out when you’re watching poor-boxes at night in a empty church?’ ‘What?’ he says, ‘what did you say, Purkis?’ he says. For answer, sir, I laid a finger solemn-like against one side of my nose, and looks at him out of the corners of my eyes. ‘Purkis,’ he says, ‘Purkis: you don’t mean as you have found it out?’ ‘But I do, sir,’ I says; and then I told him all, and he begged my pardon; and then, if he didn’t go into fits of delight, hopping about ‘I always said as it wasn’t Pellet,’ he kept on saying. Then he danced round the room, with his little bare legs popping out of the bottom of his dressing-gown, and he slapped me on the back over and over again. ‘Poor old Pellet!’ he says; ‘I’m glad: out and out glad!’ Then he called me a trump, which, though it was well meant, didn’t sound respectful to a man in my position in life, and beadle of St Runnle’s for all the years as I’ve been.

“But I didn’t show no temper, sir, for he meant well, as I said before; and he gets out something in an ugly little bottle, as he poured into two of the wretchedest little glasses you ever see; but when you come to taste it, my! it was just like what he called it; ‘gold water,’ he said it was, and he chuckled and danced as he poured it out. ’Pon my word, sir, it was like swallowing melted sovereigns.”

Tim groaned, but remained patient and motionless.

“Then, sir,” continued Purkis, “I went away a happy man, promising that I’d be with him next morning—no, it wasn’t, though, it was the same morning—to run down with him to see the vicar, as was in the country.

“‘Do you mean to report me, sir?’ I says. ‘Don’t be a fool, Purkis,’ he says. ‘I want you to tell him with your own lips.’”

“Tell him what, sir?—tell him what?” said Tim, piteously.

“That I’d seen—”

“Stop—stop!” exclaimed Tim, imploringly, as if, now that it had come to the point, and he was about to have that which he already knew corroborated, he could not bear it. “I don’t think I can quite take it yet; but there!—yes—please go on.”

“That I’d seen her, sir, as I could swear to, go to the poor-boxes one after another, and take something out, just like Mrs Purkis emptying the till, and then steal off, sir, so still that you could hardly hear her, only for the clicking of the key in the lock, and then she was gone.”

“*She* was—*she* was gone?” faltered Tim.

“Yes, sir; she was. Dark as it was, I could make out all I have said; and then it puzzled me that we should never have settled it upon her before, when we found the money missing. But, you see, she was always so prim, and clean, and neat, and respectable.”

“Always, Mr Purkis, sir,” said Tim; “always.”

“And no one never would have thought it of her,” said Purkis.

“No, sir; no one,” responded Tim, and then, sinking his voice to a whisper, he looked anxiously round the shop, dropping his hat, and then starting as he caught Purkis by one of his buttons—“Who was it, sir?—who was it?” he said, in a voice hardly above his breath.

“Why, you don’t want me to tell you, I’m sure, sir?” said Purkis, stoutly.

“Oh yes, I do!—oh yes, I do!” groaned Tim.

“Then,” said the beadle, “I’ll tell you!” When there came the words “O Joseph!” plainly heard from the inner room, pointing to the fact that Mrs Purkis had been listening the whole time. But her lord heeded not the soft appeal, but, leaning forward, he placed a hand upon Tim’s shoulder, his lips close to his ear, and whispered the words.

With a cry, the little tailor caught up his hat and dashed out of the shop, then, after silencing the irritated bell, Mr Purkis gave one of his customer-seeking looks up and down the street, but it was only to see poor Tim Ruggles disappear round the corner.

“I knowed you’d commit yourself, Joseph,” whimpered Mrs Purkis, standing at the inner door, and rolling her arms tightly in her apron.

“My dear,” said Mr Purkis pompously, “it was only my dooty!”

Volume Three—Chapter Seventeen.

John Brown.

“It’s all against rule and regulation, and that sort of thing,” said the sergeant, as he and Harry Clayton were being jolted over the stones in a Hansom cab; “but ours is a particular case. The old gentleman’s there long before this, sir. He seemed to revive like magic as soon as ever I told him the news. He just hid his face for a few moments, and then said quite sharp, ‘Go and fetch Mr Clayton, and bring him after me,’ telling me, of course, where you were gone; and here I am, sir.”

“But it seems so strange,” said Clayton. “I can’t understand it.”

“Strange, sir! ’Pon my soul, sir, if you’ll excuse me for saying so, I’m quite ashamed of myself. Thought I was up to more than that. And yet, here’s all the wind taken out of my sails, and I’m nowhere.”

Harry nodded, for he wanted to think, but the sergeant rattled on—

“It’s always the way with your biggest puzzles, sir: the way to find them out is the simplest way—the way that’s so easy that you never even give it a thought if it occurs to you. Perhaps you remember that chap in the story, sir, as wanted to keep a certain dockyment out of the way of the foreign detectives—French police—over the water—secret police, I think they call themselves; not that there’s one of them who can hold a candle to our fellows. Spies, perhaps, would be the better name for them. Well, he knew that as soon as he was out, they’d search the place from top to bottom. Well, what does he do? Hide it in the most secret place he could think of? Not he; for places that he could think of as being the safest, perhaps they might think of too. He was too foxy, sir; and he just folds it up like a letter, sticks it in a dirty old envelope, and pops it into the card-rack over the chimney-piece,—plain, for all folk to see; and, as a matter of course, they never so much as look at it. That’s just been the case with the young squire here; he’s been stuck up in the card-rack over the chimney-piece, chock before my eyes, and I’ve been shutting ’em up close so as not to see him, when he’s been as good as asking me to look. There, sir! I haven’t patience with myself; and I’m going to ask to be put on the sooperannuation list, along with the pensioners as I call ’em. Mysterious disappearance! why, it wasn’t anything of the sort, sir. But here we are!”

The cab was checked as he spoke, and alighting before a great gloomy looking building, the sergeant led the way up a flight of stone steps, and into a hall, where a liveried porter saluted him with a nod.

“Here, bring us the book again, Tomkins,” said the sergeant; and the porter reached a large folio from a desk, and placed it before the sergeant upon a side-table.

“Here you are, sir,” said the sergeant, eagerly, as he turned back some leaves, till he came to one which bore the date of Lionel’s disappearance. “Now, look here!”

He pointed to an entry in the accident register; for they were in the entrance-hall of a large hospital.

“Look at that, sir,” said the sergeant again; “and tell me what you think of it.”

Harry Clayton bent over the book, and read—

“Brown, John, stableman, run over by a cab. Severe concussion of the brain.”

“Now, sir, what do you make of that?”

“Nothing at all,” said Clayton, blankly.

“No more did I, sir. I wasn’t looking after John Brown, a stableman; but Lionel Redgrave, Esq. But that wasn’t all. I’ve seen this case—I’ve been to the bedside, and then I didn’t think anything of it. I was so clever.”

“But does that relate to him?”

“To be sure it does, sir. I tell you it’s easy enough, now one can see through it; but I couldn’t put that and that together before. Name never struck me a bit, when it ought to have been the very key to it all. He was knocked down, and run over by a cab, when out on his larks. Got his hair cut short, and his mustacher shaved off. There’s his clothes too, up-stairs—reg’lar stableman’s suit—masquerading things—such togs for a gent like him to wear! Poor chap, it was a bad case, though, for he was nearly killed. Well, of course, they brought him here, and asked him his name, when, just being able to speak, he says the very last thing that was in his poor head, before the sense was knocked out of it, and all its works were brought to a stand still. ‘What’s your name?’ they says; and as I said before, he answers the very last thing as was in his head before he was stopped short, and that was the name of the place he had been to—Brownjohn Street; and, saying it, no doubt, very feebly, they didn’t hear any more than the Brownjohn, so they put him down as Brown, and his Christian name after it, as is their custom, John—Brown, John; and here he’s lain insensible to this day. But come on up, sir.”

Following an attendant, Harry and the sergeant were ushered into a long, whitewashed ward, where, on either side, in their iron bedsteads, lay sufferers from the many accidents constantly occurring in the London streets. Here was a man who had fallen from a scaffold; there one who had had his arm crushed by machinery, and, all around, suffering enough to affect the stoutest heart. The sergeant, though, had no eye for these, and swiftly leading the way down the centre, he conducted Harry to where, weak, pale, and helpless, on his bed of suffering, lay Lionel Redgrave,—his hair shaven from his temples, and the large surgical bandages about his head adding greatly to the cadaverous expression of his countenance.

There was not the slightest doubt of his having suffered severely—it was written too plainly on his face; but he seemed now to be perfectly sensible, and as Clayton approached, he tried feebly to hold out his hand, whispering as he did so, the one word—

“Harry!”

Sir Francis sat holding the other hand, anxiously watching his son’s face, and hardly reassured by the house-surgeon’s declaration that, with anything like care, the young man was now out of danger.

“Don’t speak to him, Clayton,” said Sir Francis. “Don’t talk, my dear boy. Pray remember your condition.”

“All right,” was the reply, but in very feeble tones. “Seems as if I had been to sleep, and only just woke up. Confounded Hansom!—over me in a moment—Martin’s Lane—remember no more.”

“Yes, yes, we know all,” said Sir Francis; “but for my sake now be silent.”

“I must put in a word, too,” said the house-surgeon, approaching. “I think he has borne as much as will be beneficial for one day. I must ask you to leave now. To-morrow he will be better able to bear a visit.”

“Another ten minutes,” pleaded Sir Francis. “Not one instant more. We will not talk.”

The surgeon bowed his head, when Harry, after warmly pressing the young man’s hand—for he somehow felt thoroughly at ease within his own breast—retired with the surgeon and the detective to another part of the ward.

“Curious case this, sir, eh?” said the sergeant.

“Well, yes,” said the surgeon. “But what a strange whim! We had not the most remote idea but that he was some young groom out of place. I judged the latter from the whiteness of his hands, and I must really do our young friend the credit of saying that he thoroughly looked his part.”

“I believe you, sir,” said the sergeant, “for I was took in,—as reg’lar as I was ever took in before. But they will do this sort of thing, these young gents, with nothing else upon their hands. I don’t wonder at it. Must be a miserable life!”

The last remark was made so seriously, and in such perfect good faith, that the surgeon and Harry Clayton exchanged glances, smiling the while.

“I hope,” said the latter, “that he will soon be fit to be removed.”

“Well, before long,” said the surgeon. “Ten days or so. Not sooner—bad case rather. It was only this morning that he became sensible; and I don’t think that even now he fairly realises the length of time that he has been lying there.”

“But this must be a most unusual case,” said Clayton. “Surely you never had a suspension of the faculties for so long?”

“Oh yes!” said the surgeon. “Such things do happen. Concussion of, or pressure upon the brain from a fracture, gives us at times some exceedingly interesting studies. In this case, the horse must have struck your friend full on the temple, and I wonder that he was not killed.”

Then, according to the custom of his *confrères*, the surgeon proceeded to dilate upon the number of eighths of an inch higher or lower which would have been sufficient for the blow to have caused death. But he was interrupted in his discourse by the approach of Sir Francis, who now came up, watch in hand.

“The ten minutes are at an end, and I thank you, sir,” he said. “I am indeed most grateful for your skilful treatment of my son. How can I ever disburden myself of the obligation?”

“Oh! if you come to that, easily enough,” laughed the surgeon, who fully believed, and held unflinchingly to the faith,

that his hospital was the best in London, sparing no pains to let every one know that it was also one of the poorest. “We don’t want such patients as your son here, Sir Francis Redgrave; and you may depend in future upon receiving our yearly report, with, I hope, your name down as one of our donors.”

Sir Francis shook hands warmly, saying nothing, but thinking the more deeply; and then, bidding farewell to the sergeant at the door, he was accompanied by Clayton back to their temporary home.

They had not been back long though, before there was a step on the stair, and Mr Stiff, the landlord, came up to announce a visitor.

“Who?” said Sir Francis.

“That there little jigging man, sir, as Mr Lionel used to buy his dogs of in—”

“Tell him that I am unwell—that I cannot see him,” exclaimed Sir Francis; and Mr Stiff took his departure, but only to return at the end of five minutes.

“Well, Mr Stiff?”

“I can’t get rid of him, please, Sir Francis. He says he should be so glad if you’d see him only for a minute. He won’t detain you more, and he’s in a terrible way about your saying you can’t.”

“Well, show him up,” said Sir Francis, who was not in the humour to refuse anything in the gladness and thankfulness which now filled his heart.

“Shall I see him?” said Clayton, offering to relieve Sir Francis of the task.

“No; perhaps it is something about poor Lionel. I will see him.”

The next minute there was the peculiar thumping noise of D. Wragg’s feet in the passage, but Sir Francis found time to say a few words before the dealer readied the room.

“Is not this the curious-looking man at the house we searched?”

“The same,” said Harry.

“Ah, yes!—I forgot,” said Sir Francis; “these troubles have tried me. But here he is.”

Sir Francis was right, for the noise increased, the door was thrown open, and the next moment, in a tremendous state of excitement, D. Wragg stood confessed.

Volume Three—Chapter Eighteen.

D. Wragg on Principle.

“Sarvant, sir—sarvant, sir!” exclaimed D. Wragg, flourishing his hat first at Sir Francis, and then at Harry Clayton, while he worked and jerked himself about in a way that was perfectly frightful to contemplate. “Just give me a minute. I won’t keep you both more than that, only I couldn’t rest without coming in to tell you as it does us at home so much good ’cos that young gent’s found, as you can’t tell.”

Sir Francis knit his brow as he listened, for he could not help associating the man before him with the cause of Lionel’s disappearance; but he did not speak.

“Ah! I see you’re cross about it,” said D. Wragg, who caught the frown; “but never mind if you are; we’re glad all the same. You thought we had to do with it?”

“My good fellow, yes!” exclaimed Sir Francis, hastily; for this touched him upon a tender point—he had been unjust. “Yes; we did think so, and I beg your pardon for it most heartily. It was a gross piece of injustice, and I beg that you will forgive it. If—”

“You’re a reg’lar, thorough-bred, game gentleman! that’s what you are,” said D. Wragg; “and I respect you, sir, that I do. And if you’re sorry for having my place searched, why, there’s an end of it; and as to forgiving you, why, we won’t say any more about that.”

“But if money—” continued Sir Francis.

“No; money ain’t got nothing to do with it,” said D. Wragg, gruffly; “and yet it has too, something. You see, sir, I got hold of Sergeant Falkner, and he’s put me up to it all—how you found the young gent in the orspital and all; and so I wanted to come on about it. But what did I say to you when you came to me to search my place? Why, don’t you make no mistake, I says, and now I says it again. Don’t you make no mistake; I ain’t come after money; but just to say as I’m sorry as the young gent should have got into such trouble through coming to my place; and as to his getting better, all I’ve got to say now is, as he shan’t never come inside the shop again. I did have some of his money for different things; but there, lor’ bless you, I put it to you, Mr Clayton, sir, if I hadn’t had it to do me good, wouldn’t he have spent it in organ-grinders, or brass bands, or something? ’Pon my soul, sir, I never see a young gent as knowed so little of what money was worth.”

“And do you mean,” said Sir Francis, “that if my son gets well, and comes to your place again, you will not admit

him?”

“Course I do. Don’t you make no mistake, sir. I’m in real earnest, I am; and if at any time you want a dorg, or a score o’—Blow it! hold your tongue, will you,” he said, breaking off short in his speech, this portion of which was born of constant repetition. “But don’t you make no mistake, sir—he shan’t come no more; and as to the place being searched, that wasn’t your doing; that was spite, that was, and Mr Jack Screwby—an ugly cuss! But they’ve got him for ’sault and violence, and he’ll get it hot, and no mistake, sir. And now my sarvice to you both, gents, and I’m off; but I thought I’d come to say as I was sorry and glad too, and you understands me, I knows.”

As he turned to go, Sir Francis crossed the room, and tried to thrust a five-pound note into his hands; but D. Wragg waved him off.

“No, sir; I promised ’em at home, if you wanted to do anything of that kind, as I wouldn’t take it—and I won’t—so there now. But look here! don’t you make no mistake; I ain’t proud, and if you says to me, ‘Mr D. Wragg, will you take a glass of wine to drink my son back again to health?’—why, hang me if I don’t.”

Crash went D. Wragg’s hat down upon the floor as he spoke, and after his arms had flown about at all manner of angles with his body, he folded them tightly, and stood gazing from one to the other.

“You shall drink his health, indeed, Mr Wragg,” said Sir Francis, smiling; and the decanters being produced, D. Wragg did drink Lionel’s health, and then in another glass that of Sir Francis, then took another to drink Harry Clayton’s, and yet one more for the benefit of all absent friends, when he stumped off, evidently wonderfully steadied in his action by what he had imbibed.

Volume Three—Chapter Nineteen.

Richard Pellet’s Visitors.

The clerk whose duty it was to show visitors into Richard Pellet’s private office ought to have been well paid, for he must have been a valuable acquisition to his employer. Doubtless it was the result of training—he was for ever supposing that “the firm” was engaged. It was so when Jared last called. It was so when Harry Clayton determined to try and make friends with the husband of his late mother, and appeared at the office door. And it was so when, an hour after, a plainly-dressed, pale-looking woman asked to see Mr Richard Pellet. But if, the clerk said, she would give her name, he would go and see.

“Ellen Pellet,” was the calm, quiet answer.

“Mrs Ellen Pellet?” queried the clerk.

“Yes,” was the reply.

The man stared, hesitated, went half-way to the inner office, returned, hesitated again, and then turned to go; while more than one head was raised from ledger or letter to exchange meaning looks, after a glance at the very unusual kind of visitor to Austin Friars.

“It ain’t my business,” muttered the clerk to himself, and passing down the little passage, he opened the private office door of the firm, heedless of a light, gliding step behind him, and announced Mrs Ellen Pellet.

“Who?” roared Richard Pellet, leaping from his seat, and glaring at the clerk.

“It is I,” said a quiet voice in the doorway, and Richard sank back pale and gasping in his seat.

For the visitor was already in the room.

“Oh yes! Ah, to be sure!” stammered Richard, striving hard to recover himself, with a miserable mask-like smile overspreading his features. “Glad to see you—sit down. That will do, Bailly; I’m engaged if any one should call.”

The clerk left the office, and closed the door, walking back to his stool with a prominence in one cheek which drew forth sundry winks from fellow-labourers in Pellet and Company’s money-mill. But the door of Richard Pellet’s private office was thick and baize-lined, and no inkling of the scene within reached the ears of the clerks.

No sooner had the door closed upon them, than the smile was driven from Richard’s face by a bitter scowl, and rising from his chair, he took two or three strides to where his visitor stood, hissing between his teeth—“Curse you! what brings you here?” Such a fierce aspect, accompanied as it was by threatening gestures, would have made many recoil; but Richard’s visitor stepped towards him, and caught him by the breast, exclaiming—

“I have been unhappy lately; I could not rest there. I want my child!”

“Curse your child!” cried Richard, in an angry whisper, and then, with a cowardly, back-handed blow, he sent the poor creature staggering against the wall; but her countenance hardly underwent a change, as, starting forward again, she caught him once more by the coat, repeating her words—

“I want my child!”

“How dare you come here?” he exclaimed, in a low, angry voice. “How dare you come here to disgrace and annoy me? How came you away from—from your lodging that I got for you?”

“I came away—I want my child!” was the only reply.

“There! hush! Don’t speak so loud!” said Richard, in an angry whisper, as he glanced uneasily at the door, and stepping to it, slipped into its socket a little brass bolt. “Did I not tell you never to come here? and did you not promise?”

“Yes, yes!” was the hoarse answer; “but I want, I will have, our little one. I have been to the man who had it—I found him out; but he would not give it to me. You have told him not. I could not rest for thinking about it. I want my child, and then we will go far away together.”

“Go and seek it where it has gone,” said Richard, brutally, almost beside himself with suppressed rage;—“it is dead!”

“It is a lie—a lie!” cried the woman, excitedly, her pale face flushing with anger. “That man told me the same; but he is in your pay, and you have hidden it from me.”

She clung to him now fiercely, clutching the ostentatiously-displayed smoothly-plaited shirt-front, and turning it into a crumpled rag.

“Hush! hush! For God’s sake, be still!” he exclaimed. “They will hear you in the outer office. I have not got the child; it died months ago.”

“It is a lie!” exclaimed the woman, more angrily. “You drove me mad once with your ill-treatment, but you shall not do it again.” Then, raising her voice—“I will have my child!”

As Richard Pellet’s face turned of a ghastly muddy hue, he glanced again and again at the door, his hands trembling with the cowardly rage that, under different circumstances, might have made the life of the woman before him—his wife—not worth a moment’s purchase. The coarse, heavy, insolent smile was gone; for he was attacked in his weakest point, and already in imagination he could see the side looks and laughter of his clerks, and hear the sneering innuendoes of fellow-men of his own stamp when there was a public *exposé*, and Richard Pellet, the wealthy banker, who for the sake of money had kept his weak insane wife in obscurity for years, that he might commit bigamy for the fortune of the Widow Clayton, was arraigned for his offence against his country’s laws, and the story of his wife’s wrongs came forth.

What was he to do? He must get her away quietly—by subterfuge—he could lead her in one way he knew, and she would not believe the truth.

The scandal, after so many years lying hidden, would now most certainly be bruited abroad. Some men would have laughed it to scorn, and faced it with brazen effrontery; but Richard Pellet was a religious man—a patron of philanthropic societies—even now upon his table lay half-a-dozen annual reports with his name thereon as steward or committee-man, for all men to read. Why, his very sober beneficent look carried weight, and he was always placed in the front rank upon the platform at Exeter Hall meetings. In fact, in May, during the meetings, he adopted white cravats and frills. And now, in spite of money, care, secrecy, this matter would be spread abroad. He could hear it already; and to hide this example of his cruel love of greed, had he dared, and could have hidden the crime, he would have struck down the patient sufferer whom he had treated with such a mingling of cruelty and neglect, dead at his feet, with as little compunction as he had already shown in sending her staggering to the wall.

But the wife of long ago, whose reason had gone astray years before, the soft eyes, the pale face, and trembling lips were here no more; and Richard Pellet, as he shrank from her, felt himself to be almost helpless in the hands of one whose strength was augmented by her position, for he dared not raise his voice. He knew, too, that now the time had gone when he could command, and he must try subterfuge, and get her away abroad, where she would be safely kept. He blamed himself now that he had not placed her in an asylum, but he recalled his reason—it would have been too public a proceeding; and in these fleeting moments the question came, were the gold and position he had won worth the price that he had paid?

As he stood there in her grasp, his mind was made up, and he said quietly, “Sit down.”

“No—no—no!” was the hasty reply, as if she dreaded his influence. “I want my child: give me my child, and let me go.”

“But, Ellen, this is madness and folly,” he whispered. “You know it is not here. He told you that it was dead, did he?”

“Yes,” she cried, angrily; “but it was not true. You told him to say so. Where is she now?”

“Look here!” said Richard, writing an address upon a card—that of one of the boarding—houses in the neighbourhood. “Take this and go and wait there till I come, and we will go and see about it. But, for my sake, do not make a disturbance here—it would be ruin to me.”

The poor creature, half reft of her senses, gazed earnestly in his face for a few moments, while the angry light faded from her eye. In her tigress-like rage for her lost little one, if met by anger she was ready to dare, urged by her maternal instinct; but these gentle words disarmed her resentment, and falling on her knees at Richard Pellet’s feet, she burst into tears, sobbing as she begged of him to let her have her child.

“Yes, yes! you shall; only get up,” said Richard. “It shall all be made right, only go now.”

“Then you will give her to me?” she said, imploringly. “I will not say a word to any one about being your wife if you will give me my child. I know now why you shut me up there with Mrs Walls. I have thought it out: it was that you might marry some one rich; for I, when my head went, was not fit to be your wife. But I could not help it.”

“Well, well; go now,” cried Richard, impatiently; “and we will talk about that afterwards.”

She rose to her feet slowly, clasping his hand in both her own, and gazing earnestly in his face, as if trying to read his thoughts; and they must have been plain to read, for, as if she saw in his face cruelty, treachery, and a repetition of her long sufferings, she dashed the hand away, and stood defying him once more, the former rage flashing in her eyes as she repeated her demand—“Give me my child!”

“Go and wait for me there, then,” said Richard, sullenly.

“I will never leave you till I have my child,” she exclaimed.

Again the cruel, malignant look came into his face as Richard Pellet cursed laws, protection, everything that stayed him from crushing out the life that now rose in rebellion against him. He cursed his own hypocrisy, which now fettered him with chains such as stayed him from setting this burden at defiance and casting it off for ever.

“I told you before that she was dead,” he now said, throwing himself back in his chair.

“Dead—dead—dead!” echoed his wife, “and I told you it was a lie—a cruel lie—like those you have told me before. But she is not dead. She was too young, too beautiful to die. Why, I tried to die a hundred times there, in that cold, bare room, in the bitter winters, and I could not. She could not die. You have taken her away, and I will not be cheated again. She is not yours, but mine—mine—my very own. Give me my little one!” she cried, raising her voice.

“Here! come with me, then, and you shall have her!” cried Richard, desperately; and snatching up an overcoat, and buttoning it closely over his breast, he led the way into the outer office. “Back in an hour,” he said abruptly; and then, closely followed by his unwelcome visitor, he passed into the street, called the first cab he encountered, and, after giving some instructions to the driver, he motioned to his wife to enter; but she refused until he had set the example, when, following him, she took the opposite seat, and the door was slammed, and the vehicle driven off.

The clerks in the outer office suspended work as soon as the heavy door swung to, and began to give due attention to this strange visit, which was on all sides declared to be “a rum go,” when the door again opened, and Harry Clayton entered.

“Mr Pellet returned?” he asked.

“Been at the office again, sir; but he has just gone out with a lady. Said he would be back in an hour.”

“I’ll wait,” said Harry, and he sat for an hour, and then for another, but still Richard did not return, so he left, and slowly sauntered towards London Bridge.

“I don’t want to give him the opportunity of saying I avoided him,” thought Harry, and then his thoughts turned towards money matters, and the possibility of Richard being compelled to disgorge a portion of the money that should by rights have been Mrs Clayton’s son’s—he did not know that it was in his power to make him give up all. Then he began to wonder what sort of a reception he should meet with. The last encounter had been far from cordial, and since his mother’s funeral, Harry’s letters had been but few and far between.

“I will see him, though,” said Harry, “if I follow him for a week.”

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty.

Beating the Bars.

“Now!” exclaimed Richard Pellet, as soon as he and his unwelcome visitor were in the cab, “will you wait patiently, if I take you somewhere, till I can place you where you will see your little one?”

She gazed long and earnestly in his face before answering.

“Will you keep your word?”

“I will!” he said, and she bent her head, when, lowering the front window, Richard gave fresh instructions to the driver, who drew up at the end of a long busy street.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked, suddenly.

“Only where you can stay for a day or two,” said he, preparing to get out. “Sit still for a few minutes till I come back.”

“But you are going to leave me,” she cried, clinging to his arm.

“I tell you I will come back,” he exclaimed, angrily; and, apparently satisfied, she sank back in her seat.

Five—ten minutes elapsed, but the occupant of the cab did not stir. At the end of another five minutes, Richard returned, panting and out of breath, spoke to the driver again, and once more the cab jangled over the stones and drew up at a half-open door.

Richard sprang up and took tight hold of his companion’s arm, but she followed him with alacrity, only starting back as the street-door closed behind her, when she found herself in the presence of Mrs Walls and in her old gaol.

Richard turned to leave, but the cheated woman turned with him, clinging to him tightly, and imploring him not to

leave her there in the most piteous manner. He tried to shake her off; he swung her to and fro; he loosened one hand, but only for the other to cling to him more tightly, till, enraged by her persistence, and unable to govern the vile passions that she had roused, he struck her heavily with his clenched fist, so that she fell back half stunned and with a thin stream of blood flowing from her lip.

“Why, you great brute—you cowardly ruffian!” exclaimed Mrs Walls, who had some feeling of compassion yet for the suffering member of her sex. “That wasn’t bargained for.”

“Hold your tongue!” cried Richard, fiercely. “Keep to your engagement, and let her loose this time, and you shall suffer for it, even if I do myself. There is law, recollect, for such as you.”

“I’d suffer it for two pins, so as you should be pulled down too,” muttered the woman, as she wiped the blood from the prisoner’s lips, and then with a scowl Richard turned to go.

“I shall be back in three days at the latest,” he said. Then he paid and dismissed the cabman, walked hastily through a few streets, and then took another cab and drove off.

“Gone!” exclaimed Ellen Pellet, opening her eyes to gaze about her in an anxious manner as she tried to make for the door.

Mrs Walls nodded, and then half led, half pushed her into a back parlour.

“He’ll be back in two days, and then you’re going away from here, and for good, and I’m glad of it,” said the woman, not unkindly, considering that but a day since her prisoner had contrived to escape. “I don’t want you here any more.”

“To take me to her?”

“To be sure,” said Mrs Walls, as she would have spoken to a child. The next minute the door was closed, and the key turned upon the prisoner, who sank down upon a chair, and pressed her hands in a bewildered way to her forehead.

She sat without moving for an hour, and then began to pace round and round the room to find, after trying door and window, that the former was fast and the latter only slid down a few inches at the top, the bottom being of ground-glass, and preventing a view of the outer world unless the occupant of the room stood upon a chair; and even then only the backs of houses and a blackened wall or two were to be seen.

Escape now seemed to be the sole idea in the poor creature’s mind. She recalled in a darkened way a long period of imprisonment, and evidently dreaded its recurrence, for again and again she tried the door, shaking it gently, but it was locked, though the key remained in, so that she could touch the end as it projected about the sixteenth of an inch through the keyhole.

Another hour passed, and another, of torture and dread of treachery.

Could she not get away to her little one? That was the great thought which crushed all others; and as if determining to escape, she began to try with her nails to turn the key, repeating her efforts till the wards hung downward. Then, by means of a wooden splint, one of a dozen upon the chimney-piece, she thrust the key nearly out of the keyhole, where it hung while she listened attentively, then, with one more gentle push, it fell rattling down upon the oilcloth of the passage.

She stood listening, her bosom heaving painfully, but no steps followed the noise—it was evidently not heard, and, sinking upon her knees, she tore up the edge of the tacked-down carpet, till she could pass her worn and bony fingers beneath, and drag it away from the door, leaving the bottom exposed.

There, beneath the door, was the key plainly to be seen, for the light from a staircase window fell upon it; but it was out of reach, and the aperture would not allow the passage of her fingers. She knelt there though, biting her nails for a minute and listening, before taking up the splint that before had been her friend.

She tried to reach the key, passing the splint beneath the door, but it was not long enough. She took another—sane enough now in her desire to escape—and tearing a strip from her handkerchief, bound two splints tightly together, and tried again.

Yes; they would pass under easily, and she could touch the key and move it. She could hear it glide along the oilcloth for some distance in one direction; so she tried from the other side, and moved it back.

Forwards and backwards she moved that key a score of times, indefatigable in her efforts; but it would come no nearer, for there was an inequality over which it would not pass—the floorcloth at that spot was doubled.

Suddenly she stopped, for she heard steps upon the stairs, and Mrs Walls came by, her dress brushing against the key and slightly altering its position. Then once more all was silent; she had passed by without noticing that it was out of the door, and nothing was heard but the faint sound of the traffic in the street.

The splints again at work—this way, that way, but no sound of grating key upon the oilcloth, and after many trials, the prisoner laid her head upon the floor, and tried to catch sight of the object of her search.

There it was: just the ring visible, but beyond the reach of the splints, for it had been swept along a few inches by the dress. But three splints might do it: so another was tied to the others, and once more the trial was made.

Joy! They touched the key; but they bent and would hardly stir it from the weakness of the wood.

What should she do? How could she get out? Why did she allow herself to be trapped when it seemed to her troubled brain that her little one was calling! But if she stayed, would he let her see her child? Had not he said—had not the tailor said—it was dead. It was a lie—a cruel lie—it could not be dead. They had hidden it away from her where she was never to see it more.

With these thoughts exciting the crushed and patient sufferer, she paced round and round the room, to pause, at last, to tear at the screws that held the lock to her prison door, and only to leave off with bleeding fingers.

A new thought, and she darted to the window, tore down the red worsted blind-cord, and ran back to the door. Down upon her knees with the stiff cord doubled, and a great loop thrust gently under to try and draw the key towards her.

Now it caught, drew it a little way, let it slip, and came through alone; now it thrust it back when the cord was again pushed through. Another trial, and the cord caught, the key grating over the oilcloth, but only to be checked once more by the double fold and lost.

Disappointment upon disappointment, and a great dread upon her mind that her gaoler would return, find out her attempt to escape, and defeat it by bearing away the key.

Another trial, and another, and another, and once more the key caught against that double in the oilcloth; but now a vigorous snatch and it had fallen over it and close to the door, and though the cord came through without, she could now plainly see the wards of the key—touch them with one of the splints—draw them towards her—touch them with a finger—hold the key in her hand—and be at liberty once more.

Her heart beat with excitement, and then seemed to come to a dead stop, for as she stood where she had leaped to her feet, there came once again the sound of footsteps, now descending, and the steps were stayed by the door, where it was evident that some one was listening.

Beat—beat—beat—beat—again her heart throbbed wildly for a few moments. Then again, heavy pulsations that seemed as if they would make her head split with each agonising pang. Then once more her heart seemed to stop.

Would whoever was listening there see that the key was gone, and ask for it? Would she be compelled to give it up, or would they keep watch at the door to see that she did not escape?

“Do you want anything?” said the voice of Mrs Walls.

“No—no!” was the answer, and the last speaker’s heart beat more wildly in dread lest her eagerness should excite suspicion.

No! there was no notice taken: the steps went on along the passage, and seemed to descend to an underground kitchen, while for some minutes the prisoner stood motionless as a statue.

All silent once more but the grating noise as the key was softly pushed into the lock. Then slowly—gradually—by a tremendous effort over self, when she was longing to rush out, the key was turned, creaking loudly in the old worn lock. But now the bolt shot back, the handle was turned, and she stood in the passage, after the door had resented the movement by giving two or three loud cracks.

She stood there ready dressed, just in time to hear a sharp voice that she at once recognised exclaim—

“What’s that?”

Then a chair made a loud scraping noise upon the floor below, as if some one had suddenly risen.

There was not a moment to lose; there were steps already upon the kitchen-stairs as she ran along the passage to the front door. But there was an obstacle here: the door was locked, and a great chain up, whose ring was at the bottom of a spiral.

To turn back the lock was but the work of an instant; and then she seized the chain and tried to raise it from the spiral fastening, with steps coming nearer at every turn: one—two—three—would it never come off? Must she be dragged back again when she was so near to liberty? It was a lifelong task condensed in a few seconds. The last turn—the chain falling with a heavy clang—the door dragged open, as a firm hand grasped her shoulder, and tried to draw her back. Then a wild, despairing shriek rang down Borton Street, as a momentary struggle ensued for liberty.

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty One.

Tim Ruggles Sets Himself Right.

“Mr Pellet, sir,” said Tim Ruggles, “I ran out of Mr Purkis’s shop, sir, like a madman. Yesterday, sir, I think it was: no, it wasn’t, it was the day before, or some other time, I don’t know when, for my head’s all in a wuzzle, sir, and I hardly know what’s what. But I ran out of his shop, sir, after he had whispered two words in my ear, and them two words, sir, were—‘Mrs Ruggles.’”

“There!” interrupted Mrs Pellet; “that’s all a part of the past now, so let it be forgotten. But sit down.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Tim, standing in his old position by the chimney-piece; “it’s all a part of the past, but if you’ll let me set myself right with your family, I shall be glad.”

“Right! set yourself right! why, you are right,” said Jared, warmly. “You don’t suppose we ever thought that you knew?”

“No, sir,” said Tim, still standing; “perhaps not, sir; but I should like to tell you all about it, sir. It will ease my mind, like, so let me be obstinate for once in a way. You see, sir, I was stunned like that morning, and hardly knew what to make of things. Your good lady had partly told me the misfortune, as you may recollect, perhaps, when you came and stopped her, sir—when I rushed off to Mr Purkis’s; and then, after a long talk with him, feeling worse than ever, I ran all the way to Carnaby Street, sending the people right and left, sir, for I wouldn’t believe it true; and being a married man, sir, which makes two one, it seemed to me that I was in it, and had been the cause of it all, and ungrateful to you, as is the best friend I ever had. No, sir, I wouldn’t believe, though young Ichabod Gunnis had told me, and Mrs Pellet had quietly said the same, and then beadle Purkis; but when I rushed up into my room in Carnaby Street—first-floor back, first bell, two pulls—I knew it was all true then, for there was a letter on the table, as I afterwards found was written to Mrs Ruggles’ relations to say she was coming. And there she was, sir, trembling in the middle of the room, dressed and ready to go, sir; Sunday things on, and three or four big bundles about, with all the best of everything we had got packed up; and there was the four teaspoons, and my first wife’s brooch. When I saw all this, I recollected as there was a cab standing at the door when I came in; and then, without her dropping the bundle she was a-tying up, and busting out a-cryin’, I knew it all in a moment, that it was all true as true, and that she was going off that morning with everything she could lay her hands on, even to my poor wife’s silk dress, only I came back just in time to stop her.”

Tim Ruggles covered his face with his hands for a moment, and then went on.

“I’m only little, sir, and poor and weak, and I don’t know whether I feel the same as other people do, sir, when they are in trouble; but I couldn’t be in a violent rage, and storm and swear and abuse her, sir and ma’am”—and, probably due to the fact of Tim’s head being all in a “wuzzle,” he looked at Mrs Jared when he said “sir,” and at Jared himself when he said “ma’am;”—“No, I couldn’t do it, sir; for there was a strange sort of feeling came over me of our having broken the same bread together for years, she being my wife, and this seemed to stop me; though the nearest point I come to was—but I’m getting wuzzled. I wasn’t frightened, sir, not a bit: I was hurt, and cut, and sore, to think that a honest man’s wife should have done such a crime; and then made it ten times worse by getting you suspected, because she had a spite against you and Mrs Pellet here, sir, for taking so much notice of my poor Pine, and saying that she was not properly used, for I once let it out that you had said so. Partly that, and partly, you know, because it would clear her; for there was a deal of notice being taken of it all then, so she put the little key in your music-box, sir.

“Put the little key in your music-box, sir,” continued Tim; “it’s all true, sir, for she went down upon her knees, sir, and confessed to it all; and how she had had pounds and pounds, and that you caught her that night in the dark, when she had gone to put back a half-crown or two that was marked, and she was afraid it was found out then; but it was a letter from the vicar which settled it all. And oh! sir, if I had only known of all this, I’d never have asked you to speak up for her to be pew-opener. Yes, sir, it was a letter from the vicar had done it all, telling her never to go near the church again, and giving her what we poor journeymen tailors call the bullet.

“Oh! I was cut, sir, after all you had done for us, sir, and the customer you had been to me, for it never seemed like coming out to work a day here, sir; I was always at home, and treated like a friend; and what with the thoughts of that, and the kind way you had noticed little Pine, and the cruel manner she had treated that poor little dead angel, I worked myself up at last, sir, and I actually said and wished then, that the vicar had not promised that he wouldn’t prosecute her; for she deserved it, sir, if ever a woman did. Yes, sir, I was worked up, and in my rage, I seized the iron, sir, and she shrieked out, and though it was only cold, I thought it wouldn’t be manly to hit her with that, so I put it down, and caught up the sleeve-board, and stood over her with it, quite furious, while she told all, and begged for mercy over and over again. And then, sir, I was that mad that I stamped about the room, and she was frightened of me, hard a woman as she was.

“‘Mind my eyes—mind my eyes!’ she kept on cryin’, as I stood over her, and made her own to all her treachery; while at times, sir, I didn’t know whether to be mad or to cry with shame, sir; and to hear her telling all, and then to think of her black-heartedness after it was all found out—going to rob me, sir, and taking even my poor wife’s brooch. It was cruel—cruel—cruel!

“But then,” continued Tim, “I held up, sir, though I could have broken down a score of times, and I spurred myself on by thinking of the way she used to treat poor little Pine, till, seeing me flourish the sleeve-board about in that mad way, sir, the wicked creature was frightened for her life, and, jumping up, and giving me a push, she darted out of the room, and before I got over my surprise, sir, she was gone. And perhaps it was best, sir, or in my rage I might so far have forgotten myself as to have struck her, when, you know, sir, I should never after have forgiven myself—never, so sure as my name is Tim Ruggles.”

“It’s very sad,” said Mrs Jared, for Tim had paused; “but, of course, after the fright is over, she will come back.”

“Never, ma’am, never,” said Tim. “She has opened a gulf between us, ma’am, that there would be no bridging over—authority for saying so. I’m now, ma’am, what I ought always to have been since my poor wife was taken from me—a widower, and I mean to keep so. No, ma’am, I’m not sorry she’s gone; for though a wonderful woman, ma’am, a most strong-minded woman, ma’am, she was not happy in her ways; and since she has left me, I’ve been thinking things over, and seeing them a little clearer than I used to, and I’m afraid I didn’t do my duty by some one who is passed away and gone. But I’m sorry, sir and ma’am, and what more can I say? being only a weak man, and thinking I was doing all for the best; though I don’t mind saying to you, sir, that what some one else said was quite right: Mrs Ruggles did marry me. But it’s all over now, sir: she has gone, and I didn’t strike her, sir; for I never should have forgiven myself if I’d struck a woman, bad as she might be.”

“Well,” said Jared, kindly; “and now suppose we say, let all this be forgotten, and sit down.”

“No, sir, not yet,” said Tim, “not yet. I’m not done, sir, I’ve something else to tell you, but perhaps it would be best that Miss Patty should not stay, and you can tell her yourselves afterwards.”

Patty rose and left the room.

“You see,” said Tim, “I had a visit only yesterday from a decent-looking lady who came with a little quiet knock; and at first I thought she was making a mistake and had come to the wrong room. But no, she knew me well enough, though I did not remember her pale worn face for a minute, until I knew her all at once as little Pine’s mother, when, ma’am, I could have run away if I’d had a chance. It did seem so hard to tell her, when she came almost in a threatening way like to ask me for her child, and when I told her it was dead and gone, it was heartbreaking to see how she took on, and said I’d killed it at first; but the next moment she turned wild and strange, and said the child was not dead, but that I had joined with Mr Richard Pellet to keep her little one from her. And then I was quite frightened, for she told me she was mad, and that she was Mrs Richard Pellet, and that little Pine was her own dear child; and what with wondering whether what she said was true, and puzzling how it could be that my darling was yours too, I got wuzzled; but I told her all I could, and begged of her to listen, but the poor thing seemed quite frantic with her sorrow, and I had to let her go, believing me a cheat and a liar, and that I had been cruel to poor little Pine.

“But there,” said Tim, after a pause, “I could only pity her, poor thing, and hope that Time would make all things come right, as I hope he will, sir. But he seems a terrible long while about it, and I’m afraid it won’t be in my day; at least I can’t seem to see it.”

Then Tim found out that he must go, and he hurried away as if not a moment were to be lost, satisfied now, he said, that he had set himself right, while Jared and his wife stood together thoughtful and silent, the latter with tears in her eyes reproaching herself for not seeing through the mystery sooner.

“For, O Jared!” she said, “if we had only had the poor little thing here, who can tell but its life might have been saved!”

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Two.

In Chase.

“Five o’clock,” said Harry Clayton, as the clerk came in to lay a couple of letters upon the table of his employer’s private office. “How long have I been waiting this time?”

“Better than an hour, sir,” said the clerk.

“What time do you close?” inquired Harry.

“Five o’clock, sir,” said the clerk; “he won’t come here now.”

“S’pose not,” said Harry. “I’ll run down to Norwood. Hardly like going without an invite though, now. It won’t seem like home,” he muttered; and then he looked at the door, as much surprised as the clerk, for there stood the figure of poor Ellen.

“That’s the lady he went out with,” said the clerk, in an undertone.

“Has he not come back?” said Ellen, hoarsely. “Has not Mr Richard Pellet returned?”

“No,” said Harry, quietly. “I am waiting for him.”

“Who are you?” said his companion, abruptly.

“Who am I?” said Harry, smiling good-humouredly. “My name is Clayton.”

“Her son?” she exclaimed.

“The late Mrs Clayton’s son, if that is what you mean; and Mr Pellet is my stepfather!”

“I thought so; and where is she?”

“In heaven, I trust,” said Harry, reverently.

“Dead! dead! And did he kill her, as he killed me, to marry some one else?”

“Hush!” said Harry. “Perhaps you had better go,” he said to the clerk, who was feasting, open-mouthed, upon the gossip banquet before him, but immediately left the room.

“Where is he now?” she said, eagerly.

“At Norwood, I expect,” said Harry. “But, may I ask, who are you?”

“Me!—me!” she exclaimed, passionately. “I am the woman who has been his slave through life—the woman he drove mad, and then kept hidden away that he might marry money. I’m mad, I know, but only sometimes—only sometimes. And now—and now, he has robbed me of my child—his child!—no, no! my child—my own darling; and they try to cheat me; they say it is dead. But no, it could not die; it is well and happy, and,” she continued, in an undertone, “I have half maddened him. I was here this morning and told him I would have my little one. I would not leave him, but

he contrived to evade me.” Then, catching Harry’s wrist, she whispered a few words in his ear which made him turn pale with horror.

“Nonsense! No, no! not so bad as that,” he said, hoarsely.

“Yes, yes, I fear it is. Take me with you now—at once.”

Harry stood for a moment thinking, and half confused, at times, too, doubting the wisdom of taking such a companion; then, evidently having formed his plans, he said hurriedly, “Come then!” and in a few minutes they had secured a cab, and were rattling over London Bridge.

A train due in five minutes, but it seemed to them five hours before it came. Off at last, though; and very soon after leaving the station their footsteps were crunching over the gravel sweep that led to the front door of Richard Pellet’s place, when, as soon almost as they reached the porch, the door flew open, and a burst of warm light greeted them, their approach having been heralded by a bell from the lodge.

“Mr Pellet in?” said Harry to one of the gentlemen in drab and coach-lace.

“Not been gone out ten minutes, sir.”

“Do you know where to?” said Harry.

The gentleman in coach-lace looked at his fellow, and then back at Harry, to answer—

“Station, sir; carriage not come back yet. Came ’ome and had early dinner, and ordered carriage at five.”

“No idea where he is gone?” said Harry, anxiously.

The gentleman in coach-lace looked at his fellow once again, before answering, while Ellen whispered to Harry, as she tightly clutched his arm, “Ask him again—again,” but there was no need.

“Paris, I think, sir,” said the man. “I shouldn’t tell any one, sir; but it can’t be wrong to tell you. Glad to see you here again, sir. Like dinner d’reckly?”

“No, no,” said Harry, hesitating. “Did you notice anything particular?—but what makes you say Paris?”

“Because he told me to look what times trains run from London Bridge to Newhaven, sir; and what time the Dieppe boat started. His hand shook so, sir, he couldn’t find out for himself.”

“Was he ill? Did you see anything particular in him?” said Harry, anxiously.

“Didn’t seem himself at all, sir; and did nothing hardly at dinner but drink wine, sir.”

“There, there!” whispered Mrs Richard, “I told you so; he is wild, and you must stop him, or he will—”

Harry shuddered, and turned away to snatch his portmonnaie from his pocket and count its contents.

“You had better stay here,” he said.

“No, no! I must go with you. I want—I want to be with you. If anything were to happen—if he committed any rash act, I should feel that his blood was upon my head. Come!” she said, eagerly, and with a strange look in her eyes. “Come! there is no time to lose. I want—I want to be on the way.”

By consulting *Bradshaw*, Harry found that they might reach Newhaven before the boat started; perhaps catch the very train by which Richard Pellet travelled, though the probability was that they would find him to have an hour’s start of them, but by a slow train—that is, if he had gone at all, which Harry was sometimes disposed to doubt. But then he had taken luggage, and had written a direction, so the man said; and in corroboration he brought a blotting-pad, and part of a book of adhesive luggage labels, one of which was written upon; but, perhaps from want of legibility, smeared hastily over. But there, plain enough to read, was the address—“R. Pellet, Hotel Laroche, R—.”

That was all. Where would “R” be? Some Rue in Paris, Harry thought; when his eyes fell upon the blotting-pad—one that had hardly been used, but upon which, in reverse, he could now make out the same address, left by another label that had been blotted upon it. “R. Pellet” was perfectly plain; and then, with a little puzzling, he made out the rest,—“Hotel Laroche, Rouen.”

“Can we have the brougham?” said Harry, for he was now satisfied.

“D’reckly, sir,” answered the man. But “d’reckly” proved to be a full half-hour afterwards, when, just as Harry was about to set off on foot for the station, the brougham came round to the door, and they stepped in.

“Station—quick!” said Harry.

The man drove quickly; but they were only in time to see one train glide away through the darkness, leaving them waiting impatiently for the next.

Fortunately for the travellers, the trains succeeded each other very rapidly, and getting out at London Bridge, they had just time to cross over and reach the express as the last bell rang, hurrying into a carriage and giving vent to a sigh of relief as they felt it glide away into the outer darkness.

Gazing out of the window at the lamps here and there dimly seen through the fog that hung over them, Harry's companion sat without speaking a word. Harry had ventured one or two remarks, but she had only made an impatient gesture with her hand, and, out of respect for her evident anxiety, he remained silent, and sat pondering over the probable termination of his expedition. It had been so hurried and excited an affair, that he had not before had time to think calmly: neither was a rapid express train upon the Brighton railway a desirable place for quiet meditation.

However, as they rushed along, he tried to link together the incidents that had led to what now seemed like a wild and foolish chase. What would his stepfather say to him for hunting him in this fashion, and for bringing with him this woman? But then her dark suspicion that he was wild with rage, and meditated self-destruction, joined to the accounts he had heard at Norwood of his strange unsettled state, which seemed to tend to the same conclusion, satisfied him upon the whole that he had done right in coming. It was evident that his companion had spoken the truth, and was connected with his stepfather in some way, from the clerk having pointed her out as the lady with whom his employer had gone out that morning.

"It must be right," muttered Harry; and then his thoughts strayed away for awhile to Duplex Street, and he found himself forming plans for the future, in which Patty Pellet occupied a very prominent place.

His train of thought was interrupted by his companion uttering a moan, as though in deep distress; but, thinking it better not to intrude, he leaned back in his place, and the rest of the journey was performed in silence.

Newhaven at last, with the keen breeze blowing off the sea. Night black as Erebus, and the glimmering lamps looking down upon half-thawed snow lying here and there in patches. No fog visible, every wreath of vapour being chased away by the brisk breeze; but an utterly desolate aspect of misery everywhere, which made the warm glow of the great new-looking hotel-rooms pleasant by contrast.

"Boat, sir? half-an-hour, sir. Just time for refreshments, sir. Stout grey gentleman, sir, by last train? Not here, sir. Yes, sir, quite sure; must have known if one had come; perhaps gone to the little hotel in the town. Time to go and get back before the boat started? Should think not, sir; leastwise shouldn't like to try."

So said the waiter; and Harry and his companion started out into the dark night to search waiting-room, wharf, and steamer, deck and cabin, for him of whom they were in quest.

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Three.

The End of a Journey.

"Perhaps, after all, he has not come," said Harry to his silent companion, for no word left her lips; she only restlessly led him from place to place, pressing his arm with her hand when she wished him to speak to porter or guard. Once he heard her mutter a few words—"To escape and hide—taken her there;" but she made no reply to his remark.

They had searched the waiting-rooms of the station and hotel, paced up and down the wharf, boarded the steamer, and examined every labelled berth, but there was no sign of either Richard Pellet or his luggage. Then they returned to the pier, and watched in the direction that would be taken by any one coming from the little hotel in the town, till a blinding storm of wind-borne snow would have made Harry lead his companion into shelter, but she seemed not to pay the slightest heed to the weather, as she gazed incessantly here and there, trying to catch a glimpse of the missing man.

The mooring cables creaked and groaned as the steamer rose and fell upon the swell in the little harbour, the water rushing fiercely past, black and angry, save where it broke and glistened now and again upon the bows of a boat, or upon the piles and piers around, while the snow fell fitfully in great soft pats, whirled here and there, each flake darting from its fellow when they passed the lamps, which flickered and danced as the squalls penetrated every nook and cranny. Now the platform and pier would be white, but in a few moments a black patch would break out here, another there, growing rapidly larger, till, once more, all would be a wet, slippery, blackened sheet, upon whose surface the rays of the lamps flickered and blinked.

A bitter night—cold, dark, and dreary; the men about, clad in oilskin wrappers, which glistened with the wet that streamed down them as the snow melted. Nearly every one carried a lanthorn to swing about as a signal to guide his steps amongst the railway trucks. Dark clouds floated by, to halt now and then, and send shimmering down what seemed a winding-sheet of snow. Then would come a moaning gust of wind, sweeping the heavier clouds away, to leave the heavens but little lighter. The few passengers bound for Dieppe hurried across the pier, and made the best of their way on board to secure their berths, perhaps with no very pleasant anticipations of the coming night, and, saving for here and there a railway official with a lanthorn, scarcely a soul was to be seen as Harry and his companion still kept watch in the direction of the town.

The time had nearly expired, so nearly, that if Richard Pellet were to take his departure by that steamer, he must be there within the next five minutes, while upon their once more going on board, and questioning the steward respecting the advent of a short, stout, grey gentleman, that functionary, evidently put somewhat out of temper by the weather, and the poor array of passengers, incontinently cursed the stout gentleman, and turned his back upon the querists, who made their way back over the slippery deck, crossed the gangway, and again began to pace up and down upon the landing-stage.

If Richard Pellet had come down, which Harry now very much doubted, he must, as the waiter had suggested, have gone into the town, and Harry now repented that he had not at once hurried on there, and made inquiries. For, though he kept scouting the idea as absurd, and telling himself that his stepfather had some other reason for coming

down here, his imagination was full of horrors suggested by his memory of destroyed directions and cards, and of men who had sought hotels in remote places to do some deed which should only produce an inquest on the body of a man unknown, unrecognised, unclaimed, so that the memory of the horror might soon pass away, and relatives only know that one of their family was missing.

His fears must though, he felt, be groundless, for Richard Pellet, wealthy, prosperous, was not the man to make an end of his life; but then he might not after all be prosperous; his affairs might be in a hopeless state of confusion; and now this strange connection with the woman at his side might have urged him to flight or the commission of the crime at which she had hinted.

But might not the woman be deceiving him? A glance, though, at the anxious, pallid face at his side, showed him plainly enough that even if she believed not the words she had uttered, she was moved by some strong impulse to overtake his stepfather; and, after all, what she had whispered might be true.

At last he determined to speak—to question her; but it was in vain, for he could obtain no answer. In fact, she had, in her eagerness to overtake the man whom she believed to have her child, forgotten the ruse that she had used to set Harry in search of his stepfather. It was the half insane prompting of her fevered brain; but as soon as her object was effected, it was entirely forgotten—crushed out of her memory by the intense desire to overtake him. Richard Pellet and her child: there seemed room for nothing else in her thoughts; and once only had she spoken to Harry during the last quarter of an hour of their watch, and then only to inquire whether there was any other boat, and when answered in the negative, she relapsed into her former silence.

The night darker than ever, a star now and then appearing, but only to be directly blotted out by some dense cloud; whenever a light patch of sky was visible low down on the horizon, the interlacing rigging and masts of the few vessels about could be seen rocking to and fro, while the steamer lights rose and fell in a way that betokened rough weather in the Channel. In the intervals of the squalls, too, would be heard the long, low roar of the sea, breaking upon the beach below the chalk cliffs that towered away to the west, or round by the sandy bay by Seaford. Waves rose, too, and washed with a heavy dash against the pier at the harbour entrance; and more than once Harry had heard it hinted that the steamer would not put to sea in such weather.

But the hints were from those ill-informed: the steamer was bound for Dieppe that night, and as Harry and his companion stood by the gangway, looking down upon the vessel’s deck, the paddles began to revolve, and Harry thought she had started, and that he had come, after all, on an errand of folly—such an one as a little forethought would have stayed him from attempting. But the boat was not yet off: the movement had only been to ease the strain upon the cables stretched on to the landing-place, for, as if eager to set off, the vessel had been tugging at them, until one threatened to part.

Another squall, and a fall of snow, during which the last bell rang, and a man shouted to Harry to know if he were going on board.

“No,” he answered, but hesitatingly, as if it were possible that he whom they sought might, after all, be in the steamer; but it was too late now to search, for two men seized the gangway to draw it back, as the signal was given to go on. The wheels creaked, and the first beat of the paddle was heard, when the figure of a man bearing a valise was seen to hurry down towards the boat.

What followed seemed to occupy but a moment or two, and Harry felt powerless to do more than look on. For, as he first caught sight of and recognised the figure in spite of its wrappings, he was suddenly thrust back, and his companion darted forward, half shrieking, “My child! where is she?”

Richard Pellet stopped, turned, as if to hurry back; but the next moment he dropped the valise and ran a few steps forward along the edge of the landing-stage, as if to leap the distance between that and the steamer as she came by. Then he turned for an instant, just in time to see a woman wrest herself from a man who had tried to stay her: in another second she was upon him, crying, as she grasped at his breast, “Give me my child!”

Then there was a shout, a shriek, and Richard Pellet had stepped backward to fall from the wharf in front of one of the paddle-boxes, where his wife would have followed, but for one of the men, who dragged her away.

And what saw those who had rushed to the edge of the wharf, holding their lanthorns, and swinging them to and fro, while others flung ropes, or rushed to the places where boats were moored? The black, gliding hull of the steamer, the turbulent water, churned into a white foam by the beating paddles, and a momentary glimpse of a grey head and two raised hands, as they were sucked into the stream, and beaten beneath the floats, which crashed down heavily upon the drowning man’s head, before there was a clank, clanking noise in the engine-room, and the huge wheels ceased to revolve.

Then, as the white foam was swept away, and the steamer lay to, the life-buoy was thrown over, men were seen with lanthorns in boats rising and falling upon the black water, which reflected the gleam of the light; but in spite of searchings here and there, backwards and forwards, no one was seen clinging to the life-buoy, or hauled into either of the boats; no grey head or appealing hands were visible at the summit of a wave or in its hollow; black water only, everywhere, save when it curled back in a creamy foam from shore or pile.

Then came once more the order, “Go on a-head!” the “clink, clank, clank,” in the engine-room, where there was a warm red glow from furnace-doors, and the hot smell of oil and steam, a loud hiss or two, the huge cylinders, beginning to swing to and fro, and the pistons to rise and fall with their cranks, churning the black water again into white foam. Then the stern lights of the steamer might be seen rising and falling as she passed out of the harbour mouth, and slowly, one by one the boats returned to their moorings, and those who had manned them, to the landing-stage.

“Name on portmanter, R. Pellet,” said one man in wet oilskins, holding down his lanthorn, and examining the little black valise as it lay upon the pier, now covered with snow-flakes. “Very shocking, but I don’t see as we could have saved him, or done more than we did.”

“Get his body to-morrow, d’ye think?” said a bystander with a short pipe to a fishy-looking man in a blue jersey and a sou’wester.

“May be yes, may be no,” said the man addressed; “but most like no, for he’ll be carried out to sea, safe as wheat.”

Then there was a buzz of voices as fresh faces appeared on the scene.

“Here, for God’s sake, help!” exclaimed Harry Clayton, sick himself almost unto death; “this lady has fainted.”

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Four.

After a Lapse.

“I cannot refrain from writing to congratulate you, my dear Clayton,” wrote Sir Francis Redgrave, in a letter the young man sat reading in his rooms at Cambridge, as he leaned back, his temples throbbing, worn out with the arduous mental struggle in which he had been engaged. “Such an honour,” said Sir Francis, “is, I know, not easily earned, and I feel that yours has been a long and gallant fight. It would have afforded me great pleasure if Lionel had been gifted with your assiduity, and been possessed of similar tastes; but I have never tried to force him. I can get from him but few letters now, so can readily suppose that you have not been more favoured, and are therefore, most likely, not aware of his engagement. I enter into these details with you, on account of the interest you have always displayed in all concerning him. The lady is one whom he has

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many months since he had seen Patty, she had never been long absent from his thoughts even in his busy college life. He had, however, refrained from seeking the Pellet family in the new home to which they had removed on the sudden accession of wealth consequent on his stepfather’s death, until his industry and perseverance had brought forth fruit of which he might be justly proud.

On the day after the receipt of Sir Francis Redgrave’s letter, Harry had taken up his temporary abode in one of the hotels in the neighbourhood of the Strand, and set out at once to find Jared’s new residence at Highgate. He was disappointed, however, in his hope of seeing Patty, and there was something like constraint in the manner in which Mrs Jared informed him of her absence.

He made a second visit early the next day, but with no better success; and on coming away shaped his course towards the scene of so many adventures. First, he had a look at the old Duplex Street house, and then went on, intending to call on the little Frenchman and Janet, who, as the former had resolved, had left the naturalist’s house as soon as he was sufficiently recovered from the effects of his accident.

Finding that he would be within a short distance of Brownjohn Street, he altered his route in a degree so as to stroll through the well-remembered locality, and pay a visit, *en passant*, to the shop of the naturalist, should he still find it in the occupation of its old tenant.

As Harry Clayton entered the close neighbourhood of Decadia, he could scarcely fancy but that he had left London a week since—the aspect of the district seemed the same.

There was the squalid teeming place as of old, rejoicing in all its minglings of animated nature; the children tumbled still in the gutters; the gin-palaces drove thriving trades; costermongers’ barrows were piled with shellfish; and the slatternly women and hulking soft-handed men, hung about or sat on the doorsteps.

But Brownjohn Street was not quite the same, for there was a brightness about D. Wragg’s house, evidently due to paint; and upon approaching more closely, Harry found that D. Wragg seemed to be fuller of “natur’” than ever.

He was in the shop as Harry entered the doorway, and his face brightened with genuine pleasure as he recognised his visitor, and he commenced jigging and working about at a tremendous rate; but the next minute he had spread the newspaper he was reading upon the counter, and began to smooth it over a few times, and make it perfectly straight.

“You’re just in time, sir,” he said. “Only look here,” and he tapped the paper over and over again. “Isn’t it a game? Five years’ penal. Came out after his twelvemonth for your job, and then got in for it again. I always said he must come to it. ‘Don’t you make no mistake, Jack Screwby,’ I says, ‘you’ll be dropped on hotter yet some day; mark my words if you won’t.’ For, you see, as soon as he was out, he used to come worrying and cheeking me again. ‘It’ll come to you, my lad, see if it won’t.’ And now there it all is down in black and white: ‘Violent assault and ’tempt to murder.’ Lots o’ that sort o’ thing about here, bless you! And I could take you out here of an evening, and point you out half a hundred o’ birds o’ that sort as want the same kind o’ salt put on their tails. But there! Jack Screwby’s gone, and we shan’t see no more of him for five years certain.”

“And how is Mrs Winks?” said Harry.

“There ain’t no such person living here at all now, sir,” said D. Wragg, pulling up his collars, and speaking with dignity. “Don’t you make no mistake, sir. Mrs Winks is no more; and busy as a bee has she been this very week, marking all her linen over again in big letters—W, r, a, g, g—though I kep’ on telling her—such is the beautiful, clean,

tidy, mending natur' of that woman—as there wasn't a rag among 'em."

"What! married?" ejaculated Harry, with real surprise.

"Married it is, sir. Don't you make no mistake. We both found the place awful lonely as soon as our lodgers had gone; and what with the theayter getting unpleasant on account of Mrs Winks being stouter than she used to, and people's knees getting a deed in her way when she went round with her basket, and me having so much natur' in hand to attend to, we agreed between ourselves as she should give the theayter up, and take a share in this here business, sir, and all under one name, sir."

"And a very wise act too," said Harry, smiling.

"Twenty years did I know her, sir, before I made the venter; and I don't mind tellin' you, sir, as is a gent I respex, if Mrs D. Wragg wasn't quite so stout, she'd be an angel. But there, sir, don't you make no mistake. I'm as happy as the day's long; and talk about people's pussonal appearance! why, look at me!"

In his modest self-disparagement, D. Wragg again became quite mechanical in his fits and starts, ending by crumpling up the newspaper, and sweeping an empty cage from the counter with his turnip-sowing arm.

"Looks are nothing, Mr Wragg, if the heart is right," said Harry, smiling; "but I must be going. I thought I would look in as I passed."

"Thanky, sir, thanky, which it's very kind; but just a minute, sir. I wanted to tell you as I've quite done with the dorg business, and refused lots of commissions; and now, though I say it, as didn't oughter, there ain't a squarer shop in all London than this here. You'd hardly believe it, sir, but if I didn't sell that there Sergeant Falkner a canary bird and cage last week, I'm a Dutchman. Brings his missus with him to choose it, he does, and calls agen yesterday—no, the day afore—to say as it sings splendid, and shook hands when he went, quite friendly. But won't you take just a taste o' something before you go, sir? The missus will be put out at not seeing you; stepped out, she has, for a few potatoes. And how we have talked about you, surely! Look here, sir, here's the werry thing as I hung up in that winder as soon as he was found—and none too soon neither, for I was obligated to have my shutters up for a week, and they did smash half a dozen of the first-floor panes as it was. 'There,' says I to the people, 'don't you make no mistake: I ain't burked the gent as took it into his head to dress up and come to see—' But there! I won't say no more—and I hung out that, sir."

As D. Wragg spoke, he produced a dusty, smoke and fly-stained card, upon which, in large type, was printed—

THE GENT IS FOUND.
HE WAS RUN OVER
by
A CAB!!!

(Signed) D. Wragg.

"That there cost me two-and-six, sir; but don't you make no mistake, it saved me one pound two and six in winders, and ever so much more in character. But is there anything in my way before you go, sir? Always happy to supply you, and can do a stroke of almost everything in natur', except dorgs, which, as I said afore, I've quite done with; for, you see, sir, dorgs ain't respectable, and don't do now."

Harry had some difficulty in getting away without seeing Mrs D. Wragg; but he urged that his time was precious, and at last, after a hearty hand-shake, he was allowed to continue his way, thinking very deeply, as he wandered slowly on, till he reached a quiet little street near to that named after the great Northumbrian earl—a tame, empty, flat, and apparently, to a spectator, highly unprofitable, double row of houses, upon the door of one of which was a brass-plate bearing the words—

MONSIEUR CANAU,
Professor of Music.

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Five.

Vive L'amour.

"Yes, Mr Canau is at home," said a very mealy-faced girl, who replied to Harry Clayton's knock; and he was shown into a barely-furnished but neat parlour, to wait while, apparently, some lesson was being concluded in the back room, where a voice could be heard counting loudly:—"One, *two*, three; one, *two*, three;" and a duet between pianoforte and violin appeared to be in fierce progress. Then there was silence, a buzz of voices, and very tightly dressed, very fierce-looking—with his closely-cut hair, as he walked behind an enormous moustache,—the little exile entered.

"Ah! *mon cher, cher ami*!" he exclaimed; and in a moment his arms were round his visitor. But directly after, he seemed to recollect himself, and drew back hastily to hold out his hand. "I beg pardon—thousand pardons; but I shall never be an Englishman."

Then, running to the door, he cried in a loud voice, "*Mes amis—mes amis—entrez*."

Harry Clayton's heart beat, as the next minute Jared Pellet entered with Patty and Janet, who both started with surprise, Patty colouring deeply, and the latter looking from one to the other with something nearly akin to anger.

Harry hesitated but for one moment; and then, obeying the dictates of his heart, and heedless of the presence of father and friends, caught Patty in his arms, and kissed her tenderly.

“Aha!” said Canau; “but you do not apologise, as I did, *mon ami*. I did draw back, and make offer of my hand.”

“So I do—now and for ever,” cried Harry, “if Patty here will take it. You will forgive me, I know, Mr Pellet, for seeming brusque, but I cannot talk,—I cannot make professions. I am indeed, though, earnest and true, and I believe that you have read me aright.”

“Yes, yes—yes, yes,” said Jared, softly. “I know, but it is not for me to read. We will go and sit with Janet, and you will join us soon.”

“But, papa!” cried Patty, blushing a deeper crimson, as she hurried to his side.

“Well, my child,” he said, as he kissed her white forehead fondly, “shall I stay then?”

“Miss Pellet will, I hope, give me a short interview alone,” said Harry, crossing to her side as Canau and Janet left the room.

“Patty, dear Patty,” he said, “I am no courtly wooer, only a poor student.”

“No, no!” exclaimed Jared. “Haven’t we seen the honours you have won.”

“I have little to offer,” continued Harry, “but the true love of an honest man; but it is so true, so unselfish a love, that I blush not to offer it here in your father’s presence. But I have much to learn from you, for I tremble—this is not the welcome I had hoped to receive. You shrank from me almost with coldness, though you know that from our first meeting I have loved you. Mine may be a simple love, but I offer you a heart that never gave thought to another. But still I would not press you for that which was not yours to give. Tell me that you are not free in thought, and I will say no more.”

There was a few moments’ pause, during which Jared fiercely stroked his cheek, and then thrust his hands into his pockets, shrugging his shoulders almost up to his ears, *à la* Canau,—but, though Patty essayed to speak, her words were inaudible, as she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

Treading upon tip-toe as if he were amongst pedal-keys, Jared softly left the room, and for the next few minutes, Harry, grown eloquent with affection, pleaded his cause earnestly, till Janet glided in, looking curiously from one to the other.

“Ah, Janet!” exclaimed Harry, catching her hands in his, “you know how I have loved her from the first. You will speak for me, will you not?”

“No; why should I?” said Janet, coldly, as she turned from him to Patty, taking her to her breast in a motherly fashion, as if to protect her. “She is rich now, and you are proud to know her; but look back at when she was poor. You were ashamed to know her then before your fine friends. And then look at your cruel suspicions. Do you think I could not read them all? I have told her a hundred times over that yours was but a passing fancy—that you saw her pretty face, and liked it, and—and that was all.”

“I was weak and unjust, I know,” said Harry; “but have I not tried to expiate my sin? But why do you speak of a passing fancy? What do you mean? How can you be so unjust? Are there to be fresh riddles now?”

“Why should you trouble her when you are promised to some one else?” cried Janet, fiercely, as she turned upon him, holding Patty to her breast the while, and stroking her luxuriant hair.

“I! Promised to some one else?” exclaimed Harry. “Well, yes,” he added, gloomily. “I suppose it is to be so—to Alma Mater—to my studies.”

“Hush, Patty. No; I will not be silent,” cried Janet, excitedly; for Patty had turned imploringly to her. “I *will* speak to him—I will not be silent. Have you,” she exclaimed to Harry, “have you forgotten your stay in Essex, at a pleasant house with a lawn in front, stretching down to the road?”

She looked at him searchingly, as if she would read his very thoughts, while she awaited his answer.

“Forgotten! no, certainly not,” said Harry. “Nearly two years ago, was it not?”

“Yes, yes; I see that you remember,” cried Janet, with a tinge of sarcasm in her tones.

“Well!” said Harry, looking from one to the other in evident perplexity, for Patty’s eyes were fixed upon him anxiously, as if her happiness depended upon his answer.

“Well!” said Janet, scornfully, “do you remember?”

“You are speaking in riddles,” cried Harry, almost angrily, in his turn. “What does this mean? If you allude to my visit nearly two years since, with a brother student to his home—yes, I was there a week—a pleasant, happy week of home-life, such as I have seldom known.”

“Happy, no doubt,” said Janet, harshly.

There was a simple look of wonder and bewilderment in Harry’s face that directly disarmed suspicion, and the harsh aspect slowly faded from Janet’s countenance as the young man said calmly—

“Janet, I cannot understand what you would accuse me of; but it cannot be any falling away from my love for Patty; and as to being promised to another, I never till now spoke words of love to woman.”

The doubt and suspicion faded away still further, to leave poor Janet’s countenance almost sweet in its expression of loving sadness, as she turned away to whisper in her friend’s ear, and to kiss her fondly; and her eyes were suffused with tears, as she gently pressed back Patty’s clinging hands, and glided from the room.

For, trembling, fluttering, half-pained, half-joyous, Patty would have followed, but there were other hands to arrest her half-way; and as the door softly swung to, she felt herself drawn unresisting, now, closer and closer, to another’s breast.

Shall we tell of the words that fell now from Harry’s impassioned lips?—of the gentle, dove-like eyes that now looked up, half-scared, half-wonderingly in his, till that look was subdued and softened into one that was all love? Of the hour, that fled like minutes, as he drew the yielding little form closer, till her breath fanned his cheek, and her red, half-pouted lips seemed to ask the kiss they dared not then return? Enough, if we say that, as Harry sat proudly there, and whispered of the future, it was with a little head nestling in his breast; and when—how long after, neither knew—Jared was heard loudly approaching the room, violently humming one of the melodies from “Zampa,” and, of course, so pre-occupied, that he stumbled over the mat, and kicked it back into its place before rattling the door handle and entering, they did not move; why should they?

Jared stood and gazed for a moment with bended head, half smiling, and evidently about to utter some bantering remark; but it did not leave his lips, which began to twitch, and his face to work as he turned from them.

“Father, dear father!” cried Patty, as she fled to his side, “you are not angry?”

“Angry? No, my darling, I am not angry,” and he drew her to him to kiss her tenderly. “I am not angry, but glad and thankful to see my child happy. It brings back thoughts of old times when I—but this will not do. And what will somebody at home say to it all? I am a weak old fogey, and let you have your own way, but there is moth—I mean mamma, to consult, remember.”

At that moment the door was once more softly opened, and Janet entered slowly, to look at the trio inquiringly, till in Harry’s happy face she read all she wished to learn, and pressed his hand as he led her to a chair, sitting down by her side, and talking to her for some time, so that father and daughter might converse for a while without interruption.

Evening fell upon them unawares, and the black shadows made Janet’s countenance darker still, as, at last, gazing earnestly in Harry’s face, she laid one bony hand on his, and tried to speak, but the words died inaudibly away.

“Did you wish to ask me something?” said Harry, softly; for he had in those happy hours learned the poor girl’s secret.

“Yes.”

“You may trust me,” he said, gently; “but you are a woman of strong good sense. Let me ask you something first—Is it wise?”

“I think so,” said Janet, sadly. “I am not mad now. I suffered then, but it has passed away, to leave me wiser and better, I hope. Do you think,” she added, somewhat bitterly, “that I shall be like the little one that cried for the moon?”

Harry was silent for a while, thinking, but he was interrupted by Janet’s whisper—

“Tell me—is he well?”

“Yes,” said Harry.

“And you have seen him?”

“Not for above a year.”

“But you have had news; tell me what it is.”

Harry was again thoughtful and silent. Should he tell her or no? The blow must come some day; had it not better fall upon her now, and be at an end?

“Do you fear to tell me?” she said again.

Harry’s answer was to draw Sir Francis Redgrave’s letter from his pocket, and place it in her hands.

“Read it,” he said, “when you are alone.”

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Six.

At the New Home.

Parted at last, for Harry had seen father and daughter into an omnibus, one which must have been Ben Jonson’s “chariot at hand here of love, in which my lady rideth,” and drawn by swans or doves, instead of a jangling piece of

wood and iron work, with a wretched knacker on either side of the pole. How memory, though, dwelt upon her whose soft kiss—the first—was yet dewy sweet upon his lips—upon his, for she was his promised wife; and as he passed through the streets, walking as if upon air, flushed, proud, happy, he saw nothing but the bright future his fancy painted.

Then came the recollection of Janet, and he admired her as he thought of the calm resignation with which she seemed to pour out the lavish tenderness of her nature upon Patty.

At this point Harry glided selfishly away again in thought to add fresh colouring to his happy future.

Harry was early at Highgate the next day, to find Mrs Jared very stern and uncompromising; but he was too much for her in his downright honest declaration.

“Don’t be hard upon me, Mrs Pellet—don’t send me away; for indeed I love her very, very dearly.”

Mrs Jared was beaten, as well she might be, for there were Jared and Patty looking on. It was not consistent, she knew; but Harry stayed that day and dined with them, and saw Jared ready to go off to the vicar’s, stay to have a string tucked in here—Jared always was great in strings—and a brushing there; while, in the exertion of making the most of himself, he burst a pearl button off his wrist-band.

And now Patty was called into requisition to sew that button on again; and I vow and declare that the fresh disc of pearl which she held between her lips while she made a knot at the end of her thread, was not so bright and pure-looking as the little regular teeth over which Harry went into raptures.

Who would not have been Jared, and had that downy cheek laid against his wrist? Why, if it had been any other wrist, it must have beat and throbbed at a redoubled rate! Or who would not have been the thread which Patty bit in two when the button had been duly stabbed in all its eyes over and over again? Why, that thread must have been conscious, and enjoyed it, or it never would have held out so long, instead of being bitten through at first!

Jared gone, leaving Harry Clayton in his fold amongst the lambs of his flock. Very reprehensible, no doubt; but no worse than Mrs Jared’s behaviour. For though left at home as guardian, she either turned wilfully blind, or else her assertion was true that there was so much to settle and arrange that she thought she never should get to be at home in her new house. In fact, she was constantly away; and when by chance she did come into the room, it was to murmur to Patty about some precious thing or another that she was sure must have been left at Duplex Street.

Strange proceedings there were that afternoon at Highgate. Why could not Harry allow Patty to busily ply her needle instead of insisting upon holding one hand in his? Why, too, must he fancy that he had grown domestic, and want to help and prepare the tea? for in spite of the change in circumstances, it was hard work for Mrs Pellet and Patty to break themselves of their old homely ways. Harry kept the latter in a state of nervous flutter the whole time as he whispered. But then, at a certain stage in their existence, people do make themselves so absurd, or rather, as Richard Pellet used to say, “such fools.” The fact is, lovers imagine the whole world to be blind to their actions, when the fact is—bless the sweet innocency of their hearts!—the handkerchief is around their own eyes.

Yes; Harry must make the toast, which ought now, of course, to have been made in the kitchen—and fill up a great deal of the available space by the fire, manifesting not the slightest intention of going away so long as he could feast his eyes. There was no one there but a couple of small Pellets—little round Pellets, who sat very still, and looked on most solemnly. It was not at all surprising, seeing how such instruction is neglected at our great seats of learning, that Harry Clayton, in spite of honours, should burn that toast very often, and leave great white patches where all should have been brown.

Yes; they were as homely as ever at Highgate, though in the midst of plenty; for Mrs Jared said that she could never settle to the ways adopted by some people, even if she had a million a week. And now she was away inspecting a regiment of white jam-pots suffering from an attack of mould; so if there was any cause for the ruddy glow in Patty’s cheeks, it must have been due to a combination of Mrs Jared’s unconventional behaviour, and the example set by Adam and Eve some little time since; though there is still the possibility of the fire being to blame.

That afternoon glided away magically, and Jared was late for tea. It did not matter in the least, though he apologised for being so long away. And then what an evening was spent! for Canau arrived with Janet and a long black case, the sight of which set Jared’s fingers strumming upon the table.

Musical, of course, they were all the evening, and to Patty the notes now were those of love. But there was room for sadness even then, and Patty’s heart felt heavy as she saw the yearning, eager, almost envious look in Janet’s eyes, and thought of the poor girl’s future, till she crossed the room, and told her that she should always be happy could they but be near.

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Seven.

In the Reflector.

Jared Pellet used to declare with a grim smile that he thought he had been more happy as a poor man in Duplex Street than he was now that he had inherited his brother’s property and thriving business; for he had never known how much misery, poverty, and wretchedness was in the world before the secretaries of different charities began taking ample care to keep him well-informed upon the subject. Jared used to say he thought, he was not sure though, he almost found the money a trouble to him; in fact, it would have been a burden if he had not somewhat lightened it

by the arrangement he made respecting Harry and the money brought by his mother into the firm. He did not now find so much time for dreaming over his old organ, sooner than part from which he would almost have given up the worldly goods now in his possession.

The old house was kept on for some time in Duplex Street almost intact; and when it was decided to give it up, Mrs Jared had a good long cry over it, in spite of its pinched looks and bare rooms, but where she said that she had passed so many, many happy hours, gone never to return.

Wonderful was the collection of odds and ends brought away to be deposited in the wealthy new home—one and all articles that it was declared to be impossible to leave behind. One was Jared's glue-pot, which showed its malignant disposition to the very last, and, after being wrapped up carefully in paper, proved to have a quantity of nasty, foul, sticky water somewhere in its internal regions, which ran out all over the other objects packed in the box.

Patty, too, must be obstinate about the old tin-kettle of a piano, with the rusty wires, being left behind. What were instruments of great compass from Broadwood or Collard? They could not make her feel that she was to desert old friends. How many boxes of strange pieces of ware, and fragments of this and that, were packed up under the name of playthings, it is hard to say.

One, at least, of Mrs Jared's weaknesses has been already mentioned. This may not come in the same list, but during the arrangements what time the house in Duplex Street was turned what she called inside out, and the question was in full discussion as to what was to be taken, what left to be sold, this lady suddenly exclaimed, in answer to expostulations—"What! leave that rolling-pin and paste-board? No, not if I know it: I've had them twenty years, and —"

The remainder of Mrs Jared's speech was inaudible from her head suddenly disappearing in the depths of a big box, where she was rolling the implements in question in the folds of an old scorched ironing-blanket for safety. It is worthy of remark, that at the time Mrs Jared was packing, her jacket was hung beside her on the knob of the door, and that jacket was handsome, and of ermine.

"Well, dear, is there anything else you would like to take?" said Jared.

"Yes; that there is!" was the reply, as Mrs Jared took down a bunch of extremely dusty sweet herbs from a hook in the kitchen ceiling, and placed it beside the swaddled rolling-pin. "Yes; the things were hard enough to get together, and somehow I can hardly realise, even now, that we can afford to leave them behind!"

After that night in the church, Jared took a dislike to the reflector, for as to giving up the right to conducting the service at St Runwald's, that was out of the question, and Mr Timson used to boast to the vicar that they had not only the best, but the richest organist in London. And it was only occasionally, as a personal favour, to one of the above gentlemen, that a stranger was allowed to try the instrument.

That reflector Jared took down himself from over the keyboard of the organ, and old Purkis bore it into the damp vestry, where in course of time its reflective power became almost *nil*.

But though Jared no longer possessed a reflector in which he could gaze and dream, and conjure up the past, yet one has a mirror of the mind upon which, after a breath, the surface shines as I sit late this wintry night, as Purkis sat of old in the dim shades of the gloomy old church, listening to the inspiring music of the grand old organ, thundering in peals, wailing in sighs, or pouring forth jubilant melody. For above me in the distance, from behind a curtain suspended to a brass rod, rises a faint glow as from some soft light, above which start up, like the golden pillars dimly seen when the northern lights flush the wintry sky, the mighty pipes whose summits are in the deep obscurity which clouds the open roof of the edifice. And in my mirror what is there first? An indelible picture? No; for it fades to give place to others, as now there is visible Jared's patient lined old face poring over music-book and keyboard by the light of one feeble candle which seems to shed a halo round his quaint old head.

Now the interior of the old church by day, with Jared at the organ. A bright spring morning, and the organist in the morning costume of a glossy black dress-coat and trousers—Tim Ruggles' cut for a ducat!—white vest, and patent leather-boots. His grizzly hair has a peculiar knotty appearance? and did any mirror reflect odours, most surely there would be a smell of curling-tongs and singeing. There is a camellia, too, in his button-hole, and he has just hurried up-stairs, splitting a pair of white kid-gloves all to ribbons in dragging them off. Crash! That's the brass curtain-rings on the rod, so that Jared can screw himself round and gaze down into the church, now that he has taken a music-book from the locker and placed it upon the stand of the opened organ.

The sun streams through the tinted windows in golden and ruddy glories piercing the sombre twilight of the church with rays whereon dance myriad motes of dust—dust perhaps mingled with that of the generations of the past. Jared is looking over the heads of many people anxiously towards the chancel; and now seems to come a strange rushing sound, and a dull creak, creak, which makes the towering old instrument to shudder. But that is only Ichabod Gunnis, grown tall and out of leathers, toiling away at the long handle of the bellows till the little weight tells that the wind-chest is full.

And now here comes the party which Jared left in the vestry, for there is a buzz of excitement in the church, and heads are craning, while Tim Ruggles is so excited that he stands up on the cushions of the pew he helps to occupy so as to have a better view of what is going on.

Here they come! No, they don't; that's only old Purkis in full uniform, plump, ruddy, glistening with moisture that he is too dignified to remove, as he rolls solemnly down the nave towards the door, waving the people back with his cane. Smile? Not he! beadles don't smile in public life, only when out of uniform; and as to using a handkerchief, he

could not do that, unless compelled by such a fleshquake or sneeze as now shakes Mr Purkis's frame, caused by that sooty dust that pervades the church, and not by damp.

But now they do come: Patty leaning upon the arm of Harry Clayton; Timson next, rounder than ever, with Janet on his arm—bridesmaids—more friends—a bright confusion of figures, with only one here and there to be recognised in the mirror. But there is Canau; there Mr Grey, who has doffed his surplice; and, right at the back, there is Mrs Purkis, crying and laughing together, but turning solemn directly after, as becomes the pew-opener of St Runwald's.

Peal up the wedding-march, old Jared! But Jared can't play; not he. He has blundered several chords, though no one is a bit the wiser. He would break down, only he has known the piece by heart for years. There is music open, stave and cleff and crotchet and quaver; but the big-headed notes seem to be bobbing up and down upon their spindle bodies, and wagging their tails, and waltzing round and round. And really the book might just as well be in the locker as upon the stand; for, though Jared knows it not, it is upside down. There is dew all over Jared's spectacles, and they refuse to be seen through, while a great tear has trickled down, gathering strength from affluents as it proceeds, till it hangs upon the tip of Jared's nose, to go plash down at last upon the central G natural of the fingerboard. And there are more weak tears stealing down from behind his spectacles to moisten his cheeks. They might be taken for perspiration, since he is smiling as he plays mechanically, for he never performed in a more soulless fashion in his life.

But then he always was weak, and queer, and unbusinesslike; and "some people are such fools!" It could hardly be expected that at such a time he should be exact in his fingering; but his actions are so odd that one might say, "Bring a strait waistcoat," only that he is in one already, which crackles at every motion. And now comes a dismal groan, due to the exciting event; for, probably for only the third or fourth time in his life—being, in spite of his vagaries, a most exemplary bellows-boy—Ichabod has let the wind out of the organ.

It does not matter, for the wedding-party is already in the porch, being waited on by a deputation from the Campanological Brethren, in the shape of Beaky Jem of the tenor, who grins and rubs his Roman rostrum as he growls out something about the bells. Timson is at him, though, fighting hard to get a hand into his tight pocket, and fighting just as hard to get it out with what must have been a satisfactory answer; for St Runwald's peal asserts itself this day, far above the roar of the streets, ringing out merrily in thousands of changes, stimulated by the "sight o' beer that there was in that belfry sewerly."

The mirror blank, and then a tall, pale woman listening with clasped hands to a never-wearying tale told her by a strangely-wrinkled little man, who sits and pretends to smoke, and pokes at and arranges the scrubby trifle of hair by his temples with the stem of his pipe—a tale of a little gentle child whose spirit fled as he slept, holding her to his quaint but loving breast. How many times Tim Ruggles has told of little Pine it were hard to say, but neither he nor his listener ever tires; and perhaps it is due to their hands that flowers bloom so sweetly upon the little grave. The fount of tears might have been dry before now; but no! there is always one ready to fall to the child's memory. A strange, quiet woman this, who rarely speaks, seldom smiles, save when Patty Clayton enters with a dimple-faced baby, and sits and lets the pale, silent woman kneel by her side, and gaze with a yearning love at the tiny piece of humanity, which coos and laughs in her face.

Jared again, and grown older. The man who was puzzled years before by a letter in French from a small Norman town, saying that the writer had been much surprised at not seeing Monsieur Pellet after his note appointing an interview; but that arrangements could be entered into for the reception of one lady boarder. Jared could not understand this letter, but the truth forced itself upon him at last, that it must have been intended for his brother, who was on his way to keep his appointment when that stern voice cried "Stay!"

Jared is in his old place, with two fresh cherubs perched there, one on either side of the organ—fresh-coloured, bright-eyed, restless cherubs, upon whom the old wooden bloated angels of the instrument look jealously down. And there sits "Grandpa," pretending to practise, but a very slave to the whims and caprices of these household gods. Wonderful now are the variations made upon the pieces played: pedals are pressed down by tiny feet, stops are pulled out or pushed in; then bass or treble discords are played at unexpected times by little pudgy hands; or in the midst of the grand composition of some noble old master, the organ once more gives forth its dying wails, for the wind is out, through Ichabod Gunnis playing at "bo-peep" between the curtains with one of the cherubs, and miscalculating the lasting properties of a well-pumped, full chest of wind. But all this does not trouble Jared, who looks the picture of earthly happiness.

Poor Jared! he is head of the Austin Friars establishment, but he is afraid of the manager there, and slinks guardedly in and out. He goes every other day, because his son-in-law wishes it; but Jared is always very nervous, and fancies that the manager looks down upon him, because he comes up every Sunday from Highgate to play St Runwald's organ, and afterwards eat a modest chop in Fleet Street with Canau, who generally has been with him to help him with the stops.

The scenes come quickly now across the face of the mirror—scenes of grey old men smoking long pipes, and playing cribbage or whist at Harry's place, or at Jared's home; of life's downward course made smoother for many by the heaped-up wealth that Jared inherits; of old Timson standing before the organist, with hands beneath his coat-tails, and a frown upon his brow, though there is an odd twinkle in his eye as he points to a deficiency in the poor-box, reproached the while by the vicar, who goes with the churchwarden to empty the boxes upon the very next day, to find that deficiency is amply made up.

No glance at mirror now, but a long gaze from a seat at the reality. There is the faint glow from behind the curtain; the softened tones are pealing and quivering in the air as they float round the darkened church. The music is sweet but sad, and the soft strains thrill as they sound funereal—dirge-like. Is it the touch of Jared? The tall golden pipes stand up ray-like, and they quiver in the glow. The hour is late, the streets are getting hushed, and the solemnity of the place seems oppressive, aided as it is in its influence upon the senses by the wailing strains that sob through the air.

Silence for awhile, and the sense of oppression more heavy; but now once more come the swelling softened tones of the grand old instrument—strains wild and extemporised—music that is almost palpable, as it flows current-like through nave, aisles, and chancel—sad music, solemn strains—and then once more silence.

A strange thrill now, but only for an instant, of jarring pain; for the old clock chimes the hour, and each lapse of time is beaten out upon bell-rim by a ponderous hammer, and the lumbering old machinery is set to work by its weights, and hammers out a mutilated version of the Old Hundredth Psalm, before the clicking, grinding works stand still, and the brazen clangour dies away.

Then comes the organ again, in a sweet strain from some flute-like stop, from where the faint light rises in a halo, like the herald of the rising of some great orb of sound. And now come, in a powerful crescendo, strains loud and deep, then higher and higher, till the glorious fugue culminates in a mighty burst of harmony, poured forth by the instrument's full power, but only to die away in distant mutterings as of thunder, from the deep-toned pedal pipes; for the practice is at an end.

That was Jared Pellet's touch—that was the old organist, fettered by no ten-minute edicts of old tea-dealing Timson; that was Jared, rising on the wings of his music far away from earth; and now, as the last muttering peal of softened thunder dies away, the faint light is shining upon the bent grey head of my old friend.

The End.

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