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George Manville Fenn

"The Rosery Folk"

Volume One—Chapter One.

Sir James Scarlett's garden.

"Pray speak gently, dear."

"Speak gently! how can a man speak gently? The things are of no value, but it worries me, I've taken such pains with them, through the cold weather, to bring them on."

"You have, Sir James, you have, sir; and I never let the fire go out once."

"No: but you've let the grapes go out, confound you! and if I find that you have been dishonest—"

"Oh! but I'm sure, dear, that he would not be."

"Thank you kindly, my lady," said John Monnick, the old gardener, taking off his hat and wiping his streaming brow with his arm, as he stood bent and dejected, leaning upon his spade, with every line in his countenance puckered and drawn with trouble, and a helpless look of appeal in his eyes. "No, my lady, I wouldn't let these here old hands take to picking and stealing, and many's the trouble I've been in with Fanny and Martha and the others because I was so particular even to a gooseberry."

"There, dear, I told you so!"

"But the grapes are gone," cried Sir James Scarlett angrily. "Who could have taken them?"

"That's what puzzles me, Master James, it do indeed. I did get into temptation once, and took something, but it's been a lesson to me; and I said then, never no more, with the Lord's help, and never no more, sir, it's true, never up to now."

"Then you confess you did steal some fruit once?"

"Yes, Master James, I confess it, sir, and a deal I've thought about it since; and I've come to think from much reading, sir, that though this here garden wasn't planted eastward in Eden it's a very beautiful place; all the neighbours say, sir, that there ain't a more beautiful little place for miles round, and Lady Martlett's folk's about wild at our growing such better fruit and flowers."

"Oh, yes! I know all about that, but what has that to do with your confession?"

"Everything, if you please, Master James, for how could there be a beautiful garden even now without temptation coming into it, same as it did when that there apple, as brought all the sin into the world, was picked and eat?"

"There, that will do, Monnick; now speak out."

"I will, sir and my lady, and ask your pardon humbly and get it off my mind. It were five year ago, sir, and just after you'd took the place, and I'd come up from old master's, sir."

"Five years ago, John?" said Lady Scarlett smiling.

"Yes, my lady, five year, and it'll be six at Michaelmas, and it wasn't over an apple but over one o' them Willyum pears, as growd on that cup-shaped tree down side the south walk."

“And you cleared that, did you?” said Sir James grimly.

“Nay, sir, I didn’t; it were only one of ’em as had hung till it were dead-ripe, and then fell as soon as the sun came on it hot, and there it lay under the tree, with its rosy green and yellow side, and a big crack acrost it like a hopen mouth asking me to taste how good it was.”

“And did you, John?” said Lady Scarlett, passing her arm through her husband’s, and pressing it quietly.

“Did I, my lady? I was mowing that there great walk and I went by it three or four times, but the grass there was dry and wiry and would not cut, and I had to go over it again and again, and the more I tried to resist the temptation the more it wouldn’t flee before me, but kept on a-drawing and a-drawing of me till at last I dropped my scythe and rubber and ran right away, I did, Sir James and my lady, I did indeed.”

“And left the pear?” said Sir James.

The old man shook his grey head sadly.

“I was obliged to go and fetch my scythe and rubber, master. I might ha’ left ’em till night, but that was the temptation on it a drawing of me till I went back, meaning to shut my eyes and snatch up the scythe and come away. But lor’, my lady, you know how weak we sinful mortals be. I tried hard but my eyes would open, and so as I see that pear, I made a snatch at it, meaning to run with it right into the house at once.”

“And you did not, John?” said Lady Scarlett.

“No, ma’am, my lady,” said the old man sadly. “I got my finger all over juiced and I sucked it and that did for me. The taste of the sin was so good, Sir James, that I did eat that pear, thinking no one would know, and it’s lay heavy on my heart ever since.”

“And what about the grapes?” said Sir James.

“I don’t, know, sir; I didn’t know they were gone till you see it. That was the on’y time, sir, as ever I dared to take any of the fruit, and I wish as I could turn myself inside out to show you how clean my heart is, sir, of ever doing you a wrong all ’cept that there pear, which has, as I said afore, lay heavy on my chesty ever since.”

“Well, there: I don’t think you took the grapes, Monnick; but it’s very vexatious: I meant to send them to Lady Martlett. You must keep a good look out.”

“Thank you kindly, sir, and I will keep a look out, too. And you don’t think I’d rob you, my lady?”

“Indeed I don’t, John,” cried Lady Scarlett, who was divided between a desire to laugh and sorrow for the faithful old fellow’s trouble.

“God bless your dear, sweet, kind face, my lady, and bless you too, Sir James,” said the old fellow, taking off his ragged straw hat and standing bare-headed, “I wouldn’t rob you of a leaf.”

The three then separated, Sir James Scarlett and his sweet young wife going towards the glass-houses, and old John Monnick shouldering his spade and watching them for a few moments before going down towards another part of the garden.

“Eh, but they’re a handsome pair,” he muttered. “He’s a bit masterful, but he’s got a good heart, and she’s an angel, like a pear-tree growed by the water side, she is, bless her! and if I get hold of him as took them grapes I’ll—”

He gave the little box edging a blow with the flat of the spade, with the effect that a great snail rolled out on to the path, and suffered death beneath the old gardener’s heel, being crushed and ground into the gravel with savage earnestness.

“That I will,” said the old fellow, and then he walked away, meeting before he had gone many yards a tall, dark, grave-looking man of about thirty, coming slowly along the path reading. He was scrupulously attired in glossy black with tie to match, grey check trousers, and faultless shirt front, while his hat was of the most glossy. The hands that held the volume were white and carefully kept, while the expression of the man’s face was that of some calm, thoughtful student, who passed the greater portion of his life with books, not men.

“Ah, gardener,” he said softly, and his voice was very rich and deep, “what a lovely day! Your garden looks exquisite. I hope you are quite well.”

“Tidy, sir, thank you kindly, tidy; and, yes, the garden do look well just now, if we could keep out the thieves.”

“Ah! yes, the birds, and slugs, and snails, and insects,” said the other with a soft, grave smile; “but we must not forget, gardener, that these poor things do not comprehend the difference between right and wrong. The fair fruits of the earth are growing in their path, and they do not understand why they may not freely eat.”

“No, sir, of course not,” said Monnick, giving his ear a vicious rub, “but they has to pay for it precious dear when they are ketched.”

“Yes, gardener, yes, poor things,” said the other, letting his head sink sidewise; and shutting his book upon one finger he crossed his wrists so that the work hung lightly from his shapely hand, while his eyes half-closed and a dreamy, thoughtful look came upon his face.

“It’s a deal o’ mischief they do, sir, like plagues of Egyp’ they’d be if they weren’t stopped.”

“All, yes, gardener,” said the other contemplatively, “but it often strikes me as being one of the darker sides of horticultural pursuits, that the gardener’s way is by a path of blood.”

John Monnick pushed his old straw hat a little on one side and stared.

“I saw traps down by the wood to catch the soft velvet mole, a wire by a hole in the fence to take the harmless rabbit.”

“Harmless, sir? He took the hearts out of a row of young cauliflowers all in one night.”

“Ah, yes, but he sinned in ignorance. Then you are always destroying life. That implement you hold pierces the ground and cuts in two the burrowing worm. There was a scent of pungent fumes in the greenhouse and myriads of tiny flies lay scattered in the pots dead from the poisonous smoke. You crush the snail and slug, the beetle, and the grub. The birds are often shot. Yes, yes, I think I’m right; your path is marked by blood, but this place is very bright and beautiful, gardener.”

“Yes, sir, it is,” said Monnick, changing his spade to the other hand so as to tilt his straw hat the other way.

“It is a privilege to come down upon this glowing summer day, from the smoke and noise and crowd of London streets.”

“Ay, sir, it must be,” said the old man. “I often pity you as lives there. I was never there but once and never want to go again.”

“And I envy you, gardener,” said the speaker with a sigh, and raising his book he opened it, smiled sadly, nodded, and walked on.

“And he might do that in London town,” muttered the old man. “Looks well! of course it does; but what’s the use of looking at all my bedding plants through a book?”

“Ah!” he said as he went on, “it’s all very tine, but where would the niceness be if we didn’t kill the snails? Master don’t buy coke to heat the greenhouse to breed green fly and thrip, and as to the worms, and slugs, and grubs, there’s room enough in the whole wide world without their coming here, he’s a very nice smooth-spoken gent he is, and can’t have ever cut a worm in two with digging in his blessed life; but somehow he’s too fine for me. I wonder what his mother were like now, to have such a son. Let’s see, master’s mother’s sister I think she were. Ah! people’s like plants, they’ve sports and wariations from the payrent stock; but if I wanted to produce the finest specimen of human kind I wouldn’t graft on he.”

Volume One—Chapter Two.

Down from Town.

Little more than an hour before his words with the old gardener, Sir James was in his dingy office in Leadenhall Street, where, young as he was, through succession to his father, he stood head of a large shipping business. He had been waiting for his cousin, Arthur Prayle, who was invited to spend a few days with him in the country. Then a cab was taken, the train caught, and in an hour they were whirled down to a station in Berkshire, where, in light, simple, summer dress, looking bright and attractive as the country round, sat Lady Scarlett, eagerly watching the platform from her seat in the little phaeton drawn by two handsome cobs, who tossed their heads impatiently, and threw the white foam from their well-champed, brightly polished bits, to the bespecklement of the smart groom’s hat and coat. Her face brightened as she caught sight of her husband, and fell a little as she saw that he was followed by his cousin, Arthur Prayle; but she smiled sweetly at their visitor, and held out her hand to him as he came up and raised his hat.

“I’ve brought Arthur down to get rid of the soot, Kitty,” cried Scarlett heartily. “See how solemn he looks.”

“I am very glad to see him,” said Kate Scarlett, smiling, and colouring slightly.

“There, jump up beside Kitty, old man,” continued Scarlett. “She’ll soon rattle us home.”

“No, no, dear; you’ll drive.”

“What! In these lavender kids, and in this coat!” cried Scarlett laughingly. “No, thanks.—Jump in, Arthur. That’s right. I’m up.—Let ’em go, Tom.—Now, my beauties.”

The handsome little pair of cobs shook their heads, and started off at a rapid trot, the groom catching the side of the phaeton as it passed him, and mounting beside his master in the seat behind; when the brisk, sweet, summer air seemed to bring a little colour into the cheeks of Arthur Prayle, and a great deal into those of Lady Scarlett, as she guided the spirited little pair along the dusty road, and then in between the long stretches of fir-wood, whence came delicious warm breathings of that lemony aromatic scent of the growing pines brought forth by the mid-day sun.

“There, my lad, that’s better than sitting in chambers,” cried Scarlett. “Fellows pooh-pooh me for living out here. It is living, my boy. It’s dying, to shut yourself up in town.”

“Ah, yes,” said Prayle with a sigh; “it is very delicious.”

“Delicious I should think it is,” cried Scarlett eagerly; and he stood up behind his wife, holding on by the back seat, as fine and manly a specimen of humanity as could be found in a day’s march. He was fashionably dressed, tightly buttoned up, and had the orthodox flower in his button-hole; but his bronzed face and fresh look told of country-life; and down in Berkshire, the staid solemnity of his London ways was cast aside for a buoyant youthfulness that made his sedate cousin turn slightly to gaze at him through his half-closed eyes.

“Give them their heads, Kitty,” cried Scarlett, as they approached a hill; and, as they heard the order, the cobs gave their crests a toss, and broke into a canter, breasting the hill, and keeping up the speed to the very top, where they were checked for the descent upon the other side.

“There you are, old fellow,” cried Scarlett. “There’s the river winding among the patches of grove and meadow. There’s the Rosery; you can catch it beautifully now. Do you see how the creeper has gone up the chimney-stack? No, of course you can’t from here.—Gently, my beauties; steady, steady, little rascals. Don’t pull your mistress’s arms out by the roots.”

“A lovely view indeed, James,” said the visitor. “It seems more beautiful every time I come.”

“Oh, every place looks at its best now,” said Scarlett heartily. “I say, I’ve got down a new boat; we must have a pull up to the locks. That’s the sort of thing to do you good, my boy.”

Prayle smiled, and shrugged his shoulders lightly.

“How long does it take you to drive from the station?” he said quietly.

“We allow five-and-twenty minutes,” said Scarlett. “We shall do it in twenty to-day. I like to go fast, and these little ruffians enjoy it. They want it: they’re getting too fat.”

The cobs tossed their heads again at this, and tried to break into another canter.

“Steady, steady, you larky little scoundrels.—Give them a pull, Kitty. Oh, that’s right; the gate’s open.”

They were in sight of a rustic gateway banked with masses of rhododendrons and other flowering shrubs, and through this Mrs Scarlett deftly guided the phaeton, which seemed suddenly to run more quietly along the pretty curved gravel drive, whose sides were lawn of the most velvety green; while flowers of the brightest hues filled the many beds. The grounds were extensive, though the house was small and cottage-like, with its highly-pitched gables, latticed windows, and red-brick walls covered with magnificent specimens of creeping plants. On either side of the house were pretty extensive conservatories, and glimpses of other glass-houses could be seen beyond a tall thick hedge of yew. In fact, it was just the *beau-ideal* of a pretty country-home, with a steep slope down to the river.

“Here we are, old fellow,” cried Scarlett, as he leaped out and helped his wife to alight.—“Are they warm, Tom?”

“No, sir; not turned a hair, sir.”

“That’s right.—Now then, Arthur. Same room as you had before. Will you take anything after your ride?”

“Oh, dear, no,” said Prayle; “and if you’ll allow me, I’ll ramble about till dinner.”

“Do just what you like, old man. There are cigars and cigarettes in the study. If there’s anything else you want, just ring.”

“Oh, don’t; pray don’t,” said Prayle deprecatingly. “You will spoil my visit if you make so much of me.”

“Make much of you, lad? Stuff!—Good-bye, Buddy; good-bye, Jen,” he cried, patting the cobs.—“Take care of them, Tom.—Beauties, aren’t they, Arthur? My present to Kate. Now then, come along.”

He led the visitor into the tiled hall, at every corner of which was some large *jardinière* full of flowers, and up the broad staircase to the guest-chamber, flowers being in the window even here; while the floors were covered with the softest carpets and rugs, and pictures and engravings of no little merit covered the walls.

“You have a magnificent place here, James,” said the visitor, with a sigh.

“Nonsense, man. Half the beauty is Nature’s own doing, aided by your humble servant, Kitty, old John Monnick, and a couple of labourers. Why, I pay less for this pretty Elizabethan cottage than I should for some brick dungeon in a West-end square. Less? Why, I don’t pay half. Now, I’m going to unfig.”

He nodded pleasantly at his guest, and left him alone, when a scowl came over Prayle’s face, and glancing round at the well-furnished room, with its bright fittings and charming flowers in window and vase, he said in a low and bitter voice: “Why should this weak boor be rolling in wealth, while I have to pinch and spare and contrive in my dim blank chambers? The world is not fair. Oh, it is not fair!”

As he stood there in the middle of the room, a distant sound made him turn his head sharply, and he caught sight of his frowning face in the dressing-glass, when, smoothing away the wrinkles, he paid a few attentions to his personal appearance, and went down to stroll about the grounds.

Volume One—Chapter Three.

Fanny’s Magazines.

“Have you brought my magazines, William?” said a bright-faced, eager girl, with no slight pretensions to good looks, as she stood there in her neat, dark, closely fitting dress with white apron, collar and cuffs, and natty muslin cap with black ribbon, looking the very model of the neat-handed Phyllis many people think so satisfactory for a parlour-maid. The William addressed was a broad-shouldered, heavy-looking young man of three or four and thirty, dressed in brown velveteen coat and vest, and drab cord trousers. He was very cleanly shaved; his fair crisp hair closely cut; and he had evidently been paying a great deal of attention to his heavy boots. There was a sprig of southernwood in his button-hole, a smaller sprig in his mouth; and he held in one hand his soft felt hat, in the other, one of those ash, quarter-staff-looking implements, with a tiny spade at the end, known to farmers as a thistle-spud—a companion that served him as walking-stick and a means of getting rid of the obnoxious weeds about his little farm. For Brother William, otherwise William Cressy, farmed the twenty acres that had been held by his ancestors for the past two hundred years, and it was his custom to walk over every Saturday to see how his sister Fanny was getting on, the said young lady having been in service at the Rosery ever since Sir James Scarlett’s marriage, he always timed his visit so that he should get there just before Martha set out the tea-things, and from regular usage Martha always placed an extra cup—extra large as well, for Brother William, who afterwards stayed until supper, and then declared, in a tone quite of remonstrance, “Well, I must go now,” as if he had been all along pressed to stay, whereas he had scarcely spoken all the time, and been hardly spoken to, but had sat stolidly in an armed Windsor chair staring at Martha, the housemaid, as she darned, stockings, a whole basket full, with the light making a broad path upon her carefully smoothed and glossy hair.

“Yes; here they be,” said Brother William, solemnly drawing a couple of the most romantic and highly flavoured of the penny weeklies of the day from his breast-pocket, and opening and smoothing them out, so as to display to the best advantage the woodcuts on the front pages of each, where, remarkably similar in style, a very undulatory young lady in evening dress was listening to the attentions of a small-headed, square-shouldered gentleman of impossible height, with an enormous moustache, worn probably to make up for his paucity of cranial hair. “Yes; here they be; and I don’t think much of ’em either.”

“No! what do you know about them?” said the girl sharply. “If it had been the *Farmer’s Friend*, with its rubbish about crops and horseballs and drenches, you would say it was good reading.”

“Mebbe,” said Brother William, placing his soft hat very carefully upon the rounded knob of his thistle staff, and standing it up in a corner of the room adjoining the kitchen. “Mebbe, Fanny, my lass; but I don’t see what good it’s going to do you reading ’bout dooks and lords a-marrying housemaids, as they don’t never do—do they, Martha?”

“I never knew of such a thing, Mr Cressy,” said Martha in a quiet demure way. “I did once hear of a gentleman marrying his cook.”

“Yes,” said Brother William solemnly, “I think I did hear of such a thing as that, and that might be sensible; but in them magazines they never marry the cooks—it’s always the housemaids—and Fanny’s getting her head full of such stuff.”

“You mind your own business, William, and let me mind mine, if you please,” said the young lady warmly.

“Oh, all right, my dear; only, I’m your brother, you know,” said the young man, hitching himself more comfortably into his chair. “Got company, I see.”

“How did you know?” cried Fanny.

“I was over at the station delivering my bit o’ wheat, when Sir James come in with that Mr Prayle. I don’t think much of him.”

“And pray, why not?”

“Dunno. Seems too smooth and underhanded like. I didn’t take to him when he come round my farm.”

“You’re a very foolish, prejudiced fellow, William,” said Fanny warmly; and she whisked herself out of the room.

“That’s what mother used to say,” said Brother William, thoughtfully rubbing his broad palms to and fro along the polished arms of the chair. “She used to say: ‘Wilyum, my boy, thou’rt prejudiced;’ and I s’pose I am. That sort o’ thing is in a man’s natur’, and can only be bred out in time.—Is tea ’most ready, Martha Betts?”

Martha replied by filling up the teapot, and proceeding to cut some bread and butter, of both of which refreshing kinds of nutriment Brother William partook largely upon the return of his sister, who soon after hurried away to attend to her duties, that being with her a busy night.

Volume One—Chapter Four.

“Jack.”

To “unfig,” with Sir James Scarlett, meant to thoroughly change his London garments for an easy suit of flannels, such as he used for boating and gardening, the latter pursuit being one of which he was passionately fond. He had begun by having a professed gardener, and ended by being his own head. For the sharp professed gardener seemed to be imbued with the idea that the grounds and glass-houses of the Rosery were his special property, out of whose abundance he grudgingly allowed his master a few cut flowers, an occasional cucumber, now and then a melon, and at times a bunch of grapes, and a nectarine or peach.

But that régime had to come to an end.

“Hang the fellow, Kitty!” cried Scarlett one day; “he bullies poor old Monnick, and snubs me, and I feel as if I were nobody but the paymaster. It won’t do. What’s the good of living in the country with such a garden as this, if one can’t have abundance of fruit and flowers for one’s friends?”

“It does seem too bad, certainly, dear,” she replied. “I don’t get half the flowers I should like.”

The result was that the professed gardener left, saying that he wanted to be where the master was a gentleman, and not one who meddled in the garden like a jobbing hand. Furthermore, he prophesied that the Rosery would go to ruin now; and when it did not go to ruin, but under its master’s own management put forth such flowers and fruit as the place had never seen before, the dethroned monarch declared that it was scandalous for one who called himself a gentleman to suck a poor fellow’s brains and then turn him out like a dog.

Unfigged, Sir James Scarlett hurried out into the garden with his young partner, and for a good hour was busy seeing how much certain plants had grown since the previous evening. Then there was an adjournment to the grape-house, where the great black Hambros grew so well and in such abundance, without artificial heat; and here, about half an hour later, a very keen-looking, plainly-dressed man heard the sound of singing as he walked down the path from the house. He paused and listened, with a pleasant smile coming upon his earnest lace, and as he stood attent, a judge of humankind who had gazed upon his broad shoulders and lithe strong limbs, and the sharp intelligent look in his face, would have said that Nature had meant him for a handsome man, but had altered her mind to make him look like one of the clever ones of earth. He laughed, and after listening for a minute, went on softly and stood in the doorway, looking up. The large house with its span roof was covered with the sweetly scented leaves of the young vine growth, and everywhere hung pendent bunches in their immature state, with grapes no larger than so many peas. It was not upon these that the visitor’s eyes were fixed, but upon a stout plank stretching from one iron tie of the grape-house to another; for, perched upon this plank, to whose height approach was gained by a pair of steps, sat the owners of the place, with heads thrown back, holding each a bunch of grapes with one hand, a pair of pointed scissors with the other, which clicked as they snipped away, thinning out the superabundant berries, which kept on falling, and making a noise like the *avant-garde* of a gentle hailstorm on a summer’s day. As they snipped, the grape-thinners sang verse after verse, throwing plenty of soul into the harmony which was formed by a pleasant soprano and a deep tenor voice.

The visitor stood for fully five minutes, watching and laughing silently, before he said aloud: “What a place this is for birds!”

Lady Scarlett started; her scissors fell tinkling upon the tiled floor, and her face followed suit with her name.

“Why, Jack!” shouted Scarlett, leaping off the board, and then holding it tightly as his wife uttered a cry of alarm. —“All right, dear; you shan’t fall. There, let me help you down.”

“I beg your pardon, Lady Scarlett,” said the visitor apologetically. “It was very thoughtless of me. I am sorry.”

“O Jack, old fellow, Kitty don’t mind. It was only meant for a bit of fun. But how did you get down?”

“Train, and walked over, of course.”

“I *am* glad to see you,” said Scarlett. “Why didn’t you say you were coming, and meet me at the station?”

“Didn’t know I was coming till the last moment.—Will you give me a bit of dinner, Lady Scarlett?”

“Will we give you a bit of dinner?” cried Sir James. “Just hark at him! There come along; never mind the grapes. I say, how’s the practice—improving?”

“Pooh! No. I shall never get on. I can’t stick to their old humdrum ways. I want to go forward and take advantage of the increased light science gives us, and consequently they say I’m unorthodox, and the fellows about my place won’t meet me in consultation.”

“Well, you always were a bit of a quack, old boy,” said Scarlett laughing.

“Always, always. I accept the soft impeachment. But is a man to run the chariot of his life down in the deeply worn ruts made by his ancestors? I say, let us keep to the rut when it is true and good; but let us try and make new, hard, sensible tracks where we can improve upon the old. It is my honest conviction that in the noble practice of medicine a man may—ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Just look at your husband’s face, Lady Scarlett,” cried their visitor, bursting into a hearty, uncontrollable fit of honest, contagious laughter.

“My face!” said Sir James. “Why, of course I hurry back home for country enjoyment, and you begin a confounded lecture on medical science. I’m quite well, thank you, doctor, and won’t put out my tongue.”

“Well? Yes, you always are well,” said the other.—“I never saw such a man as your husband, Lady Scarlett; he is disgustingly robust and hearty. Such men ought to be forced to take some complaint. Why, if there were many of them, my profession would become bankrupt.”

“You must be faint after your walk, Doctor Scales,” said Lady Scarlett. “Come in and have a cup of tea and a biscuit; it is some time yet to dinner.”

“Thanks. But may I choose for myself?”

“Of course.”

“Then I have a lively recollection of a lady with whom I fell in love last time I was here.”

“A lady—fell in love?”

“Yes. Let me see,” said the visitor. “She is pretty well photographed upon my brain.”

“I say, Jack, old boy, what do you mean?” cried Scarlett.

“By your leave, sir,” said the doctor, waving one strong brown hand. “Let me see; she had large, full, lustrous, beaming eyes, which dwelt upon me kindly; her breath was odorous of the balmy meads—”

“Why, the fellow’s going to do a sonnet,” cried Scarlett. But the doctor paid no heed, and went on.

“Her lips were dewy, her mousy skin was glossy, her black horns curved, and as she ruminating stood—”

“Why, he means Dolly,” cried Lady Scarlett clapping her hands—“Jersey Dolly.—A glass of new milk, Doctor Scales?”

“The very culmination of my wishes, madam,” said the doctor, nodding.

“Then why couldn’t you say so in plain English?” cried Scarlett, clapping him on the shoulder. “What a fellow you are, Jack! I say, if you get talking in such a metaphorical manner about salts and senna and indigestion I don’t wonder at the profession being dead against you.”

“Would you like to come round to the dairy, Doctor Scales?” said Lady Scarlett.

“I’d rather go there than into the grandest palace in the world.”

“Then come alone,” cried Scarlett thrusting his arm through that of his old schoolfellow; and the little party went down a walk, through an opening in a laurel hedge, and entered a thickly thatched, shady, red-brick building, with ruddy-tiled floor, and there, in front of them was a row of shallow glistening tins, brimming with rich milk, whose top was thick with yellow cream.

“Hah! how deliciously cool and fresh!” cried the doctor, as his eye ranged over the white chum and marble slabs. “Some men are wonderfully proud of their wine-cellars, but at a time like this I feel as if I would rather own a dairy and keep cows.”

“Now then, Kitty, give him his draught,” said Scarlett.

“Yes, just one glass,” cried the doctor; “and here we are,” he said, pausing before a great shallow tin, beyond which was freshly chalked the word “Dolly.” “This is the well in the pleasant oasis from which I’d drink.”

“Give him some quickly, Kitty,” cried Scarlett; “his metaphors will make me ill.”

“Then my visit will not have been in vain,” cried the doctor merrily. Then he ejaculated, “Hah!” very softly, and closed his eyes as he partook of the sweet rich draught, set down the glass, and after wiping his lips, exclaimed:

“‘Serenely calm, the epicure may say’—”

“O yes; I know,” said Sir James, catching him up. “‘Fate cannot harm me—I have dined to-day.’ But you have not dined yet, old fellow; and you shall have such a salad! My own growing; Kitty’s making. Come along now, and let’s look round. Prayle’s here.”

“Is he?” said the doctor, raising his eye-brows slightly, and his tone seemed to say: “I’m sorry to hear it.”

“Yes, poor fellow; he’s working too hard, and I brought him down to stay a bit. Now you’ve come, and we’ll have—”

“No, no; I must get back. None of your unmanly temptations. I’m going to catch the last up-train to-night.”

“One of your patients in a dangerous state, I suppose?” said Scarlett, with a humorous glance at his wife.

“No: worse luck! I’ve no patients waiting for me. I say, old fellow, you haven’t a rich old countess about here—baroness would do—one who suffers from chronic spleen, as the French call it? Get me called in there, you know, and make me her confidential attendant.”

“Why, there’s Lady Martlett,” said Scarlett, with another glance at his wife which plainly said: “Hold your tongue, dear.”

“Widow lady. Just the body. I dare say she’ll be here before long.”

“Oh, but I’m off back to-night.”

“Are you?” said Scarlett,—“Kitty, my dear, Jack Scales is your prisoner. You are the châtelaine here, and as your superior, I order you to render him up to me safe and sound for transport back to town this day month. Why, Jack, you promised to help me drain the pond. We’ll do it now you’re down.”

“Oh, nonsense; I must go back.”

“Yes; that’s what all prisoners say or think,” said Scarlett, laughing—“Don’t be too hard upon the poor fellow, dear. He may have as much milk as he likes. Soften his confinement as pleasantly us you can.—Excuse me, Jack. There’s Prayle.”

He nodded, and went off down one of the paths, and his departure seemed to have taken with it some of the freedom and ease of the conversation that had been carried on; the doctor's manner becoming colder, and the bright girlish look fading out of Lady Scarlett's face.

"This is very, very kind of you both," said the doctor, turning to her; "but I really ought not to stay."

"James will be quite hurt, I am sure, if you do not," she answered. "He thinks so much of you."

"I'm glad of it," said the doctor earnestly; and Lady Scarlett's face brightened a little. "He's one of the most frank and open-hearted fellows in the world. It's one of the bright streaks in my career that we have always remained friends. Really I envy him his home here, though I fear that I should be out of place in such a country-life."

"I do not think you would, Doctor Scales," said his hostess, "but of course he is busy the greater part of his time in town, and that makes the change so nice."

"But you?" said the doctor. "Do you not find it dull when he is away?"

"I? I find it dull?" she cried, with a girlish laugh. "Oh dear, no. I did for the first month, but you have no idea how busy I am. James has made me such a gardener; and I superintend. Come and see my poultry and the cows."

"To be sure I will," said the doctor more warmly, as they walked on towards a fence which separated them from a meadow running down to the river, where three soft fawn-coloured Jersey cows were grazing, each of which raised its head slowly, and came up, munching the sweet grass, to put its deer-like head over the fence to feel the touch of its mistress's hand.

"Are they not beauties?" cried Lady Scarlett. "There's your friend Dolly," she continued. "She won't hurt you."

"I'm not afraid," said the doctor, smiling; and then a visit was paid to where the poultry came rushing up to be fed, and then follow their mistress; while the pigeons hovered about, and one more venturesome than the others settled upon her head.

They saw no more of Scarlett till just before dinner, when they met him with Prayle; and now it was that, after feeling warmer and more friendly towards his young hostess than he ever had felt before, the unpleasant sense of distance and of chill came back, as the doctor was shown up into his room.

"I'm afraid I'm prejudiced," he said. "She's very charming, and the natural girlish manner comes in very nicely at times; but somehow, Kate Scarlett, I never thought you were quite the wife for my old friend.—Let's play fair," he said, as he stood contemplatively wiping his hands upon a towel that smelt of the pure fresh air. "What have I to say against her?"

He remained silent for a few moments, and then said aloud: "Nothing; only that she has always seemed to distrust me, and I have distrusted her. Why, I believe we are jealous of each other's influence with poor old Jem."

He laughed as he said these words, and then went down-stairs, to find that his stay at the Rosery was to be more lively than he had anticipated, for, upon entering the drawing-room, he was introduced by Lady Scarlett to a stern-looking, grey, elderly lady as "my Aunt Sophia—Miss Raleigh," and to a rather pretty girl, "Miss Naomi Raleigh," the former of which two ladies he had to take in to dinner.

Volume One—Chapter Five.

The Doctor on Nerves.

The dinner at the Rosery was all that was pleasant and desirable, saving that Doctor Scales felt rather disappointed in having to take in Aunt Sophia. He was not a ladies' man, he said, when talking of such matters, and would have been better content to have gone in alone. He was not much pleased either at being very near Mr Arthur Prayle, to whom he at once took a more decided dislike, being, as he acknowledged to himself, exceedingly ready to form antipathies, and prejudiced in the extreme.

"Ah," he said to himself, "one ought to be satisfied;" and he glanced round the prettily decorated table, and uttered a sigh of satisfaction as the sweet scents of the garden floated in through the open window. Then he uttered another similar sigh, for there were scents in the room more satisfying to a hungry man.

"Perhaps you'd like the window shut, auntie?" said Sir James.

"No, my dear; it would be a shame: the weather is so fine.—You don't think it will give me rheumatism in the shoulder, do you, doctor?"

"No, madam, certainly not," said Scales. "You are not over-heated."

"Then we will have it open," said Aunt Sophia decisively.

"Do you consider that rheumatism always comes from colds, Doctor Scales?" said Arthur Prayle, bending forward from his seat beside his hostess, and speaking in a bland smooth tone.

"That fellow's mouth seems to me as if it must be lined with black velvet," thought the doctor. "Bother him! if I believed in metempsychosis, I should say he would turn into a black Tom-cat. He purrs and sets up his back, and

seems as if he must have a tail hidden away under his coat.—No, decidedly not," he said aloud. "I think people often suffer from a kind of rheumatic affection due to errors of diet."

"Dear me! how strange."

"Then we shall have Aunt Sophia laid up," said Sir James, "for she is always committing errors in diet."

"Now, James!" began the lady in protestation.

"Now, auntie, you know you'd eat a whole cucumber on the sly, if you had the chance."

"No, no, my dear; that is too bad. I confess that I do like cucumber, but not to that extent."

"Well, Naomi, I hope you are ready for plenty of boating, now you have come down," said Scarlett. "We must brown you a bit; you are too fair.—Isn't she, Jack?"

"Not a bit," said the doctor, who was enjoying his salmon. "A lady can't be too fair."

Aunt Sophia looked at him sharply; but Jack Scales's eyes had not travelled in the direction of Naomi, and when he raised them to meet Aunt Sophia's, there was a frank ingenuous look in them that disarmed a disposition on the lady's part to set up her feathers and defend her niece.

"I think young ladies ought to be fair and pretty; don't you, ma'am?"

"Ye-es; in reason," said Aunt Sophia, bridling slightly.

"I side with you, Jack," said their host, with a tender look at his wife.

"Yes," said Prayle slowly; "one naturally expects a lady to be beautiful; but, alas! how soon does beauty fade."

"Yes, if you don't take care of it," said Aunt Sophia sharply. "Unkindness is like a blight to a flower, and so is the misery of this world."

"So," said Scarlett, "the best thing is never to be unkind, auntie, and have nothing to do with misery—"

"If you can help it," said the doctor.

"—Or the doctors," said Scarlett, laughing—"always excepting Doctor Scales."

About this time, Aunt Sophia, who had been very stiff and distant, began to soften a little towards the doctor, and listened attentively, as the host seemed to be trying to draw him out.

"What are you doing now, Jack?" he said, after a glance round the table to see that all was going satisfactorily and well; while Lady Scarlett sat, flushed and timid, troubled with the cares of the house, and wondering whether her husband was satisfied with the preparations that had been made.

"Eating," said the doctor drily, "and to such an extent, that I am blushing inwardly for having such a dreadful appetite."

"I suppose," said Prayle, "that a good appetite is a sign of good health?"

"Sometimes," said the doctor. "There are morbid forms of desire for food.—What say?"

"I repeated my question," said Scarlett, laughing. "What are you doing now?"

"Well, I am devoting myself for the most part to the study of nervous diseases," said the doctor. "There seems to be more opening there than in any other branch of my profession, and unless a man goes in for a speciality, he has no chance."

"Come, Aunt Sophia," said Scarlett, merrily; "here's your opportunity. You are always complaining of your nerves."

"Of course I am," said the old lady sharply; "and no wonder."

"Well, then, why not engage Doctor Scales as your private physician, before he is snatched up?"

"All, before I'm snatched up, Miss Raleigh. Don't you have anything to do with me, madam. Follow your nephew's lead, and take to gardening—There is medicine in the scent of the newly turned earth, in the air you breathe, and in the exercise, that will do you more good than any drugs I can prescribe."

"There you are, aunt; pay up."

"Pay up? Bless the boy! what do you mean?" said Aunt Sophia.

"A guinea. Physician's fee."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Aunt Sophia.—"But I don't want to be rude to you, Doctor Scales, and I think it's worth the guinea far more than many a fee I've paid for what has done me no good."

"I've got a case in hand," said the doctor, going on with his dinner, but finding time to talk. "I've a poor creature suffering from nervous shock. Fine-looking, gentlemanly fellow as you'd wish to see, but completely off his balance."

“Bless the man! don’t talk about mad people,” said Aunt Sophia.

“No, ma’am, I will not. He’s as sane as you are,” said the doctor; “but his nerve is gone, he dare not trust himself outside the house; he cannot, do the slightest calculation—write a letter—give a decisive answer. He would not take the shortest journey, or see any one on business. In fact, though he could do all these things as well as any of us, he doesn’t, and, paradoxical as it may sound, can’t.”

“But why not?” said Scarlett.

“Why not? Because his nerve has gone, he dare not sleep without some one in the next room. He could not bear to be in the dark. He cannot trust himself to do a single thing for fear he should do it wrong, or go anywhere lest some terrible accident should befall him.”

“What a dreadful man!” cried Aunt Sophia.

“Not at all, my dear madam; he’s a splendid fellow.”

“It must be terrible for his poor wife, Doctor Scales.”

“No, ma’am, it is not, because he has no wife; but it is very trying to his sweet sister.”

“I say, hark at that,” said Scarlett, merrily—“‘his sweet sister.’ Ahem, Jack! In confidence, eh?”

“What do you mean?” cried the doctor, as the ladies smiled.

“I say—you know—his sweet sister. Is that the immortal she?”

“What? My choice? Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha?” laughed the doctor, with enjoyable mirth. “No, no; I’m cut out for a bachelor. No wedding for me. Bah! what’s a poor doctor to do with a wife! No, sir; no, sir. I’m going to preserve myself free of domestic cares for the benefit of all who may seek my aid.”

“Well, for my part,” said Aunt Sophia, “I think it must be a very terrible case.”

“Terrible, my dear madam.”

“But you will be able to cure him?”

“I hope so; but indeed that is all I can say. Such cases as this puzzle the greatest men.”

“I suppose,” said Arthur Prayle, in a smooth bland voice, “that you administer tonic medicines—quinine and iron and the like?”

“O yes,” said the doctor grimly. “That’s exactly what we do, and it doesn’t cure the patient in the least.”

“But you give him cold bathing and exercise, doctor?”

“O yes, Mr Prayle; cold bathing and exercise, plenty of them; but they don’t do any good.”

“Hah! that is singular,” said Prayle thoughtfully. “Would the failure be from want of perseverance, do you think?”

“Perhaps so. One doesn’t know how much to persevere, you see.”

“These matters are very strange—very well worthy of consideration and study, Doctor Scales.”

“Very well worthy of consideration indeed, Mr Prayle,” said the doctor; and then to himself: “This fellow gives me a nervous affection in the toes.”

“I trust my remarks do not worry you, Lady Scarlett?” said Prayle, in his bland way.

“O no, not at all,” replied that lady. “Pray do not think we cannot appreciate a little serious talk.”

Prayle smiled as he looked at the speaker—a quiet sad smile, full of thankfulness; but it seemed to trouble Lady Scarlett, who hastened to join the conversation on the other side, replying only in monosyllables afterwards to Prayle’s remarks.

The dinner passed off very pleasantly, and at last the ladies rose and left the table, leaving the gentlemen to their wine, or rather to the modern substitute for the old custom—their coffee, after which they smoked their cigarettes in the veranda, and the conversation once more took a medical turn.

“I can’t help thinking about that patient of yours, Jack,” said Sir James. “Poor fellow! What a shocking affair!”

“Yes, it must be a terrible life,” said Prayle. “Life, Arthur! it must be a sort of death,” exclaimed Scarlett excitedly. “Poor fellow! What a state!”

“Well, sympathy’s all very well,” said the doctor, smiling in rather an amused way; “but I don’t see why you need get excited about it.”

“Oh, but it is horrible.”

“Dreadful!” echoed Prayle.

“Then I must have been an idiot to introduce it here, where all is so calm and peaceful,” said the doctor. “Fancy what a shock it would give us all if we were suddenly to hear an omnibus go blundering by. James Scarlett, you are a lucky man. You have everything a fellow could desire in this world: money, a delightful home, the best of health—”

“The best of wives,” said Prayle softly. “Thank you for that, Arthur,” said Scarlett, turning and smiling upon the speaker.

“Humph! Perhaps I was going to say that myself,” said the doctor sourly. “Hah! you’re a lucky man.”

“Well, I don’t grumble,” said Scarlett, laughing. “You fellows come down here just when everything’s at its best; but there is such a season as winter, you know.”

“Of course there is, stupid!” said the doctor. “If there wasn’t, who would care for fickle spring?”

“May the winter of adversity never come to your home, Cousin James,” said Prayle softly: and he looked at his frank, manly young host with something like pathetic interest as he spoke.

“Thank you, old fellow, thank you.—Now, let’s join the ladies.”

“This fellow wants to borrow fifty pounds,” growled Doctor Scales. Then after a pause—“There’s that itching again in my toes.”

Volume One—Chapter Six.

Doctor Scales hears a Morning Lecture.

“Morning, Monnick,” said the doctor, who had resigned himself to his fate, and had passed three days without attempting to escape from his pleasant prison.

“Morning, sir,” said the old gardener, touching his hat.

“Sir James down yet?”

“Oh yes, sir, he’s been in the peach-house this last hour.”

“Has he? thanks,” said the doctor, walking on in that direction, to hear his old friend’s voice, directly after, humming away beneath the glass like some gigantic bee.

“Hallo, lazybones!” cried Sir James, who was busy at work with a syringe water-shooting the various insects that had affected a lodgment amongst his peach and nectarine trees.

“Lazybones; be hanged! why, it’s barely five.”

“Well, that’s late enough this weather. I love being out early.”

“Work of supererogation to tell me that, old fellow.”

“So it is, Jack, and I suppose I’m a monomaniac. Fellows at the club laugh at me. They say, here you are—with plenty of money, which is true; heaps of brains—which is not; a title and a seat in the house, openings before you to get some day in the cabinet, and you go down in the country and work like a gardener. They think I’m a fool.”

“Let ’em,” said the doctor, grimly.

“But I am a bit of a lunatic over garden matters, and country-life, Jack.”

“So much the better,” said the doctor, lighting a cigar and beginning to walk up and down. “Go on with your squirting.”

“Shan’t! I shall follow your bad habit.” And Sir James took one of his friend’s cigars and began to smoke. “Pleasure and profit together,” he said; “it will kill insects.”

“Nice place, this,” said the doctor, glancing about the large light structure, with its healthy fruit trees growing vigorously; “but I should be careful about sudden changes. Might get a cold that would affect you seriously.”

“Out, croaker!” cried Sir James; “I never catch cold.” And he perched himself upon a pair of steps.

“Going to preach?” said the doctor, “because if so I’ll sit down.”

“Then sit, for I am, sir, a charity sermon; but there will be no collection after I have done.”

“Go ahead,” said the doctor.

“My dear guest,” said Sir James, “there is nothing pleasanter than being, through your own foresight, on the right side of the hedge. The bull may bellow and snort, and run at the unfortunates who carelessly cross the dangerous meadow, but it does not hurt you, who can calmly shout to those in danger to run here or there to save themselves from horns or hoofs. In the same way how satisfactory to float at your ease when the flood comes, and to see your neighbours floundering and splashing as they struggle to bank or tree, hardly saving themselves, while you, armed

as you are with that pocket. Noah's Ark of a safety-belt, philosophically think, what a pity it is that people will not take precautions against the inevitable."

"What are you aiming at, Jemmy?" said the doctor.

"Sir," said Sir James, waving his cigar; "I take this roundabout way of approaching that most popular though slightly threadbare subject, the weather; and as I do so I cannot help, in my self-satisfied way, feeling a kind of contemptuous compassion for those who, being agriculturally or horticulturally disposed, go out metaphorically without macintosh, umbrella, or goloshes. It is in this spirit that I feel but small pity for unfortunate Pat who, knowing that Erin is so green on account of its heavy rainfall, will persist in making the staple of his growth the highly satisfactory but tropical potato—that child of the sun which blights and rots and dies away in a humid atmosphere, the consequence of our heavy downpours of rain. 'But we must have potatoes,' say both Pat, and John Bull. True: then do as I, Ajax, the weather defier, have done: grow early sorts, which flourish, ripen, and can be housed before the setting in of the heavy autumnal rains."

"Hear, hear," said the doctor, sitting back in his wicker chair and holding his fuming cigar in the middle of a peach-tree, where some insects had effected a lodgment.

"That's right, doctor, give them a good dose," said Sir James following suit. "But to proceed. It is not *apropos* of tubers that I indulge this spring in a pleasant warm feeling of self-satisfaction, but on account of wall-fruit—the delicious plum, a bag of golden saccharine pulp, or a violet bloomed, purple-skinned mass of deliciously flavoured amber; the downy-skinned peach, with a ruddy tint like that of a bonny English maiden's cheek; the fiery stoned luscious nectarine—that vinous ambrosial fruit that ought to be eaten with the eyes closed that the soul may dream and be transported into transports of mundane bliss; item, the apricot, that bivalve of fruits which will daintily split into two halves, to enable you to drop the stone before partaking of its juicy joys. Come good season or bad season your Londoner sees the pick of these princes of the fruit world reposing in perfect trim in the market or window; but in such an autumn as the past it was melancholy to walk round one's friends' gardens—say with Tompkins or Smith or Robinson, each of whom spends a little fortune upon his grounds, over which Macduff or Macbeth or Macfarlane, or some other 'gairdner fra' the North,' tyrannically presides. The plums upon the most favoured walls were cracked, and dropped spoiled from the trees; the peaches looked white and sickly, and were spotted with decomposition; the nectarines that consented to stay on the twigs were hard and green, and where one that approached the appearance of ripeness was tasted, it was watery, flavourless, and poor."

"Watery, flavourless, and poor, is good," said the doctor. "I don't often buy wall-fruit, but if I do spend sixpence in the Central Avenue, Covent Garden, that is about the state of the purchase."

"Exactly," said Sir James eagerly, "and it is impossible to help triumphing in one's pity while one reasonably says, 'Why attempt to grow out-of-doors the tender fruits of a warmer clime in such a precarious country as ours? Or, if you must grow them, why not metaphorically provide your peaches, nectarines, apricots, and choice plums with goloshes, macintoshes, and, above all, with an umbrella?' I do, and I egotistically take my friends to see the result. Their trees are drenched, desolate, and the saturated ground beneath is strewn with rotting fruit. My trees, on the contrary, have their toes nice and warm; their bodies are surrounded by a comfortable great coat; and, above all, their delicate leaves and still more delicate blossoms are sheltered by a spreading umbrella of glass. In other words I grow them in an orchard house, and the result is that they are laden with luscious fruit."

"Ah!" said the doctor, "but this is the luxury of the rich, my boy: glass-houses are a great expense."

"By no means, Jack. If gorgeous glass palaces and Paxtonian splendour are desired, of course I have nothing to say; but the man of modest mind who likes to exercise his own ingenuity to slope some rafters from the top of a garden wall to a few posts and boards in front, and cover in the slope with the cheapest glass, may provide himself at a very trifling expense with a glazed shed, within whose artificial climate he may grow as many choice plants as he chooses, he may begin with five pounds, or go up to five hundred, as he pleases: the fruit would be the same: all that is required is shelter, ventilation, and abundance of light. The heat is provided by Nature, none other is needed—no furnaces, boilers, hot-water pipes, flues, or expensive apparatus of any kind; finally, comprehensively, nothing is necessary but a glass-roofed shed with brick or boarded sides, and, I repeat, the roughest structure will give as good fruit, perhaps as much satisfaction, as the grandest house."

"Just as poor Hodge enjoys his slice of bacon as much as you do your paté."

"Exactly, Jack," continued Sir James, who was well mounted upon his hobby, "there is no secret about the matter. The delicate fruits of the peach family, and even choicer plums, are most abundant bearers; all they want is a suitable climate to produce their stores. That climate, save, say, once in seven or eight years, England does not afford. The troubles of these aristocrats of the garden begin very early in the year, when, according to their habit, every twig puts forth a wondrous display of crimson, pink, and delicately-tinted white bloom, just at a time when our nipping frosts of early spring are rife. The consequence is that in a few short hours the hopes of a season are blighted. In sheltered positions often, by chance, a few blossoms, as a gardener would say, set their fruit, which run the gauntlet of our fickle clime, and perhaps ripen, but more likely drop from the trees in various stages of their approach to maturity, the whole process being so disheartening that, in a season like the past, many gardeners declared that it was a hopeless effort to attempt to grow peaches and nectarines out-of-doors."

The doctor looked at his watch.

"All! it isn't breakfast time yet, Jack, and you are in for my lecture. As I was about to say, *nous avons changé tout cela*. We build our orchard house handsome or plain, according to our means, and in that shelter we have an artificial climate, such as made some gentlemen from the South of France exclaim, when visiting the gardens of the late Mr Rivers, of Sawbridgeworth, the introducer of the system, '*Ah! Monsieur Rivers, voici notre climat*!' In fact the above

gentleman, in his interesting work, says: ‘An orchard house in the south of England will give as nearly as possible the summer climate of Toulouse.’ And this, mind, from sun heat and earth heat alone—heat which, so far from needing increase, has to be modified by abundant ventilation.”

“Ah! that’s what I want you to mind, old fellow,” said the doctor; “you are not a plant, and I don’t want you to get yourself in a state of heat under the glass here, and then expose yourself to abundant ventilation.”

“Only like cooling after a Turkish bath,” said Sir James.

“I don’t like Turkish baths,” said the doctor, “the overheating affects the nerves.”

“You are always croaking about the nerves,” said Sir James; “but as I was saying—”

“Oh! go on, preach the orchard house down,” said the doctor, “I’ll listen.”

“I’m preaching it up, man,” said Sir James. “Given the matter of the orchard house, then, what next? Presuming that you have taken advantage of the possession of a south or south west wall already covered with trees, and against which you have placed glass roof and simple front and ends, all else necessary is to plant the space unoccupied by nailed-up trees moderately full of little bushes and standards.”

“I always thought peaches and nectarines ought to be nailed-up against walls till I saw yours,” said the doctor.

“Yes; if you like to torture them into that position; but they will grow and bear better like ordinary apple-trees or pears, only asking for abundant pruning, plenty of water, and freedom from insect plagues. If you prefer so doing, you may grow them in large pots, the same as you would camellias, and ornament your dining-table with a beautiful little eighteen-inch or two-feet high Early Louise peach, an Elruge nectarine, or Moor Park apricot, bearing its dozen or so of perfectly-shaped fruit. And to the man of frugal mind this has its advantages; for every one exclaims, ‘Oh, it would be a pity to pick them!’ and the dessert is saved.”

“My dear James, I shall never say that, I promise you.”

“You’re a humbug, Jack. Here we are, and all this place, asking you to run down and share some of its fruits, but you will never come. But to proceed. I think I shall write a pamphlet on this subject.”

“I would,” said the doctor, drily.

“I don’t care for your chaff, my boy. I want to see poor people refine their ways,—working-men growing vines, old ladies with orchard houses.”

“And I hope you may get it,” said the doctor.

“My dear Jack,” continued Sir James, “such a structure as an orchard house for a long period of the year is ‘a thing of beauty,’ and a walk down the central avenue, with the little trees blooming, leafing, and fruiting, is ‘a joy, for ever’ so long. There is a large sound about that ‘central avenue,’ but, believe me, there is great pleasure to be derived if the little path be only six feet long, and this is a pleasure that can be enjoyed by the man of very humble means, who may make it profitable if he has the heart to sell his pets. Even in the simplest structure there is infinite variety to be obtained.”

“I daresay,” said the doctor. “I say, how this leaf has curled up. It has killed the insects, though.”

“So would you curl up if a giant held a red hot cigar end against your body,” said Sir James. “Do I bore you?”

“Not a bit, my dear boy; not a bit,” cried the doctor. “You do me good. Your verdant prose refreshes me, and makes me think the world is better than it is.”

“Get out. But I’ve nearly done. I say, Jack, I’m trying this on you. It’s part of a lecture I’m writing to deliver at our National School.”

“And here have I been sitting admiring your eloquence. Oh! James Scarlett, what a deceitful world is this! But there: go on, old enthusiast.”

“Some of the commonest plums,” continued Sir James, “are lovely objects when grown under glass; so are the dwarf cherries, trees which are clusters of coral from root to top, while those who have not partaken of that wonderfully beautiful fruit, the apple, when a choice American kind is grown in an orchard house, have a new sensation before them in the way of taste. The modern Continental mode of growing fruit on *cordons*, as they are termed, a simple stick, so to speak, without an extraneous branch, all being fruit spurs, enables the lover of such a form of horticulture to place an enormous number of trees beneath his glass in a very small space, as they will flourish well at a distance of two feet apart all along the back and sides, and three feet apart in the centre, while as to expense, the choicest of young trees can be purchased for from eighteenpence to half-a-crown each. In fact, if I wanted an orchard house, I would start with quite a small one, erected and stocked for a five-pound note, and if I could not raise so large a sum, I would do it for half the money with old sashes from some house-wrecker’s stock, and grow it to a better by-and-by.”

“How much did this place cost?” said the doctor.

“Five hundred,” said Sir James. “But listen to the finish, old fellow. Ajax, if he builds himself such a structure, can defy the weather—the much-abused weather, which, in spite of all that has been said, seems much the same as ever, people forgetting that they ask it to perform the same miracles of growth that it does in Eastern and Southern climes. Nature meant England to grow sloes, blackberries, and crabs, and we ask her to grow the pomegranate, the orange,

and the date. She definitely says she won't, though she does accord the fig, but in a very insipid, trashy way. Put up the glass umbrella however, and shut out her freezing winds, and she will perform wonders at our call. Our grandfathers thought they had done everything when they had planted their trees against a sheltering wall. Our fathers went farther, and gave us the idea of growing grapes and pines in a house of glass. But, the pine and grape were luxurious affairs, not to be approached by the meek, to whom these ideas are presented as facts that will add another pleasure to their lives."

"As the celebrated Samuel Weller observed, when he had listened patiently to the Shepherd's discourse, 'Brayvo! Very pretty!' But I say, I'm getting hungry."

"Not seven yet," said Sir James; "go and get yourself a glass of milk, and I'll have a walk with you till breakfast time. Here, I'll come with you now."

"But, my dear boy, you are not coming out of this hot, moist atmosphere without first putting on a coat?"

"Stuff! Nothing hurts me, I'm used to it."

"My dear fellow, you'll have a bad attack some day," said the doctor.

"Not if I know it, Jack. Get out, you old rascal, you want to run me up a bill. I'm as sound as a roach, and shall be as long as I lead my country-life. I say, I'm going to empty the pond to-day. We'll get the water out, and then the ladies can come and see us catch the fish."

"Us?" said the doctor, "us?"

"Yes, you shall have a landing-net at the end of a pole. You'll come?"

"Is Prayle going to be there?"

"Of course."

"Then I think I shall stay away."

"Nonsense, you prejudiced humbug. I want you to see the fun. You will come?"

"My dear James Scarlett, I do not get on at my profession, I know now why. It is from weakness of will. I see it now. You have taught me that lesson this morning. First, I find myself listening to a rigmarole about growing fruit under glass. Now I am weakly consenting to make myself as much a schoolboy as you in your verdant idyllic life."

"Then you'll come?"

"Oh, yes," said the doctor grimly, "I'll come. Shall I go into the mud after eels?"

"If you like, I'll lend you a pair of old trousers. I shall."

"My dear fellow, I shall be attending you one of these days for paralysis brought on by cold; or spinal—"

"Nancy, two big glasses of new milk," cried Sir James, for they had entered the dairy. "I say, Jack, old fellow, I want to give you a little more of my natural history lecture, because it would be sure to help me on."

"I feel," said the doctor, "as if I had a soft collar round my neck, and was being led about by a chain. There, make the most of me while I'm here, you don't catch me down again."

"Don't I?" said Sir James. "Why, my dear Jack, Kitty and I have made up our minds to find you a wife."

Volume One—Chapter Seven.

Sir James Catches Cold in the Back.

"And are there any fish in that muddy pond, Monnick?" said Arthur Prayle that morning after breakfast.

"Oh, sir, yes; you should see them sometimes; great fellows that come up after the bread you throw in. Are you coming to see it emptied?"

Arthur Prayle looked at his glossy black garments, and then, bowing his head, gravely said, "Yes, perhaps I shall be there," and he raised his book and went on down the garden.

His "perhaps" proved a certainty, for when the party started from the house to go across the fields he walked sedately between Aunt Sophia and Naomi, talking softly all the time till they reached the place.

It was a large pond. How large? Well, about as big as ponds generally are; and it was pretty deep. There were mysterious places beneath the overhanging willows, whose roots hung in the water, where the hooked fish rushed and entangled the lines. There was that awkward spot where the old posts, and wood, and willow poles lay with their ends in the mud, where Sir James caught the great eel that twined himself in and out, and the stout silkworm gut line parted like tinder. There was a deep hole, too, by the penstock, and various linking places where, in the silence of the night, you could hear wallowings and splashings, and now and then a loud suck or smack of the lips as a fish took something from the top of the water.

On inspection half-a-dozen brawny brown-armed men were found picking and throwing out the earth, and graving a trench in a way that would have made a military engineer long for a few hundred of such fellows to form his earthworks. Deep down they delved till they had cut and laid bare certain pipes in a huge dyke, every foot of which was suggestive of the mysteries of the pond that required so vast a trench to drain off its waters. There was a good deal of speculation rife about that pond, inasmuch as one that was drained by Sir James a couple of years before proved to hold nothing but thousands of great fat newts that swarmed over the mud like alligators in a Florida lagoon. It was said that after all perhaps a carp or two and an eel would be all that were found, but, even as the speculative remarks were made, a shoal of small roach flecked the surface, and it was certain that the result could not be *nil*.

It boots not to tell of the way those men worked, as full of interest in the job as any one else, it is enough to say that the pond head was reached at last, the new drain ready, and over the pipe a piece of wire-work placed to stay any fish from passing down; and at last the water was allowed to flow till the pond was a couple of feet lower, the roots of the bank vegetation and the willows bare, and dozens of slimy holes visible, such as would be affected by eels, water-voles, and other lovers of such snuggeries in the banks. Ragged pieces of wood stood out at all angles from the mud and water, the penstock rose up like a model in old oak of Tyburn Tree, kept for the execution of rats; and the great wooden pump, with its platform in the corner where the water-barrels were tilled, trailed its leaden pipe down into the depths like a monstrous antediluvian eel.

Not so much as a splash to tell that there was anything within the waters rushing away in a flood, down through the alders in an old marl pit hard by. More hours went on and there were no signs of fish. Mud and to spare, and the banks looking slimy and strange. Tangles of wood that had lain at the bottom for years began to show as lower sank the water, revealing pots, old boots, hurdles, and rusty iron, but still no fish of size. Then there was a shout of triumph from one of the men at the sight of a billhook some six feet from the bank, one that had been dropped in years before, when the overhanging willows were being lopped, and there was no Mercury at hand to bring it up transformed to silver or gold. The keen-edged implement was recovered, hardly the worse for its immersion, and, as far as its owner was concerned, the game of draining the pond was worth the candle. But still no fish, and, save in the holes, the water was now only a foot deep. There were indications though, for the simple running of the water off would not have made the remainder so thick, and as some bubbles were seen to rise, one man declared that it was a “girt” eel at work. Another six inches lower, and here and there a dark line could be seen, cutting the muddy water, ploughing as it were along, while behind there came a wavy eddy, and it was evident that these dark lines were the back fins of fish swimming in the shallow pool.

“They are getting sick,” said John Monnick with a grim smile.

Certainly if swimming at the top of the water indicated sickness, a number of large fish were very sick indeed, while now that the fact was patent of there being plenty of finny creatures there, the excitement began to grow. The remaining water grew more thick, and here and there the surface was dimpled and splashed by little dark spots where shoals of small fish hurried to and fro. Then as the water grew lower still, there was a cessation of movement, the fish seemed all to have disappeared, and they might have passed down the drain for all there was to see.

“Rather a boyish pursuit,” said Prayle, who found himself close by the doctor.

“Thoroughly,” replied Scales; “puts one in mind of old school days. Never enjoyed myself so much in my life.”

Prayle smiled and turned to Naomi.

“That fellow’s ancestors must have been eels,” growled the doctor to himself. “Great Darwin! I declare myself converted.”

“Interested in it, Mr Prayle?” said Naomi, opening her large soft eyes. “Oh, yes, I like to see anything that pleases my cousin.”

“Ah!” sighed Prayle, “it seems a strange pursuit.”

“My cousin is so fond of the water,” said Naomi gently.

“He seems fond of the mud,” muttered Prayle. “Good heavens! how can a man be such a boor?”

All this while Lady Scarlett was smiling on everybody, and taking intense interest in her husband’s pursuit, seeing that the men had lunch and as much beer as they liked—which was a good deal—but they were working tremendously and as eager as their lord.

And now preparations were made. Half-a-dozen large tubs were filled with clean water; a strong landing-net was placed at hand, with a couple of buckets, and two or three of the shallow wooden baskets, known as “trucks,” or so-called “trugs.” The next proceeding was for a man to descend into the slime at the head of the pond, and commence a trench, throwing out the mud right and left till he had reached the solid bottom, and thus going on ahead to form, as it were, a ditch through the centre of the hollow, a process which hastened the flow of water and soon set the latest doubt at rest. For before long there was a scuffling and splashing of small fish, roach leaped out, and small bream kept, displaying their silvery sides. Tiny pools formed all over the bottom of the pond, each occupied by its scores of fish, while, in the principal pool, the great carp could be seen sailing slowly and sedately here and there, all singly, save in one instance, where a monster fellow swam slowly in and out with one two-thirds his size close to his side—a regular fishy Darby and Joan. Then lower sank the water, the small fish all splash and excitement, but the great carp as cool and calm as could be, retiring with the water to a pool that grew less and less until, in place of being single and in pairs, they were united into one great shoal that, if not like dogs, as John Monnick said, were certainly suggestive of the backs of so many little pigs swimming quietly to and fro. Lower still the water, and the excitement increasing.

“What a great carp!” cried the doctor. “Look at his back fin.”

“No; it is an eel!” cried Sir James; and an eel it was, slowly gliding along through what was rapidly becoming liquid mud; and in few minutes another and another, and then once more another could be seen, huge fellows nearly a yard long, and very thick and fat, going about with their long back fins above the surface, as they moved in serpentine wavy progression, seeking for some place of refuge, and then suddenly disappearing by giving themselves a wriggle and twist, and working themselves down into the mud.

“There goes Prayle’s relation. I wish he’d follow,” said the doctor to himself.

“Well, Jack, what do you think of it all?” cried Sir James, whose old tweed coat was bespattered with mud.

“That I never saw a fellow less like a baronet and a member of Parliament in my life,” replied Scales.

“Ah! you should have seen me at the Cape, my boy, cooking for our party; and in the far west making a brush hut. You don’t know what a number of facets a fellow can show. There, pull off your coat and come and help. Let’s be boys while we can.”

The doctor pulled off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, and then bowing apologetically to the ladies—

“For heaven’s sake,” he said, “if ever you meet any patients of mine, don’t say you saw me bemired like this.”

“Humph!” ejaculated Aunt Sophia, whose face was an enigma.

“They would perhaps like you all the better for it, doctor,” said Lady Scarlett smiling, and then turning serious as she noted the grave look on the face of her husband’s friend.

She looked up directly after, and saw that Prayle was watching her, and he soon took a step forward as if about to come to her side, but she coloured slightly, and went to speak to the old gardener, whom she sent to the house upon some errand.

“An excuse,” said Prayle to himself: “she invented that on the instant.”

By this time the ditch through the middle was extending fast, the water pouring off, and the landing-net at work stopping fish like shoals of sprats from going towards the wire-protected drain, and these were scooped out, placed in buckets, and from thence carried to the tubs. The men worked furiously, evidently as delighted with the task as so many schoolboys, though extremely careful about getting in the mud. But time soon changed all that, for the water was now low enough for the great carp to be reached, and the smaller fry of roach and bream were left, for the present, while the men laid down planks upon the mud, and approached the hole beneath the willows, where it was known that the carp now lay. “Take care! Don’t hurt them!” “Scoop ’em out wi’ the trug.” Order after order, as the wooden buckets were handled; one was plunged in, and shovelled out a great carp with a quarter of a pailful of liquid mud. No calm sedateness now. The monarchs of the pond had felt their latent majesty touched, and there was a tremendous splashing and plunging; the man who had scooped out the great fish was spattered with mud from head to foot; there was a plunge, and the carp was gone. The mud was forgotten now in the excitement, as fresh efforts were made, the carp were scooped out and held down by main force as they gave displays of their tremendous muscular power, and were passed up the side—great golden fellows, thick, short, and fat, clothed in a scale armour that seemed to be composed of well-worn half-sovereigns, and panting and gaping with surprise as they were safely landed.

Shouts and laughter greeted each capture of the great fellows, only one of which was as small as two pounds weight, the others running from three to five, and exhibiting a power that was marvellous in creatures of their size. Sometimes a great fellow eluded capture again and again, gliding between the hands, leaping out of the basket, and making furious efforts to escape, but only to be caught once more, till the last was secured, and attention turned to the eels.

By this time the doctor had caught the infection from his friend, and he was as forgetful of the mud and as eager in the chase as Sir James and his men; and as the big landing-net was brought into use, and the great eels that glided over the mud like serpents were chased, they showed that they could travel tail first as fast as head first, and with the greatest ease. The landing-net was held before them, and efforts made to drive them in, but generally without result, or if they were driven in, it was only for them to glide out more quickly. Hands were useless, shovels impotent, and the chase grew exciting in the extreme, as the men plunged in their bare arms to the shoulder, and drew them from the mud again, looking; as if they had gone in, like Mrs Boffin, for fashion, and were wearing twenty-four button gloves of a gloomy hue. But lithe and strong as they were, the eels had to succumb, great two and three pound fellows, and were safely thrown out on the grass; the last of the small fish were secured, the whole of the water drained off, and nothing remained but three feet of thick mud. Nothing? Nothing but the eels that had dived in like worms. These were now attacked. The mud was stirred with poles or shovels till the lurking place of one was found, when, after a long tight, he would be secured, twisting, twining, and fighting for liberty; needing delicate handling too, for these monsters of the pond bite hard and sharp. Deep down in the mud some forced themselves, but many were dug out, and thrown or driven into places where they could be secured, and at last, wet, muddy, and weary, the owner cried *Quantum suff.*, beer for the last time was handed round, and the empty pond was left in peace.

But there was fish for dinner that night, savoury spitchcocked eels, and regal carp with wine sauce, the latter being declared by every one present, from Aunt Sophia to Prayle, to be the poorest, muddiest, most insipid dish ever placed upon a table.

It was about nine that night that just before Lady Scarlett sent a message to the study, which was half full of smoke, and while Prayle had gone for a stroll to watch the stars, as he said, making Scales look a little glum as he left the

room, that Sir James cried suddenly—“Jack, old man, I’ll never brag again.”

“Why?”

“I’ve got the most awful of pains in my back, and it seems to run right up my spine. What the dickens is it? Have you been giving me a dose?”

“No,” said Scales grimly; “that comes of emptying the pond.”

“Not going to be anything, is it?”

“Well,” said the doctor, “I don’t know, but a cold will settle sometimes upon the nerves.”

“Oh! hang it, man, don’t talk about one’s nerves. Here, come along, I shall forget it. Let’s go and have some tea.”

Volume One—Chapter Eight.

Jack Scales Meets His Fate.

“That’s what I like in the country,” said Jack Scales to himself, as he thrust his hands into his pockets and strolled down one of the garden paths. “Humph! Five o’clock, and people snoring in bed, when they might be up and out enjoying this lovely air, the sweet dewy scent of the flowers, and the clear sunshine, and be inhaling health with every breath they draw. Bah! I can’t understand how people can lie in bed—in the country. There is reason in stopping in peaceful thought upon one’s pillow in town till nine.—Ah, gardener, nice morning.”

“Beautiful morning, sir,” said John Monnick, touching his hat, and then going on with his task of carefully whetting a scythe, and sending a pleasant ringing sound out upon the sweet silence of the time.

“Grass cuts well, eh?” said the doctor.

“Yes, sir; crisp, as if there was a white frost on.”

“Ah, let’s try,” said the doctor. “I haven’t handled a scythe for a good many years now.”

“No, sir; I s’pose not,” said Monnick, with a half-contemptuous smile. “Mind you don’t stick the pynte into the ground, sir, and don’t ee cut too deep. I like to keep my lawns regular like.”

“Why don’t you have a machine?” said the doctor, taking the scythe, and sweeping it round with a slow measured *swish* that took off the grass and the dewy daisies to leave a velvet pile.

“Machine, sir? Oh, there’s two in the potting shed; but I don’t want no machines, sir. Noo-fangled things, that breaks a man’s back to push ’em along. You has to put yourself in a onnat’ral-like position to work ’em, and when you’ve done it, the grass don’t look like as if it had been mowed.—Well, you do s’prise me, sir; I didn’t know as you could mow.”

“Didn’t you, Monnick?” said the doctor, pausing to take the piece of carpet with which the old man wiped the blade, using it, and then reaching out his hand for the long gritty whetstone, with which he proceeded to sharpen the scythe in the most business-like way. “Ah, you never know what a man can do till you try him. You see, Monnick, when I was a young fellow, I often used to cut the Rectory lawns at home.”

“He’s a clever one,” muttered the old man, watching intently the rubber, as it was passed with quite a scientific touch up and down and from side to side of the long curved blade. “Man who can mow like that must, be a good doctor. I’ll ask him about my ’bago.”

“There, I’m going for a walk. I’m out of condition too, and mowing touches my back.”

“Do it now, sir?” said the old man, smiling. “Hah! that’s where it lays hold o’ me in a rheumaticky sort o’ way, sir. You couldn’t tell me what’d be good for it, sir, could you? I’ve tried the iles, but it seems as if it was getting worse.”

“Oh, I’ll give you something, Monnick,” said the doctor, laughing; “but, you know, there’s a touch of old age in your complaint.”

“Eh, but I’m afraid there is, sir; but thank you kindly, and you’ll forgive me making so bold as to ask.”

“Of course, of course. Come to me after breakfast.—And look here, I want to get on the open heathy part, among the gorse and fir-trees. Which road had I better take?”

“Well, sir, if you don’t mind the wet grass, you’d best go acrost the meadows out into the lane, turn to the left past the church, take the first turning to the right, and go straight on.”

“Thanks; I shall find my way. Don’t forget. I daresay I can set you right.” And the doctor went off at a swinging pace, crossed the meadows, where the soft-eyed cows paused to look up at him, then leaped a gate, walked down the lane, had a look at the pretty old church, embowered in trees, and had nearly reached the open common-land, when the sharp cantering of a horse roused him from his pleasant morning reverie.

He looked round, to see that the cantering horse was ridden by a lady, whose long habit and natty felt hat set off what seemed in the distance to be a very graceful figure; while the oncoming group appeared to be advancing

through an elongated telescopic frame of green leaves and drooping branches, splashed with gold and blue.

“Here’s one sensible woman, at all events. What a splendid horse!” His glance was almost momentary. Then, feeling that he was staring rudely, he went on with his walk, continuing his way along the lane, and passing a gate that opened at once upon the furzy common-land.

Suddenly the horse was checked a short distance behind him, and an imperious voice called out: “Here!—hi!—my man.”

John Scales, M.D., felt amused. “This is one of the haughty aristocrats we read about in books,” he said to himself, as he turned and saw a handsome, imperious-looking woman of eight-and-twenty or so, beckoning to him with the handle of her whip.

“The goddess Diana in a riding-habit by Poole, and superbly mounted,” muttered the doctor as he stared wonderingly. He saw that the lady’s hair was dark, her cheeks slightly flushed with exorcise; that there was a glint of very white teeth between two scarlet lips; that the figure was really what he had at the first glance imagined—well formed and graceful, if slightly too matured; and his first idea was to take off his hat and stand uncovered in the presence of so much beauty; his second, as he saw the curl of the lady’s upper lip, and her imperious glance, to thrust his hands lower in his pockets and return the haughty stare.

“Here, my man, come and open this gate.”

As she spoke. Scales saw her pass her whip into her bridle hand, draw off a tan-coloured gauntlet glove, and a white and jewelled set of taper fingers go towards the little pocket in her saddle.

“Why, confound her impudence! she takes me for a yokel, and is going to give me a pint of beer,” said the doctor to himself; and he stood as if turned into stone.

“Do you hear!” she cried again sharply, and in the tones of one accustomed to the greatest deference. “Come and open this gate.”

John Scales felt his dignity touched, for he too was accustomed to the greatest deference, such as a doctor generally receives. For a moment he felt disposed to turn upon his heel and walk away; but he did not, for he burst into a hearty laugh, and walked straight up to the speaker, the latter flushing crimson with anger at the insolence, as she mentally called it, of this stranger.

“How dare you!” she exclaimed. “Open that gate;” and she retook her whip with her ungloved hand to point onward, while her highly bred horse pawed the ground, and snorted and tossed its mane, as if indignant too.

“How dare I, my dear?” said the doctor coolly, as he mentally determined not to be set down.

“Sir!” exclaimed the lady with a flash of her dark eyes that made the recipient think afterwards that here was the style of woman who, in the good old times, would have handed him over to her serfs. “Do you know whom you are addressing?”

“Not I,” said the doctor; “unless you are some very beautiful edition in animated nature of the huntress Diana.”

“Sir!”

“And if you were not such a handsome woman, I should leave you to open the gate yourself, or leap the hedge, which seems more in your way.”

“How *dare* you!” she cried, utterly astounded at the speaker’s words.

“How dare I?” said the doctor, smiling. “Oh, I’d dare anything now, to see those eyes sparkle and those cheeks flush. There,” he continued, unfastening the gate and throwing it back; “the gate’s open. *Au revoir*.”

The lady seemed petrified. Then, giving her horse a sharp cut, he bounded through on to the furzy heath, and went off over the rough ground like a swallow.

The doctor stood gazing after them, half expecting to see the lady turn her head; but she rode straight on till she passed out of sight, when he refastened the gate.

“She might have given me the twopence for that pint of beer,” he said mockingly. “Why, she has!” he cried, stooping and picking up a sixpence that lay upon the bare earth close to the gate-post. “Well, come, I’ll keep you, my little friend, and give you back. We may meet again some day.”

It was a trifling incident, but it seemed to affect the doctor a good deal, for he walked on amidst the furze and heath, seeing no golden bloom and hearing no bird-song, but giving vent every now and then to some short angry ejaculation. For he was ruffled and annoyed. He hardly knew why, unless it was at having been treated with such contemptuous disdain.

“And by a woman, too,” he cried at last, stopping short, “of all creatures in the world. Confound her impudence! I should just like to prescribe for her, upon my word.”

Volume One—Chapter Nine.

Aunt Sophia on Boats.

The encounter completely spoiled the doctor's walk, and he turned back sooner than he had intended, meeting Aunt Sophia and Naomi Raleigh in the garden, and accompanying them in to the breakfast-table, where the incident was forgotten in the discussion that ensued respecting returns to town. Of these, Scarlett would hear nothing, for he had made his plans. He said they were to dine at five; and directly after, the boat would be ready, and they would pull up to the lock, and then float down home again by moonlight.

"Well," said Scales, with a shrug of the shoulders, "you are master here."

"No, no," replied his host; "yonder sits the master;" and he pointed to his wife.

"How many will the boat hold safely, dear?" said Lady Scarlett.

"Oh, a dozen, easily. Eighteen, if they would all sit still and not wink their eyes. We shan't be above seven, so that's all right."

"You need not expect me to go," said Aunt Sophia sharply. "I'm not going to risk my life in a boat."

"Pooh! auntie; there's no risk," cried Scarlett. "You'd better come."

"No; I shall not!" said the lady very decisively.

"Why, auntie, how absurd!" said Scarlett, passing his arm round her waist. "Now, what is the very worst that could happen?"

"Why, that boat would be sure to upset, James, and then we should all be drowned."

"Now, my dear old auntie," cried Scarlett, "the boat is not at all likely to upset; in fact I don't think we could upset her; and if she were, it does not follow that we should be drowned."

"Why, we should certainly be, boy," cried Aunt Sophia.—"Naomi, my dear, of course you have not thought of going?"

"Yes, aunt, dear; I should like to go very much," said Naomi.

"Bless the child! Why?"

"The river is lovely, aunt, with the shadows of the trees falling upon it, and their branches reflected on its surface."

"O yes; very poetical and pretty at your age, child," cried Aunt Sophia. "You never see the mud at the bottom, or think that it is wet and covered with misty fog in winter. Well, I suppose you must go."

"Really, Miss Raleigh, we will take the greatest care of her," said Prayle.

"I really should like to take the greatest care of you," muttered the doctor.

"Well, I suppose you must go, my dear," said Aunt Sophia.

"Oh, thank you, aunt!" cried the girl gleefully.

"Now, look here, James," said Aunt Sophia; "you will be very, very careful?"

"Of course, auntie."

"And you won't be dancing about in the boat or playing any tricks?"

"No—no—no," said Scarlett, at intervals. "I faithfully promise, though I do not know why."

"You don't know why, James?"

"No, auntie. I never do play tricks in a boat. No one does but a madman, or a fool. Besides, I don't want to drown my little wifie."

"Now, James, don't be absurd. Who ever thought you did?"

"No one, aunt," said Lady Scarlett. "But you will go with us, will you not?"

"No, my dear; you know how I hate the water. It is not safe."

"But James is so careful, aunt. I'd go anywhere with him."

"Of course you would, my child," said Aunt, Sophia shortly. "A wife should trust in her husband thoroughly and well."

"So should a maiden aunt in her nephew," said Scarlett, laughing. "Come, auntie, you shan't be drowned."

"Now, James, my dear, don't try to persuade me," said the lady, pulling up her black lace mittens in a peculiar, nervous, twitchy way.

"I'll undertake to do the best for you, if you are drowned, Miss Raleigh," said the doctor drily. "I'm pretty successful with such cases."

“Doctor Scales!” cried Aunt Sophia.

“Fact, my dear madam. An old friend of mine did the Royal Humane Society’s business for them at the building in Hyde Park; and one very severe winter when I helped him, we really brought back to life a good many whom you might have quite given up.”

“Doctor, you horrify me,” cried Aunt Sophia.—“Naomi, my child, come away.”

“No, no: nonsense!” cried Scarlett. “It’s only Jack’s joking way, auntie.”

“Joke!” cried the doctor; “nonsense. The ice was unsafe; so of course the idiots insisted upon setting the police at defiance, and went on, to drown themselves as fast as they could.”

“How dreadful!” said Prayle.

“Very, for the poor doctors,” said Scales grimly. “I nearly rubbed my arms out of the sockets.”

“Kitty, dear, you stay with Aunt Sophia, then,” said Scarlett. “We won’t be very long away.”

“Stop!” cried Aunt Sophia sternly. “Where is it you are going?”

“Up to the lock and weir,” said Scarlett. “You and Kitty can sit under the big medlar in the shade till we come back.”

“The lock and weir?” cried Aunt Sophia sharply. “That’s where the water comes running over through a lot of sticks, isn’t it?”

“Yes, aunt, that’s the place.”

“And you’ve seen it before?”

“Scores of times, dear.”

“Then why do you want to go now?”

“Because it will be a pleasant row.”

“Nonsense!” said Aunt Sophia shortly, “pulling those oars and making blisters on your hands. Well, you must have your own way, I suppose.”

“All right, aunt. You won’t think it queer of us to desert you?”

“Oh, you’re not going to desert me, James.”

“Kitty will stay with you.”

“No; she will not,” said the old lady, “I’m not going to deprive her of her treat.”

“I shan’t mind, indeed, aunt,” cried Lady Scarlett.

“Yes you would; and you shall not be disappointed, for I shall go too.”

“You will, aunt?” cried Scarlett.

“Yes; if you promise to be very careful. And you are sure the boat is safe?”

“As safe as being on this lawn, my dear aunt. You trust to me. I am glad you are going.”

Aunt Sophia looked at the frank manly face before her, saw the truth in the eager eyes, and her thin, yellow, careworn countenance relaxed into a smile.

“Well, I’m going, James, because I don’t want to disappoint your little wife,” she said to him in a low tone; “but I don’t see what pleasure it can give you to have a disagreeable old woman with you in the boat.”

They had moved off a little way from the others now, Scarlett having kept his arm round the old lady’s waist, evidently greatly to her gratification, though if it had been hinted at, she would have repudiated the fact with scorn.

“Don’t you, auntie?” he said seriously. “Well, I’ll tell you.” He paused, then, and seemed to be thinking.

“Well?” she said sharply; “why is it? Now you are making up a flowery speech.”

“No,” he said softly. “I was thinking of how precious little a young fellow thinks of his mother till she has gone. Auntie, every now and then, when I look at you, there is a something that brings her back so much. That’s why I like to have you with me in this trip.”

Aunt Sophia did not speak; but her hard sharp face softened more and more as she went into the house, to come out, ten minutes later, in one of the most far-spreading Tuscan straw-hats that ever covered the head of a maiden lady; and the marvel to her friends was that she should have been able to obtain so old-fashioned a production in these modern times.

Volume One—Chapter Ten.

Up to the Weir.

“That’s the style. Hold her tight, Monnick.—Now, auntie, you first. Steady; that’s the way. You won’t swamp her.”

“But it gives way so, James, my dear,” said Aunt Sophia nervously.

“There you are. Sit down at once. Never stand up in a boat.—Is the cushion all right? That’s the way.—Now, Naomi.—Hand her in, Jack.—Come along, Kitty.”

Lady Scarlett gave her hand to her husband as soon as Naomi Raleigh was in, and stepped lightly from the gunwale to one thwart, and then took her place beside Aunt Sophia, Naomi being on the other.

“Arthur, old fellow, you’d better sit behind them and ship the rudder. Shorten the lines, and you can steer.—Ready, Jack?” he said as Prayle stepped into the boat and sat down on a thwart behind the ladies.

“Oh!” cried Aunt Sophia with a little scream; “take him out; he’s too heavy. He’ll sink the boat.”

“Ha-ha-ha!” laughed the doctor.

“It’s all right, auntie, I tell you,” cried Scarlett, making the boat dance up and down as he stepped in, and, stripping off his flannel jacket, rolled up his sleeves over his arms.

The doctor stepped in and imitated his friend, both standing up, the muscular specimens of humanity, though wonderfully unlike in aspect.

“Now, you told me it was dangerous to stand up in a boat, James,” cried Aunt Sophia. “Pray, pray, take care. And look, look—the boat has broken loose!” For the gardener had dropped the chain into the forepart, and it was drifting slowly with the stream.

“All, so she has,” cried Scarlett merrily; “and if we don’t stop her, she’ll take us right to London before we know where we are.”

“But do, pray, sit down, my dear.”

“All right, auntie,” said Scarlett, dropping into his place, the doctor following suit.

“Oh, oh!” cried Aunt Sophia, catching tightly hold of her companions on each side; “the boat’s going over.”

“No, no, aunt, dear,” said Lady Scarlett; “it is quite safe.”

“But why did it rock?” cried the old lady tremulously. “And look, look; there are only two of them there, and we are four at this end! We shall sink it, I’m sure.”

“Now, auntie, it’s too bad of you to set up for a stout old lady, when you are as light as a cork,” cried Scarlett, dropping his oar with a splash.—“Ready, Jack?”

“Ready, ay, ready,” said the doctor, following suit; but his oar only swept the sedge.

“Gently,” said Scarlett; “don’t break the oar.—That’s better; now you have it,” he said, as the head of the gig turned more and more, the doctor’s oar took a good hold of the water; and in a few moments they were well out from the shore, the steady vigorous strokes sending them past the sloping lawn of the Rosery, which looked its best from the river.

“There, aunt, see how steadily and well the boat goes,” said Lady Scarlett.

“Yes, my dear, but it doesn’t seem at all safe.”

“Place looks pretty from the water, doesn’t it, Arthur?” shouted Scarlett.

“Delightful. A most charming home—charming, charming,” said Prayle, lowering his voice with each word, till it was heard as in a whisper by those on the seat in front.

“Don’t feel afraid now, do you, auntie?” cried Scarlett to Aunt Sophia.

“N-not quite so much, my dear. But won’t you make yourself very hot and tired?”

“Do him good, ma’am,” said the doctor; “and me too.—Gently, old fellow, or you’ll pull her head round. I’m not in your trim.”

Scarlett laughed, and pulled a little less vigorously, so that they rode on and on between the lovely banks, passing villa after villa, with its boat-house, lawn, and trimly kept garden. Then came a patch of trees laving their drooping branches in the stream; then a sweep of wood, climbing higher and higher into the background on one hand; while on the other the hills receded, leaving a lawn-like stretch of meadow-land, rich in the summer wild-flowers, and whose river-edge was dense with flag and sedge and willow-herb of lilac pink. The marsh-marigold shone golden, and the water-plantains spread their candelabra here and there. Great patches of tansy displayed their beautifully cut foliage; while in sheltered pools, the yellow water-lilies sent up their leaves to float upon the calm surface, with here and

there a round green hall in every grade of effort to escape from the tightening scales to form a golden chalice on the silvery stream.

By degrees the beauty of the scene lulled Aunt Sophia's fears to rest, and she found sufficient faith in the safety of the boat to loosen her clutch upon the ladies on either side, to admire some rustic cottage, or the sweep of many-tinted verdure, drooping to the water's edge; while here and there, at a word from Scarlett, the rowers let the boat go forward by its own impetus, slowly and more slowly, against the stream, so that its occupants could gaze upon some lovely reach. Then as they sat in silence, watching the beauty spread around, the boat grew stationary, hung for a moment on the balance, and began drifting back, gliding with increasing pace, till the oars were clipped again.

"The evening is so lovely," said Scarlett, breaking a long silence, "that I think we might go through the lock."

"Right," cried the doctor. "I am just warming to my work."

"I think it would be delightful," said Lady Scarlett.

"Oh, yes," said Naomi. "Those islands are so beautiful."

"I don't think any part could be more beautiful than where we are," said Aunt Sophia, rather shortly.

"Oh, yes, it is, aunt, dear," said Scarlett. "There you trust to me."

"Well, it seems I must, for we women are very helpless here."

"Oh, you may trust us, aunt. We won't take you into any danger."

As they were speaking the boat was rowed round a sharp curve to where the river on each side was embowered in trees, and stretching apparently like a bridge from side to side was one of the many weirs that cross the stream; while from between its piles, in graceful curves a row of little waterfalls flowed down, each arc of water glistening golden and many-tinted in the evening sun.

"There!" cried Scarlett.—"Easy, Jack.—What do you think of that, aunt, for a view?"

"Yes," said the old lady thoughtfully; "it is very sweet."

"A very poet's dream," said Prayle softly, as he rested his elbow on the gunwale of the boat, his chin upon his hand.

"It is one of my husband's favourite bits," said Lady Scarlett, smiling in the face of him she named.—"Look, Naomi; that is the fishing-cottage, there on the left."

"I have not seen the weir for years—twenty years," said Aunt Sophia thoughtfully; "and then it was from the carriage, as we drove along the road."

"Not half so good a view as this," said Scarlett.—"Now, then, we'll go through the lock, row up for a mile by the Dell woods, and then back."

"But you will be tired, my dear," said Aunt Sophia, whom the beauty of the scene seemed to have softened; and her worn sharp face looked wistful and strange.

"Tired?" said Lady Scarlett, laughing. "Oh, no, aunt; he's never tired."

"Well," said Scarlett, with a bright look at his wife, "I'll promise one thing—when we're tired, we'll turn back."

"Yes, dear; but there's all the way to return."

"Oh, the river takes us back itself, aunt," said Lady Scarlett merrily. "Row up; and then float back."

"Ah, well, my dears, I am in your hands," said Aunt Sophia softly; "but don't take me into danger, please."

"All right, auntie—There's one of the prettiest bits," he added, pointing to where the trees on the right bank opened, showing a view of the hills beyond.—"Now, Jack, pull."

Ten minutes' sharp rowing brought them up to the stout piles that guarded the entrance to the lock, whose slimy doors were open; and as they approached, they could see the further pair, with the water hissing and spirting through in tiny streams, making a strange echo from the perpendicular stone walls that rose up a dozen feet on either side.

"Lock, lock, lock, lock!" shouted Scarlett in his mellow tones, as the boat glided in between the walls, and Aunt Sophia turned pale.

"They shut us up here, don't they, James, and then let the water in?"

"Till we are on a level with the river above, and then open the other pair," said Scarlett quietly. "Don't be alarmed."

"But I am, my dear," said the old lady earnestly. "My nerves are not what they were."

"Of course not," said the doctor kindly.—"I wouldn't go through, old fellow," he continued to Scarlett. "Let's paddle about below the weir."

“To be sure,” said Scarlett, as he saw his aunt’s alarm. “I brought you out to enjoy yourselves.—Here—hi!” he cried, standing up in the boat, and making Aunt Sophia lean forward, as if to catch him and save him from going overboard. —“All right, auntie.—Hi!—catch!” he cried to the lock-keeper, throwing him a shilling. “We won’t go through.”

The man did not make an effort to catch the money, but stooped in a heavy dreamy manner to pick it up, staring stolidly at the occupants of the boat.

Aunt Sophia uttered a sigh of relief, one that seemed to be echoed from behind her, where Arthur Prayle was seated, looking of a sallow sickly grey, but with his colour rapidly coming back as they reached the open space below the weir, where the water at once seemed to seize the boat and to sweep it downwards, but only to be checked and rowed upwards again towards the weir.

“There, auntie, look over the side,” cried Scarlett. “Can you see the stones?”

“Yes, my dear,” said Aunt Sophia, who was evidently mastering a good deal of trepidation. “Is it all shallow like this?”

“Oh, no. Up yonder, towards the piles, there are plenty of holes fifteen and twenty feet deep, scoured out by the falling water when it comes over in a flood. See how clear and bright it is.”

Aunt Sophia sat up rigidly; but her two companions leaned over on each side to look down through the limpid rushing stream at the stones and gravel, over which shot away in fear, shoal after shoal of silvery dace, with here and there some bigger, darker fish that had been lying head to stream, patiently waiting for whatever good might come.

“Yes, my dears, it is very beautiful,” said Aunt Sophia. “But you are going very near the falling water, James. It will be tumbling in the boat.”

“Oh, we’ll take care of that, auntie,” said Scarlett merrily. “Trust to your boatman, ma’am, and he will take you safe. —What say, Arthur?”

“I say, are there any large fish here?”

“Large fish, my boy? Wait a moment.—Pull, Jack.” They rowed close up to a clump of piles, driven in to save the bank from the constant washing of the stream.—“Now, look down, old fellow,” continued Scarlett, “close in by the piles. It’s getting too late to see them well. It ought to be when the sun is high.—Well, what can you see?”

“A number of dark shadowy forms close to bottom,” said Prayle.

“Ay, shoals of them. Big barbel, some as long as your arm, my lad—ten and twelve pounders. Come down some day and we’ll have a good try for them.”

“Don’t go too near, dear,” cried Aunt Sophia.

“All right, auntie.—Here, Jack, take the boat-hook, and hold on a moment while I get out the cigars and matches.—Ladies, may we smoke? Our work is done.”

“A bad habit, James,” said Aunt Sophia, shaking her head at him.

“But he has so few bad habits, aunt,” said Lady Scarlett, smiling.

“And you encourage him in those, my dear,” said Aunt Sophia.—“There sir, go on.”

“Won’t you have a cigar, Arthur?”

“Thank you; no,” said Prayle, with a grave smile. “I never smoke.”

“Good young man!” said the doctor to himself as he lit up.

“Man after your own heart, aunt,” said Scarlett merrily, as he resumed his oar; and for the next half-hour they rowed about over the swiftly running water, now dyed with many a hue, the reflections from the gorgeous clouds that hovered over the ruddy sinking sun. The dancing wavelets flashed and sparkled with orange and gold: the shadows grew more intense, beneath the trees; while in one portion of the weir, where a pile or two had rotted away, the water ran down in one smooth soft curve, like so much molten metal poured from some mighty furnace into the hissing, boiling stream below.

“I never saw it so beautiful before,” cried Scarlett excitedly. “It is lovely indeed.—Look, aunt.—Why, Arthur, it was worth a journey to see.”

“The place is like one seen in some vision of the night,” said Prayle softly.

“Hah! yes,” exclaimed the doctor thoughtfully; “it is enough to tempt a man to give up town.”

“Do, old fellow, and you shall have us Impatients,” cried Scarlett, “We never want a doctor, and I hope we never shall.”

“Amen to that!” said Scales, in a low, serious tone. “Ah!” he continued, “what a pity it seems that we have so few of these heavenly days.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Scarlett. “Makes us appreciate them all the more.”

“I think these things are best as they are,” said Prayle in his soft dreamy tenor. “Yes; all is for the best.”

Lady Scarlett looked at him uneasily, and Aunt Sophia tightened her lips.

“I should like to duck that fellow, and fish him out with the boat-hook,” thought the doctor.

Then the conversation ceased. Words seemed to be a trouble in the beauty of that evening scene, one so imprinted in the breasts of the spectators that it was never forgotten. The boat was kept from floating down with the quick racing current by a sharp dip of the oars just given now and then, while every touch of the long blue blades seemed to be into liquid gold and silver and ruddy gems. The wind had sunk, and, saving the occasional distance—softened lowing from the meads, no sound came from the shore; but always like distant thunder, heard upon the summer breeze, came the never-ceasing, low-pitched roar of the falling water at the weir.

The silence was at last broken by Scarlett, who said suddenly, making his hearers start: “Now then, Jack, one row round by the piles, and then home.”

“Right,” said the doctor, throwing the end of his cigar into the water, where it fell with a hiss; and bending to his oar, the light gig was sent up against the racing water nearer and nearer to the weir.

The ladies joined hands, as if there was danger, but became reassured as they saw their protectors smile; and soon after, quite near to where the river came thundering down from where it was six feet above their heads, instead of the stream forcing them away, the water seemed comparatively still, the eddy setting slightly towards the weir.

“Here’s one of the deep places,” said Scarlett. “I fished here once, and my plummet went down over twenty feet.”

“And you didn’t catch a gudgeon?” said the doctor.

“Not one,” replied Scarlett.

“How deep and black it looks!” said Prayle softly, as he laved one soft white hand in the water.

“Enough to make it,” said Scarlett—“deep as that. I say, what a place for a header!”

“Ah, splendid!” said the doctor; “only, you mustn’t dive onto pile or stone. I say, hadn’t we better keep off a little more?”

“Yes,” said Scarlett, rising, oar in hand. “I never knew the eddy set in so sharply before.—Why, auntie, if we went much nearer, it would carry us right in beneath the falling water, and we should be filled.”

“Pray, take care, James.”

“To be sure I will, my dear auntie,” he said, as he stood up there in the soft evening light, “I’ll take care of you all, my precious freight;” and wailing his time, he thrust the blade of his oar against a pile, placed one foot upon the gunwale, and pressing heavily, he sent the boat steadily farther and farther away, “Back water, Jack,” he said. —“Now!” As he spoke, he gave one more thrust; but in the act there was a sharp crack as the frail ashen oar snapped in twain, a shriek of horror from Lady Scarlett as she started up, and a dull, heavy plunge, making the water foam up, as Sir James Scarlett went in head foremost and disappeared.

Volume One—Chapter Eleven.

The Doctor Abroad.

The thrust delivered by Scarlett before the breaking of the oar, aided by the impetus given by his feet as he fell, sent the boat back into the rapid stream beyond the eddy; and in spite of the doctor’s efforts, he could not check its course, till, suddenly starting up, he used his oar as a pole, arresting their downward course as he scanned the surface towards the piles.

“Sit down, Lady Scarlett!” he cried in a fierce, hoarse voice.—“Hold her, or she will be over.”

Aunt Sophia had already seized her niece’s dress, and was dragging her back, the three women sitting with blanched faces and parted ashy lips, gazing at the place where Scarlett had gone down.

“Don’t be alarmed; he swims like a fish,” said the doctor, though grave apprehension was changing the hue of his own countenance, as he stood watching for the reappearance of his friend.

“Help! help!” cried Lady Scarlett suddenly; and her voice went echoing over the water.

“Hush! be calm,” cried the doctor.—“Here, quick—you—Mr Prayle! Come and shove down the boat-hook here. She’s drifting. Mind, man, mind!” he cried, as Prayle, trembling visibly, nearly fell over as he stooped to get out the boat-hook.

He thrust it down into the water, but in a timid, helpless way.

“Put it down!” cried the doctor; and then, seizing an oar by the middle, he used it as a paddle, just managing to keep the boat from being swept away.

They were twenty yards at least from where Scarlett went down: but had he possessed the power to urge the boat

forward, Scales dared not have sent it nearer to the piles with that freight on board. And still those terrible moments went on, lengthening first into one and then into a second minute, and Scarlett did not reappear.

“Why does he not come up?” said Prayle, in a harsh whisper.

“Silence, man! Wait!” cried the doctor hoarsely, as he saw Lady Scarlett’s wild imploring eyes.

“He must have struck his head against a stone or pile,” thought the doctor, “and is stunned.” And then the horrible idea came upon him, that his poor friend was being kept down by the tons and tons of falling water, every time he would have risen to the top. Two minutes—three minutes had passed, and, as if in sympathy with the horror that had fallen upon the group, the noise of the tumbling waters seemed to grow more loud, and the orange glow of sunset was giving place to a cold grey light.

Aunt Sophia was the next to speak. “Do something, man!” she cried, in a passionate imploring voice. But the doctor did not heed; he only scanned the surface of the foamy pool.

“There, there, there!” shrieked Lady Scarlett. “There, help!—James! Husband! Help!”

She would have flung herself from the boat, as she gazed wildly in quite a different direction; and the doctor, dropping the oar across the sides, sent the frail vessel back from him, rocking heavily; for he had plunged from it headlong into the rushing water, but only to rise directly; and they saw him swimming rapidly towards where something creamy-looking was being slowly carried by the current back towards the piles. The doctor was a powerful swimmer, but he was weary from his exertions. He swam on, though, rapidly nearing the object of his search, caught it by the flannel shirt, made a tremendous effort to get beyond the back-set of the current, and then turned a ghastly face upward to the air.

The gig was fifty yards away now, Prayle being helpless to stay its course; and though the doctor looked round, there was neither soul nor boat in sight to give them help.

It was a hard fight; but the swimmer won; for some thirty or forty strokes, given with all his might, brought him into the shallow stream, and then the rest was easy; he had but to keep his friend’s face above the water while he tried to overtake the boat. For a moment he thought of landing; but no help was near without carrying his inanimate burden perhaps a mile, the lock being on the other side, its keeper probably asleep, for he made no sign.

“Cannot that idiot stop the boat?” groaned Scales. “At last—at last!” He uttered these words with a cry of satisfaction, for Prayle was making some pretence of forcing the boat up-stream once more.

The doctor was skilful enough to direct his course so that they were swept down to the bows; and grasping the gunwale with one hand, he panted forth: “Down with that boat-hook! Now, take him by the shoulders. Lean back to the other side and draw him in.”

The swimmer could lend but little help; and Prayle would have failed in his effort, and probably overturned the boat, but for Aunt Sophia, whose dread of the water seemed to have passed away as she came forward, and between them they dragged Scarlett over the side.

The doctor followed, with the water streaming from him, and gave a glance to right and left in search of a place to land.

“It would be no use,” he said quickly. “While we were getting him to some house, valuable minutes would be gone.—Now, Lady Scarlett, for heaven’s sake, be calm!”

“Oh, he is dead—he is dead!” moaned the wretched woman, on her knees.

“That’s more than you know, or I know,” cried the doctor, who was working busily all the time. “Be calm, and help me.—You too, Miss Raleigh.—Prayle, get out of the way!”

Arthur Prayle frowned and went aft. Lady Scarlett made a supreme effort to be calm; while Aunt Sophia, with her lips pressed lightly together, knelt there, watchful and ready, as the doctor toiled on. She it was who, unasked, passed him the cushions which he laid beneath the apparently drowned man, and, at a word, was the first to strip away the coverings from his feet and apply friction, while Scales was hard at work trying to produce artificial respiration by movements of his patient’s arms.

“Don’t be down-hearted,” he said; “only work. We want warmth and friction to induce the circulation to return. Throw plenty of hope into your efforts, and, with God’s help, we’ll have him back to life.”

Naomi Raleigh would have helped had there been room, but there was none, and she could only sit with starting eyes watching the efforts that were made, while Prayle tried hard with the oar to hasten the progress of the boat.

There was no sign of life in the figure that lay there inert and motionless; but no heed was paid to that. Animated by the doctor’s example, aunt and niece laboured on in silence, while the boat rocked from their efforts, and the water that had streamed from the garments of the doctor and his patient washed to and fro.

It was a strange freight for a pleasure-boat as it floated swiftly down with the stream, passing no one on that solitary portion of the river; though had they encountered scores no further help could have been rendered than that which friend was giving to friend.

For the doctor’s face was purple with his exertions, and the great drops of perspiration stood now side by side with the water that still trickled from his crisp hair.

“Don’t slacken,” he cried cheerily. “I’ve brought fellows to, after being four or five times as long under water, in the depth of winter too. We shall have a flicker of life before long, I’ll be sworn. Is he still as cold? I can’t stop to feel.”

Aunt Sophia laid her hand upon the bare white chest of her nephew in the region of his heart; and then, as her eyes met the doctor’s her lips tightened just a little—that was all.

“Too soon to expect it yet.—Don’t be despondent, Lady Scarlett. Be a brave, true little wife. That’s right.” He nodded at her so encouragingly, that, in the face of what he was doing, Lady Scarlett felt that all little distance between them was for ever at an end, and that she had a sister’s love for this gallant, earnest man.

“Where are we?” he said at last, toiling more slowly now, from sheer exhaustion.

“Very nearly down to the cottage,” replied Prayle; and the doctor muttered an inaudible “Thank God!” It was not loud enough for wife or aunt to hear, or it would have carried with it a despair far greater than that they felt.

“Can you run her into the landing-place?”

“I’ll try,” said Prayle, but in so doubting a tone, that the doctor uttered a low ejaculation, full of impatient anger, and Kate Scarlett looked up.

“Naomi! Quick! Here!” she cried. “Kneel down, and take my place.”

“Yes; warmth is life,” panted the doctor, who was hoarse now and faint. “Poor woman! she’s fagged,” he thought; “but still she is his wife.” There was a feeling of annoyance in his breast as he thought this—a sensation of anger against Kate Scarlett, who ought to have died at her post, he felt, sooner than give it up to another. Put the next moment he gave a sigh of satisfaction and relief, as he saw her rise and stop lightly to where Prayle was fumbling with the oar.

“Sit down!” she said in a quick, imperious manner; and, slipping the oar over the stern, she cleverly sculled with it, as her husband had taught her in happier times, so that she sent the gig nearer and nearer to the shore. But in spite of her efforts, they would have been swept beyond, had not the old gardener, waiting their return, waded in to get hold of the bows of the gig and haul it to the side. As it grated against the landing-stage, the doctor summoned all the strength that he had left, to bend down, lift his friend over his shoulder, and then stagger to the house.

Volume One—Chapter Twelve.

A Hard Night’s Work.

“Yes,” said Scales excitedly, as he bent over his patient, whom he had placed upon the floor of the study, after ordering fresh medical help to be fetched at once—“yes—there is hope.”

As he spoke, Kate Scarlett uttered a low wail, and Aunt Sophia caught her in her arms; but the stricken wife struggled to get free. “No, no; I shall not give way,” she panted; “I will be brave, and help.” For, as the doctor slowly continued his efforts to restore the circulation, there came at last a faint gasp; and soon after, the medical man from the village came in, cool and calm, to take in the situation at a glance.

By this time, Scarlett was breathing with some approach to the normal strength, and Scales turned to the new-comer. “Will you”—he began. He could say no more, from utter exhaustion and excitement, but sank over sidewise, fainting dead away, leaving the new-comer to complete his task.

It was not a long one now, for almost together James Scarlett and his friend opened their eyes and gazed about wildly.

The doctor was the first to recover himself, and he drank eagerly of the spirit and water held to his lips, and then rose and walked to the open window.

“I’m better now,” he said, returning to where his fellow professional was leaning over Scarlett, to whose wandering eyes the light of reason had not yet returned. “How is he now?”

“Coming round fast,” said the other.

“He’s dying?” moaned Lady Scarlett, as she saw her husband’s eyes slowly close once more.

“No, no,” said Scales quietly. “It is exhaustion and sleep. He’ll go off soundly now for many hours, and wake up nearly well.”

“Are you saying this to deceive me?” cried Lady Scarlett.

“Indeed, no; ask our friend here.”

Lady Scarlett looked at the other appealingly, and he confirmed his confrère’s words. But still she was not convinced, so pale and motionless Sir James lay, till the doctor signed to her to bend over and place her ear against her husband’s breast.

Then, as she heard the regular heavy pulsation of his heart, she uttered a low, sobbing, hysterical cry, turned to Scales, caught his hand in hers, kissed it again and again, and then crouched lower upon her knees at her husband’s side, weeping and praying during his heavy sleep.

The local doctor stayed for a couple of hours, and then, after a short consultation with Scales, shook hands. “You have done wonders,” he said on leaving.

“No,” said Scales quietly; “I only persevered.”

He found Aunt Sophia kneeling by Lady Scarlett’s side, pressing her to rise and partake of some tea which the old lady had ready for her, but only to obtain negative motions of the suffering little woman’s head, till Scales bent down and whispered—

“Yes, you must take it, Lady Scarlett; you will want all your strength perhaps when your husband wakes.”

His voice roused her and she rose at once, caught his hand in hers and kissed it again before going to a side-table and eating and drinking whatever Aunt Sophia placed in her hands.

“She’d make a splendid nurse,” said the doctor to himself, “so obedient and patient. I didn’t think she had it in her, but somehow I don’t quite like her and her ways.”

Just then he turned and met Prayle’s eyes fixed upon him rather curiously, and it seemed to him, in his own rather excited state, that his friend’s cousin was watching him in no very amiable way.

The thought passed off on the moment and he went down on one knee by Scarlett’s extemporised couch. For by this time the patient had been made comfortable where he lay with blankets and cushions. The doctor too had found time to change, and had prescribed for himself what he told Aunt Sophia was the tip-top of recuperators in such a case, a strong cup of tea with a tablespoonful of brandy.

“Poor old boy!” he said tenderly, as he laid his hand upon Scarlett’s breast. “Yes, your old heart’s doing its duty once again, and, and—confound it! what a weak fool I am.”

He remained very still for some minutes, so that no one should see the big hot tears that dropped in a most unprofessional fashion upon the blankets and glistened there. But it was a failure as far as one person was concerned, and he might just as well have taken out his handkerchief, wiped his eyes, and had one of those good sonorous blows of the nose indulged in by Englishmen when they feel affected; for under the most painful circumstances, however natural, it is of course exceedingly unmanly of the first made human being to cry. That luxury and relief of an overladen spirit is reserved for the Eves of creation. All the same though, there are few men who do not weep in times of intense mental agony. They almost invariably, however, and by long practice and custom, the result probably of assistance in accordance with Darwinian laws, contrive to switch the lines or rather ducts of their tears, shunt these saline globules of bitterness, and cry through the nose.

“There! he’s going on capitally now,” he said, after a time.—“Mr Prayle, you need not, stay.”

“Oh, I would rather wait,” said Prayle. “He may have a relapse.”

“Oh, I shall be with him,” said the doctor confidently. “I will ask you to leave us now, Mr Prayle. I want to keep the room quiet and cool.”

Arthur Prayle was disposed to resist; but a doctor is an autocrat in a sick-chamber, whom no one but a patient dare disobey; and the result was that Prayle unwillingly left the room.

“Got rid of him,” muttered the doctor.—“Now for the old maid,” who, by the way, has behaved like a trump.

“I don’t think you need stay, Miss Raleigh,” he whispered. “You must be very tired now.”

“Yes, Doctor Scales,” she said quietly; “but I will not go to bed. You may want a little help in the night.”

“I shall not leave my husband’s side,” said Lady Scarlett firmly.—“Oh, Doctor Scales, pray, pray, tell me the truth; keep nothing back. Is there any danger?”

“Upon my word, as a man, Lady Scarlett, there is none.”

“You are not deceiving me?”

“Indeed, no. Here is the case for yourself: he has been nearly drowned.”

“Yes, yes,” sobbed Lady Scarlett.

“Well, he has his breathing apparatus in order again, and is fast asleep. There is no disease.”

“No; I understand that,” said Lady Scarlett excitedly; “but—a relapse?”

“Relapse?” said the doctor in a low voice and laughing quietly. “Well, the only form of relapse he could have would be to tumble in again.”

“Don’t; pray, don’t laugh at me, doctor,” said Lady Scarlett piteously. “You cannot tell what I suffer.”

“O yes, I can,” he said kindly. “If I laughed then, it was only to give you confidence. He will wake up with a bad nervous headache, and that’s all.—Now, suppose you go and lie down.”

“No; I shall stay with my husband,” she said firmly. “I cannot go.”

“Well,” he said, “you shall stay.—Perhaps you will stay with us as well, Miss Raleigh,” he added. “We can shade the light; and he is so utterly exhausted, that even if we talk, I don’t think he will wake.”

“And he will not be worse?” whispered Lady Scarlett.

“People *will* not have any confidence in their medical man. Come, now, I think you might trust me, after what I have done.”

“I do trust you, Doctor Scales, and believe in you as my husband’s best and dearest friend,” cried Lady Scarlett. “Heaven bless you for what you have done!” She hurriedly kissed his hand; and then, after a glance at her husband’s pale face, she went and sat upon the floor beside Aunt Sophia’s chair, laid her hands upon the elder lady’s knees, and hid her face, sitting there so motionless that she seemed to be asleep.

“I wish she would not do that,” muttered the doctor; and then: “I hate a woman who behaves in that lapdog way. I never liked her, and I don’t think I ever shall.”

It was a change indeed, the long watch through that night, and it was with a sigh of relief that the doctor saw the first grey light of morning stealing through the window. Only a few hours before and all had been so bright and sunny, now all was depression and gloom. When they started for their water trip trouble seemed a something that could not fall upon so happy a home. Aunt Sophia’s fears had only been a motive for mirth, and since then, with a rapidity that was like the lightning’s flash, this terrible shock had come upon them.

“Ah, well!” mused the doctor, as he stood at the window holding the blind a little on one side so as to gaze out at the grey sky, “it might have been worse, and it will make him more careful for the future. My word though, it was precious lucky that I was in the boat.”

He yawned slightly now, for there was no denying that the doctor was terribly sleepy. It was bad enough to lose a night’s rest, but the exhaustion he had suffered from his efforts made it worse, and in spite of his anxiety and eagerness to save his friend, there was no concealing the fact that unless he had risen and walked about now and then he would have fallen asleep.

Just as the sky was becoming flecked with tiny clouds of gold and orange, the first brightness that had been seen since the evening before, a few muttered words and a restless movement made doctor and wife hurry to the extempore couch.

“Kate! Where’s Kate?” exclaimed Scarlett in a hoarse cracked voice.

“I am here, dear—here at your side,” she whispered, laying her cheek to his.

“Has the boat gone over? Save Kate!”

“We are all safe, dear husband.”

“Fool!—idiot!—to go so near. So dangerous!” he cried excitedly. “Jack—Jack, old man—my wife—my wife!”

“It’s all right, old fellow,” said the doctor cheerily. “There, there; you only had a bit of a ducking—that’s all.”

“Scales—Jack!—Where am I? Where’s Kate?”

“Here, dear love, by your side.”

“My head!” panted the poor fellow. “I’m frightened. What does it mean? Why do you all stare at me like that? Here! what’s the matter? Have I had a dream?”

“He calm, old fellow,” said the doctor. “You’re all right now.”

“Catch hold of my hand, Kate,” he cried, drawing in his breath with a hiss. “There’s something wrong with—here—the back of my neck, and my head throbs terribly. Here! Have I been overboard? Why don’t you speak?”

“Scarlett, old fellow, be calm,” said the doctor firmly. “There; that’s better.”

“Yes; I’ll lie still. What a frightful headache! But tell me what it all means.—Ah! I remember now. The oar broke, and I went under. I was beaten down.—Jack—Kate, dear—do you hear me?”

“Yes, yes, dear love; yes, yes,” whispered Lady Scarlett, placing her arm round his neck and drawing his head upon her breast. “It was a nasty accident; but you are quite safe now.”

“Safe? Am I safe?” he whispered hoarsely. “That’s right, dear; hold me—tightly now.” He closed his eyes and shuddered, while Lady Scarlett gazed imploringly in the doctor’s face.

“The shock to his nerves,” he said quietly. “A bit upset; but he’ll be all right soon;” and as he spoke, the doctor laid his hand upon his friend’s pulse.

Scarlett uttered a piercing cry, starting and gazing wildly at his old companion. “Oh! It was you,” he panted, and he closed his eyes again, clinging tightly to his wife, as he whispered softly, “Don’t leave me, dear—don’t leave me.”

He seemed to calm down then and lay quite still muttering about the boat—the oar breaking—and the black water.

“It kept me down,” he said with another shudder, and speaking as if to himself. “It kept me down till I felt that I was

drowning. Jack Scales," he said aloud, "how does a man feel when he is drowned?"

"Don't know, old fellow. Never was drowned," said the doctor cheerily.—"Now, look here; it's only just sunrise, so you'd better go to sleep again, and then you'll wake up as lively as a cricket."

"Sunrise?—sunrise?" said Scarlett excitedly—"sunrise?" And as he spoke he looked round from one to the other. "Why, you've been sitting up all night! Of course, I'm down here. Have I been very bad?"

The doctor hesitated for a few moments, and then, deeming it best to tell him all, he said quietly:

"Well, pretty bad, old fellow, but we brought you to again, and it's all right now."

"Yes, it's all right now. It's all right now," muttered Scarlett, looking from one to the other, and then clinging tightly to his wife's hand he closed his eyes once more, lay muttering for a time, and then seemed to be fast asleep.

Lady Scarlett kept following the doctor's every movement with her wistful eyes till he said in a whisper: "Let him sleep, and I'll come back presently."

"Don't you leave me, Kate," cried Scarlett, shuddering.

"No, no, dear," she said tenderly; and the poor fellow uttered a low sigh, and remained with his eyes closed, as the doctor softly left the room, beckoning to Aunt Sophia to follow him.

"I'm going to get a prescription made up," he said. "I'll send off the groom on one of the horses; there will be a place open in the town by the time he gets there."

"Stop a moment," said Aunt Sophia, clutching at his arm. "Tell me what, this means. Why is he like this?"

"Oh, it is only the reaction—the shock to his nerves. Poor fellow!" he muttered to himself, "he has been face to face with death."

"Doctor Scales," said Aunt Sophia, with her hand tightening upon his arm—"shock to his nerves! He is not going to be like that patient of yours you spoke of the other day?"

The sun was up, and streaming in upon them where they stood in the plant-bedecked hall, and it seemed as if its light had sent a flash into the soul of John Scales, M.D., as he gazed sharply into his querist's eyes and then shuddered. For in these moments he seemed to see the owner of that delightful English home, him who, but a few hours before, had been all that was perfect in manly vigour and mental strength, changed into a stricken, nerveless, helpless man, clinging to his wife in the extremity of his child-like dread.

For the time being he could not speak, then struggling against the spell that seemed to hold him fast, he cried angrily —

"No, no! Absurd, absurd! Only a few hours' rest, and he'll be himself."

He hurried into the study, and hastily wrote his prescription, taking it out directly to where the groom was just unfastening the stable-doors.

"Ride over to the town, sir? Yes, sir.—But, beg pardon, sir—Sir James, sir? Is he all right?"

"Oh, getting over it nicely, my man. Be quick."

"I'll be off in five minutes, sir," cried the groom; and within the specified time the horse's hoofs were clattering over the stable-yard as the man rode off.

"Like my patient of whom I spoke!" said the doctor to himself. "Oh, it would be too horrible! Bah! What an idiot I am, thinking like that weak old lady there. What nonsense, to be sure!"

But as he re-entered the room softly, and saw the shrinking, horror-stricken look with which at the very slight sound he made his friend started up, he asked himself whether it was possible that such a terrible change could have taken place, and the more he tried to drive the thought away the stronger it seemed to grow, shadowing him like some black mental cloud till he hardly dared to meet the young wife's questioning eyes, as she besought him silently to help her in this time of need.

Volume One—Chapter Thirteen.

After the Mishap.

Such an accident could not occur without the news spreading pretty quickly; and in the course of the morning several of the neighbours drove over to make inquiries, the trouble having been so far magnified that, as it travelled in different directions, the number of drowned had varied from one to half-a-dozen; the most sensational report having it that the pleasure-boat had been sunk as well, and that men were busy at work trying to recover it up by the weir.

The groom had returned; the patient had partaken of his sedative draught and sunk into a heavy sleep, watched by his wife; while the doctor had gone to lie down for a few hours' rest, for, as he said, the excitement was at an end, and all that was needful now was plenty of sleep. Arthur Prayle had betaken himself to the garden, where he read, moralised, and watched John Monnick, who in his turn dug, moralised, and watched the visitor from beneath his

overhanging brows.

Aunt Sophia and Naomi were in the drawing-room reading and answering letters; the former doing the reading, the latter the answering from dictation; for there was a cessation from the visiting that had gone on all the morning.

“Now I do hope they will leave us at peace,” said Aunt Sophia. “Talk, talk, talk, and always in the same strain. I do hate country visiting-calls; and I will not have my correspondence get behind.—Now then, my dear, where were we?”

“East Boodle silver-lead mines,” said Naomi. “Ah, of course. Expect to pay a dividend of twelve and a half per cent?”

“Yes, aunt dear,” said the girl, referring to a prospectus.

“Humph! That’s very different from consols. I think I shall have some of those shares, Naomi.”

“Do you, aunt?”

“Do I, child? Why, of course. It’s like throwing money in the gutter, to be content with three per cent, when you can have twelve and a half. Write and tell Mr Saxby to buy me fifty shares.”

“Yes, aunt dear. But do you think it would be safe?”

“Safe, child? Yes, of course. You read what all those captains said—Captain Pengummon and Captain Trehum and Captain Polwhiddle.”

“But Mr Saxby said, aunt, that some of these Cornish mines were very risky speculations; don’t you remember?”

“No, my dear; I don’t. I wonder that I remember anything, after yesterday’s shock.”

“But I remember, aunt dear,” said the girl. “He said that if these mines would pay such enormous dividends, was it likely that the shares would go begging, and the owners be obliged to advertise to get them taken up.”

“Yes; and Captain Polwhiddle in his printed Report says that there is a lode of unexampled richness not yet tapped; though one would think the silver-lead was in a melted state, for them to have to tap it.”

“Yes, aunt dear; but Mr Saxby said that these people always have a bit of rich ore on purpose to make a show.”

“I don’t believe people would be so dishonest, my dear; and as for Mr Saxby—he’s a goose. No more courage or speculation in him than a frog. Not so much. A frog will travel about and investigate things; while Mr Saxby sits boxed up in his office all day long, and as soon as a good opportunity occurs, he spoils it. I might have made a large fortune by now, if it had not been for him. Write and tell him to buy me a hundred twenty-pound shares.”

The letter was written, read over by Aunt Sophia, in a very judicial manner, through her gold-rimmed eyeglass, approved, and had just been addressed and stamped, when there was the sound of wheels once more, and the servant shortly after announced Lady Martlett.

At the same moment the visitor and Doctor Scales entered the drawing-room from opposite doors, the latter feeling bright and refreshed by his nap; and Aunt Sophia and Naomi looked on wonderingly as Lady Martlett stopped short and the doctor smiled.

Her Ladyship was the first to recover herself, and walked towards Aunt Sophia with stately carriage and extended hand. “I have only just heard of the accident,” she said in a sweet rich voice. “My dear Miss Raleigh, I am indeed deeply grieved.” She bent forward and kissed Aunt Sophia, and then embraced Naomi, before drawing herself up in a stately statuesque manner, darting a quick flash of her fine eyes at the doctor and haughtily waiting to be introduced.

“It’s very kind of you, my dear Lady Martlett,” said Aunt Sophia—“very kind indeed; and I’m glad to say that, thanks to Doctor Scales here, my poor nephew has nearly recovered from the shock.—But I forgot; you have not been introduced. Lady Martlett; Doctor Scales.”

“Doctor Scales and I have had the pleasure of meeting before,” said Lady Martlett coldly.

“Yes,” said the doctor; “I had the pleasure of being of a little assistance to her Ladyship;” and as he spoke he took a sixpence out of his pocket, turned it over, advanced a step with the coin between his finger and thumb, as if about to hand it to its former owner; but instead of doing so, he replaced it in his pocket and smiled.

Lady Martlett apparently paid no heed to this movement, but bowed and turned to Aunt Sophia; while the doctor said to himself: “Now, that was very weak, and decidedly impertinent. I deserved a snub.”

“Doctor Scales and I met last week—the day before—really, I hardly recollect,” said Lady Martlett. “It was while I was out for a morning ride. He was polite enough to open a gate for me.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Aunt Sophia quietly; and she wondered why the visitor should be so impressive about so trifling a matter.

“And now, tell me all about the accident,” said Lady Martlett; “I am so fond of the water, and it seems so shocking for such an innocent amusement to be attended with so much risk.”

“I was always afraid of the water,” said Aunt Sophia; “and not without reason,” she added severely; “but against my own convictions I went.”

“But Sir James is in no danger?”

“O dear, no,” said the doctor quickly.

“I am glad of that,” said the visitor, without turning her head, and taking the announcement as if it had come from Aunt Sophia.

“Thanks to Doctor Scales’s bravery and able treatment,” said Aunt Sophia.

“Pray, spare me,” said the doctor, laughing. “I am so accustomed to blame, that I cannot bear praise.”

“I am not praising you,” said Aunt Sophia, “but telling the simple truth.—What do you say, Naomi?”

“I did not speak, aunt,” replied the girl.

“Tut! child; who said you did?” cried Aunt Sophia pettishly. “You know that the doctor saved your cousin’s life.”

“O yes, indeed,” cried Naomi, blushing, and looking up brightly and gratefully; and then shrinking and seeming conscious, as her eyes met those of their visitor gazing at her with an aspect mingled of contempt and anger—a look that made gentle, little, quiet Naomi retire as it were within herself, closing up her petals like some sensitive bud attacked by sun or rain.

The doctor saw it, and had his thoughts upon the matter, as, upon his threatening to beat a retreat, Aunt Sophia said: “Well, never mind; I can think what I please.”

“Think, then, by all means,” he said merrily.—“Flattery is hard to bear, Lady Martlett.”

“I am not accustomed to flattery,” said the visitor coldly, and she turned away her head.

“That is a fib,” said the doctor to himself, as he watched the handsome woman intently. “You are used to flattery—thick, slab, coarse flattery—to be told that you are extremely beautiful, and to receive adulation of the most abject kind. You are very rich, and people make themselves your slaves, till you think and look and move in that imperious way: and yet, some of these days, *ma belle dame*, you will be prostrate, and weak, and humble, and ready to implore Doctor somebody or another to restore you to health. Let’s see, though. I called you *belle dame*. Rather suggestive, when shortened and pronounced after the old English fashion.—Well, Miss Raleigh, of what are you thinking?” he said aloud, as he turned and found Naomi watching him; Lady Martlett having risen and walked with Aunt Sophia into the conservatory.

“I—I—”

“Ah, ah!” said the doctor, laughing. “Come, confess; no evasions. You must always be frank with a medical man. Now then?”

“You would be angry with me if I were to tell you,” said Naomi.

“Indeed, no. Come, I’ll help you.”

“Oh, thank you—do,” cried the girl with a sigh of relief, which seemed to mean: “You will never guess.”

“You were thinking that I admired Lady Martlett.”

“Yes! How did you know?” cried the girl, starting.

“Diagnosed it, of course!” said the doctor, laughing. “Ah, you don’t know how easily we medical men read sensitive young faces like yours, and—Oh, here they come back.”

In effect, Lady Martlett and Aunt Sophia returned to the drawing-room, the former lady entirely ignoring the presence of the doctor till she left, which she did soon afterwards, leaving the kindest of messages for Lady Scarlett, all full of condolence, and quite accepting the apologies for her non-appearance. Then there was the warmest of partings, while the doctor stood back, wondering whether he was to be noticed or passed over, the latter seeming to be likely; when, just as she reached the door, Lady Martlett turned and bowed in the most distant way.

Then John Scales, M.D., stood alone in the drawing-room, listening to the voices in the hall as the door swung to.

“Humph!” he said to himself. “What a woman! She’s glorious! I like her pride and that cool haughty way of hers! And what a voice!

“No; it won’t do,” he muttered, after a short pause. “I’m not a marrying man—not likely to be a marrying man; and if I were, her Ladyship would say, with all reason upon her side: ‘The fellow must be mad! His insolence and assumption are not to be borne.’

“I wish I had not shown her the sixpence, she will think me quite contemptible.”

“Talking to yourself, doctor?” said Lady Scarlett, entering the room, looking very pale and anxious.

“Yes, Lady Scarlett; it is one of my bad habits.—How is my patient?”

“Sleeping pretty easily,” she said. “I came to ask you to come and look at him, though.”

“What’s the matter?” cried the doctor sharply; and he was half-way to the door as he spoke.

“Nothing, I hope,” exclaimed Lady Scarlett, trembling; “but he alarms me. I—I am afraid that I am quite unnerved.”

The doctor did not make any comment till he had been and examined the patient for a few minutes, Lady Scarlett hardly daring to breathe the while; then he turned to her with a satisfied nod: “Only the sedative. You are over-anxious, and must have some rest.”

This she refused to take, and the doctor had to give way.

Volume One—Chapter Fourteen.

Mr Saxby Comes Down on Business.

The next day and next, Sir James Scarlett seemed to be better. He was pale and suffering from the shock, speaking gravely to all about him, but evidently trying to make the visitors feel at their ease. He pressed them to stay; but the doctor had to get back to town; so had Prayle, though the latter acknowledged the fact with great reluctance; and it was arranged that they were to be driven over to the station together.

That morning at breakfast, however, a visitor was announced in the person of Mr Frederick Saxby.

“Saxby? What does he want?” said Scarlett. “Why, he must have come down from town this morning. Here, I’ll fetch him in.” He rose and left the room, and the doctor noted that his manner was a good deal changed.

“Unpleasant business, perhaps,” he thought: and then, as his eyes met Lady Scarlett’s: “She’s thinking the same.”

Just then Scarlett returned, ushering in a good-looking rather florid man of about thirty-five, over-dressed, and giving the impression, from his glossy coat to his dapper patent-leather boots, that he was something in the City.

“Saxby has come down on purpose to see you, aunt,” said Scarlett. “Trusted to our giving him some breakfast, so let’s go on, and you people can afterwards discuss news.”

Mr Saxby was extremely polite to all before he took his place, bowing deferentially to the ladies, most reverentially to Naomi, and apologetically to the gentlemen; though, as soon as the constraint caused by his coming in as he did had passed, he proved that he really was something in the City, displaying all the sharp dogmatic way of business men, the laying-down-the-law style of speech, and general belief that all the world’s inhabitants are fools—mere children in everything connected with business—always excepting the speaker, who seemed to assume a kind of hidden knowledge concerning all matters connected with sterling coin. He chatted a good deal upon subject that he assumed to be likely to interest his audience—how Egyptians were down, Turkish were up, and Hudson’s Bays were slashing, an expression likely to confuse an unversed personage, who might have taken Hudson’s Bays for some celebrated regiment of horse. He several times over tried to meet Aunt Sophia’s eyes; but that lady rigidly kept them upon her coffee-cup; and not only looked very stern and uncompromising, but gave vent to an occasional sniff, that made Mr Saxby start, as though he looked upon it as a kind of challenge to the fight to come.

Despite the disturbing influences of Aunt Sophia’s sniffs and the proximate presence of Naomi, by whom he was seated, and to whom, in spite of his assumption, he found himself utterly unable to say a dozen sensible words, Mr Frederick Saxby, of the Stock Exchange, managed to partake of a most excellent breakfast—such a meal, in fact, as made Dr Scales glance inquiringly at him, and ask himself questions respecting digestion and the state of his general health.

It was now, as the breakfast party separated, some to enter the conservatory, others to stroll round the garden, that Aunt Sophia met Mr Saxby’s eye, and nodding towards the drawing-room, said shortly: “Go in there!—Naomi, you can come too.”

Mr Saxby heard the first part of Aunt Sophia’s speech as if it were an adverse sentence, the latter part as if it were a reprieve; and after drawing back, to allow the ladies to pass, he found that he was expected to go first, and did so, feeling extremely uncomfortable, and as if Naomi must be criticising his back—a very unpleasant feeling, by the way, to a sensitive man, especially if he be one who is exceedingly particular about his personal appearance, and wonders whether his coat fits, and the aforesaid back has been properly brushed.

Naomi noted Mr Saxby’s uneasiness, and she also became aware of the fact that Arthur Prayle strolled slowly off into the conservatory, where he became deeply interested in the flowers, taking off a dead leaf here and there, and picking up fallen petals, accidentally getting near the open window the while.

“Now, Mr Saxby,” said Aunt Sophia sharply, “you have brought me down those shares?”

“Well, no, Miss Raleigh,” he said, business-like now at once. “I did not buy them because—”

“You did not buy them?”

“No, ma’am. You see, shares of that kind—”

“Pay twelve and fifteen per cent, and I only get a pitiful three.”

“Every year, ma’am, regularly. Shares like those you want me to buy generally promise fifteen, pay at the rate of ten on the first half-year—”

“Well, ten per cent, then,” cried Aunt Sophia.

“Don’t pay any dividend the second half-year, and the shares remain upon the buyer’s hands. No one will take them at any price.”

“Oh, this is all stuff and nonsense, Mr Saxby!” cried Aunt Sophia angrily.

“Not a bit of it, ma’am,” cried the stockbroker firmly.

“But I say it is!” cried Aunt Sophia, with a stamp of her foot. “I had set my mind upon having those shares.”

“And I had set my mind upon stopping you, ma’am. That’s why I got up at six o’clock this morning and came down.”

“Mr Saxby!”

“No use for you to be cross ma’am. Fighting against my own interest in the present; but while I have your business to transact, ma’am, I won’t see your little fortune frittered away.”

“Mr Saxby!” exclaimed Aunt Sophia again.

“I can’t help it, ma’am; and of course you are perfectly at liberty to take your business elsewhere. I want to make all I can out of you by commission and brokerage, etcetera; but I never allow a client of mine to go headlong, and run himself, or herself, down a Cornish mine, without trying to skid the wheels.”

“You forget that you are addressing ladies, Mr Saxby.”

“Beg pardon; yes,” said the stockbroker, trying hard to recall what he had said. “Very sorry; but those are my principles, ma’am.—I’m twenty pounds out of pocket, Miss Raleigh,” he continued, “by not doing this bit of business of your aunt’s.”

“And I think it is a very great piece of presumption on your part, Mr Saxby. You need not address my niece, sir; she does not understand these matters at all. Am I to understand then, that you refuse to buy these shares for me?”

“Yes, ma’am, must distinctly. I wouldn’t buy ’em for a client on any consideration.”

“Very well, sir; that will do,” said Aunt Sophia shortly. “Good-morning.”

“But, my dear madam—”

“I said that will do, Mr Saxby,” said Aunt Sophia stiffly. “Good-morning.”

Mr Saxby’s lips moved, and he seemed to be trying to say something in his own defence, and he also turned towards Naomi, as if seeking for sympathy; but she only cast down her eyes.

“Perhaps Mr Saxby would like to walk round the garden before he goes away,” continued Aunt Sophia, looking at a statuette beneath a glass shade as she spoke. “He will find my nephew and the doctor there.—Naomi, my dear, come with me.”

“Really madam”—began the stockbroker.

“Of course you will charge your expenses for this visit to me, Mr Saxby,” said Aunt Sophia coldly; and without another word she swept out of the room.

“Well, if ever I”—Mr Saxby did not finish his sentence as he stood in the hall, but delivered a tremendous blow right into his hat, checking it in time to prevent injury to the glossy fabric; and then, sticking it sideways upon his head, and his hands beneath his coat-tails, he strolled out into the garden.

Ten minutes later, Aunt Sophia returned into the drawing-room, and as she did so, a tall dark figure rose from where it was bending over a book.

“Bless the man! how you made me jump,” cried Aunt Sophia.

“I beg your pardon—I’m extremely sorry, Miss Raleigh,” said Prayle softly. “I was just looking through that little work.”

“Oh!” said Aunt Sophia shortly.

“By the way, Miss Raleigh—I am sure you will excuse me.”

“Certainly, Mr Prayle, certainly,” said Aunt Sophia, who evidently supposed that the speaker was about to leave the room.

“Thank you,” he said softly. “I only wanted to observe that I am engaged a great deal in the City, and—er—it often falls to my lot—er—to be aware of good opportunities for making investments.”

“Indeed,” said Aunt Sophia.

“Yes; not always, but at times,” continued Prayle. “I thought I would name it to you, as you might perhaps feel disposed to take shares, say, in some object of philanthropic design. I find that these affairs generally pay good

dividends, while the shareholders are perfectly safe."

"Thank you, Mr Prayle," said Aunt Sophia shortly. "I don't know that I have any money to invest."

"Exactly so," exclaimed Prayle. "Of course I did not for a moment suppose that for the present you would have; but still I thought I would name the matter to you. There is some difficulty in obtaining shares of this class. They are apportioned amongst a very few."

"And do they pay a high percentage?"

"Very, very high. The shareholders have been known to divide as much as twenty per cent, amongst them."

"Indeed, Mr Prayle."

"Yes, madam, indeed," said the young man, as solemnly as if it had been some religious question.

"That settles it then," said Aunt Sophia cheerfully.

"My dear madam?"

"If they pay twenty per cent, the thing is not honest."

"My dear madam, I am speaking of no special undertaking," said Prayle; "only generally."

"Special or general," said Aunt Sophia dogmatically, "any undertaking that pays more than five per cent, is either exceptionally fortunate or exceptionally dishonest. Take my advice, Mr Prayle, and if ever you have any spare cash to invest, put it in consols. The interest is low, but it is sure, and whenever you want your money you can get it in an hour without waiting for settling days. There, as you are so soon going, I will say good-morning and good-bye."

She held out her hand, which was taken with a great show of respect, and then they parted.

"The old girl is cunning," said Arthur Prayle to himself; "but she will bite, and I shall land her yet."

"Ugh! How I do hate that smooth, dark, unpleasant man!" said Aunt Sophia, hurrying up to her bedroom. "He always puts me in mind of a slimy snake."

Moved by this idea, Aunt Sophia carefully washed her hands in two different waters, and even went so far as to smell her right hand afterwards, in happy ignorance of the fact that snakes are not slimy, but have skins that are tolerably dry and clean. So she sniffed in an angry kind of way at the hand she washed, though its scent was only that of old brown Windsor soap, which had for the time being, in her prejudiced mind, become an odour symbolical of deceit and all that was base and bad.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, after another good rub, and another sniff; "that's better now."

An hour later, the doctor, Prayle, and Mr Saxby had taken their leave, the last fully under the impression that he had lost a very excellent client.

"Most pragmatical old lady," he said to the doctor.

"Well, she has all the crotchets of an old maid," said Scales. "Ought to have married thirty or forty years ago. I don't dislike her though."

"Humph! I didn't, yesterday, Doctor Scales," said Saxby; "to-day, I'm afraid I do. How she could ever have had such a niece!"

Prayle looked up quickly.

"Ah, it does seem curious," said the doctor with a dry look of amusement on his countenance. "Would it not be more correct to say, one wonders that the young lady could ever have had such an aunt?"

"Eh? Yes! Of course you are right," said Mr Saxby, nodding. "Or, no! Oh, no! That won't do, you know. Impossible. I was right. Eh? No; I was not. Tut—tut! how confusing these relationships are."

Mr Saxby discoursed upon stocks right through the journey up; and Mr Prayle either assumed to, or really did go to sleep, only awakening to take an effusive farewell of his companions at the terminus; while Saxby, to the doctor's discomposure, took his arm, saying, "I'm going your way," and walked by his side, talking of the weather, till, turning suddenly, he said: "I say: fair play's a jewel, doctor. Are we both—eh?—Miss Naomi?"

"What, I?—thinking of her? My dear sir, no!"

"Thank you, doctor. First time I'm ill, I'll come to you. That's a load off my mind!"

"But really, Mr Saxby, you should have asked Mr Prayle that question."

"Eh? What? You don't think so, do you?"

"I should be sorry to pass any judgment upon the matter, Mr Saxby," said the doctor quietly; "and now we part. Good-day."

“Prayle, eh?” said Saxby. “Well, I never thought of him, and—Ah, she’s about the nicest, simplest, and sweetest girl I ever saw! But, Prayle!”

People wondered why the smartly dressed City man stopped short and removed his glossy hat to rub one ear.

Volume One—Chapter Fifteen.

A Wife’s Appeal.

Two months of the life of John Scales passed away, during which he had three opportunities of gaining good additions to his practice, but in each case he set himself so thoroughly in apposition to the medical men with whom he was to be associated, that they one and all combined against him; and the heterodox professor of strange ideas of his own had the satisfaction of learning that his services would be dispensed with.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said to himself. “I’m a deal happier as I am. Strange I haven’t heard from James Scarlett, by the way. I’ll give him a look in at his chambers. That Rosery is a paradise of a place! I wonder how the Diana is that I met—Lady Martlett. If I were an artist, I should go mad to paint her. As I’m a doctor,” he added reflectively, “I should like her as a patient.”

“I shall be ready to believe in being influenced, if this sort of thing goes on,” said the doctor, a couple of hours later, as he read a letter from Lady Scarlett, giving him a long and painful account of his friend’s state of health.

“Had four different doctors down,” read Scales. “Hum—ha, of course—would have asked me to come too, but they refused to meet me. Ha! I’m getting a nice character, somehow. Say they can do no more. Humph! Wonder at that. Growing moral, I suppose. Might have made a twelvemonth’s job of it. Humph! Cousin, Mr Arthur Prayle, been so kind. Given up everything to attend to dear James’s affairs. I shouldn’t like him to have anything to do with mine. Will I come down at once? James wishes it. Well, I suppose I must, poor old chap. They’ve been dosing him to death. Poor old boy! the shock of that drowning could hardly have kept up till now.” The upshot of it was that the doctor ran down that afternoon.

Next morning, on entering the study, he found Lady Scarlett and Prayle seated at the table, the latter leaning towards his cousin’s wife, and apparently pointing to something, in a small clasped book, with the very sharply pointed pencil that he held in his hand.

Prayle started, and shifted his position quickly. Lady Scarlett did not move, beyond looking up at the doctor anxiously, as his stern face was turned towards her.

“I beg your pardon,” he said; “I did not know that you were engaged.”

“Mr Prayle was explaining some business matters to me,” said Lady Scarlett. “Don’t go away. You said you should like to talk to me this morning.”

“Yes,” replied the doctor coldly; “but the business will keep.”

“Oh no; I beg you will not go,” said Lady Scarlett anxiously.

“Perhaps I shall be *de trop*,” said Prayle smoothly, and his voice and looks forbade the idea that they were in the slightest degree malicious.

“Well, as my remarks are for Lady Scarlett alone, Mr Prayle, perhaps you would kindly give me half an hour.”

“Certainly,” cried Prayle, with a great assumption of frankness.—“Lady Scarlett will tell me, perhaps, when she would like to go on with these accounts?”

“Oh, at any time, Arthur,” said Lady Scarlett anxiously. “Pray, do not think I am slighting them: but this seems of so much more importance now.”

“When and where you please,” said Prayle softly. “Don’t study me. I have only my cousin’s interest at heart.” He rose, smiling, and left the room; but the smile passed off Prayle’s countenance as the door closed; and he went out angry-looking and biting his lip, to walk up and down the garden, turning from time to time to the book he held in his hand.

The doctor was very quiet and grave, as he took the chair pointed to by Lady Scarlett; and as he gazed at her rather fixedly, his face seemed to harden.

“I am very glad you have come,” she said. “James seems to be more restful and confident now you are here. He always thought so much of you.”

“We were such old companions: perhaps that is it.”

“Well, you have seen him again this morning. You said I was to give you time. Now, tell me what you think. You find him better?”

“I must be frank with you, Lady Scarlett,” said the doctor. “No; I do not.”

“And I was so hopeful!” said the poor woman piteously.

“It would be folly for me not to speak plainly—I think cruelty. I find him worse.”

Lady Scarlett let her head go down upon her hands, covering her face, and the doctor thought that she was weeping; but at the end of a minute she raised her head again, and looked at her visitor, dry-eyed and pale. “Go on,” she said in a voice full of suppressed pain.

“I cannot, help telling you plainly what I think.”

“No; of course not. Pray, hide nothing from me.”

“Well, it seems to me,” he continued, “that in bringing him back as it were to life, I left part of my work undone.”

“O no!” cried Lady Scarlett.

“Yes: I brought back his body to life and activity, but I seem to have left behind much of his brain. That seems half dead. He is no longer the man he was.”

“No,” sighed Lady Scarlett. “What you say is true; but surely,” she cried, “you can cure him now.”

The doctor remained silent and thoughtful for a few minutes. “I think when I was down here—at the time of the accident—I told you at the table about a patient I was attending—a gentleman suffering from a peculiar nervous ailment.”

“O yes, yes!” cried Lady Scarlett. “I remember. It seems to be burned into my brain, and I’ve lain awake night after night, thinking it was almost prophetic.”

“I’ve thought so too,” said the doctor drily, “though I never fancied that I was going to join the prophets.”

“But you cured your patient?” cried Lady Scarlett anxiously.

“No; I am sorry to say that my efforts, have been vain. It is one of my failures; and I think it would be a pity for me to take up poor Scarlett’s case.”

“But he wishes it—I wish it.”

“You have quite ceased going to Sir Morton Laurent?”

“O yes. He did my husband no good; and the excitement of going up to town—the train—the carriage—and the cab—and then seeing the doctor, always upset him dreadfully. I am sure the visits did him a great deal of harm.”

“Perhaps so, in his nervous state. Maybe, under the circumstances, you were wise to give them up.”

“I am sure I was,” responded Lady Scarlett.

“And the local doctors?”

“He will not see them; he says they aggravate him with their stupid questions. And yet he must have medical advice.”

“How would it be if you took him abroad—say to some one or other of the baths? There you would get change of air, scene, the tonic waters for him to drink, and medical attendance on the spot.”

“No, no; no, no; it is impossible! You shall judge for yourself,” cried Lady Scarlett. “He would never bear the change. You will find that he is only satisfied when he is here at home—safe, he calls it, within the garden fence. He will not stir outside, and trembles even here at the slightest sound.”

“But surely we could hit upon some clever medical man who would be able to manage his case with skill, and in whom my poor friend would feel confidence.”

“Whom could I find? How could I find one?” exclaimed Lady Scarlett. “There is no one but you to whom I can appeal.”

“Is this truth, or acting?” thought Scales. “Why does she want me here?”

“I have thought it all out so carefully,” continued Lady Scarlett. “You see he is alarmed at the very idea of a doctor coming near him.”

“And yet you bring me here.”

“Yes; you are his old schoolfellow, and he will welcome you as a friend. The fact of your being a doctor will not trouble him.”

“I see,” said Scales.

“Then, while being constantly in his company, you can watch every change.”

“Nice treacherous plan, eh, Lady Scarlett!” said the doctor, laughing.

“Don’t call it that,” she said pitifully. “It is for his good.”

“Yes, yes; of course—of course. It’s only giving him his powder in jam after all. But, tell me, if I agree to take his case

in hand—”

“Which you will?” interrupted Lady Scarlett.

“I don’t know yet,” he replied drily. “But supposing I do: how often would you want me to come down here?”

“How often?” echoed the lady, with her eyes dilating. “I meant for you to come and live here until he is well.”

“Phee-ew!” whistled the doctor, and he sat back in his chair thinking and biting his nails. “What does she mean?” he thought. “Am I too hard upon her? Is my dislike prejudice, or am I justified in thinking her a woman as deceitful as she is bad? If I am right, I am wanted down here to help some one or other of her plans. I won’t stop. I’m sorry for poor Scarlett, and I might do him good, but—”

“You have considered the matter, and you will stay, doctor, will you not?” said Lady Scarlett sweetly.

“No, madam; I do not think it would be fair to any of the parties concerned.”

“Doctor!” she cried appealingly, “oh, pray, don’t say that. Forgive me if I speak plainly. Is it a question of money? If it is, pray, speak. I’d give up half of what we have for my husband to be restored.”

“No, madam,” said the doctor bluntly; “it is not a question of money. Several things combine to make me decline this offer; principally, I find a want of confidence in undertaking so grave a responsibility.”

“Doctor!” cried Lady Scarlett, rising and standing before him, with one hand resting upon the table, “you are trying to deceive me.”

“Indeed, madam—”

“You never liked me, doctor, from the hour I was engaged; you have never liked me since.”

“My dear Lady Scarlett!—”

“Listen to me, doctor. A woman is never deceived upon such points as this; she as readily notes the fact when a man dislikes as when he admires her. It is one of the gifts of her sex.”

“I was not aware of it,” said the doctor coldly, “but I will take it that it is so.”

“I have never injured you, doctor.”

“Never, madam.”

“I have, for my dear husband’s sake, always longed to be your friend; but—be frank with me, doctor, as I am with you—you never gave me a place in your esteem.”

The doctor was silent.

“I don’t know why,” continued Lady Scarlett, with tears in her eyes, “for I have always tried to win you to my side; but you have repelled me. You have been friendly and spoken kindly; but there was always a something behind. Doctor, why is all this—No; stop! Don’t speak to me—don’t say a word. What are my poor troubles, or your likes and dislikes, in the face of this terrible calamity? You dislike me, Doctor Scales. I do not dislike you; for I believe you to be an honourable man. Let us sink all our differences. No, I beg—I pray of you to stop here—to give up everything else to the study of my poor husband’s case. My only hope is in you.”

As she made this appeal with an intensity of earnestness that was almost dramatic in its tone and action, the doctor imitated her movement and rose to his feet.

“Lady Scarlett,” he said coldly, “you are excited now, and you have said several things that perhaps would have been as well left unsaid. I will not reply to them; for I agree with you that the question of Sir James Scarlett’s health and restoration is one that should sweep away all petty differences. I trust that I have always treated my poor friend’s wife with the greatest respect and deference, and that I always shall.”

“Yes, yes,” replied Lady Scarlett sadly; “deference and respect;” and as she gazed at him, there was a pained and wistful look in her suffused eyes that seemed to make him hesitate for the moment; but as she added, rather bitterly—“that is all,” the way to his heart, that was beginning to open a little, reclosed, and he said sternly:

“No; I feel certain that it would be far better that I should not monopolise the treatment of my friend’s case, and that—”

“Hush!” exclaimed Lady Scarlett quickly, for the door opened, and the object of their conversation, looking thin, pale, and with a scared and anxious expression on his countenance, came quickly into the room.

“Ah, Jack, here you are, then!” he exclaimed. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere. Here, come and sit and talk to me.”

“All right,” said the doctor, in his blunt way. “What do you say to having out the ponies and giving me a drive?”

“Drive?—a drive?” repeated Scarlett uneasily. “No, no. It is not fine enough.”

“Lovely, my dear fellow, as soon as you get outside.”

“No; not to-day, Jack. Don’t ask me,” said Scarlett excitedly, as his wife sat down and took up a piece of work. “The ponies are too fresh. They’ve done nothing lately, and one of them has developed a frightfully vicious temper. I shall have to sell them.”

“Let’s go on the water, then; a row would do you good.”

Lady Scarlett darted an imploring look at the doctor; but if intended to stay his speech it came too late.

“Row? No!” said Scarlett with a shudder. “I never go on the water now. My left wrist is so weak, I am afraid I have somehow sprained one of the tendons. Don’t ask me to row.”

Lady Scarlett darted a second imploring look at the doctor, and he read it, as it seemed to him, to say: “Pray, don’t allude to the water;” but it was part of his endeavour to probe his friend’s mental wound to the quick, and he went on: “Laziness, you sybaritish old humbug! Very well, then; I’ll give up the rowing, and we’ll have the punt, and go and fish.”

“Impossible; the water is too thick, and I don’t think there are any baits ready.”

“How tiresome!” said the doctor. “I had made up my mind for a try at the barbel before I went back.”

“Before you went back?” cried Scarlett excitedly; and he caught his friend by the arm—“before you went back! What do you mean?”

“Mean, old fellow? Why, before I went back to London.”

“Why, you’re not thinking of going back—of leaving me here alone—of leaving me—me—er—” He trailed off, leaving his sentence unfinished, and stood looking appealingly at his friend.

“Why, my dear boy, what nonsense you are talking,” replied Scales. “Leave you—alone? Why, man, you’ve your aunt and your relatives. There’s your cousin out there now.”

“Yes, yes—of course—I know. But don’t go, Jack. I’m—I’m ill. I—I want you to set.—to set me right. Don’t—don’t go and leave me, Jack.”

“Now, there’s a wicked old impostor for you, Lady Scarlett!” cried the doctor, going close up to his friend, catching him by both shoulders, giving him a bit of a shake, and then patting him on the chest and back. “Not so stout as he was, but sound as a roach. Lungs without a weak spot. Heart pumping like a steam-engine—eyes clear—skin as fresh as a daisy—and tongue as clean. Get out, you sham Abram! pretending a pain to get me to stay!”

“Yes, of course I’m quite well—quite well, Jack; but a trifle—just a trifle low. I thought you’d stop with me, and take—take care of me a bit and put me right. I’m—I’m so lonely down here now.”

Lady Scarlett did not speak; but there was a quiver of the lip, and a look in her eyes as she turned them upon the doctor, that disarmed him.

“She does care for him,” he said to himself. “She must care for him.”

“I tell you what it is,” he said aloud; “you’ve been overdoing it in those confounded greenhouses of yours. Too much hot air, moist carbonic acid gas, and that sort of thing.—Lady Scarlett, he has been thinking a deal more of his melons than of his health.”

“Yes; he does devote a very, very great deal of attention to them,” assented Lady Scarlett eagerly.

“To be sure, and it is not good for him.—You must go up to town more and attend to business.”

“Yes, of course; I mean to—soon,” said Scarlett, with his eyes wandering from one to the other.

“Here, you must beg off with Lady Scarlett, and come up with me.”

“With you? What! to town?”

“To be sure; and we’ll have a regular round of dissipation: Monday pops; the opera; and Saturday concerts at the Crystal Palace. What do you say?”

“No!” said Scarlett, in a sharp, harsh, peremptory way. “I am not going to town again—at present.”

“Nonsense, man I—Tell him he may come, Lady Scarlett.”

“Oh yes, yes; I should be glad for him to go!” cried Lady Scarlett eagerly; and then she shrank and coloured as she saw the doctor’s searching look.

“There, you hear.”

“Yes, I hear; but I cannot go. The glass-houses could not be left now.”

“What, not to our old friend Monnick?”

“No; certainly not; no,” cried Scarlett hastily. “Come out now—in the garden, Jack. I’ll show you.—Are you very busy in town—much practice?”

“Practice?” cried Scales, laughing, and thoroughly off his guard as to himself. “Not a bit, my dear boy. I’m a regular outcast from professional circles. No practice for me.”

“Then there is nothing to take you back,” cried Scarlett quickly, “and you must stay.—Kate, do you hear? I say he must stay!”

There was an intense irritation in his manner as he said these words, and his wife looked up in a frightened way.

“Yes, yes, dear. Of course Doctor Scales will stay.”

“Then why don’t you ask him?” he continued in the same irritable manner. “A man won’t stop if the mistress of the house slights him.”

“But, my dear James,” cried Lady Scarlett, with the tears in her eyes, “I have not slighted Doctor Scales. On the contrary, I was begging that he would stay when you came in.”

“Why?—why?” exclaimed Scarlett, with increasing excitement. “You must have had some reason. Do you hear? Why did you ask him to stay?”

“Because I knew you wished it,” said Lady Scarlett meekly; “and I thought it would do you good to have him with you for a time, dear.”

“Do me good! Such sickly nonsense! Just as if I were ill. You put me out of patience, Kate; you do indeed. How can you be so childish!—Come into the garden, Jack. I’ll be back directly I’ve got my cigar-case.”

“Shall I fetch it, dear?” asked Lady Scarlett eagerly.

“No; of course not. Any one would think I was an invalid;” and he left the room.

“Lady Scarlett,” said the doctor, as soon as they were alone, “I will stay.”

“God bless you!” she cried, with a burst of sobbing; and she hurried away.

Volume One—Chapter Sixteen.

Brother William at Home.

Brother William went very regularly to the Scarletts, and took Fanny’s magazines, handing them to her always with an air of disgust, which resulted in their being snatched angrily away. Then he would sit down, and in due time partake of tea, dwelling over it, as it were, in a very bovine manner—the resemblance being the stronger whenever there was watercress or lettuce upon the table. In fact, there was something remarkably ruminative in Brother William’s slow, deliberate, contemplative way; while, to carry on the simile, there was a something almost in keeping in the manners of Martha Betts—a something that while you looked at the well-nurtured, smooth, pleasant, quiet woman, set the observer thinking of Lady Scarlett’s gentle Jersey cows, that came up, dewy lipped and sweet breathed, to blink and have their necks patted and ears pulled by those they knew.

Injustice to Martha Betts, it must be said that she never allowed her neck to be patted nor her ears pulled by Brother William; and what was more, that stout yeoman farmer would never for a moment have thought of presuming to behave so to the lady of his choice; for that she was the lady of his choice he one day showed. It was a pleasant afternoon, and Brother William had been greatly enjoying a delicious full-hearted lettuce that John Monnick had brought in expressly for the servants’ tea. Perhaps it was the lettuce which inspired the proposal that was made during the temporary absence of Fanny from the tea-table.

“Pretty girl, Fanny; ain’t she, Martha?”

“Very; but I would not tell her so. She knows it quite enough.”

“She do,” said Brother William; “and it’s a pity; but I’m used to it. She always was like that, from quite a little un; and it frets me a bit when I get thinking about her taking up with any one. You don’t know of any one, do you?”

“Not that she’s taken with,” said Martha, in the quietest way. “There’s the ironmonger’s young man, and Colonel Sturt’s Scotch gardener; but Fanny won’t notice them.”

“No,” said Brother William, biting a great half-moon out of a slice of bread-and-butter, and then looking at it regretfully, as much as to say: “See what havoc I have made.”—“No, she wouldn’t. I don’t expect she’ll have any one at all.”

“Oh, there’s no knowing,” said Martha, refilling the visitor’s cup.

“No; there’s no knowing,” assented Brother William; and there was silence for a few minutes.

“You’ve never been over to see my farm, Martha Betts,” said Brother William, then.

“No; I have never been,” assented Martha in her quiet way.

“I should like you to come over alone, and see it,” said Brother William; “but I know you wouldn’t.”

"*No*; I would not," said Martha.—"Was your last cup sweet enough?"

"Just right," said Brother William thoughtfully.—"But you would come along with Fanny, and have tea, and look round at the beasts and the crops?"

"Yes," said Martha, in the most matter-of-fact manner, as if the proposal had not the least interest for her. "But Fanny would not care to come."

"I'll make her," said Brother William quietly; and he went on ruminating and gazing sleepily at the presiding genius of the tea-table. Then Fanny came back, took a magazine from her pocket, and went on reading and partaking of her tea at the same time, till Brother William said suddenly: "Fanny, I've asked Martha Betts and you to come over to tea o' Friday, at the farm. Be in good time. I'll walk back with you both."

Fanny looked up sharply, and was about to decline the honour, when a thought that made her foolish little heart beat, and a quiet but firm look from her brother's eye, altered her intention, and she, to Martha's surprise, said calmly: "Oh, very well. We will be over by four—if we can get leave."

There was no difficulty about getting leave, for Fanny took the first opportunity of asking her mistress, and that first opportunity was one day when Lady Scarlett was busy in the study with Arthur Prayle.

Lady Scarlett looked up as the girl paused and hesitated, after taking in a letter; and Arthur Prayle also looked up and gazed calmly at the changing colour in the handsome face.

"What is it, Fanny?" said Lady Scarlett.

"I was going to ask, ma'am, if I might go with Martha—on Friday—to my brother's farm—to tea. My brother would bring us back by ten; or if you liked, ma'am, I could come back alone much sooner, if you wanted me."

"Oh, certainly, Fanny. You can go. I like you to have a change sometimes."

"And shall I come back, ma'am—about nine?" said the girl eagerly.

"O no; certainly not," replied Lady Scarlett. "Come back with Martha, under your brother's charge. I don't think you ought to come back alone."

Lady Scarlett inadvertently turned her face in the direction of Prayle, as she spoke, and found his eyes fixed upon her gravely, as he rested his elbows on the table and kept his finger-tips together.

"Certainly not," he said softly. "You are quite right, I think;" and he bowed his head in a quiet serious manner, as if giving the matter his entire approval.

Fanny said, "Thank you, ma'am;" and it might have been supposed that this extension of time would have afforded her gratification; but an analyst of the human countenance would have said that there was something almost spiteful in the look which she bestowed upon Arthur Prayle, as she was about to leave the room.

In due time the visit was paid, Fanny and Martha bestowing no little attention on their outward appearance; and upon crossing the bridge and taking the meadow-path, they were some little distance from the farm, when Brother William encountered them, with a very shiny face, as if polished for the occasion, and a rose in the button-hole of his velveteen coat.

"How are you, Martha Betts?" he said, with a very bountiful smile; and he shook hands almost too heartily to be pleasant, even to one whose fingers were pretty well hardened with work.—"How are you, Fanny, lass?" he continued; and he was about to bestow upon the graceful well-dressed little body a fraternal hug and a kiss, but she repelled him.

"No; don't, William. There that will do. I'm very glad to see you; but I wish you wouldn't be such a bear."

"Bear, eh?" said Brother William, with a disappointed look. "Why, I was only going to kiss you, lass. All right," he said, smiling again. "But she mustn't think of having a sweetheart, Martha Betts, or he'll be wanting to hug her too."

Brother William's face was a study as he let off this, to his way of thinking, very facetious remark. His bountiful smile expanded into an extremely broad grin, and he looked to Martha Betts for approval, but only to encounter so stern and grave a look, that his smile grew stiff, then hard, then faded away into an expression of pain, which in turn gave way to one that was stolid solemnity frozen hard.

"It's a nice day, ain't it?" he said at last, to break the unpleasant silence that had fallen upon the little group, as they walked on between hedges bright with wild-roses, and over which the briony twined its long strands and spread its arrowy leaves. There was the scent of the sweet meadow-plant as it raised its creamy blossoms from every moist ditch; and borne on the breeze came the low sweet music of the weir.

But somehow these various scents, sights, and sounds had grown common to the little party, or else their thoughts were on other matters, for Fanny the pretty seemed to be looking eagerly across the meadow towards the river and down every lane, as if expecting to see some one on the way towards them. From time to time she hung back, to pick and make little bouquets of wild-flowers, but only to throw them pettishly away, as she found that her brother and fellow-servant kept coming to a full stop till she rejoined them, when they went on once more.

As for Brother William and Martha, they diligently avoided looking at one another, while their conversation was confined to a few words, and those were mostly from Brother William, who said on each of these occasions: "Hadn't

we best wait for Fanny?”

To which Martha Betts responded: “Well, I suppose we had.”

Martha seemed in nowise delighted with the appearance of the pretty cottage farm, with its low thick thatch and dense ivy, which covered the walls like a cloak. Neither was she excited by the sight of the old-fashioned garden, gay with homely flowers; but she did accept a rosebud, and a sprig of that pleasant herbaceous plant which Brother William called “Old Man,” pinning them tightly at the top of her dress with a very large pin, which her host took out of the edge of his waistcoat.

“That *is* a pretty dress,” he said admiringly. “One o’ my favourite colours. There’s nowt like laylock and plum.”

“I’m glad you like it,” said Martha quietly; and she then followed Brother William into the clean, homely keeping-room, where Joe’s wife—Joe being one of Brother William’s labourers—who did for him, as he expressed it, had prepared the tea, which was spread upon one of the whitest of cloths. Beside the ordinary preparations for the infusion of the Chinese leaf, there was an abundance of country delicacies—ham of the host’s own growing and curing; rich moist radishes; the yellowest of butter, so sweetly fresh as to be scented; the brownest of loaves, and the thickest of cream.

Martha looked round at the bright homely furniture of the room, the bees’-waxed chairs, the polished bureau of walnut inlaid with brass, the ancient eight-day clock, and the side-table with its grey-and-red check cotton cover, highly decorated tea-tray, set up picture-fashion, and a few books.

“Ah,” said Brother William, seeing the direction of his visitor’s eyes, “I haven’t got many books. That’s the owd Bible. Got mine and Fanny’s birthdays in. That’s mother’s owd hymn-book; and here’s a book here, if you like. If Fanny would lay that up by heart, ’stead o’ reading them penny gimcracks, she’d be a-doing herself some good.” As he spoke, he took up a well-used old book in a brown cover, which opened easily in his hand. “That’s Bowcroft’s *Farmer’s Compendium*, that is. I’ll lend it to you, if you like. Stodge-full of receipts for cattle-drinks and sheep-dressings; and there’s a gardener’s calendar in it too. I wouldn’t take fi’ pound for that book, Martha. There ain’t many like it, even up at Sir James Scarlett’s, I’ll be bound. That’s litrichur, that is.”

Fanny did not enter with them. She preferred to have a good look at the garden, she said; and she lingered there for some time, her “good look at the garden” taking in a great many protracted looks up and down the lane, each of which was followed by a disappointed frown and a sigh.

“Won’t you take off your bonnet and jacket, Martha Betts?” said Brother William. “You can go up to Fanny’s old bedroom, or you can hang ’em up behind the door on the Peg.”

Martha thought she would hang them up on the peg that was behind the door; and Brother William looked stolidly on, but in an admiring way, as he saw the quick deft manner in which his visitor divested herself of these outdoor articles of garb, made her hair smooth with a touch, and then brought out an apron from her pocket, unrolled it, and from within, neatly folded so that it should not crease, one of those natty little scraps of lace that are pinned upon the top of the head and called by courtesy a cap.

“Hah!” said Brother William, as the cap was adjusted and the apron fastened on; “the kettle is byling, but we may as well look round before you make the tea.”

“Thank you,” said Martha calmly.

“This is the washus,” said Brother William, opening a door to display a particularly clean whitewashed place, with red—brick floor. There was a copper in one corner; at one side, a great old-fashioned open fireplace with clumsy iron dogs, and within this fireplace, in what should have been the chimney corner, an iron door, nearly breast high.

“That’s the brick oven,” said Brother William, noticing the bent of his visitor’s eyes. “We burn fuzz in it mostly; but any wood does. Them hooks is when we kill a pig. The water in that there pump over the sink’s soft: there’s a big tank outside. That other pump you see through the window’s the drinking-water. It never gets dry. Nice convenient washus; isn’t it?”

“Very,” said Martha quietly; “only there ought to be a board put down front of the sink, for a body to stand on.”

“There is one outside. Mrs Badley must ha’ left it there when she cleaned up,” cried Brother William eagerly; and Martha said “Oh!”

Then he led the way back into the keeping-room, and opened a second door, while Martha’s quick eyes were taking in everything, not an article of furniture escaping her gaze; not that she was admiring or calculating their quality or value, but as if she were in search of some particular thing that so far she had found absent; this object being a spot of dirt.

“This here’s the dairy,” said Brother William, entering, and holding open the double doors of the cool, dark, shady place—brick-floored, like the washhouse, but with a broad erection of red-brick all round like a rough dresser, upon which stood rows of white-lined pans, with a large white table in the middle, and the churn, scales, and beaters, and other utensils used in the preparation of the butter, along with the milk-pails at one end.

Martha’s wandering eyes were as badly off as Noah’s dove in the early days after the flood; they could find no place to rest, for everything was scrupulously clean. The cream looked thick and heavy and almost tawny in its yellowness; and upon two large dishes were a couple of dozen rolls of delicious-looking butter, reposing beneath a piece of while muslin, ready for taking to market on the following day.

“Myste and cool, isn’t it?” said Brother William. “You see it’s torst the north, and I’ve got elder-trees to shade the window as well.”

Martha nodded, and continued her search for that spot of dirt which her reason told her must be somewhere; but certainly it was not hiding there.

“There’s four cows in full milk now, Martha. Cream’s rich; isn’t it? Wait a moment.”

“Where do you get your hot-water to scald the churn and things?” said Martha sharply, checking Brother William as he was moving towards the open door.

“There’s a big byler in the kitchen,” said Brother William, eager to make the best of things; and then, as Martha said no more, but went on with her dirt quest, he left the dairy, and came back directly after with an old-fashioned, much worn, silver tablespoon.

“I thought you wouldn’t mind tasting the cream, Martha. This here is ’bout the freshest,” he said, going to one of the broad shallow pans, inserting the spoon, which, Martha had seen at a glance, was beautifully clean, and gently drawing the cream sidewise, so that it crinkled all over, so thick was it and rich, and the spoon came out piled up as it were with the luscious produce of the little farm.

Martha’s face was perfectly solemn, as she watched Brother William’s acts, and she did not move a muscle till he spoke.

“Open your mouth,” he said seriously—“Wide.”

Martha obeyed, and did open her mouth—wide, for it was rather a large mouth; but the lips were well shaped and red, and the teeth within were even and white.

Brother William carefully placed the spoonful of cream within; and Martha closed her lips, solemnly imbibing the luscious spoonful, when, as a small portion was left visible at one corner, Brother William carefully removed it with an orange silk pocket-handkerchief; and Martha quietly said: “Thank you.”

“Would you like to look at the cows now, or have tea?” said Brother William; whereupon Martha opined that it would be better to have tea, as Fanny would be expecting them.

But Fanny was evidently not expecting them, and did not come in until Martha had made the tea and cut the bread-and-butter, Brother William leaning his arms on the back of the big, well bees’-waxed Windsor chair, and gazing at her busy fingers, as she spread the yellow butter and cut a plateful of slices.

“Seems just as if you were doing it at home,” said Brother William; “only it looks nicer here.”

Then Fanny was summoned, and Martha made way for her to preside at the tea-tray.

“No; you’d better pour out,” the girl said absently. “I’d rather sit here.”

“Here” was where she could see through the open window out into the road; and there she sat while the meal was discussed, little attention being paid to her by her brother, who divided his time between eating heartily himself, and pressing slices of ham upon Martha, who took her place in the most matter-of-fact way, and supplied her host’s wants, which were frequent, as the teacups were very small. In fact, so occupied with their meal were Brother William and Martha, that they did not notice a slow, deliberate step in the road, passing evidently down the lane; neither did they see that Fanny’s face, as she bent lower over her cup, became deeply suffused, and that she did not look up till the step had died away, when she uttered a low sigh, as if a burden had been removed from her breast.

After that, though, they did notice that she became brighter and more willing to enter into conversation, seeming at last to take quite an interest in her brother’s account of the loss of a sheep through its getting upside down in a ditch; and she also expressed a feeling of satisfaction upon hearing that hay would fetch a good price in the autumn, so many people having had theirs spoiled.

“Never mind me,” said Fanny, as soon as, between them, she and Martha had put away the tea-things: “I shall go into the garden and look round.”

Brother William evidently did not mind her, for, in his slow deliberate way, he took off Martha to introduce her to the cows; after which she had to scrape acquaintance with the pigs, visit the poultry, who were somewhat disturbed, inasmuch as they were settling themselves in the positions that they were to occupy for the night, and made no little outcry in consequence. Then there were the sheep; and there was last year’s haystack, and this year’s, both of which had to be smelt, Brother William pulling out a good handful from each, to show Martha that there was not a trace of damp in either. This done, a happy thought seemed to strike Brother William, who turned to Martha and exclaimed: “I wonder whether you could churn?”

“Let’s try,” said Martha, with the air of one who would have made the same answer if it had been the question of making a steam-engine or a watch.

Brother William gave one of his legs a vigorous slap, and marched Martha back into the house, through into the dairy. Then he fetched a can of hot-water to rinse out and warm the churn. There was a pot of lumpy cream already waiting, and this was carefully poured in, the lid duly replaced, with the addition of a cloth, to keep the cream from splashing out, and then he stood and watched Martha, who was busily pinning up her dress all round. She then turned up her sleeves and took out a clean pocket-handkerchief, which she folded by laying one corner across to the other, and then tied it over her head and under her chin, making her pleasant comely face look so provocative, that

Brother William drew a long breath, took a step forward, and was going to catch Martha in his arms; but he recollected himself in time, gave a slew round, and caught hold of the churn handle instead, and this he began to turn steadily round and round, as if intending to play a tune.

“I thought *I* was to make it,” said Martha quietly.

“Oh, ah, yes, of course,” he said, resigning the handle; and then he drew back, as if it was not safe for him to stand there and watch, while Martha steadily turned and turned, and the cream within the snowy white sycamore box went “wish-wash, wish-wash, wish-wash,” playing, after all, a very delicious tune in the young farmer’s ears, for it suggested yellow butter, and yellow butter suggested sovereigns, and sovereigns suggested borne comforts and savings, and above all, the turning of that handle suggested the winning of just the very wife to occupy that home.

Five minutes, and there was a glow of colour in Martha’s cheeks. Five minutes more, and the colour was in her brow as well.

“You are tired now,” said Brother William. “Let me turn.”

“No; I mean to make it,” she replied, tightening her lips and turning steadily away.

Another five minutes, and there was a very red spot on Martha’s chin, and her lips were apart; but she turned away, with Brother William quite rapt in admiration at the patient perseverance displayed; and in fact, if it had been a question of another hour, Martha would have kept on turning till she dropped. She did not speak, neither did Brother William; but his admiration increased. Their eyes never met, for Martha’s were fixed steadfastly upon one particular red-brick; not that it was dirty, for it was of a brighter red than the others; and she turned and turned, first with one hand, then with the other, till there was a change in the “wish-wash, wish-wash” in the churn, and then Brother William exclaimed: “That’s done it! Butter!”

“Hah!” ejaculated Martha, with a heavy sigh, and her breath came all the faster for the exertion.

“Look at it!” cried Brother William, taking the lid off the churn. “Can you see?”

Martha was rather short; hence, perhaps, it was that Brother William placed his arm round her waist to raise her slightly; and he was not looking at the butter, and Martha was not looking at it either, but up at him, as he bent down a little lower, and somehow, without having had the slightest intention of doing so the moment before, Brother William gave Martha a very long and solemn kiss.

She shrank away from him the next moment, and looked up at him reproachfully. “You shouldn’t,” she said. “It’s so wrong.”

“Is it?” he said dolefully. “I’m very sorry. I couldn’t help it, Martha. You made the butter so beautifully. Don’t be cross.”

“I’m not cross,” she said, untying the handkerchief, and then proceeding to take out the pins from her dress, holding them between her lips, points outwards; “only you mustn’t do so again.”

Brother William said: “Well, I won’t;” and then, as the pins were taken from Martha’s red lips—so great is the falsity of man—he bent down and let his lips take the place of the pins, and Martha said never a word.

“Joe’s wife said yesterday that she didn’t mean to come and do for me much longer,” said Brother William suddenly.

“Why not?” said Martha.

“Because she said I’d best ask you.”

“And are you going to ask me, William?”

“Yes. When will you come altogether?” he said softly.

Martha glanced round once more, as if in search of that spot of dirt which would keep eluding her search. Then she raised her eyes to Brother William’s shirt front with a triumphant flash, feeling sure that she would see a button off, or a worn hole; but there was neither; and when she turned her eyes upon his hands, the wristbands were not a bit frayed.

“I don’t know,” she said dubiously. “Do you want me to come?”

He nodded, and they went out of the dairy into the sitting room.

“I’ll tell Fanny,” he said. “I hope she’ll be pleased.”

But Fanny was not there; and when they went into the garden, she was not there either, nor yet in the orchard.

“She must have gone down the lane,” said Brother William—“down towards the river. Let’s go and see.”

They went out together, with Martha making no scruple now about holding on by Brother William’s sturdy arm. But though they walked nearly down to the river, Fanny was not there.

“She’ll be cross, and think we neglected her,” said Martha. “I am sorry we went away.”

“I’m not,” said Brother William, trying to be facetious for the second time that evening. “We’ve made half a dozen

pounds o’ butter, and a match.”

Martha shook her head.

“Let’s go back and see if she went up to the wood,” cried Brother William.

“She’s reading somewhere,” said Martha as they walked back, to find Fanny standing by the gate, looking slightly flushed and very pretty, ready to smile and banter them for being away so long.

They soon ended the visit to the farm; for, after partaking of supper, and eating one of Brother William’s own carefully grown lettuces, they walked slowly back, in the soft moist evening air, to the Rosery, when, during the leave-takings, Brother William said: “Fanny, Martha’s going to be my wife.”

“Is she?” said Fanny indifferently. “Oh!” And then to herself: “Poor things! What a common, ordinary-looking woman Martha is. And Brother William—Ah, what a degrading life this is!”

The degradation did not seem to affect the others, for Brother William’s cheeks quite shone, and the high lights on Martha’s two glossy smooth hands of hair seemed to be brighter than ever.

“Good-night,” said Brother William. “Good-night, Martha.”

“Good-night, William.”

“You’ll keep a sharp eye on Fanny till I fetch you away; won’t you?”

“I always do, William; but I’m afraid her eyes are sharper than mine.”

“What do you mean?” he said quietly.

“I’m afraid she’s got a sweetheart.”

“Who is it?” said Brother William sternly.

“I don’t know yet. Sometimes I think it’s a real one, and sometimes I think it’s all sham—only one out of her magazines that she talks about; but I’m not sure.”

“Then look here, Martha: you’ve got to be sure,” said Brother William, who was as business-like now as if he had been selling his hay. “You’ve got to make sure, and tell me, for I’m not going to have anybody play the fool with her. If any one does, there’ll be something the matter somewhere;” and shaking his head very fiercely, Brother William strode away, giving a thump with his stick at every step along the road.

End of Volume One.

Volume Two—Chapter One.

Aunt Sophia Visits the City.

Mr Fred. Saxby stopped in front of the Royal Exchange one morning to buy a rose, and spent some time in selecting it. Red ones would not do; yellow he despised. He wanted a delicate white rose, with a dash of blush pink upon its petals; and when he had discovered one, he made no scruple about paying the flower-girl sixpence and carrying it off with the greatest care to deposit in a glass upon his desk, for reasons known only to himself.

He had rather a busy morning in his close, cool, dark office, in a court out of Throgmorton Street—an office where the light of day had a struggle every morning to get down between two tall piles of building, and illumine the room, failing dismally seven or eight months out of the twelve, and leaving the stockbroker to the tender mercies of his gas company and the yellow flame that danced within a globe.

Mr Saxby’s room was “as clean as hands could make it,”—the housekeeper’s words—but all the same it did not seem clean. There was a dingy look about everything, excepting the rose he bought every morning, and himself. In one part of the room was a tiny machine, untouched save by electricity, which went on, unwinding, inking its letters and stamping mile after mile of tape-like paper, informing the reader the while that the shares of this railway were up, of that down; that foreign stocks had made this change, consols were at that, and so on, and so on, while the occupant of the office paid not the slightest heed, but divided his attention between the *Times* and the rose.

Just in the midst of one of his most earnest inspections of the flower, during which he took a long soft inhalation of its odorous breath, a clerk entered with a card. “Miss Raleigh, sir.”

“Bless my heart!” ejaculated the stockbroker, hastily setting down the rose, for the act of smelling it had taken him down to a velvet lawn, sloping to the riverside; and upon that lawn he had seemed to see some one walking, wearing a similar rose; but it was not the lady who now entered, and of whom he had heard nothing since he warned her not to venture in the Cornish mine.

“Good-morning, Miss Raleigh,” he exclaimed, placing a chair. “I hardly expected to see you.”

“Why not?” said Aunt Sophia shortly. “Where did you expect I should go?”

“I hope you are well, ma’am, and—Sir James and Lady Scarlett?”

“No; I’m not well; I’m worried,” said the lady. “Sir James and Lady Scarlett are both ill. Has—But never mind that now. Look here, Mr Saxby; you always give me very bad advice, and you seem determined not to let me get good interest for my money. Now, tell me this, sir. I have been receiving a great many circulars lately about different excellent investments; above all, several about gold mines in the north of India.”

“So I suppose, ma’am,” said Mr Saxby rubbing his hands softly.

“And I suppose you will say that they are not good; but here is one that I received yesterday which cannot fail to be right. I want some shares in that.”

“And you won’t have one, ma’am,” said Mr Saxby, who was far more autocratic in his own office than at a friend’s house.

“What! are they all sold?”

“Sold? Pooh! ma’am, hardly any. There are not many people lunatics enough to throw their money into an Indian gold mine.”

“Saxby, you are the most obstinate, aggravating man I ever *did* know. Look here; will not these figures convince you?”

“No, ma’am; only make me more obstinate—more aggravating still.”

“Then what do these figures mean?”

“Mean, madam? To trap spinster ladies with small incomes, half-pay officers, poor clergymen with miserable livings—the whole lot of poor genteel people, and those who like to dabble in investments—people who can’t afford to lose, and people who can. Why, my dear madam, use your own judgment. If there were a safe fifteen per cent, there, the shares would be gone in one hour, and at a heavy premium the next.”

“Humph!” said Aunt Sophia. “Of course you do all my nephew’s business?”

“Yes, madam; it all comes here.”

“You know what shares he holds?”

“I think so. Of course, he may have been to other brokers; but he would not have done so without good reason.”

“As far as you can, then,” said Aunt Sophia, “keep an eye upon what are sold, and I should like to be made acquainted with any sales that may take place.”

“Well, really, my dear Miss Raleigh, such a proceeding—”

“Yes, yes, man; I know all about that; but you know to what a state he has been reduced. I love him like a son, and I—Now look here, Saxby; I’m telling you this, because I think you are an honest man.”

“Well, I hope I am, ma’am.”

“Then look here; I will speak out. I won’t mention any names; but I am afraid that designing people are at work to get possession of some of his property, and I want it watched.”

“Rather a serious charge, Miss Raleigh.”

“Stuff and nonsense, man! Not half serious enough. Just look at this prospectus for a moment. There are some good names to it. I’ll talk about those other matters afterwards.”

Aunt Sophia fixed her double glasses upon her nose, and stared through them upon the neat and dapper stockbroker, who stared in return, and frowned, otherwise he would have laughed, for the spring of Aunt Sophia’s *pince-nez* was very strong, and its effect was to compress the organ upon which it rested, so that the ordinarily thin sharp point of the lady’s nose was turned into a sickly-looking bulb, that was, to say the least, grotesque.

“Halt!” said Mr Saxby, reading quickly: “Society for the Elevation of the Human Race in large and Crowded Towns; patrons, the Right Hon.—hum-ha-hum; his Grace the—hum-ha-hum; the Lord Bishop of—hum-ha-hum; directors—hum-ha-hum; M.P.—hum—Mr—hum,”—Mr Saxby’s voice grew less and less distinct, becoming at last a continuance of the sound expressed in letters by *hum*, but he finished off sharply with: “Secretary, Mr Arthur Prayle!—Well, ma’am, and what of this?”

“What of it, Saxby? Why, wouldn’t it be a most admirable thing to invest in a Society which will benefit my fellow-creatures and bring in a large percentage as well?”

“Admirable, my dear madam,” said Saxby; “but you don’t quite express the result.”

“What *do* you mean?”

“Singular, ma’am, not plural, and no percentage.”

“Now, look here, Saxby: I have come here on business, if you please, not to hear you discuss points of grammar.

What do you mean by your singular and plural?”

“I mean, my dear madam,” said Saxby, with a chuckle, “that this Society,”—he flipped the prospectus with his finger as he spoke—“would benefit one fellow-creature only, and give no percentage at all. What is more, you would never see your money back.”

“Ho!” ejaculated Aunt Sophia. “And pray, who would be the fellow-creature?”

“Well, ma’am, it is being rather hard upon a gentleman whom I have had the pleasure of meeting, and who is no doubt acting in the best of faith; but the secretary is the only fellow-creature who will get anything out of that affair. He will of course take care that the office expenses are paid, he is an office expense. There will be nothing for a soul beside.”

“Oh, this is prejudice, Mr Saxby.”

“Business prejudice, perhaps, ma’am; but, to my mind, this is only one of many Societies that are constantly springing up like toadstools—that kind that comes up fair and white, looks very much like a good mushroom for a time, and then dissolves into a nasty black inky fluid, and is gone.”

“It *is* prejudice,” said Aunt Sophia.

“Maybe, ma’am; but there are numbers of silly Societies got up, such as appeal to weak sensitive people; the secretary gets a few letters in the daily papers, and plenty of ladies like yourself subscribe their money, say, for the Suppression of Sunday Labour amongst Cabhorses, the Society for Dieting Destitute Blackbeetles, and the Provident Home for Canaries whose Patrons are out of Town. These, my dear madam, are exaggerations, but only slight ones, of many Societies got up by ingenious secretaries, who turn a bottle of ink, a ream of neatly headed note-paper, and some cleverly monogrammed envelopes, into a comfortable income.”

“That will do,” said Aunt Sophia shortly as she took off her *pince-nez* and allowed the blood to resume its circulation —“that will do, Mr Saxby.—Then you will not buy the shares for me?”

“No, ma’am, not a share. I should deserve to be kicked out of the Stock Exchange, if I did.”

“Very well, sir—very well, sir,” said the lady, rising and tightening her lips. “That will do.”

“And now, as business is over, my dear madam, may I ask for the latest report concerning our friend Scarlett’s health?”

“Yes, sir, you may,” said Aunt Sophia shortly. “It is very bad. His nerve is completely gone.”

“Ah, but I hope it will return,” said Saxby. “Patience, ma’am, patience. When stocks in a good thing, mind, I say a good thing, are at their lowest, they take a turn, and become often enough better than ever. And—er—may I ask how —how Miss Raleigh junior is?”

“No, sir; you may not,” said Aunt Sophia shortly. “Good-morning!”

“Phe-ew! What an old she-dragon it is!” said Mr Saxby to himself as the door closed upon Aunt Sophia’s angular form.

“I am right!” said Aunt Sophia to herself as she got into the hansom cab that she had waiting. “Here!—hi!” she cried, poking at the little trapdoor in the roof with her parasol. “Waterloo Station.”

Then, as the cab rattled along: “Arthur Prayle is a smooth-looking, smooth-tongued scoundrel; I know he is, and I’ve a good mind to let him have a few hundreds, so as to take off his mask. I won’t mistrust Saxby any more. He’s as honest as the day, and I’m glad I’ve put him on his guard. But he must be snubbed, very hard, and I must speak to Naomi. I do believe the hard, money-grubbing, fog-breathing creature thinks that he is in love!”

Volume Two—Chapter Two.

Sir James Scarlett’s Nerves.

“Come, old fellow; I think you are better now,” said the doctor, as he took Scarlett’s arm and walked with him down the garden. They had just been standing upon the lawn, where, in a group, Lady Scarlett, Lady Martlett, Naomi, and Aunt Sophia were with Arthur Prayle. The doctor had been irritated, though he would not own it, by the cool, haughty indifference of Lady Martlett, and it had cost him an effort to tear his thoughts from his own affairs to the troubles of his friend; but upon twice waking up to the fact that Scarlett was growing excited, and that he had displayed a disposition to what the doctor called “break out,” he suggested a stroll down the grounds.

Scarlett eagerly agreed; and after a solemn exchange of courtesies with Lady Martlett, the doctor took his friend away.

“Confound her!” muttered the doctor; “the others must have wondered whether I was going to hand her out for a minuet. I wish the woman would keep away.”

They strolled about for some few minutes, and twice came to a halt; but the first time, as they seated themselves in a couple of garden-chairs, the voice of Arthur Prayle came in a low deep murmur from the lawn as he was saying something earnestly, and the doctor saw his patient’s eyes flash, and then, us he watched him curiously, contract in

an unpleasant way.

“Prayle seems to be working very hard for you, old fellow.”

“Yes.”

“You trust him, I suppose, with all the settlement of your London affairs?”

“Yes: everything.”

“Thoroughly trustworthy fellow, of course?”

“Yes, yes, I tell you,” cried Scarlett angrily. “He is my cousin.”

“Yes, of course,” said the doctor, quietly noting every change in his friend the while.

“Come somewhere else,” said Scarlett, leaping up in an excited manner. “I can’t bear to sit here.”

“All right—all right,” said the doctor cheerily. “Let’s go down to the waterside.”

“No, no!” exclaimed Scarlett, with a shudder. “Come to the rhododendrons.”

“By all means. But I say, old fellow, you must fight down this weakness.”

“Weakness? What weakness? Is it a weakness to prefer one part of the garden to the other?”

“O no; of course not. Let’s go down there.”

They strolled down between two great banks of the grand flowering shrubs, now rich with the glossy green of their summer growth, and sat down, when a new trouble assailed Scarlett, and he sprang up impatiently. “Hah!” he exclaimed. “I can’t bear it.”

“Why, what’s the matter now?”

“Those blue-bottles buzzing about me like that; just as if they expected I should soon be carrion.”

“Pooh! What an absurd idea! But you are wrong, old fellow, as usual. I am the more fleshy subject, and they would be after me. Let’s go down yonder under the firs.”

“Why? What is there there, that you should choose that part?” said Scarlett, with a quick suspicious glance.

“Fir-trees, shade, seats to sit down,” said the doctor quietly.

“Yes, yes, of course; that will do,” said Scarlett hastily. “Let’s go there.”

They strolled along a sun-burned path; and the doctor had just made the remark that commences this chapter, when there was a rustling noise among the shrubs, a whining yelp, and Scarlett’s favourite dog, a little white fox-terrier, rushed out at them, to leap up at its master, barking with delight. It came upon them so suddenly, that Scarlett uttered a wild cry, caught at the doctor’s arm, screened himself behind his sturdy body, and stood there trembling like a leaf.

“Why, it’s only Fritz!” cried the doctor, smiling.

“He startled me so—so sudden,” panted Scarlett. “Drive the brute away.”

“Ist! Go home; go back!” cried the doctor; and, as if understanding the state of affairs, and dejected and wretched at being treated like this, where he had expected to be patted and caressed, the dog drooped his head and tail, looked wistfully up at his master, and slowly trotted away. He turned at the end of the path, and looked back at them, as if half expecting to be recalled, and then went on out of sight.

“I’ll sell that dog, Jack; he’s growing vicious,” said Scarlett, speaking in an excited tone. “I’ve watched him a good deal lately. What are the first signs of hydrophobia?”

“Hydrophobia,” said the doctor smiling—“water-hating; but I have never studied the diseases of dogs—only sad dogs.”

“I wish you would not be so flippant, Jack, I’m sure that dog is going mad. He hates water now.”

“Don’t agree with you, old fellow,” said the doctor, throwing himself upon a great rustic seal beneath some pines; “the dog was quite wet, and I saw him, an hour ago, plashing about after the rats.”

“Ah, but he avoids it sometimes. I have a horror of mad dogs.”

Scarlett settled himself down in the seat in a moody, excitable way, looking uneasily round; and the doctor offered him a cigar, which he took and lit, Scales also lighting one, and the friends sat smoking in the delicious pine-scented shade.

“I wish that woman would not be so fond of coming over here,” said Scarlett suddenly.

“What woman?”

“That Lady Martlett. Coarse, masculine, horsy creature. She is spoiling Kate.”

The doctor’s countenance grew lowering, and there was a red spot on either cheek, but he only said quietly: “Think so?”

“Yes. I shall put a stop to the intimacy.”

“I’m not going to have my home-life spoiled. Her coming makes me nervous.”

“Does it?” said the doctor cheerfully. “I’ll soon put that right for you.”

“How?” said Scarlett suspiciously.

“You shall have a shower-bath every morning, old fellow.”

“Water? ah!” The poor fellow shuddered, and started up. “Here, let’s have a stroll down by the meadow-side.”

“All right!” cried the doctor with alacrity, “What a glorious day it is!”

“Glorious? Ah, yes. Not breeze enough though. Now, let’s go back to the lawn.”

“As you like, old fellow; but I don’t think Lady Martlett has gone.”

“Why, what a dislike you seem to have taken to Lady Martlett, Jack!”

“Well, you know what a woman-hater I am.”

“Yes, of course. Let’s go on down by the meadow. Perhaps it will be best.”

They strolled down a green path separated from the meadow, where the cows were placidly grazing, by an iron fence; and as they went slowly on, two of the soft mousy-coloured creatures came slowly from the middle of the field, blinking their eyes to get rid of the clustering black flies, and giving a pendulum-like swing to their long tails. They timed their approach so accurately, that as the doctor and his patient reached the corner, they were there, with their heads stretched over the railings, ready for the caress and scrap of oilcake which they expected to receive.

Scarlett’s attention was so taken up by his thoughts, that he came upon the two patient animals quite suddenly, stopping as if paralysed, and trembling like one afflicted with the palsy. He did not speak, but stood staring, fascinated as it were by the great soft eyes gazing at him; but he stretched out one hand slowly and cautiously behind him, feeling about for his friend, till Scales placed his hand within. Then the poor fellow clasped the fingers with a sob of relief, shuddering as he tore himself away from the inoffensive beasts, and suffering himself to be led back to the seat they had quitted, where he sank down shivering, and covered his face with his hands, sobbing like a child.

The doctor sat gazing at him gravely thinking it better to let him give free vent to his emotion; but, as it grew more and more intense, he laid his hand upon his friend’s shoulder, saying nothing, but firmly pressing it; the effect of which was to make Scarlett snatch at his hand and grasp it passionately, as he panted out in a voice choked with sobs: “It’s a judgment on me, Jack. I’ve been living here in wealth and idleness, thinking of nothing but self and my own enjoyment. I have not had a thought of anything but pleasure, and I felt so strong and well, that it did not seem possible for a cloud to come across my life. Now, look at me! One stroke, and I have been taught what a poor frail helpless worm I am. Jack, Jack! my nerve is gone. I hate everything. I mistrust every one, even my poor wife, and I see danger everywhere. I daren’t stir a step. You pretend not to see it; but you are always reading me. Jack, old man, I’m afraid of you sometimes, but I do believe in and trust you. I’ll obey you; I’ll do every thing you want, even if it kills me with fear. I will—I will indeed; but, for God’s sake, don’t let them take me away. Don’t leave me. Don’t trust anybody. Don’t get any other advice. Go by your own judgment, old fellow, and no matter what I say or do, don’t let me drive you away. You are the only one I can trust.”

“My dear Scarlett, be calm.”

“I can’t—I can’t!” cried the wretched man passionately, “knowing what I do—knowing what I am; but I will—I will try so—so hard.”

“Of course; and you’ll succeed.”

“No—no! I’m getting worse—much worse, and I can see what everybody thinks. Kate sees it, and has turned from me in horror. You see it; I can read it in your eyes. You wouldn’t say so, but you know it as well as can be. Tell me; isn’t it true?”

“What, that the shock of that half-drowning has upset your nerves, so that you are weak, and have developed a temper that would try an angel? Yes; that’s true enough.”

“No—no! I mean the other—that horror—that dreadful thought that makes me lie and shudder, and ask myself whether I had not better,”—He stopped short and crouched away in the corner of the seat, his face ghastly, his eyes wild and staring, till the doctor spoke in a firm imperious voice, that made him reply, as it were, in spite of himself. “Better what?”

“End it all, and be at rest.”

“Why?” said the doctor, bending towards him as if about to drag forth an answer.

“Because—”

“Well? Speak. I know what you are going to say, but speak out.”

“Because,” said Scarlett, in a low hoarse whisper, as if he dreaded that the very breeze might bear away his confession—“I know it—I feel it—I can tell as well as can be, without something always seeming to whisper it in my ears—I am going mad!” He covered his face with his hands, and sank lower in his seat, panting heavily, and his breath coming and going each minute in a piteous sigh; while, after watching him intently for a few moments, the doctor rose and stood by his side.

Volume Two—Chapter Three.

Doctor and Friend.

A wonderful stillness seemed to have fallen, and not even a bird twittered or uttered a note in the hot midsummer sunshine. Once from the distance came the low soft murmur of the weir, but that died away, and scarcely a leaf rustled, so that when the doctor spoke, his firm deep tones sounded as if all nature in that lovely country-home were listening for the verdict he was about to deliver to the stricken man.

“James Scarlett,” he said firmly, “I hold a double position here: I am your old friend—I am your doctor.”

“Yes,” said Scarlett in a whisper, but without changing his position.

“I am going to speak the simple truth; I am going to hide nothing. I am about to give you plain facts. Will you trust me?”

“Yes. I have always trusted you.”

“Will you believe me? I need not swear?”

“No, Jack, no,” said Scarlett, letting his hands fall from his haggard face. “I believe your word: I do indeed.”

“You asked me not to leave you.”

“Yes: for heaven’s sake, stay.”

“I will not leave you; and if I can, I’ll bring you back to health.”

“Yes,” said Scarlett, shuddering. “And you will not let them drag me away. Jack!—Kate has been planning it with Arthur—an asylum—and I dare not speak, I should be so violent, and make it worse.”

“You shan’t be dragged away, old man, and you need not fancy that any such plans are being made.”

“Even if it came to the worst,” said Scarlett pitifully, “you could keep me down. O Jack, I could not bear it; I’d sooner die!”

“Let me speak out at once, my dear boy,” said the doctor. “The terrible shock to your nerves has made you so weak that you fancy all these things. It is the natural outcome of such a state as yours. Now, listen: you said you would believe me.”

“Yes, yes; and I will.”

“I am glad you have spoken. I knew all this; but I am not sorry you indorsed it. You are haunted by a horrible dread that you are about to lose your reason.”

“Yes,” moaned Scarlett; “and it is so hard—so hard!”

“Then you may take this comfort to your heart: you are not in the slightest degree likely to become insane; and, what is more, I am as good as certain that, sooner or later, you will recover your health.”

“Jack!”

“You said that you would trust in me.”

“Yes—I did—and I will try—so hard. There, I am trying—you see how I am trying. Stand by me, Jack, and help me. Tell me what to do—do you hear! Tell me what to *do*!”

“I will,” cried Scales. “Give me your hand. Stand up—like a man. Now, grasp it firmly. Firmly, man; a good grip.—That’s better. Now, listen! What are you to do?”

“Yes: tell me quickly. My own strength is gone.”

“I’ll tell you, then,” said the doctor. “Give yourself up to me as if you were a man who could not swim.”

“Don’t talk about the water, Jack. For God’s sake, don’t!”

“I *will* talk about the water, and you shall listen. Now, then, you must act as if you were helpless and I a strong

swimmer. You must trust to me. Recollect, if you struggle and fight against me, you must drown—morally drown: the black waters will close over your spirit, and nothing that I can do will save you. Now, then, drowning man, is it to be trust in the swimmer?—That's right!" he cried, as Scarlett placed his hands upon his arm—"that's well. I won't leave you, James Scarlett, till you are sound and strong as I am now!"

The stricken man made an effort to speak, but the words would not come. He could only gaze wistfully in his friend's face, his wild eyes looking his gratitude, while they seemed to promise the fidelity of a dog.

"That's right, old fellow. Now, we pretty well understand each other, only I've got to preach at you a little. First of all, I must have full confidence, you know. You must come to me with every symptom and sensation."

"I will tell you everything," said Scarlett humbly.

"And I would just make up my mind to meet my troubles like a man. You have yours now; and they come the more painfully after a long course of prosperity and happiness; but even then, old fellow, life is too good a gift to talk of throwing it away."

Scarlett shuddered, and the doctor watched him narrowly.

"Existence accompanied by a most awful fit of neuralgia would not be pleasant; but all the same I would not refuse it, even with those conditions, for the intervals when the neuralgia is not stinging you are about the most delicious moments by contrast that can be imagined."

"Yes, yes; of course."

"Well, then, now let us go and join them on the lawn. What do you say to beginning to fight the nervous foe at once?"

"Yes, at once," said Scarlett, speaking as if under the influence of the doctor.

"Come along, then; and we shall master yet."

Scarlett hesitated and hung back; but the doctor did not speak. He could see that his patient was trying to avoid his eye. Once Scarlett glanced up, but the look was rapid as lightning. He saw that the doctor was watching him, and he avoided his look again instantly, like a schoolboy who had committed some fault. At the end of a minute, though, he gradually raised his eyes again, slowly and furtively, and in a way that troubled the doctor more than he would have cared to own; but he had his consolation directly in finding his patient gazing fully at him while Scarlett uttered a low sigh of satisfaction, as if he rejoiced at being in charge of a stronger will than his own; and then, without a word, they moved towards the lawn.

"I must do my bit of fighting too," said the doctor to himself, as his eyes fell upon Lady Martlett. "She's very handsome; she knows it; and she wants to make me feel it; but she shall not.—Humph! How that fellow Prayle hangs about Lady Scarlett's side. They can't always be wanting to talk over business matters."

"Well, James, have you had a pleasant stroll?" said Aunt Sophia, as the two men joined the group.

"Yes—very," he answered quietly.

"Have you seen how the peaches are getting on upon the little bush?" she continued.

"I? No. I have not been in the peach-house for days."

"You don't go half often enough. Let's go now."

"What, I? N—" The poor fellow met the doctor's eye, and said hastily: "Well, yes; I will, aunt.—Will you come too, Naomi?"

"O yes," cried the girl eagerly.

"Perhaps Lady Martlett will come and see the rosy-cheeked beauties of the peach-house?" said the doctor half-mockingly.—"She'll give me such a snub," he added to himself.

"Yes; I should like to see them," said her Ladyship quietly; "my gardener tells me that they are far more beautiful than mine."

"I should have thought it impossible," cried the doctor. "Your Ladyship's wealth and position ought to be able to secure for you everything."

"But it does not," said Lady Martlett; "not even such a simple thing as deference or respect."

"Ah, but money could not buy those—at least not genuine, sterling qualities of that kind, Lady Martlett," said the doctor, as they moved towards the end of the garden.

"So it seems, Doctor Scales."

"There are some people who even have the impertinence to look down upon the rich who do not carry their honours with graceful humility."

"How dares he speak to me like this!" thought Lady Martlett; "but I'll humble him yet."

“Let me see,” she replied coolly; “what do you cull that class of person—a radical, is it not?”

“Yes; I suppose that is the term.”

“And I understand that there are radicals of all kinds: in politics; in those who pass judgment on social behaviour; and even in medicine.”

“That’s a clever thrust,” thought the doctor.—“Just so, Lady Martlett; and I am one of the radicals in medicine.”

“Of course, then, not in social matters, Doctor Scales?”

“Will your Ladyship deign to notice the tints upon these peaches?” said the doctor evasively.—“Here is one,” he said, lowering his voice, “that seems as if it had been mocking you, when your cheek is flushed with the exercise of riding, and you imperiously command the first poor wretch who passes your way to open the gate.”

“The peaches look very fine,” said her Ladyship, refusing to notice the remark—“much finer than mine, dear Lady Scarlett. My head-gardener says that some disease has attacked the leaves.”

“You should invite Doctor Scales over to treat the ailment,” said Aunt Sophia archly.—“My dear James, what is the matter?”

“It is too bad—it is disgraceful!” cried Scarlett, stamping his foot. “Because I am weak and ill, every one imposes on me. That old scoundrel has been neglecting everything.”

“What! Monnick?” cried Aunt Sophia.

“Yes. No one else has the key. Ah! here you are,” he said more angrily, “look, Kate, you ought to be more particular. These keys should be brought to you.”

“What is wrong, dear?” said Lady Scarlett anxiously, as she came down that side of the peach-house, closely followed by Prayle.

“Everything is wrong,” cried the unhappy man, gazing at her wildly. “I cannot bear it.” He hurried from the peach-house, followed by the doctor, who calmed him by degrees.

“Some of the best peaches stolen,” he cried. “It is too bad; I set such a store by them.”

“And I set such store by your recovery, old fellow,” said the doctor. “That was a wretched fit of temper; but it’s over now. Don’t worry about it, man; and now go and lie down till dinner-time.”

“No—no: I have no wish to—”

“Mind what I say.—Yes, you have, my dear boy. Come: a quiet nap till dinner-time, and then you will have forgotten this petty trouble, and be fresh and cool.”

Scarlett sighed and walked slowly to the house, his companion seeing him lie down before going to his own room, and taking up a book which he read till it was time to get ready for the evening meal. Then he made his few simple preparations and strolled out into the garden again, to think out his plans and go over the events of the day and the possibility of his effecting a permanent cure. Item: to think a little about his own sore place, and how long it would take to heal up so thoroughly that he could always with impunity look Lady Martlett in the face.

Volume Two—Chapter Four.

Mr Saxby has Aspirations.

A couple of months had passed.

“Mr Saxby wants to speak to you, ma’am,” said Fanny; and Aunt Sophia jumped up in a pet. “What does he want now? This is four times he has been down this month. Where is he?”

“In the study, ma’am. He wouldn’t come in here.”

Aunt Sophia entered the study to find quite a strong odour in the room. It was something between lemon-scented verbena and magnolia; and as soon as she noticed it, she began to sniff, with the result that the busy City man, so strong in his office, so weak outside, began to turn red.

“Well, Mr Saxby,” said Aunt Sophia, “have you sold those consols for me?”

“Yes, ma’am, as you insisted; but you’ll excuse me, I’m sure, when I tell you that—”

“There, there, there, man! I know what you are going to say; but it is my own money, and I shall do with it what I please, and—” Sniff, sniff, sniff. “Whatever is it smells so strong?”

“Strong, ma’am, strong?” said Mr Saxby, wiping his brow, for Aunt Sophia had a peculiar effect upon him, causing him to grow moist about the palms of his hands and dew to form upon his temples.

“Why, it’s that handkerchief, man: and you’ve been putting scent upon your hair!”

“Well, a little, ma’am, just a little,” said Saxby, with a smile that was more indicative of feebleness than strength. “I was coming into the country, you see, and, ahem!—sweets to the sweet.”

“Stuff!—How about that money.”

“There’s the cheque, ma’am,” said Mr Saxby, taking out his pocket-book; “but I give it to you with regret; and—let me beg of you, my dear madam, to be guided by me.”

“That will do, Saxby. I know what I am about; and now, I suppose, you have some eligible investment to propose?”

“Well, no, my dear madam; no. Things are very quiet. Money’s cheap as dirt.”

“May I ask, then, why you have come down?”

“The—er—the cheque, my dear madam.”

“Might very well have come by post, Mr Saxby.”

“Yes, but I was anxious to see and hear about how poor Sir James is getting on; to say a few words of condolence to Lady Scarlett. I esteem them both very highly, Miss Raleigh; I do indeed.”

“Dear me! Ah!” said Aunt Sophia; “and—Shall I finish for you, Saxby?”

“Finish for me, my dear madam? I do not understand.”

“Then I will, Saxby: you thought that if you came down and brought the cheque, you might perhaps see my niece.”

“My dear madam! My dear Miss Raleigh! Really, my dear madam!”

“Don’t be a sham, Saxby. Own it like a man.”

Mr Saxby looked helplessly round the room, as if in search of help, even of an open door through which he could escape; but there was none; and whenever he looked straight before him, there was the unrelenting eye of the elderly maiden lady fixed upon him, and seeming to read him through and through. He wished that he had not come; he wished that he could bring his office effrontery down with him; he wished that he could make Aunt Sophia quail, as he could his clerks; but all in vain. Aunt Sophia, to use her own words, could turn him round her finger when she had him there, and at last he gasped out:

“Well, there, I’ll be honest about it—I did.”

“I didn’t need telling,” said Aunt Sophia. “I believe, Saxby, I could even tell you what you are thinking now.”

“Oh nonsense, ma’am—nonsense!”

“Oh yes, I could,” said Aunt Sophia sharply. “You were thinking that I was a wretched old griffin, and you wished I was dead.”

“Wrong!” cried Saxby triumphantly, and speaking more like himself. “I’ll own to the griffin; but hang me if I will to the wishing you dead!”

“Why, you know you think she’ll have my money, Saxby.”

“Hang your money, ma’am!” cried the stockbroker sharply. “I’ve got plenty of my own, and can make more; and as to yours—why, if it hadn’t been for me, you wouldn’t have a penny. It would be all gone in some swindling company. I—I beg your pardon, Miss Raleigh; I—ah—really—ah—I’m afraid I rather forgot myself—I—”

“You’re quite right, Saxby, quite right,” said Aunt Sophia quietly. “I’m afraid I am a very stupid, sanguine old woman over money matters, and you have saved me several times. But now about Naomi. Whatever is it you want?”

“What do I want?” said Saxby.

“Yes. Why do you come hanging about here like this? Do you want to marry the girl?”

“Well—er—yes, my dear madam; to be candid, that is what I thought. For ever since the day when I first set—”

“Thank you: that will do, Saxby. Rhapsodies do sound such silly stuff to people at my age. Really, if you talk like that, I shall feel as if it would be madness to come to consult you again on business.”

“But really, my dear madam—”

“Yes,” said Aunt Sophia, interrupting; “I know. Well, then, we’ll grant that you like her.”

“Like her, madam? I worship her?”

“No: don’t, my good man. Let’s be sensible, if we can. My niece Naomi is a very nice, amiable, good girl.”

“She’s an angel, ma’am!”

“No; she is not,” said Aunt Sophia stiffly; “and so the man who marries her will find. She’s only a nice English girl, and I don’t want her feelings hurt by any one.”

“Miss Raleigh, it would be my study to spare her feelings in every way.”

“If you had the opportunity, my good man. As it happens, I must speak plainly to you, and tell you that I am afraid she has formed an attachment to Mr Prayle.”

“To him!” groaned Saxby.

“Now, look here, Mr Saxby; if you are going to act sensibly, I’ll talk to you; if you are going on like that, I’ve done. This is not part of a play.”

“Yes, ma’am, it is,” said Saxby dolefully; “the tragedy of my life.”

“Now, don’t be a goose, Saxby. If the girl likes somebody else better than you, don’t go making yourself miserable about it. Have some common-sense.”

Saxby shook his head.

“There’s no common-sense in love.”

Aunt Sophia looked at him in a half-pitying, half-contemptuous manner. “It isn’t very deep, is it?” she said good-humouredly.

“I don’t know,” he said; “only, that somehow she’s seemed to me to be like the flowers; and when I’ve gone to my office every morning, I’ve bought a rose or something of that kind, and put it in water, and it’s been company to me, as if she were there all the time. And now, after what you’ve told me, ma’am, I don’t think I shall ever buy a rose again.” He got up, walked to the window and looked out, so that Aunt Sophia should not see his face.

“Poor fellow!” she said softly to herself, and it was evident that her sympathies were touched.

“Mr Prayle has not spoken to Naomi yet,” she said, and there was a smile in her eye as she saw the sudden start that Saxby gave, and the look of hope that came back into his countenance as he turned round and faced her.

“Does he—does he—care for her very much?” said Saxby.

Aunt Sophia hesitated for a few moments, and then seemed to make up her mind. “I don’t know,” she said; “but I’ll speak plainly to you, Saxby, for I like you.”

“You—Miss Raleigh!—you—like—me?”

“Yes. Why shouldn’t I?”

“Because—because—”

“Yes; I know. Because you opposed me sometimes. Well, a woman likes to be opposed. Some stupid people say that a woman likes to have her own way in everything. It isn’t true. She likes to find some one who will and who does master her. It’s her nature, Saxby, and whenever you find anyone who asserts the contrary, set him or her down as ignorant or an impostor.”

“But don’t raise my hopes, Miss Raleigh, don’t, pray, if there’s no chance for me.”

“I’m not going to raise your hopes—not much. I shall only say to you, that I am sorry about my niece’s leanings, and that, perhaps, after all, it is but a girlish fancy. If I were a man—”

“Yes, Miss Raleigh, if you were a man?”

“And cared for a woman, I should never give her up till I saw that my case was quite hopeless.”

“Miss Raleigh,” cried the stockbroker excitedly, “your words are like fresh air in a hot office. One thinks more clearly; life seems better worth living for; and there’s a general rise of one’s natural stock all over a fellow’s market.—Might I kiss your hand?”

“No,” cried Aunt Sophia; “but you may behave sensibly. Stop down a day or two, and see how the land lies.”

“May I?”

“Yes; I’ll answer for your welcome.—And now, mind this: I’m not going to interfere with my niece and her likes and dislikes; but let me give you a bit of advice.”

“If you would!” exclaimed Saxby.

“Then don’t go about sighing like a bull-goose. Women don’t care for such weak silly creatures. Naomi’s naturally weak, and what she looks for in a man is strength both in brain and body.”

“Yes, I see,” said Saxby sadly. “I under stand stocks and shares, but I don’t understand women.”

“Of course you don’t. No man yet ever did; not even Solomon, with all his experience; and no man ever will.”

“But, I thought, Miss Raleigh—I hoped—”

“Well, what did you think and hope?”

“That you might help me—as an old and trustworthy friend—about Miss Naomi.”

“Why, bless the boy—man, I mean—if I were to tell Naomi to love you, or that she was to be your wife, she’d do as all girls do.”

“What’s that, Miss Raleigh?”

“What’s that? Why, go off at a tangent, whatever that may be, and marry Prayle at once.”

“Ah, yes, I suppose so,” faltered Saxby.

“Well, well, pluck up your spirits, man, and be what you are at your office. I do trust you Saxby; and to show you my confidence, I’ll tell you frankly that I should be deeply grieved if anything came of her leanings towards that smooth, good-looking fellow.—There, what stuff I am talking. You ought to be able to get on without advice from me.”

Then Aunt Sophia smiled and nodded her head at the stockbroker, after which she sailed out of the room, leaving him hopeful and ready to take heart of grace, even though just then he saw Arthur Prayle go by in company with the object of his aspirations. Certainly, though, Lady Scarlett, was with them; while directly after, Sir James Scarlett passed, hanging upon Scales’s arm; and the aspect of the baronet’s face startled Saxby, who was clever enough at reading countenances, possessing as he did all the shrewdness of the dealer in questions of the purse. For in that face he read, or fancied he read, hopeless misery, jealousy, and distrust mingled in one.

“Why,” exclaimed Saxby, as they passed out of sight beyond the bushes, “the poor fellow looks worse than ever; and —everything—is drifting into the hands of that Prayle. I hope he’s honest. Hang him! I hate him.

“Well, I must be civil to him while I’m here. But I’ll wager he hates me too; and knows that I have stood in his way just the same as he does in mine. No, not the same,” he added, as he opened the French window to go out on the lawn. “In my case it is a lady, in his money. Which of us will win?”

Volume Two—Chapter Five.

Although an Old Maid.

“Well, doctor?”

“Well, Miss Raleigh.”

“You do not bring him round.”

“I don’t. He is worried mentally, and I can’t get at his complaint.”

“Why not take him away, and give him a complete change?”

Doctor Scales injured John Monnick’s beautiful turf, that he had been at such trouble to make grow under the big mulberry tree, by suddenly screwing round his garden-seat, to stare in Aunt Sophia’s face. “I say,” he exclaimed, “are you a reader of thoughts or a prophetess?”

“Neither. Why?”

“Because you are proposing what I have planned.”

“Indeed! Well, is it not a good proposal?”

“Excellent; but he will not listen to it. He dare not go outside the place, he says; and I believe that at first he would suffer terribly, for it is quite shocking how weak his nerves have become. He has a horror of the most trivial things; and above all, there is something troubling the brain.”

“What can it be?” said Aunt Sophia.

“Well—I’m speaking very plainly to you, Miss Raleigh.”

“Of course. We trust each other, doctor.”

“Exactly. Well, in a case like this, it is only natural that the poor fellow should feel his position deeply, and be troubling himself about his wife.”

“But she seems to be most attentive to him.”

“O yes; she never neglects him,” replied the doctor, hurriedly going into another branch of his subject. “His money affairs, too, seem to worry him a great deal; and I know it causes him intense agony to be compelled by his weakness to leave so much to other hands.”

“But his cousin—Mr Prayle—seems to be devoting himself heart and soul to their management.”

“O yes; he seems indefatigable; and Lady Scarlett is always watching over his interests; but no man can find an

adequate substitute for himself.”

Aunt Sophia watched the doctor anxiously, asking herself what he really thought, and then half bitterly reflecting how very shallow after all their trust was of each other upon this delicate question of Sir James Scarlett’s health. As she looked, she could not help seeing that the doctor’s eyes were fixed upon hers with a close scrutiny; and it was with almost a malicious pleasure that she said quietly a few words, and watched the result: “You know, I suppose, that Lady Martlett is coming here to dinner this evening?”

“Coming here? To dinner? This evening?”

“Yes. Is there anything so wonderful in that?”

“O no; of course not. Only—that is—I am a little surprised.”

“I don’t see why you should be surprised. Lady Martlett always made a great friend of Lady Scarlett, from the time she first came down.”

“Yes; I think I have heard so. Of course, there is nothing surprising, except in their great diversity of tastes.”

“Extremes meet, doctor,” said Aunt Sophia, smiling; “and that will be the case when you take her Ladyship down to dinner.”

“I? Take her down?—No, not I,” said Scales quickly. “In fact, I was thinking of running up to town to-day. There is an old friend of mine, who has studied nervous diseases a great deal in the Paris hospitals; he is over for a few weeks, and I thought I would consult him.”

“At the expense of running away, and making it appear to be because Lady Martlett is coming to dinner.”

“Oh; but that idea would be absurd.”

“I don’t know that, doctor, because, you see, it would be so true. There, there: don’t look cross. I am not an obstinate patient. Why, doctor, are you afraid of her?”

“No; I am more afraid of myself,” he said bitterly; “and I have some pride, Miss Raleigh.”

“Too much—far too much.—Do you know, doctor, I am turning match-maker in my old age?”

“A worthy pursuit, if you could make good matches.”

“Well, would it not be a good one between you and Lady Martlett?”

“Admirable!” he cried, in a bitterly ironical tone. “The union of a wealthy woman, who has a right to make a brilliant contract with some one of her own class, to a beggarly, penniless doctor, whose head is full of absurd crotchets.—Miss Raleigh, Miss Raleigh, where is your discrimination!”

“In my brains, I suppose,” said Aunt Sophia; “though I do not see how that portion of our organisation can make plans and plots.”

“Then you are plotting and planning to marry me to Lady Martlett.”

“It needed neither,” said Aunt Sophia. “You worked out the union yourselves. She is very fond of you.”

“Ha-ha-ha!” laughed the doctor harshly. “And you think her the most attractive woman you ever saw.”

“Granted. But that does not prove that I love her. No; I love my profession. James Scarlett’s health is my idol, until I have cured him—if I ever do. Then I shall look out for another patient, Miss Raleigh.”

“It is my turn now to laugh, doctor. Why, what a transparent man you are!”

“I hope so,” he replied. “But you will stay to dinner this evening?”

“No, madam; I shall go to town.”

“You will not!” said Aunt Sophia, smiling. “It would be too cowardly for you.”

“No, no; I must go,” he said. “She would make me her slave, and trample upon my best instincts. It would not do, Miss Raleigh. As it is, I am free. Poor enough, heaven knows! but independent, and—I hope—a gentleman.”

“Of course,” said Aunt Sophia gravely.

“Granting that I could win her—the idea seems contemptible presumption—what would follow? In her eyes, as well as in those of the whole world, I should have sacrificed my independence. I should have degraded myself; and in place of being spoken of in future as a slightly clever, eccentric doctor, I should sink into a successful fortune-hunter—a man admitted into the society that receives his wife, as her lapdog would be, at the end of a string. I couldn’t do it, my dear madam; I could not bear it; for the galling part would be that I deserved my fate.”

“I hope you do not exaggerate your patients’ cases as you do your own, doctor.”

“No exaggeration, my dear madam. Take another side of the question. Suppose I did sink my pride—suppose my lady

did condescend from her high pedestal to put a collar round my neck—how then? What should I be worth, leading such a lapdog existence? What would become of my theories, my efforts to make discoveries in our grand profession? Oh, Miss Raleigh, Miss Raleigh, I did think I had won some little respect from you! What would you say if you saw me lower myself to such an extent as that?"

Aunt Sophia smiled. "There would be something extremely droll to a bystander, if he heard all this. You talking of stooping!"

"Well, would it not be?" he cried. "With some women, yes; but you don't yet know Lady Martlett.—Oh, most *apropos*: she has come early, so as to have a pleasant afternoon without form. Doctor Scales, you are too late; you will have to stay."

"Confound the woman!" cried the doctor, as he saw Lady Martlett, very simply dressed, coming towards the lawn in company with Scarlett and his wife.

"I'll tell her you said so."

"I'll tell her myself."

"No; you will not," said Aunt Sophia quietly. "At one time, I thought that you needed a rival to bring you to your senses, but I venture to say that it will not be necessary." As she spoke, she advanced to meet the visitor, who embraced her cordially, and then bowed coldly to the doctor, as he raised his straw hat and then walked away.

Lady Martlett bit her lip, but took no further notice, devoting herself to her hostess, and talking a great deal to Scarlett, who, however, met her advances only peevishly, and seemed as if he found some under-thought in everything that was said, watching Lady Scarlett suspiciously, and whenever he left the group, hanging about so as to be within hearing and then suddenly rejoining them. This went on for some time, and then they adjourned to the house, where Lady Scarlett was soon after called away, and the visitor was left alone.

Volume Two—Chapter Six.

How Lady Martlett Humbled the Doctor.

"I hate him, and I'll humble him yet!" said Lady Martlett, with her eyes flashing, as she saw Jack Scales coming along the path towards the drawing-room window. "How dares he assume such a high tone towards me! How dares he speak to me as if I were an inferior, or a woman at whom he laughs as unworthy of his notice! I will humble him, proud as he may be." She watched him through the window as he walked very thoughtfully along the path; and probably it was anger that made her countenance show a higher colour than usual. The visit did not seem pleasant. The weather was all that could be desired; but there was to her something unrestful in the atmosphere. Kate Scarlett was nervous and excited, for some reason or other, and was constantly leaving her alone. Aunt Sophia had seemed more touchy than usual; and Naomi looked as if she were afraid of the visitor.

Lady Martlett had come, telling herself that she wanted company; now she was at The Rosery, she felt that she wanted to be alone. And now that, for the second time, Lady Scarlett had left her alone, she had been sitting fretfully, and thinking it very tiresome that she should be left.

Then came the sound of the footsteps of the doctor—a doctor who would have treated her complaint to perfection, had she not scornfully declared to herself that it was out of his power, and that he was an ignorant pretender, who did not understand her ailment in the least; and at last her eyes filled with tears.

"I'm a miserable woman!" she said to herself, as she called to mind the fact that she was a very rich young widow with beauty and a title; that there were scores of opportunities for making a good match, did she wish to wed; that she had only to give an order to have it obeyed; and—yes—here was this careless, indifferent young doctor, always ready to insult her, always treating her with a cool flippancy of manner, metaphorically snapping his fingers at her beauty of person, her title, and her wealth, and all the time utterly refusing to become her slave.

Just then, Lady Martlett uttered a low sigh, biting her lip directly after, in vexation at her weakness, for Scales had sauntered by the French window, engagingly open as it was like a trap, with her inside as a most attractive bait, and without so much as once glancing in.

"I believe he knows I'm in here alone," she said to herself angrily; "and he has gone by on purpose to pique me. It is his conceit. He thinks I care for him. Oh, it is unbearable!" she cried impetuously. "I'll bring him as a supplicant to my knees; and when I do," she continued, with a flash of triumph in her dark eyes, "he shall know what it is to have slighted and laughed at me!"

She fanned her flaming cheeks, and started up to pace the room, when once more there was the sound of the doctor's footsteps, as, in utter ignorance of Lady Martlett's presence, he returned along the gravel walk, thinking deeply over the knotty points of his patient's case.

Lady Martlett threw herself back in her seat, composed her features, but could not chase away the warm flush of resentment upon her checks. She, however, assumed an air of haughty languor, and appeared to be gazing at the landscape framed in by the open window.

"Heigh-ho-ha-hum!" sighed, or rather half-yawned Jack Scales, as he turned in at the window very slowly and thoughtfully, and for the moment did not see that the room was occupied.

Lady Martlett put her own interpretation upon the noise made by the doctor—she mentally called it a sigh, and her heart gave a satisfied throb as she told herself that he was touched—that her triumph was near at hand when she would humble him; and then—well, cast him off.

“Ah, Lady Martlett, you here?” he said coolly.—“What a lovely day!”

“Yes, doctor; charming,” she said, softening her voice.

“And this is a lovely place.—Your home, the Court, is, of course, far more pretentious.”

“I was not aware that there was anything pretentious about Leigh Court,” said Lady Martlett coldly.

“Well, pretentious is perhaps not the word,” said Jack, “I mean big and important, and solid and wealthy, and that sort of thing.”

“Oh, I see,” said Lady Martlett.

“And what I meant was, that this place is so much more charming, with its undulating lawn, its bosky clumps of evergreens, the pillar roses, and that wonderful clematis of which poor Scarlett is so fond.”

“You speak like a house-agent’s catalogue. Doctor Scales,” said Lady Martlett scornfully.

“Yes, I do; don’t I?” said Jack quietly, “But do you know, Lady Martlett, I often think that I could turn out a better description of a country estate than some of those fellows do?”

“Indeed?” said her Ladyship. “Yes, indeed,” said Jack, who eagerly assumed his bantering tones as soon as he was alone with Lady Martlett, telling himself it was a rest, and that it was a necessity to bring down her Ladyship’s haughtiness.

“Dang her! I’ll make her thoroughly disgusted with me,” he said to himself. “I hate the handsome Semiramis!—She’d like to drag me at her chariot-wheels, and she shall not.”

“I believe,” he continued, “that I could do something far better than the well-known specimen about the litter of rose-leaves and the noise of the nightingales.”

“Indeed, doctor,” said her Ladyship, with a curl of her lip.

“O yes,” cried Scales. “Now, for instance, suppose that Leigh Court were to be let.”

“Leigh Court is not likely to be let,” said her Ladyship haughtily.

“No?” said the doctor, raising his eyebrows slightly. “Well, perhaps not, though one never knows. Your Ladyship might take a dislike to it, say; and if it were to go into the estate-agent’s list—”

“It never will, Doctor Scales! I should consider it a profanation,” said her Ladyship haughtily. “Pray, change the subject.”

“Oh, certainly,” said Scales politely.—“Been up to the Academy, of course?”

“Yes,” said Lady Martlett coldly. “There was nothing, though, worth looking at. I was terribly bored.”

“Hah! I suppose you would be. I had a couple of hours. All I could spare. There is some admirable work there, all the same.”

“I was not aware that Doctor Scales was an art critic.”

“Neither was I; but when I see a landscape that is a faithful rendering of nature in some beautiful or terrible mood, I cannot help admiring it.”

“Some people profess to be very fond of pictures.”

“I am one of those foolish people, Lady Martlett.”

“And have you a valuable collection, Doctor Scales?”

“Collection? Well, I have a folio with a few water-colours in it, given me by artist friends instead of fees, and I have a few photographs; that is about all. As to their value—well, if sold, they would perhaps fetch thirty shillings.”

Lady Martlett looked at him angrily, for she felt that he was assuming poverty to annoy her.

“Your Ladyship looks astonished; but I can assure you that a poor crotchety physician does not get much besides the thanks of grateful patients.”

“I noticed that there were a great many portraits at the Academy,” said her Ladyship, “portraits of great and famous men.”

“Yes; of men, too, who are famous without being great,” said the doctor, laughing.

“Indeed!” said Lady Martlett. “I thought the two qualities went together.”

“In anyone else,” said Jack, “that would be a vulgar error: in your Ladyship, of course, though it may be an error, it cannot be vulgar.”

“How dearly I should like to box your ears!” thought Lady Martlett, as she gazed at the provoking face before her. “He doesn’t respect me a bit. He doesn’t care for me. The man is a very stone.”

“Did you notice the portraits of some of the fashionable beauties, Doctor Scales?” she continued, ignoring his compliment, and leading him back to the topic on hand.

“O yes,” he said; “several of them, and it set me thinking.”

“No? Really!” said her Ladyship, with a mocking laugh. “Was Doctor Scales touched by the beauty of some of the painted canvases with speaking eyes?”

“No; not a bit,” he said cheerily—“not a bit. It set me wondering how it was that Lady Martlett’s portrait was not on the walls.”

“I am not a fashionable beauty,” said the lady haughtily.

“Well, let us say a beauty, and not fashionable.”

A flash of triumph darted from Lady Martlett’s eyes. He had granted, then, that she was beautiful—at last.

But Jack Scales saw the look.

“I have no desire to be painted for an exhibition,” said Lady Martlett quietly.

“But I thought all ladies loved to be admired.”

“Surely not all,” she replied. “Are all women so weak?”

“Well, I don’t know. That is a question that needs discussing. I am disposed to think they are. It is a woman’s nature; and when she does not care for admiration, she is either very old, or there is something wrong.”

“Why, you libel our sex.”

“By no means, madam. I did not say that they love the admiration of many. Surely she must be a very unpleasant woman indeed who does not care for the admiration of one man.”

“He is caught!” thought Lady Martlett, with a strange feeling of triumph. Perhaps there was something else in her sensation, but she would not own it then.

“Perhaps you are right,” she said quietly. “It may be natural; but in these days, Doctor Scales, education teaches us to master our weakness.”

“Which most of us do,” he said, with a bow, “But really, if your Ladyship’s portrait, painted by a masterly hand, had been hung.”—He stopped short, as if thinking how to say his next words.

“Well, doctor?” she said, giving him a look that he caught, weighed, and valued on the instant at its true worth.

“It would have had a crowd around it to admire.”

“The artist’s work, doctor?”

“No, madam; the beauty of the features the artist had set himself to limn.”

“Is this a compliment, doctor, or a new form of bantering Lady Scarlett’s guest?” said the visitor, rather bitterly.

“Neither the one nor the other, but the simple truth.”

Lady Martlett fought hard to conceal the exultation; nay, more, the thrill of pleasure that ran through her nerves as she heard these words; but though outwardly she seemed quite calm, her cheeks were more highly coloured than usual, and her voice sounded deeper and more rich.

Jack Scales told himself she was plotting to humble him to the very dust, so he stood upon his guard.

Perhaps he did not know himself. Who does? If he had, he might have acted differently as he met Lady Martlett’s eyes when she raised hers and said; “Ah, then, Doctor Scales has turned courtier and flatterer.”

“No; I was speaking very sincerely.”

“Ought I to sit here,” said Lady Martlett, “and listen to a gentleman who tells me I am more handsome than one of the fashionable beauties of the season?”

“Why not?” he said, smiling. “Is the truthful compliment so displeasing?”

“No,” she said softly; “I do not think it is;” and beneath her lowered lashes, the look of triumph intensified as she led him on to speak more plainly.

“It ought not to be,” he said, speaking warmly now. “I have paid you a compliment, Lady Martlett, but it is in all

sincerity."

"He will be on his knees to me directly," she thought, "and then—"

"For," he continued, "woman generally is a very beautiful work of creation: complicated, wonderful—mentally and corporeally—perfect."

"Perfect, Doctor Scales?"

"Yes, madam; perfect. Your Ladyship, for instance, is one of the most—I think I may say *the* most perfect woman I ever saw."

"Doctor Scales?" she said quickly, as she drew herself up, half-angry, but thoroughly endorsing his words; and then to herself, in the triumph that flushed her as she saw the animation in his eyes and the colour in his checks: "At last he is moved; he never spoke or looked like that before." Then aloud: "You are really very complimentary, Doctor Scales;" and she gave him a sharp arrow-like glance, that he saw was barbed with contempt.

"Well, yes, Lady Martlett, I suppose I am," he said; "but it was truly honest, and I will be frank with you. Really, I never come into your presence—I never see you—But no; I ought not to venture to say so much."

"Why not?" she said, with an arch look. "I am not a silly young girl, but a woman who has seen something of the world."

"True, yes," he said, as if encouraged; and Lady Martlett's bosom rose and fell with the excitement of her expected triumph.

Still he hesitated, and asked himself whether he was misjudging her in his belief that she intended to lead him on to a confession of his love, and then cast him off with scorn and insult; but as he looked at her handsome face and shifting eager eyes, he told himself that there was something mingled with the partiality for him which she might possess, and he became hard as steel.

"Well," she said, smiling, and that smile had in it a power that nearly brought him to her feet; "you were saying: 'I never see you'—"

"Exactly. Yes," he said quickly; "I will say it. You'll pardon me, I know. I am but a weak man, with an intense love—"

She drew a long breath, and half turned away her head.

"For the better parts of my profession." Lady Martlett's face became fixed, and she listened to him intently.

"Yes; I confess I do love my profession, and I never see you in your perfection of womanly beauty, without feeling an intense desire to dissect you."

Lady Martlett started up from the seat, where, in a studied attitude, she had well displayed the graceful undulations of her figure, and stood before Jack Scales, proud, haughty, and indignant. Her eyes flashed; there was an ardent colour in her cheeks, which then seemed to flood back to her heart, leaving her white with anger.

"How dare you!" she began, in the mortification and passion that came upon her; and then, thoroughly mastered, and unable to control herself longer, she burst into a wild hysterical fit of laughter and hurried out of the room.

Jack Scales rose and stood watching the door as it swung to, and there was a look of tenderness and regret in his countenance as he muttered: "Too bad—too bad! Brutal and insulting! And to a woman—a lady of her position and refinement! I'll go and beg her pardon—ask her to forgive me—make confession of why I spoke so.—No. Put my head beneath her heel, to be crushed by her contempt! It wouldn't do. She goaded me to it. She wants to triumph over me. I could read her looks. If she cared for me, and those looks were real, I'd go down upon my knees humbly and tell her my sorrow; and then—then—then—What should I do then?

"Hah!" he cried, after a pause, "what would you do then, Jack Scales! Go away, and never set eyes upon her again, for it would not do. It is impossible, and I am a fool." He stood with his brows knit for a few minutes, and then said, in quite a different mood: "And now I am a man of the world again. Yes; you are about the most handsome woman I ever saw; but a woman is but a woman to a doctor, be she titled or only a farmer's lass. Blue blood is only a fiction after all; for if I blooded my lady there, pretty Fanny Cressy, and one of Brother William Cressy's pigs into separate test tubes, and placed them in a rack; and if, furthermore, I left them for a few minutes, and some busybody took them up and changed their places, I might, when I returned, fiddle about for long enough with the various corpuscles, but I could not tell which was which.—Lady Martlett, I am your very obedient servant, but I am not going to be your rejected slave."

Volume Two—Chapter Seven.

The Doctor Discourses.

"My back's a sight better, sir, wi' that stuff you said I was to get, and I thank you kindly for it," said John Monnick, as the doctor seated himself one day close by where the old man was busy weeding a bed in the flower-garden—a special task that he would not entrust to any one else.

"I'm glad of it, Monnick—very glad."

“But master don’t seem no better, sir, if you’ll excuse me for saying so.”

“Yes, Monnick, I’ll excuse you,” said the doctor sadly. “As you say, he is very little better if any. I’m afraid that pond emptying began the work the accident finished.”

“It frets me, sir, it do—it do indeed. For only to think of it: him so stout and straight and hearty one day, and as wan and thin and bad the next as an old basket. Ah! it’s a strange life this here.”

“True Monnick, true,” said the doctor.

“I felt a bit cut up when his father died, sir, but thank the Lord he aren’t here now to see the boy as he ’most worshipped pulled down as he be. Why, I were down in Sucksix, sir, in the marshes, for two years, ’twix’ Hastings and Rye, and I had the ager awful bad, but it never pulled me down like this. Do try your best with Sir James, do, pray.”

“I will, Monnick, I will,” said the doctor.

Monnick went on with his weeding, and the doctor sat watching in a low-spirited way the motions of a beautiful little robin that kept popping down and seizing some worm which, alarmed by the disturbance of the ground, was trying to escape.

“What humbug popular favouritism is,” he exclaimed suddenly.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said Monnick, glad of an excuse to straighten his back.

“I say what humbug there is in the world,” said the doctor. “Look at that robin, Monnick.”

“Yes, sir; he be a pretty one too. There’s lots on ’em here, and welcome as rain.”

“Yes,” said the doctor, “but what humbug it is.”

Monnick stared, and the robin hopped on the top of a garden stick and chirruped a few notes.

“Just imagine,” said the doctor, who was in a didactic mood; “try and imagine a stout, well-built man, six feet high, a fine, handsome brawny savage, seizing a boa constrictor in his teeth, shaking the, say, eighteen feet of writhing bone and muscle till it had grown weak and limp, and, by a complete reverse of all rule, swallowing the lengthy monster without an effort. The idea partakes of the nature of the serpent, and is monstrous; but all the same, that little petted and be-praised impostor will hop up to a great earthworm three times his length, give it a few digs with his sharp beak, and then—as the Americans would say—get outside it apparently without effort or ruffling a feather, after which he will hop away, flit to a twig, and indulge in a short, sharp song of triumph over his deed. It is his nature to, no doubt, and so are a good many more of his acts; but in these days, when it has grown to be the custom to run tilt at no end of our cherished notions; when we are taught that Alfred did not burn the cakes; that Caractacus never made that pathetic speech about the wealth of Rome: it is only fair to strip the hypocritical feather cloak of hypocrisy off that flagrant little impostor, the robin.”

“The robin and the wren be God’s cock and hen,” said John Monnick solemnly, pairing according to old custom two birds of different kinds.

“Yes,” said the doctor, “and terrible are the penalties supposed to attach to the man or boy who takes the nest, steals the egg, or destroys old or young of their sacred progeny. As a matter of course, no one ever did take egg, nest, or destroy the young of this couple, inasmuch as they are two distinct birds.”

“Yes, sir, two of ’em,” said John Monnick solemnly. “The robin and the wren be God’s cock and hen, and nobody never takes their eggs but jays and magpies and such like, robins is always the friends of man.”

“Friend of man, eh?” said the doctor. “Well, go where you will, there is the pretty bird to be seen, with his orange-scarlet breast, olive-green back, and large, bright, intelligent eyes. Winter or summer, by the homestead, at the window-pane, amongst the shrubs of the garden, or in the wood, there is the robin ready to perch near you and watch your every act, while from time to time he favours you with his tuneful lay. All pure affection for man, of course—so the unobservant have it, and so poets sing; when the fact of the matter is that the familiarity of the bird comes from what Mr Roger Riderhood termed ‘cheek,’ for, the sparrow not excepted, there is no bird in which the sense of fear seems so small; while the motive power which brings the pretty little fellow so constantly in man’s society is that love which is known as cupboard. Probably the robin first learned from Adam that when man begins to garden he turns up worms; and, as these ringed creepers are this bird’s daily bread, he has attached himself to man ever since, and will come and pick the worms from his very feet, whether it be in a garden or during a botanical ramble in the depths of some wood.”

“Yes, sir,” said John Monnick, “they follows mankind everywhere. I’ve had ’em with me wherever I go.”

“For worms, Monnick, and in winter they will come for crumbs to the window sill, or pick pieces of meat and gristle from the bones inside the dog’s kennel; while in autumn time, when the flies grow sluggish and little spiders fat, where is there a better hunting-ground than the inside of a house where there is an open window, or, best of all, a church? What other bird, it may be asked, would take delight in making its way into a country church to flit about as the robin will? A sparrow would awaken at once to its sacrilegious behaviour, and beat the window-pane to escape; a robin never. On the contrary, he seems to take delight in making the little boys laugh, in impishly attracting the attention of people from the ‘secondly’ and ‘thirdly’ of the sermon.”

“Yes, sir, I’ve seed ’em pick the dog’s bones often, and I *have* seen ’em in a church.”

“Seen them, Monnick? Have seen them? Why, but the other day, in an old church with a regular three-decker pulpit, I saw a robin perch upon the cushion just over the parson’s head as he read the lessons, and mockingly begin to preach in song, indulging afterwards in a joyous flit round the church, out at the open door, and back again, to make a sharp snap with its bill at the flies. If, you might say, the robin bore love to man he would not play tricks in church.”

“I don’t quite see what you’re a trying to sow on me, sir, but, you being a doctor, I suppose it’s all right,” said Monnick.

“John Monnick,” said the doctor bitterly, “I am trying to give you a lesson on humbugs. Robins do not pair out of their station—out of their kind. Men do when they are wed, but the wisest do not. Robins pair with robins, not with wrens.”

“Well, sir, I never seed ’em,” said Monnick, “but that’s what they say—the robin and the wren be God’s cock and hen.”

“Stuff! Robins pair with robins. Should I, being a sparrow, pair with a swallow that flies high above me—three mullets on a field azure—flying across the blue sky.”

“Well, no, sir,” said Monnick thoughtfully; “I suppose not.”

“It would be humbug, John Monnick, humbug; and the robin is a humbug, John. As to his behaviour to his kind, it seems grievous to have to lift the veil that covers so much evil; but it must be done. What do you say to your belauded robin being one of the most sanguinary little monsters under the sun? Not merely is he a murderer of his kind, but he will commit parricide, matricide, or fratricide without the smallest provocation. Put half-a-dozen robins in an aviary, and go the next morning to see the result. I don’t say that, as in the case of the celebrated Kilkenny cats, there will be nothing left but one tail; but I guarantee that five of the robins will be dead, and the survivor in anything but the best of plumage, for a gamecock is not more pugnacious than our little friend.”

“That be true enough, sir,” said John, rubbing his back softly, “I’ve seen ’em. But you must ha’ taken a mort o’ notice of ’em, sir. I didn’t know you ever see such things.”

“You thought I dealt only in physic and lotions, John, eh? But I have noticed robins and a few other things. But about Cock Robin. It might be thought that this fighting propensity would only exist at pairing time, and that it was a question of fighting for the smiles of some fair Robinetta; but nothing of the kind: a robin will not submit to the presence of another in or on its beat, and will slay the intruder without mercy, or be slain in the attempt. It might almost be thought that the ruddy stain upon its breast-feathers was the proof-mark of some late victory, where the feathers had been imbrued in the victim’s blood; but I will not venture upon the imagery lest it should jar. It is no uncommon thing to see a couple of robins in a walk, flitting round each other with wings drooping and tails erect: they will bend and bow, and utter short, defiant notes, retreat, as if to take up more strategic positions, and, after an inordinate amount of fencing, dash in and fight till there seems to be a sort of feathery firework going off amongst the bushes; and so intent are they on their battle, so careless of man’s approach, that they may at times be picked up panting, exhausted, bleeding, and dying, holding tightly on to one another by their slender bills.”

“Yes, sir, and I’ve picked ’em up dead more’n once.”

“Ah! yes! *Pace*, good Doctor Watts, birds do not in their little nests agree, nor yet out of them. The old country idea is that in the autumn the young robins kill off the old: undoubtedly the strong do slay the weak. It can be often seen, and were it not so, we should have robins in plenty, instead of coming upon the solitary little fellows here and there, popping out silently like spies upon our every act. Come late autumn and wintry weather, the small birds can be seen in companies, sparrows and finches mixing up in friendly concourse; but the robin never seems to flock, but always to be comparatively scarce. He never joins their companies, though he comes in their midst to the window for wintry alms of crumbs, but when he does, as Artemus Ward would say, there is ‘a fite.’ He attacks the stranger birds all round, and audaciously takes the best pieces for himself, robins do not remain scarce from not being prolific, for you may find the nest a couple have built in an ivy tod, an old watering-pot, or in a corner of the toolshed, with five or six reddish blotchy eggs in it. They have two or three broods every season, while their brown speckled young ones, wanting in the olive and red of their ciders, are a cry familiar objects, hopping sedately about in the sunny summer-time.”

“That be all true as gorspel, sir,” said Monnick. “Why, bless you, they’ve built in my toolshed, in watering-pots, and even in my shred-bag.”

“Yes, Monnick, and now look here. I have shown what a murderer our small impostor is, and how, under his pleasant outward appearance, he has a nature that will stick at nothing for the gratification of self, even, as I must now show, at such a despicable act as theft. There are those who maintain that the robin’s mission is all for good, and that he is merely a destroyer of noxious insects, grubs, and worms; that he relieves the garden of myriads of blights, and eating, boring, and canker-producing pests. Granted: so he does, though it is very unpleasant for the unfortunate little insect that happens to be dubbed a pest to find itself within reach of that vicious bill and cavernous throat. But why cannot our young friend—for, in spite of his wickedness, we shall always call him friend for the pleasure he affords our eyes and ears, just as we wink at the private life of a great artist who gratifies the senses in his turn—but I repeat why cannot our young friend be content to ‘cry havock’ amongst the insect pests, and to peek from the dog’s basin, the pig’s trough, and the chickens’ food, and not, sit on some bare spray, or under the shadows of a thorny bush, and watch with those great earnest eyes of his till the ventilators of the glass-houses are open, and then flit—flutter—dash headlong in for a feast of grapes?”

“They do, sir, they’re as bad as the wopses. Some gardeners say as robins never touch fruit, sir, but they do.”

“Yes, John, you are right; they do, and most unmercifully. They pick out, as if by instinct, the ripest and best bunches of the great black Hambro’s, hang on to the stalks, and wherever these rich pearly black grapes have been well

thinned and petted that they may grow to an abnormal size, dig dig go the wicked little beaks. If they would be content with a grape or two, and begin and finish them, or even four or five or six, it would not matter; but your robin is a sybarite in his way: he treats a grape-house as visitors with tasting orders used to treat the cellars of the docks. They did not want the wine, but they would fee the cooper, who would broach a cask here and another cask there, and all of the best, till the vinous sawdust was soaked with the waste, and the fumes produced a strange intoxicating effect. Very strange that, how intoxicating those fumes would be. Unfortunately, this juice of the grape is not fermented, and the robin goes on upon his destructive quest. Still there is one redeeming feature: he will brook no companion. One visitor at a time; two means battle royal, and flying feathers."

John Monnick scratched one red ear, for the doctor was taking him out of his depth, and he looked more puzzled still as the speaker went on.

"To sum up, then, the robin is a compound of all that is audacious, gluttonous, vicious, cruel, and despicable; but he can sing, and his pleasant little note, mournful though it be, as it acts as harbinger of falling leaves, is as much associated with home and our native land as the bonny English rose, and that resource from chills and fogs, our own fireside. Never mind the superstitious penalties! Who is there among us who would kill a robin, or would take its nest? From earliest childhood till the days when Time's hoar frost appears upon the hair, one greets the ruddy-breasted little rascal with a smile, and feeds him when his feathered friends and foes fall fast before the winter's scythe. So loved is he, that in far-off foreign lands the nearest likeness to him is called a robin still. We can forgive him, and wink at all his sins, as he flits attendance where'er we go in country lane, and gladly greet him even in some suburban square; and even as I speak, I am fain to say—as his pretty little figure there greets my eye—what a nuisance it is to have to speak the truth! There, John Monnick, what do you think of that?"

"It's very good, sir, all as I could understand of it, but there's some as wants hearing again and diegestin' like, to get it all well into a man, as you may say. Going sir?"

"Yes, John Monnick, I'm going to your master."

"Ay, do, sir, and if I might make so bold to say so, if you'd talk to him like you did to me about the robins and their taking his grapes, it would interest him like, and may be do him good. I'd dearly like to see Sir James himself again. It's my belief he 'as got something on his mind?"

"I would give something to be able to ease him, Monnick. Well, I'll take your advice."

"Do, sir, do. Bless me, I could stand all day and hear you talk, sir, but I must be getting on. An'," he added, as the doctor strolled off, "it's curious, very curious, but I s'pose it's all true, but I don't kind o' like to hear a man, even if he be a gentleman, upsetting all what you've been taught and cherished like."

He went on weeding for a few minutes, and then straightened himself once more.

"The robin and the wren be God's cock and hen. Well, now I come to think of it, I never see 'em together. P'r'aps the doctor's right."

Volume Two—Chapter Eight.

Old John is Paternal, and Fanny Makes a Promise.

"Now do give me a rose, Mr Monnick; do, please."

"Give you a rose, my dear?" said John Monnick, pausing in his task of thinning out the superabundant growth amongst the swelling grapes. "Well, I don't like to refuse you anything, though it do seem a shame to cut the poor things, when they look so much prettier on the trees."

"Oh, but I like to have one to wear, Mr Monnick, to pin in my breast."

"And then, as soon as it gets a bit faded, my dear, you chucks it away."

"O no; not if it's a nice one, Mr Monnick. I put it in water afterwards, and let it recover."

"Putting things in water, 'specially masters, don't always make 'em recover, my dear," said the old man, picking out and snapping off a few more shoots. "Hah!" he cried, after a good sniff at the bunch of succulent pieces, and then placing one acid tendrilled scrap in his mouth, twisting it up, and munching it like some ruminating animal—"smell that, my dear; there's a scent!" and he held out the bunch to the pretty coquettish-looking maid.

"*De*-licious, Mr Monnick," said the girl, taking a long sniff at the shoots. "And now you will give me a nice pretty rosebud, won't you?"

"I allus observe," said the old man thoughtfully, going on with his work, "that if you want something, Fanny, you calls me Mister Monnick; but if I ask you to do anything for me, or you have an order from Sir James or my lady, it's nothing but plain John."

"Oh, I don't always think to call you Mr Monnick," said the girl archly.—"But I must go now. Do give me a nice just opening bud."

"Well, if you'll be a good girl, and promise only to take one, I'll give you leave to fetch your scissors and cut a Homer."

“What! one of those nasty common-looking little dirty pinky ones?” cried the girl. “No, thank you; I want one of those.” As she spoke, she pointed to a trellis at the end of the greenhouse, over which was trailed the abundant growth of a hook-thorned climbing rose.

“What, one o’ my Ma’shal Niels?” cried the old gardener. “I should just think not. Besides,” he added with a grim smile, “yaller wouldn’t suit your complexion.”

“Now, don’t talk stuff,” cried the girl. “Yellow does suit dark people.—Do cut me one, there’s a dear good man.”

“Yes,” said the old man; “and then, next time you get washing out your bits o’ lace and things, you’ll go hanging ’em to dry on my trained plants in the sun.”

“No; I won’t. There, I promise you I’ll never do so any more.”

“Till nex’ time.—I say, Fanny, when’s Mr Arthur going back to London?”

“I don’t know,” said the girl, rather sharply. “How can I tell?”

“Oh, I thought p’r’aps he might have been telling you last night.”

“Telling me last night!” echoed the girl. “Where should he be telling me?”

“Why, down the field-walk, to be sure, when he was a-talking to you.”

“That I’m sure he wasn’t,” cried the girl, changing colour.

“Well, he was a-wagging his chin up and down and making sounds like words; and so was you, Fanny, my dear.”

“Oh, how can you say so!”

“This way,” said the old man, facing her and speaking very deliberately. “What was he saying to you?”

“I—I wasn’t—”

“Stop a moment,” said the old man. “Mr Arthur Prayle’s such a religious-spoken sort o’ gent, that I dessay he was giving you all sorts o’ good advice, and I’m sure he wouldn’t like you to tell a lie.”

“I’m not telling a lie; I’m not.—Oh, you wicked, deceitful, spying old thing!” she cried, bursting into tears. “How dare you come watching me!”

“I didn’t come watching you, my dear. I was down there with a pot, picking up the big grey slugs that come out o’ the field into the garden; for they feeds the ducks, and saves my plants as well.—Now, lookye here, my dear; you’re a very pretty girl, and it’s very nice to be talked to by a young man, I dare say. I never cared for it myself; but young women do.”

“How dare you speak to me like that!” cried the girl, flaming up.

“’Cause I’m an old man, and knows the ways o’ the world, my dear. Mr Arthur comes down the garden to me and gives me bits o’ religious instruction and advice like; but if he wants to give any to you, I think he ought to do it in the house, and give it to Martha Betts and cook at the same time.”

“It’s all a wicked story,” cried Fanny angrily; “and I won’t stop here to be insulted!”

“Don’t, my dear. But I’m going to walk over to your brother William’s to-night, and have a bit o’ chat with him ’bout things in general, and I thought I’d give him my opinion on the pynte.”

Fanny had reached the door of the vinery; but these words stopped her short, and she came back with her face changing from red to white and back again. “You are going to tell my brother William?”

“Yes, my dear, as is right and proper too. Sir James aren’t fit to be talked to; and it’s a thing as I couldn’t say to her ladyship. It aren’t in the doctor’s way; and if I was to so much as hint at it to Miss Raleigh, she’d snap my head off, and then send you home.”

Fanny stood staring mutely with her lips apart at the old gardener, who went on deliberately snapping out the shoots, and staring up at the roof with his head amongst the vines. One moment her eyes flashed; the next they softened and the tears brimmed in them. She made a movement towards the old man where he sat perched upon his steps calmly ruminating with his mouth full of acid shoots; then, in a fit of indignation, she shrank back, but ended by going close up to him and laying her hand upon his arm.

“Leave that now,” she said.

“Nay, nay, my lass; I’ve no time to spare. Here’s all these shoots running away with the jushe and strength as ought to go into the grapes; and the master never touches them now. It all falls upon my shoulders since he’s ill.”

“Yes, yes; you work very hard; but I want to talk to you a minute.”

“Well; there then,” he said. “Now, what is it?” and he left off his task to select a nice fresh tendril to munch.

“You—you won’t tell Brother William.”

“Ay, but I shall, lass. Why, what do it matter to you, if it was all a lie and you warn’t there?”

“But William will think it was me, Mr Monnick; and he is *so* particular; and—There, I’ll confess it, was me.”

“Thankye,” said the old man, with a grim smile; “but my eyes are not had enough to make a mistake.”

“But you won’t tell William?”

“It aren’t pleasant for you, my dear; but you’ll thank me for it some day.”

“But it would make such trouble. William would come over and see Mr Prayle; and you know how violent my brother can be. There’s plenty of trouble in the house without that.”

“I don’t know as William Cressy would be violent, my dear. He’s a very fine young fellow, and as good a judge o’ gardening as he be of his farm. He be very proud of his sister: and he said to me one day—”

“William said—to you?”

“Yes, my dear, to me, over a quiet pipe, as he had along o’ me one evening in my tool-house. ‘John Monnick,’ he says, ‘our Fanny’s as pretty a little lass as ever stepped, and some day she’ll be having a chap.’”

“Having a chip!” said Fanny, with her lip curling in disgust.

“‘And that’s all right and proper, if he’s a good sort; but I’m not going to have her take up with anybody, and I’m not going to have her fooled.’”

“I wish William would mind his own business,” cried Fanny, stamping her foot. “He’s got a deal to talk about; coming and staring at a stupid housemaid.”

“Martha Betts aren’t stupid, my dear, and a housemaid’s is a very honourable situation. The first woman as ever lived in a house must have been a housemaid, just the same as the first man was a gardener. Don’t you sneer at lowly occupations. Everything as is honest is good.”

“Oh, yes, of course. But you won’t tell William?”

“I feel, my dear, as if I must,” said the old man, taking the girl’s hand, and patting it softly. “You’re a very pretty little lass, and it’s quite right that you should have a sweetheart.”

“Sweetheart, indeed!” cried Fanny in disgust,

“But that there Mr Arthur aren’t the right sort.”

“How do you know?” cried the girl defiantly.

“‘Cause I’m an old man as has seen a deal of the world, my dear, and I’ve got a granddaughter just like you. I shouldn’t have thought it of Mr Arthur, and I don’t know as I shan’t speak to him about it myself.”

“Oh no, no!” cried the girl excitedly. “Pray, don’t do that.”

The old man loosed her hand to sit gazing thoughtfully before him, while the girl once more grasped his arm.

“There’s on’y one thing as would make me say I wouldn’t speak to William Cressy and Mr Arthur.”

“And what’s that?” cried the girl.

“You a-giving of me your solemn promise as you won’t let Mr Arthur talk to you again.”

“I’ll promise,” cried the girl. “Yes,” said the old man; “it’s easy enough to promise; but will you keep it?”

“Yes, yes, that I will.”

“You see he’s a gentleman, and you’re only a farmer’s daughter, my dear; and he wouldn’t think no more of you, after once he’d gone away from here; and then you’d be frettin’ your pretty little heart out.”

“Then you won’t tell Brother William?”

“Well, I won’t.”

“Nor yet speak to Mr Arthur?”

“Not this time, my dear; but if I see any more of it, I shall go straight over to William Cressy, and then he’ll do what seems best in his own eyes.”

“I think it would be far more creditable of you, gardener, if you were attending to your vines, instead of wasting your time gossiping with the maids,” said a stern sharp voice. “And as for you, Fanny, I think you have enough to do indoors.”

“If you please, ma’am, you are not my mistress,” said the girl pertly.

“No, Fanny, and never shall be; but your mistress is too much taken up with her cares to note your negligence,

therefore I speak. Now go!”

A sharp answer was upon Fanny’s lips; but she checked it, and flounced out of the vinery, leaving Aunt Sophia with the gardener.

“I am surprised at you, John Monnick,” continued the old lady. “Your master is helpless now, and you take advantage of it.”

“No, ma’am, no,” said the old fellow, who would not bring the question of Fanny’s delinquency into his defence. “I’m working as steadily as I can.”

“Humph!” ejaculated Aunt Sophia. “I never saw these vines so wild before.”

“Well, they are behind, ma’am; but you see this is all extry. Sir James always done the vines himself, besides nearly all the other glass-work; and the things do run away from me a bit.”

“Yes, if you encourage the maid-servants to come and talk.”

“Yes, ma’am; shan’t occur again,” said the old fellow grimly; and he went on busily snapping out the shoots, while Aunt Sophia stalked out into the garden to meet Arthur Prayle, who was walking thoughtfully up and down one of the green walks, with his hands behind him, one holding a memorandum book, the other a pencil, with which he made a note from time to time.

Volume Two—Chapter Nine.

The Consequence of Killing Slugs.

Poor James Scarlett’s garden was in fair condition, but far from being at its best. It was well attended to, but the guiding spirit was to some extent absent; and as Jack Scales walked down it one soft moist morning, feeling in anything but good spirits at the ill success that had attended his efforts, he began to think a good deal about quaint, acid-voiced Aunt Sophia, with her sharp manner, disposition to snub, and general harshness to those around.

“Poor old girl!” he said. “She has settled herself down here, where I believe she does not want to stay; and I know it is to play propriety, and for the benefit of her nephew. It was too bad to speak to her as I did, but I was out of temper with her fidgeting about me. Let me see; what did I call her? a vexatious, meddling old maid. Poor old girl! How it does seem to sting a woman of that kind. Old maid. Too bad. I suppose the woman never existed yet who did not in her early days wish to wed. They all swear they never did, and that if the opportunity had come, they would have refused it with scorn; but human nature’s human nature, especially female human nature; and it’s woman’s vocation in life to marry, be a mother, and bring up her young to replenish the earth. If it is not, I’ve never studied humanity in sickness and in health. Oh, it’s plain enough,” he went on; “there are all the natural yearnings in her youth for one to love; and the tender affection, patience, and intense passion for her young, for whom she will work and starve and die, are all in her, like so many seeds waiting to shoot and bring forth flowers—beautiful flowers. But, as it too often happens, those flowers never blossom, for the seeds have no chance to grow; and the consequence of this unnatural life is that, a woman grows up soured—disappointed—withered as it were. Often enough she is ignorant of the unnatural state of her life, but it is unnatural all the same. Then we have the acid ways, the sharp disappointed looks, the effects, in short, of the withering up of all their beautiful God-given yearnings for that most sublime of nature’s gifts—motherhood; and we thoughtless fools sneer at unmarried women, and call them old maids. Hah!” he ejaculated; “it’s too bad. I’ll beg the old lady’s pardon the first time we meet.”

Jack Scales’s meeting with Aunt Sophia came sooner than he expected, for, turning down one of the walks, he heard a rustling noise before him, and directly after a grim smile crossed his face as he saw, a short distance in front, the figure of Aunt Sophia, while at her feet were a pair of gardening gloves, and a basket filled with the weeds and dead leaves that she had been gathering.

“Why, what the dickens is she about?” said the doctor. “Why—ha-ha-ha! But it isn’t a bad dodge after all.” For as he watched, he could see that Aunt Sophia was busy at work with an implement evidently of her own invention. She had a handkerchief tied over her head and beneath her chin, to keep her cap from blowing off or falling forward when she stooped, and in her hands a pair of the light lancewood wands used in playing the game of “Les Graces;” but they were firmly bound to a large pair of old scissors, turning them as it were into very long-handled shears. With these she poked and rustled about among the plants till she routed out some good fat slug, which she instantly scissored in three pieces, and then closing the shears, used their point to rake a little hole in the ground near the foot of the plant and bury the slug therein.

“That’s not a bad plan, Miss Raleigh,” said the doctor as the lady looked up sharply. “The slug has fattened himself upon the tender leaves of the plant and grown to his present size; now you offer him up as a sacrifice, and bury him where he will fertilise the plant in return.”

“Of course,” said Aunt Sophia shortly. “You would not leave the nasty slimy thing on the top, would you?”

“Certainly not,” said the doctor. “And besides, you give the plant back, about those wonderful imbibers—its roots—the concentrated essence of all that it has lost, in the shape of slug.”

“Is this meant for a joke, Doctor Scales?”

“Not in the least, my dear madam. By the way, though, our friend Mr Arthur Prayle would give us a lecture on cruelty, if he saw us rejoicing over the death of our molluscous enemies here.”

“Mr Arthur Prayle had better mind his accounts,” said the lady shortly; “he knows nothing about gardening.”

“No; I do not think he does,” said the doctor, as the old lady routed out another slug, cut it in three, and buried it viciously—just as if she were operating on Arthur Prayle.

“It seems to amuse you,” said Aunt Sophia.

“Amuse me? Well, it does look rather droll,” replied the doctor; “but it can’t be pleasant for the slugs.”

“Then the slugs had better emigrate,” said Aunt Sophia sharply. “I don’t want to see my poor nephew’s garden go to rack and ruin.”

Doctor Scales went off as Aunt Sophia resumed her task, and, as was often his habit, began to work out a discourse upon what he had seen. Starting with the text, “Is it cruel to kill slugs,” and it was somewhat after this fashion that he mused: “Is it cruel to kill slugs? Just stand with upraised foot before one of those slimy, moist, elongated bags of concentrated cabbage, cauliflower, choice plant, and tender cucumber, and answer that question if you can.

“Now, letting slimy slugs alone, and speaking as a humble-minded individual whose profession it is to save life, I want to know whether it is cruel to kill the myriad of teeming creatures that throng this earth. With sportsmen I have nothing to do. I speak from a simple horticultural point of view, and want to know whether I am justified in destroying life. To begin with, I am a teeming creature on the surface of the earth and I don’t want anybody to kill me. It would be far from pleasant to my feelings to be cut in two with a spade; to be crushed into an unpleasant mass by a broad foot; to be salted till I writhed and melted away; to be shot at with guns; caught in traps; killed with lime besprinkled upon me quick: or poisoned with deadly drugs. Yet I openly confess that I have been guilty of all these crimes. I might, in fact, have called this ‘The Recollections of a Murderer,’ so bestained are my hands in innocent blood of red and green and other colours. Certainly I might do the dirty work in a vicarious way by bringing into the garden a very serious-looking young drake, who makes no more ado about swallowing great earthworms by the yard than he does of devouring slugs by the quart, but that is a sneaking, underhanded way that I do not approve. I should feel like a Venetian noble who has hired a bravo to use his stiletto upon some obnoxious friend; and besides, if I did, the shadow of those murders would come like Banquo’s ghost to sit at my table when the aforesaid serious-looking young drake and a brother graced the board in company with a goodly dish of green peas, and seemed to murmur of the slugs and worms he had slain at my command. And there it is again—wholesale murder. I was guilty vicariously of the death of those ducks; I slew the sparrows who came to eat the peas; and, to go further, did I not kill the peas?

“Who says no? The peas were alive. I plucked their pods, tearing the graceful vines to pieces limb by limb, and the pea plants died—killed—murdered. Certainly I planted them and saved their lives when they were tender, sprouting, infantile pea-lings by killing the invading slugs with salt and soot, but, though I murdered that they might live, there was no reason why I should slay them when mature. But it is so all through man’s career, he walks his ground—his little Eden—a very Cain. Say he conquers that terrible disinclination to follow the example of the old man Adam, and till the ground with a spade, a genial kind of toil that opens the pores of the skin, increases the appetite with the smell of the newly-turned earth, and gives such an awful aching pain in the back that a quarter of an hour’s usance is quite sufficient digging for any but an extremely greedy man who possesses an enormous digestion. I repeat, say he conquers his aversion to manual toil, he has not inserted the deadly blade eight inches, and turned up the ‘spit,’ as the gardeners call it, before he finds that he has chopped some wretched wriggling worm in two. The worm had no business to be there when he was digging. Why not? What does the worm know about human rights? His name is not Macgregor, and he has no feet to be upon his native heath, but he was in his native soil. He was born there, and had gone on pleasantly boring his way through life, coming up to the surface as soon as it was dark, and lying out on the cool, dewy, fragrant earth, and then you, because you want potatoes, or peas, or some other vegetable for your gluttonous maw, come and cut him in two. A judge in a court of law would go against the worm, and call it justifiable vermicide, as he was a trespasser, you legally holding the land, but that worm’s blood would still be upon your—spade.

“There is no begging the question; if you garden you must kill wholesale. There is only one alternative. You can throw the big nuisances over into your neighbour’s plot, but it is only a temporary palliation, for he is sure not to like it, and certain to throw them back. Besides, you may have some compunction in the matter, and as the small nuisances cannot be thrown over, one kills and slays wholesale. It is terrible to think of! Intentionally and unintentionally one slays millions of creatures a year, beginning with one’s beef, and going down to the tiniest aphis that one treads upon in one’s daily walk, so that if it is wicked to kill slugs, it must be equally unjust to slay the tiniest fly. Why it is quite appalling, this reckoning up of crime. Those calceolarias were covered with lovely little green-flies right up the blossom stalks, and without compunction there was a massacre of the insects with tobacco water. That croquet lawn was infested with great worms, and they were watered with solution of copperas to crawl out and die. The great shelled snails that made a raid by regiments upon the strawberry beds were supplied with pillars of salt. The birds after much forbearance, were condemned to death for stealing cherries and black and red currants and gooseberries; so were the rabbits for nibbling off the tops of the tender broccoli and Brussels sprout plants. As a romantic young lady would say, this garden has been literally stained with gore, but the gore does not show, and the garden is the more abundant and green for the removal of its plagues.

“Yes, there is the creephole left that the killing may be looked upon as in defence of one’s own. The worm may be indigenous, but the birds and flies invade the place, while the slugs, snails, and rodents come in through fence and wall. They attack one’s cherished plants, and, granting that those plants have life, why should they not be protected, as one’s poultry is from foxes, and their young from predatory cats? Naturalists grant plants to possess life, circulation, sleep, functions, and nerves; they grow, they blossom, they have young; they have endless contrivances for sending those young emigrating to a distance where they can get a living for themselves, and not bother and eat the nutriment of the old folks, who are, perhaps, in pinched circumstances. Some send their offspring flying upon little parachutes of their own; some artfully stick them upon the backs or sides of any animal who passes by; there is one great balsam which sits on a sunny day apparently taking aim with its little seeds, and shooting them out with a

loud pop to a considerable distance; some youngsters really possess locomotion, and contract and expand in quite a crawling way till they get to some distance from the parent stem; others, again, take advantage of the first rain flood, and these little ones are off to sea, merrily sailing along hundreds of yards from where they were born. Why, even in the wood, at the bottom of the garden, there is one umbelliferous plant, a kind of wild parsnip—'hog weed,' as it is locally called—which grows up in a summer nine and ten feet high, carrying a host of children upon its head like a Covent Garden porter with a basket, till it thinks they are big enough to take care of themselves, when it calmly lies down, and tilts the little seeds off three or four yards away from its roots to form an independent nursery.

"I cannot solve the problem whether it is cruel to slay slugs, but take refuge in the protection theory, and so, as in duty bound, we go on killing and slaying, setting traps of sugared water for the wasps that love the plums, picking off the crawling caterpillars, before they have time to bloom into butterflies, drowning aphides with syringe storms, enlisting toads to kill the wood-lice and beetles, and full of remorse for what we do, go on in our wicked ways. To take a step outside one's garden, though, and gaze in thought around this teeming earth, what a vast scheme of preying destruction and bursting forth into new life is always going on. Those words, *destruction* and *cruelty*, might almost be expunged as being absurd in their broadest sense, for, in spite of the sore problem, it seems that from man downward to the tiniest microscopic organism, the great aim of existence is an exemplification of the verb 'to prey.'"

Jack Scales in his musings had been pretty well round the garden, and had returned to where Aunt Sophia was still killing slugs.

She looked up as he approached and seemed about to speak, so he resolved to give her the opportunity, and going up he said with a smile, "Do you know Miss Raleigh, I have been musing on killing slugs, and I think yours is a very notable employment."

"Humph!" ejaculated the old lady, stopping short, and looking the doctor full in the face.—"And now, doctor, a word with you as a gentleman. You are here in constant attendance upon my nephew. He has a good deal of property and that sort of thing, but I don't think it ought to be wasted."

"Of course not, my dear madam."

"Are you doing James any good?"

The doctor opened his eyes a little more widely at this, and then said: "Well, that is a very plain question, Miss Raleigh; but I'll give you a plain answer—So far, none."

"Then why do you stay, putting him to expense? You know the other doctors say it is a case for years of patient waiting."

"Hang the other doctors, ma'am!" cried Scales. "I do not go by what they say. I think differently, and have faith in being able to alter the condition of things."

Miss Raleigh shook her head.

"Ah, but I have, madam; and I shall go on trying till my poor friend sends me away.—And now, Miss Raleigh, before I go any further, I want to apologise to you."

"Apologise! To me?"

"Yes, to you. I made use of a very common but unkindly expression towards you, yesterday. Perhaps you have forgotten it."

Aunt Sophia looked at him searchingly; and there he saw the look of pain that had softened her countenance on the previous day come back, and her eyes filled with tears, as she said quietly: "I never forget these things."

"But you will forgive them. Believe me, I am very sorry, and I regret it extremely. I was worried and disappointed at the time."

"You only called me an old maid," said Aunt Sophia, with a smile full of sadness softening the harsh lines of her face.

"And I ought to have been ashamed of myself. It was the act of some thoughtless boy. Forgive me;" and he held out his hand.

Aunt Sophia gazed at him thoughtfully for a few moments, and then placed her hand in his. "Let it go," she said softly. "I shall never think of it again."

Jack Scales raised the hand to his lips, and had just let it fail, when he became aware of the fact that Arthur Prayle was walking along one of the neighbouring paths, apparently deep in the study of some book. "Confound him! he'll misinterpret that," said the doctor to himself; and then he saw that his companion's eyes were fixed upon him inquiringly.

"You were thinking that Mr Prayle will make remarks," she said softly.

"Let him. What is it to me what he thinks?"

"No; it does not matter," said Aunt Sophia. "Let us go down here." She led the way along the walk to where the iron gate opened upon the meadows, across which lay the lane leading to the little ivy-grown church; and, wondering at her action, Jack Scales walked by her side.

“Surely,” he thought, “she does not imagine that—Oh, absurd!” He glanced sidewise, and then, man of the world as he was, he could not help a slight sensation of uneasy confusion coming over him as he noticed that Aunt Sophia seemed to have divined his thoughts, and to be reading him through and through.

“This is a pretty place,” she said, breaking a rather awkward silence.

“As pretty a place as I ever saw,” replied the doctor, jumping at the opportunity of speaking on a fresh subject.

“It is much altered since I knew it as a child. James has done so much to improve it since he has been master.”

“You knew it well, when you were young, then?”

“O yes; we lived at the next house, higher up the river,” said Aunt Sophia softly; and there was a dreamy look in her eyes, while a pleasant smile, rarely enough seen, played about her lips as she spoke. “I was child, girl, and grew to middle age down here, Doctor Scales; I come back to the place, the grey, withered, old woman you see.”

“What an idiot I am!” thought the doctor. “I shall never understand her.”

They were walking on across the meadows, at the end of which was a gate, at which Aunt Sophia paused. “Will you give me your hand?” she said quietly. “I am not so active as I was.”

“I really don’t understand her!” muttered the doctor, climbing the gate, which was nailed up, and then assisting the old lady over. It was an easy task, for in spite of her self-disparagement, Aunt Sophia’s spareness made her very active, and, just holding by the doctor’s hands for steadiness, she jumped lightly down and stood beside him in the lane.

“Shall we go down to the river and round back to the house by the path?”

“No,” said Aunt Sophia quietly. “I want to go as far as the church.”

Jack Scales wondered more and more as they walked on along the shadowy lane to where the little ivy-covered church stood, with its ancient wall and lychgate, stones, and wood memorials sinking sidewise into the earth, and a general aspect everywhere of calm moss-grown decay.

“Hah!” exclaimed the doctor, as he stood gazing at the lichen-covered stones, and the lights and shadows thrown upon the ruddy-tiled mossy roof. “I wish I were an artist. What a place to paint!”

“Yes,” said Aunt Sophia, standing with her hands clasped, gazing in a rapt dreamy way before her; “it is a beautiful old place.” She moved to the gate, and held it open for him to pass through as well, pausing while he stopped to examine a wonderfully old yew-tree, about which a rough oaken seat had been placed, one that had been cut and marked by generations with initials. Then, as he turned, she went on again to the old south porch with its seat on either side, and through it into the church, which struck cool and moist as the doctor entered, taking off his hat and gazing about impressed by its ancient quaintness.

“I ought to have come before,” he said. “How old and calm everything seems! What a place for a man to be buried in, when the lifework’s done!”

“And the fight, and strife, and turmoil at an end,” said Aunt Sophia, in a low sweet voice, that made the doctor start, for it did not seem like hers.

Aunt Sophia went on along the little aisle with its few old pews on either side, and past the worm-eaten altar screen, beyond which were some venerable stalls, in one of which she sat down, motioning her companion to another at her side.

He took the seat, and the strangely solemn calm of the place impressed him as he noted the well-worn pavement, composed of the memorial stones of the passed away, dyed in many hues by the sunlight that streamed through the old east window. Before him were the remains of a brass relating to the founder of the church; beyond that were more of the old worm-eaten stalls, in which, in bygone days, the monks of the neighbouring priory must have sat, long enough before the huge linden that had grown to maturity, and now dappled the sunbeams that fell upon the floor, had been planted where it stood, at the chancel end.

As the doctor looked along the aisle with its soft dim light, the sunshine that streamed in through the southern windows and the light that came from the open door seemed to cut into the faint gloom, and mark out for themselves a place; while clearly heard from without came the twittering of swallows that circled about the little low tower, the chirping of sparrows in the ivy, and the clear trill of a lark somewhere poised in air hard by.

“I shall end by being a lover of the country, and coming here to live, Miss Raleigh,” said Scales at last, breaking the solemn silence, for his companion had not spoken since she took her place within the chancel.

“Not to fire from trouble?” she said with a smile.

“No,” he replied; “not to flee from trouble. But there is such a sweet sense of tranquillity here, that one seems to feel at rest, and the ordinary cares of life are forgotten.—Hark!” he said, as the note of the lark grew louder and clearer in the ringing arch of heaven. And then he sat back, listening for a time, wondering at last why his companion had brought him there. Then he fell to glancing casually at the two or three tablets on the wall. One was to the memory of a former vicar; another told of the virtues of the Squire of a neighbouring Hall, who had gone to his account followed by the prayers and blessings of the whole district—so the tablet seemed to say. Lastly, his eyes lighted upon a simple square marble tablet, raised upon another of black, and read the inscription: “To the Memory of Charles Hartly,

Lieutenant of Her Majesty's —th Regiment of Foot, who fell at Delhi, when bringing in a wounded comrade lying in front of the enemy's lines."

"Forty years ago," said the doctor thoughtfully. "Poor fellow! he died a hero's death."

"He was to have been my husband," said Aunt Sophia in a low sweet voice, "had he but lived. Forty years ago! Is it so long?"

Jack Scales was a man pretty well inured to trouble. He had seen grief in many phases, and his sympathies to some extent were dulled; but as he heard those calmly uttered words, and saw the old face that was raised half reverently towards the tablet upon the wall, there was a something seemed to catch his breath, and the white marble grew dim and blurred, as did the softened face that was by his side; and as Aunt Sophia rose, he once more raised her hand to his lips and kissed it, the look he gave her asking forgiveness, which was accorded with a smile.

As they walked slowly back, the doctor's manner towards his companion was entirely changed. He felt that here was a woman whom a man might be proud to call friend; and when they reached the gate leading into the meadows, and she turned to him with a smile, and said to him, "And how is Lady Martlett?" he started slightly, and then uttered a sigh of relief.

"Hah!" he exclaimed. "You still take an interest in that?"

"O yes, doctor," she said. "I have from the beginning. Well, is it to be a match?"

"No, no. I'll be frank with you. I like the woman—well, I love her as well as a man should one whom he would make his wife; but it is impossible."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; impossible," he said gloomily; "even if she were not playing with me."

"I don't think she is, doctor—not if I understand anything about women. Her pride is assumed, on account of your off-hand way to her. Why, you jeer and laugh at her. I have seen you insult her."

"Well, yes, I have. What else could I do? She wanted to bring me to her feet, to make me her slave, and to throw me over, as she has served a dozen more."

"Fops and fortune-hunters."

"Yes, that's it," he said excitedly, and quite carried out of his ordinary mood; "fortune-hunters. She thinks me one of that despicable brood. Hang it all, Miss Raleigh! it is out of the question."

"Why?"

"Why, my dear madam? Now come. You know me pretty well by this time. Do you think I'd go hanging after such a woman for the sake of her money, and be the miserable reptile who married her for that?"

"No; I think you like her for herself alone."

"I wish she hadn't a penny; and then again, if she hadn't, I couldn't marry her."

"Indeed?"

"Now, how could I drag such a woman down from a life of refinement and luxury, to be the wife of a poor doctor? No, madam; it is all a dream. We shall go on, sneering on her part, laughing and defiant on mine, and, I believe, all the time with sore hearts hidden beneath it all. There, you have my secret out bare before you. Now, you can laugh at the misogynist of a doctor, and think as little of him as you like."

"Yes," said Aunt Sophia, laying her hand upon his arm softly, and looking almost tenderly in his face, "you are a strange couple.—And now," she continued, "tell me about my poor nephew. Tell me frankly, have you any hope of his becoming the man he was?"

"Hope? Yes," he replied gloomily; "but little more. I have done and am doing all I can; but the human frame with all its nerves is a terrible mystery, in whose darkness one moves with awe."

"Then you give him up?"

"Give him up!" said Scales, with a short laugh—"give him up? Miss Raleigh; you don't know me yet. I'll never give him up. He's my study—the study of my life, and I shall fight on out of sheer obstinacy. I've plenty of *amour propre*, and it's touched here. I've learned one thing about him, and that's my lighthouse by which I steer."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Nature will perform the cure if cure there is to be; but Nature will not do it alone without a little guiding and calling upon at important times."

"I wish you success," said Aunt Sophia softly, as they came once more in sight of Arthur Prayle, now seated in one of the garden-seats, still deep in his book; and as she spoke her eyes were fixed upon the reader. "I will help you, doctor, and you must help me. Now, I am going on with my gardening." She left him, and walked straight back to her slug scissors, resuming her task as if nothing had happened, while the doctor stood looking after her.

“Old maid!” he said to himself. “I called her an old maid. Good heavens! Why, the woman is a saint!”

Volume Two—Chapter Ten.

Nice Task for an Old Maid.

“I declare,” said Aunt Sophia to herself, “it is quite ridiculous as well as shocking. Here I seem to be set up as the head of a sort of wedding bureau, for everybody seized with the silly complaint.”

“Oh, aunt, dear, it isn’t a silly complaint—it’s a very bad one,” sobbed Naomi, who had sought the old lady in her bedroom.

“Oh, stuff and nonsense, child!”

“But it is, aunt; it’s dreadful—worse than anything. You never knew how bad it was.”

“No, child,” said Aunt Sophia softly—“so people say;” and she laid her hand tenderly upon the head of the sobbing girl.

“It—it’s bad enough when—when you think—he loves you—and you—you—you—you are waiting—for him to speak; but—when—wh—wh—when he doesn’t speak at all, and—and you find out—he—he loves some one else—it—it breaks your heart,” sobbed poor Naomi. “I shall never be happy again.”

“Hush, hush, my darling. Not so bad as that, I hope. And pray, who is is that you love, and who loves some one else?”

“Nobody!” cried Naomi, lifting her face and speaking passionately, and with all the child-like anger of a susceptible girl with no very great depth of feeling. “I hate him—I detest him—I’ll never speak to him again. He’s a wicked, base, bad man, and—and—I wish he was dead.”

“Softly, softly. Why, what a baby love is this! Come, come, Naomi; we can’t all pick the bright fruit we see upon the tree; and, my child, those who do, often wish, as I daresay Eve did, that they had left it untouched.”

“I—I don’t know what you mean, aunt dear, but it’s very, very cruel. I did think him so nice and good and handsome.”

“Poor child!” said Aunt Sophia, smiling as the girl rested her head upon her arm, which was upon the old lady’s knee. “And who is this wicked man? Is it Doctor Scales?”

“Oh, what nonsense, aunt! He has always treated me as if I were a child, and—and that’s what I am. To think that I should have made myself so miserable about such a wretch!”

It was a curious mingling of the very young girl and the passionate budding woman, and Aunt Sophia read her very truly as she said softly: “Ah, well, child, time will cure all this. But who has troubled the poor little baby heart?”

“Yes, aunt, that’s right; that’s what it is; but it will never be a baby heart again for such a man as Mr Prayle.”

“And so Mr Prayle has been playing fast and loose with you, has he, dear?”

“No, aunt,” said the girl sadly. “It was all my silliness. He never said a word to me; and I am glad now,” she cried, firing up. “He’s a bad, wicked man.”

“Indeed, my dear,” thought Aunt Sophia, as she recalled Saxby’s words.

“I—I—I went into the study this morning, for I did not like it. I was hurt and annoyed, aunt, dear. Ought I to tell you all this?”

“Think for yourself, my dear. You have been with me these fifteen years, ever since your poor mother died. I am a cross old woman, I know, full of whims and caprices; but I thought I had tried to fill a mother’s place to you.”

“Oh, auntie, auntie!” sobbed the girl, clinging lightly to her, and drawing herself more and more up, till she could rest her head upon the old lady’s shoulder, “don’t think me ungrateful. I do—I do love you very dearly.”

“Enough to make you feel that there should be no want of confidence between us?”

“O yes, aunt, dear; and I’ll never think of keeping anything back from you again. I’ll tell you everything now, and then I’m sure you’ll say we ought to go away from here.”

“Well, well—we’ll see.”

“I thought I was very fond of Mr Prayle, aunt dear; and then I grew sure that I was, when I saw how he was always being shut up in the study with Kate, and it—it—”

“Speak out, my dear,” said Aunt Sophia gravely.

“It made me feel so miserable.”

Aunt Sophia’s face puckered, and she bowed her head.

“Then I said that it was wicked and degrading to think what I did, and I drove such thoughts away, and tried to believe that it was all Cousin James’s affairs; and then I saw something else; but I would not believe it was true till this morning.”

“Well, Naomi, my child, and what was it?”

“Why, aunt—Oh, I don’t like to confess—it was so shameless and unmaidenly; but I thought I loved him so very much. I—I—don’t like to confess.”

“Not to me, my dear?”

“Yes, yes; I will, aunt dear—I will,” cried the girl, whose cheeks were now aflame. “It’s about a fortnight ago that one evening, when we were all sitting in the drawing-room with the windows open, and it was so beautiful and soft and warm, Mr Prayle got up and came across and talked to me for a few minutes. It was only about that sketch I was making, and he did not say much, but he said it in such a way that it set my heart beating; and when he left the room, I fancied it meant something. So I got up, feeling terribly guilty, and went out of the window on to the lawn and then down to the rose garden, and picked two or three buds. Then I went round to the grass path where Mr Prayle walks up and down so much with his book.”

“Because you thought he would be there, my dear?”

“Yes, aunt! It was very wrong—but I did.”

“And you thought he had gone out there to read his book in the dark, eh?”

“No, aunt dear; I thought he would be there waiting to see if I would go to him.”

“And you were going?”

“Yes, aunt dear.”

“Was he there?”

“Yes, aunt.”

“Waiting for you?”

“O no, aunt dear; for as I went softly over the grass, I stopped short all at once, and turned giddy, and felt as if everything was at an end.”

“Why, Naomi?”

“He was going by me in the darkness with his arm round some one else’s waist!”

Aunt Sophia’s face had never looked so old before, for every wrinkle was deeply marked, and her eyes seemed sunk and strange in their fixed intensity as she waited to hear more; but Naomi remained silent, as if afraid to speak.

“Well, child, and who was it with Mr Prayle?”

Naomi hesitated for a few moments, and then said in a passionate burst: “I did not believe it till this morning, aunt. I thought then that it was Kate; but it seemed so impossible—so terrible—that I dare not think it was she. But when I went quickly into the study this morning, Mr Prayle was just raising her hand to his lips. O aunt, how can people be so wicked! I shall go and be a nun!” Aunt Sophia looked still older, for a time, as she tenderly caressed and fondled the sobbing girl. Then a more serene aspect came over her face, and she said softly: “There, there; you have learned a severe lesson—that Mr Prayle does not care for you; and as to being a nun—no, no, my darling: there is plenty of good work to be done in the world. Don’t shirk it by shutting yourself up. Come, you have been almost a child so far; now, be a woman. Show your pride. There are other and better men than Arthur Prayle; and as to what you saw—it may have been a mistake. Let’s wait and see.”

“Yes, aunt.”

“And you’ll be brave, and think no more of him?”

“Never again, aunt dear. There!”

“That’s my brave little woman.—Now, bathe your eyes, and stop here till the redness has gone off. I’m going down to write.” She kissed Naomi tenderly, and left her, making her way to the drawing-room, where she wrote several letters, one being to Mr Saxby to ask him to come down again for a day or two, as she wanted to ask his advice about an investment.

Volume Two—Chapter Eleven.

John Monnick Looks at his Traps.

It was one of those dark, soft, autumn evenings when the country seems dream-like and delicious. Summer is past, but winter is yet far away; and the year having gone through the light fickleness of spring and the heats of summer, with its changes of cold and passions of storm, has settled down into the mellow maturity, the softened glow, the

ripeness of life which indicate its prime.

Doctor Scales was not happy in his mind, he was—and he owned it—in love with the imperious beauty Lady Martlett, but he was at odds with himself for loving her.

“The absurd part of it is,” he said to himself as he lit a cigar and went out into the garden, “that there seems to be no medicine by which a fellow could put himself right.—There,” he said after a pause, “I will not think about her, but about Scarlett.”

He strolled slowly along, finding it intensely dark; but he knew the position of every flower-bed now too well to let his feet stray off the velvet grass, and as he went on, he came round by the open window of the drawing-room, and, looking through the conservatory, stood thinking what a pleasant picture the prettily lighted room formed, with severe Aunt Sophia spectacled and reading, while Naomi was busy over some sketch that she had made during the day.

Lady Scarlett was not there; but it did not excite any surprise; and the doctor stood for some minutes thinking, from his post of observation, that Naomi was a very sweet girl, as nice and simple as she was pretty, and that she would make a man who loved her, one of those gentle equable wives who never change.

“Very different from Lady Scarlett,” he said to himself, as he stood there invisible, but for the glowing end of his cigar. “Ha! I don’t like the way in which things are going, a bit.”

He walked on over the soft mossy grass, with his feet sinking in at every step, and his hands in his pockets, round past the dining-room to where a soft glow shone out from the study window; and on pausing where he could obtain a good view, he stood for some time watching his friend’s countenance, as James Scarlett sat back in his chair with the light from the shaded lamp full upon his face.

“I’m about beaten,” the doctor said to himself. “I’ve tried all I know; and I’m beginning to think that they are all right, and that if Nature does not step in, or fate, or whatever it may be, does not give him some powerful shock, he will remain the wreck he is, perhaps to the end of his days.—Yes, I’m about beaten,” he thought again, as he seized this opportunity of studying his friend’s face unobserved; “but I’m as far off giving up, as I was on the day I started. I won’t give it over as a bad job; but how to go on next, I cannot say.—Just the same,” he muttered after a time, as he noted one or two uneasy movements, and saw a curious wrinkled expression come into the thin troubled face. “Poor old boy! I’d give something to work a cure.—By the way, where’s Prayle? I thought he was here.”

The doctor thrust his hands more deeply into his pockets and strolled away, threading his course in and out amongst the flower-beds, and then, thinking deeply, going on and on down first one green path and then another, his footsteps perfectly inaudible. As he walked on, his mind grew so intent upon the question of his patient’s state, that the cigar went out, and he contented himself with rolling it to and fro between his lips, till he paused involuntarily beside a seat under the tall green hedge that separated the garden from one of the meadows.

“Damp?” said the doctor to himself, as he passed one hand over the seat. “No; dry as a bone;” and he seated himself, throwing up his legs, and leaning back in the corner, listening to the soft crop, crop, crop of one of the cows, still busy in the darkness preparing grass for rumination during the night. “I wonder whether cows ever have any troubles on their minds?” thought Scales. “Yes; of course they do. Calves are taken away, and they fret, and—Hallo! Who’s this?”

He tried to pierce the darkness as he heard heavy breathing, and the dull sound of footsteps coming along the walk, the heavy sound of one who was clumsy of tread, and who was coming cautiously towards him.

“Some scoundrel after the pears. I’ll startle him.”

He had every opportunity for carrying out his plan, for the steps came closer, stopped, and he who had made them drew a long breath, and though the movements were not visible, Scales knew, as well as if he had seen each motion, that the man before him had taken off his hat and was wiping the perspiration from his face.

“Hallo!”

The man started and made a step back; and the doctor told a fib.

“Oh, you needn’t run,” he said. “I see you. I know who you are.”

“I—I wasn’t going to run, sir,” said John Monnick softly.

“What are you doing here?”

“Well, sir, you see, sir—I—I have got a trap or two down the garden here, and—and—I’ve been seeing whether there’s anything in. You see, sir,” continued the old gardener in an eager whisper, “the rarebuds do such a mort o’ mischief among my young plahnts, that I’m druv-like—reg’lar druv-like—to snare ’em.”

It was rather high moral ground for a man to take who had just told a deliberate untruth; but Doctor Scales took it, and said sharply: “John Monnick, you are telling me a lie!”

“A lie, sir!” whispered the old man. “Hush, sir! pray.”

“Are you afraid the rabbits will hear me?—Shame, man! An old servant like you.—John Monnick, you know me.”

“Ay, sir, I do.”

“Now, don’t you feel ashamed of yourself, an old servant, like you, with always a Scripture text on your tongue, telling me a lie like that about the traps?”

The gardener was silent, and the doctor heard him draw a long breath.

“Well, sir,” he said at last—“and I hope I may be forgiven, as I meant well—it weer not the truth.”

“Then you were after the fruit?”

“I? After the fruit, sir? Bless your heart, no; I was only watching.”

“What! for thieves?”

The gardener hesitated, and remained silent.

“There, that’s better; don’t tell a lie, man. I think the better of you. But shame upon you! with your poor master broken, helpless, and obliged to depend upon his people. To go and rob him now, of all times. John Monnick, you are a contemptible, canting old humbug.”

“No, I aren’t, doctor,” said the old fellow angrily; “and you’ll beg my pardon for this.”

“Beg your pardon?”

“Ay, that you will, sir. It was all on account of master, and him not being able to look after things, as brought me here.”

“I don’t believe you, Monnick.”

“You can do as you like, sir,” said the old man sturdily; “but it’s all as true as gorspel. I couldn’t bear to see such goings-on; and I says to myself, it’s time as they was stopped; and I thought they was, till I come in late to lock up the peach-house, and see her go down the garden.”

The doctor rose from his seat, startled.

“And then I says to myself, he won’t be long before he comes, for its a pyntment.”

“Yes. Well?” said the doctor, who, generally cool to excess, now felt his heart heating strangely.

“Oh, you needn’t believe it without you like, sir. I dessay I am a canting old humbug, sir; but far as in me lies, I means well by him, as I’ve eat his bread and his father’s afore him this many a year.”

“I’m afraid I’ve wronged you, Monnick,” said the doctor hastily.

“You aren’t the first by a good many, sir; but you may as well speak low, or they’ll maybe hear, for I walked up torst the house, and I see him pass the window, and then I watched him. P’r’aps I oughtn’t, but I knowed it weren’t right, and Sir James ought to know.”

“You—you knew of this, then?”

“Yes, sir. Was it likely I shouldn’t, when it was all in my garden! Why, a slug don’t get at a leaf, or a battletwig, or wops at a plum, without me knowing of it; so, was it likely as a gent was going to carry on like that wi’out me finding of it out?”

“And—and is he down the garden now?” said the doctor, involuntarily pressing his hand to his side, to check the action of his heart.

“Ay, that he be, sir; and him a gent as seemed so religious and good, and allus saying proper sort o’ things. It’s set me agen saying ought script’ral evermore.”

There was a dead silence for a few moments; and then the doctor hissed out: “The scoundrel!”

“Ay, that’s it, sir; and of course it’s all his doing, for she was so good and sweet; and it’s touched me quite like to the heart, sir, for master thought so much o’ she.”

“Good heavens!—then my suspicions were right!”

“You suspected too, sir? Well, I don’t wonder.”

“No, no; it is impossible, Monnick, impossible. Man, it must be a mistake.”

“Well, sir,” said the old fellow sturdily, “maybe it be. All of us makes mistakes sometimes, and suspects wrongfully. Even you, sir. But I’m pretty sure as I’m right; and for her sake, I’m going to go and tell master, and have it stopped.”

“No, no, man; are you mad?” cried the doctor, catching him by the arm.

“No more nor most folks be, sir; but I’m not going to see a woman go wrong, and a good true young man’s heart broke, to save a smooth-tongued gent from getting into trouble. It’ll do him good too.”

“Then you mean Mr Prayle?”

“Course I do, sir. There aren’t no one else here, I hope, as would behave that how.”

“Where are you going?” said the doctor, holding the old man tightly by the arm.

“Straight up to Sir James, sir.”

“No, no, man. Let me go.”

“To master, sir?”

“No, no. To Prayle—to them. Where are they?” The doctor’s voice sounded very hoarse, and the blood flushed to his face in his bitter anger as he clenched his hand.

“They’re down in the lower summer-house, sir,” said the old man; “and it’s my dooty to take Sir James strite down to confront him and ask him what he means; see what a bad un he be and then send him about his business, never to come meddling here no more.”

Scales stood perfectly silent, but gripping the old man’s arm tightly. It was confirmation of suspicions that had troubled him again and again. He had crushed them constantly, telling himself that there was no truth in them; that they disgraced him; and here was the end. What should he do? The shock to his friend would be terrible; but would it not be better that he should know—better than going on in such a state as this? The knowledge must come sooner or later, and why not now?

The shock? What of the effects of that shock with his mind in such a state? Would it work ill or good?

“Poor fellow!” he muttered, “as if he had not suffered enough. I never thoroughly believed in her, and yet I have tried. No, no; he must not know.”

“Now, sir, if you’ll let go o’ me, I’m going up to master.”

“No, my man; he must not be told.”

“It’s my dooty to tell him, sir; and I’m a-going to do it.”

“But I don’t know what effect it may have upon him, man.”

“It can’t have a bad one, sir; and it may rouse Sir James up into being the man he was afore the accident. I must make haste, please, sir, or I may be too late.”

“No, Monnick; you must not go.”

“Not go, sir? Well, sir, I don’t want to be disrespeckful to my master’s friends; but I’ve thought this over, and my conscience says it’s my dooty, and I shall go.” The old man shook himself free, and went off at a trot, leaving the doctor hesitating as to the course to pursue.

Should he run after and stop him? Should he go down the garden, interrupt the meeting, and enable them to escape? “No; a hundred times no!” he muttered, stamping his foot. “I must stop him at any cost.” He ran up the garden; but he was too late, for before he reached the house he heard low voices, and found that Scarlett had been tempted out by the beauty of the night—or by fate, as the doctor put it—and was half-way down the path when Monnick had met him.

“Who is this?” he said in a low, agitated voice, as the doctor met them.

“It is I, old fellow,” said the doctor, hastily.—“Now come, be calm. You must govern yourself. Has he told you something?”

“I wanted no telling, Jack,” groaned Scarlett. “The moment he opened his lips, I knew it. I have suspected it for long enough; but I could not stir—I would not stir. He, my own cousin, too; the man I have made my friend. O, heaven, is there no gratitude or manly feeling on the earth!”

“My dear boy, you must—you shall be cool,” whispered the doctor. “You are in a low nervous state, and—”

“It is false! I am strong. I never felt stronger than to-night. This has brought me to myself. I would not see it, Jack. I blinded myself. I told myself I was mad and a traitor, to imagine such things; but I have felt it all along.”

“And has this been preying on your mind?”

“Preying? Gnawing my heart out.—Don’t stop me. Let us go. Quick! He shall know me for what I am. Not the weak miserable fool he thinks.—Come quickly!—No! stop!” He stood panting, with Scales holding tightly by his arm, trembling for the result.

“Monnick, go back to the house,” said Scarlett, at last in a low whisper; and the old man went without a word.

“Now you stop here,” said Scarlett, in the same low painful whisper. “I will not degrade her more by bringing a witness.”

“But Scarlett—my dear old fellow. There must be no violence. Recollect that you are a gentleman.”

“Yes! I recollect. I am not going to act like a ruffian. You see how calm I am.”

“But it may be some mistake. I have seen nothing. It is all dependent on your gardener’s words. What did he tell you?”

“Hardly a word,” groaned Scarlett, “hardly a word. ‘Prayle—the summer-house.’ It was enough. I tell you, I have suspected it so long. It has been killing me. How could I get well with this upon my mind!”

“But, now?”

“Stay here, man—stay here.”

“Promise me you will use no violence, and I will loose your arm.”

“I promise—I will act like—a gentleman.”

The doctor loosed his arm; and drawing a long hissing breath, James Scarlett walked swiftly down the garden-path to where, in the moist dark shades below the trained hazels, the summer-house had been formed as a nook for sunny scorching days. It was close to the river, and from it there was a glorious view of one of the most beautiful reaches of the Thames.

James Scarlett recalled many a happy hour passed within its shade, and the rage that burned within his breast gave place to a misery so profound that, as he reached the turn that led to the retreat, he stopped short, pressing his hands to his throat and panting for his breath, which hardly came to his labouring breast. And as he stood there, he heard his cousin’s voice, in the silence of the evening, saying softly: “Then you promise? I will be at the station to meet you, and no one will know where you have gone.”

James Scarlett’s brain swam as he heard the answer. It was: “Yes!” A faithful promise for the next evening; and as he listened and heard each word clearly, he staggered back and nearly fell. Recovering himself somewhat, though, he walked slowly back, groping in the dark as it were, with his hands spread out before him, to keep from striking against one or other of the trees. The next minute, the doctor had him by the hand, and was hurrying him away, when Scarlett gave a sudden lurch, and would have fallen, had not his friend thrown one arm about him, and then, lifting him by main force, carried him to the house. The French window of the study was open; and he bore him in and laid him upon a couch, where, after a liberal application of cold water to his temples, he began to revive, opening his eyes and gazing wonderingly around. Then, as recollection came back, he uttered a low sigh, and caught at the doctor’s hand.

“Kate!” he said softly. “Go and fetch poor Kate.”

Volume Two—Chapter Twelve.

The Doctor’s Eyesight Improves.

Doctor Scales left his friend, after sending word by one of the servants that he wished to see Lady Scarlett. The meeting would be very painful, and it was one to be avoided. Consequently, beyond encountering Aunt Sophia in the course of the evening and answering a few questions, the doctor managed so well that he saw no one else belonging to the establishment before asking whether Scarlett would see him again, and retiring for the night.

“It isn’t a question of medicine,” he had said to himself. “Wretched woman! I always mistrusted her. I don’t know why, but I did. And now, what will be the next movement? They will separate of course; and after poor Scarlett has got over the shock, I daresay he will mend.—How closely he kept it, poor fellow. He must have loved her very dearly, and would not speak while it was mere suspicion.”

It was just about this time that Aunt Sophia came to him, to ask him if he would have some tea.

“No,” he said shortly; “not to-night.”

“Do you know what agitated my nephew so much?”

“Yes,” said the doctor; “but I am not at liberty to tell you.”

“I will not press you,” said Aunt Sophia gravely. “Lady Scarlett is with him now.”

She walked away; and after making sure that he would not be wanted, as has been said, Scales sought his room.

The night passed quietly enough; and in good time the doctor rose to take his morning walk about the grounds, when, as he returned, towards eight o’clock, he heard the grating of wheels upon the gravel, and saw the dogcart driven up to the door. He involuntarily drew back and stayed amongst the shrubs, just as Prayle came out quickly, with his coat over his arm, and thin umbrella in hand. His little portmanteau was handed in by the servant, and at a word, the groom drove off.

“Thank goodness!” ejaculated the doctor. “We’ve seen the last of him, I hope; and as to that woman—Pah! What brazen effrontery!” This was consequent upon seeing Prayle turn slightly in his place and look back at the end of the house, where, from a staircase window, a hand appeared, and a kerchief was for a moment waved.

Prayle, however, made no sign, and the doctor went in.

“I can’t help people’s emotions,” he said to himself. “I have to quell all mine and be matter-of-fact. Consequently,

hunger has an opportunity to develop itself, and I want my breakfast as at any other time."

There was no one in the breakfast-room when he entered; but in a few minutes Naomi came down, looking rather pale and troubled; and soon after Miss Raleigh appeared with a very solemn, stern countenance, which relaxed, however, as she laid her hand in that of the young doctor.

"You have not seen James this morning, of course?"

"No," he replied.

"Ah! You will be glad to hear that he has had a better night. So Kate tells me."

"Then he has forgiven her," said the doctor to himself. "Well, I could not. It is Christian-like, though; and I suppose they will separate quietly."

Just then, Lady Scarlett entered the room, looking very pale and red-eyed, as if from weeping. She went up to Aunt Sophia and kissed her, the kiss being coldly received; paid the same attention to Naomi; and then held out her hand to the doctor. He hesitated for a moment, and then, from force of habit more than anything else, he took a couple of steps forward and shook hands in a cold limp fashion, astounded at the fact that Lady Scarlett raised her eyes to his with a frank ingenuous look of pain.

"As much like that of a sweet innocent girl as I ever saw," he thought, as he took his place.

The meal was not a sociable one, for everybody seemed awkward and constrained, and it passed off almost in silence; while, when soon after it was ended, the doctor asked if he might go up to Scarlett's room, there was a look almost of reproach in Lady Scarlett's eyes as she said: "O yes; of course."

For some time past it had been Scarlett's habit to stay in his room till mid-day. He dressed at eight, and then lay down again in a heavy, dreamy way, to lie moodily thinking; but this time the doctor found him fast asleep, looking very calm and peaceful, as his breath came regularly, and there was a slight flush upon his haggard face.

"Poor fellow!" thought the doctor, "How wretchedly thin he has grown. I was afraid the encounter last night would have been too much for him; but it almost seems as if he is better, now he knows the worst."

As he stood watching him, he heard Lady Scarlett pass, on her way to her own room; but she seemed to change her mind, came lightly back, and opened the door softly.

"He is asleep," said the doctor sternly; and she at once withdrew, leaving Scales at his post, from which he did not stir till luncheon-time, when he went down.

Lady Scarlett had been twice to the door, to look in with wistful eyes; but each time she had been forbidden to enter, as the patient was not to be awakened at any cost; so the anxious woman went patiently away to wait, for she never even dreamed of resisting the medical man's command.

Sleep seemed to have so thoroughly taken possession of James Scarlett, that he remained under its influence hour after hour; and when Lady Scarlett timidly asked if it was right, she received the same answer—that under the circumstances nothing could be better—and went away content.

It was quite evening when Scarlett awoke to find the doctor sitting reading by his bed. "Why, Jack!" he cried, rather excitedly, "am I—am I—worse?"

"My dear fellow, no; I hope not."

"No; of course not. I'm—I must be—Thank God!" he sighed fervently; "what a restful, grateful sleep.—Where's Kate?"

"She has been here several times, but I would not have you disturbed."

"Bless her!" said Scarlett softly. "Jack you are my one friend, the only one to whom I ever opened my heart, I trust you, Jack, with everything."

"My dear old boy," said the doctor warmly, grasping his hands, "I hope I deserve it. Heaven knows, I try."

"You do deserve it, Jack. I can never repay you for hat you've done for me."

"Tchah, man, stuff! Why, I owe you a debt for letting me try to cure you."

"Now let me be more in your debt, Jack," said Scarlett.

"As much as you like, old fellow. I'll do all I can."

Scarlett paused, and his face flushed almost feverishly as he gazed earnestly at his friend. At last he spoke. "I have been weak—unstrung; and that, made me what I was, Jack," he said piteously. "You saw the weak side of my character last night. I had hidden it so well before; but when you came to me then, I was half mad, and—well, I need not confess—you must have seen the turn my thoughts took. You don't wish me to degrade myself again—to make confession?"

"No, no—say nothing," said Scales quietly. "My dear old fellow, believe me, I am your friend."

"You are, Jack; you are more—my very brother at heart; and if you ever think again of my cruel sacrilegious doubts,

set them down as a sick man's fancies, and then bury them for ever. And—Jack, old friend—let last night's outburst be a thing that's dead."

"I promise you, Scarlett, upon my word."

"Thanks, Jack, thanks! I shiver when I think of it. If Kate knew, it would break her heart."

The doctor was silent.

"When I came back with my brain reeling, I was drunk with a great joy. You know what I had fancied. O Jack! if I could forgive myself!—but I never can."

"You are growing excited. You must be quiet, now."

"Excited, man? Oh, it is only with my happiness. That accursed idea, born of my nervous state, was eating my very life away; while now that I know that it was but the foul emanation of my own brain, I can scarcely contain myself, and I seem to have leaped back to health and strength."

Scales did not speak.

"But I am forgetting.—Good heavens! I have slept away the day, and the night is here. That wretched girl!"

The doctor gazed at him fixedly, asking himself if his friend's brain was wandering.

"She promised to meet him—at some station—in London—to-night. Jack, it must be stopped before it is too late.—Where is that scoundrel Prayle?"

"He left this morning, early, to catch the train."

"And I've lain here as if in a stupor—Quick, Jack—my wife—no, poor girl, she must not be troubled with this; she has borne enough. Ring for—No; fetch my aunt. Yes; she will be the best. Go, old fellow, quick!"

"Is he wandering, or am I a fool?" muttered the doctor, as he hurried from the room to encounter Lady Scarlett on the stairs. "He is worse!" she cried. "No, no," said the doctor, almost roughly. "Not yet. You must not go, Lady Scarlett. I forbid it."

She shrank back meekly. "Tell me that he is in no danger," she said imploringly.

"Yes; I do tell you that," he said with a feeling of repugnance that would tinge his voice.—"Where is Miss Raleigh?"

"In the drawing-room. I will fetch her," cried Lady Scarlett, rushing to perform the task, while the doctor stood rubbing his ear.

"It is I who am mad," he said to himself, "and not poor Scarlett.—Yes," he said aloud, as Aunt Sophia came up, "Scarlett wants to see you at once." He led the way back, and closed the door almost angrily after them, leaving Lady Scarlett with her head leaning against the wall, as the tears coursed down her cheeks.

"Why does he dislike me so?" she sighed. "He is jealous of my love for him—they are such friends. I ought to hate him; but how can I when he is so true!"

"Auntie!" exclaimed Scarlett excitedly, as the old lady entered his room, "I want you, quick—before it is too late. That smooth-tongued scoundrel Prayle—"

"Amen!" said Aunt Sophia softly.

"Has been practising upon the weakness of that pretty little lass of ours—Fanny. He has gone up to town, and she promised him to follow. Go and stop her at any cost. Then send for her brother, and let him know the truth; and if he follows and thrashes—What?"

"The girl has gone," said Aunt Sophia.

"Gone?"

"She asked Kate for a holiday, and went this afternoon. She was to be back to-morrow night."

"Good heavens!" cried Scarlett. "I would sooner have given a thousand pounds.—What is it, Jack?"

"Nothing—only this—so sad!" said the doctor hoarsely, as he sat where he had literally dropped—into a chair.

"What is to be done?" cried Scarlett excitedly. "Here, send for William Cressy. Let a man gallop over at once."

"Yes, I'll send," said the doctor; and he literally staggered out of the room. "Am I really out of my senses?" he said to himself as he hurried down. "Have I been blundering all this time; or is it a ruse of the poor fellow to throw us off the truth?—Good heavens! what am I to think!" he ran into the study and rang the bell loudly, when Martha Betts came into the room at once in her calm grave way.

"Can you find the gardener—Monnick," he said, "quickly."

"Yes, sir."

“Send him here—at once.”

The girl hurried out, and the doctor paced the room.

“If I am wrong, I shall never forgive myself. I can never look her in the face again. Good heavens!—good heavens! I must, have been mad and blind, and an utter scoundrel, to think such things of—Oh, what a villain I have been!”

Just then, there was a heavy footstep in the passage, and the old gardener tapped at the door.

“Come in,” cried the doctor, running to meet him; and as the old man entered, he caught him by the arm. “Quick!” he cried—“tell me—speak out, man—the truth.”

“Ay, sir, I will,” muttered the old fellow.

“Who—who—now speak out; keep nothing back; I am your master’s trusted friend. Who was in the summer-house last night with Mr Prayle?”

“That poor foolish little wench, Fanny, sir; and—”

“Fool, fool, fool!” cried the doctor, stamping upon the floor.

“Ay, that’s so, sir; that’s so; and she’ll know better soon, let’s hope.”

“Quick!” cried the doctor. “Go—at once—and fetch her brother William Cressy here. Your master wants to see him instantly. Go yourself, or send some one who can run.”

The old man hesitated, and then hurried out. “I’d better go mysen,” he muttered. “P’raps it’s best; but I don’t think Willyum Cressy will be here to-night.”

He had hardly closed the door before the doctor had opened it again, and was on his way upstairs, but only to be waylaid by Lady Scarlett, who caught him by the arm, and literally made him enter the drawing-room.

“Doctor Scales, I am his wife,” she pleaded. “I have borne so much; for pity’s sake tell me. You see how I obey you and keep away; but tell me what is wrong—or I shall die.”

“Wrong?” cried the doctor, catching her hands, and kissing them again and again. “Nothing about him, my dear child. He is better—much better. The trouble—forgive me for saying it to you—is a scandal about that scoundrel—double scoundrel—Prayle.”

“And my husband?”

“Is better—much better.”

Lady Scarlett’s hands joined, and were raised towards heaven as she sank upon her knees motionless, but for a low sob that forced its way from her breast from time to time.

Doctor Scales stood gazing down at her for a few moments, and then stooping low, he laid his hand reverently upon her head.

This brought her back from her rapt state of thankful prayer, and she rose and caught his hand.

“I have been so rude and harsh,” he blundered out. “Can you forgive me?”

“Forgive? You, who have devoted yourself to him I love? My husband’s dearest friend has never yet truly read his poor wife’s heart.”

She said this with a quiet womanly dignity that humbled the doctor to the very dust, and his voice was broken as he replied gently:

“I never have—I have been very blind.”

He said no more, but went slowly to the door. There he turned.

“Once more,” he said: “Scarlett is much better. It was only to save you from pain that he sent for Miss Raleigh. That is all.”

Volume Two—Chapter Thirteen.

Events at a Terminus.

There was a deeply interested gathering in one of the large offices of the Waterloo Station, where a clerk in his shirt-sleeves was seated beneath a gas-jet making entries, what time two porters, also in shirt-sleeves, and by the light of other gas-jets, seemed to be engaged in a game of “Catch.” They were, however, not displaying their deftness with balls, but with small packets, parcels, baskets, bundles of fishing-rods, and what seemed to be carefully done-up articles fresh from tradespeople’s shops. The game seemed to consist of one porter taking a packet from a great basket upon wheels, and saying something before he jerked it rapidly to the other porter, who also said something and deposited the packet in another basket on wheels; while, apparently, the clerk at the desk where the gas-jet

fluttered and whistled as it burned, carefully noted the score in a book. Further inspection, however, showed the casual observer that the men were not at play, but busy manipulating parcels and preparing them for despatch to their various destinations. The business came to a standstill all at once, as a couple of guards just off duty, and an inspector and ticket-collector, came sauntering in, chatting loudly one to the other about some incident that had just taken place upon the platform.

“Ah, you fellows get all the fun,” said the clerk, sticking his pen behind his ear, and slewing round his tall stool, as the guards made themselves comfortable, one upon a wine-hamper, and the other upon an upturned box; while the ticket-collector seated himself upon the edge of a huge pigeon-hole, which necessitated his keeping his body in a bent position, something after the fashion of that held by occupants of the pleasant dungeon known in the Tower as “The Little Ease.”

“Well, we get all the rough as well,” said one of the guards, “and some ugly customers too.”

“Regular ’lopement, then?” said one of the porters, scratching his ear with a piece of straw.

“Regular, my lad,” said one of the guards. “You saw the gent before, didn’t you, George?”

“Yes; he was walking up and down the platform for half an hour first,” said the ticket-collector. “I hadn’t noticed the other, because he was outside the gate waiting.”

“Well, tell us all about it,” said the clerk.

“Oh, there ain’t much to tell,” said the guard who had spoken first. “I saw the girl get in at Lympton, regular stylish-looking body, nice figure, closely veiled. I thought it meant sixpence perhaps; and took her bag, and ran and opened a first-class, when she quite staggered me as she says: ‘Third class, please.’ Well, of course that made me notice her more than once, as we stopped coming up, and I could see that she had been crying and was in trouble.”

The little party grew more interested and drew closer.

“Somehow, I couldn’t help seeing that there was something wrong, for she tried to avoid being noticed, squeezing herself up in the corner of the compartment, and then being very fidgety at every station we stopped at, till I slapped my leg as I got into the break, and says to myself: ‘She’s off!’”

“Ah, it would look like it,” said the clerk, nodding, and letting his pen slip from behind his ear, so that it fell, sticking its nib like an arrow in the boarded floor.

“Yes; I wasn’t a bit surprised to see a dark good-looking gentleman on the platform, peeping into every carriage as the train drew up; and I managed to be close to her door as the gent opened it and held out his hand.”

“‘Why didn’t you come first-class, you foolish girl?’ he says in a whisper; and she didn’t answer, only gave a low moan, like, and let him help her out on to the platform, when he draws her arm right through his, so as to support her well, catches up her little bag, and walks her along towards George here; and I felt so interested, that I followed ’em, just to see how matters went.”

“You felt reg’lar suspicious then?” said one of the porters.

“I just did, my lad; so that as soon as they’d passed George here, him giving up the girl’s ticket, I wasn’t a bit surprised to see a great stout fellow in a velveteen jacket and a low-crowned hat step right in front of ’em just as my gent had called up a cab, lay one hand on the girl’s arm, and the other on the gent’s breast, and he says, in a rough, country sort o’ way: ‘Here, I want you.’”

“Just like a detective,” said the clerk.

“Not a bit, my lad—not a bit,” said the guard. “Reg’lar bluff gamekeeper sort of chap, who looked as if he wouldn’t stand any nonsense; and as soon as she saw him, the girl gives a little cry, and looks as if she’d drop, while my gent begins to bluster.—‘Stand aside, fellow,’ he says. ‘How dare you! Stand back!’ The big bluff fellow seemed so staggered by the gent’s way, that for just about a moment he was checked. Then he takes one step forward, and look here—he does so.”

“Oh!” shouted the clerk, for the guard brought down one muscular hand sharply upon his shoulder and gripped him tightly.

“Lor’ bless you, my lad! that’s nothing to it. He gripped that gent’s shoulder so that you a’most heard his collar-bone crack; and he turned yellow and gashly like, as the other says to him with a growl as savage as a bear, ‘You want to wed my sister, eh? Well, you shall. I won’t leave you till you do.’”

“That was business and no mistake,” said the other guard; “wasn’t it?”

“Ay, and he meant business too,” continued the first speaker, “for the gent began to bluster, and say, ‘How dare you!’ and ‘I’ll give you in charge;’ and then he calls for a policeman; and then ‘Tak’ howd o’ my sister,’ says the big fellow.”

“Ay, that was it,” said the ticket-collector. “‘Tak’ howd,’ just like a Yorkshireman.”

“George there catches the girl, as was half-fainting; and as there was getting quite a crowd now, the bluff fellow tightens his grip, brings Mr Gent down on his knees, and gives him such a thrashing with a stout ash-stick as would have half killed him, if we hadn’t interfered; and Thompson come up and outs with his book. ‘Here,’ he says, just like

one of the regular force; ‘I’ll take the charge.’”

“When,” said the second guard, “up jumps my gentleman, and made the cleanest run for it, dodging through the crowd, and out through the ticket-office, you ever saw.”

“Ay,” said the ticket-collector; “and he run round so as to get to the waterside, and over Charing Cross Bridge.”

“And did Thompson take up the countryman?”

“No,” said the guard. “He gave his name out straightforward—William Cressy, Rayford, Berks. ‘I’m there when I’m wanted,’ he says. ‘This here’s my sister as that chap was stealing away, and I’ve thrashed him, and I’ll do it again if ever we meets.’”

“And then the crowd gave a cheer,” said the ticket-collector.

“And Thompson put his book in his pocket,” said the second guard.

“And the countryman walked the girl off to a cab, put her in, jumped in himself, and the crowd cheered again; and that’s about all.”

“And I’d have given him a cheer too, if I’d been there,” said the clerk, flushing. “Why, if a fellow as calls himself a gentleman was to treat my sister like that, I’d half-kill him, law or no law.”

“And serve him right too,” was chorused.

Then the business of catching parcels began again; the indignant clerk continued his entering; a little more conversation went on in a desultory manner, and the guards and ticket-collector off duty walked home.

The station was disturbed by no more extraordinary incident that night. Trains went and trains came, till at last there was only one more for the neighbourhood of Scarlett’s home.

Doctor Scales was standing on the platform thinking, and in that confused state of mind that comes upon nearly every one who is in search of a person in the great wilderness of London, and has not the most remote idea of what would be the next best step to take. He was asking himself whether there was anything else that he could do. He had been to the police, given all the information that he could, and the telegraph had been set in motion. Then he had been told that nothing more could be done—that he must wait; and he was waiting, and thinking whether he ought to telegraph again to Scarlett; to take the last train due in a few minutes, and go down again; or stay in town, and see what the morrow brought forth.

“I’ll stay,” he said at last; and he turned to go, feeling weary and in that disgusted frame of mind that comes over a man who has been working hard mentally and bodily for days, and who then finds himself low-spirited and thoroughly vexed with everything he has done. It is a mental disease that only one thing will cure, and that is sleep. It was to find this rest that the doctor had turned, and was about to seek his chambers, when he came suddenly upon the object of his search—Fanny Cressy—closely veiled and hanging heavily upon the great arm of her stalwart brother.

“You here, Cressy?” cried the doctor excitedly.

“Yes, sir,” said the farmer fiercely. “Hev you got to say anything again it?”

“No, man, no! But you—you have found your sister.”

“I hev, sir,” said Cressy, more fiercely still. “Hev you got anything to say again that—or *her*?” he added slowly.

“No, no; only I say, thank heaven!” cried the doctor fervently. “I came up to try and overtake her.”

“You did, sir? Then thank you kindly,” said the farmer, changing the stout walking-stick he carried from one hand to the other, so as to leave the right free to extend for a hearty shake. He altered his menacing tone too, and seemed to interpose his great body as a sort of screen between his sister and the doctor as he continued in a low voice, only intended for the other’s ear: “Don’t you say nowt to her; I’ve said about enough.—And it’s all right now,” he said, raising his voice, as if for his sister to hear. “Me and Fanny understands one another, and she’s coming home wi’ me; and if any one’s got to say anything again her for this night’s work, he’s got to talk to William Cressy, farmer, Rayford, Berks.”

There was a low sob here; and the doctor saw that the drooping girl was clinging tightly to her brother’s arm.

“I am sure,” said the doctor quietly, “no one would be so brutal as to say anything against a trusting woman, who placed faith in a scoundrel.”

“Doctor Scales!” cried Fanny, raising her head as she was about to say a few words in defence of the man she loved.

“You hold your tongue, Fan,” said the farmer firmly. “The doctor’s right. He is a scoundrel, a regular bla’guard, as you’d soon have found out, if old John Monnick hadn’t put me up to his games.”

“Bill, dear Bill!” sobbed the girl.

“Well, ain’t he? If he’d been a man, and had cared for you, wouldn’t he have come fair and open to me, as you hadn’t no father nor mother? And if he’d meant right, would he have sneaked off like a whipped dog, as he did to-night!”

“Your brother is right, Fanny,” said the doctor quietly.—“Now, let’s get back, and I can ease the minds of all at the

Rosery. It was at Sir James's wish that I came; and I have been setting the police at work to find your whereabouts."

"Sir James always was a gentleman," said the farmer, giving his head a satisfied nod; "and it puzzles me how he could have had a cousin who was such a bla— Well, it's no use for you to nip my arm, Fan; he is a bla'guard, and I'm beginning to repent now as I didn't half-kill him, and—"

"There goes the last bell," cried the doctor, hurriedly interposing; and taking the same compartment as the brother and sister, he earned poor weak Fanny's gratitude on the way down by carefully taking her brother's thoughts away from Arthur Prayle and her escapade, and keeping him in conversation upon questions relating to the diseases of horses, cows, and sheep.

Volume Two—Chapter Fourteen.

Marrying and Giving in Marriage.

"And would you say *Yes*, aunt dear, if he should ask me?"

"Before I answer that question, Naomi, my dear, let me ask you one. Is this little heart still sore about Arthur Prayle?"

"Indeed, no, aunt," cried the girl indignantly; "pray, don't mention his name. I am angry with myself for ever thinking of him as I did."

"Under those circumstances, my dear, it may be as well to ask you whether you would like to be married."

"Like to be married, aunt?—I—I—I think I should."

"When, then—when a man, who is perhaps rather too bluff and tradesman-like in his ways, but who loves very dearly, and is a thoroughly true honest gentleman at heart, asked me to be his wife, I think I should say *Yes*."

She was a good obedient girl, this Naomi, and most ready to obey her aunt and take her advice. So thoroughly did she act upon it, that the very next day, Saxby charged into the room where Aunt Sophia was writing a letter, caught her hands in his and kissed them, crying in the most exultant manner: "She's said it—she's said it!"

"What! has she refused you, Saxby?" said Aunt Sophia quietly.

"Refused me? No. Said *Yes*, my dear madam. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Aunt Sophia. "Do you think so?"

"That I do," said Saxby. "Oh, I am proud, Miss Raleigh, I am indeed; for though I'm an awfully big man on 'Change—away from Capel Court and my office, no one knows better than I do what a humbug I am."

"Don't be a goose, Saxby," said Aunt Sophia severely. "There; you see you make use of such bad language that it is catching. Humbug, indeed! Look here, don't you say such nasty things again. If I had not known you to be a very good true gentleman at heart, do you think I should have encouraged your attentions as I have? Don't, say any more. She's a dear girl, Saxby; and I am very glad for both your sakes that it is to be a match."

"Oh, thank you!" he cried. "But mind this, Saxby; if ever you neglect or ill-use her—"

"If ever I neglect or ill-use her!" cried Saxby. "Well, well, I know you will not. And now, listen, Saxby. I mean to give Naomi for her dowry—"

"Nothing at all, my dear madam," cried the stockbroker, interrupting her. "I've plenty of money for both of us—heaps; and as for yours," he said, with a merry twinkle in his eye, "keep it for making investments, so that we can have a few squabbles now and then about shares."

"Now," said Aunt Sophia, "I daresay it is very wicked; but if I could see my dear Doctor Scales made as happy as Saxby, I should like it very much indeed.—What do you think, Kate? Can I do anything about him and Lady Martlett?"

"No, aunt; I think not," said Lady Scarlett. "And yet it seems to be a pity, for I am sure they are very fond of each other."

"It's their nasty unpleasant pride keeps them apart," said Aunt Sophia. "Anna Martlett is as proud as Lucifer; and Scales is as proud as—as—as the box." For Aunt Sophia was at a loss for a simile, and this was the only word that suggested itself.

"Let them alone," said Lady Scarlett. "Matters may come right after all."

"But it's so stupid of him," cried Aunt Sophia. "Hang the man! What does he want? She can't help having a title and being rich. Why, she's dying for him."

"But she sets a barrier between them, every time they meet," said Lady Scarlett.

"Yes; they're both eaten up with pride," cried Aunt Sophia. "Oh, if I were Scales, I'd give her such a dose!"

"Would you, aunt?"

“That I would. And if I were Anna Martlett, I’d box his ears till he went down on his knees and asked me to marry him.”

“Begging your pardon, ma’am, you haven’t seen master about, have you?” said John Monnick.

“He went up to the house just now, Monnick.”

“Because, if you please ’m, I’ve got him a splendid lot o’ wums, and a box full o’ gentles for the doctor.”

“Ugh! the nasty creatures!” cried Aunt Sophia, with a shudder. “I hope they are not going fishing up by that weir.”

“They are, aunt dear—for the barbel.”

But they were not, for a messenger was already at the gate.

Just then, James Scarlett and the doctor came along the path, laden with fishing-tackle, on their way to the punt; but they were stopped by Fanny, who came up with a letter in her hand, the poor girl looking very subdued and pale, and a great deal changed in manner since the events of a certain night—events that had, by Sir James’s orders, been buried for ever.

“Lady Martlett’s groom with the dogcart, and a letter for Doctor Scales, sir.”

“Ha-ha-ha!” cried the doctor, with a harsh scornful laugh, which told tales to the thoughtful, as Aunt Sophia and Lady Scarlett came up. “Here, Miss Raleigh, you see how I am getting on in my profession. Lady Martlett’s pet dog has a fit, and I am honoured by her instructions. Here: read the note, Scarlett.”

“No, thanks; it is addressed to you.”

The doctor frowned, and opened the note as he stood with his rod resting in the hollow of his arm, and his friends watched the change in his countenance. “Good heavens!” he exclaimed, with quite a groan. “Here, Miss Raleigh—read!” he thrust the letter into her hand, dropped the rod, and ran swiftly to the house, taking off his white flannel jacket as he ran; and a minute later they saw him in more professional guise beside the groom, who was urging the horse into a brisk canter as they passed along the lane beyond the meadow.

Meanwhile Aunt Sophia had read the letter. It was very brief, containing merely these words: “I am very ill. I do not feel confidence in my medical man. Pray, come and see me.—Anna Martlett.”

“Had we not better go over at once?” said Lady Scarlett eagerly; and the tears rose in her eyes.—“You will come, aunt?”

“Yes, of course, if it is necessary,” said Aunt Sophia. “But had we not better wait till the doctor returns?”

Kate Scarlett looked up at her husband, who nodded. “Yes,” he said; “I think aunt is right.”

So they waited.

Volume Two—Chapter Fifteen.

Ditto, and—.

“This doesn’t look professional,” said the doctor to himself.—“Go a little more steadily, my man,” he said aloud to the groom; and consequently the horse was checked into a decent trot. For John Scales wanted to grow calm, and quiet down the feeling of agony that had come upon him.

“She may want all my help,” he thought. “Poor girl! Bah! Rubbish! A widow of thirty. Girl indeed! Well, I hope she’s very bad. It will be a lesson to her—bring her to her senses. What an idiot I am! Here, my hand’s trembling, and I’m all in a nervous fret. Just as if it was some one very dear to me, when all the time—When was your mistress taken ill, my man?”

“She’s kep’ her room the last fortnight, sir—not her bed; but she’s seemed going off like for months and months. Hasn’t been on a horse for a good half-year, sir, and hasn’t been at all the lady she was.”

By the time they reached the lodge-gates, which were thrown open by a woman on the watch for the returning vehicle, the doctor assured himself that he was perfectly calm and collected; but all the same there was a strange gnawing at his heart; and he turned pale at the sight of the promptitude with which the gates were opened. It seemed as if matters were known to be serious. This did not tend to make him cooler as they trotted along the beautiful avenue, and drew up at the great stone steps of the ancient ivy-grown mansion, with its magnificent view over a glorious sweep of park-land; neither did the sight of a quiet-looking butler and footman waiting to open the hall door lessen Scales’s anxiety. His lips parted to question the butler; but by an effort he restrained himself, and followed him up to a room at the top of the broad old oaken staircase, before whose door a heavy curtain was drawn.

“Doctor Scales,” said the butler, in a low voice; and as the doctor advanced with the door closing behind him, it was to see that he was in a handsomely furnished boudoir; while rising from a couch placed near the open window was Lady Martlett, looking extremely agitated and pale. Her eyes seemed to have grown larger, and the roundness had begun to leave her cheeks; but there was no languor in her movement, no trace of weakness. Still she was sufficiently changed to break down the icy reserve with which the doctor had clothed himself ready for the interview.

“I will meet her with the most matter-of-fact professional politeness,” he had said as he ascended the stairs, “do the best I can for her as far as my knowledge will let me, and she shall pay me some thumping fees.—No; she shan’t,” he added the next moment. “She shall know what pride really is. I won’t touch a penny of her wretched money. She shall have my services condescendingly given, or go without.”

That is what John Scales, M.D., Edin., as he signed himself sometimes, determined upon before he saw Lady Martlett; but as soon as he was alone with her, and saw the wistful appealing look in her eyes as she turned towards him, away went the icy formality, and he half ran to her. “My dear Lady Martlett!” he exclaimed, catching her hands in his.

For answer, she burst into an hysterical fit of sobbing, sank upon her knees, and hid her face upon his hands. “I cannot bear it,” she moaned. “You are breaking my heart!”

Jenner, Thompson, Robert Barnes—the whole party of the grandees of the profession would have been utterly scandalised had they been witnesses of Doctor Scales’s treatment of his patient, though they must have afterwards confessed that it was almost miraculous in its effects. For he bent down, raised her from her knees, said the one word, “Anna!” and held her tightly to his breast. In fact so satisfactory was the treatment, that Lady Martlett’s passionate sobs grew softer, till they almost ceased, and then she slowly raised her face to look into his eyes, saying softly: “There, I am humble now. Are you content?”

“Content?” he exclaimed passionately, as he kissed her again and again. “But you are ill,” he said excitedly, “and I am forgetting everything. Why did you send for me?”

“Is pride always to keep us apart?” she said in a low tender whisper. “Have I not humbled myself enough? Yes; I am ill. I have thought lately that I should die. Will you let me die like this?”

“Let you die?” he cried excitedly.

“No, no! But think—what will the world say?”

“You are my world,” she said softly, as she nestled to him. “My pride is all gone now. You may say what you will. It has been a struggle, and you have won.”

“No,” he said softly; “you have won.”

He never boasted of the cure that he effected here. Wisely so. But certainly Lady Martlett was in an extremely low state—a state that necessitated change—such a complete change as would be given by a long continental tour, with a physician always at her side.

The world did talk, and said that Lady Martlett had thrown herself away.

“The stupids!” exclaimed Aunt Sophia. “Just as if a woman could throw herself away, when it was into the arms of as good a husband as ever breathed.”

James Scarlett had one or two little relapses into his nervous state, and these were when family troubles had come upon him; but they soon passed away, and the little riverside home blushes more brightly than ever with flowers; the glass-houses are fragrant with ripening fruit; and Aunt Sophia sits and bows her head solemnly over her work beneath some shady tree or another in the hot summer afternoons, the only solitary heart there;—and yet not solitary, for it is filled as freshly as ever with the memory of the dead.

Doctor Scales practises still, in his own way; and though he is somewhat at variance with the profession, they all hold him in respect.

“As they must,” her Ladyship declares, “for there is not a greater man among them all.”

Saxby bought the pretty villa across the river that you can see from Lady Scarlett’s drawing-room. You can shoot an arrow from one garden into the other; but Aunt Sophia, who lives at the Scarletts’ now, when she does not live with the Saxbys, always goes round by the bridge—five miles—never once venturing in the boat.

Arthur Prayle has been heard of as a Company promoter in Australia, where, as he does not deserve, he is doing well.

“A rascal!” Aunt Sophia says; “and with the four hundred pounds he got out of me for that Society. But never mind; it was on the strength of my money that he tried to delude that foolish girl, and so we found out what a bad fellow he was.”

That foolish girl, by the way, has married a farmer, a friend of Brother William; and Aunt Sophia knits a great many little contrivances of wool for the results.

The last trouble that happened at the Rosery was when old John Monnick passed away.

“It’s quite nat’ral like, Master James,” he said, smiling. “Seventy-seven, you see. There isn’t the least o’ anything the matter with me, and I aren’t in a bit o’ pain. There’s only one thing as troubles me, and that is ’bout the opening and shutting o’ them glarss-houses. I hope you won’t be neglecting of ’em when I’m gone.”

“Oh, but you’ll be stronger soon, John, with the spring—and come and look after things again.”

The old man smiled, and shook his head slowly from side to side—“’Tain’t in natur’, Master James,” he said—“’Tain’t in natur’, my lady. I come up, and I growed up, and I blossomed, and the seed’s dead ripe now, ready for being garnered, if the heavenly Master thinks it fit. I’m only a gardener, Master James, and I’ve been a gardener all my life;

and now, as I lie here, it's to think and hope that he will say: 'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'"

It was Kate Scarlett's lips that formed in an almost inaudible whisper the word "Amen!" as the old man fell asleep.

The End.

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