The Project Gutenberg eBook of Ralph Clavering; Or, We Must Try Before We Can Do, by William Henry Giles Kingston

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"Ralph Clavering"

"We must try before we can do"

Chapter One.

A young girl dressed in a cloak and hat, and looking sad and somewhat timid, stood in the middle of the large hall of a fine old country house. The floor was of oak, and the walls were covered with dark oak wainscoting, from which hung down several full-length portraits of grim old knights and gentlemen in bag wigs, and ladies in court suits, looking very prim and stern.

The hall door was open, and through it was seen a post-chaise, from which a footman was extracting a small trunk and a variety of other articles, under the direction of a woman who, it was evident, had also just arrived. As there was no one to notice the young lady, she amused herself by looking round the hall and examining the portraits.

While she was thus employed, a door opened, and a lad appeared, who, running forward, put out his hand, and said, "And so you are my own cousin, are you? and your name is Lilly Vernon, is it?"

The young lady looked up with a quick, intelligent glance, and answered, "If you are Ralph Clavering, I conclude we are cousins, for I am, as you suppose, Lilly Vernon."

"All right—how jolly!" exclaimed the boy. "We have been looking for you for some days, and I have been expecting to have great fun when you came. I once had a sister, but she is dead, and I have terribly wanted some one to help me kill the time since then, though I would far rather have had a boy cousin, I will tell you that."

"I would rather help you to employ time than to kill it, Cousin Ralph," said Lilly, with a smile. "It may chance to come off the victor otherwise."

"Oh, is that the way you talk? I don't like preaching," exclaimed Ralph petulantly, and turning away with a frown. He came back, however, and added, "But I don't want to quarrel with you. Come into the dining-room, and warm yourself by the fire, and have some luncheon. I was eating mine when you arrived, and I have not finished. We shall be all alone, for papa is out hunting, and mamma is ill in bed, as she always is. I should have gone out after the hounds too, but I was ill and lazy. I intend to take a trot this afternoon though. You can ride I hope—if not, I will teach you; but ride you must, that I am determined."

"Oh, I can ride almost anything. I had a pony of my own—a spirited little creature—at home," answered Lilly, a shade of melancholy passing over her features as she pronounced the word home.

Ralph did not observe it, but answered, "Oh, that's capital! I should like to see you ride with me though, and take a ditch or a gate. There are not many things I do well, perhaps; but I do that, at all events."

"Perhaps you try to do that, and don't try to do anything else," remarked Lilly.

"Oh, there you are again!" exclaimed Ralph, "I will not stand sermonising—remember that—so you had better knock off at once."

He spoke in a tone so dictatorial and loud that Lilly stared at him, wondering whether or not he was in earnest.

The two young people had by this time reached the dining-room, where a substantial luncheon was spread, speaking well for the hospitality of Clavering Hall. Ralph, having helped his cousin with a courtesy which showed that he was well accustomed to do the honours of the table, filled his own plate with no unsparing hand, and addressed himself steadily to discuss the viands.

Lilly, who quickly got through her meal, looked up more than once, wondering when he would finish and talk to her again. Poor girl! she could not help feeling sad and forlorn. She perceived instantly that Ralph was not a person to treat her with sympathy, and at the best his kindness would be precarious. She was the daughter of a clergyman in the south of Ireland. Both he and her mother had died during a famine which had raged in that country. She had been thus left an orphan, and had been committed to the guardianship of her uncle and only near relation, Mr Clavering, of Clavering Hall. Unhappily he was not a person well fitted for the responsible office. Mrs Clavering was an invalid, and seldom quitted her bed-room. As Mr Clavering was also constantly from home, engaged in magisterial duties, or in hunting or shooting, their son Ralph was very much neglected and left to his own devices. These devices were too often bad, while, as was to be expected, he found his associates among his father's grooms, and other uneducated persons willing to flatter him. Thus noxious weeds were springing up in his disposition, which should carefully have been rooted out as they appeared; indeed. Master Ralph Clavering was being utterly ruined at the time of Lilly Vernon's arrival at Clavering Hall. He had been to school for some years, so that he was not altogether uneducated; but his education was far from finished when he unexpectedly appeared at home, and it was soon whispered about that he had been expelled for some act of insubordination and a flagrant exhibition of violence of temper. After this, as his father did not think fit to send him to another school, he was placed under the nominal charge of the curate of the parish, who undertook to superintend his further education till he was old enough to go to college. As, however, he only spent with him a few hours in the morning, and found numerous excuses for keeping away altogether, neither his character improved, nor did his progress in learning become satisfactory. Ralph, thus unchecked, yielded more frequently to his temper, became more dictatorial and tyrannical every day, till he was rather feared and disliked than loved by all with whom he came in contact. Such is the not very pleasant character our hero had obtained at the time our history commences.

Chapter Two.

Lilly Vernon had been for some weeks at Clavering Hall. She had been kindly received by her uncle and aunt, had completely got over the timidity she felt on her arrival, and had found herself perfectly at home. Not so Biddy O'Reardon, her former nurse, who had accompanied her from Ireland, and was desired to remain as her personal attendant. Biddy did not comprehend all that was said, and thought that the other servants were laughing at her, and declared that though Clavering Hall was a fine place, its ways were not those to which she had been accustomed, and she heartily wished herself back at Ballyshannon in the dear ould country. Still, for the love of the young mistress, she would stay wherever she stayed, though it was a pity she had so ill-conditioned a spalpeen of a cousin to be her companion. These remarks reached Ralph's ears, and he and Biddy became on far from good terms. He revenged himself by playing her all sorts of tricks. One day he came into the little sitting-room in which she sat with Lilly and begged her to sew a button on his coat. Poor Biddy good-naturedly assented, but on opening her workbox found that her thimble had been trodden flat, her scissors divided, and all her reels of cotton exchanged for small pebbles! Enjoying her anger and vexation, Ralph ran laughing away, while Lilly gently, though indignantly, reproved him for his unkind and ungenerous conduct.

No one thought that a governess was necessary for Lilly; but happily her education had been carefully attended to by her parents, and she had formed the resolution of continuing the studies she had commenced with them. As soon as she could get her books unpacked, she set to work, and with steady perseverance performed her daily task, to the unbounded astonishment of her cousin, who could not comprehend why she should take so much trouble when there was no one "to make her," as he expressed himself.

It was a fine bright day in the winter when Ralph burst into the study which Lilly had very much to herself. "Come along, Lilly!" he exclaimed. "I have ordered out Apple-blossom for you, and I will ride Sugar-plum. Throw those stupid books away. What can make you drone over them as you do?"

Lilly looked up at her cousin with a serious expression in her calm eyes, and said, "Papa and mamma wished me to learn my lessons, and I want to do exactly as if they were alive. They always made me do my lessons before I went out, and so, Ralph, I cannot come."

Ralph Clavering looked very much astonished, and with a contemptuous curl of his lip and a frown on his brow left the room, exclaiming, "What can Lilly mean? She doesn't care for me, that's very positive." He threw himself on his pony, and switching it with more than his usual impetuosity, galloped off down the avenue. Lilly bent forward again to her self-imposed studies. Now and then she got up from her seat, and putting the book on one side and placing her hands behind her, repeated her lesson through with an expression of awe in her countenance, as if she thought her mother was looking over the book and listening to her. Lilly had just finished her work when Ralph returned. "What, old bookworm, have you really finished your stupid lessons?" he exclaimed. "You've lost a capital gallop, that I can tell you. However, you shall have one in the afternoon, though you don't deserve it. I've ordered Sugar-plum round to the stable to get a feed of corn while we are at luncheon, and in an hour he'll be ready again. Apple-blossom will be ready for you, and we'll have a capital ride after all."

Lilly said that she should like to ride, and soon afterwards luncheon was announced. The young people took it by themselves, for Mr Clavering was from home, and there were no guests in the house. Ralph tossed off a couple of glasses of sherry, scolding the butler for not quite filling them. "Good stuff after a gallop this cold weather," he observed.

Lilly shook her head. "You could do very well without that," she remarked.

"Oh, you girls know nothing," he answered contemptuously. "I could drink twice as much, and not be the worse for it."

In spite of Lilly's entreaties he took one or two more glasses, evidently for the sake of teasing her. Lilly found it difficult not to show her vexation. Ralph was in one of his obstinate humours. He had never been restrained when a

child, and every day he found the task of restraining his temper become harder and harder. He owned this to his cousin. “Try, Ralph, what you can do,” she answered. “Unless you try you cannot hope to succeed.”

“Impossible,” he answered petulantly. “It is absurd to suppose that I’m not to get into a rage every now and then. It is gentlemanly, it is manly.”

“Oh, Ralph, what nonsense!” exclaimed Lilly. “Which is the most manly, to guide your pony along the road, or let it run away with you, flinging out at everybody it meets, and throwing you at last?”

“That’s nothing to do with my getting into a rage if I please,” said Ralph. But he looked as if he fully comprehended the simile; and as Lilly saw that he did so, and had no wish to irritate him, she changed the subject. Soon after this the ponies were brought to the door. Lilly, who had got on her riding-skirt, sprang lightly on Apple-blossom, Ralph not even offering to assist her, and away the two cousins galloped down the avenue. Ralph’s good humour did not return for some time, in spite of all Lilly could do. At length her lively remarks and the fine fresh air gradually brought it back, and this encouraged her to talk on. They had a delightful and a very long ride. Sometimes they galloped over the level sward through a fine extensive forest in the neighbourhood, and through the deciduous trees, now destitute of leaves. There were many hollies and firs and other evergreens, which gave a cheerful aspect to the scene, and with the blue sky overhead they scarcely remembered that it was winter. Sometimes they got on a hard piece of road, and had a good trot for a couple of miles, and then they reached some fine open downs, when, giving their little steeds the rein, away they galloped as hard as hoof could be laid to the ground, with the fresh pure air circulating freely round them. Now they had to descend and to pass along lanes full of ruts and holes, where they had carefully to pick their way, and then they crossed some ploughed fields till they once more reached a piece of turf by the road-side. On the turf, Ralph was again able to make his pony go at the pace which best suited his taste, Lilly easily keeping up with him. Once more in the forest, they galloped as fast as ever along its open glades.

“This is first-rate,” cried Ralph. “There never was a finer day for riding.”

“Oh, indeed it is,” responded Lilly. “This is a beautiful world, and I always think each season as it comes round the most delightful.”

“I don’t trouble my head about that,” said Ralph, giving his pony a switch. “I know when it is a fine day, and I enjoy it.”

Lilly had discovered that Ralph always carefully fenced off from any subject which he thought might lead to serious reflection. She waited her time to speak to him, hoping it might come. Soon after this they again reached the high

road. Several times Ralph's pony, which had gone through a good deal of work that morning, attempted to stop, and when Ralph urged him on he stumbled.

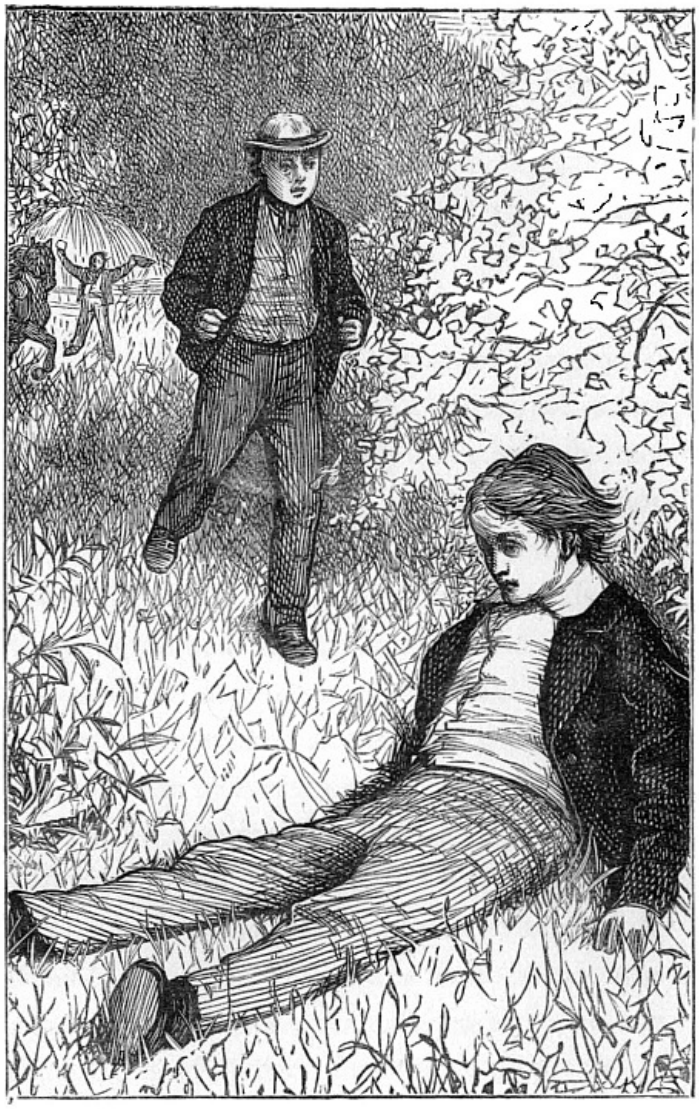
"Sugar-plum must be tired," observed Lilly.

"Let us walk our ponies home."

"No, I hate everything slow," cried Ralph, hastening on the pony. "If the beast can't go he won't suit me, and so he shall soon find who is master."

Lilly again entreated him to pull up, but he would not listen to her. At some distance before them appeared a figure in a red cloak. Lilly perceived that it was an old gipsy woman with a child at her back. In a copse by the road-side there was a cart with a tent and a fire before it, from which ascended into the clear calm air a thin column of smoke. The old woman was making her way towards the camp, not hearing apparently the tramp of the pony's hoofs.

"Take care, take care, Ralph," cried Lilly; "you will ride over that poor old woman if you gallop on."



RALPH THROWN FROM HIS PONY —p. 17.

"I don't care if I do," said Ralph, angry at being spoken to. "She's only a wretched old gipsy woman."

"A fellow-creature," answered Lilly. "Oh, Ralph, take care."

Ralph galloped on till his pony was close up to the old woman, at a spot where the ground was rough, and there was a somewhat steep descent. He could scarcely have intended actually to ride over the old woman. Just then she heard the pony's hoofs strike the ground close behind her. She started on one side, and the pony dashed on, shying as he did so. The animal's foot at that moment struck against a piece of hard clay, and already almost exhausted, down he came, throwing his rider to a considerable distance over his head on the ground. Lilly slipped off her well-trained little pony, which stood perfectly still while she ran to her cousin's assistance. Ralph's countenance was pale as death. He groaned heavily, and was evidently much hurt. His pony, as soon as it got up, trotted off to a distance to avoid the beating its young master might have bestowed.

Lilly cried out to the old gipsy woman, who, although she could not hear, saw and understood her gestures. The old woman stood at a distance gazing at the scene, and then slowly and unwillingly came back. Lilly, as she watched Ralph's countenance, became more and more alarmed. She endeavoured, by every gesture she could make use of, to intimate that she wanted assistance. The old woman knelt down by the lad, and putting her hand on his brow, and then on his arm, gave a grunt, and rising with more agility than could have been expected, hobbled off towards the

gipsy camp. Lilly would have run on herself for help, but she dared not leave her cousin on the ground, lest a carriage coming rapidly down the hill might run over him. She anxiously watched the old woman as she approached the tent. No one came forth, and she feared that all the gipsies might be absent, and that no help could be procured. She was herself, in the meantime, not idle. She placed Ralph's head on her lap, loosened his neckerchief, and chafed his temples, but her efforts were vain; he still remained unconscious, and she fancied that he was growing rather worse than better. Lilly knew that she could not lift him, though she longed to be able to carry him even as far as the green bank by the road-side. She was in despair, and could not refrain from bursting into tears. At last a thin dark man, with long elf-locks, accompanied by two boys as wild-looking as he was, and still more ragged, came running up.

"Ah! my pretty lady, don't take on; your brother has still life in him," he exclaimed when he saw Ralph. "Here, you Seth, lift up the young master's legs; and Tim, you be off after his pony. Be quick, like lightning, in a hurry."

Without more ado he raised Ralph from the ground, and bore him in his arms towards the tent. Lilly followed, leading Apple-blossom. They soon reached the gipsy tents. In one of them was a heap of straw. Ralph was placed on it. Lilly saw that the sooner medical aid could be procured the better. Still she did not like to leave him in charge of such doubtful characters as the gipsies.

"You will take care of him, and I will hurry home to bring assistance," she said to the gipsy.

"Whatever you like, pretty mistress, for your sake we will do," was the gallant answer.

Lilly mounted Apple-blossom, and galloped on to the Hall. Great was the consternation her news caused. Mrs Clavering was so ill that no one ventured to tell her of the accident. Mr Clavering was away from home, and the butler and housekeeper were out on a visit. Lilly found that she must decide what was to be done. She ordered the carriage to be got ready, and then she sat down and wrote a note to the doctor, which she sent off by a groom. By that time the carriage was at the door, and, with Biddy as her companion, she drove back to the gipsy encampment. They considerately took with them some food, and all sorts of things which they thought might be required. Just as they reached the camp they found the doctor, whom the groom had happily met. There, on a heap of dirty straw, under cover of a tattered tent, lay the heir of Clavering Hall. Lilly had hoped to take Ralph home; but directly Doctor Morison saw him, he said that he must on no account be carried to such a distance, although he might be moved on a litter to a neighbouring cottage, as the gipsy tent afforded neither warmth nor shelter from rain or snow. A door was accordingly procured, and Ralph was carried by the gipsy and his two sons to a cottage about a quarter of a mile off, while the carriage was sent back for some bedding and clothes. No sooner had the gipsies performed the office they had undertaken than they hurried away; and when, some time afterwards Doctor Morison, at Miss Vernon's request, sent to call them back that they might receive a reward, they had moved their ground: the black spot caused by their fire, and some patches of straw, alone showed where their camp had been pitched.

"I fear, Miss Vernon, that your cousin is in a very dangerous state," said Doctor Morison, after again examining Ralph. "I think that it will be well if you return in the carriage, and break the news to his father. Remember, however, that I do not despair of his life."

This information made Lilly's heart very sad.

"He may die, and so unprepared," she whispered to herself. "Oh, may he be graciously preserved!"

How many, young as Ralph Clavering, have been cut off in the midst of their evil doings! An old woman and her daughter, the occupants of the cottage, gladly consented to give up the best accommodation their small abode offered to their wealthy neighbours. Mr Clavering, who had just reached the Hall, scarcely comprehended at first what had happened. Lilly had to repeat her tale. At length, when he really understood what had occurred, like a frantic person he threw himself into the carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive on as fast as the horses could go.

"What a wretched, miserable hole for my boy!" he exclaimed as he entered the cottage.

"Poor young master bean't accustomed to cottage rooms," observed the old woman, Dame Harvey, to her daughter. She could not forget that, humble as was her cottage, it was her own, and that she was bestowing a favour on those she had admitted within it. She was conscious at the same time that she was doing her duty towards them as a Christian, and this made her overlook, without complaint, many other slights she received. It was an anxious night to all concerned in Ralph's welfare. Doctor Morison feared that he had received a concussion of the brain, but could not decide whether it would prove serious till the next day. Mr Clavering scarcely left his son's bedside, nor would Lilly, had not Biddy filled her place, and she then consented to lie down on some chairs in a back room, where a large fire had been made up, a cart with fuel having arrived from the Hall. Ralph breathed painfully, it was evident that his life hung by a thread.

Chapter Three.

Two days passed by, and it seemed very uncertain whether Ralph Clavering would recover. Lilly, by the doctor's orders, had to return home, but she begged that Biddy might remain to watch the invalid, and a more faithful nurse could not have been found. She, indeed, discovered with sorrow the true estimation in which her cousin was held at Clavering Hall; for among all the pampered servants not one volunteered, or seemed anxious to attend by his bedside. When he was well he ordered them roughly about, and abused them if they did not obey his often unreasonable commands. Now, as mean and irreligious persons are wont to do, they retaliated by treating him with neglect. Mr Clavering, whose fears for his son's life were fully aroused, only rushed out of the cottage for a few minutes at a time to calm his agitation, or to give way to his grief, and then hurried back to his bedside. He had sent for the housekeeper to attend on Ralph, but Mrs Gammage declined coming on the plea that her mistress required

her attendance, and that her own health was so delicate that she should die of cold in Dame Harvey's cottage. The dame, therefore, and her daughter volunteered their services, and more careful attendants could not have been found. Mrs Harvey had been in service in her youth, and as she observed knew how to attend on gentlefolks. Food, and bedding, and furniture and all sorts of things had been sent from the Hall, and as the cottage was neat and clean, Mr Clavering might well have been thankful that his son had so comfortable a refuge.

Lilly rode over every morning from the Hall, and generally again in the afternoon, but she was not allowed to remain many minutes at a time with her cousin. For several days the doctor continued to look grave, and said that he might possibly recover, but that he must not yet hold out too strong hopes on the subject.

"I do trust he may recover," she answered. "It would be so dreadful for him to die, and I really think that there is some good in him."

"There is no good thing in any of us, young lady," remarked the doctor; "yet I pray that if he lives the very best of things may be put into him—a new heart, or we cannot hope to see him changed from what he was."

"I will pray that he may recover, and that he may get a new heart," said Lilly, artlessly.

"Do, Miss Vernon," said Doctor Morison. "Human skill avails us nothing without God's aid."

Lilly rode home much happier. She could not have much of what might properly be called affection for her cousin, for his behaviour had prevented that, but she sincerely pitied him, and was anxious for his welfare.

Day after day passed by. "I will tell you to-morrow what to hope," answered Dr Morison to her usual inquiries. Lilly cantered home more anxious than ever to make her report to her aunt.

"Of course he will die," observed Mrs Clavering; "what have we to expect?"

"God is ever merciful and good," said Lilly, calmly.

The lady stared. "I shall not believe that he will live till I see him recovered," she answered.

"We can pray that he may, dear aunt, at all events," replied Lilly.

The next day Lilly rode off at an early hour to Dame Harvey's cottage. Dr Morison arrived nearly at the same moment. She waited anxiously for his report. He remained, it seemed, a very long time with his patient. At last he appeared with a smile on his countenance. "He will yet do well. He requires careful nursing more than anything else, and I hope that in a few days he will be strong enough to be removed to the Hall." Lilly rode back to carry the joyful news to her aunt.

Mr Clavering, when he heard this opinion, poured out expressions of gratitude to the doctor, and called him the preserver of his son's life, assuring him that there was nothing he would not do to show his sense of the obligation.

"Give thanks where they are due," said Dr Morison. "And, my dear sir, you cannot please me more than by endeavouring to correct his faults, and to bring him up in the way he should go."

"A very odd man, that doctor," said Mr Clavering, to himself. "Under other circumstances I should think his remarks highly impertinent."

Dame Harvey could hardly be persuaded to take the sum of money offered her by Mr Clavering. She had only done her duty, and she had done it without thought of reward; she would have done the same for any poor neighbour who would have been unable to repay her. Mr Clavering was incredulous as to her disinterestedness. Lilly took her part.

"I am sure, uncle, she nursed Ralph so kindly and gave up her cottage to him simply from kindness of heart," she observed. "Had any young nobleman been thrown from his horse out hunting would you not have taken him in, and kept him till he was well, without thought of reward? Papa used to say that the poor feel as we do, and often more acutely, and that we should treat their feelings with the same consideration that we should those of the rich."

"You have vast experience, Miss Lilly, about such matters," answered Mr Clavering, with a laugh. "I know that the poor pull down my fences, and do all sorts of mischief, and I judge them by their deeds."

"And how do the rich treat each other, and how would they behave if they were exposed to the temptations of poverty?" argued Lilly, with unusual vehemence.

"We have put up your Irish spirit, young lady," answered her uncle, laughing. "However, I dare say that you are right, and I have no doubt of Dame Harvey's good intentions."

Ralph having as the doctor said, once turned the corner, got rapidly well. Lilly was in hopes that from what had occurred his character would have improved, indeed, while he still remained weak and unable to help himself he was far less dictatorial than he used to be, and more than once, though not, perhaps, in the most gracious of ways, expressed himself obliged for what had been done for him.

"He'll do better by-and-by," thought his sanguine cousin. "He is fretful now from his long confinement. When he gets out in the fresh air he will recover his temper."

Chapter Four.

There is an old saying that, “What is born in the grain is shown in the fruit.” No sooner had Ralph Clavering recovered his physical strength than he was himself again in all other respects, or even still more dictatorial and abusive if any one offended him than before. At first Lilly was in despair. At last she recollected her own motto, “We must try before we can succeed.”

“Yes, I will try again, and very hard before I give it up in despair.”

The winter had been very severe, and numbers of labourers had been thrown out of work. Ralph was allowed at first only to drive out in the carriage. One day as he was waiting in the porch, filled with the warm sunshine, for his luxurious vehicle to come to the door, two ragged objects were seen approaching up the avenue. One was a thin and tall dark man, the other was a lad of the same foreign complexion. A frown gathered on Ralph’s brow as he saw them. “What do you want here, you fellows?” he shouted out.

“Food and money to pay the doctor, young master,” answered the man, coming up to the floor. “The rest of the family are down with sickness camped in Fouley Copse, and they’ll die if they don’t get help.”

“Then you are gipsies, and we don’t encourage gipsies,” said Ralph.

“You wouldn’t let us die, young master, would you?” asked the man, humbly.

“No fear of that, I’m up to you,” cried Ralph, growing angry. “Be off with you.”

“I’ve always heard that one good turn deserves another, and believed it too, gipsy though I am, but I am not likely to get it this time,” said the man, eyeing Ralph with a glance of contempt.

Just then Lilly, hearing her cousin speaking loudly, came to the hall door. No sooner did she see the man than she exclaimed, “Why, that is the kind gipsy who carried you to Dame Harvey’s cottage, and would take no reward. What is it you want, poor man? Tell us, that we may do what we can.”

The gipsy repeated his previous story.

“We will go there immediately, and carry some food and other things for your family,” she said. “But you are hungry yourselves, Ralph, tell Mrs Gammage that she must let them have some dinner, and that she must put up some food and blankets, and some other things for you to carry.”

Ralph demurred. Lilly grew impatient. “If we do not find matters as they are described, we can but bring the things back,” she observed.

This satisfied her cousin, who had thus suddenly become so scrupulous. It is wonderful how careful people are not to make a mistake in doing an act of charity.

“Blessings on thee, young mistress! You remember me, then, sweet lady?” said the gipsy.

“I do, indeed,” answered Lilly; “but I did not hear your name.”

“Arnold I am called in this country, sweet lady,” answered the gipsy. “My people are not wont to ask favours, but we are starving; and though you call us outcasts and heathens, we can be grateful.”

Ralph had gone to ask Mrs Gammage, very much to that lady’s astonishment, to give the gipsies some food. Still greater was her surprise when he insisted on having some provisions put up to carry to their encampment. “Cousin Lilly will have it so,” he answered, when she expostulated with him on the subject.

This settled the matter; and the gipsies, being invited into the servants’ hall, had a more abundant meal placed before them than they had seen for many a day.

Ralph felt a pleasure which he had never before experienced, as he got into the pony-carriage with the stores the housekeeper had provided. Lilly rode by his side, and away they went. They got to the encampment before Arnold and his son could reach it. It was in the centre of a thick copse, which sheltered the tents from the wind. They had need of such shelter, for the tents were formed of old canvas thickened by mats of rushes, but so low, that they scarcely allowed the inmates to sit upright. They took the gipsies completely by surprise, and Lilly saw at a glance that Arnold had in no way exaggerated their miserable condition. Great was the astonishment, therefore, of the poor people at having a plentiful supply of provisions presented to them. Lilly, who soon saw that those who were most ill were far beyond her skill, promised to send Dr Morison to them.

Lilly and Ralph were still at the encampment when Arnold and his son arrived. Their expressions of gratitude, if not profuse, were evidently sincere. So reduced were the whole party to starvation, that it seemed likely, had aid not arrived, they must all soon have died. There were two or three girls and boys sitting on the ground, covered up with old mats, their elf-locks almost concealing their features, of which little more than their black sparkling eyes were visible, while some smaller children were crouching down under the rags which their mother had heaped over her. There was an iron pot hanging from a triangle over the fire; but it contained but a few turnips and other vegetables, not a particle of meat. Even the pony which drew the family cart looked half-starved, as if sharing the general distress.

THE GIPSY ENCAMPMENT.—p 37.

“It is a pleasure to help those poor people,” observed Ralph to his cousin, as they returned homeward. “I did not suppose so much wretchedness existed in England.”

“There is far more than we have seen to-day,” said Lilly. “When hard times come, there are thousands and thousands thrown out of work, who then from one day to another do not know how they are to find food to put into their mouths on the next.”

“I should think that they might lay by when they are getting full wages,” remarked Ralph.

A carriage passing prevented Lilly from hearing the remark. The groom, who was driving, replied to it. “A hard job, Mr Ralph, for a poor man with a large family of hungry boys and girls able to eat, but to earn nothing, to lay by out of eight or nine shillings a week. Many a hard-working, strong man, gets no more. Why, Mr Ralph, you spend more on your clothes, gloves, and washing, and such like things.”

“Yes; but I am different, Thomas, you know. I couldn’t do without good clothes and other things,” answered Ralph.

Thomas, fancying that he would be supported by Miss Lilly, ventured to say more than he would otherwise have done, and so he replied, “Don’t see the difference, Mr Ralph. A rich man can’t wear many more clothes at a time, or eat much more, than a poor one; and a poor one wants food and clothing as much as his betters. If he can’t get them by honest means he sickens and dies, or takes to stealing. I don’t know how the rich would act if they were to have the temptations the poor are exposed to!”

Ralph was not inclined to say anything more on the subject to Thomas; he felt angry at his speaking so plainly. Thomas had never before done so, undoubtedly because he was sensible how useless it would have been.

Not long after this they reached Dr Morison’s house. Lilly told her tale, and the doctor promised to set off immediately to the gipsy encampment.

Never had Ralph appeared to greater advantage than he did on that day at dinner. He laughed and talked, and made himself generally agreeable. His father and mother were surprised, and hailed the change as a sign of returning health. The doctor called in the evening. He had visited the gipsy encampment, and stated his belief, that if aid had not been sent to them, two or more of their number would have died before many days were over. “They owe their lives under Providence to you, Miss Vernon, I assure you,” said the doctor.

“Not more to me than to my cousin,” answered Lilly, promptly. “He got the eatables from Mrs Gammage, and carried

them to the encampment. I should have been afraid of going alone."

The doctor did not repeat a version of the story which he had heard from Arnold, but he replied, "I am truly glad to hear that Mr Ralph busies himself about the welfare of his fellow-creatures."

Mr and Mrs Clavering looked surprised; the words struck strangely on their ears. They were so different to what they were accustomed to hear. Mrs Clavering had been inclined to complain of her son and niece having visited the gipsies for fear they might catch a fever from them or get robbed, and now she heard them praised by Dr Morison, for whose opinion she had great respect; so she said nothing. Every day after this Lilly and Ralph paid a visit to the encampment, taking not only food but some blankets, with some of which Mrs Gammage had supplied them. Others had actually been bought by Ralph, at his cousin's instigation, with his own money. There could be no doubt from the way they expressed themselves, that the gipsies really were grateful for the kindness shown them, so different from the treatment they had been accustomed to receive from the world. Their hand was supposed to be against every man, and every man's hand was undoubtedly against them.

At length the whole family had so completely recovered, that Arnold told them that he should leave the neighbourhood. "The gentlefolks don't like our ways, and we should be sorry, after what you have done for us, if we came foul of any of your people," said the gipsy.

"So should we, indeed," answered Lilly. "And I hope you will not do anything elsewhere to get yourselves into trouble."

"No fear, sweet lady," said Arnold, with the courtesy so often found among his people. "The thought that you would be offended would prevent us."

Chapter Five.

The days flew by; the spring returned; Ralph completely recovered his strength, and renewed his daily visits to his tutor; while Lilly, unaided, pursued her own studies with unwavering steadiness, and employed herself in calling, with her aunt, on some of the surrounding families of their own rank, in riding, sketching, in visiting the poor in the neighbourhood, and in doing good to all around as far as she had the power. Doctor Morison called her his bright intelligence, and said that he considered her a ministering angel, sent into their district to awaken these people from the Boetian lethargy into which they had sunk. Lilly, however, did not hear these compliments. Had she, her reply would have been that she was only doing what she knew to be right.

Ralph occasionally joined his cousin in her occupations. Sometimes he rode with her, and sat by her side while she sketched; and he even condescended to carry her basket when she visited the cottages of their poor neighbours. He was rising, though he was not aware of it, in their estimation, and many expressed a belief that he would turn out well after all. To be sure, he would occasionally cast that hope to the ground by some outbreak of temper and violence of language. Lilly was often almost in despair, but she remembered her motto, "We must try before we can do," and so she determined to try on.

It must not be supposed that she had distinctly said to herself, "I will set to work to give my cousin good principles, or to reform my cousin." The nearest approach was to think, "I wish that anything I could say or do would make Ralph give up some of his bad habits, and to act as I am sure he ought."

Still, had she clearly seen all the difficulties of the task which she had in reality, although unknowingly, undertaken, she would not have shrunk from it. "It would be so delightful to have Cousin Ralph what he ought to be," she said, over and over again, to herself.

She undoubtedly was setting properly about the work by gently leading him into the right way. He had too undisciplined a mind to be reasoned with, and had been too much indulged to be driven.

Ralph had since his recovery taken a great fancy for rowing. A broad stream passed at no great distance from the Hall, which ultimately fell into a rapid river. Ralph had persuaded his father to have a small boat built for him, which he could manage by himself. He had hitherto had but little practice; he had, however, learned to pull sufficiently well to send on the boat ahead a short distance without catching a crab, and this made him fancy himself already a proficient.

Lilly very naturally believed his assertions that he could row perfectly well; and the boat having been repainted and put in order, she gladly accompanied him on one of the first warm days in spring down to the stream. John Hobby, a cottager near, had charge of the boat and kept the oars. He was out when Ralph called for them, and so his wife told their son to take them down to the boat.

"But you surely are not going alone, Mr Ralph, without my good man or our lad?" said the dame. "It's a main dangerous stream, and needs a strong arm and a practised hand to guide a boat along it."

"That's all you know about it, mistress!" answered Ralph, in his usual self-satisfied, contemptuous tone. "I've rowed often enough on the stream to know that I've no reason to be afraid."

"Well, maybe, Mr Ralph; but you won't go far, I do hope," persisted the dame.

"Just as far as I please; and I'll thank you not to interfere with your advice, mistress," answered Ralph, walking off to follow Lilly, who had unfortunately not heard the warning voice.

Lilly had got to some distance before Dame Hobby saw her, or she would undoubtedly have entreated her not to

venture on the water. Ralph, with unusual politeness, handed his cousin into the boat.

“John, John!” cried the dame, “here lad, take the oars down to the boat for Master Ralph Clavering, and just give him a hint, that if he goes without you, he may chance to drown himself and the pretty young lady with him.” Then she added, in a lower tone, to herself, “A nice young gentleman to order people about as he does. He’ll learn some day who’s who.”

A fine handsome young lad, who had been working in the garden at the back of the house, appeared at her call. He appeared to be about the same age as Ralph Clavering, but was taller and stouter. There was a look, too, of health and conscious strength about him, and withal, a pleasant, good-natured smile on his well-formed countenance, which showed that he was on good terms with himself and the world in general. He took the oars from an outhouse, and followed Ralph and Lilly to the boat.

Young John Hobby was about to follow, when Ralph told him to keep back, and seizing the oars, exclaimed, “Now, Lilly, I will show you what I can do; and we’ll make a voyage unsurpassed since the days of Columbus!”

Lilly was but little accustomed to boating, and believing that her cousin’s experience was equal to what he asserted it to be, she entrusted herself to him without hesitation. John Hobby stood watching their proceedings, and scratching his head, evidently wishing to say something. “You’d better go up stream, Master Clavering,” he cried out at length, as Ralph shoved off from the bank. “The current runs very strong, and it’s easier to go with, than against it.”

“Hold your tongue, you lout,” answered Ralph, angrily. “I know how to row, and don’t want to be dictated to.”

“Beg pardon, Master Clavering: I only said what I knew would be best,” answered John Hobby, sturdily.

Though a tenant of Mr Clavering’s, John Hobby, the elder, paid his rent, improved his land, and feared neither him nor anyone else. Of young John, more will be said hereafter. Ralph had been undecided which way to go. To show his independence, he immediately turned the boat’s head down the stream. He had skill enough to keep her in the centre of the river, and down she floated smoothly and easily. He was delighted with his own performance.

“Hurrah!” he shouted. “Away we go, right merrily. That lout wanted to frighten you. I told you, Cousin Lilly, how pleasant it would be.”

Lilly found it extremely pleasant. The sun shone brightly and sparkled on the surface of the stream; and so clear was the water, that the fish could be seen swimming about on each side of the boat. The water-fowl skimmed lightly over it, or flew from bank to bank, every now and then giving forth strange cries, which made Lilly declare that the river must be infested by water kelpies, who were attempting to lure them to destruction.

On the little boat glided. It did not seem to occur to Ralph that the current, rather than his exertions, was carrying them on.

“This is what I like. Isn’t it pleasant?” he exclaimed, again and again. Lilly was inclined to enjoy it, although, perhaps, a suspicion might have arisen that it would have been wiser to have followed John Hobby’s advice, and to have gone up the stream first, so as to have returned with the current in their favour. They did not go very fast, but had ample time to admire the scenery. Sometimes the stream expanded in width, the banks were low, and little else than beds of rushes and willows, green meadows with cows feeding, were to be seen, with, perhaps, far off, a row of trees, a few Lombardy poplars, and the spire of a church peeping above them. In other places there were steep slopes, and rocks and cliffs, crowned with birch and alder, and even oak, and a variety of other trees. There were bends or angles in the course of the stream, which afforded a variety of pretty views, with here and there a cottage, or some fine old tree, whose branches extended over the water, forming a prominent feature.

“Oh! how I wish that I had brought my sketch-book,” exclaimed Lilly. “These views are so different to those I have been accustomed to take. We must come again to-morrow, and then you must stop as we go up and down the stream at the points I most admire to-day.” Ralph promised to do as his cousin wished, but it did not occur to him to ascertain how far he could keep the boat in one place. At last, Lilly recollected that she had the back of a letter and a pencil in her bag, and, with a piece of board which was in the boat, she extemporised a drawing block. “Now, Ralph, here is a very pretty spot, turn the boat round a little, and I will quickly sketch it,” she cried out, not doubting that her wishes would be fulfilled. Ralph got the boat round, as he was directed, but Lilly soon found herself receding so rapidly from her subject, that it was impossible to take a correct sketch. Again and again she called to him to keep the boat in one place. Ralph persisted that he was doing his best.

“Why, Ralph, I thought that you were so expert an oarsman, that you could make your boat go anywhere, or do anything?” said Lilly.

Ralph could not stand being jeered, even by his cousin. He quickly lost his temper, and at the same time while increasing his exertions, he lost his oar. Away it went out of his grasp, and floated down the stream. “There, you made me do that, you silly girl!” he exclaimed, angrily. “What is to be done now?”

“Try and pick it up, to be sure,” answered Lilly. “Paddle after it with the other oar.”

Ralph stood up to use the other oar as a paddle, and very nearly tumbled over in making the attempt. Lilly now became somewhat alarmed. She knew, however, that the wisest thing to do was to sit still, especially as Ralph began jumping about, and beating the water without any definite object. The boat continued to float down, following the oar, which gained but very little on her. Lilly again urged her cousin to try and recover it. His next attempt was as unsuccessful as the first, and the other oar nearly slipped from his hands. At last he sat down, almost crying, and looking exceedingly foolish. “The boat may go where it chooses,” he exclaimed, pettishly. “How am I to row with only one oar?”

In spite of her fears, Lilly almost burst into a fit of laughter.

“Try again, cousin Ralph; you can do nothing unless you try,” she answered. “If you will not try to row, I must put you to shame by making the attempt myself.”

Thus put on his mettle, Ralph again roused himself, but it was to little purpose; and he and Lilly now found that they had reached the mouth of the stream, and were entering the main river, which was far broader and more rapid. In vain he now tried to gain the bank, the rapid current bore the boat on into the very middle of the river. They both had ridden along the bank, and they remembered that some way down the water rushed over a ledge of rocks, with a fall of several feet.

“Never mind,” said Ralph; “there is a ford there, and I can but jump out and drag the boat to land.”

“Ah, but that was in the summer,” answered Lilly. “I remember a man telling us that in the spring a great body of water falls over the ledge; and that when we passed, with the water scarcely up to our horse’s knees, there is a regular cataract, and that once some people who were attempting to cross in a boat, got drifted near it, and were carried down and all drowned.”

“Oh, how dreadful!” exclaimed Ralph, now fairly wringing his hands. “Why did we come? How foolish we were. I wish that we had followed that lout Hobby’s advice. He, of course, knows more about the river than we do.”

Lilly was very much inclined to say, “Speak for yourself, cousin Ralph; I believed your boastful assertions, and trusted myself to you.”

Instead of that, she only said, “Still we must try to save ourselves. We ought, at all events, to try to reach the bank. Ah! what is this?” She lifted up a loose board from the bottom of the boat: “Here, do you use this as a paddle, and give me the oar. We shall be able to guide the boat if we try.”

Ralph, once more roused, took the plank and used it as his cousin directed. Still, from want of skill, they made but little progress. The other oar had been caught in an eddy, and had been drifted so far away, that they had lost sight of it altogether. As they were exerting themselves with might and main, their attention was aroused by a shout, and looking up, they saw a man standing on the bank and waving the lost oar. This encouraged them; while the roar of the cataract, a little way below, made them still more feel the necessity of exertion. The boat was, of course, all the time drifting down, sideways, nearer and nearer to the dangerous spot. Still they were approaching the shore. The man with the oar ran along the bank. They had got within twenty yards of it, when the current seemed to increase in rapidity. The man shouted to them to use more exertion, but that was beyond their power. Poor Lilly’s arms were already aching, and her hands were hot and blistered with the oar. Glancing on one side, they could see the ledge of rocks against which the river rushed, breaking into a mass of foam. It seemed impossible that they could reach the bank before they got within its influence. The man with the oar, seeing their danger, sprang forward and swam out towards them. He was not, apparently, a very good swimmer, but he struggled on.

“He’ll be drowned, and do us no good,” cried Ralph.

“Oh, no! I pray God that he may be preserved!” exclaimed Lilly, with a fervour, which showed that the expression came from her heart, and was truly a prayer.

It was heard, the man struggled on, and seized the stem of the boat.

“Go back to the other end,” he cried out; and, as Ralph obeyed the order, he threw in the oar, and climbed up himself over the bow. Without speaking a word more, he seized both oars, and began rowing away with might and main towards the shore. Only then did Lilly and her cousin discover that the stranger was no other than Arnold, the gipsy.

“Why, Arnold, we little thought that it was you!” they exclaimed in the same breath.

“No time to talk,” was the answer. “I’ll tell you when we are all safe.”

In a few seconds the boat reached the land. Ralph shuddered when he saw how short a distance they were above the place where the waters, raging and foaming, dashed over the rocks. Lilly remarked, also, the great danger they had escaped. Her first impulse was to offer their gratitude to God for their preservation; her next was, to thank the gipsy for the effort he had made on their behalf.

“But you will surely catch cold, Arnold, if you remain in your wet things,” said Lilly.

“No fear for me, young lady,” he answered; “I am seasoned for all weathers, and a little wetting will do me no harm; but, I’m thinking that you young people will be wishing to get home again. How are you to do it?”

“My cousin said that he would row back,” answered Lilly, with a glance at Ralph, indicative of her real opinion on the subject.

“Perhaps, then, you’ll give me a passage, Master Ralph,” said the gipsy. “It’s a long way round by land, and the roads, such as they are, are not a little muddy in some places, and rough in others.”

“Oh, yes, I’ll row you round—or, that is to say, you shall go round in the boat if you will take the oars, for I feel rather tired after rowing all the way down,” replied Ralph, looking very sheepish.

“Well, young gentleman, after my wetting it will be wise to keep in exercise; so, sit down, and I will try what I can do,” said Arnold, taking the oars in a way which showed that he was accustomed to their use.

He put the boat in motion, but instead of rowing out in the stream, he kept close in with the bank, following all its sinuosities, so as to avoid the opposing current. He bent sturdily to the oars, and sent the boat so rapidly through the water, that she went up the stream even faster than she had descended it when Ralph was rowing. For some time he said nothing; perhaps he felt rather ashamed of himself, but if such was the case the feeling wore off. Arnold made the boat skim over the water so easily, that at last he began to fancy that he could do the same. Surely he could do everything better than a wretched gipsy, who only the other day was almost starving.

Meantime, Lilly had asked Arnold after his wife and family, and how he had happened to be on the bank of the river at a moment so opportune for her and Ralph.

“The questions, sweet lady, are easily answered,” said Arnold. “My wife and children are as well as scant food and hard living will allow them. We are camped about a mile from where you saw me. Knowing of old that the river is full of fish, I had gone to catch some. I had only just thrown in my line when I caught sight of your boat, and guessed that you would be the better for any help I could give you.”

“Then your family will lose the supper you expected to catch for them, and will not know what has become of you,” said Lilly.

“They are too well accustomed to go without supper to complain of that,” said Arnold; “and as to not knowing what has become of me, we make it a rule never to trouble ourselves if one or the other does not appear at the time expected. We suppose that the absent one has some good reason for not coming back to camp. We gipsies do not allow ourselves to have more cares than we can help. It is all very well for the rich who live in fine houses, and ride in fine carriages, and wear fine clothes, and have more food than they can eat, to make cares for themselves; that would never do for us.”

Ralph thought that the gipsy was growing rather impertinent in his observations; yet, as Lilly encouraged him by her remarks, he said nothing. They had for some time re-entered the tributary stream, and were proceeding quickly up it. At last, Ralph, having recovered his confidence, insisted on taking the oars, he had contemplated desiring Arnold to get out, but he had a suspicion that Lilly would not approve of such a proceeding. Arnold, without hesitation, relinquished his seat, and allowed him to take the oars.

Ralph at first rowed away sturdily enough, but the boat at once began to go on one side, and then to cross over to the other side of the stream; and even Ralph could not help discovering that instead of progressing upwards, the boat was once more dropping down with the current.

“I cannot tell how it is,” he exclaimed at last, in a tone of vexation, “there is something or other prevents me from managing the boat as I used. The oars have been changed, or they have been doing something to the boat.”

Lilly’s lips curled, but she saw that her cousin was not in a humour to bear any quizzing; so she merely said—

“Never mind then, Ralph; let Arnold take the oars and row us home as fast as he can, for I am afraid that Uncle and Aunt Clavering will be very anxious about us, if they hear the report John Hobby is likely to give.”

“He’d better not have said anything—that’s all,” growled Ralph, looking as if he could annihilate the low-born Hobby, had he dared to commit such an atrocity.

Happily for that individual, now so unconscious of evil, nearly an hour elapsed after this ere the boat reached the landing-place near the Hall. There stood Hobby.

“I am truly glad to see you—that I am!” he exclaimed, honest satisfaction lighting up his countenance. “I was terribly alarmed you would never get back of your own selves—indeed I was, let me tell you.”

Ralph was going to make an angry reply to what he considered Hobby’s impertinent remarks, but Lilly interrupted him—

“You are right, John Hobby,” she said, kindly. “If it had not been for our friend Arnold here, we might never have got back at all; and had we followed your advice we should have saved ourselves a great deal of anxiety, and not have been exposed to the great danger from which we have been preserved.”

“As to the danger, it’s all well that ends well, Miss,” remarked Hobby, bluntly. “But I do hope Master Ralph won’t be taking you on the water again till he’s learnt to row properly.”

“Make the boat fast, and take the oars away with you!” exclaimed Ralph, walking off homewards.

“Stop, cousin! You have not thanked Arnold, or asked him to come up to the Hall, where I am sure Uncle and Aunt Clavering would wish to see him,” cried Lilly; but Ralph was so angry with Hobby’s remarks, that he would not return.

“Do not trouble him, young lady,” said Arnold, casting a glance after the young heir of Clavering Hall, in which he did not conceal his contempt. “I do not require his thanks, nor any reward from him or his. You show me by your looks that you thank me, and that pays me more than enough.”

“Oh, but his father and mother will not be satisfied with that; they will wish to repay you,” answered Lilly. “And besides, your wife and children are not well off; some money or some clothing will be of use to them, surely.”

“I’ll not deny it; but we value such things less than you fancy, young lady,” said the gipsy. “We have enough for the present, and we do not trouble ourselves much as to what is to come. But I won’t keep you talking. The young gentleman has just remembered that he ought to wait for you, and is sitting down on the bank there. He thinks himself very rich and very important, and that he can do everything, I daresay; but if he knew all about himself that I

know about him, he would act more kindly towards others and think less of himself. You may tell him so whenever you like from me."

The meaning of this last remark did not strike Lilly at the moment. She still pressed Arnold to come to the Hall, but he declined, saying that he must of necessity go back to his family. Lilly again expressing her thanks, hurried after Ralph, who did not recover his self-complacency till they reached the Hall.

Chapter Six.

When Mr and Mrs Clavering heard Lilly's version of the boating expedition, they were anxious to repay Arnold for the service he had rendered; but when they sent over a servant on horseback to the locality where he had said his tents were pitched, he was not to be found. Lilly was extremely sorry to hear this. She wished also to express her gratitude more fully than she had before done, and although he had refused to receive any reward, she had hopes that his wife and children would be willing to accept any presents she might be able to give them. Every effort, however, made by Mr Clavering to discover him proved unavailing. Perhaps his steward, whom he employed, did not take as much pains as he might have done. Ralph and Lilly went on much as they had been accustomed to do. Although Lilly often asked Ralph, when he was going to take her for another excursion on the water, he invariably offered some excuse. She observed also that he never went near the river if he could help it, and that he invariably seemed much annoyed whenever John Hobby's name was mentioned. It was evident that he had not forgotten the remarks made by honest John about his rowing. Sometimes Lilly suspected that he had even some stronger reason for disliking the young peasant. She feared that it was from the meanest of all reasons, jealousy. Hobby was better looking and more active, and excelled him in all athletic exercises. Hobby also was very good-natured, and had a great deal of humour, so that he was a general favourite among all who knew him in the country round. Ralph felt annoyed that one so much his inferior in birth, wealth, and education should in all other respects be his superior.

Again Lilly felt almost in despair that Ralph would ever become what he ought to be. She was a sensible and wise girl, and had not formed too high a standard of perfection, but still there was a standard which she knew he could and ought to reach, and she did not feel disposed to be satisfied with any measure below it. She had flattered herself that she had got him out of many of his bad habits, but he had fallen back into most of them, and she found that the influence, which she fancied she had gained over him, was in no way secured. He mixed as before, whenever he had an opportunity, with low associates, and he used to abuse and swear at all around him at the slightest provocation. As a young boy, this conduct had only met with contempt, but as he grew older it gained him every day fresh enemies, so that there was scarcely a person in the district round who was so much disliked.

During the last few years a great and happy change has taken place among the peasantry of England, and except a limited number of Chartists and other ill-instructed persons mostly confined to the towns, it may truly be said that the whole of the population is contented and orderly and patient under inevitable suffering and poverty. It was not so formerly, and directly they began to suffer from a scarcity of provisions or low wages, their only idea of remedying the evil, was to burn or destroy the property of their more wealthy and prosperous neighbours. Bad times, as they were called, were now occurring, and the whole rural population, especially in the neighbourhood of Clavering Hall, were in a state of great discontent. Incendiary fires were of nightly occurrence throughout the country. Not only haystacks, but wheat-stacks and barns and farm buildings were set on fire. This way which the country people took of showing their suffering was both very wicked and exceedingly foolish, but it proved indubitably that something or other required amendment. The magistrates took very naturally a somewhat one-sided view of the case, and regarding the people as evil-disposed and rebellious, employed the most stringent measures to repress these outrages. Whenever any supposed incendiaries were caught they seldom escaped conviction and were always punished with the utmost severity. Mr Clavering especially was conspicuous for the zeal with which he hunted down offenders and the unrelenting sternness with which he brought them to punishment. He, in consequence, brought upon himself a large amount of odium, and coupled with his conduct generally towards the peasantry, it made him probably the most unpopular man in the county. While the proud owner of Clavering Hall was the most unpopular, the poor tenant of one of his humble cottages was one of the most popular. This was no other than John Hobby. Hobby's popularity arose from several causes. A good deal of it was owing to the estimation in which his son was held, while he himself was looked upon as a hearty, good-natured fellow, ever ready with his tongue or his single stick to stand up for a friend or to defend the right; but, above all this, he had been falsely accused and tried on the charge of an act of incendiarism or of instigating others to commit it, and likewise of afterwards heading a number of persons who had committed various lawless acts. After a long imprisonment John Hobby had proved his innocence, and not being of either a humble or forgiving temper, he was not backward in speaking on all occasions of the way in which he had been treated. The summer passed away, the autumn came round, and matters grew worse. Lilly Vernon, however, rode out as usual, fearless of evil. Sometimes her uncle accompanied her, at others Ralph condescended to do so; but more usually of late she was followed by a groom, one of the most respectable and honest of the household. She had one day gone a considerable distance from home, when as she was walking her horse up a hill, with a copse wood on either side, she saw among the trees a small fire with a tent and carts near it, and the other usual features of a gipsy encampment. "Perhaps that is Arnold's camp," she said to herself, and just then she caught sight of the gipsy himself coming along the road. As soon as he perceived who it was he hurried towards her.

"I was coming this very day to watch for you near the Hall, young lady," he said, putting his hand on her horse's neck. "You wished, I know, to do me a service, and you have it now in your power to help me. My eldest boy has been taken up by the constables on a charge of setting fire to Farmer Low's haystacks. He is innocent of the crime, for crime I hold it; but he is a gipsy, he was taken near the spot, and it will go hard with him. Your uncle has an affection for you, and will listen to the truth from your lips. If you put the matter before him, and tell him whose son the lad is, may be he will exert himself in his favour. Though he is a hard man, he is not one to let the innocent suffer."

Lilly willingly promised to do all that the gipsy asked. Having paid a visit to his wife and children, who warmly

welcomed her, she hurried homeward. On her return she met considerable bodies of men proceeding along the road, all armed with scythes, or hooks, or sticks. On enquiring of the groom what they were about his only reply was, “They are up to some mischief, Miss, but it’s as much as my life’s worth to ask them. I did not like their looks as they passed, and cast their eyes on the Clavering livery.”

On reaching the Hall Lilly hastened to find her uncle, who was at home, and without saying anything of what she had just seen, laid the young gipsy’s case before him and placed the evidence of his innocence in so clear a light that he at once promised he would befriend him. She had promised the gipsy’s wife to ride out the next day to tell her of the success of her petition.

To assist in keeping down the disturbances which have been mentioned, the yeomanry were called out. The magistrates announced that the next time a mob assembled for mischief they should be fired on, and ridden down without mercy. No one was louder than Ralph Clavering in asserting that this was the only way to treat them.

“I cannot help thinking, cousin, that milder measures would answer better,” observed Lilly; “I would rather go unarmed among them, and show them the folly and wickedness of their proceedings.”

“You are very wise, Lilly, but you know nothing of the management of men,” answered Ralph, contemptuously.

A body of cavalry had been quartered near Clavering Hall for some time, but information being brought that an outbreak was expected in a town in the other end of the county they were immediately ordered off in that direction.

A number of guests were assembled that day at the Hall at dinner. The cloth had just been removed, when the butler hurried in, and with a pale face and a trembling voice, announced the startling fact that one of the grooms had met a large body of armed men marching up through the park. His report was so circumstantial that there was no doubt about the matter. Some of the ladies took the matter calmly enough, others gave utterance to various expressions of terror, while the gentlemen were unanimous in the opinion that the windows and doors should be instantly barricaded, and that the Hall should be defended to the last if attacked. Not a moment was to be lost. There was no time to take out the sashes, but the shutters of all the lower rooms were closed and barred, as also were the doors, and chests of drawers, and tables and chairs were piled against them.

Ralph seemed highly pleased with the proceedings. He had never been so energetic, and no one was more active in carrying about the furniture and placing it, so as to strengthen the fortifications. There were a number of fowling-pieces and pistols and other fire-arms in the house. Those fit for use were at once loaded, and consigned to the different guests and men servants; others which had long been laid aside were hunted up, and while one part of the garrison set to work to clean them, others commenced casting bullets, and a third party went about to forage for lead for the purpose. A leaden cistern and some leaden pipes leading to it were quickly cut to pieces and the material carried below.

Lilly, though fully believing the report from what she had seen in the afternoon, and considerably alarmed in consequence, devoted herself to comforting her aunt, who was in a sad state of agitation, and kept declaring that the house would be burned down, and that they would all be murdered. Some of the ladies, however, volunteered to assist in casting bullets, and expressed their readiness to fight if the house were attacked.

Mr Clavering appeared at this juncture to considerable advantage. He showed that he felt as an Englishman, and that, as Englishmen may well glory in the privilege of doing, he looked upon his house as his castle. He at once took the lead, and went about calmly from room to room, superintending all the arrangements.

While affairs were in this state, it occurred to one of the gentlemen to enquire how near the rioters had got to the house? No one could say; in fact, no one had seen them since Bill Snookes, the groom, had reported their approach. One old gentleman, who enjoyed a practical joke, suggested that they had perhaps been taking a great deal of trouble, and disarranging the house to no purpose, and that the rioters might not be coming at all, which, of course made the rest very angry; at the same time that it induced two or three others to volunteer to go out and ascertain the position and force of the enemy.

Bill’s report had been somewhat vague, and he might possibly have exaggerated their numbers. The night was very dark, and from the upper windows no persons were visible in the park, and not a sound was heard—even the dogs were silent, which they would not have been had people been moving about. Beyond the park, however, were seen in two or more places a bright glare in the sky, which, there could be little doubt, was caused by incendiary fires.

We at the present day can scarcely realise that such was possible. The inmates of the Hall watched anxiously; any moment the well-formed corn and haystacks on the estate might burst into a blaze, and so might even the extensive outhouses of the Hall itself.

Still the Hall was not attacked. Two volunteers offered to go out and ascertain the state of affairs. A strong party accompanied them to one of the side-doors to repel any attack of the enemy who might be in ambush near and attempt to surprise them. Ralph wanted to accompany the scouts, but they politely declined having his company.

The night was now drawing on; several of the party reiterated their belief that the rioters would not come near them. At length the probability of an attack being made on the Hall was set at rest by the return of the two scouts, who stated that they had encountered a large body of men marching towards it and loudly threatening its destruction. They themselves were almost discovered, and had had no little difficulty in making their escape.

Everybody within the mansion was now in greater bustle than before. Again Mr Clavering looked at all the doors and fastenings, and inspected all the points of possible approach, and men servants or maid servants were stationed at all the windows which could be reached by ladders, several of which it was recollected, when too late, were left exposed to view in the outhouses. Several of the gentlemen stood with fire-arms in their hands at some of the

windows of the upper rooms commanding the approach to the house. The night was calm, not a sound was yet to be heard. At length the low, dull tramp of a body of men moving rapidly onward, broke the stillness. It grew more and more distinct; voices were heard mingling with it. They became louder and louder. Shouts and cries broke forth which soon evolved themselves into threats of vengeance against Clavering Hall and its proprietor. At last the open space before the house became filled with men. The cries became more prolonged.

“Now, lads, destruction to the Hall and death to its owner. Hurrah!” shouted some one from the crowd. The shout was repeated by a hundred voices.

It might well have made the defenders of the Hall tremble, for it was known that the cavalry had been sent off to a distance, and that there was no prospect of succour.

“We’ll fight it out, and we must needs be ashamed of ourselves if we cannot drive the scoundrels away,” exclaimed Mr Clavering.

“Light your torches, lads—fire is the thing for us,” shouted one of the mob. “We’ll soon smoke out these monsters.”

Soon after this, a small light was seen. It seemed to spread from hand to hand; and now some hundred torches waved to and fro in front of the Hall. The female occupants had now good reason for trembling with alarm. Still Mr Clavering was unwilling to give the order to fire. Not that he had much compunction about killing them, but it would only have exasperated the people, without driving them away.

“The doors are closed,” cried the man who had before spoken. “We must burst them open. Bring forward the battering rams.”

No sooner was the command issued, than a number of men were seen hurrying up with some trunks of small trees, slung on ropes, between them. This proceeding had not been foreseen; and it was evident that the doors could not withstand the force about to be applied to them.

“If you proceed to violence, understand all of you below this, that we will fire,” shouted Mr Clavering. “Many of you will lose your lives—mark that. I give you warning.”

“And we give you warning, that we will burn you and your fine Hall, and everybody in it. Mark that, Ralph Clavering,” was the answer. “Huzza, lads.—No more delay.—On with the work.”

The men thus incited brought forward a battering ram, and made a furious attack on the front door. Stout as it was, it cracked throughout. Another such blow would have burst it open, and allowed the angry assailants a free entrance.

Still Mr Clavering and his companions were unwilling to fire, till it appeared that they had no longer any other resource.

“Again I give you warning, men—we will take the lives of some of you if you approach the door,” he shouted out.

“Do your worst—we don’t fear you, squire,” was the answer; and again a rush was made towards the door.

A shower of bullets rattled down among the assailants, and several shots were fired from the crowd in return. Loud shrieks and cries of vengeance arose on all sides. The hall door was burst open, and fierce men, maddened by hunger, with all their worst passions aroused, were rushing in, with torches in their hands, bent on destroying the mansion, when they were met by a party of the defenders, who resolutely kept them back. Still it was too evident that numbers would prevail, when, at that moment, a voice which rose high and clear above the din shouted out—

“What, men, are you about? Do you wish to destroy the property of one of your best friends? You fancy that Clavering Hall is to belong to the lad known as young Ralph Clavering; but you are mistaken. The rightful heir is no other than he whom we all have called John Hobby. Look at him, any one of you; and who can doubt it? When the right moment comes it will be proved. In the meantime let that high and mighty young gentleman, Master Ralph Clavering, enjoy his dignity as best he can, and look down on those whom he will soon find are his equals.”

While the stranger was speaking, there was so perfect a silence among the rioters that every word was heard by those within the house. Ralph Clavering heard them with feelings of astonishment and dismay. So did Lilly, and so did Mr and Mrs Clavering. They did not believe the extraordinary assertion; but still it created most painful feelings within their bosoms. The effect on the mob, however, was highly satisfactory. Although some insisted that they should continue the attack, because the property, as it still belonged to Squire Clavering, ought to be destroyed, but by far the larger majority agreed to abandon it. The majority carried the day, and the small minority had no inclination to continue fighting alone.

“But before we go, lads, let us give three cheers for the rightful heir of Clavering Hall. Hip! hip! hip! hurra for honest John Hobby! and when he comes into his property, may he not forget his poorer neighbours!”

Again and again they shouted this assertion, creating even more astonishment and dismay in the minds of the owner of the Hall and his friends than their attack had done. The volley from the fowling-pieces did not appear to have produced much effect, or, if any of the people had been hit, they were carried off by their friends.

After the last cheer, the whole body suddenly moved off, the rear ranks pushing hurriedly on, evidently not wishing to be the last, lest they might be assailed by the inmates of the Hall. Some of the gentlemen, indeed, proposed sallying out, and punishing the rioters; but Mr Clavering told them that he would not sanction such an act, as it would be utterly useless, and might lead to their own destruction. In a few minutes not a person was to be seen in the park, while the sound of the retreating footsteps of the mob gradually faded away.

Chapter Seven.

The assertion made by the stranger, which had so unexpectedly raised the siege of the Hall, created the most painful doubts in the minds of Mr and Mrs Clavering. At the time of their child's birth Mr Clavering had been away, and his conscience told him that it had been for the sake of his own gratification and amusement. The housekeeper and several other servants in the Hall at the time had been dismissed for misconduct, and, from circumstances which occurred, Mrs Clavering had no proof or certainty whatever that her child had not been changed. Seldom has a mother been placed in a more painful position. Another circumstance which gave the statement a greater air of truth was, that the woman Hobby had been employed at the Hall at the time Mrs Clavering's child was born, that she herself was said to have given birth to an infant shortly afterwards, and that certainly a boy had been brought up by her who was now known as John Hobby. She was by some means or other better off than her neighbours. Young Hobby was always well dressed and well cared for, and had been sent to the best village school the neighbourhood afforded; so that, considered only a cottager's child, he soon became the associate on equal terms of the sons of the well-to-do farmers in the neighbourhood. Mrs Hobby had not spoiled him; and John Hobby the elder, who was a conscientious man, had, to the best of his power, done his duty by him, and given him such religious instruction as he was able. He was also a firm, mild-tempered man, and had never failed firmly and gently to punish him whenever he committed a fault.

The morning after the events which have been described, Mr Clavering met his guests at the breakfast-table with a calmer countenance than could have been expected.

"You all heard the strange assertion made last night, and saw the effect it produced," he observed. "In its truth I am not inclined to believe, though I shall, of course, make the most searching inquiry as to the origin of the report. I have sent for the youth, the supposed rival of Ralph, and I am endeavouring to discover the person who last night made the statement which probably saved the Hall from destruction. I cannot look upon him otherwise than as a friend."

"Then, uncle, I will tell you who he is," exclaimed Lilly, eagerly; "I recognised his voice. He is Arnold the gipsy. I was certain of it the moment he began speaking."

"Those gipsies pick up strange tales, which can seldom be relied on," observed one of the guests.

"I should think not," exclaimed Ralph Clavering, whose features had been much agitated since he took his seat at the table, but who had endeavoured to preserve a calm demeanour. "You are not going to discard me as your son, I hope, merely from the assertion of a vagabond gipsy?"

"No, indeed, Ralph, my dear boy; but you would surely wish the report to be inquired into," said Mr Clavering, calmly.

Lilly had come round, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Whatever is the case, dear Ralph, I will be your sister-cousin as long as we live," she said, in her sweet, gentle voice. "Endeavour to bear this great trial well; you can if you strive properly."

Ralph bent his head down between his hands, and bursting into tears, murmured—

"But it is very hard to bear."

It was the first time in his life that he had ever shown signs of a softened heart, and it made Lilly inwardly rejoice, for she had expected to see him fly out, and abuse Hobby as a vile impostor, and, as it were, strike right and left at any one who ventured to question that he was the lawful heir of Clavering Hall. She observed, also, that during the day, though occasionally moody, he was far less dictatorial and haughty in his manner towards others than usual, while to her he was especially gentle and polite.

Mr Clavering attended the magistrates' meeting, and not unmindful of his promise to his niece, succeeded in getting the young gipsy, Arnold's son, discharged, though the evidence against him would, perhaps, have been sufficient in those days, to convict him, had he not had a friend to speak in his favour.

In the evening young John Hobby, with Mrs Hobby, arrived at the Hall. She was given in charge of the housekeeper, with strict orders to prevent her from communicating with any one. John was habited in his Sunday suit, and with his good looks and modest and unassuming yet unembarrassed manners, he won many sympathisers. He was extremely astonished to find himself at the Hall, for he had not heard the report promulgated by Arnold, nor had he nor Mrs Hobby been told why they had been sent for.

When the young gipsy had been discharged, Mr Clavering told him that he wished to see his father; but it was not till another day had nearly passed that Arnold made his appearance. There could be little doubt that he was well aware of the object for which he had been requested to come to the Hall, though Mrs Hobby and John had been kept out of his way.

A lawyer had come down from London, and two or three other friends remained at the Hall to assist Mr Clavering in investigating the case. Arnold was first brought up. His story was very simple. He had no personal interest whatever in young Hobby. He had obtained the information through his wife, who, in the course of her calling of fortune-telling, had got it from Mrs Hobby herself. He considered the secret of value, but had not intended to make use of it, though he was induced to do so for the purpose of saving the Hall from destruction.

Mrs Hobby's evidence was next taken. She stated that neither of the children about whom this question had arisen was her own; that Mrs Duffy, the housekeeper at the Hall, had brought her an infant, stating that it was the child of Mrs Clavering; that it would never be reared if brought up by its mother, and that to save its life she had taken it away, and substituted another in its stead. She owned that she had her doubts as to the propriety of the proceeding,

but that her scruples had been quieted by a sum of money, and that she was told she would receive a similar sum every year as long as she did not betray the secret. The gipsy wife had, however, wormed it out of her, and this year the looked-for sum had not arrived at the usual time.

Although there were some discrepancies, and even improbabilities, in the details of the statement, it still appeared possible that the story might in the main be true; and, at all events, it wore an air of sufficient probability to make the positions of the two youths extremely painful. Ralph came forward in a way which was little expected, but which gave Lilly great satisfaction. He earnestly begged that John Hobby might remain at the Hall, and be treated in all respects as he had been, and that he might accompany him to his tutor, and obtain the education which would fit him for the position in life he might possibly be destined to gain. No conclusion could possibly be arrived at, however, it appeared, unless Mrs Duffy and her accomplices could be found; and what had become of her no one knew. Another question also arose: if Ralph was not the heir of Clavering Hall, who was he? Again, should he be proved to be the son of Mr and Mrs Clavering, who was John Hobby? For the present, however, Mr Clavering's legal adviser assured him that the law would in no way interfere with the right of his supposed son Ralph as heir of Clavering Hall.

John Hobby himself made no claim, while the whole story rested on the assertions of a gipsy and an ignorant woman, who had no proofs to bring forward in its support. The persons who suffered most were Mr and Mrs Clavering. They had looked upon Ralph as their son, and had loved him as such, too blindly indeed; and now they felt that they might possibly have been bestowing this love on a stranger, and neglecting their own offspring. As they saw young Hobby, indeed, they could not help acknowledging that he was worthy of the love of any parents, though they could discover no likeness in him to themselves, or any of their near relatives, while Ralph had always been considered the very image of Mr Clavering. Thus they continued in the most painful state of uncertainty as to which was their son, without any possibility of solving the mystery.

Chapter Eight.

Ralph Clavering was becoming a changed character. His spirit had been humbled, if not broken. He had persuaded himself that any moment he might have to descend from his proud position as heir of Clavering Hall, and become a nameless beggar, ignorant even of who were his parents. John Hobby had truly heaped coals of fire on his head that had completely softened and won his heart. In their studies, John Hobby's quickness and perseverance stimulated him to make greater exertions than he had ever before used. Hobby remained on as a guest at the Hall and was soon looked upon as one of the family. The only thing certain with regard to him was that he was not the son of Dame Hobby and her husband John; and Lilly, at all events, hoped that he had the right to bear some more euphonious name. He also daily improved in manners and in the tone of his voice and accent, so that after the lapse of a few months, a stranger visiting the Hall would not have supposed that his early days had been spent in one of the humblest cottages on the estate. He did not, however, lose his modest demeanour and simple manners. They remained, but became those of a cultivated and polished person. At length the time arrived when it had been arranged that Ralph should go to the University. He wished that his friend should accompany him. Here in an open field Hobby's talents had full space for development. Ralph was inclined to feel jealous at finding himself distanced by his friend, but he stifled the unworthy feeling, and rejoiced at his success. It was considerable, for Hobby carried off all the prizes for which he was able to contend.

Thus three years passed rapidly away, and at the end of that time, while Ralph Clavering passed a very creditable degree, John Hobby took high honours. He now resolved, by the advice of his tutors and other friends, to enter at the Bar, where he might carve out his own fortune. He invariably spent his vacations with Ralph. Sometimes they made tours together on the Continent or elsewhere, but the winters were generally spent at Clavering Hall. Ralph was now as much loved and respected by the household and tenants as he had before been disliked, and all agreed that it would be a grievous pity if it should be proved that he was not the rightful heir, though it was acknowledged that a finer or better young gentleman than Mr John Hobby was not to be found.

The two young men were at the Hall for the early part of the Christmas vacation, just as they had left College. After it they proposed making a tour in the East. Snow covered the ground and a biting north-east wind blew out side, while all within was cheerful and bright. A large party staying in the house were assembled in the dining-room; the cloth had just been removed and the young collegians were receiving the congratulations of their friends at their success at the University, when the butler entering whispered to Mr Clavering that a man desired to see him immediately on important business. Desiring that the man might be shown into his study he apologised to his friends and hurriedly left the room.

On entering the study a tall thin man stepped forward—"It's a long time since you have seen me, Squire Clavering, but maybe you may remember the gipsy Arnold," said the stranger. "You and yours acted kindly towards me and mine, and I have ever since been wishing to do you a service in return. I knew that the occasion would some day come. It has arrived. You have long been anxious to find the woman Duffy. She is in the neighbourhood, and I suspect on her death-bed. If you hasten to her you may yet be in time to take her depositions, as she alone is able to settle who is your rightful son and heir."

Fortunately a brother magistrate and Mr Clavering's lawyer were staying in the house. Ordering a carriage to be got ready, he sent for them, and, without delay, accompanied by Arnold, they set off to the cottage where Mrs Duffy was to be found.

The old woman was in bed and evidently very ill. At first, when told why they had come, she was greatly alarmed and refused to say anything, but being soothed and assured that no injury would be done her, she expressed her readiness to say all she knew. Mr Clavering, who had hitherto been so calm, now that the painful mystery was about to be cleared up, could scarcely restrain his feelings. As she spoke the lawyer, unobserved by her, wrote down her words. The description of a life of crime is not edifying. Avarice, the eager desire for money, had been the incentive which urged her on from crime to crime. By a bribe she had been induced by the wicked brother of a gentleman of

property in the north of England to assist in carrying off his son and heir, and not knowing what to do with the infant, she had committed it to the charge of Dame Hobby, leading her by further falsehood to suppose that it was the heir, lately born, of Clavering Hall. Part of the money she had received from the uncle she had remitted regularly to the Dame for the boy's support. She asserted most positively that Ralph Clavering was truly the child, born to Mr and Mrs Clavering, and that no change had been effected to her knowledge and belief.

Mr Clavering uttered an ejaculation of thankfulness when he heard this, and his brother magistrate warmly congratulated him. The lawyer rubbed his hands, exclaiming—"This other affair will, however, give the gentlemen of the long robe a nice supply of occupation for the spring months. I know the gentleman, and believe every word; he'll fight it out to the last. Really if all people were honest, it would be hard work for barristers to find support."

The trial predicted by the lawyer took place; and, thanks to Mr Clavering's purse, it was brought to a successful issue for the interests of Ralph's friend.

As Sir Harry Olcotte, the owner of many broad acres, the latter never forgot that he had once been simple John Hobby, while Ralph Clavering had reason to bless the day which aroused him from his state of self-conceit and self-indulgence, and which made him feel the necessity of self-exertion and self-command.

It may be satisfactory to some readers to know that Lilly Vernon, not many years after the events recorded, became Lady Olcotte; that Arnold the gipsy and all his family settled down near them, and became respectable members of society; and that old John Hobby and his dame were placed on one of the best farms of the estate, and that the Steward, in the most unaccountable way, always forgot to call for their rent.

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