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Author: B. L. Farjeon

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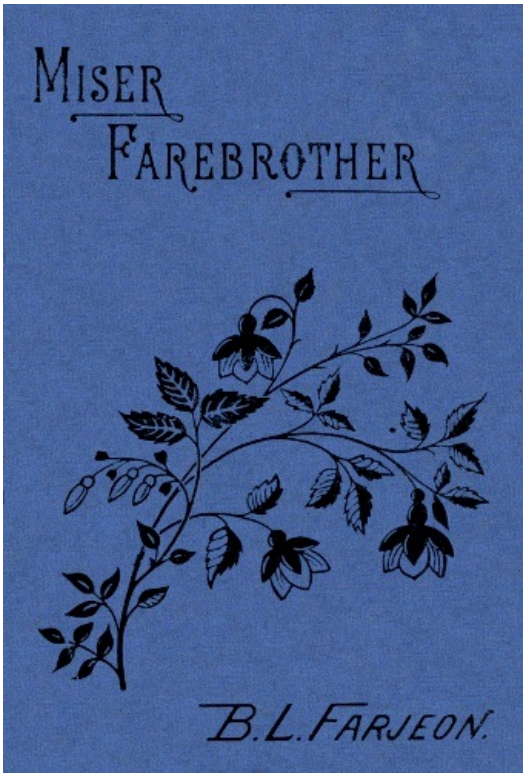

MISER FAREBROTHER.

A Novel.

BY B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF "GREAT PORTER SQUARE," "GRIF," "IN A SILVER SEA," "THE HOUSE OF WHITE SHADOWS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MISER FAREBROTHER.

CHAPTER I.

JEREMIAH PAMFLETT ASSERTS HIMSELF.

The innocent fun and gaiety at the tea-table were long afterward remembered. There was an animated discussion as to who should take the head of the table. Phœbe wanted Aunt Leth to do so, but Fanny interfered, and said no one should sit there but Phœbe.

"It is Phœbe's day," persisted the light-hearted girl, "and something unlucky will happen if she doesn't pour out the tea. Mr. Cornwall, come and court me at the bottom of the table."

"Didn't you say it was Miss Farebrother's day?" said Fred, as he took his seat next to the young hostess. He was not wanting in resource, and rather enjoyed Fanny's badinage.

The table was much more plentifully supplied than Phœbe expected, and she cast many grateful glances at Mrs. Pamflett, who had certainly taken pains to do honour to the occasion. Mrs. Pamflett received these tokens of gratitude gravely and quietly; no one would have supposed that her mind was occupied by any other consideration than the comfort of her young mistress's guests. But nothing escaped her secretly watchful eyes; every word, every look, every little attention from Fred Cornwall to Phœbe was carefully noted and treasured up.

A merrier meal was never enjoyed; the buzz of conversation was delightful to hear. Phœbe was the quietest, Fanny the noisiest. Suddenly she became quite still, and gazed pensively at Fred Cornwall.

"A penny for your thoughts," said he.

"They are yours at the price," she replied, holding out her hand for the penny. "I am feeling very sorry for you."

"Why?"

"Because I am convinced you would be much happier if you were at this moment shelling peas with a certain young lady in Switzerland."

This caused a general laugh, and Fred enlarged upon the delights of his trip, Fanny interrupting him a dozen times with some quizzical remark.

"You certainly want some one to keep you in order, Fanny," laughingly observed her mother.

"I do," replied Fanny, dolefully. "Where *is* that some one? Why *does* he not appear?"

Toward the end of the meal Mrs. Pamflett swiftly left the room. Looking out of the window she saw her son Jeremiah, and she hastened down to him.

"Well, mother?" said he.

"What has made you so late?" she asked, anxiously.

"Now, don't nag!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't get here before; had a hundred things to look after. The new clothes I ordered never came home, and I had to go and bullyrag the tailor. How do I look, mother?"

"Beautiful, Jeremiah, beautiful!" she said, enthusiastically.

On his feet were patent-leather shoes; on his head the shiniest of belltoppers; on his hands lavender-coloured kid gloves; round his neck a light blue scarf, with a great carbuncle pin stuck in it; and he wore a tourist's suit of russet-brown of a very large check pattern.

"Rather licks 'em, doesn't it?" he asked, in a tone of self-admiration and approval, turning slowly round to exhibit his points.

"That it does, Jeremiah."

"Look at this," he said, taking off his hat.

"Why, you've had your hair curled, Jeremiah!"

"Slightly! Nobby, ain't it?"

"Beautiful! My own dear boy!"

"Keep your fingers to yourself, can't you? There, you've gone and put it all out!" He drew from his pocket a small mirror, and anxiously readjusted the curls his mother had touched. "Now just you be careful. Eyes on, hands off!"

"They must have cost a lot of money, Jeremiah."

"They did; a heap; but in for a penny, in for a pound. There's one comfort; it's all spent on myself. Catch me spending it on anybody else. They cost, altogether—Well, never mind; we're going in for a big thing, ain't we? I ain't particular to a pound or two when the stake's worth it."

"You have the heart of a lion!" said Mrs. Pamflett.

"What will she think of me, mother? Look at me well; reckon me up."

"She can't help thinking as I do, Jeremiah."

"She's a ninny if she don't. She won't get another chance like it, I'll bet."

"What is that you're carrying, my boy?"

"A bouquet. Here, I'll just lift the paper, so that you can see it. Roses, stephanotis, and maidenhair. Now, who'll say I ain't a plucky one? Just wipe this dust off my boots."

In her full-hearted admiration Mrs. Pamflett had lost sight of her conversation with Miser Farebrother, and of the presence of Fred Cornwall in the room above; but now, as she carefully wiped Jeremiah's boots, it all came back to her. Bidding him to give her his best attention, she told him everything; he listened to her attentively, and put a good many questions to her when she had done, the most important of which related to his master.

"He didn't shy at it, then?" he asked.

"No," she replied; "he seemed to take to it kindly."

"You're sure he understood you?"

"He couldn't be off understanding me; I put it to him pretty plain. All you've got to do is to play your cards well."

"I'll do that. When I've got a winning hand I know what to do with it."

"Are you pleased with me, Jeremiah?"

"Yes; it was a bold stroke; only don't do it again. Let me play my own game. I don't mind telling you something if you'll keep it dark." He paused a moment before continuing. "Do you see my thumb?" He held out his right hand, palm upward, with the thumb arched over it. "I've got the London business like this; I've got Miser Farebrother like this. He's under my thumb, mother, and

he doesn't know it. If I left him he'd lose thousands, and if the worst comes to the worst I can put it to him like that in a way he can't mistake."

"Don't be rash, Jeremiah," implored Mrs. Pamflett; "be humble with him."

"Oh, yes; I'll be humble with him as long as it suits me. Do you think I've been working all these years for nothing? Do you think I've had the office all to myself for nothing? Does *he* think I didn't take his measure years and years ago, and that I didn't make up my mind what to do?"

"Jeremiah! Jeremiah!" cried Mrs. Pamflett, "be careful. He's cunning, he's clever; he can see with his eyes shut."

"I can beat him at his own game. Cunning as he is, I'm cunninger; clever as he is, I'm cleverer; I could see without any eyes at all. Wasn't it as clear to me as daylight, if I'd been content to be his slave, taking his miserable few shillings a week, and trying to live on it, that I should be no better off at seventy years than I was at seventeen? Oh, no; not at all! I was a fool, I was, and didn't know how many beans made five! I was born yesterday, I was! There now; I've said enough. You'll live to see something that'll make you open your eyes. Oh! hanged if I wasn't forgetting. What did the governor do with that beggar, Tom Barley?"

"Discharged him. He's gone for good."

"He's gone for bad, you mean. He'll come to a nice end, and I'll help him to it if I can. So the old hunks discharged Tom Barley, did he? Well, I settled his hash for him, at all events."

"It shows what influence you have over the master," observed Mrs. Pamflett.

"I'll have more before I've done with him. Hallo! Just hear how they're laughing upstairs. I say, mother, couldn't you call Phœbe down here? I don't care about giving her the flowers with all that lot looking on and sniggering. Just you go and whisper to her that a gentleman wants very particularly to see her. Wait a minute; is my scarf right?"

"Yes, Jeremiah," said Mrs. Pamflett, and was about to leave him, when he cried again, nervously:

"Wait a minute, can't you? What a hurry you're in. What would you say to her, mother, when you give 'em to her?"

"Wish her many happy returns of the day, Jeremiah; and you might ask if she will give you a cup of tea. That will give you an excuse for following her; she can't very well leave the people upstairs long to themselves."

"All right; I'll do it." And Jeremiah struck an attitude, and waited for Phœbe, who had received a message, not that "a gentleman" wanted particularly to see her, but that a friend was below who was anxious to wish her many happy returns. When Phœbe heard this, she thought for a moment that it might be faithful Tom Barley, whom Mrs. Pamflett, in her good-nature, had allowed to enter, and she was startled when she saw Jeremiah Pamflett.

"It's me, miss," said that worthy. "You're not sorry, I hope?"

"No," she said, awkwardly; "not at all."

"Seeing it was your birthday," said Jeremiah, "I thought I'd give you an agreeable surprise. Just look at this." He took the blue paper off the bouquet, and held it up for her admiration.

"It is very pretty," said Phœbe.

"I should rather say it was. It cost enough, anyhow: eight and six I gave for it."

He paused for a reply, and Phœbe said, "Yes?" not knowing what else to say.

"Half a guinea they asked, but I beat 'em down. They *do* try to take you in, the shopkeepers; but I get up a little too early for them. When they try their games on me, they try 'em on the wrong party. Don't you think so?" He made a motion with his elbow, with the intention of digging it playfully into her side; but she shrank back, and frustrated his amiable design. "I went to Covent Garden myself to pick it out." He paused again, and as she did not speak, he thought, "Hang it! why doesn't she say something?" comforting himself, however, with the reflection that his resplendent appearance had "regularly knocked her over," as he would have openly expressed it in his choice vernacular. Feeling that he was not getting along as well as he wished, he wound up with, "For you, miss; wishing you many happy returns of the day."

"You are very kind," said Phœbe, having no option but to accept the bouquet, "to spend so much money upon me."

"Oh," said Jeremiah, boastfully, "I can do a thing swell when I've a mind to. I never laid out so much on flowers before, but I wouldn't mind doing it again—for you, miss."

"Pray don't think of it," said Phœbe, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry.

"Well, I won't say whether I will or not. It all depends." He spread himself out airily in order that she might have a good view of him. He took off his hat, touched his curled hair gingerly, put his left arm akimbo, and stood at ease, with his right leg out-stretched. He was rather proud of his manners, and thought he was making an impression. The question whether Phœbe should laugh or cry was determined by his attitude, and Jeremiah was somewhat confounded as a light

hysterical laugh escaped her.

"What at, miss?" he asked, the smirk on his face changing to a frown.

"At that boy," said Phœbe, looking at the back of him; "he is so funny."

Jeremiah, turning, really saw a ragged little boy approaching them. It was a fortunate escape for Phœbe, who went toward the little fellow and asked him what he wanted.

"I wants to see the young lady of the 'ouse," said the boy. "Are you 'er?"

"Yes."

"I'm to give yer this, and run away."

A faithful messenger. He gave a small brown paper parcel to Phœbe, and scuttled away as fast as his little legs would carry him. Phœbe, wondering, opened the parcel, and there lay a few wild daisies, accompanied by a piece of white paper, upon which was written, "With Tom Barley's humble duty. For ever and ever." It was shocking writing, and Phœbe had some difficulty in deciphering it; but it brought the tears to her eyes. She put the paper in her pocket, and pinned the daisies at her bosom.

"I beg your pardon for leaving you," said Phœbe to Jeremiah. "And now I must go to my friends."

"You might offer me a cup of tea, miss," he said.

"Yes, I will, though I am afraid it is almost cold."

"Nothing can be cold where you are, miss," said Jeremiah, gallantly. "I'll come up with you. Why do you wear those rubbishing flowers? You can pick 'em up in the fields."

"They are from an old friend," said Phœbe, loyally. "I value them quite as much as if they had cost —" She stopped, frightened at her rashness; she was about to add, "eight and six." Jeremiah completed the sentence for her, supplying the precise words in her mind.

"As if they cost eight and six, miss," he said, quietly. There was a venom in his voice which made her shudder. "I'll think of that."

She felt it necessary to mollify him, and though she hated herself for her duplicity, she was very gracious to him as they ascended the stairs, so that when they entered the room his equanimity was restored. It may have been the grandeur of his appearance, or perhaps it was something in Phœbe's face, that caused an awkward pause in the merriment upon their entrance. Fortunately for the situation, Mrs. Pamflett was in the room, and as Phœbe made no attempt to introduce Jeremiah to the company, Mrs. Pamflett said, in a distinct, measured voice, "My son, Mr. Pamflett, Mr. Farebrother's manager."

Mr. Lethbridge rose and offered the young man his hand.

"Glad to know you," said Jeremiah. "You're Mr. Lethbridge. How do you do, all of you?"

Mrs. Lethbridge inclined her head, perceiving that something was wrong. Fanny with difficulty repressed a giggle, Bob looked supercilious, while Fred Cornwall scarcely glanced at the new arrival.

"Will you give Mr. Pamflett a cup of tea, aunt?" said Phœbe.

"No," said Jeremiah, "not from your aunt, if you please; from you. Then I sha'n't want any sugar in it. Anything the matter with you, miss?" He addressed this question to Fanny, from whom an uncertain sound of laughter was proceeding.

"Something in my throat," replied Miss Fanny.

"Shall I slap you on the back, miss?"

"No, no!" cried Fanny, suddenly quite sobered.

Jeremiah drank his tea quite slowly, looking alternately from one to the other. There was a dead silence in the room.

"Shall my niece pour you out another cup?" asked Mrs. Lethbridge, politely.

"If it will oblige her," said Jeremiah, with cold malignity, "she may."

Without a word Phœbe poured out the tea and handed it to him. He drank it even more slowly than he had done the first cup. When it was finished, Mrs. Lethbridge said, "There is no more in the pot."

"That is a pity," said Jeremiah, "because we are enjoying ourselves so."

"I propose," said Mrs. Lethbridge, "that we go into the open air. It is a most lovely evening."

They all rose, glad of the escape. Jeremiah pushed himself between Fred Cornwall and Phœbe, and walked by her side down the stairs. When they were in the open he said to her, "You have forgotten your bouquet. I will go and bring it to you. Shall I?"

"If you please," she answered, faintly. She could make no other reply.

His mother met him in the passage. "Miser Farebrother wishes to see you, Jeremiah. You can join Miss Phœbe afterward."

"All right," said Jeremiah; "I will. Look here, mother. Is that Cornwall fellow sticking up to Phœbe?"

"That is for you to find out, Jeremiah. If you are my son you are not to be easily beaten."

"Easily beaten!" he echoed, with malignant emphasis. "When my back's up, I generally let people know it. Did you notice how they behaved to me at the tea-table?"

"You paid them out for it, Jeremiah," said Mrs. Pamflett, exultingly. "I am proud of you."

"You shall have more reason by-and-by. Paid them out for it! Why, they didn't have a word to say for themselves! I just looked at them, and shut them up! As for Phœbe, let her look out; that's all I say—let her look out! Did you ever see a cat play with a mouse?"

"Often, Jeremiah."

"Well, let her look out for herself. That's all I've got to say."

CHAPTER II.

ARCADES AMBO.

Jeremiah entered Miser Farebrother's room, holding in his hand the bouquet of flowers he had brought for Phœbe. He had debated within himself whether he should allow the miser to see them or no, and he had decided in the affirmative. "Mother commenced it," he thought, "and I'll go on with it. Strike while the iron's hot, Jeremiah."

"You sent for me," said he, laying the bouquet on the table in full view of Miser Farebrother.

"Are those the flowers the gentleman lawyer gave my daughter?" asked Miser Farebrother.

"No," replied Jeremiah; "I didn't know he brought her any. I bought these in Covent Garden to present to Miss Phœbe."

"You are growing extravagant," said the miser; "and you are becoming quite a gay young character: first escorting my daughter home from the village, and now presenting her with expensive flowers. It rains flowers in Parksides to-day. I was never guilty of such extravagance—never."

"This is the first time *I* have ever done such a thing," said Jeremiah, apologetically; "but seeing it was Miss Phœbe's birthday, I thought the money wouldn't be exactly thrown away. Look here—that lawyer chap; he's up to no good."

"You don't like lawyers?"

"No more than you do; though, mind you, if I was married and had a son, I'd bring him up as one. Then he'd know exactly how far to go, and I should get my legal business done for nothing."

"Oh! oh!" said Miser Farebrother, with a quiet chuckle. "If you were married and had a son! That's looking ahead, Jeremiah."

"It's a good plan; it keeps one prepared. You've no objection to my giving Miss Phœbe these flowers, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest, so long as you bought them with your own money. Only don't do too much of that sort of thing. When you spend money, spend it to advantage—in something that will last, or will make more money. Spending money in flowers is folly; in two days flowers and money are gone. You can look at them in gardens and shop windows, then you get all your pleasure for nothing. That's the wise plan. Costs nothing for looking, Jeremiah."

"You are quite right. I'll bear in mind what you say, and profit by it."

"That pleases me. What I like is obedience—blind obedience—and I will have it from those in my control. So—you're thinking of marriage, eh? A wife is an expensive toy."

"Not when you've got the right one! Likely as not it keeps a man out of mischief."

"So long as you've got the right one! Your mother said something to me; has she told you of it?"

Jeremiah considered a moment, and for once in his life was candid.

"Yes," he said, "she told me of it."

"Sit down, Jeremiah."

The astute young man obeyed in silence, and inwardly congratulated himself. "Things are going on swimmingly," he thought; "the fish is as good as in my net already." While Miser Farebrother, gazing on Jeremiah, thought, "I'll bind him tight; I'll bind him tight!" Presently he spoke.

"You have been a long time in my service, and are acquainted with my business."

"I know all the ins and outs of it," said Jeremiah. "I've got it at my fingers' ends."

Miser Farebrother sighed. Humbly as Jeremiah's words were spoken, the miser felt that his managing clerk had him in his power. Well, the best plan was to put chains around him, and what chains so tight and binding as matrimony?

"If I came to grief, Jeremiah, you could set up in business for yourself?"

"Yes," said Jeremiah, boldly; "and make a fortune. But you come to grief! No, sir; not while I am with you."

"It is my misfortune," continued the miser, "and your good luck, that I am ill and weak, and unable to give the proper personal attention to my affairs."

"Why say 'misfortune,' sir? It may be your good luck as well as mine."

"But it is as I say," cried Miser Farebrother, testily.

"Very well, sir. Then what a shrewd man would do is to make the best of it." Jeremiah's cue was not to cross or vex his master; to assert himself up to a certain point, but to lead the miser to believe that in him, Jeremiah, a wily master had a suitable tool, who, for a prospective advantage, would devote himself hand and foot, body and soul, to his employer's interest.

"That is all that is left to me," groaned Miser Farebrother—"to make the best of it. Jeremiah Pamflett," he said, abruptly, "were I in your place and you in mine, how would you act?"

"Under precisely similar circumstances?"

"Yes, under precisely similar circumstances."

"I should seek an interview," said Jeremiah, keeping down his excitement, "with the young man who was managing my business in London for me, in whom I had every confidence, and say to him, 'You seem to have a liking for my daughter.'"

"Ah!" said Miser Farebrother, "Go on."

"'My object is,' I should say to this young man, 'that she shall marry a man who will serve me faithfully, to keep her out of the hands of scheming relatives, and to keep her especially out of the hands of scheming lawyers. You are the man I would select as her husband. Marry her, and continue to serve me faithfully, and then all our interests will be common interests, and I shall be safe from conspiracies, which have but one end in view: to rob me of my hard-earned money.' After that I should wait to hear what he had to say."

"Not yet, Jeremiah, not yet," said Miser Farebrother; "there is still something more to be said on my side. Supposing that the words you have put into my mouth have been spoken by me to you, I should not wind up there. I should continue thus: 'If I give you my consent to pay court to my daughter, who, when I am gone, will, if she behaves herself, inherit what little property I have, you must bind yourself to me for a term of years. No, not for a term of years, but for as long as I am alive. There shall be an agreement drawn up, a binding agreement, which, if you break, will render you liable for a heavy penalty, which I shall exact. Your salary shall be so much a week, and no more; and you are not to ask me for more. You are to be, until my last hour, my servant, amenable to me, acting under my instructions, and you are not to put yourself in opposition to my wishes,' That, as far as I can at present see, is what I should say to you, Jeremiah; and now I await your answer."

"My answer is," said Jeremiah, "that I agree to everything. It is my interest to do so. You see, sir, I don't mince matters, and don't want to take any credit to myself that I am not entitled to."

"Continue in that vein," said Miser Farebrother, "and all will be well. But don't think I am going to die yet awhile."

"I hope," cried Jeremiah, fervently, "that you will live for fifty years."

"I may believe that or not," said Miser Farebrother, dryly, "as I please. Make no mistakes with me, Jeremiah; I know what human nature is. You have my permission to pay court to my daughter."

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you!" exclaimed Jeremiah, attempting to take the miser's hand.

"We want none of that nonsense," said Miser Farebrother, sardonically. "We have entered into a bargain, and that is enough. Now attend to me, and follow my instructions. What has passed between us is, for the present, to be kept a secret. There is to be no hurry, no violence. Pay attention to my daughter in a quiet way: endeavour to win her favour—"

"Her love, sir, her love!" interrupted Jeremiah, enthusiastically.

"Her love, if you will; but that is between you and her. I do not propose that there shall be an immediate break between her and her relatives, the Lethbridges. Things must be allowed to go on as usual in that quarter. I have my own reasons for biding my time. When I tell you to speak openly to my daughter, you will speak openly, and not till then. You agree to this?"

"Yes, sir, yes; I agree."

"Should she offer any obstacle, I will throw upon your side the weight of my authority, and she will not dare to disobey me. Meanwhile keep a watch upon the Lethbridges and their lawyer friend, who has come here to-day uninvited. He may have some design against me; he may know something which it is necessary I should learn before I put my foot down. And further, friend Jeremiah, you are not to presume because I have given you this great chance. Everything between us is to remain as it is. I am my own master and yours, and I submit to no dictation."

On the gray, sly face of Jeremiah Pamflett no expression was visible which could be construed into rebellion at these imperious words, but in his mind reigned the thought: "My master, are you? I will make you pipe to another tune before you are many months older. Let me but get hold of Phœbe, and I will grind you as you are grinding me!" Master and man were well matched.

CHAPTER III.

MISER FAREBROTHER WELCOMES PHŒBE'S FRIENDS.

Life is sweet and beautiful to a young and innocent girl when to her heart is conveyed the assurance that she is beloved. Then is the world in its spring-time, and all outward evidence is in harmony with the tremulous joy which stirs her being. What sorrow lies in the past fades utterly away in the light of a new-born happiness. She lives in the present, which is imbued with a solemn and sacred tenderness. Strangely beautiful are the time and scene: she loves, and is beloved.

To a pure and trustful heart no direct words are needed for such an assurance; and between Fred Cornwall and Phœbe no direct words were spoken as they walked together in a retired part of the grounds of Parksides. How they had wandered there, and how they had come to be alone, they did not know, and they did not stop to inquire. All that they felt was the sweetness and the beauty of the hour. He spoke of many things: of his tour, and the adventures he had met with; of the occasions upon which some small incident brought her to his mind, of his delight when he found himself back in London—"to be near you," he would have said, but hardly dared yet to be so outspoken; of the resolution he had formed to "get along" in spite of all the difficulties in his path.

"No easy matter," he said: "the ranks are so crowded; but when a man is determined, and has a dear object to spur him on, he has already half gained success."

She did not ask him what the dear object was; it was for him to speak and for her to listen; and, indeed, he would have spoken more directly had he felt himself in a position to marry. But there was the home to make, and the clear prospect of being able to maintain it. He must be able to go to her father and say, "I am in such and such a position, and I love your daughter." Deeply in love as he was with the sweet girl walking by his side, there was a practical side to his character which augured well for his future. He was a proud and honourable young fellow, and he shrank from presenting himself to Miser Farebrother as a beggar. No; he must first win his spurs; must show the kind of stuff he was made of, and that he was worthy of the treasure he aspired to win. He had heard that Miser Farebrother was very rich and very grasping, and he was aware that in dealing with such a man he was treading on delicate ground. He did not dare to risk a refusal. To trade upon the prospect of living upon the money Miser Farebrother might give his daughter was, in Fred Cornwall's view, a base proceeding, and he could not lend himself to it. "I wish the old gentleman was poor," he thought; "then I would speak at once. But a few months will soon pass."

Meanwhile, this quiet hour with Phœbe assured him that he had won her love, and that she would wait for him. He may be forgiven for being a little sentimental; it is an old fashion, as old as hearts; and that their hands should meet, and that the girl's pulses should thrill at the touch of his, is natural and good when young people commune in innocence and honour. The silence that fell upon them now and then was sweeter, perhaps, than the words that were spoken.

Fanny championed and guarded them, and kept intruders off. The principal would-be offender was Bob, and it needed all his sister's cleverness to keep him by her side. It is to be feared, however, that if he had had any suspicion of what was going on, he would have made a bold dash for it; but a very unsuspicious mortal was Bob, and the last thought in his mind was that any young gentleman would come wooing his pretty cousin. Fanny was completely in her element, fencing and parrying questions asked by her father and brother, saying: "Oh! she will be here presently. Do you think she has no one to attend to but us?" Aunt Leth was discreetly silent; she remembered the time when she herself was young, and her dear husband came courting her. Once Mrs. Pamflett came up, and asked, "Where is Miss Farebrother?"

Fanny promptly answered her: "Dear me! She was here but a moment ago! I think she must have gone in that direction." (Pointing in front of her, while Phœbe was in the rear.)

"And Mr. Cornwall," said Mrs. Pamflett, very quietly, "has he also gone in that direction?"

"Oh no!" said Fanny, unblushingly; "he has gone to have a smoke. Men are the selfishest

creatures, are they not, Mrs. Pamflett?"

Mrs. Pamflett sighed a gentle endorsement of the declaration, and meekly went the way indicated by Fanny. She turned off, however, when she could no longer be seen by the Lethbridges, and by a devious path successfully tracked Phœbe and Fred Cornwall, whom, from a distance, she watched with lynx eyes, noting the manner of their association—Phœbe's head modestly bent down, and Fred gazing upon her with looks of love.

Fanny, meanwhile, talking away vivaciously, suddenly stopped in the middle of a sentence, and cried, "Oh!"

"Has a pin run into you?" asked Bob; but he too gasped as he saw Miser Farebrother, leaning upon Jeremiah's arm, standing in front. Aunt Leth was the first to speak to him.

"How do you do, Mr. Farebrother?" she said, holding out her hand.

"Weak and ill, as you see," said Miser Farebrother, shaking hands with his sister-in-law; "a martyr to rheumatism and other pains. I'm growing old, sister-in-law; I am growing old. Don't you see the change in me?"

"We are all growing old," said Mrs. Lethbridge, with a sympathizing smile.

"But some can bear it better than others," groaned Miser Farebrother. "Now, you are strong and can walk without assistance. Look at me: even with my crutch-stick I cannot walk without human support. Don't go, Jeremiah; I shall fall to the ground if you leave me. You know my sister-in-law?"

"Yes," said Jeremiah, with a careless nod at Aunt Leth; "we had tea together—a delightful tea."

He had been searching with his eyes for Phœbe, and not seeing her or Fred Cornwall, had made a movement to leave his master.

"We have to thank you," said Aunt Leth to Miser Farebrother, "for a very pleasant evening."

"Don't speak of it. We ought to see more of each other; you ought to have been here oftener. One's flesh and blood—we are almost that, are we not, sister-in-law?—should not desert one as you have deserted me."

"Indeed! indeed!" stammered Aunt Leth, somewhat confounded by this reproach.

"Never mind, never mind," said Miser Farebrother, with a gentle air of resignation. "We must say nothing but kind things to one another. If you have deserted me, you have not deserted my dear child, who is always full of praises of you."

"We love her," said Aunt Leth, "as well as we love our own."

"It is very good of you. Is that your husband? My eyesight is shockingly weak. I'm breaking fast, I'm afraid."

Mr. Lethbridge came forward, and Miser Farebrother seized his hand and gave it a cordial grasp. The kind-hearted man could find nothing better to say than,

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Farebrother."

"Not so glad to see me as I am to see you. It is quite like old times—quite like old times. How is the world using you? But I need not ask; I can see for myself. I am very pleased—very—very! You deserve it. I wish the world used me as well; but we can't all be so fortunate. When I was a young man, I used to hope that when I was as old as I am now I should be able to keep a carriage. Young hopes, brother-in-law—eh? Seldom realized, are they? I can hardly afford to keep a—a wheelbarrow—eh, Jeremiah?"

"Yes, sir," said Jeremiah, obsequiously.

"We can't have all we wish," pursued Miser Farebrother; and Jeremiah, although he was impatient to go in search of Phœbe, whom he now looked upon as his property, could not help taking interest and pleasure in his master's gentle and philosophic departure, which he, better than any one of the other listeners, could appreciate at its true value. "In a hundred years to come, a carriage and a wheelbarrow will be all the same to us. Still, I am glad to hear of your good fortune." (Mr. Lethbridge stared, and wondered whether he was awake or asleep, or whether he had said anything of which he was unconscious.) "How well and hale you look! Not a day older—not a day. You must tell me the secret; though I fear it is too late for me. And this young gentleman"—turning to Bob, who became suddenly very hot and uncomfortable—"your son, eh?—your bright boy?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lethbridge; "our son Robert."

"How do you do, nephew?" said Miser Farebrother, giving Bob two fingers, which, when Bob got them, he did not know what to do with. "And how is the world using *you*?"

"Extremely well, sir, thank you," Bob blurted out, without in the least knowing what he was saying; for, instead of the world using him extremely well, it was not using him at all.

"How pleasant to hear!" exclaimed Miser Farebrother. "I feel like rubbing my hands, but one has

my crutch-stick in it, and the other is leaning on Jeremiah. You come of a lucky stock; go on and prosper, nephew. And this—" He turned to Fanny, who, in a feverish state, was awaiting recognition. She was so confused that it was not until hours afterward that her indignation was excited at being referred to as "this"—as though she were a chattel.

"Our daughter Fanny," said Aunt Leth, observing that her husband was incapable of speech.

"Kiss me, niece," said Miser Farebrother. He raised his wrinkled face, and Fanny put her lips to it. He called a joyous look into his eyes, and in a kind of rapture murmured: "The kiss of beauty! But don't be too lavish of them, niece." He peered around as though he suddenly missed somebody. "Where is your young gentleman, niece?"

Jeremiah chuckled quietly.

"*My* young gentleman!" cried Fanny, flushing up.

Her mother gave her a warning look.

"Yes, your young gentleman. There is one here, isn't there? or did Phœbe make a mistake?"

"You mean Mr. Cornwall," said Aunt Leth, in a gentle tone.

"I think that is the name Phœbe mentioned. A lawyer, isn't he?"

"Yes," replied Fanny, before her mother could speak, "and a very clever one."

"Bravo! bravo!" exclaimed Miser Farebrother. "That is as it should be. I am sure he is a very clever one; I hope we are not wrong in our opinion of him—for your sake, niece, for your sake. Sister-in-law, brother-in-law, I congratulate you. Niece, kiss me again."

Fanny held back, but her mother murmured, "Fanny!" and the girl kissed the miser's wrinkled face again, upon which he smacked his lips and cast up his eyes languishingly.

"And now," he said, "I must really go and find my dear Phœbe and the very clever lawyer. *We* must go; mustn't we, Jeremiah? See, sister-in-law, Jeremiah brought some flowers for my dear child, and happening to forget them when she left the table, she sent him back for them. I am ashamed of myself for having detained him. Do you know where Phœbe is?—this way—or that? That way? Thank you; I shall easily find her. Remember what I said to you—we must really see more of each other; you must come here oftener. And you, brother-in-law, and you, niece. And hark you, nephew: when I asked you how the world was using you, you answered, 'Extremely well, sir.' You did, did you not?"

"Yes, sir," said Bob, not knowing what was coming.

"You were wrong, and you are wrong again. Sister-in-law, too: you called me 'Mr. Farebrother?'"

"Yes," said Aunt Leth, faintly.

"But why? why? Why 'sir' and why 'Mr.'? Everybody else calls me Miser Farebrother. I like it; it tickles me. Pray call me that for the future, like good-natured souls, as you are. Come, Jeremiah, come. Phœbe will be impatient for your flowers."

He hobbled away, clinging to Jeremiah's arm, and presently said,

"Well, Jeremiah?"

"Thank you," said Jeremiah.

"Keep faith with me," said Miser Farebrother, fiercely, taking his hand from Jeremiah's arm, and standing erect, "and I'll keep faith with you. Trick me, deceive me, rob me, and I'll make England too hot to hold you!"

"Why do you speak to me like that?" asked Jeremiah, in an injured tone.

"Because I know the world," retorted the miser; "because I know human nature. Did I show it to them just now, or did I not? Did I compel them to be honey to my face, while they hated me in their hearts? Play tricks with me, and I'll serve you worse!"

"We have made a bargain," said Jeremiah, submissively, "and I will keep to it, and be grateful to you all my life."

"That is what I want," said Miser Farebrother. "While I am alive I am master. When I am gone, you will have your turn."

After that they walked on in silence; but Jeremiah's thoughts, fashioned into words, may be thus construed: "When you are gone! You think I will wait till then, do you? You old fool! you're not in it with me!"

For a few moments after Miser Farebrother left the Lethbridges they gazed at each other in silence. Then said Fanny:

"Would you like to know what I think of Uncle—no—Miser Farebrother? Well, I think he's a brute!"

"Hush, hush, Fanny!" said Mrs. Lethbridge. "For Phœbe's sake!"

CHAPTER IV.

A SACRED PROMISE—WON BY GUILE.

Upon the happy musings of the lovers came a harsh interruption. They turned and saw Miser Farebrother and Jeremiah.

"I have been looking for you, Phœbe," said the miser; "and so has Jeremiah."

"Your flowers, miss," said Jeremiah, offering them.

With her father's eye upon her, she could not choose but take them.

"You sent me back for them, you know," said Jeremiah. "I should have brought them before, but for—"

"But for my calling to him," interrupted Miser Farebrother, "upon a matter of business. I am pleased that your friends have enjoyed themselves. You have had a pleasant birthday, Phœbe?"

"Very pleasant, father; I shall never forget it. Father, this is Mr. Cornwall, who brought me the presents I showed you."

"I trust you will excuse me," said Fred, gazing with interest at Phœbe's father, "for intruding myself. But Miss Farebrother and I have met so often at Mrs. Lethbridge's house that I thought I might venture."

"All my daughter's friends," said Miser Farebrother, in his blandest tone, "are welcome here. A very charming family, the Lethbridges."

"Indeed they are," said Fred, warmly.

"We have met but seldom," said Miser Farebrother, "and I was just expressing my regret that we did not see each other oftener."

"Oh, father!" said Phœbe, in a grateful voice, gliding to his side. There was no discordant note in his speech; he looked kindly upon her; and he had met Fred Cornwall in a spirit of friendliness. Her cup of happiness was full to overflowing.

"Perhaps Mr. Cornwall will give me his address," said Miser Farebrother. "I may ask him to decide some knotty point of law for me."

Fred Cornwall drew forth his card-case with alacrity, and handed a card to the miser.

"You will excuse me now," said Miser Farebrother; "I am by no means well, and I must go in-doors and rest. Remain with your friends, Phœbe; Jeremiah will assist me to my room. Come in and wish me good-night, Phœbe, before you retire."

"Yes, father, I will."

He smiled amiably, and saying "Good evening, Mr. Cornwall," departed, clinging to Jeremiah's arm. Jeremiah was not at all in a good humour; he would have preferred to be left behind with Phœbe, and he said as much to his master.

"Be wise, be wise, Jeremiah," said Miser Farebrother, in response to this complaint. "You are but a novice with these people. Take a lesson from me, and learn to wait with patience. Before a good general strikes a blow, he lays his plans, and satisfies himself that everything is in order. Do I know how to act, eh? Have I already entangled and confused them, or have I not? I shall be a subject of discussion among them. 'He was flinging stones at us all the time he was speaking,' the Lethbridges will say. 'He said the most sarcastic things.' Who will defend me? The sharp lawyer, Mr. Cornwall, and, better than all, my daughter Phœbe. 'You are mistaken,' she will say; 'I am sure you are mistaken. He has been kindness itself; you do not understand him.' Then she will appeal to Mr. Cornwall, and ask him whether I did not speak in the most beautiful way of her aunt and uncle, and he will be able to make but one answer. That will silence them; they won't have a word to say for themselves. Ha, ha! I am really enjoying the game."

He kept Jeremiah with him until the Lethbridges and Fred Cornwall were gone, and then sent him back to London, bidding him not to take the same train as Phœbe's relatives.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock when Phœbe received a message from her father, through Mrs. Pamflett, bidding her come to him and wish him good-night. Phœbe had been sitting at the open window of her bedroom, musing upon the happy day fast drawing to an end. A tender light bathed the grounds of Parksides, and seemed to the happy girl to be an omen of the future—a future of love and peace. The soft breeze kissed her, and whispered to her of love; the silence of nature was eloquent with the immortal song; a tremulous joy possessed her soul. "He loves me! he loves me! he loves me!" This was the song sung by her heart, bringing light to her eyes, blushes to her cheeks, and causing her, from a very excess of joy, to hide her face in her hands. "How sweet, how beautiful is the world!" she said only to herself. "How good everybody is to me!" She rose from these musings to attend her father. Mrs. Pamflett accompanied her to the door of his apartment.

"Good-night," she said to the young girl.

"Good-night, Mrs. Pamflett," said Phœbe; "and thank you for all you have done to-day."

"I am glad you are pleased with me. May I call you Phœbe?"

"Yes, if you like."

"May I kiss you?"

"Yes," said Phœbe, with a bright look; and she received and returned the kiss.

"This is the commencement of a happy time for you, Phœbe." She had heard from her son all the particulars of the agreement entered into by him and Miser Farebrother.

Phœbe glanced shyly at her, and thought, "Does she know about Mr. Cornwall? Does everybody know?" She answered Mrs. Pamflett's remark aloud: "I am sure it is. Oh, Mrs. Pamflett, I *am* happy—very, very happy!"

"I am delighted to hear you say so. Good-night again, Phœbe."

"Good-night, Mrs. Pamflett."

When she was in her father's room, with the door closed, what reason had Phœbe to suppose that Mrs. Pamflett was crouching down outside, to catch what passed between Miser Farebrother and his daughter?

"Come and sit beside me, Phœbe," said Miser Farebrother. "So—the birthday is over?"

"Nearly over, father."

"And your friends have gone away contented?"

"Yes, father."

"Those flowers look well in your dress. What flowers are they? Ah, I see—white daisies and roses. Who gave you the daisies?"

"A poor friend in the village sent them to me." Knowing that her father was incensed against Tom Barley, she did not dare to mention his name.

"And the roses, Phœbe?"

"Mr. Cornwall gave them to me," said Phœbe, timidly.

"Can you spare me one?"

She gave it to him gladly, and he stuck it in his coat. Phœbe's heart beat quick. Every sign that came to her was in harmony with its throbbing.

"I am sorry for your sake, Phœbe, that I am not younger and stronger."

"Dear father! I grieve that you suffer so! If I only knew what to do to make you well!"

"That is spoken like a dutiful child. All that you can do is not to worry me—not to give me pain."

"Indeed, indeed, father," said Phœbe, earnestly, "I will never do that!"

"You are a good girl. It is strange that it was only the other day I suddenly discovered you were a woman. The change brings other changes; and I, your father, must not be blind to the fact. Why, Phœbe," he said, gaily, "it is more than likely that one day you will marry!" Phœbe hung her head. "You blush!—as your dear mother used to blush when she and I were talking of love. I did my best to make her happy. She died too soon for you and me!" He sighed, and paused a moment. "And now, Phœbe, I am both mother and father to you."

"Yes, dear father."

"I have only one wish in life, Phœbe—your happiness: and we must bring it about. It has happened sometimes that you have not seen me in a right light; I have said things which may have laid me open to misconstruction. They have not really come from my heart; I have been so tortured with pain that I scarcely knew what I was saying. Will you forgive me, Phœbe?"

"Dear father, I love you!"

"You are my own child, your sainted mother's child! Before she died she spoke to me of the time when you would be a woman, and when changes were before you. The duty you owed to her, you owe also to me."

"I shall never be wanting in it, father."

"You will marry—of course you will marry. You will ask for my consent, like a dutiful, loving child?"

"I could not be happy without it, father," said Phœbe, in a low tone. His voice was so benevolent, so imbued with concern for her happiness, that her heart went out to him.

"That is a promise, my dear child?"

"Yes, dear father, it is a promise."

"That you will not marry without my consent. Phœbe, this loving conversation is doing me good; it is better than all the doctors in the world: I am feeling almost well." He folded her in his arms and kissed her. "Why, what is this? A Prayer-book. Your mother's, my dear, which we read together when we went to church. She is looking down upon us now; she will guard you in your dreams to-night. Kiss this sacred book, my child, and repeat what you have promised—that you will not marry without my consent."

Without hesitation Phœbe took the book in her hand and kissed it, saying, as she did so, "Dear father, I will never marry without your consent." She laid the book upon the table, and burst into a flood of happy tears.

"Good child, good child!" said Miser Farebrother—"your sainted mother's child. Now go; I am exhausted. Good-night, Phœbe. May you have happy dreams."

Phœbe tenderly embraced him, and went to her room, the happiest of happy girls. While Miser Farebrother rubbed his hands, and muttered gleefully, "Mr. Cornwall, my cunning lawyer, and my dear sister and brother-in-law, I think I have scotched your little scheme." He went to bed in a perfectly happy frame of mind. He had done a good night's work.

On a little table by Phœbe's bed were Fred Cornwall's and Tom Barley's flowers. She kissed Fred's flowers before she blew out the light, and even in the dark she drew them to her lips, and so fell asleep with the roses at her breast.

CHAPTER V.

TOM BARLEY COMMENCES A NEW LIFE.

"It's going to be performed to-morrow night, and master and missis and all the family 'll be there. I 'eerd it read. It was beautiful. It give me the creeps, and it made me laugh just as if I was being tickled to death!"

The speaker was 'Melia Jane; the person she was addressing was Tom Barley; the place was the kitchen of Mrs. Lethbridge's house in Camden Town; and the subject of 'Melia Jane's remarks was Mr. Linton's comedy-drama *A Heart of Gold*, the first representation of which was to take place on the following evening at the Star Theatre. The whole house was in a flutter of excitement about it; the cousins were in the sitting-room above, busy over their frocks; Fred Cornwall was there, and was to accompany them to the theatre; the ticket for the stage-box was placed in a conspicuous position on the mantel-shelf, so that it should not escape the attention of any chance visitor; the conversation was animated, and full of hopeful anticipations of a great success for the poor dramatic author; and what was perhaps of greater importance than all else, Bob was in the cast. He had taken the fatal plunge, and through Kiss's influence had obtained an engagement for the run of *A Heart of Gold*. The "screw," as he called it, was small—ten shillings a week—but so were the parts for which, to his great disgust, he was cast. The more distinguished of the two characters he was to enact was a footman, who had to make three announcements of visitors of two words each—"Mrs. Portarlington" (a long name, that was lucky; almost as good as two or three words rolled into one), "Mr. Praxis," "Lord Fouracres." That was the extent of his part. He was greatly disappointed, having had an idea that he would be called upon to play one of the leading characters; but he was taken to task for his presumption by Kiss, who told him he might think himself lucky at being allowed to open his mouth on the stage for the first twelve months. The other character was a "guest," in which he was restricted to dumb-show, and very little of that. He unfortunately took it into his head to ask the stage-manager how he should play this dumb guest, and the answer he received, to the effect that he was to "look as little like an idiot as possible," somewhat dashed his budding aspirations. However, Kiss gave him some very good advice, and he took heart of grace, and rehearsed his six words on the stage, and also at home in the bosom of his family. Twenty times in the course of the night he would arrange the scene in which he was to appear and speak his lines, and when all was ready, would throw open the door and call "Mrs. Portarlington," upon which Fanny, as the audience, would burst into applause, which she kept up until Bob acknowledged the reception by a bow. It was perhaps fortunate that Kiss, breaking in upon the family rehearsal one evening, took the nonsense out of Bob by showing him how the thing should be done. "Make the announcements quite quietly, my lad," said Kiss; "and don't attempt to spoil the picture by thrusting yourself forward. Time enough for that when you have something to do. Remember that 'modesty is young ambition's ladder.'" "Of course I shall do as he tells me," said Bob, in confidence to Phœbe; "but did you ever know a profession in which there was so much jealousy?" Kiss found an opportunity to speak privately to the Lethbridges upon the subject of giving Bob a reception when he appeared. "For Heaven's sake," he said, "don't attempt it. Don't so much as wag your head. You don't know what a first-night audience is. Injudicious applause has ruined many a promising piece." Aunt Leth, sweet-natured as she was, was a little inclined to agree with Bob as to the dreadful amount of jealousy in the dramatic calling.

Tom Barley had not yet achieved his ambition of becoming a policeman, but he had great hopes that in a short time he would be pacing a beat, and in the vicinity of Camden Town, too. Uncle

Leth was much respected, and had some influence, which he was exerting on Tom's behalf. It was 'Melia Jane who had put the idea into Tom's head. Between these two humble persons a confidence had been long since established. There was no idea of love-making—it had not entered either of their heads—but when Tom had been in attendance on Phœbe in London, he naturally found his way to the kitchen. 'Melia Jane "took to him," as she said; and he "took to her," and a mutual liking sprang up. When Tom left Miser Farebrother's service and Parksides, he came to London and asked advice of Mr. and Mrs. Lethbridge, and they succeeded in obtaining for him a few hours' employment a day in a friend's garden. The remuneration was small; but Tom managed to rub along, and was always welcome to a meal in the kitchen with 'Melia Jane. This worthy creature, the invariable cleanliness and brightness of whose kitchen crowned her with glory, rather looked upon Tom as a kind of son, whom it was her pleasure to protect, to advise, and occasionally to scold. It mattered not that she was rather younger than he, and that intellectually she was in no way his superior. It was her pleasure to adopt him, and she adopted him accordingly; it was a pleasure to him to be adopted, and he submitted with complete satisfaction. It came to be a custom with him to spend his evenings with 'Melia Jane, and he gave a good return for the hospitality extended to him. He proved himself a perfect marvel in all practical matters relating to a house. If a window were broken, no need for a glazier; Tom took the measure of the glass, purchased it for a trifle, and the repair was made in less than no time. No need either for locksmiths so long as Tom Barley was about; he put locks and handles to rights in a trice. Did a drain want looking to, there was Tom; a tile off the roof, there was Tom; a ceiling to whitewash, there was Tom; a bit of painting to do, there was Tom. Indeed, with respect to painting, he made it his special business that the house should be bright and clean inside and out: all the neighbours remarked what a deal the Lethbridges were doing to their house, and how nice and fresh it looked. Then there was the garden; Tom worked a miracle. A little care and pains, the expenditure of a few pence now and then, and a large amount of zeal and earnestness, converted the hitherto rather shabby patches of ground in the front and rear of the house into a perfect paradise. It was impossible that such a handy, grateful, willing fellow should be otherwise than welcome. "Upon my word, my dear," said Uncle Leth to his wife, "that Tom Barley is a wonder. There is nothing he cannot do." A few bits of deal, which would have been chopped up for fire-wood had not Tom put them to a better use, a few nails, a pound of paint, and half a pint of varnish, and there, presto! were flower boxes for all the windows, looking as sweet and fresh as the best in Mayfair. He had a knack of making friends and of getting himself liked. There was the greengrocer, the proud possessor of a pony and cart. Tom so ingratiated himself into the favour of this tradesman by his cheerful ways, and by doing for *him*, also, an odd job or two, very neatly and expeditiously, that early one morning, there was Tom rattling away with the pony and trap into the country, making for some ripe woods of his acquaintance, wherefrom he unlawfully plucked roots and rich soil to beautify the garden of his friends; bringing back, of course, some acceptable offerings to the greengrocer, to insure the loan of the pony and trap the next time he required them. For one who aspired to be a policeman a transaction so nefarious cannot well be defended; but, after all, no one was the worse for the innocent abstraction. 'Melia Jane, be sure, was not forgotten. He helped her to brighten her pots and pans; the little bit of electro-plate the Lethbridges possessed twinkled with light as it lay upon the table-cloth; the carving-knives, for sharpness, were a treat to handle; and for polishing boots and shoes there was not Tom's equal in the city of London. Heaven only knows where he got the sweetness of his nature from; its quality was so fine and prompt, doing the exact thing that was required to be done at exactly the right moment (which adds enormously to the value of a service), that it could not fail to win friends for him wherever kind hearts were to be found. And these, as my experience goes, are beating multitudinously whichever way you turn your face.

He had led a rough and happy life, but he had never been so happy as at this time. The few clothes he possessed were kept in order by 'Melia Jane, who washed and mended for him, and who, upon Sundays, made him so resplendent that he was almost ashamed to be seen. A smile or a friendly nod or greeting was always ready for him from the Lethbridges and their friends, with whom Tom was quite an institution, and Aunt Leth grew into the habit of consulting him and asking his advice when anything inside or outside of the house was required to be done. Sweetest of all was Phœbe's greeting upon her visits to her aunt. "Well, Tom, how are you?" "Getting along splendidly, miss." Simple words, but pearls of price, nevertheless, to Tom, who went about his work more blithely the whole day afterward. Of girls in her own station in life 'Melia Jane might have been jealous had Tom championed them, but she entirely approved of his devotion to Fanny and his worship of Phœbe.

"She's a angel, Tom," said 'Melia Jane.

"She is, 'Melia Jane," responded Tom; "and I'd lay down my life for her."

He was not neglected either in the way of education. Ambitious as he was to become a public official, Mr. Lethbridge knew how important it was that he should be able to read and write fairly. He provided Tom with copy-books, and made the young man go through a regular course of pot-hooks and hangers; and Aunt Leth gave him reading lessons three times a week; so that he made capital progress, and was "gitting quite a scholard," according to 'Melia Jane.

This young lady attended to his education in other ways. She was great in superstitions, which were to her a kind of religion; and instead of pious exordiums in frames to remind her of her duty, she had scraps of card-board hanging in sacred corners in her bedroom and kitchen, upon which were written extracts from fortune-telling and dream books, which, if they did not form for her the whole duty of woman, went a long way towards it. She had an apt pupil in Tom, whom she

inoculated with her precautions to woo good fortune and avert disaster.

As to cutting your nails, now. From her bedroom 'Melia Jane brought into the kitchen the written magic formula, which Tom soon learnt by heart:

> "Cut your nails on Monday, cut them for wealth.
> Cut them on Tuesday, cut them for health.
> Cut them on Wednesday, cut them for news.
> Cut them on Thursday, a new pair of shoes.
> Cut them on Friday, cut them for sorrow.
> Cut them on Saturday, see sweetheart to-morrow.
> Cut them on Sunday, cut them for evil:
> The whole of the week you'll be ruled by the ——"

What could be simpler and more direct? And in the matter of nails, Tom abided by it.

"Wot day in the week was you born?" asked 'Melia Jane.

"Blessed if I know," answered Tom.

"'Ow could you be so careless," said 'Melia Jane, severely, "as not to get to know? Then we could settle it?"

"Settle what, 'Melia Jane?"

"Why, don't you know?" she replied.

> "'Monday's child is fair of face.
> Tuesday's child is full of grace.
> Wednesday's child is loving and giving.
> Thursday's child works hard for a living.
> Friday's child is full of woe.
> Saturday's child has far to go.
> But the child that is born on Sabbath-day
> Is bonnie and happy, and wise and gay.'"

"I say Thursday," said Tom, good-humouredly. "That's the most likely day for me."

"I say Sabbath-day," said 'Melia Jane.

"That won't fit," said Tom. "Happy? Yes. And gay, sometimes. But wise? No, no, 'Melia Jane; not a bit of it."

But in argument Tom was a child in the hands of 'Melia Jane, and she generally succeeded in compelling him to subscribe to her views. She had a very effective method of punishment if he persisted in holding out. She was, in Tom's eyes, a very wonderful fortune-teller with the cards, and to have his fortune told half a dozen times a week became a perfect passion with him. Nothing pleased 'Melia Jane more than the opportunity of laying out the cards; but she could successfully resist the temptation when Tom was obstinate. It was in vain for him to implore; she was adamant. At length he would say, "I give in, 'Melia Jane; I give in." And out would come a very old and terribly thumbed pack, and with a solemn face Tom settled down to the onerous task of cutting the cards again and again, in accordance with 'Melia Jane's complicated instructions. It was not at all material that last night's fortune was diametrically opposite to the fortune of to-night; nor that last night it was a fair woman, and to-night a dark one; nor that last night Tom was to be greeted by a coffin, and to-night by a baby. The point was that the fortune was to be told, and that being done, no reference was made to inconsistencies and contradictions. 'Melia Jane and Tom would sit staring, open-mouthed, at the finger of fate, whose smudgy impress was to be found on every card in the pack. She was telling his fortune now, on the night before the production of *A Heart of Gold*.

"The four of clubs, Tom. A strange bed."

"Ah," said Tom. "I wonder where?"

"The eight of spades. That's trouble, Tom."

He pulled a long face.

"And there's that dark woman, agin. Who *can* she be?"

"I wonder, now!" said Tom, turning over in his mind every dark woman whom he could call to remembrance.

"Well!" cried 'Melia Jane. "Did you ever? Jest look, Tom. The ten of 'earts and the four of 'earts next door to each other. A wedding and a marriage bed. And if there ain't the seven and the six of spades! A doctor and a birth!"

"Never!" exclaimed Tom, aghast.

"Here it is. There's no going agin it. Oh, Tom! here's tears; and here's disappointment and sickness. Take care of that dark woman; she's up to no good."

"Ain't she?" cried Tom, energetically. "I'll keep a sharp eye on her."

The fortune being ended, the cards were put away in a drawer in the dresser, and 'Melia Jane proceeded to discuss lighter and less important matters.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST NIGHT OF "A HEART OF GOLD."

Three-quarters of an hour before it was time to start for the Star Theatre, Fred Cornwall with a cab was at the Lethbridges' door. There was no one but 'Melia Jane to receive him. Everybody was dressing, and 'Melia Jane, with a jug of hot water in her hand, informed Fred Cornwall that "Miss Phœbe, sir, she do look most lovely," for which she received a sixpenny bit.

"Take these flowers up to the ladies, 'Melia Jane," said Fred, "and be careful you don't mix them. These are for Mrs. Lethbridge; these are for Miss Lethbridge; these for Miss Farebrother; and ask them how long they will be."

"Lor', sir!" exclaimed 'Melia Jane, "now you're 'ere they'll be down in no time."

"That foolish boy," observed Fanny, when the flowers were brought into the girls' bedroom, "will ruin himself. You will have to check him, Phœbe. But what taste he has! Did you ever see anything more exquisite? I knew he would bring us flowers. And of course he has the cab at the door, waiting; he hasn't the least idea of the value of money. I shall have to give him a good talking to, the foolish, extravagant boy!"

This was a new fashion of Fanny's—to put on matronly airs and to talk of Fred Cornwall as a foolish boy. He was greatly amused by it, and he listened to her lectures with a mock-penitential air, which caused her to deliver her counsels with greater severity.

"You are a model of punctuality," he said, as Fanny sailed into the room.

"And you're a modeller," retorted Fanny gaily. "How do I look?" turning slowly round.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Fred, advancing eagerly as Phœbe entered.

"Oh, of course," cried Fanny. "Come here, Phœbe," taking her cousin's hand. "He sha'n't admire one without the other."

With looks and words of genuine admiration, Fred scanned and criticised the girls, who, truly, for loveliness, would take the palm presently in the Star Theatre.

"That's very sweet of you," said Fanny, when he came to the end of an eloquent speech, "and you may kiss my hand. But don't come too near me; I mustn't be crushed; and Phœbe mustn't, either. Oh, my dear, beautiful mother!" And the light-hearted girl ran to her mother, who at this moment entered the room.

Aunt Leth was the picture of a refined, gentle-hearted sweet-mannered lady. She had her best gown on, of course; and so cleverly had she managed that it looked, if not quite new, at least almost as good as new. She gazed with wistful tenderness at her daughter and niece, and kissed them affectionately; then she greeted Fred, and thanked him for the flowers.

Phœbe and Fanny had already thanked him, and when he gave Uncle Leth a rose for his coat (he himself wearing one), Fanny whispered to Phœbe that she had not a fault to find with him.

"What I like especially about Fred," said Fanny, "is that when he does a thing he does it thoroughly. Did you notice how pleased dear mamma was when he gave papa the rose? He could not have delighted her more. You lucky girl!"

Altogether Fred's position in that affectionate family was an enviable one, and if he was not a proud and happy young fellow as he rattled away with them to the Star Theatre, he ought to have been. Any gentleman in London would have been happy to be in his shoes.

Bob, of course, had gone early to the theatre, convinced that the success of *A Heart of Gold* depended upon the way in which he would announce "Mrs. Portarlington," "Mr. Praxis," and "Lord Fouracres."

There was a great house. The manager had taken more than usual pains to obtain the attendance of the critic of every influential paper. Fred, who knew a great many of them, pointed them out to the eager girls, and described their peculiarities and the qualities for which they were famous. Mr. Linton, although he had written seven or eight pieces, all of which had been played, was not yet looked upon as a dramatist of mark; some of the best judges had declared that he had a great deal in him, and that he would one day surprise the public, and take London captive by the production of a play of the greatest merit. This opinion was more or less shared by most of the dramatic writers on the press, and they came to-night prepared to deal generously toward him if he showed himself deserving of it. There were others who came prepared for contingencies: theatrical frequenters of pit and gallery, regular "first-nighters," who knew by sight every critic on the London press, and every notability in the city. Before the music commenced they kept up a

buzz of conversation, pointing out the celebrities, and tiptoeing over their neighbours to catch a sight of the great men. "It's quite like a party," observed Aunt Leth, as she saw the friendly greeting and salutations of those who were in the habit of meeting on such occasions. Then came a cheer or two and a clapping of hands, which was taken up gradually in all the cheaper parts of the house. A favourite actress had entered a private box, and the enthusiastic play-goers were showing their regard for her. She smiled, and turned to the pit with a pleasant nod, which added to the delight of her admirers. They compared notes: "Did you see her in so-and-so? Wasn't she stunning? Ah, but she was better than all in such-and-such. What does she play in next?" Hungry and eager and ever-ready are the theatrical public to show favour to established favourites; beloved by them are the actor and actress who have given them pleasure; and thus much being acknowledged, it is strange that the dramatic author should hold in their regard what is at best but an equivocal position. They call him out when the curtain falls to hoot or applaud him, and it is a moot point which of the two processes pleases them more. It was of this moment to come that Mr. Linton was thinking as he sat hidden in a box behind the curtains, his fingers playing convulsively on the palms of his hands. To-night, he believed, was to make or mar him. More hung upon the success of *A Heart of Gold* than the public was aware of. He was poor, very poor; his wife was nursing a sick child, for whom the doctor had prescribed what it was not in Linton's power to afford. Would the result of this night's work put him in funds, cause him to be in demand, and make the world bright for him? He saw an American manager in the stalls, and he knew if *A Heart of Gold* was successful that he would at once receive an offer from him for the American rights. That meant money—meant, perhaps, the life of his child. He had sat by the bedside at home till the last minute, and when he kissed his little one, had whispered, "Wish father good luck, my dear!" "Good luck, father!" murmured the child, and kept his arms entwined round the loving father's neck so tight that they had to be loosened by gentle force. Then he had held his good wife in his embrace for a moment, and she pressed him fondly to her; he could not speak, he was almost choked; his lips trembled so that he could scarcely kiss her; and he bore with him, as he ran out of the room, the memory of the patient, wistful face, which would have been more cheerful had their circumstances been better. He saw it now as he sat hidden behind the curtains in the private box; he saw his little child in bed, pining away. "Oh, God!" he muttered, "if they but knew! if they but knew!"

"Who is in that box?" asked Fanny. "Not a soul can be seen; but—there, there it is again—the curtain just moved, and some one peeped through."

"That is the author's box," said Fred. "I have no doubt Mr. Linton is there."

"Poor gentleman!" said Aunt Leth. "How anxious he must be! I wish we had him here with us."

"They prefer to be alone, as a rule," said Fred, somewhat grimly, "on the first nights of their pieces."

The leader of the band entered the orchestra, gloved for the honourable occasion. People began to seat themselves; the music was lively and appropriate, and put them in good humour. Linton gnawed his under-lip, and leaning forward suddenly, almost betrayed his presence. The curtain rose, and *A Heart of Gold* commenced its perilous career.

Is there any need to describe it at length here? It would be but a recapitulation of that with which every old play-goer is familiar, for this was a night to be remembered. Sufficient that the comedy-drama opened well and won the sympathies and the favour of the house. Kiss was greeted with a roar of applause, and outshone himself. The act-drop descended on the first act, and there was a general call. Linton brightened up; he hastened to the back of the scenes through a little door at the side of his box, and nodded gaily at the manager; but that astute person of long experience merely looked at him, and said, "Wait." He passed on, and Linton, rather dashed, went back to his box.

In the second act Bob made his appearance, and very bravely announced "Mrs. Portarlington," and his family declared that it was a most successful début. It was with difficulty that they refrained from applauding him, and if the truth must be told they did patter slightly with their feet, but as not a soul in the house responded to this initial movement, they did not continue it.

How was it that, after this, *A Heart of Gold* began to trail off? The Lethbridges could not account for it, nor could many other sympathizing friends in the house. It was pretty, the language was touching, the situations were sufficiently good, and yet it is a fact that from the opening of the second act the favourable impression created faded away, and was replaced by a feeling of weariness and indifference. Behind the scenes, where Linton did not put in an appearance till the play was over, the manager knitted his brows, and Kiss looked grave; while in his private box the poor dramatic author was gnawing his heart and thinking of his wife and child. The Lethbridges were in consternation; they strove in vain to stimulate the applause; the audience resented the attempt, and commenced to hiss. This stirred the indignation of the more favourably disposed, and they stamped and clapped their hands violently. "The fools!" muttered the manager, as he stood at the side wings. "Why don't they leave off applauding? If they go on, there'll be a row." His prognostication was verified. The hissing grew louder and more frequent, and when the curtain finally fell a perfect storm broke out. It was, however, stilled for a few minutes by a spirit of toleration toward old favourites among the company, and these were called before the curtain and applauded. Then came calls for "Author! Author!" The unfortunate man had made his way on to the stage, and was wandering about with a white face and a mind almost crazed with distracted thought. The actors and actresses scarcely dared to speak to him; some looked upon him with positive displeasure, and turned from him to their dressing-rooms, saying as they went:

"The notice will be up to-morrow. A nice slating we shall get in the papers!" Kiss stepped to Linton's side, and laid his hand kindly on the author's shoulder. Linton raised his eyes pitifully, and a sound like a sob escaped from him. Meanwhile the hooting and hissing and the cruel cries for "Author! Author!" continued.

"Oh!" sighed Aunt Leth, "how dreadful! how dreadful! I shall never have courage to come to another first night."

She was on the verge of tears herself, as though it was one very dear to her who was being damned. In a little while the audience waxed into fury. "Author! Author! Author!" rang through the house; and there were malicious ones among the auditors who enjoyed the fun. Five minutes, six minutes, seven minutes passed in this way. And still the poor author paced the stage, in and out the wings.

"Go on," said the manager to him, "or they'll tear up the benches!"

Linton did not answer. The cries redoubled in fierceness.

"Author! Author! Author! Hoo-oo-oo! Hoo-oo-oo! Author! Author!"

"Damn you!" cried the manager to Linton; "go on like a man, can't you, and get it over! It will cost me another hundred pounds if you don't!"

The noise now really began to assume the preliminary features of a riot; the malcontents were not only angry, they were enraged.

"How will it end? How will it end?" sighed Aunt Leth, clasping her hands.

"He ought to come on," observed Fred Cornwall, gravely.

Suddenly the green curtain was shaken, drawn aside, and Linton stepped in front. He made but two steps forward, and was greeted with volleys of hisses and derisive laughter. He was about to retire, when, swayed by an uncontrollable impulse, he altered his intention, and, advancing swiftly into the centre of the stage, stood before the audience, and held up his trembling hands.

"What is he going to do now?" said the manager, watching him from the side. "He has his gruelling; why don't he come off?"

Linton's unexpected movement produced an instant effect. Every voice was instantly hushed, and the people craned forward to hear what he had to say.

Two or three times he essayed to speak, but not a sound issued from him. Then he found his voice and spoke:

"Why have you insisted that I should come before you? In order that you may hoot me? Do you think I do not feel with sufficient keenness that my effort to-night has been a failure? It is an effort, at least, which has occupied me for many hard-working months; and that the result should be what it is—is it not punishment enough? Are you not satisfied with killing a man? Must you also torture him? There is a side to this matter which may not recommend itself to you, because it is human. An author is not entirely an abstract entity. He is also a man. In my case he is a husband and a father. I am not appealing to you for mercy—I would scorn to do it; I am simply stating a fact. We are not very rich at home, and cannot afford more than two rooms to live in. When I left my wife this evening to come here she was nursing a delicate child—our only child—for whom the doctor had ordered a certain course which we were not exactly able to carry out, because of the slender purse. I hoped to be able to take home to her news which would cheer her heart, and perhaps save the life of our little one. How anxiously is she awaiting me, counting the moments, and fondly hoping that my brows are being crowned with success! You are angry, indignant with me, but your loss is a trifle compared with mine. I take with me this night from the theatre a heavier load than yours. I can say no more; I retire from your presence with no light heart, and as I go, continue to hoot me! It will be manly!"

He bowed with an ashen face, and was slowly leaving the stage amidst a dead silence, when he paused and spoke again:

"There have been instances when first-night verdicts have been reversed, and when what looked like a failure has been worked into a success. On my knees to-night I shall pray to God that this may be the case with my play! Perhaps He will hear me!"

"My boy!" cried the manager, slapping Linton on the back when he got behind the curtain. "My boy! a wonderful speech! Wonderful! I never heard anything like it. Did you learn it beforehand? It will do us a power of good. Nothing could be more fortunate. It may save the piece."

"Don't speak to me! Don't speak to me!" said Linton, and he crept from the theatre, sobbing as though his heart were breaking.

CHAPTER VII.

DIPLOMATIC FANNY.

The audience filed slowly out of the theatre, discussing the unexpected and unprecedented climax with a certain hushed animation. Many of those who had been the noisiest veered round to the side of the unfortunate author, and were truly ashamed of themselves for so cruelly baiting a man who was down, while a few of the severest judges endeavoured unsuccessfully to stem the tide of sympathy which the novel speech had set flowing. "What have we to do with feelings?" they asked. "What have we to do with a man's private circumstances? We come here to pass a verdict, and we pass it. If it is favourable, the author gets the benefit of it; if unfavourable, he must bear the brunt." These stern ones, however, were in a decided minority, and failed to make converts; despite of which the general opinion was that this had been a first night upon which it was worth while to be present. "I wouldn't have missed it for anything," was said by friends and foes.

This was not the kind of sentiment which animated Mrs. Lethbridge and her party; their hearts were filled with pity for Mr. Linton, and Aunt Leth experienced something like horror at the behaviour of the audience. Her thoughts travelled to the humble home which the author had pictured, to the anxious wife and the sick child. Tears flooded her eyes, and she could scarcely see the beloved forms which pressed around her.

"The crush is over now," said Fred Cornwall; "we shall be able to get out in comfort."

At this moment Bob appeared, having made haste to dress and join his family, according to previous arrangement. He was in a fever of excitement, and full of the eventful night. "Everybody is talking of it behind the scenes," he said. "Such a thing has never occurred before, and there is no telling what will be the result. Opinions are divided. Some of the actors say the dramatic critics are much too wide-awake to be taken in by such a trick; others say that after Mr. Linton's speech they can scarcely pitch into the piece." And then Bob added, rather proudly, "I did what *I* could to save it."

"That you did," said Fanny enthusiastically. "You acted beautifully. Didn't the manager praise you?"

"Well, no," replied Bob; "but then he had so many other things to think of. At all events, my first appearance on the stage is not likely to be forgotten. It is a great night."

"A great night!" sighed Mrs. Lethbridge. "Mr. Linton has gone home, I suppose?"

"I don't know," said Bob. "Mr. Kiss is in a dreadful way about him. A few minutes after Mr. Linton ran out of the theatre Mr. Kiss ran after him; he changed his dress in no time, and as it was, he ran off with his 'make-up' on his face."

Mr. Lethbridge observed his wife's agitation and distress, and he beckoned Bob aside.

"Do you know where Mr. Linton lives?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Bob. "He sent me to his rooms one day, before rehearsal commenced, for an alteration in a scene he had left behind him."

He gave his father the address; they were now in the lobby of the theatre. Mr. Lethbridge told Bob to go for a couple of four-wheelers.

"I'll go with you," said Fred Cornwall, and then he turned to Mr. Lethbridge. "Will not one cab do? We can all squeeze into it."

He was rather afraid that Mr. Lethbridge did not intend that he should accompany them home to Camden Town.

"No," said Mr. Lethbridge. "We must have two. You and Bob can see the girls home. My wife and I are going another way."

Fred looked at him, and understood. "Come along, Bob," he said.

Then Mr. Lethbridge turned to his wife: "You and I will go and see if we can do anything for Mrs. Linton. Bob has given me the address."

Mrs. Lethbridge pressed her husband's hand; she was deeply grateful, but it was no surprise to her that he had anticipated and furthered the wish of her heart. Had he not done so on innumerable occasions in the course of their wedded life?

"May we come with you?" asked Fanny.

"No, my dear," said her father; "the fewer the better. We must do nothing that will look like impertinent intrusion. Your mother is an old woman, and may take the liberty. While she is with Mrs. Linton I shall remain outside in the street."

"My mother is not an old woman," said Fanny, in tender reproof. "She is an angel of goodness, and so are you, papa."

Uncle Leth smiled rather sadly, but he had no time to contradict Fanny, because there were Fred and Bob, with the announcement that the cabs were waiting.

"We shall get home as soon as possible," said Mr. Lethbridge, as he and his wife took their seats in their cab.

"We shall wait up for you," cried Fanny. "Oh, dear!"

This ejaculation was caused by the sudden appearance of Jeremiah Pamflett. He had been in the theatre, in the pit, and had been all the night watching the private box occupied by the Lethbridge party. He had taken note of Fred Cornwall's attentions to Phœbe and of the young girl's blushes, and he had formed his conclusions. Once during the evening he had endeavoured to make his way to the private box; but as he had only a pit check to show, he was peremptorily sent back. His humour was malicious and sour, but some crumbs of comfort fell to his share through the failure of *A Heart of Gold*. Upon the success of the piece depended, he knew, the payment of the bill for three hundred pounds which Mr. Lethbridge had signed, and the prospect of selling up Phœbe's uncle, or of showing him mercy at Phœbe's intercession, was very gratifying to him. He felt that it strengthened his chances with the girl he intended should be his wife. "I will have her," he thought, "whether she likes it or not. Miser Farebrother is bound to me, and there shall be no backing out. He can't back out: I've got his signature to his written promise, and Mr. Lawyer may go to the devil. I'll wring his heart! I'll wring all their hearts!" To such a nature as Jeremiah's this was an agreeable contemplation, and he revelled in it, setting every tender glance that passed between Phœbe and Fred in the private box to the account which at no distant time he should commence to square up. It was a delight to him that *A Heart of Gold* had failed. He yelled in derision at the top of his voice when the curtain fell, and patted the breast of his coat exultantly, in the pocket of which Mr. Lethbridge's acceptance was safely deposited. It was as good as a love-token to him; it gave him assurance of success in his wooing. When the dramatic author finished his speech and had left the stage, Jeremiah tried to push through the mob in the pit; but, in his eagerness, it was his misfortune to hustle rather roughly a peppery individual, who straightway pitched into him. A row ensued, and a fight, which left Jeremiah with a black eye and clothes much disordered. This had delayed his progress considerably, and his confusion of mind did not help him. All this, of course, went down on the account between him and Phœbe and her friends, and was debited against them. Clear of the theatre he had hunted for them in every direction but the right one, and it was only when they were getting into the cabs that he discovered them.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Fanny.

"How d'ye do? how d'ye do?" cried Jeremiah, poking his head in through the open window. "Stop a minute, cabby; friends of mine. Must first shake hands with father and mother. Ah, Mr. Lethbridge, how are you? Glorious fun, wasn't it? Saw you all in a private box; couldn't get at you. Beggar wouldn't let me pass. I say, Mrs. Lethbridge, why don't you invite me to come and see you? It would only be doing the polite. Phœbe's father and me—why, we're almost partners!"

"We shall be very pleased," said Mrs. Lethbridge faintly.

"Of course you will. Thank you; I'll come. No occasion to give me the address; I know where you live. I say, Mr. Lethbridge, rather a crusher, isn't this, to our friends Kiss and Linton? Hope our little affair will be all right? You're in a hurry to be off, I see. Well, good-night! Look out for me soon. You might send me an invite, so that I may be sure of finding you at home. Phœbe will tell you where her father's office in London is; I'm always there. Did you pay for your private box?"

"Mr. Linton was good enough to send it to us," said Mr. Lethbridge.

"Was he? Might have been good enough to send *me* an order, considering all things; but *I* had to pay: left me out in the cold, the beggar did. Never mind; I'll remember him for it. Well, good-night; so glad to see you! Don't forget the invitation."

He returned to the cab in which the young people were. Fred and Fanny were for driving away before he came back, but Phœbe begged them not to do so, saying that Mr. Pamflett was her father's manager, and that it would make them both angry to slight him.

"Here I am again," said Jeremiah vivaciously; his remarks to Mr. and Mrs. Lethbridge had almost put him in good humour, "like a bad penny. You look as if you'd just taken one, Mr. Cornwall; and you too, Miss Lethbridge. How do you do, Miss Phœbe?" He thrust his hand into the cab, and Phœbe was compelled to give him hers, which he pressed and retained, in huge enjoyment of Fred's wrathful glances. "How blooming you look! I saw your father to-day at Parksides; he told me you were on a visit to Camden Town. I have some business with him to-morrow. Shall I give him your love? But I dare say you will be at Parksides before I am. You've no idea how I miss you when you're not there! A jolly night, hasn't it been? You seem rather fidgety, Miss Lethbridge."

"We want to get home," said Fanny. "It costs money to keep the cab waiting."

"And I'm not worth it. What a pity you think so! But soon you'll think differently, perhaps—soon we'll surprise you, Miss Phœbe and I. Some people would say 'Miss Phœbe and me;' but I've been educated, and know how to speak properly, and how to behave properly. There isn't a lawyer in London can get ahead of me, and that we'll prove before long; won't we, Miss Phœbe? I must be going now. Thank you so much for your kind reception. It is more than kind: it is gracious and condescending. Who pays for the cab? But what a question to ask! Of course the swell of the party. I'm glad I've cost him nothing. Let a lawyer alone for knowing what's what. The cab regulations say, 'For the first fifteen minutes completed, 6*d*.' And I've detained you"—he consulted his watch here—"just thirteen minutes and three-quarters, so the driver can't demand anything. Good-night all; happy dreams."

He went off chuckling, eminently satisfied with himself for the part he had played. He knew that

he had left a sting behind.

Out of consideration for Phœbe, bearing in mind that her father and Jeremiah Pamflett were hand and glove, Fred Cornwall said nothing of that worthy young man to Phœbe. Fanny, however, was boiling over, and she was not the kind of person to keep her opinions to herself.

"Oh!" she said, "I wish I was a man!"

"What for, Fan?" asked Bob.

"Just for one little half-hour a man," said Fanny; "to go after that reptile, and give him what he deserves! He has got one black eye already; he should have two. I'd beat him to a jelly; I'd pull every hair out of his head; I'd—I'd—" She grew so indignant that she could not proceed.

"Shall I go and give him a thrashing?" asked Bob. He was not of a truculent nature, but his blood was roused.

"Stop where you are, Bob," said Fred Cornwall quietly. "It is best to keep out of difficulties with such as he. I beg your pardon, Miss Farebrother; I did not mean to say it."

"You have said what is right," said Phœbe, in a low tone. "It is I who should ask pardon of you for subjecting you to insults."

She burst into tears, and Fanny instantly took her in her arms. The men were silent and grave, and not another word was spoken till they arrived at Camden Town. Fred paid the cabman liberally, and the party entered the house, Phœbe and Fanny going up to their bedroom, and Fred and Bob finding refuge in the dining-room, where supper was laid out for them. As they went upstairs Fanny called out to the young men, "We shall not be long. Don't go away, Fred." He had no intention of doing so; he paced the room in deep thought, while Bob, who, in the absence of his father, took upon himself the duties of host, ran down to the larder for beer. Returning with it, he poured out two foaming glasses, and handed one to Fred.

"Here's luck," said Bob.

"Here's luck," said Fred.

Fred emptied his glass in one pull, and when he put it on the table there was a flush on his face and a soft light in his eyes. He had formed a most important resolution. Presently he heard Fanny's voice calling to him, and he went out to her in the passage. That diplomatic young lady received him with her finger on her lips, and she closed the dining-room door before she spoke.

"She is in there," she whispered, pointing to the drawing-room. "I lit the gas."

"Does she wish to see me?" asked Fred, with an exact following of her cautious movements.

"She didn't say so," replied Fanny, "but I thought you would like to go to her."

"Yes," said Fred, "I will go. You are my best friend, Fanny."

"I am a true one, at all events. Oh, Fred!" There was nothing teasing or wilful or capricious in the tone in which these two simple words were uttered. It was fraught with wistful, tremulous feeling, and her eyes were humid with tears.

"God bless you, Fanny!"

"And you, Fred. No one shall come in."

Phœbe looked up as he entered, expecting to see Fanny. He sat down by her side, and said:

"I have been anxious about you. Fanny told me you were here. You are better?"

"Yes." She would have risen and made an attempt to leave him, not out of coquetry, but maiden modesty, but she had not the strength.

"This has been a sad night," said Fred, "but it may prove to be the happiest one in my life, if my heart has not deceived me. May I say to you what my heart dictates?" He construed her silence into assent, and proceeded: "I did not intend to speak yet awhile; I thought I would first make my position—my worldly position—firmer than it is; but I can no longer be silent. Since that happy evening at Parksides I have not been idle, and though my position is not yet quite assured, I am very hopeful; I have really made progress, and I think I can see my way. I have gained some good friends who will help me along, and once the ball is set fairly rolling, it only depends upon a man's ability and industry to keep it rolling till it reaches a home which he can call his own, and where it may be his bright fortune to enjoy the sweetest blessings of life. Industry I have, and I mean to work harder than ever; and I am told I have ability. Whatever be the measure of it, I am sure it will help me to some kind of success; and if the home of which I speak be not at first a very grand one, it will be grand enough for happiness. I ask you to have faith in my earnestness and truth. I love you with my whole heart and soul; I will work for you with my whole heart and soul; I will shield and protect you; I will be true and faithful to you. Will you not answer me? Will you not speak to me?"

She raised her eyes timidly to his, and in the tender light that shone therein he saw his answer. He clasped her in his arms; her pulses thrilled with ineffable rapture.

"Phœbe!"

"Fred!" Her voice was like the whisper of a rose, filling space with sweet music.

"You will be my wife, Phœbe?"

"Yes."

"Say you love me!"

"I love you!"

Thereafter there was silence awhile, and as Phœbe lay enfolded in her lover's arms, a high resolve entered his soul to be worthy of the priceless blessing of her love. And she? Her soul was also stirred by a prayer that she might be able to make herself worthy of him—her hero, her life!

"We must go in now, Fred. They will think it so strange!"

"I am not so sure," he said, and kept her still in his embrace.

"Why are you not so sure, Fred? Indeed, indeed they will!"

"Do you know, my darling"—he paused, and repeated softly, "my darling!—my very, very own!" And then he lost himself, and forgot for a moment what he had intended to say.

"Well, Fred?"

"Well what, Phœbe?"

"You were saying, 'Do you know—'"

"Oh, yes. I said, 'Do you know.' What came afterward?"

"My darling!" she said, in a delicious whisper.

It was enough to make him forget himself again; and he did; but he presently took up the thread.

"Do you know, my darling, I have an idea that Fanny sent me here for a purpose—bless her kind heart!"

"For what purpose?"

"For this." He pressed her closer to him.

"Oh, Fred, she never could!"

"Couldn't she? What! Our Fanny, our dear cousin, not be equal to such a scheme! Upon my word, she deserves—what she shall get when we go to her. Thinking seriously over the matter, Phœbe—and I never was more serious in my life than I am now, my own!—I have no doubt that she had everything already planned out in her pretty little head."

"Fred, we really must go."

"Not till—"

"Till what, Fred?"

He held her face between his hands, and put his lips to hers. Thus they pledged love and faith to each other, for weal or woe.

"Well, you people!" cried Fanny, as they entered. "We are not half ready for you; and here you come breaking in upon us so suddenly and quickly—just as Bob and I were talking secrets—weren't we, Bob? Well, I wonder at your impudence, Fred! Oh, my dear, my dear!"

The affectionate girl's arms were round Phœbe's neck, hugging her close, and her gay voice had drifted into tears. For Fred had kissed her, and Phœbe too; and somehow or other, in these kissings the news of Phœbe's and Fred's engagement was conveyed without ever a word being spoken about it. How Fanny danced round Phœbe, and how she commanded Fred to kiss her again, and how she kissed him unblushingly more than once, and how she hugged Phœbe again and again, and how her face flushed and her eyes sparkled, and how she got her hair rumpled in the most unaccountable manner, and how she seized Bob and waltzed round the room with him, dodging the chairs and tables in the most marvellous way, and how, finally, she fell upon the sofa, out of breath, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry, and therefore doing a little of both!—all this must be imagined, for it is impossible to describe.

"And oh, my dears, my dears!" she cried, "I hope you'll be happy for ever and ever!"

For brilliant impulsiveness there never *was* such a girl.

But what had come over Bob? Had he been so schooled and lectured by Fanny that, metaphorically speaking, he had not a leg to stand upon, or had he already transferred his affections from Phœbe to some fair nymph at the Star Theatre, that he submitted himself to Phœbe's kiss—knowing the meaning of it—with a fairly good grace, with only just a shade of sulkiness in recognition of her perfidy, and that he shook hands with Fred with no expressed intention of having his life's blood? However it was, these things happened; and if a happier or more agreeable quartette ever sat down to a supper table, the present chronicler would like to be

present on the occasion.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE POOR AUTHOR'S HOME.

Outside the humble house in Lambeth in which Mr. Linton and his family occupied two modest rooms—and those not the best—Uncle Leth paced the lonely street. There was not a soul about, with the exception of the policeman, with whom Uncle Leth exchanged a few words explaining his presence; but although that functionary expressed himself satisfied, he still kept an eye upon the stranger in the neighbourhood. Aunt Leth was upstairs with Mrs. Linton; the unfortunate author had not returned home, as Aunt Leth, running breathlessly down to the street door, had informed her husband; and Uncle Leth was now looking anxiously for his appearance. It was out of a feeling of delicacy that he had not entered the house; he knew that the intrusion of a strange man would have alarmed Mrs. Linton, and have marred the kind errand upon which he and his wife were engaged. So he waited outside, listening for footsteps, and mentally praying that Mr. Linton had done nothing rash.

Aunt Leth and Mrs. Linton were already friends, and it seemed to the poor author's wife as if she had known her kind visitor for years. It was not without trepidation that Aunt Leth had introduced herself to Mrs. Linton, but she allowed no signs of this feeling to appear in her manner: she was cheerful and unobtrusive, and her sweet face and pleasant voice conveyed hope to the heart of the anxious wife.

"I am a friend of your husband," Aunt Leth said, "and I hope you will forgive me for calling upon you at so late an hour. My name is Lethbridge."

"Yes," said Mrs. Linton; "my husband has often spoken of you and your family. He was desirous that we should become personally acquainted some time since; but"—she paused here; the sentence, completed, would have been an avowal of poverty.

"But," said Aunt Leth, taking up the words, with a sweet smile, "you have been so busy, and your husband has been so much engaged, that you could not find time. It is just the way with us at home. The days are really not long enough for one's cares and duties."

"Are you alone?" asked Mrs. Linton.

"No; my husband is below, waiting for me. He would not come up, it is so late. I should not have had the courage to come had I not heard that your little boy was not well. Dear little fellow! You won't mind my kissing you, will you, sweet?"

She was by the bedside, bending over the lad, who was awake, and who, when she lowered her face to his, put his little arms round her neck. In Aunt Leth's beautiful ways there was an affectionate magnetism which won the hearts of old and young. Mrs. Linton burst into tears.

"Don't cry, my dear," said Aunt Leth; "we are going to be very good friends, and everything will be bright and happy. Ah! it is only wives and mothers like ourselves who know what real trouble is; but then we are able to bear it, thank God! It is love's duty. To be strong and reliant and hopeful will help to bring back the roses to your little boy's cheeks."

All the time she was speaking she was either at the bedside or doing unobtrusively something housewifely about the room, which made her presence there like an angel's visit.

"Where did you hear that our little boy was ill?" asked Mrs. Linton.

"At the theatre."

"Ah! you have been there?" Mrs. Linton's agitation was so great that her hand rose instinctively to her heart. It was a thin white hand, eloquent with weakness and suffering. "Tell me, tell me about the piece! I expected my husband home by this time. If it was a success he would have flown here."

"My dear," said Aunt Leth, with a bright look, "I am not an author's wife, and therefore I cannot speak with authority; but I can understand how much there must be to talk about at the theatre after the first representation of a play. Perhaps some trifling alterations to make, or a little dialogue to be strengthened or shortened, and there is nothing like taking these things in hand on the spur of the moment. That is business, and must be attended to, must it not? I hardly know whether I am right or wrong in what I say, but it seems to me so."

"You are right," sighed Mrs. Linton; "there are always a great many alterations to make in my husband's plays. I used to go on the first nights, but the excitement had such an effect upon me that I wait now to know whether they are likely to be a success or not. It is an anxious life, waiting, waiting, waiting for what, perhaps, will never come. It is wearing my poor husband out; and he works so hard, so earnestly—"

"All the more need for courage, my dear," said Aunt Leth, taking Mrs. Linton's hand and patting it hopefully. "Bright fortune, when it comes, will be all the sweeter for a little delay. It will come,

my dear, it will!"

"Perhaps too late!" murmured the mother, her apprehensive eyes travelling to the bed upon which her sick child was lying.

"You must not say that; you must not think it. When your husband returns you must be cheerful and strong; he will require such help after his anxious night. And what a beautiful play he has written! How proud you must be of him!"

With such like affectionate interchange of confidences did the time pass in Mrs. Linton's room; but Aunt Leth's heart almost fainted within her at the lengthened absence of the author. No less anxious was Uncle Leth in the street below. Two or three times, on some pretence or other, Aunt Leth ran down to him to satisfy herself that he was all right, hoping on each occasion that she would return in the company of Mr. Linton. She and her husband were afraid to give expression to their fast-growing fears. All that Uncle Leth said was: "Don't hurry away. You must not leave till Mr. Linton comes home. He will be here soon."

But more than an hour elapsed before the author appeared, and Uncle Leth breathed a "Thank God!" when he saw him turn the corner of the street, in the company of Kiss. Uncle Leth hastened toward them to explain the meaning of his presence, but Mr. Linton did not give him time to utter a word. His agitation was so great, he had been so wrought up by the incidents of the night, that he saw a tragedy in the surprise.

"My God!" he cried; and but for the support afforded by Kiss's strong arm he would have fallen to the ground. "My wife! my child!"

"Are well," said Uncle Leth, quickly. "My wife is with yours, and they are waiting for you. Don't take it ill of us; we are here in true friendship and sympathy. Keep up your heart; all will turn out right."

"That's what I've been telling him," said Kiss, heartily; "and if ever there was a bright omen, this is one. Now go up to your wife, like a good fellow, and put on a cheerful face. We shall rub through. Never lose sight of the silver lining, my boy; it is shining now in your room on the faces of two good women!"

Mr. Linton, unable to speak, pressed Uncle Leth's hand, and passed into the house, leaving his friends in the street.

"How kind of you!" murmured Kiss. "I intended to go up with Linton, but now your good wife is there my presence is not required. I have had a dreadful time with him. When he rushed out of the theatre I hardly knew what to think, being knocked over, so to speak, by the strange speech he made. I was not the only one; it was so novel, so thoroughly unexpected. There is just the chance it may be the talk of the town, and if that happens it will bring money to the treasury. I ran up to my dressing-room for a quick change, and it suddenly occurred to me that in the state Linton was in it would be as well if he had a friend by his side. Quick as thought I left the theatre, without waiting to wash, and knowing the road Linton always took home, followed it without coming up to him. I didn't trouble myself about the public-houses: Linton is a temperate man, and he was in no mood for company. With a great success it might have been different: he might have taken a glass. You see, Mr. Lethbridge, I know him and his ways. He is wonderfully sensitive and nervous, and he had taken it into his head that upon the success of *A Heart of Gold* his whole career depended. He had staked all his hopes upon it. Success meant life, fortune, fame, happiness: failure meant death, ruin, despair. It is the misfortune of these highly sensitive natures; they suffer the tortures of the damned! How did you come here?"

"In a cab," said Uncle Leth.

"I followed Linton on foot, and must have been pretty smart, because I got here before you arrived. I ascertained from the landlady of the house that Linton had not come home, and back I started, retracing my steps, first cautioning the landlady not to let Mrs. Linton know that I had been here making inquiries. I'll tell you what was in my mind. Linton's road home led past a bridge, which he had no occasion to cross, and I thought if I didn't meet him before I came to that bridge that I would cross it myself, to see if some impulse of despair had drawn his steps in that direction. Sir, I was right! There, looking down upon the river, stood Linton. I must not do him an injustice: I do not believe he had any idea of suicide; it was simply that he was in a condition of blank despairing bewilderment, and it is my opinion he might have stood there for hours without conscious thought. When I laid my hand upon his shoulder, he looked at me like a man in a dream. It was quite a time before he completely recovered himself; before, it may be said, he was awake. Then we talked. He could not tell me how he had got on the bridge; he had been drawn there, as I supposed, and he stood looking down upon the river in a kind of waking trance. I could dilate on the theme, but the hour is not propitious. Well, Mr. Lethbridge, when we conversed intelligently, I discovered that he was afraid to go home. Hereby hangs a tale. His wife, before he married her, was in a better position in life than he; she had wealthy relatives, who disowned her when she married Linton. Since then it has been one long struggle; nothing but hardships; nothing but privations. She has never reproached him; such a thought I am certain has never entered her mind. But he has taken it into his head that he has done her a great wrong, and the culminating events of this night at the theatre took all the courage out of him; he dared not face her. But for him she might have been prosperous and happy; it was through him that her life had been wrecked. I had to combat this view, and it needed all my powers. Without wearying you I may say that I partly succeeded at length in bringing him to a better state of mind. That is all,

and I have ended just in time. Here is your wife. Madam," he said, advancing, and raising her hand to his lips, "in the garden of human nature you are the sweetest flower!"

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE NEWSPAPERS SAID OF "A HEART OF GOLD."

Mr. Linton's speech before the curtain served more than one good purpose with many of the dramatic critics. It diverted the attention of some from the demerits of the comedy drama, and it softened the condemnation which others would have pronounced upon it. Again, it furnished a theme upon which one and all dilated—this one indulgently, that one severely; but the main point was (and the most important in the judgment of the manager of the Star Theatre) that it drew public attention to the production.

"The great point gained," said that astute individual, "is that we get a lot of advertising for nothing."

There were leading articles upon the incident, and it provoked correspondence upon certain collateral matters, which the theatrical manager did his best to nourish. "Keep the pot boiling," said he, and he persuaded his friends to write to the papers, not caring much which side they took so long as their letters were inserted. The old cry of first-night cliques was raised; the right of passing judgment within the walls of the theatre on the first night of production was defended, as to which certain methods in vogue were challenged or upheld, some calling them cruel, others maintaining that they were just. Novel theories were discussed. Said one correspondent:

"We are compelled to pay our money at the doors before we know anything of the quality of the dish which is to be set before us. If it is worthless, we are naturally indignant, and we say as much; if it is good work, we give unstinted praise. Had we the option of paying afterward, instead of being compelled to part with our money beforehand, the case would be different."

To this it was replied:

"Nobody forces you to the theatre on first nights; you can keep away if you choose until you hear from the dramatic critics whether the fare is good or bad."

Of course came the indignant rejoinder:

"It is the public who are the critics, not the writers on the press. There is not a man in pit or gallery who is not as good a judge of the merits of a play as the best professional dramatic critic in the country."

An Englishman who had just returned from a visit to America wrote:

"Three weeks ago I was present in a New York theatre on the first production of a new play. It was the most wretched trash imaginable, and was an unmitigated and deserved failure. In comparison with the play I witnessed then, *A Heart of Gold*, at the first representation of which I was present, shines forth a most worthy, intellectual, and praiseworthy effort. It is the work of an earnest, capable playwright, who deserves every encouragement, even when he does not come up to the requirements of the modern play-goer. I will, however, go so far as to place the two plays on a level, pronouncing them, for the purpose of my illustration, as equal in merit—which is not the case, for one is a gem, the other the vilest paste. Both plays were condemned. Note, now, the methods of condemnation. In New York, when the curtain fell, the audience very quietly left the theatre; there was no applause; there were no shrieks and howls; no brutal cries for 'Author,' to serve a cruel end. There was something almost funereal in the manner of the New York audience as they filed slowly out of the house; they seemed to tread more softly than usual; they spoke in lower tones. This was their method of damning the play, and I commend it to the attention of London play-goers as incomparably more decent and respectable than that which they adopt to break an author's heart. There are certain of our national customs which will bear reform; this undoubtedly is one. As I pen these lines I see the two assemblages; one conducting itself with reason and dignity, as becomes rational men and women; the other conducting itself with unreasoning and indefensible cruelty, as becomes a lower order of being."

A morning paper of high repute summed up the matter thus:

"In our columns to-day will be found a letter from a gentleman who contrasts with some force the different methods of 'damning' a play in England and America. He commends the American system and condemns the English, ignoring, as it appears to us, the more important issues which hang upon the methods he describes. If the matter which he argues commenced and ended with the behaviour of an audience on the first night of a new production, his views would be convincing, but it only commences and does not end there. We have ourselves, on several occasions during late years, commented with some severity upon the unnecessarily noisy conduct of first-night audiences in London when an indifferent or a bad play has been submitted to their judgment, but we have never gone so far as to absolutely condemn the method which has excited the indignation of our correspondent. It is merely a question of degree, and the good sense of the public will sooner or later set the matter right. To this end the proceedings at the Star Theatre on

the first representation of *A Heart of Gold* will healthfully contribute. But that is not the question. What we have to consider is absolutely apart from the purely personal aspect of the matter, and we have no hesitation in declaring that the English method, exercised with reasonable moderation, is much more powerful in its beneficial effects upon dramatic literature than the 'silent system' depicted by our correspondent as being the vogue in New York. If a lesson is to be enforced, it is as well that some emphasis should be used in the manner of its administration; its effect is intended not only for the present, but for the future, and our correspondent is totally mistaken in supposing that there is anything really and solely personal in the attitude of our first-night audiences when they are displeased—and generally justly displeased—with the fare provided for them. It means, 'Be more careful in your future work; let your proportions be more nicely managed, do not fall into the ultra-sentimental, or the ultra-farcical, or the ultra-melodramatic.' The condemnation pronounced is not the condemnation of an author's life and career; it is condemnation of a single effort. Let this same author the following night at another theatre produce a play which justly pleases, and he will be acclaimed from the topmost row of the gallery to the foremost row of the stalls. This fact is a proof that the argument of personalism ridiculously introduced is unworthy of consideration, and likely to be detrimental to the best interests of the drama. As well might one say that a wholesome correction administered to a child is cruel and brutal.

"It may not be unprofitable to cursorily examine the effect of the opposite systems current in America and England with respect to first-nights. We do not for one moment intend to advance that these verdicts are the direct cause of the comparative merits of production, but certainly they contribute to the result. For generations it has been the fashion here to sigh for the dramatist who is to lift our drama to a higher level than it occupies at present. This yearning is to a great extent sentimental, for much has been done by living English dramatists which is by no means discreditable to intellectual effort; and the thirst for great plays—plays which shall take their place as classics—seems in the near future not unlikely to be satisfied. We mention no names, for that would be invidious, and we are aware that in a few of our best theatres no high level is aimed at—that is to say, that the eye more than the mind is catered for. There are, however, four or five West End theatres which, while entirely satisfying the demand for pictorial effect, at the same time satisfy the intellect. At these theatres original plays of a high order are from time to time produced, and in their revival of old plays an intelligence is displayed worthy of the sincerest commendation. We have writers of comedy also who are aiming high, who fail now and then, but who buckle on their armour again and work with a will. This is the right spirit, and we claim that our English first-night system has stirred it to a higher emulation. On the other hand, what has America done? Is there upon the English stage to-day one lofty example of American original dramatic effort? We supply the American theatres; they do not reciprocate by supplying us. What is the customary answer to this? 'Oh! but we are a young country.' It is a fallacious excuse. America, as a nation, is more than a hundred years old; it has gathered into its folds a fair proportion of our best intellect; it has a stirring, new, and picturesque history; its public and social life teems with novel and amusing characteristics; its story abounds in heroic episodes; Nature smiles upon it bounteously and beautifully; and humanity, as varied and many-sided in its aspects as could ever be hoped to be seen cheek by jowl in one country, there plays its part through the hours and the days and the years. What more is needed? Young! America is ripe now, if ever it will be; but where is its lofty dramatic record? 'Where is yours?' the nation may retort. And we answer: Such as it is, look for it in your American theatres. You ask for our stamp, when you should make and rely upon one of your own. We should not be the losers if you satisfied our demand; nor would you; we should both be nerved to the highest instead of to the mediocre. It is not unworthy of consideration whether the silent attitude of your first-night audiences, instead of the indignant, as with us, be not prejudicial to the production of a dramatic literature worthy of your greatness.

"One word more. If London play-goers who are in the habit of going to 'first nights' with unfair and ungenerous intentions, in the hope of or the desire for a failure, regard what we have said as a defence or a justification of their occasionally inconsiderate and violent conduct, they are grievously mistaken. There must be moderation an all things, and there must be moderation in the expression of their opinions. They have a license, but the privilege accorded to them must not be abused. They have no right to demand that the author of an unsuccessful play should appear before them to be hooted and howled at, and it is to be hoped for the future that this insistence may not be carried to an extreme, as of late years has frequently been the case."

The result of all this was that instead of empty benches, as the manager of the Star Theatre had feared before Mr. Linton's speech, the public flocked to see *A Heart of Gold*, in order that they might judge for themselves. Everybody in the theatre was in a high state of exultation at this unexpected turn of the tables. Kiss, who was in great trepidation at the prospect of not being able to meet the bill which Jeremiah Pamflett held, became gradually reassured, and was not chary in the expression of his hopes to Mr. Lethbridge. "It is the most wonderful event in my professional experience," he said.

This recountal of the progress of Mr. Linton's comedy drama has somewhat transgressed the sequence of events, the private details of which now claim our attention.

When Mr. and Mrs. Lethbridge returned home after their visit to Mrs. Linton they found the young people up; Fred Cornwall, as a matter of course, and because of what had taken place between him and Phœbe, being happily ensconced by Phœbe's side, as was his undoubted right under the circumstances. Very few moments elapsed before Mr. and Mrs. Lethbridge were made

acquainted with the engagement. Phœbe's happiness was reflected in her face, and her aunt and uncle fondly embraced her, and wished the young people every joy.

"I should not have dared to stop so late but for this," said Fred Cornwall to Mrs. Lethbridge.

"It *is* very late," said Mrs. Lethbridge, glancing at the clock; "five minutes to three; and the girls must go to bed. Dear, dear, what a night this has been! Now, Fanny, Phœbe, you must not stop up a minute longer. Mr. Cornwall, I am glad, for Phœbe's sake, that you are not a dramatic author."

"Why, mamma?" exclaimed Fanny, the staunch and faithful champion. "The successful ones makes heaps of money, and Fred would have been sure to be successful. And, mamma, it isn't 'Mr. Cornwall' now; it is Fred with all of us. You mustn't forget he is one of the family—aren't you, Fred?"

"I hope to be," said Fred, gaily, "and very soon."

"And you must call mamma Aunt Leth, as everybody does who has the least affection for her," said Fanny.

"May I?" asked Fred.

"Indeed you may," said Mrs. Lethbridge. She clasped the young man's hand, and looked at him solicitously; "I must speak to you before you go."

He took the hint, and went out into the passage to wish his dear girl good night. It is wonderful what a long time this simplest form of farewell occupied, but then it was like a new language to the lovers. Indeed, everything to their senses was at that moment new and beautiful, and every word they spoke to each other was charged with strange tenderness. Fanny, as was to be expected of her, retired first to her bedroom, leaving the lovers together; but her high spirits would not allow her to be utterly extinguished. When at length Phœbe came slowly into the room, "with many a lingering look behind," Fanny popped out into the passage, shutting her cousin in.

"Fred!" said Fanny, in a stage-whisper, leaning over the balustrade.

"Yes," he said, looking up.

"Like Romeo and Juliet, isn't it? Parting is such sweet sorrow she could say good-night until to-morrow. But she isn't coming out again, so you had best go at once to mamma. Good-night, Fred."

"Good-night, Fanny."

Then he went into the dining-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Lethbridge were waiting for him. It rather discomposed him to observe that they received him with grave looks instead of smiles.

"You are not sorry," he said, "for what has occurred?"

"No," replied Mrs. Lethbridge, "we are not sorry. But for one consideration there would not be a cloud upon our hearts to-night."

"What consideration?" asked Fred.

"Phœbe's father. You have not spoken to him?"

"No, I have not. To speak the truth, it was my intention to ask your advice whether, before I spoke to Phœbe, I should go to see Mr. Farebrother at Parksides."

"That would have been the best course, perhaps," said Mrs. Lethbridge.

"You would have advised me to do so?"

"Yes."

"It is, however, too late to talk of that now. I had no intention of proposing to Phœbe to-night, and I have no idea how it all came about. But there it is, and I would not unsay what I have said, or undo what I have done, for all the wealth in the world."

"We would not wish you to do so," said Mrs. Lethbridge; and her gentle voice and wistful eyes were sufficient proof that she was in entire sympathy with him. "It is not to-night that we have discovered that you and our dear Phœbe love each other. We have known it a long time, and our prayer is that we have not acted unwisely in innocently encouraging it. Should there be no obstacle to your union a happy life is before you both."

"What obstacle can there be?"

"Phœbe's father may refuse his consent."

"I cannot see upon what grounds," said Fred. "I am not rich, it is true; but I am a gentleman, and I shall not ask him for any money. I am content—more than content—to take Phœbe as she is, without a penny, and to work with all my heart and soul for her happiness and comfort. And she will be happy with me, Aunt Leth."

"There is no reason to doubt it," said Mrs. Lethbridge. "But it is as well to be prepared when you go to see Mr. Farebrother."

"To be prepared for what?—for his refusal? Well, in that case I shall have reason to rejoice that I spoke to Phœbe first, and learnt from her dear lips that her heart is mine. With her father's refusal staring me in the face I might have hesitated, but I should have spoken all the same. It isn't likely that I should have stood tamely aside and seen the happiness of our lives destroyed. But what is done, is done, Aunt Leth, and nothing can undo it. Phœbe is mine, and I am hers. Nothing in the world shall part us."

"Let us hope for the best," said Mrs. Lethbridge. "We thought it our duty to give you a word of warning. Phœbe's father is a strange man, and you must be careful in dealing with him."

"I will be. Phœbe remains here four or five days, she tells me."

"Yes; her father consented that she should stop with us till Tuesday or Wednesday next."

Fred rubbed his hands joyously. "Let it be Wednesday, Aunt Leth."

"I shall be only too happy, Fred. When will you go to Parksides?"

"Not before Wednesday next. I want time, you see, to think of what I shall say to Mr. Farebrother. There is no immediate hurry, because everything is as good as settled. Good-night dear Aunt Leth. I am the happiest man in the world!"

CHAPTER X.

HIDDEN TREASURE.

"Mother," said Jeremiah Pamflett, the next day, when he reached Parksides, "I am going to make a move; I am getting tired of playing a waiting game."

"Something has occurred, then, Jeremiah?" asked Mrs. Pamflett, her keen eyes on her son's face.

"Well, I went to the theatre last night, and sat in the pit, while Phœbe—*my* Phœbe, mother—and her precious set were in a private box, dressed up to the nines, with flowers and all sorts of things."

"The Lethbridges, Jeremiah?"

"Yes, the Lethbridges, and that lawyer chap."

"I told you there was danger in that quarter, Jeremiah."

"And I told *you* to mind your own business. Do you think this Phœbe affair is the only one I've got to look after? There are other schemes, mother, with heaps of money hanging to them, which will land me in a carriage as sure as guns. I'm going to take in the sharpers; I'm going to prove that I'm the sharpest fellow *they* ever had to deal with; I'll have thousands out of them! They think they know a lot, but they don't know everything. Why, with my head for figures and calculations, I ought to be as rich as the Rothschilds! I'll tell you all about it by-and-by."

"You are always keeping things from me, Jeremiah," said Mrs. Pamflett, in an injured tone. "Why not tell me now?"

"Because I don't choose. Still tongue, wise head."

"I might keep things from you, Jeremiah," said Mrs. Pamflett; and there was now a sly note in her voice which caused Jeremiah to bristle up.

"Oh, you would, would you! You've got something to tell, and you won't tell it! All right. I've done with you." He turned to go, but she seized his arm and detained him.

"No, no, Jeremiah! I've no one in the world but you. I'll tell you everything, everything!"

"Well, out with it; and never speak to me again like that, or it will be the worse for you. Mind what I say!"

"I will, Jeremiah—I will. Shut the door, and look first that there's no one outside."

"Who should be outside?" he asked, when he returned to his mother's side.

"Speak low, Jeremiah. Miser Farebrother is as cunning as a fox. For all his lameness, he can creep about the house as soft as a cat. I was awake last night with a bad toothache, and I heard his bedroom door creak, and then I heard him go softly, softly down-stairs. 'What is he up to?' I thought, and I slipped out of bed and into the passage. There was no fear of his hearing *my* door creak; I keep the hinges well oiled; and it was dark, and he couldn't see me. Would you believe it, Jeremiah? It was past two o'clock in the morning, and he went out of the house. I was afraid to go after him, because if he had turned suddenly back, and shut the street door upon me, I shouldn't have been able to get in without his finding me out. So I waited and waited, wondering what he was about. I suppose it must have been twenty minutes at least before he came back; but he did come at last, and, oh, Jeremiah; you never in all your life saw anybody as sly as he was! He

looked round and round, and this way and that, to make sure he was alone, and then he crawled upstairs. How he managed it I don't know, he was in such pain; but not a groan, not a sound, escaped him. And he was carrying a large cash-box, too, that I had never seen before. It was covered with mud, and of course I jumped at the truth; it had been buried somewhere in the grounds, and he had gone out in the middle of the night to dig it up. You may guess what a state of excitement I was in, and I said to myself, 'For Jeremiah's sake I'll see the end of it.' It took him almost another twenty minutes to get to his room; he had to sit on the stairs a dozen times to rest, and I couldn't help thinking what a wonderfully sly man he was that he should be doing what he was doing, and what perhaps he's done over and over again, without my ever being able to find it out."

"You may well say that," grumbled Jeremiah. "A nice article you are to look after my interests! Catch me being in the house all the years you've been, and being taken in like that! I wouldn't have believed it of you if anybody else was telling me."

"I wouldn't have believed it of myself, Jeremiah; but better late than never, my boy."

"Better soon than late: that's the proper way of it. But go on, can't you? He got back to his room, and there was you outside the door, peeping through the key-hole?"

"Yes, Jeremiah, and Miser Farebrother none the wiser. He wiped the mud off the cash-box and opened it. Jeremiah, it was stuffed full of gold and bank-notes. He counted it and counted it over and over again, and he wrote down some figures on a piece of paper. Then he put the money back and locked the box, and hid it under his mattress. After that he tore up the paper he'd been writing on, and blew out the candle, and went to bed. I heard him groaning there for an hour afterward."

"Is that the end of it?" asked Jeremiah, in a wrathful voice and with wrathful looks. "Do you mean to tell me that is the end of it?"

"No, it isn't; there's something more. Never you call me a fool again. I went into his room as usual this morning, and you may depend I looked about for the box; but I couldn't catch sight of it. Oh, he's a cunning one, he is! But I did catch sight of something. I had my hand-broom and shovel, and I swept up the floor and the fireplace, and brought away the pieces of paper he had torn up. I asked him if he'd had a good night, and he said he fell asleep the moment he put his head on the pillow, and that he must have slept seven or eight hours right off. I told him he looked as if he'd had a splendid rest—which he didn't, Jeremiah. He was the picture of misery. When I got away from him I sorted out the pieces of paper and stuck them together. Here it is. He must be richer than we think, Jeremiah. Look! Ten one hundred pounds—bank-notes, Jeremiah! I saw him count 'em—that's a thousand. Twenty fifties—that's another thousand. Fifty twenties—that's another thousand. And another thousand in sovereigns. He laid 'em in piles upon the table. They did look grand! Piles of gold. Jeremiah! Four thousand pounds altogether. You didn't know anything about it, did you?"

"No, I didn't," replied Jeremiah, his eyes glittering greedily. "He must have had the money by him a long time, I expect. Did you look about the grounds for his hiding-place?"

"Yes; but I didn't find it. I couldn't see the slightest signs of one."

"*I'll* find it, mother."

"You mustn't do anything rash, Jeremiah; you mustn't get yourself into trouble."

"Not likely, mother. Trust me for looking after myself. All his money is mine, and I mean to have it! By fair means, mother—by fair means; and he sha'n't cheat me out of a penny. Once I get hold of Phœbe—. Well, all right! I shall know how to work it. I'll go now and have a talk with him."

CHAPTER XI.

MISER FAREBROTHER GIVES JEREMIAH A WARNING.

Jeremiah's "talk" with Miser Farebrother proved to be not entirely to the satisfaction of the younger juggler, and the few days of happiness which yet remained to Phœbe were not disturbed by any intimation of the conspiracy into which the two men had entered, the successful issue of which would result in the destruction of the fondest hopes of her life. Jeremiah was impatient, and eager that Phœbe should be recalled home immediately; but Miser Farebrother would not have it so. Of the two he was infinitely the more wily and astute, and he dropped pearls of wisdom for the benefit of his crafty managing clerk. It told rather against Jeremiah that in the account he gave of his interviews with the Lethbridge party on the previous night he should accentuate every unpleasant and disagreeable word to which he had given utterance; he had an idea that by so doing he was impressing the miser with a deep sense of his wit and cleverness, the fact being that he produced quite an opposite effect.

"Never startle your game, Jeremiah," said Miser Farebrother. "A skilful sportsman goes quietly and patiently to work. I have not been in the habit of suddenly summoning my daughter from London, after having given her permission to remain there for a stated time. To do so now would

only excite suspicion, and strengthen, perhaps, any opposition we have to meet with. Last night's proceedings are not in your favour. You spoke sarcastically, and made yourself generally objectionable. The tongue of that clever young person, Miss Fanny Lethbridge, must have wagged rarely against you after you took your departure. You rubbed them the wrong way, Jeremiah—a mistake, a great mistake! Instead of oil, you used vinegar. 'Tis a million to one that the lawyer scoundrel saw through you; you made an enemy of him when you might have thrown dust into his eyes."

"What does it matter?" said Jeremiah, rather sulkily. "I'm not afraid of him."

"It matters everything," retorted Miser Farebrother. "It matters that you exposed your hand, and gave your rival the advantage over you."

"My rival!" cried Jeremiah, with a dark frown.

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" said Miser Farebrother, with a certain sly satisfaction at Jeremiah's discomposure. For himself, he was easy in his mind with respect to Phœbe. He had her oath, sworn upon her dead mother's prayer-book, that she would not marry without his consent, and he knew that she would rather die than break it. Jeremiah was not cognizant of this sacred promise, so cunningly wrung by Miser Farebrother from his daughter, and the miser, secure in the knowledge, could afford to laugh at his intriguing clerk, who thought himself his master's equal in duplicity. In Miser Farebrother's feelings there was something of the delight and the triumph which one rogue experiences when he overreaches another. "It looks like it, doesn't it? And we mustn't lose sight of the uncomfortable fact that Mr. Cornwall looks like a gentleman, while you, Jeremiah, you—not to mince the matter—look quite the other thing." He rubbed his hands with a sense of great enjoyment, and proceeded: "There you were, Jeremiah, sitting in the pit all the time this fine lawyer-gentleman was paying court to your sweetheart in a private box. And she blushing and hanging her head the while; and our dear friends the Lethbridges—"

"Damn them!" interposed Jeremiah, the blurting out of the expletive being some slight relief to his feelings.

"With all my heart! Damn them behind their backs, but bless them to their faces. That is the true and wise policy of life. Never take off your mask unless you are alone, or with me, Jeremiah. And there, as I was saying, while my daughter was blushing and hanging her head at the honeyed nonsense the gentleman-lawyer was pouring into her ears, were our dear friends the Lethbridges holding back, and doing all they could to break your tender heart. You owe them a good turn, Jeremiah."

"I will pay what I owe," said Jeremiah, fiercely. "They are working against me, and they shall live to rue it. When they play with men like me they play with edged tools. But doesn't all this go to prove that you should summon Miss Phœbe home at once—this very day?"

"No; it only goes to prove that I know how to conduct this matter better than you do. My daughter will return home on Tuesday or Wednesday; and then, Jeremiah, then you can commence your wooing in real earnest."

"You mean it?"

"I mean it. I can't afford to trick and deceive you."

"No," said Jeremiah, unaccountably—for one so shrewd—losing his guard; "I don't think you can." But he was ready the next moment to bite his tongue off for the indiscretion.

"That is right," said Miser Farebrother, with outward composure, "always be frank with me, Jeremiah—with me above all others. When you are conversing with me, drop the mask, as I advised you. It makes me understand the kind of metal I am dealing with, and how I must act to shape it to my will. And it is as well that you should understand, my lad"—and now there was in Miser Farebrother's voice a note of stern determination which caused Jeremiah to wince and to shift uneasily on his chair—"exactly how far it is safe to go with me. My will is law, and shall be while I live. We have made a bargain, you and I, and I shall abide by it as long as it suits me—no longer. You are not yet my son-in-law; you are my servant, and your future welfare depends upon me. Remember it, Jeremiah."

"Why do you speak to me like that?" whined Jeremiah. "If I happened to say something foolish, it was because my feelings were worked up. You helped to work them up, speaking in the way you did about your daughter and that—that beast! What I meant was that I am sure you wouldn't deceive me. I know that I am dependent upon you, and I beg your pardon a thousand times!" He so cringed and fawned that he seemed to become limp, and to grovel in the dust before the miser.

"You see, Jeremiah," said Miser Farebrother, slowly and deliberately, "though I am weak, I am not entirely powerless. My brain was never clearer, my will never stronger, than they are this day. At any moment, my servant as you are, my son-in-law as you hope to be, I could manage to pounce upon you in London, and clear you out of my office. Money will buy service, and I can buy it. Money will buy spies, and I can buy them. Let me have reason to suppose that you are playing me false, and this piece of paper is not more easily torn than you should be ruined! I hold out no threat; I simply warn you. We are not men of sentiment, you and I, Jeremiah, because we know that sentiment doesn't pay; it always ends in a loss. We are practical, hard-headed men, with a shrewd eye to our own interests. I don't blame you for that; I like you for it. We are associated

with each other, you for your interests, I for mine; and that you have, and will have, the best of the bargain is a slice of luck for which you may thank this cursed rheumatism which racks my bones and makes my life a torture. But what I would drive into you is the conviction that I am more necessary to you than you are to me; and that I could more easily do without you than you could do without me. Supposing you were dead"—Jeremiah started—"supposing you were dead," the miser repeated, complacently, "I should still have my business, which I could intrust to other hands, or wind up, as I pleased; my money would still be my own, and I could leave it to my daughter, or, if she offended and thwarted me, to some good charitable institution where my name would be revered, or to some church—I am not particular as to creeds, Jeremiah—where prayers would be offered up for my soul. Rheumatism doesn't necessarily kill a man; it makes his life a hell, but it seldom shortens it. Now I think of it, I can even see advantages in it. It keeps a man in-doors; he can't be run over; he can't slip down on a piece of orange peel; he can't sit in a 'bus next to a person who has a fever or the small-pox. Why, it lengthens life instead of shortens it; the statistics are worth looking up. I am not what you call a reading man—I never was—but I can remember what I have heard, and when I was a young man I heard somebody say, 'Those whom the gods love die young.' Now you are young, Jeremiah, and the gods may love you. So, taking it altogether, the chances of my life against yours are rather in my favour. With respect to our particular business relations, I warn you to be careful; I may not be in such complete ignorance of your doings as you suppose me to be. That is all I have to say."

"It isn't very pleasant," said Jeremiah, thoroughly cowed, "after the years I've worked for you, to have to listen to all this, and just because I happened to let a word slip. What more can I do, except to beg your pardon again?"

"Let it pass, Jeremiah; I forgive you. All I require is obedience."

"I will give it to you, sir, as I have always done."

"And faithfulness. No tampering with me or what belongs to me." He looked up with a sour smile. "This little storm has cleared the air, Jeremiah."

"I hope so, sir. Everything stands as it did?"

"Everything stands, son-in-law that is to be. Be gentle in your wooing."

"I will, sir; I can never be grateful enough to you."

"Never mind gratitude. Be honest, obedient, and faithful. That is all I require of you."

In Jeremiah's heart, as he left Parksides that day, reigned a very cordial hatred toward Miser Farebrother. This feeling was intensified by genuine fear, for the miser's random shot, "I am not in such complete ignorance of your doings as you suppose me to be," had struck home. That he was guilty of acts in the conduct of the business intrusted to him, the discovery of which would place him in the criminal dock, no person, he believed, was aware but himself. But if the miser were to recover his health and strength so completely as to enable him to come to London and undertake the management of his own affairs for a few weeks, there would be scarcely any escape for the dishonest clerk. Account-books had been tampered with, money misappropriated, borrowed for a time, and never replaced; forgery even could be traced to his hand. "What does he know?" thought Jeremiah. "What does he really know—and how much? Or is it mere guess-work, suspecting me and everybody, as I dare say I should do in his place? Yes, it must be that, or he would not have waited so long before he had his fling at me." He began to feel more composed. His mother had informed him before he bade her good-by that it was absolutely impossible for Miser Farebrother to come to London unless he was carried there, and that but for her constant care and attention he could hardly be expected to live. It was a marvel to her, she said, how he had contrived to leave the house on the previous night to fetch his treasure, and to return unassisted. As it was, he had been compelled, much against his will, to call in a doctor, who had said that it required but slight exertion on the miser's part to bring on inflammation of the stomach, in which case, the doctor added, he would be very likely to die.

"He is too fond of his precious life," said Mrs. Pamflett to her son, "and too frightened of death, to run a risk. The doctor has ordered him to keep his room, and not to attempt to stir out of it for a fortnight at least. There is no fear of his pouncing upon you, as he threatened; but, oh, Jeremiah, what makes you in such a pucker at the thought of it?"

To which Jeremiah had replied that he did not care a brass farthing whether the miser came or kept away, but that he did not intend to be taken unawares, and to be interfered with without proper notice. He instructed his mother to write to him twice a day, morning and evening, informing him how the miser was. "And look here, mother," said Jeremiah; "it won't do you or me any harm if you are not quite so careful of him. Keep him prisoner till I am married to Phœbe, and everything will be right. After that he may go to the devil as soon as he likes!"

By the time he reached London, Jeremiah had recovered his composure, and had flattered himself into the belief that there was nothing to fear from the miser's threats. At all events, he would take care of himself. "He warned me to be careful," thought Jeremiah. "Let *him* be careful, or it will be the worse for him!"

Meanwhile Phœbe was enjoying a very heaven upon earth. There comes such a time to many, when life is sweet and beautiful, and all things are fair. Was there ever such a lover as Fred—so manly, so thoughtful, so devoted? Her heart throbbed with profound gratitude to the Giver of all

good for the great happiness which had fallen to her lot.

"And, oh, dear aunt!" she said to Aunt Leth, "I have you to thank for it all."

"You have only yourself to thank," said Aunt Leth; "and Fred is the luckiest man in the world."

But with affectionate persistence Phœbe adhered to her belief that Aunt Leth was the ministering angel who had brought such light into her life.

"If you had not been so good to me, I should never have seen him. To be able to prove my gratitude to you, that is my most earnest wish—and Fred's. He never tires of speaking of you, aunt. I think he loves you almost as much as Bob does."

"It delights me to hear it, my dear child. He is a good man, and there is nothing but happiness before you."

At such a joyful spring-time she would not cast a cloud upon the young girl's heart by giving expression to the fear which filled her own, that Phœbe's father might place an obstacle in the way of the fair future which her union with Fred Cornwall would insure for her; but she never gazed upon Phœbe's sunny face without inward agitation and anxiety. At such a joyful spring-time all that is woeful and sordid in surrounding aspect is touched with tender light; charity, that might have slept, dispenses blessings; the sight of suffering suffices for the exercise of practical sympathy. At such a joyful spring-time a pure maiden walks in paths of fairy colour, and her heart is a holy of holies. Into the prayers breathed by the bedside comes the beloved name, comes infinite worship, come sacred visions, comes gratitude for life and life's blessings. When daylight shines, for him this bit of ribbon at her throat, for him this rose at her breast—slight things, made wondrous and strangely beautiful by the ineffable sweetness of love's young dream! Truly, life's spring-time.

"If you had your dearest wish," said Fred, "what would it be?"

"That this day might last for ever," she whispered; "that we might never change."

"Darling!"

Thus passed the happy holiday, all too quickly. Then came a rude awakening.

"Our last night," said Fred, "for a little while. How shall I live when you are not with me?"

"Think of me," Phœbe murmured.

To-morrow was Wednesday, and it had been arranged that Aunt Leth and Fred were to accompany Phœbe to Parksides, and that Fred should ask Phœbe's father for her hand.

"Perhaps he will let you come back to London with us," said Fred.

She said she hoped so; and then, accompanied by her lover and her aunt, she travelled to Parksides to learn her fate.

CHAPTER XII.

A LITTLE PARTY IN CAPTAIN ABLEWHITE'S ROOMS.

In his vague allusions to a future carriage, and to his becoming, in course of time, as rich as the Rothschilds, Jeremiah Pamflett built, as he supposed, upon a very solid foundation. So have other men—for instance, Mr. Lethbridge; but in the indulgence of his day-dreams Uncle Leth built his castles in the air, and extracted nothing but pure pleasure from them; intangible as they were, they invariably left a sweet taste in the mouth. It is to be doubted whether he really ever seriously inquired into their composition; he simply built them as he walked along, blind and deaf to the sterner realities of life by which he was surrounded, saw them grow under his magic touch, filled them with fair forms, and smiled gratefully and pensively as they faded away. He was, of course, a most unpractical being, otherwise he would occasionally have built a castle of terrors, peopled by unpleasant creatures, upon whose faces reigned frowns instead of smiles. Wise men, becoming acquainted with his imaginings, would have shaken their heads and cast pitying looks upon him; some even would have questioned his sanity; but it is by no means certain whether Uncle Leth was not wiser than they. Life is short, and, granted that a man performs his duties with a fair amount of conscientiousness, the next and altogether the wisest thing is to extract from life as much innocent enjoyment of one's days as opportunity affords. And whether that opportunity be upon the surface, for all men to see and understand, or be delved for in airy depths, or climbed up to in airy heights, is of little matter so that the good end is reached.

From these brief speculations it may be inferred that Jeremiah Pamflett had his day-dreams as well as Uncle Leth, and from our knowledge of their characters it may be judged that between the day-dreams of the one and the other there was a wide gulf. Uncle Leth's day-dreams brought happiness to all, and his best sense of enjoyment was derived from the blessings he shed around him. Jeremiah's day-dreams brought happiness to one—himself; and his best sense of enjoyment was derived from the wretchedness and misery the result he aimed at and the road he was

treading could not fail to produce.

That is, supposing him to be successful; but it has happened that in digging pits for others, men have fallen into their own graves. Whether this was to be the case with Jeremiah Pamflett remained to be proved. He was altogether so sharp a fellow, so extraordinarily astute, such a "dab at figures," as he had declared, so completely "up" to every move on the board, so thoroughly conversant with the game of spiders and flies, that men of the world would have backed him to come out triumphant from any scheme upon which, after mature consideration, he had resolved to put a great stake. Consideration the most mature, study the most profound, calculations the most careful and precise, had led Jeremiah to the conclusion that he had discovered a means of making a great and rapid fortune. Those who are about to be let into the secret, and who have not had favourable opportunities of studying human nature from a sufficiently comprehensive panorama, will perhaps be surprised at the vulgarity of Jeremiah's discovery; and more surprised, may be, because it is neither novel nor original.

To lead intelligently up to the disclosure, it may be mentioned that some short time before Jeremiah Pamflett had conceived the ambitious idea of becoming Miser Farebrother's son-in-law, a business transaction introduced him to scenes altogether new to him. Of course it was a money-lending transaction, and the debtor, to whom in the first instance he had lent thirty pounds out of his own pocket, was a certain Captain Ablewhite. It may not have been his rightful name, but into this we will not too curiously inquire, nor into his antecedents; and yet he was undoubtedly well connected. He knew and mixed with a great number of "swells," and his name might occasionally be seen in some of the "society" papers; he dressed in most perfect taste, and was seldom seen without an expensive exotic in his button-hole; you would judge him from outward observance to be a man of good-breeding; he had had a sufficient education; his manners were easy, confident, smiling; he seemed to know everything and everybody—all of which did not prevent him from being chronically hard up. It may not have troubled him much, he was so accustomed to it; and although he met with many obstacles in his career of continual borrowing and seldom paying, there was never seen upon his face any but the pleasantest of smiling expressions. He was a good-looking man, with a handsome moustache and blue eyes, and he carried himself like a soldier; hence, maybe, his "captainship," though how captain, or captain of what, was never inquired into. Misery, it is said, makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows; so does such a career as Captain Ablewhite's. It was a career the successful steering of which required peculiar ingenuity, and the waters upon which it floated were not of the sweetest. One day Captain Ablewhite presented himself with his smiling face and his choice exotic at the office over which Jeremiah Pamflett presided. He came with the intention of borrowing a large sum of money, some three or four hundred pounds, upon a bill backed by half a dozen names. Miser Farebrother did not do an advertising business; you did not read in the papers that he was prepared to advance, immediately upon application, any amount of money, from ten pounds to ten thousand, without security, to noblemen and gentlemen; his connection was a private one, and new clients presented themselves at the office of their own accord, or through private recommendation. However it came about, there was Captain Ablewhite, ready and willing to confer an obligation upon Jeremiah Pamflett—believing him to be the principal, and Farebrother an assumed name, as is generally the case with money-lenders, either from being ashamed of their own, or from a wish to do their dirty work in the dark. Jeremiah, who was launching out for himself, and who, by fraudulently trading on his own account with his master's funds, was already making money, never contradicted a client upon this point when he scented some personal advantage; and he scented it in Captain Ablewhite. Here was an opportunity of worming himself into the society of swells, where pigeons most do congregate, and it was not to be thrown away. Jeremiah played with Captain Ablewhite, who was the soul of candour; he was a new kind of client for Jeremiah's study and observation, and the cunning young money-thirster saw a grand prospect of the future, through Captain Ablewhite's introduction, dotted by sons of peers and suckling young fools sowing their oats.

Now, out of this encounter, which came the victor, the man who desired to borrow the money, or the man who had to lend?

Nothing was done on the first day, but on the second Jeremiah was the possessor of a three-months' bill, well backed, for fifty pounds, and Captain Ablewhite walked out of the office with seven five-pound notes in his pocket. Instead of landing a large fish, Captain Ablewhite had landed a very small one, but there was a satisfied smile on his face as he strolled away. It was not bad interest—fifty pounds for thirty-five, at three months; but Captain Ablewhite was content, even though upon Jeremiah Pamflett's table lay six of the gallant Captain's finest Havanas, which Jeremiah wrapped carefully in paper and put into a drawer.

This was the commencement of the business transactions of Jeremiah Pamflett and Captain Ablewhite, a recountal of the details of which is not necessary. Say, for general purposes, that their course was the usual course, and all is said that need be said. What it is important to mention is that one evening Jeremiah Pamflett found himself at the door of Captain Ablewhite's chambers in Piccadilly.

Strictly speaking, it was night, the hour being eleven. Captain Ablewhite had been giving a little dinner to a few friends, and when Jeremiah's name was announced the men were beginning to play. There were two card-tables, five playing poker at one, six playing baccarat at another. Captain Ablewhite was at the baccarat table.

Jeremiah's visit was the result of a bargain. There had been a bill to be renewed, and Jeremiah

had indirectly bid for the invitation.

"All right," said Captain Ablewhite; "come at eleven or twelve. Evening dress you know."

He received his visitor with a smiling "How d'ye do?" and waved a general introduction by saying "Mr. Pamflett," his guests having been previously informed that "a fellow might drop in who finances for me." This was received with a laugh and some slight show of interest, "fellows who finance" for fellows who require it being very necessary joints in the society machine upon which Captain Ablewhite and most of his chums rode.

"He's a cub," said Captain Ablewhite; "but that's neither here nor there."

"The main point is," observed a middle-aged punter, "that he'll do a bill."

"Yes, that's it," said Captain Ablewhite.

Therefore Jeremiah Pamflett was not unexpected. The party, however, were too interested in their game to take much notice of him. "Make yourself at home," said Captain Ablewhite, pointing to a corner of the room, where there was a buffet, with drinks and cigars. All the men were smoking, and Jeremiah with an assumption of ease by no means successful, helped himself. He knew the quality of Captain Ablewhite's cigars, and appreciated them. That he put a handful in his pocket on the sly was, as Captain Ablewhite had said, "neither here nor there."

With his cigar in his mouth, Jeremiah stood at the tables and looked on. The game of "poker" he did not understand, but his eyes glittered as he saw the free flowing of notes and gold, and the easy way in which money was lost and won. By close peering and study he soon mastered the rudiments of the game, and followed the play. It was a ten-pound limit, the minimum "ante" half a sovereign. At first he was confused at the "bluffing" which took place, but what he learned convinced him that money was to be won by cool heads, and his heart beat more quickly than usual when he saw a player with nothing in his hand take a large pool. He stood for some time at the baccarat table, and watched the game there. It was much more easily mastered than poker, and in a very few moments he understood it fairly well.

"You don't play?" said Captain Ablewhite to him, who held the bank at that moment.

"No," said Jeremiah; "not to-night."

At each table there was a player who profited by the indifferent play of his comrades, and who, according to Jeremiah's just calculation, was bound to rise a winner. "It is easy enough," said Jeremiah mentally; "only what they win they don't keep. *I* would!" A new world seemed to be opening out to this young man—a new world filled with fools emptying their purses into his. Why not? He did not disturb or interfere with the players, and although one superstitious man fidgeted about uneasily when Jeremiah stood at his back looking over his cards, Jeremiah's conduct was sufficiently unobtrusive and quiet not to excite displeasure.

At about two o'clock there was a kind of informal supper, of which Jeremiah freely partook, amazed at the profusion of good things handed about by the waiters. The liberality was a revelation to him, but he was discreet enough to betray no outward surprise. He was taking a lesson which he meant to profit by. Most men would have drunk too much, and most of the men in Captain Ablewhite's rooms did, but not Jeremiah Pamflett; still the two or three glasses of champagne he drank (the glasses being goblets) had a slight effect upon him. He maintained his equilibrium, however, physically and mentally. The fortunes of the night had pretty well declared themselves: three men had lost each some hundreds of pounds, and were desperately striving to get it back by plunging; others had lost in a lesser degree; the only winners were Captain Ablewhite and the two cool-headed players, one at each table, who continued playing their steady game. Jeremiah thought he would try his luck, and he took a sovereign from his pocket, and followed in the wake of the cool-headed gamester at the baccarat table. He won, and staked it again, and won. No one took any notice of his winnings, which were pushed across to him quite carelessly. At half-past four in the morning Jeremiah walked out of Captain Ablewhite's rooms with forty odd sovereigns winning money in his pocket. He walked along in a high state of elation, with his hand in his trousers pocket, clutching the gold and counting it. Forty-one, forty-two, forty-three, forty-four. Yes; forty-four sovereigns. And so easily won!

He felt quite fresh, although it was his habit to be in bed before midnight. He reviewed the scene at which he had been present, recalled different hands of cards he had seen dealt out, and the course of the play, and calculated how much he might have won had he done this or that. That he would have done the right thing always he was sure; and it is likely he was correct, because it was a simple matter of calculation of odds and chances. One of the cool-headed players had won six hundred pounds; the other, four hundred. "I might have done the same," thought Jeremiah.

Captain Ablewhite had said something to him before he left.

"I wonder you don't play a bit. With your head for figures you would win a fortune."

That was it—with his head for figures. "I could snuff them all out," he thought.

Captain Ablewhite had also said, "Drop in to-morrow at two or three."

In compliance with this invitation, Jeremiah walked up the stairs of the house in Piccadilly at half-past two o'clock on the following day. In this—the being master of his time, left entirely to himself to do as he pleased—lay the great value of his situation with Miser Farebrother. He was his own

master. With the miser eternally at the office looking over him, niggling and naggling at this and that, Jeremiah would have had but scant opportunities for attending to Number One.

At the door of the outer of Captain Ablewhite's rooms stood a man-servant, who asked Jeremiah's name.

"Mr. Pamflett," said Jeremiah. "Captain Ablewhite expects me."

"If you will wait here a moment," said the man, "I will tell Captain Ablewhite."

He returned very quickly, and Captain Ablewhite with him.

"Ah, Mr. Pamflett," said the Captain. "Just one word." He drew Jeremiah aside: "What you see inside is private."

"Not to be spoken of?" said Jeremiah rather mystified.

"Not to a soul," said Captain Ablewhite. "Is that settled?"

"Yes."

"Come along, then."

The rooms had undergone a transformation. There was an air of serious business about them and the twenty or thirty men assembled there. Every one of the men had a little book, which he consulted, and in which he was making calculations. At two tables sat two clerks with account-books. There was a "tape" in the room, and a man standing by it, reading the messages aloud.

"False start," this man said aloud as Jeremiah Pamflett entered.

"Go and help yourself," said Captain Ablewhite, pointing to the buffet, which was in its accustomed corner, crowded with bottles, glasses, cigars and sandwiches.

CHAPTER XIII.

JEREMIAH DISCOVERS A "SYSTEM" BY WHICH HE MUST MAKE A LARGE FORTUNE.

Just before the man called out "False start," there had been a momentary lull in the room, the principal bets having been made and booked, but when the two words were spoken a buzz of eager inquiries commenced. "How much Silver Rose?" "Northampton for a pony—what price?" "I'll take twelves and threes Peter Simple, a tenner each way." "I want to back an outsider for a fiver." To most of these propositions rapid answers were returned by a man who seemed to have the direction of affairs. He was a man with a face like a ribstone pippin and clear grey eyes. A great number of the propositions led to business and booking on both sides. Then came the sound of the tape, and another hush, everybody craning forward to hear the message. "They're off!" said the man at the tape. At this the betting practically ceased, and all in the room waited in expectancy, with more or less eagerness. The distinguishing mark of the company was that nearly every man in it was a swell, half of them, at least, having titles to their names. Presently the little bell, the tinkling of which preceded the ticking of each fresh message, rang, and the tape recommenced its labours. "Result," called the man: "Prickly Pear first, Silver Rose second, Peter Simple third." A hubbub ensued. "I told you to back the favourite; it was a dead certainty; at least a stone in hand." "I've cleared a century." "I lose a hundred and forty. Cursed luck!" And so on, and so on. In a few instances money changed hands, and Jeremiah saw the passing of new Bank of England notes. He was joined by Captain Ablewhite.

"Do you understand it?" asked the Captain.

"A betting club" said Jeremiah.

"Not at all," said the smiling Captain. "A little party of friends amusing themselves privately, just to pass the time. Do you see that tall gentleman with the gray moustache? That's Major Rex-Schon. He backed the favourite for a monkey at even money."

"Who lost it?" inquired Jeremiah.

"The book-maker," said Captain Ablewhite, laughing. "A bad race for him. So was the first one. Both the favourites have won. He'll get his money back, with interest, before the day's out. You won a few sovs. last night; put three or four on Praxis for the next race; a sure thing. The starters are being called out."

The man at the tape gave the names of the horses as they went up on the board a hundred miles away. There were eleven, Praxis being among them.

"Butterfly's favourite," said Captain Ablewhite, "and won't win."

The betting on the third race began. How much this?—how much that?—how much t'other? What's Butterfly's price? Evens. Done for a hundred. I'll take an even fifty. A pony for me. Five to

two, Anonyma. Eights, Geranium. Eight ponies? All right. Praxis, twenties.

Not one backed the horse recommended by Captain Ablewhite. Jeremiah screwed up his courage.

"Can I bet a sovereign?" he whispered to the Captain.

"Certainly. Take my advice; make it five."

"No. Two."

"Very well. Forty to two."

He made the bet with the book-maker for Jeremiah, and took four hundred to twenty for himself.

"I've made yours ready money," he said. "You can give me two sovs. now, or when the race is over, if Praxis loses."

Jeremiah nodded; he was too much excited to speak; it was his first bet on a race, and his heart went thump, thump, and he could scarcely distinguish what was being said. "Horses at the post. False start. Butterfly bolted." Thus proclaimed the man at the tape.

"I told you so," said Captain Ablewhite to Jeremiah. "Cost three thou. as a yearling; not worth his keep."

The man at the tape spoke again.

"Butterfly pulled up, and at the post again. Another false start. Another. They're off!"

Jeremiah did not know whether he was glad or sorry that he had risked two sovereigns. He was animated by new sensations; the spirit of gambling was awakened within him.

Then came the result, and Jeremiah could scarcely refrain from shouting when he heard the name of the winner—Praxis.

"Here's your money," said Captain Ablewhite, after "All right!" was called out by the man at the tape. He handed Jeremiah four ten-pound notes. "Easy, isn't it? Done the trick this time. Major Rex-Schon backed it; he has a system, and has won eight thousand this year if he's won a penny."

"A system?" said Jeremiah, handling the forty pounds with delight.

"Yes. See which horse he backs in the next race, and follow him. Reckon you've won thirty pounds, and back the Major's fancy for a tenner."

Jeremiah, after some hesitation, decided to take the advice, and backed the Major's fancy for ten pounds at six to one. Again he was fortunate, and he won sixty pounds. His head throbbed with the possibilities of the future. Major Rex-Schon, satisfied with his winnings, took his departure, and Jeremiah bet no more on that occasion.

"What are you going to do to-night?" asked Captain Ablewhite.

"Nothing," replied Jeremiah.

"Come and have a bit of dinner with me," said the Captain.

To enjoy anything at another man's expense was an opportunity which Jeremiah never neglected, and he and Captain Ablewhite had their bit of dinner at a French restaurant. The Captain was a man of expensive tastes, and the dinner was the best meal which Jeremiah had ever sat down to. The wines were hock, champagne, and claret, and Jeremiah took his share; he was entering upon a new world. When the dinner was over, and they were finishing the claret and smoking the Captain's best cigars, Jeremiah's host gave his views of betting on horse-racing.

"The great thing," he said, "is a head for figures. Most men lose; the clever ones win great fortunes. Major Rex-Schon, when he began to bet, was a ruined man. He has been at it three years, and is worth fifty thousand—every penny of it. What he can do, others can do. For my part, I don't mind confessing it, I haven't a level head, and I lose when I ought to win. I make up my mind beforehand, and I don't keep to it; I get led away. If I had been wise, being in the swim as I am, I ought to be a millionaire; but it's not too late. There are better chances now than ever. Yes, I ought to have been a millionaire, and I should have been if I had had a man like you at my back. It's a great thing, you know, being in the swim, in a position to get at the stable secrets. Why, there was only yesterday now: the owner of Robert Macaire dropped me a hint to bet against his horse for the Liverpool Cup. Instead of taking his advice I, like a fool, mentioned it to Major Rex-Schon. What does he do? An hour afterwards he bets seven thousand to one against Robert Macaire, and to-day at one o'clock the horse is scratched. Result, the level-headed Major is a clear thousand in pocket, which should have been in mine. Waiter, bring me the *Daily Telegraph* and the special *Standard*. Now, look here at the *Telegraph* this morning. Ah, here it is. 'Liverpool Cup, 7000 to 1000 against Robert Macaire.' That was the Major's bet, made last night. Here's the special *Standard*. 'Scratchings: Robert Macaire out of the Liverpool Cup, at 1.10 P.M.' I don't cry, 'What infernal luck!' I know that I lost a thousand pounds by my own folly—that's the long and the short of it. I'll tell you what the best of this kind of speculation is. You get your money; no owings. Ready money down, if you like; that's what would suit you?"

"Yes," said Jeremiah, sucking in every word, and yet believing that it was he who was pumping Captain Ablewhite, and not Captain Ablewhite who was pumping him; "that is the best plan."

"Of course it is. You got your money to-day, didn't you? And how long did it take? Forty pounds in ten minutes on Praxis. You ought to have done as I told you, and made a hundred."

"I ought," groaned Jeremiah, feeling as if somebody had cheated him out of sixty pounds.

"I don't blame you entirely; you are not used to this sort of thing, and you were cautious. But I'll be bound you never made forty pounds first and sixty pounds afterward so quickly. That's the beauty of the thing."

"Do you know," inquired Jeremiah, "what the Major's system is?"

"Catch the Major telling anybody!" said Captain Ablewhite. "No, sir; he keeps it to himself—as you would do if you had a sure thing, as I would do, as anybody would do. If he finds any one watching him he puts him off the scent, or drops betting. Know his system! I would give ten thousand pounds to know it. But what matters? There are more systems than one, and if there's a man in the country who can discover them, you are the man. A long head like yours—such a calculator as you! There's backing first favourites; there's backing second favourites; there's backing them both together; there's backing outsiders; there's backing short odds and long odds; there's backing jockeys. If one thing won't do alone, there are combinations. Why, there never was such a field and such opportunities for a head like yours! With what I can learn from the stables, and what you could discover, such an absolute certainty never presented itself. Everything hasn't been discovered yet. There are a thousand fortunes in figures and calculations which some fellows will make. Why not you, for one, and me, for another? I won't make a pretence of disguising from you that I want a little bit of it. That's natural enough, and you won't make a pretence of denying it. Fair play's a jewel. Then there's the people I can introduce you to—young men who come into great estates and get into messes. There's another field for you. Keep it all to yourself; but give me a commission. I don't ask for more than that. The puddings shall be yours; give me a little plum now and then. Then there's such games as you saw going on last night in my rooms. There are kites and pigeons, and *we* know it. Why, some of the fellows know about as much of baccarat and poker as a blue-bottle—and they *will* play when they get a chance! Always have done, and always will. But the great thing is racing. It's waiting for you and made for you every day for nine months in the year. Wants a little pluck now and then; but the result is a moral. Your slow, timid, cautious ones, what do they make? A hundred a year instead of a hundred thousand."

In this way Captain Ablewhite talked, and Jeremiah listened and took it all in. A golden field lay before him, a veritable Tom Tiddler's ground. What a fool he would be to turn his back upon it! Such a chance would never present itself again.

Behold him, then, a few weeks after this conversation, secretly hand and glove with Captain Ablewhite, going occasionally to the Captain's rooms and picking up a few sovereigns; going occasionally to a race-course and coming home a pound or two the richer, and night after night covering pages upon pages with figures and calculations from racing-books. He was very cautious in these gambling transactions, and he suffered tortures upon nearly every occasion when he sat down in Miser Farebrother's office, which he regarded as his own, and reckoned up what he might have won had he been able to screw his courage to the sticking-point. "Had I done this or that," he thought, "had I had pluck, I should have been so much in pocket. The Captain told me I should require pluck now and then, and that the result would be a certainty—and it would have been." At the end of some three months, during which he was feeling his way, he calculated that a little courage would have made him the richer at least by a couple of thousand pounds—for, as is the case with every person who calculates after the event—he had no doubt that he would have backed such or such a horse or such and such a jockey, or have adopted such or such a combination, the issue of which would have been to put him on the straight, or the crooked, road to fortune. At length he was convinced that he had discovered a certain system of winning. What that system was it would be imprudent to explain here, for the reason that it might lead misguided persons to ruin. Sufficient that Jeremiah was convinced that it was impossible of failure, and that he had very nearly nerved himself to plunge boldly into it.

Meanwhile the fever and the infatuation of betting and gambling had taken such complete possession of him that he thought of little else, except the safety which lay in his marriage with Phœbe. "For," as he argued with himself, "supposing that by some extraordinary combination of circumstances luck should go against me, I should still be all right if I were the master of Miser Farebrother's business, and if his money were mine." As for anything in shape of sentiment, that was entirely outside his domain; his nature was not capable of it. He thought only of himself, and worked and schemed only for himself.

Meanwhile, also, the course of events was—so far as Jeremiah Pamflett was mixed up in his affairs—fairly satisfactory to Captain Ablewhite. Instead of being dunned for the money he owed Jeremiah—which by Jeremiah's cunning methods of compound interest, was beginning to swell into an important amount—he borrowed more of him; small sums at a time, certainly, but, as Captain Ablewhite said to himself, "Little fish are sweet." As Jeremiah had him in his power, so also the smiling Captain had managed to obtain a hold upon the man from whom, in ordinary circumstances, he knew he would get no mercy. Of a different quality of cunning from Jeremiah's was the standard of Captain Ablewhite's intellect, but, properly handled, it was scarcely less powerful. All his life had Captain Ablewhite lived upon his wits, eating and drinking of the best, a member of good clubs, living in fashionable quarters, owing money right and left, and yet managing somehow to keep out of water too hot for him. He entertained a very thorough and sincere contempt for Jeremiah, laughed in his sleeve at his meanness, fooled him on and on,

allowed him to win a little at his card-parties, introduced him to men as impecunious and unscrupulous as himself, who borrowed money of Jeremiah, and would have pulled his nose upon the smallest provocation. But Jeremiah was always humble, cringing, and subservient, biding his time for the grand coup which would make him as good as the best among them. And so the game went on, its minutest detail assisting to bring to a terrible climax the tragedy in which Phœbe's life was presently to be engulfed. This brings us to the day upon which our heroine, accompanied by Fred Cornwall and dear Aunt Leth, journeyed to Parksides to ask her father's consent to her engagement with the young lawyer.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DAUGHTER'S DUTIES.

Upon that day Jeremiah Pamflett, arrayed in a brand-new suit of clothes, with a flower in his button-hole (copying Captain Ablewhite as the pink of fashion), and carrying a bouquet of flowers for the girl whom he was now to commence wooing openly, had the satisfaction, while sitting in the railway carriage which was to convey him to Parksides, of seeing her and her friends hurry on to the platform just as the signal was given for the departure of the train. They had had the misfortune to get into a growler, the driver of which, in addition to crawling to the railway station at the rate of three miles an hour, stopped on the road to exchange the reverse of urbanities with a rival cabby who had excited his ire. Fred's urgent requests to the driver to get along quickly, so that they might catch the train, were received with supreme indifference; he was an old hand, and insisted upon having his little joke, the consequence of which was that they arrived too late, and had to wait three-quarters of an hour for the next train. It was no serious trouble to Fred. A house, a railway station, a barn, England, Timbuctoo—they were all the same to him so long as Phœbe was with him.

Jeremiah rushed to his mother with the news.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"Don't trouble yourself," said Mrs. Pamflett. "Perhaps it is all for the best."

"You talk like a fool," snarled Jeremiah, who was never happier than when he had some one to bully. "How can it be all for the best?"

"It will bring matters to a head, Jeremiah. It is much better for our enemies to work in the light than in the dark. You have nothing to fear. Miser Farebrother and I had a conversation to-day about you. He told me that everything was settled, and that you and Phœbe were to be married. He is very ill and frightened. The doctor told him if he wasn't very careful he would die. He has been moaning and groaning ever since. 'You mustn't think,' the doctor said to him, 'of stirring out of the house.'"

"Ah!" said Jeremiah, with a sigh of relief, "that is good. Anything more? And was there any special reason for the doctor giving him that caution?"

"It came," said Mrs. Pamflett, "through his expressing a wish to go to London."

"What for?" said Jeremiah, his face growing very white.

"I can't tell you," replied Mrs. Pamflett; "except it was to look after the business."

"To pry into what I am doing! Let him be careful, or it will be the worse for him!"

"Jeremiah!"

"Don't 'Jeremiah' me! I won't stand it! What do I care for that—that image? Do you think I will have him come spying into my affairs? Let him look to himself—that's all I've got to say."

"At any rate," said Mrs. Pamflett, whose face had grown as white as her son's, "he can't leave Parksides."

"You take care that he doesn't—that's what you've got to see to. If he gets any better, make it impossible for him to leave."

"Jere—!" But a warning look from her son prevented her from getting farther with his name. Then she wrung her hands, and cried, "Oh! what are you doing—what are you doing?"

From fever-heat he went down to zero. "What do you think I am doing?"

"I don't know what to think, Jeremiah. You frighten me!"

He did not speak for a moment or two, and in her agony of impatience she cried, "Why don't you answer me?"

"I am puzzling my head to find out," he said, frigidly, "why I have frightened you." He suddenly changed his tone, and spoke with warmth. "Just you mind what I say, mother. What I choose to tell you, I'll tell you; what I choose to keep to myself, I'll keep to myself. I'm on the road to a great

fortune—a glorious fortune; and I'm not going to miss it. I've made a discovery, and if I'm idiot enough to blurt it out, everything will be spoiled. Besides, you wouldn't understand it. Can't you be satisfied? I'm working for you as well as for myself. Do you want to go on slaving here all your life, instead of being mistress of a fine house of your own, with servants and horses and carriages, and the best people in the country bowing down to you? Take your choice. But mind, if anything's got to be done to bring this all about—I don't care whether it is you or I who's got to do it—done it must be. If I'm lucky, you shall share my luck. If I'm unlucky—Well, now, what have you got to say to that?"

"Jeremiah," she answered, and he did not reprove her, because he was too intent upon her response, "there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. What should I be but for you? What would the world be to me but for you? If you were in danger, and I could save you by—"

He put his fingers upon her lips, and looked fearsomely around.

"That will do," he said.

Then he kissed her, and she threw her arms passionately around his neck, and pressed him close to her breast.

Half an hour afterward she went up to Miser Farebrother's room.

"Are you any better? Do you feel any stronger?"

"No. Why do you ask? Why do you intrude when you're not wanted?"

"Your daughter has come home."

"What of that?"

"Her aunt is with her."

"Send her away. I will not see her. Tell her I am too ill to see anybody."

"Mr. Cornwall is with her."

His fretfulness vanished; he became calm and cool and collected.

"Mr. Cornwall the lawyer?"

"Yes."

"Has he asked to see me?"

"He has come for that purpose."

"And Phœbe's aunt too?"

"Yes."

"Did you tell them I am ill?"

"Yes."

"And they insist upon seeing me?"

"Yes." It was not the truth, but she did not hesitate. She had said nothing to Mrs. Lethbridge and Fred Cornwall about Miser Farebrother's illness.

He considered awhile before he spoke again.

"Your son knew that my daughter was coming home to-day?"

"Yes, he did; and he is here to see her, as you wished. He obeys your lightest word."

"Send him to me; and five minutes afterward show my daughter and her fine friends into the room."

Jeremiah entered with his usual obsequiousness and deference. It afforded him inward satisfaction to note how ill the miser looked, but he did not allow the expression of this feeling to appear on his face. On the contrary, he said, "I am glad to see you looking so much better, sir."

"Am I really looking better, Jeremiah?" asked Miser Farebrother, eager to seize the slenderest hope. "Really better?"

"Indeed you are, sir. Be careful, and in a short time you'll be quite your old self again."

"Never that; never that, I'm afraid," groaned Miser Farebrother. "It has gone too far—too far!"

"Not at all, sir," said Jeremiah, with lugubrious cheerfulness. "You are frightening yourself unnecessarily. We all do when the least thing ails us. If my little finger aches, I think I am going to die."

"It is hard, it is wicked, that a man should have to die. I have read of an elixir a few drops of which would make an old man young. If I only knew where it was to be obtained—where it was to be bought!"

"I wish I knew where, sir," said Jeremiah. "I would get you a bottle."

"And one for yourself, eh, Jeremiah?"

"Yes, sir! I shouldn't object. The idea of death isn't pleasant."

"Then don't let us think of it," said the miser, with a doleful shake of his head; and then, more briskly, "at all events, while I live I will do what I have set my mind to. I may live fifty years yet. There's old Parr: why shouldn't I be such another? Those people down-stairs, who are waiting and longing for me to go—it would drive them to frenzy if they thought there was any chance of my out-living them."

"Miss Phœbe's friends, sir?"

"Yes, my daughter's friends. I have sent for them here. Did you bring those flowers for her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Put them on the table. Take your seat there. Open the books, and seem as if you are doing the accounts. And speak no word till I give you the cue."

Mrs. Pamflett, delaying longer than she was instructed to do, had allowed ample time for this conversation to take place. Ten or twelve minutes elapsed before she conducted Phœbe and her friends to Miser Farebrother's room. They were somewhat discomposed to discover Jeremiah Pamflett at the table; he took no notice of them, however, but with his head bent down, pretended to be very busy with his accounts.

Undoubtedly there was a great change in Miser Farebrother's appearance. Traces of sickness and suffering were plainly visible in his cadaverous face; and Phœbe, whose heart was beating with love and hope and fear, glided to his side and put her lips to his.

"Good child, good child!" he said, passing his arm round her, and holding her tight to him. "My only child, the only tie that binds me to life!"

"Dear father!" exclaimed Phœbe, softly, embracing him again. His voice was so kind and so charged with pain that the fear which had troubled her that he might not approve of Fred vanished, and loving sympathy took its place.

"You will not leave me, Phœbe?"

"No, father."

"I have missed you sadly, my child! You see how ill I am. I need your care and help—you can do so much for me. My own child! All others are strangers."

"I will do what lies in my power, father."

"You put new life into me. Don't stir from my side. Your arm round my neck like this; it strengthens me, gives me courage, infuses vigour into my weak frame." Had she wished to move away from him she could not have done so, he held her so tight. All this time he had taken no notice of Aunt Leth or Fred Cornwall; he had purposely prolonged the little scene out of pure maliciousness toward them. But now he looked up and fixed his eye upon them.

"Sister-in-law, it is kind and unselfish of you to bring my daughter back to me. Had you known I was ill you would have brought her home earlier."

"Certainly I should," said Aunt Leth, gently.

"Suffering as I am, sister-in-law, this is my daughter's proper place."

"Yes."

But her heart sank as she spoke the word.

"You are the happy mother of children," continued Miser Farebrother, "and should be able to set me right—if by chance I should happen to be wrong—in the views I have formed of certain matters. I rely upon your judgment. What is a daughter's first duty to her parents?"

"Love."

"Good! Thus love becomes a duty—a duty to be performed even though it clash with other feelings. You hear, Phœbe. You are ready to perform a daughter's duty?"

"I love you, father," said Phœbe; but her voice was troubled; a vague fear oppressed her once more—a fear she could not define or explain.

"Dear child! I have no doubt of that. Your sainted mother lives again in you. Sister-in-law, there is another duty which a daughter owes to her parents."

"There are many others," responded Aunt Leth.

"But one especially, which I will name, in case it may not occur to you. Obedience."

"Yes," said Aunt Leth, faintly; "obedience."

"These duties, which are your due from your children, are not neglected by them?"

"No, they are not."

"What a happy home must yours be!" exclaimed Miser Farebrother, with enthusiasm. "And how glad I am to think that my child has learned from you the lessons which you have taught your own bright children. You hear what your aunt says, Phœbe? Love and obedience are a child's first duties to her parents. Your sainted mother, from celestial spheres"—there was a subtle mockery in his voice and eyes as he raised the latter to the ceiling—"looks down and approves. And now, sir," he said, turning to Fred Cornwall, "to what am I indebted for the favour of a visit from you? It is the second time you have paid me the unsolicited honour."

"I wish to have a few minutes' private conversation with you, sir," said Fred. Hope was slipping from him, but he was prepared to play a manly part.

"I cannot give you a private interview," said Miser Farebrother. "If you have anything to say to me, you can say it now and here. I'll wager you will not be in want of words."

"Father!" whispered Phœbe, entreatingly, but he purposely ignored her.

Fred Cornwall pointed to Jeremiah Pamflett. "As it is your wish, sir, I will say what I have to say before your daughter and her aunt. Perhaps you will ask this gentleman to retire."

"Perhaps I will do nothing of the kind. This young gentleman, Mr. Jeremiah Pamflett, is an old and trusted friend; you are neither one nor the other. Proceed to your business at once, or leave me."

"Let me beg of you—" said Aunt Leth.

He interrupted her with a touch of his caustic humour. "Do not beg of me, sister-in-law; it will be useless; I have nothing to give. Do you intend to speak, sir? You perceive I am not in a fit state to be harassed."

"You leave me no choice, sir. I love your daughter, and she—"

"Stop!" cried Miser Farebrother. "My daughter will speak for herself when she and I are alone. I will not allow you to refer to her."

"But it is necessary, sir," said Fred, respectfully and firmly, "because I am here with her permission."

"Necessary or not, according to your thinking—which is not mine—I will not allow you to refer to her. My house is my own, and I am master in it; let me remind you of that."

"I will do as you wish, sir," said Fred, not daring to look at Phœbe, whose head, bowed upon her breast, was an indication of the agony she was suffering. "I love your daughter, and I come to ask you for her hand. I will do all that a man—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the miser, testily, "we know all that: the old formula. Is that all you have come here for?"

"Is not that enough, sir?"

"Too much. My daughter has other views—I also. I forbid you to speak, Phœbe. Remember the oath you swore upon your dead mother's Bible! Mr. Cornwall, I refuse what you ask. With my permission you will never marry my daughter. Without it, she well knows such an event is impossible, unless she commits perjury. You have not a deep acquaintance with me, sir; but the knowledge of human nature you must have gained as a lawyer will convince you that nothing can turn me from a resolution I have formed, more especially from a resolution in which vital interests are involved—*my* vital interests! My daughter's hand is promised to my manager, Mr. Jeremiah Pamflett."

"Oh, Phœbe!" cried Aunt Leth, with quivering lips and overbrimming eyes. "My poor, poor Phœbe!"

"Spare your heroics," said Miser Farebrother; "we know the value of them. My daughter will give me what she owes me—love and obedience." He rang the bell, and Mrs. Pamflett instantly appeared. "Show these people the door," he said to her; "and if they venture to present themselves here again, send for a policeman and have them locked up. Jeremiah, give my daughter your love-offering."

With a face of triumph Jeremiah started from his chair, and advanced toward Phœbe, holding the flowers for her acceptance.

"Look up, Phœbe," said Miser Farebrother, sternly.

She raised her head, and with a blind look of anguish at her aunt and Fred, stretched forth her trembling arms, as though imploring them to save her. Then her strength gave way, and she fell senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XV.

PHŒBE IS STILL FURTHER ENTRAPPED.

When Phœbe recovered her senses she found herself in her bedroom, with Mrs. Pamflett in attendance upon her. She was so dazed and confused that for a few minutes she could not recall what had transpired, but presently she remembered, and she burst into tears.

"There! there!" said Mrs. Pamflett, smoothing the young girl's hair with her hand. "Don't take on so! Everything will come right, and you will soon be as happy as a bird."

Surprised at Mrs. Pamflett's tender tone and gentle manner, Phœbe dried her eyes and gazed upon her father's house-keeper.

"Then they are still here?" said Phœbe.

"Who, my pet?" asked Mrs. Pamflett.

"My aunt and—and Mr. Cornwall."

"No," replied Mrs. Pamflett, still speaking with tenderness: "they have gone; and it is to be hoped that they will never come back."

"'Gone'!" exclaimed Phœbe. "'They will never come back'!"

"If they do," said Mrs. Pamflett, hovering officiously about Phœbe, "it will be worse for them. They have been found out at last. You have had a narrow escape. While you were lying in a fainting condition on the ground your father unmasked them, and compelled them to confess that all their pretended kindness to you was done to wring money out of him, only because they thought he was rich. He *is* rich, my pet, and can make a lady of you; and so can Jeremiah, who is dying of love for you, and who is the cleverest man and the finest gentleman in England. We shall all be as happy as the day is long, and you will bring comfort to your father, who is suffering a martyrdom, and who has the first claim on your heart. Yes, my pet, you have had a narrow escape —a narrow escape! I shall give thanks for it before I go to bed to-night."

Phœbe fixed her clear, honest eyes upon the white face of Mrs. Pamflett, who made an impotent attempt to return the gaze with equal frankness.

"I remember everything now," said Phœbe, in a tone of forced calmness. "My father turned my dear friends out of the house!"

"He did turn them away. But to call them your dear friends after what they said! Phœbe, Phœbe, you are too simple and confiding. You should be angry; you should cast them off, as your father has done."

"'After what they said'! What did they say? I heard not a word which they should not have spoken."

"That was their artfulness and wickedness. They have been playing upon you all through. It was while you were unconscious and could not hear what was spoken that your false aunt, Mrs. Lethbridge—"

"Stop!" cried Phœbe; "I will not hear her called so. If you wish to tell me anything that passed after I fainted you can do so, but I will not listen to you if you speak against those I love."

"You will not love them long," said Mrs. Pamflett, composedly, "if you have a daughter's feelings. Your aunt confessed to your father that the reason she had welcomed you at her house was because she looked for a proper return in money from him. Why, my pet—"

"Mrs. Pamflett!" cried Phœbe, interrupting her again.

"Yes, pet?"

"You have never used that term of endearment to me before," said Phœbe, resolutely, "and I should prefer you would not do so now."

"You would prefer!" exclaimed Mrs. Pamflett, softly, but the artificial crust of tenderness was beginning to be broken by her true deceitful nature. "But then you are only a child. You may not quite know what is good for you. And so, pet, your aunt confessed the whole plot. Would you be surprised to hear that she has kept an account of everything she has done for you, of every meal you have eaten, of every night you slept at her house, and that she is going to send it in to your father?"

"I should be very much surprised," said Phœbe.

"You will find it true. Oh, the artfulness, the deceitfulness of women! Men are almost as bad—at least some of them are. There are exceptions; Jeremiah is one—the soul of truth and honour—and as for cleverness, there's no saying how clever he is. Said your father to that scheming lawyer, Mr. Cornwall, who has been playing upon your feelings, and who is employed by your aunt to ruin us all—said your father to him, while you were lying on the ground: 'There is my daughter. You

have come to ask my consent to her marriage with you. You are free to take her; but, knowing what you are, I will not give you one penny of my money with her!' 'What!' cried the lawyer; 'not one penny?' 'Not one penny,' said your father. 'If you love her, as you say you do, for herself alone, there she is; but neither now nor at any time, before or after my death, shall one penny of my hard-earned money go into your pocket.' 'In that case,' said the fine lawyer, 'I will have nothing to do with her.' Then your father burst into a passion, and I am certain that if he had been a younger man he would have struck Mr. Cornwall to the earth. Jeremiah started forward to do it, but your father laid hold of him, and told him not to soil his fingers by touching such a reptile. It was as much as he could do to prevent my Jeremiah from thrashing the villain who wanted to get you in his toils. Then your father ordered your aunt and her lawyer friend out of the house, and warned them never to show their faces here again."

"You forget," said Phœbe, "my father did that in my hearing."

"And he repeated it afterward. They were glad enough to get away, my pet, and I hope that they will never annoy you again."

"Suppose, Mrs. Pamflett," said Phœbe, "that I were to write to my aunt all you have told me?"

"You are quite welcome to do so, pet. Of course she will deny it, and will invent another story to try and set herself right in your eyes. It is just on the cards, though, that she may brazen it out and admit the truth. It is a dreadful thing when one is exposed as she has been."

"Yes, it is hard to be found out," said Phœbe. "Mrs. Pamflett, I should like to be alone for a little while."

"Very well, pet. I will go; but you have only to call, and I will come immediately. I am more than your friend—I am your faithful servant. I will guard you like a mother. From this day no harm shall come to you."

She turned to go, and standing by the door, said, "Your father wishes to see you, pet."

"I will go to him presently," said Phœbe.

Outside the door Mrs. Pamflett's face underwent a change, and showed itself in its true colours. Her thought was, "Is she trying to hoodwink me that she did not fly into a passion? What has come over her? Let her be careful—let her be careful! I can make life a torture for her."

Phœbe, indeed, was surprised at herself, and wondered how it was that she had had strength to meet Mrs. Pamflett's lies in the way she did. She well knew that they were the basest of calumnies, and she received them as such. Though all the world rose up against her aunt Leth, she would remain that dear woman's champion. And Fred—her own true lover—that Mrs. Pamflett should for a moment expect her to believe the false story she had invented! The fact was Mrs. Pamflett had over-reached herself. Like a great number of less skilful artists, she had laid on the colours too thick. Had she been more delicate she might have had a greater chance of success. And yet that was scarcely likely with a girl like Phœbe, the strength of whose nature appeared to have been, as it were, latent within her until the occurrence of this crisis in her young life. She did not quite realize what it meant to her; but for the present the spirit required to meet an enemy like Mrs. Pamflett had a healthy effect upon her; it had aroused her from despondency; that, and her love for Fred, and her faith in Aunt Leth, had given her strength to listen with outward calmness to Mrs. Pamflett's fabrications. If trouble were before her, she would meet it bravely. Fred would be true to her, and she would be true to him. Aunt and Uncle Leth and her cousins would not forget her—would always love her. Her father and Mrs. Pamflett could not force her into a marriage with a man she abhorred. "Be brave, Phœbe, be brave," she whispered to herself as she walked to her father's room, "for the sake of those who love you truly."

Jeremiah Pamflett was in the miser's room when Phœbe entered. Miser Farebrother looked very ill; his face was white and pinched, his lips were drawn in. Phœbe's heart sank, and a feeling of remorse shot through her as she gazed upon his suffering face. She was his daughter—his only child—and he had a claim upon her love and obedience. Was it not her dear aunt Leth who had said as much? She knew that this plain setting forth of a child's duty to her parents was no false declaration; it was her aunt's belief. Well, she would perform her duty to the uttermost of her strength; but to one thing she was resolved.

"Sit here," said Miser Farebrother. Phœbe took the chair he indicated; it was between him and Jeremiah Pamflett, and as she passed her enemy she drew herself carefully from him. He noted this avoidance, but made no comment upon it. At present his case was in his master's hands. "You are well?" asked Miser Farebrother.

"Not quite well, father," said Phœbe.

"But well enough," he retorted. "You have a long life before you. Look at me. How long do you think I shall live?"

"Many years, I hope, father."

"We shall see whether you do hope it. It must be plain to you that I am ill—seriously ill."

"I am very sorry, father."

"We shall see whether you are sorry. What is a man to believe in? Words? No. Actions speak, not words. False sympathy, lying protestations—what are they worth? Those who use them ought to be trodden in the mud. You hope I shall live many years. We shall see. I have not long to live, I tell you; but you can hasten my death; you can murder me."

"Father!" cried Phœbe, in terror. "Murder you!"

"Murder me. You can do it. If I were to implore you to spare me—to let me live, would you grant my prayer, or would you carry out your wicked designs? We shall see—we shall see. You perceive that I am suffering, and you say you are sorry. Your dead mother knows how far you are speaking the truth; I do not—as yet. It has to be made clear to me. You are my daughter, are you not?"

"Yes, father."

"What kind of love have you given me? What kind of care have you bestowed upon me? For years I have been groaning and suffering here, and you—what have you been doing? Have you attended to me, have you nursed me, have you shown one spark of a daughter's proper feelings? No, not one—not one. Gadding about, going to theatres, dancing, making light friends, laughing, singing, ministering to your vanities, while I, your father, have lain here, cut to the soul by your coldness and want of decent feeling. If it was not in you, you might have pretended it was, and I should have been deceived. It would have made it no better for you, but it might have been better for me. You know that I have a doctor attending me?"

"Yes, father."

"Have you ever asked him how I was—have you ever shown, in a single conversation with him, that you have within you those solicitous feelings which a daughter should have for a suffering father? Have you ever shown—" He did not proceed. He lay back, panting, in his chair, and Jeremiah, without looking up, thought: "What an actor he is! Oh, what an actor he is!"

"Father," said Phœbe, in deep distress, "you do me an injustice. It has always been my wish to attend to you, to nurse you, but you would never allow me. 'Let me alone! let me alone!' you said, and have always repulsed me."

"Why? why?" he asked, raising himself in his chair, and bending so excitedly forward that she was frightened, and cried:

"Don't excite yourself, father; you are not strong enough to bear it."

"I know I am not. You know it too. It is not I who am exciting myself—it is you, because you wish to kill me!" She shuddered violently, and covered her face with her hands. "Why, when you have asked me whether you could do anything for me, have I desired you to let me alone? Because I could see plainly that you wished not to be troubled about me; that you were pretending—that you were wholly false in your advances. There are a thousand things a child can do for a parent in my condition which would bring pleasure to him. Have you done one? That I am impatient, querulous, quick-tempered—is not that natural when a man is in anguish day and night? Did you ever give that a thought? do you give it a thought now?"

"Father," said poor Phœbe, feeling acutely the bitter injustice of her father's accusations, and yet not knowing how to combat them without plunging him into deeper excitement, "I will nurse you if you will allow me; I will do everything in my power to restore you to health. Try me, father!"

"You do not intend to leave Parksides, then, without my permission?"

"To leave Parksides without your permission!" she echoed. "No, father!"

"For the few weeks that remain to me you will not leave the house? You will nurse me—you will soothe my last hours?"

"Oh, father, do not speak like that! I will do all you wish."

"Out of your own loving heart?"

"Yes, father, out of my own loving heart!"

"Swear it!" he cried, in a loud, commanding tone, pushing his dead wife's prayer-book to the guileless girl. "Kiss your mother's prayer-book, and prove to me whether you are lying or speaking the truth!"

In an impulse of fervour and self-reproach she kissed the prayer-book. He took it from her hands.

"You are a witness, Jeremiah," he said.

"I am a witness, sir," said Jeremiah.

"You have sworn," said Miser Farebrother to his daughter, "that you will not leave Parksides while I live, unless I drive you forth. That is your oath."

"Yes, father." But she said it with a sinking heart. It seemed to her as if a net were being spread around her, from which it was impossible to escape.

In her bed that night this impression of a forced, inexorable imprisonment became accentuated by a review of what had passed between herself and her father. For what other reason had he

made her swear upon her dead mother's prayer-book that she would not leave Parksides without his permission? Could he not have taken her word? Was she to regard all that he had said as of equal value with Mrs. Pamflett's false statements? Were they all leagued against her? and what would be the end of the plot? Could they now compel her to marry Jeremiah Pamflett? No; she would endure a thousand deaths first. But she was imprisoned here in Parksides; she had no longer a will of her own. Her father had turned her only friends from his house, and he and they were the bitterest enemies; he had turned her lover from his house; she was cut off from all she held dear, and was here unprotected, at the mercy of Mrs. Pamflett and her son, and of her father, whose inexplicable behaviour toward her afflicted her with shuddering doubts. Had she been aware of what transpired between her aunt Leth and her father after she had fainted in the earlier part of the day, she would not so readily have fallen into the trap her father had set for her.

When she fell to the ground Aunt Leth and Fred Cornwall started forward with sympathizing eagerness to assist her, but they were motioned sternly back by Miser Farebrother.

"I have ordered you to leave my house," he said. "I can attend to my daughter."

Sadly they turned to the door, but Aunt Leth came swiftly back.

"Listen to me, my dead sister's husband," she said, in a quick, trembling voice. "At my sister's death-bed, in this very room, I promised her to look after her child, my poor niece lying here at our feet, as tenderly as though she were one of my own. I love her as my own child, and I shall redeem my promise to my dead sister. This person"—she pointed to Jeremiah Pamflett—"to whom you say you have promised your daughter's hand, is utterly unworthy of her. She loves an honourable gentleman, and what I can do to bring about her happiness shall be done. If you have a plot against her welfare I will endeavour to circumvent it. My heart and the hearts of my husband and children are ever open to her. Our home is hers; she can come to us at any moment, and we will receive her with joy. In this house there was never for her nor for her dead mother the slightest sign of love."

"My daughter has told you so?" demanded Miser Farebrother.

"She has not told me so," said the indignant woman. "She has always spoken of you with tenderness and gentleness. You know best how you deserved it at her hands. If she cannot find love and protection here, she can find them with me and mine!" She knelt and kissed Phœbe's pale face. "My sweet child! so happy but an hour ago! Come to me if they oppress you here—my child! my daughter!"

"Bundle them out," cried Miser Farebrother, "neck and crop!"

They had no right to stay, and they left the place mournfully.

"Do not be false to Phœbe," said Aunt Leth to Fred.

"No need to say that to me, Aunt Leth," said the young fellow. "Phœbe, and no other woman, shall be my wife."

This encounter it was between Aunt Leth and Miser Farebrother which had caused the miser to extract a binding oath from Phœbe that she would not leave Parksides without his permission.

"How was that done, Jeremiah?" he asked, when his daughter left the room.

"Capitally! capitally, sir!" said Jeremiah. "What an actor you would have made!"

"Perhaps—perhaps," said Miser Farebrother, with a sneer. "I am not half so ill as I look, Jeremiah. Don't reckon too soon upon my death. Excitement like this does me a power of good. They came to trap me, my fine lawyer and tearful sister-in-law; but I have turned the tables upon them. As I will upon every one"—with a keen look at Jeremiah—"who dares to play me false!"

It was fortunate for the miser that his managing clerk did not possess the power of striking a man dead by a glance; if he had, that moment would have been Miser Farebrother's last.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ENGAGEMENT RING.

From that day Phœbe's life in Parksides was, as Mrs. Pamflett had threatened, a torture, and had it not been that she was endowed with a reserved strength which lies latent in many gentle natures until a supreme occasion calls it forth, it is likely she could not have lived through the next three or four months. One day her father summoned her.

"It is time now," he said, "that our plans for your future should be finally settled. I have already waited too long."

Phœbe knew what was coming, and though she dreaded it, she had nerved herself to meet it.

"Cannot things remain as they are?" she asked.

It was impossible for her to speak with any show of affection. She had discovered that her father's wish that she should be his nurse was a mere pretence. Believing in it, she had endeavoured to carry it out and to perform her duty; but the stern repulses she met with had convinced her that she had been deceived and betrayed. The oaths she had sworn were binding upon her; she knew that she could not escape from them, and that her life's happiness was blasted; but she resolved not to be beguiled by any further treachery. So she suffered in silence, and with some fortitude, praying for strength, and in some small degree finding it; but she was growing daily thinner and paler, and sometimes an impression stole upon her that her life was slowly ebbing away. "It will be better that I should die," she thought; "then I shall see my mother, and my torture will be at an end."

It was a torture subtly carried out. Phœbe had gauged Mrs. Pamflett, and had rejected with quiet scorn all attempts at an affectionate intimacy. Mrs. Pamflett repaid her with interest.

"When you are my son's wife," she said, "you will be more tractable; you will know me better, and you will love me."

"I shall never know you better," Phœbe replied, "and I shall never love you."

"Proud spirits can be broken," said Mrs. Pamflett.

"Yes," sighed Phœbe; "but I am not proud—I am only faithful; and perhaps I shall soon die."

"You will be no loss," said Mrs. Pamflett; "but before you die you will be my daughter-in-law."

At this period Miser Farebrother had not spoken positively to Phœbe about Jeremiah; he had left it to the young villain to make his way, and, indeed, Jeremiah had attempted to do so. But Phœbe utterly baffled him. He brought her flowers, and at her father's command she received them from his hands. An hour afterward he saw them lying on the floor or in the grounds, where she had dropped or thrown them. He arrayed himself in new suits of clothes and laid himself out for admiration, which she never bestowed upon him. He strove to draw her into conversation, and if he managed to extract a word from her it was but a word—often not even that; a look of scorn and contempt was then his reward. At meals his offers of small courtesies were disregarded. By her father's order she sat at the head of the breakfast and tea table, but she would never pass Jeremiah's cup nor accept it from him. His mean nature resented this treatment in mean ways, and after a while he indulged in sarcasms, speaking at her instead of to her. This change passed unnoticed by her; she might have been deaf and blind to everything he said and did. Two or three weeks after the visit of her aunt and Fred Cornwall to Parksides, Phœbe went to her father with a letter.

"I wish to post this letter," she said. "May I do so?"

"You have sworn not to leave Parksides without my permission," he replied. "I will not allow you to go to the village."

"I had no intention of going without your permission," she said.

He kept her so strictly to her oath that she was virtually a prisoner in Parksides.

"I will have the letter posted for you," he said.

She gave it to him, and he opened it, read it, and burnt it. No answer, of course, could come to a letter that was not sent; but Aunt Leth, of her own accord, wrote to Phœbe, very careful in what she said, because she suspected treachery, and feared that her letter might not reach Phœbe's hands. It did not; nor did letters written by Fanny. They were all opened by Miser Farebrother, read, and burnt.

"Have any letters come for me?" asked Phœbe.

"None," replied her father. "Your precious friends have forgotten you. Now that they are convinced they cannot wring any money out of me, they will have nothing more to do with you."

She did not tell him that she knew he was guilty of an untruth. She had the firmest belief in her aunt's constancy, and this, to some extent, was a comfort to her; but the pain and the grief that lay in silence were very bitter. She never ceased thinking of her lover; that was the keenest torture of all. For when weeks had passed in this way she argued with herself, how could any young man, how could even Fred, be faithful to one who was as dead to him? Perhaps the greatest terror she experienced during these unhappy weeks arose out of a dream. She dreamt that her father was dead, and she woke up with a strange feeling of ease. Would she, then, rejoice in his death? "Am I growing wicked and revengeful?" she asked of herself, in the silence of the night. "Cruel as he is, he is still my father. Send death to me, and end this misery!" It was a prayer to God, and as she grew daily weaker and thinner it seemed as if her prayer would be answered.

So now when her father sent for her, and told her that it was time the plans he had formed for her future should be carried out, she answered, "Cannot things remain as they are?"

"They cannot," said Miser Farebrother. "Mr. Pamflett will come here this evening, and will sleep here to-night. To-morrow morning he will go to London to attend to the business, and in the evening he will return. Before to-morrow night is over you will accept him for your husband."

"I will never do that," said Phœbe.

"You have sworn to obey me," he said, sternly.

"I have not," she said, in as steady a voice as she could command. "I have sworn never to marry without your consent, and I will keep my oath. I have sworn not to leave Parksides unless you thrust me out, and I will keep my oath. There my obligation ends."

"What objection have you to Mr. Pamflett?" he asked.

"I hate and abhor him," said Phœbe, firmly. "He is not a man; he is a reptile."

The door opened, and Mrs. Pamflett appeared.

"Come in," cried Miser Farebrother, "and hear what this ungrateful child calls your son. Repeat it in her hearing," he said to Phœbe.

The girl did not speak.

"I will tell you," said Miser Farebrother, "and if she denies it she lies. I asked her what objection she had to Jeremiah, and she answered that she hated and abhorred him, and that he was not a man but a reptile."

"Did you say that?" exclaimed Mrs. Pamflett, with venom in her voice and eyes.

Phœbe was silent.

"That is the proof," said Miser Farebrother. "If she did not say it she would deny it."

"My son a reptile!" said Mrs. Pamflett; "then what am I—his mother? I shall remember it!"

"Do you want me any longer?" asked Phœbe of her father.

"No; you can go."

At tea time, Jeremiah having arrived, Miser Farebrother sent for his daughter. She sat at the table and poured out the tea. Dark rims were around her eyes, her lips were quivering; but there was no pity for her. They talked of business matters; according to Jeremiah, money was being made fast; profitable negotiations had been entered into that day, and the miser gloated as he jotted down figures and calculated interest.

"Things are looking up, Jeremiah," he said, in a tone of exultation.

"That they are, sir," said Jeremiah. "Everything is going on swimmingly."

Could the thoughts which were harassing him have been read, could his mind have been laid bare, Miser Farebrother would have been aghast. Jeremiah was in a sea of difficulties; he had spread nets for others, they were closing around himself. The accounts he presented to his master were false; the negotiations he had entered into were inventions; the bills he exhibited were forged. There were only two roads of safety for him—one, his speedy marriage with Phœbe; the other, his master's death. His mother was filled with apprehension, for, having a better knowledge of his guilty nature than the others, she divined that he was in some deep trouble.

After tea the miser said, "Jeremiah, you have something in your pocket for my daughter."

Jeremiah produced it—a piece of silver tissue-paper, from which he took a ring.

"It is an engagement ring," said Miser Farebrother. "Give it to Phœbe."

He offered it to her, and she did not raise her hand.

"Take it!" cried Miser Farebrother.

Phœbe took it, and flung it away.

Miser Farebrother rose slowly to his feet. One hand rested on the table, in the other he held his crutch stick.

"Pick it up!" he said, sternly.

Phœbe did not move.

"Pick it up!" he cried again.

Still Phœbe made no motion. Trembling with passion, he lifted his crutch stick and struck her across the neck. It was a cruel blow, and it left a long red streak upon the girl's fair flesh. She tottered, and almost fell to the ground, but she straightened herself, and uttered no word.

"If I were dead," he said, "you could marry your gentleman lawyer."

"If he would have me," Phœbe replied, in a low, firm tone. "I should then not be bound by my oath."

"You hear!" he exclaimed, appealing to Mrs. Pamflett and Jeremiah. "She wishes for my death, and would bring it about if she could in order that she might be free to disgrace me!"

They heard; but Phœbe did not. The pain of the blow was great, and she could scarcely bear it. Blinding tears rushed into her eyes.

"Go from my sight!" said Miser Farebrother. "And bear this in mind: my word is law. You will marry the gentleman I have chosen for you, or my curse shall rest upon you till your dying day! My death alone shall accomplish your guilty desire."

Thereafter there was no peace for her. There was something devilish in the ingenuity displayed by her enemies to torture her soul. There are women, strong women, whom it would have driven to madness; but from this despair Phœbe was mercifully saved. "I will bear it; I will bear it," she murmured, "till the end comes. I must preserve my reason. When I am dead, Aunt Leth will drop a flower on my grave. And Mr. Cornwall, perhaps, will think with sorrow of the poor girl whose heart is his for ever and ever!" She never thought of him now as "Fred;" he was too far removed from her; all was over between them, but she would be faithful to him to the last. She intrenched herself in silence, never opening her lips to Mrs. Pamflett and Jeremiah, and never to her father unless he addressed her and compelled her to reply. From the day he struck her she did not call him "father." She did not regard him as such; her heart was a heart of tenderness, but his merciless conduct had deadened it to him. She thought frequently of her mother, and prayed aloud to that pure spirit. "Take me, mother," she cried, "take your unhappy child from this hard world!" So months passed, her cross becoming harder to bear with every rising sun. Then it was that Phœbe began to fear that in the cruel, unequal fight her reason might be wrecked. At length a crisis came.

During the day her father had been more than usually savage toward her. In the evening he ordered her to her room. She went willingly, and undressing, retired to bed.

She did not know what time of the night it was when she heard her father's voice outside her door. He had tried the handle, but Phœbe never went to bed now without turning the key in the lock.

"Answer me! answer me!" cried her father.

"What do you want?" she asked, sitting up in bed.

"You! Dress this instant, and come out!"

She rose from her bed, and dressed hurriedly, without lighting a candle. Then she went to the door and opened it.

"Assist me to my room," he said, in his cold, cruel voice.

He leant upon her with such force that he almost bore her down. They reached his room.

"Attend to my words," he said, "they may be the last that will ever pass between us. There is ruin on all sides of me. Whom should I trust, if not you? Once more I ask if you will obey me."

"In everything," said Phœbe, "except—"

He did not allow her to finish.

"Except in the way I wish. I will put an end to this. You walk like a ghost about the house. I see you in my dreams. You come, you and your mother, who was like you, a pale, sickly creature, and stand by my bedside in the night. I saw her a few minutes since, and I will submit to it no longer. I will rid myself of you both, now and for ever! Again, will you obey me?"

"Not in the way you wish," replied Phœbe.

"In what other way can you satisfy me? You know well in no other way. You will not?"

"I will not."

With all his strength—with more than his ordinary strength, for he was excited to a furious pitch—he struck her in the face.

"Will you obey me?"

"No."

He struck her again, a frightful blow.

"I call down a curse upon you!" he cried. "You are no longer a child of mine. I drive you from my house. Go, this moment, or I shall kill you!"

She turned and fled without a word. Out into the passage, down the stairs, out of the house, and into the open, quivering, bleeding, and staggering blindly on through the darkness of night.

CHAPTER XVII.

DARK CLOUDS ARE GATHERING.

During these troublous months in Phœbe's life matters pregnant with momentous issues for weal or woe were progressing in the careers of others who are playing their parts in this domestic

drama. From a worldly point of view Fred Cornwall was making rapid progress. He still possessed but a scanty purse, but he saw before him an almost certain prospect of success. He was making a reputation; his foot was on the ladder. He was unhappy and sad at heart, and he took refuge in desperately hard work, slaving day and night, as it is necessary for a man to do if he desires to make his mark in life's tough battle. This incessant labour and his visits to the Lethbridges—which were as frequent as ever—were his only consolation. Faithfully did he cherish Phœbe's image in his memory; he was as true to her as a true man could be; and the esteem and affection which the Lethbridges entertained for him deepened as time wore on. Many were the conversations, many the consultations, which he and the Lethbridges held respecting the young girl upon whose life had fallen so heavy a blow, and whose place in the dear home in Camden Town was open for her if by any happy chance she should come to claim it. That they received no letters from her, that those they wrote to her should remain unanswered, distressed them, but did not shake their faith in her.

"She has written," said Aunt Leth, "and her letters have been intercepted. Ours have never reached her hands. Poor child! poor child!"

"What is the use of being a lawyer," exclaimed Fanny, "if you don't know how to bring her back to us?"

Fred Cornwall smiled sadly. "God knows," he said, "I would risk and sacrifice my life for her if any good could be done! A lawyer's skill is powerless here. She is living with her father, under his protection. He has a legal claim upon her which no action on our part can touch. If she herself made some move we could act; but as it is, the lawful right is on her father's side."

"Her father!" cried Fanny. "Her oppressor! her torturer, you mean!"

"I mean that," replied Fred; "but that does not help us. I have consulted a dozen fellows, and they all agree that, as things stand, nothing can be done. Her father has forbidden us his house; he has a right to do so. To put a foot inside the grounds of Parksides would be a trespass; we should only be bringing ourselves into trouble, and bringing heavier trouble, most likely, upon Phœbe."

"If I were a man," Fanny declared, "I would do it! I would drag her from that wretched, miserable hole; I would tear the hair out of Mrs. Pamflett's head; I—I—"

"Fanny," said her mother, reprovingly, "you don't know what you are saying."

Whereupon Fanny began to cry and express her wish that she lived in a country where there was no law.

In the kitchen, as in the parlour, the principal topic of conversation between Tom Barley and 'Melia Jane was Phœbe. Tom Barley, truly, would have laid his life down for his young mistress; he sorrowed and grieved, and if he could conveniently have got into a personal difficulty with Jeremiah Pamflett which could have been decided by fists or sticks, he would have courted the opportunity with alacrity. But though he cudgelled his brains he could find no way to an issue so agreeable and desirable. The number of times 'Melia Jane laid out the cards to arrive at a proper understanding of Phœbe's future could not be counted. Sometimes it was bad, sometimes it was good; and Tom Barley's spirits rose and fell accordingly. There was always the dark woman, Mrs. Pamflett, exercising her malevolent influence; there was always the dark man, Jeremiah Pamflett, prowling around to do some dreadful deed; there was always the fair man, Fred Cornwall, popping up to circumvent the diabolical plots which surrounded poor Phœbe. The result of the labour of scores of nights, with the heads of Tom Barley and 'Melia Jane very close together bending over the cards, was eventually 'Melia Jane's summing up that it all depended upon Tom Barley.

"Yes, Tom," said 'Melia Jane, "it all depends upon you."

Tom Barley could not exactly see how this could be, but he set his wits to work, and he came to the conclusion that it was his duty to go down to Parksides as often as possible "to have a good look around," and to be on the spot if he was required. His efforts in this direction were circumscribed, for a very sufficient reason. Fred Cornwall was not the only one who, despite the cloud which hung over him and the girl he loved, was getting along in the world. The same may be said of faithful Tom Barley. He had reached the height of his ambition. Through the interest of friends, and the good character he had earned since he left Parksides, he had succeeded in being taken on in "the force." He was now a policeman. The pride he felt in obtaining this honourable position in the service of his country, and the sense of importance which almost overwhelmed him when he presented himself in his uniform to his friends, would require a more powerful pen than mine to describe. At length he had raised himself; at length he was "somebody"; at length he held a place in the world and society.

"Behave yourself, 'Melia Jane," said he to that most estimable servant of all work, "or I'll take you up."

"'Im take me up!" said 'Melia Jane in confidence to Aunt Leth. "Why, I can twist 'im round my little finger!"

Which, if not taken literally, was exactly how the case stood.

"I 'ope he'll take somebody up," said 'Melia Jane, still in confidence to her mistress; "'cause if he doesn't, what's the good of 'is being a peeler?" A view of the case which is no doubt entertained

by other persons than 'Melia Jane.

That Tom Barley had a heart as tender as "a babe unborned," in 'Melia Jane's estimation, was perhaps true enough, but he had a strong sense of duty, and it will be seen that, common policeman as he was, he had in him the stuff of which heroes are made. It is the fashion to dress heroes in grand uniform and gold-lace, but the majority of them are dressed in fustian.

Being a policeman, as has been stated, with a policeman's duties, was a tax upon Tom Barley's time; in that respect he was not his own master; but 'Melia Jane's verdict, that it all depended upon him, was not to be disputed. Therefore, when he was on day duty, he sometimes went down to Parksides at night, to try and find out something about his young mistress, and whether he could be of service to her; and when he was on night duty, he went down to Parksides during the day, bent on the same errand. But he saw nothing; heard nothing. Nevertheless, he did not relax his efforts. That they encroached upon the hours which should have been devoted to sleep was of the smallest importance; he had a constitution of iron and the strength of a lion, and, bent upon a task to which his heart and soul were devoted, he could do with three hours' sleep out of the twenty-four. You shall see presently of what else he was capable. It is not revealing anything in this domestic drama which at this point should not be revealed, by stating that, in the exercise of his common policeman's duties, he did a deed which made all England ring with admiration. It is simply leaving you in a pleasant state of mystery.

His expenses to Parksides were not borne entirely by himself. Fred Cornwall supplied him with part of the necessary funds, and would have supplied him with the whole, but Tom would not have it so. His service was a service of love and honour, not to be measured by pounds, shillings, and pence.

Thus it will be seen that the lawyer and the policeman were on the road to worldly prosperity. Not so the Lethbridges. A thunder-bolt was forged, ready at the fatal moment to descend upon them and crush them. This thunder-bolt was the acceptance for three hundred pounds which Mr. Lethbridge had given to Kiss and Mr. Linton, the dramatic author, and which they had negotiated with Jeremiah Pamflett. On the night that Miser Farebrother drove his daughter with cruel blows from Parksides, this acceptance was within three weeks of becoming due, and there was no prospect of meeting it.

The cause of this is easily explained.

A Heart of Gold, on its first representation a failure, had been made the talk of the town by Mr. Linton's extraordinary speech when the audience insisted upon his appearing before the curtain. It has already been described how the papers took it up, and how great was the interest it excited. For two or three weeks the Star Theatre was crowded, and the manager advertised that seats could be booked two months in advance. Everybody concerned in the success of *A Heart of Gold* was in high feather. Kiss went about in a state of exultation; the company were in raptures, discovering in the drama diamonds which they had looked upon as paste; the author beamed, believing that his star had risen at last. His wife was radiant; colour came into her cheeks, and she visited the Lethbridges in her cotton frock with joyful hope blooming in her eyes. Apart from this unexpected turn in her husband's fortunes, had she not cause to rejoice? Her little boy was growing stronger. Friends had come forward to assist Linton with loans of small sums of money, to be repaid presently when the dramatic author touched his profits. Before that fortunate day arrived there were the expenses of the getting up of the play to be provided for; it was the arrangement made in the agreement into which he had entered with the manager of the Star Theatre. A month's good business would clear off these expenses, and the boat would be trimmed and the winds would be fair for the haven of rest and hope.

But that month's good business did not become an accomplished fact. In three weeks the interest which had been excited, and which had nothing whatever to do with the merits of *A Heart of Gold*, slackened, and the audiences followed suit. The flash of prosperity was but a flash in the pan. The emphatic verdict of the first-night audience that the drama was not a good drama was endorsed by the majority of those who flocked afterward to the theatre to judge for themselves. From a hundred pounds a night the receipts fell to eighty, sixty, fifty, forty, and then dwindled down infinitesimally. *A Heart of Gold* was not "in" for a long run, as the elated ones declared; it was doomed.

Reviewing the play from a dramatic standpoint, Kiss, in a subsequent conversation with Mr. Lethbridge, thus summed it up: "It is a good play; its literature is of a high order; it has plenty of points; the plot is strong enough; the opportunities given to the actors to create parts are capital. But, my dear sir—*but*—and here comes in the fatal blemish—it has no villain. I must have been blind not to have discovered it in time, but I was misled by the reading. There is absolutely no villain. In a pure comedy a mild villain is sufficient; even that order of piece requires something disagreeable, something we can condemn. But for a drama, my dear sir, for such a drama as *A Heart of Gold*, not only is a villain required, but a strong villain—some damned unscrupulous scoundrel that the audience would like to jump upon and tear to pieces. Every character in Linton's piece is too good; they are all too good. There is nothing to hate. What is the consequence? There is no contrast; and, sir, a drama without strong contrasts will not, cannot, please. Why? Because it is contrary to human nature. Never mind the colour; never mind the improbability of the story. Give us contrasts; and that is exactly what Linton has not done. Love interest—yes? I do not know a play in which the love interest is stronger than it is in *A Heart of Gold*; and yet it is a failure—and a failure, my dear sir, upon assured and established grounds. I will just ask you if play-goers sympathize with a pair of lovers because they are lovers, because

they are interesting, because they are all that is sweet, because they are true to each other?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Lethbridge, in the innocence of his heart; "of course they do."

"Not a bit of it, my dear sir," said Kiss—"not a bit of it. They sympathize with the lovers because they are oppressed; because a villain is trying to ruin their happiness, is trying to separate them, is trying to blacken and damn the young fellow. That, my dear sir, is the secret of the interest the love-story creates. Without it the audience would regard it as so much wash—mere milk and water. The more the lovers are oppressed, the more the audience sympathizes with them. Pile on the agony; that is what a dramatist has to do. And a curious outcome of all this is to be found in the fact that the villain is now really the most popular character in a play. Presently he will command a larger salary than the leading man."

All this was very well as a matter of observation and disputation, but it did not provide for the meeting of the acceptance, and Mr. Lethbridge looked forward to the due date with a feeling of terror. Kiss could not meet the bill; Mr. Linton could not; and he could not.

He kept the trouble to himself, and all the more did it weigh upon him with terrible effect. The home in which they had been so happy from the first day of their marriage was slipping from him; the exposure would be a disgrace; the chances were that he would lose his situation at the bank; and what would become of him after that? He dared not think of it. Unconsciously he paced the rooms of the dear home, gazing at the old mementos with exaggerated affection. They were part of his life; to every small item some story was attached which invested it with a sweet and human interest. It was an additional torture that he had kept his secret from his wife.

"My dear," said his wife to him while he was dressing in the morning, "you were very restless last night."

"Was I?" he remarked, with a guilty air.

"Yes. You were tossing about for hours, and murmuring something about a bill."

"Oh," he said, "the bank business. It is beginning to tell upon me, perhaps."

"Nonsense," said Aunt Leth; "you want a little medicine."

"Yes," he said, meekly; "that must be it."

"I dreamt of Phœbe all night long," said Aunt Leth. "What would I not give to see her dear face!"

"It is strange we hear nothing of her," he observed. "It is wearing upon Mr. Cornwall."

"And upon all of us. Fanny is quite a changed girl. All her high spirits seem to be going."

"It is terrible," said Mr. Lethbridge, absently. He loved Phœbe devotedly, but he was thinking of the bill.

"Tom Barley is going to Parksides to-night. 'Melia Jane says he is determined to get some news of the dear girl."

"I hope he will," said Mr. Lethbridge; and then they went down to breakfast.

On his way to the bank that morning he made up his mind that before the week was out he would confide his trouble to his wife.

CHAPTER XVIII.

O RARE TOM BARLEY!

Aunt Leth's statement to her husband that Tom Barley was going to Parksides to-night, and was determined to get some news of Phœbe, was in exact accordance with that faithful fellow's determination. Hitherto in his visits to Parksides he had contented himself with wandering and lingering in the vicinity of the grounds; he had no right to enter them, and it was a certainty that he would get himself into difficulty if he committed a trespass. But he was now nerved to a daring pitch, for which 'Melia Jane slightly, and Fanny Lethbridge largely, were responsible. By 'Melia Jane he was led to believe that to render his young mistress a service which might be inestimable, and of which she stood sorely in need, depended entirely upon himself. The nature of this service, and the manner in which it was to be rendered, were a mystery to the elucidation of which he held no clue, and to all appearance he might continue to go to Parksides for years, as he had already been doing for months, without his being any the wiser. But Fanny had stepped in and implored him to do something—never mind what nor at how great a risk—to get one word from Phœbe that he could bring back to the Lethbridges. "What *can* I do, miss?" Tom had asked. "Get inside the grounds at night," Fanny had replied, "when Phœbe's father and that wicked wretch, Mrs. Pamflett, are asleep. You know the room in which my dear cousin sleeps. Perhaps you may see a light in it—if not the first time you go, the second, or third, or fourth. If you see a light it is almost certain that my cousin will be awake, because she always sleeps in the dark. Throw a little gravel up at her window; you will know how to act so that she shall not be frightened. She knows your voice, and has spoken a hundred times of your kindness to her. Tell

her you come from me and Aunt Leth; that we sent you. Ask her if she wants any help. Say that we are all ready to die for her; that we love her more than ever we did; that we have written again and again to her, and that we are certain that our letters have been kept from her; that Mr. Cornwall is here continually, and never ceases speaking of her; that he is faithful and true to her, and will be all his life. Say whatever comes into your mind, Tom, that you think will please and comfort her, and bring us back some news of her. Do, Tom, do!" Fanny said much more than this, and said it so excitedly and with so much fervour that there was no resisting her. So Tom Barley had promised, and he set out for Parksides determined to carry his resolution into effect. He knew what he was risking, and that if he were caught by Miser Farebrother or Mrs. Pamflett or Jeremiah prowling in the grounds in the dead of the night, he would be as good as ruined. He would be dismissed from the force, and all his bright hopes for the future would be destroyed. These considerations, however, did not deter him from putting his design into execution. His love for his young mistress was too profound for him to hesitate because there was danger ahead. All the more reason that he should go straight on to his service of humble love and duty.

He reached Beddington station at a few minutes past eleven o'clock, and he walked slowly thence to Parksides, congratulating himself that the night was dark, and that he was therefore not likely to be recognized. By midnight he was on the outskirts of the grounds. He was familiar with every inch of them, and he was soon immediately outside the old house, looking up at the windows. All was dark and silent; there came from within not a sound of life. There was no light in his young mistress's room, but the white blinds drawn down were an indication that it was inhabited. He resolved to wait an hour or two, and then, if all still remained silent, if no sign came to him, to make a cautious attempt to arouse Phœbe by throwing a little light gravel against the window-panes. He knew, also, in which room Miser Farebrother slept, and saw that all was dark therein. Up to this point he was safe.

He had been watching and waiting for nearly an hour when he was startled by a circumstance which could not but be unusual at such an hour of the night in that locality. For a horseman to gallop along the public road would have been reasonable enough, but for the rider to pull up immediately outside the grounds, to alight, to tie his horse to a hedge, to creep stealthily into the grounds, to peer around him in the dark for several minutes, not daring to move another step until he was convinced that he was alone and that his movements were not observed; then to creep on and on into the interior of the grounds, away from the house, to pause again and take from an inner pocket a dark lantern, and to commence to search the earth for some mark of which he was in quest—all this was unusual and suspicious; but it was exactly what occurred, and the man peering and searching, falling on his knees now and then, and seeming to tear at the earth, was none other than Jeremiah Pamflett! When the sounds of the horse's feet had ceased outside the grounds, Tom Barley had crept in that direction, and had seen what has been described. He recognized Jeremiah, but had not the slightest idea of the object which had brought the schemer to Parksides at such a strange hour. But it was not the first time that Jeremiah had been thus engaged. He was convinced that in some part of the grounds there was a spot in which Miser Farebrother had been in the habit of secreting large hoards of money. During the last three or four months the miser had drawn out of the bank at various times sums amounting in the aggregate to not less than £7,000. Information which Jeremiah had received from his mother had forced upon him this conviction of a secret hiding-place. Even in the daylight, when he was strong enough to walk in the open air by the aid of his crutch stick, the miser was sometimes seen by Mrs. Pamflett creeping painfully onward in the direction to which Jeremiah was now devoting his attention. Lynx-eyed and fox-like in his movements, Miser Farebrother had never failed to discover when Mrs. Pamflett was watching him, and on every occasion he had peremptorily sent her about her business. He was too wary for her, but she was satisfied that he had this secret hiding-place; Jeremiah was satisfied of it also, and knowing that it would not be safe for him to search for it in daylight, he had adopted this means toward the discovery. Had it not been that it was almost vitally necessary that he should produce a large sum of money by a certain date to save himself from exposure, Jeremiah Pamflett might not have had the courage to do as he was doing now. The career into which he had been tempted by Captain Ablewhite had proved singularly disastrous; he had "plunged" and lost, and was now engaged in the desperate task of trying to get his money back. If not his money, some other person's money —he scarcely cared whose, or by what means, so long as he made himself safe; and surely in these midnight quests, cautious as he was, coming out of London disguised, and always careful to avoid observation, there was small danger of exposure.

He had not yet been successful. At first he had searched wildly, and without any distinct plan, but of late he had pursued the search systematically; mapping out the ground as it were, and examining it foot by foot; and so, on this night when he was watched by Tom Barley, he continued his examination. Four or five hundred yards off lay the house, in deep shadow. From where Tom Barley and Jeremiah Pamflett were lurking it could not be seen; and after Tom had been for some forty or fifty minutes observing Jeremiah's proceedings, it occurred to him that this was not the errand upon which he himself had come to Parksides. He moved silently back in the direction of the house, and started when he observed a light in the room occupied by Miser Farebrother. Some person, therefore, must be awake in the house. Tom felt that he was in a position of danger, but he would not desert his post. He fancied he heard voices proceeding from the room, but he was not sure, though his sense of hearing was extraordinarily acute. However it was, the impression of these real or fancied sounds did not remain upon him. He stood in silence for a few minutes, and then the light in the miser's room was suddenly extinguished. All was dark within and without. He moved in the direction of his young mistress's room; there was no indication that she was not asleep, and the knowledge he had gained that Miser Farebrother was passing a

restless night was a warning not to attempt to arouse her on this occasion. He would leave it for another time. It was now past two o'clock. "One more peep at that scoundrel Jeremiah," he thought, "and then it will be as well that I should make tracks to London." It was his intention to foot it; a walk of ten or eleven miles was a small matter to such a pedestrian.

He did not fulfil his intention of going in search of Jeremiah. The front of the house opened, and a figure staggered blindly out. Tom Barley could not distinguish who it was, but it seemed to him that the person's movements were wild and uncertain, and that there was in them no attempt at concealment. The figure was approaching in his direction, swaying this way and that, attempting to catch at something for support; then the arms were thrown up, a moan of agony escaped the lips, and the figure slid rather than fell to the ground, where it lay still and motionless.

Tom Barley knew who it was the moment she fell. He darted forward and bent over her. Yes, it was Phœbe, his beloved mistress, with marks of cruel blows upon her, with blood staining her white neck and forehead! As he held her on his knee he saw these marks of blows and the oozing blood, and his heart beat with furious passion and indignation.

This, then, had been the life of his dear mistress, the sweetest lady the world contained; it was for this she had been immured in the prisonhouse of Parksides! But he, her devoted servant, was there to protect her now, and to convey her to a place of safety!

His passion deserted him; he became cold as ice. Had he arrived too late? Was she dead?

He put his ear to her heart. No, she was not dead. Faint as were her heart-beats, he heard them, and thanked God!

There was no time to lose—not a moment. He would take her at once to London, where love and truest pity awaited her; he would take her to the only home in which she had had an hour's real happiness.

But how was this to be accomplished? It must be done swiftly and in secret. There were no trains. He could have carried her light form easily to the station, but it would be hours before the departure of a train to London. There was no possibility of obtaining a conveyance or a horse.

A horse! An inspiration fell on him. Jeremiah's horse was tethered a couple of hundred yards away.

Quick as thought he acted. Swiftly and tenderly he lifted the inanimate form from the ground, swiftly and tenderly he bore it along; with a lightning movement he unfastened the rope, and was on the horse's back, clasping Phœbe closely to him. Away he galloped through the dark night toward London!

Jeremiah raised his head. What sound was that? The sound of a horse galloping away. He ran to the place by which he had fastened his horse. It was gone. "Curse my luck!" cried Jeremiah.

He dared not remain any longer. He must himself get back to London, and there was nothing for it but to walk the road. He did not doubt but that the horse had got loose, and was running riderless. Perhaps he would catch it up. He extinguished the light in his lantern, which he put into his pocket, buttoning his long coat over it. Then he shambled on, cursing and swearing.

The rushing air played about Phœbe's face and revived her. The horse, urged by Tom Barley, was racing like the wind. Tom, glancing down, saw his beloved mistress's eyes languidly open.

"Don't be frightened," he whispered. "I am with you—Tom Barley! We are riding to London. I am taking you to your aunt's house in Camden Town."

"Oh, Tom!" she murmured; and clasped her trembling arms about his neck, and laid her face close to his.

If ever a man tasted heaven on earth, Tom Barley tasted it then.

And Phœbe? O dolorous night, charged with woe and pain! O happy night, charged with visions of hope and glory! O blessed winds that kissed her hot and feverish face and neck! Loving hearts still beat for her; loving arms were waiting to welcome her. The sweetness overcame her; her eyes were filled with happy tears.

"Miss Phœbe," said Tom.

"Yes, Tom?"

"You must try and help yourself a bit."

"I will, Tom. Tell me what to do."

"In half an hour we shall be in London streets. Then I must take you off the horse. We can't ride on it to your aunt's door. There are reasons."

"Very well, Tom."

"Do you think you will be able to walk a bit?"

"I will try, Tom—and you will help me?"

"That I will. I could carry you, but it would draw attention upon us. Perhaps we may get a cab.

Then there will be no difficulty."

"Tom, I will do everything you tell me."

"Thank you, Miss Phœbe."

They had taken the Croydon road to London Bridge, and in half an hour, when they reached a quiet street, in which no soul but themselves was to be seen, Tom lifted Phœbe from the horse.

"Hold on to me, Miss Phœbe, and turn your face a bit."

She did so. With a branch which he had plucked from the hedge and had used as a whip Tom struck the horse a smart blow. Away it galloped with an empty saddle on its back, and in three moments was lost to his sight.

"Now, Miss Phœbe, if we can only find a cab!"

Angel Fortune was on their side. They had taken scarcely a dozen steps when a four-wheeler turned the corner of the street. The bargain was soon made, and Phœbe and Tom, safely ensconced in the cab, were on their way to Camden Town.

"My dear," said Aunt Leth, shaking her husband, "the street-door bell has rung; and, hark! do you hear the loud knocking? What can have happened?"

He was out of bed in a moment and gliding down the stairs, and Aunt Leth quickly drew on a dressing-gown, and hastened after him.

"Open the door," cried Tom Barley, outside. "It's all right! There's nothing to be frightened at."

Uncle Leth threw open the door.

"Aunt Leth! oh, dear Aunt Leth!" murmured Phœbe, and fell sobbing into the good woman's arms.

"Phœbe! my poor dear Phœbe! Oh! look here! look here! There is blood upon her!"

"I am well and happy now!" sobbed Phœbe. "Oh! so happy! so happy! Dear aunt, dear uncle, don't let them take me from you again!"

"They never shall! they never shall! Oh, my poor dear! oh, my poor dear!"

Close, close, to the tender womanly heart, close to the faithful breast—closer, closer, closer!

"Phœbe!" screamed Fanny, flying down the stairs. "Oh, Phœbe! Phœbe! Mother, give her to me! give her to me!"

And here was 'Melia Jane, in the most outrageous of costumes, quite scandalous, indeed, running down to the kitchen to light the fire.

"I will tell you all to-morrow," said Tom Barley. "Nobody must know she is here. Good-night."

"Tom!" murmured Phœbe.

"Yes, Miss Phœbe?"

"Good-night, Tom."

"Good-night, miss."

He took the thin white hand she held out to him. She drew his face to hers and kissed him.

"Thank you, Tom! Oh, thank you!"

The tender light of the coming day shone upon his tear-stained face as he walked home to his humble bed.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VISIT TO DONCASTER AND ITS RESULTS.

The "system" which Jeremiah Pamflett, after infinite patience, had discovered of winning large sums of money upon the turf did not turn out the absolute certainty which his calculations upon paper had foreshadowed. At first all went well; he commenced with small amounts, and a peculiar run of wins in a certain direction favoured him. For three or four weeks his good fortune continued; every day's results showed a balance on the right, his lowest daily win being £3, his highest £62. At the end of that time he was the richer by £280. So far, so good.

He did not think so; he was mad with himself for winning so little. That was because he had ventured so little. "What an idiot I am!" he groaned, in the solitude of his bedchamber. "What an idiot! what an idiot! Had I multiplied my stakes by fifty I should have won £14,000. Where are my brains? Where is my pluck? Without courage, no one who was not born to riches has ever made a great fortune. And here am I wasting the precious time and letting my opportunities slip! £14,000

in four weeks. Forty racing weeks a year, £140,000. Five years of that, £7,000,000. Oh, Lord! *seven million pounds!* Seven millions! I could double it while I was making it. FOURTEEN MILLION POUNDS! What could I do with fourteen millions? What *could* I do?" he screamed. "What couldn't I do? I could turn the world topsy-turvy! I could become anything I liked!—a Prince—a King—an Emperor! And all in five years from to-day—with a long life before me to enjoy my money! I'll do it—I'll do it—I'll do it!"

These contemplations turned his head. He resolved to dash in and become a millionaire.

The race-courses upon which his initial trials were made were situated at an easy distance from London—Kempton Park, Sandown, Epsom, Croydon, Ascot, Hampton, Windsor, and other such meetings, from which, when the last race was run, he could reach Miser Farebrother's office at seven or eight o'clock in the evening.

"I'm going to commence my system in real earnest," said Jeremiah to Captain Ablewhite. "No more shillyshallying."

"Brave boy!" replied Captain Ablewhite admiringly. "Where?"

"Well," questioned Jeremiah, seeking information. "Where?"

"Come with me to Doncaster," said Captain Ablewhite. "Glorious place! No end of swells there, waiting to hand you their money. A fortune ready made for you. We'll have a rare week. I know to a certainty what's going to win the Leger. A dark 'un."

"Doncaster's a long way off," said Jeremiah ruminatively.

"All the better. You can manage it: throw over the office for five days. What is life without beer and skittles? You will come back rolling in money."

Jeremiah did manage it. Miser Farebrother had one of his worst attacks, and there was no likelihood of his being able to leave his room the Doncaster week. Away went Jeremiah on Monday, in the company of Captain Ablewhite and three other swells, to commence the solid foundation of the great fortune in store for him. He had made his preparations for the grand *coup*, and had possessed himself of no less a sum than two thousand pounds in ready cash. How he had obtained this money need not be too curiously inquired into; sufficient to say that it was his master's, and that forgery was the means by which he had come into possession of it. He had "borrowed" it for a week. When the Doncaster Meeting was over, he would be able to replace it. He had confided to his mother that he was leaving London for a few days, and had instructed her to communicate regularly with him at Doncaster, giving her the address of an inn at which he and Captain Ablewhite intended to stop. She had implored him to confide in her the nature of the business which took him away; but he was obdurate, and he sternly refused to let her into the secret.

"All it is necessary for you to know," he said to her, "is that when you see me next I shall have twenty thousand pounds of my own."

"Don't run yourself into danger," she begged. "Oh, Jeremiah, be careful!"

"Let me alone for that," he replied. "I know what I'm about."

On the road to Doncaster he played "Nap" with Captain Ablewhite and his swell friends, crown points, and when the train reached its destination he had won over forty pounds.

"A good commencement," he said to himself, elated at his good fortune.

"You have the luck of the devil," said one of the losers to him. "How do you manage it?"

Jeremiah smiled as he packed his winnings away.

"It is my opinion," observed Captain Ablewhite pleasantly, "that Mr. Pamflett has made a bargain with the old gentleman. Everything he touches turns to gold."

On the following day Jeremiah, on the race-course, commenced to plunge, and after a martingale of six series of bets on six races found himself a loser of eleven hundred pounds. He was desperately frightened. He went carefully over his "system," and it was small satisfaction to him to prove that he had not made a mistake. What should he do? Leave off, or go on? There was no choice for him. He *must* go on; he *must* get back the money he had lost. It was not possible that he should continue to lose. The money would be sure to come back. He infused false courage into his trembling body by drinking brandy.

"A bad day," said Captain Ablewhite.

"What's the odds?" cried Jeremiah, emptying his glass. "It's only lent."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Captain Ablewhite. "You've got the right sort of stuff in you. You'll break the ring."

They played "poker" that night, and Jeremiah, by boldness, won back two hundred of the eleven. This put spirit into him. "It is all right," he thought. "I'll make them sing small before I've done with them."

On the race-course again he continued his "system"—lost on the first race of the day, lost on the

second, and lost on the Leger. The "dark" horse, which Captain Ablewhite was certain would win, came in fourth. The carrying out of Jeremiah's "system" now required very heavy stakes, and when the number of the winner of the Leger went up on the board, he had but four hundred of the two thousand pounds left. Then he began to flounder. He had lost on nine successive races, and to pull back his losses it was necessary that he should stake the whole of the four hundred pounds in his pocket on the race about to take place. Did he dare to do that?

He walked about the ring, muttering to himself, and studying his card. "Shall I do it? shall I do it?" he muttered, in a state of indecision. He knew exactly what his "system" demanded. There was the horse, and there the jockey; did he dare to back them for the four hundred pounds? As he was hesitating and dallying, two men, whispering, brushed past him. He heard what they said. "They've squared it: it's a moral. Now's the time; I'm going nap on Morning Light."

Morning Light! Morning Light! The man was going nap on Morning Light. Was there ever a straighter tip? It was not the horse his "system" proclaimed he should back; but he could never forgive himself if he neglected the tip so fortuitously imparted to him. "It is sure to win; it is sure to win," muttered Jeremiah; and in a fit of nervous desperation he put his money on Morning Light. He could not get the odds to the amount from one book-maker, but he got them from four good men and true, to whom he intrusted the last of his new crisp bank-notes. He stood to win three thousand eight hundred pounds. "That will put me eighteen hundred on the right side," he muttered, "and my four hundred that I shall get back, that will be two thousand two hundred."

So great was his agitation that he walked out of the ring, and tried not to think of the race till it was over.

"Hallo, my buck!" cried Captain Ablewhite, clapping him on the shoulder just as he passed through the gate. "How are we getting along? Do you know anything? What have you backed?"

But Jeremiah would not allow the name of the horse to pass consciously from his lips. He had a superstitious fear that it would bring him bad luck; he mumbled some indistinct words, and staggered away. Captain Ablewhite looked after him and smiled.

How was it that in a few moments Jeremiah found himself back in the ring again? He could not tell, except that he was impelled by a terrible force which seemed to deprive him of self-control. His eyes blazed, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. All at once he was standing before the bar calling for brandy. He drank it neat, and called for another glass and another, which he tossed off. The ringing of a bell and cries of, "They're off!" dragged him to the grand stand; but though he strained his eyes and looked in the direction of the running horses he could not see them. They were all mixed up in seemingly inextricable confusion. A man close to him shouted, "Tricksy wins! Tricksy wins, for a pony!" Tricksy! It was the horse he ought to have backed. "You're a damned liar!" He thought he had screamed the words aloud, but only a gurgling, inarticulate sound had escaped him. From a hundred throats came the cries, "Tricksy wins! Tricksy wins! Tricksy wins!" The horses rushed past the post, and the race was over.

Jeremiah wiped the perspiration from his face, and dug his handkerchief in his eyes to clear them. The winning numbers were going up, and he saw them in a red mist. Tricksy first, Bamboo second, Moselle third. Morning Light nowhere.

What a cursed fool he had been! Fortune was within his grasp, and he had missed it—had wilfully thrown it away. His "system" pointed unerringly to the backing of Tricksy, and he had allowed himself to be turned from the certainty by a casual whisper. No, not casual; it was a plot to ruin him; it had been done purposely to destroy him. And here was Captain Ablewhite at his elbow again.

"Was there ever such infernal luck?" the Captain was saying to him. "I had the tip before I came on the course, and I go and back Moselle. I've no head, no head! Oh, if I only had your clear brain! No use growling, though; it won't mend matters. Better luck next time. None but the brave deserve the—mopusses. But I say, old fellow, you look upset. You don't mean to say you didn't back Tricksy! Why you told me after the second race that mathematically, it couldn't lose, and I said to myself, 'Pamflett'll back Tricksy, and I'll back Moselle. If Moselle wins, I can let Pamflett have a few hundreds to go on with. If Tricksy wins, he can oblige me.' You can't eh?"

"No, I can't," said Jeremiah, in a hoarse tone. "I didn't back it."

"You didn't back it!" exclaimed Captain Ablewhite, with an amazed look. "What *did* you back, then?"

"Morning Light."

"Morning Light! Have you lost your wits? Why, old chap, he was never meant! I could have told you that if you had asked me. He's going to win the Cambridgeshire. Upon my soul, this is the best thing I've heard for a month."

"I don't think so."

"How much did you back him for?"

"Four hundred."

Captain Ablewhite whistled. "Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk. There's one good thing—the game's alive. You can pull it back with interest, and you are not the man I take you for if you

don't do it. What does it matter to you, a thousand or two? These things happen to all of us. I remember last year at Ascot—but it's no good raking it up. It knocked me over for a month, I can tell you that. From what I can understand of your system it's when you risk the most you win the most. Isn't it?"

"Yes," groaned Jeremiah.

"I thought so. Now if you had backed Tricksy, what would you have won?"

"Nearly five thousand," groaned Jeremiah.

"By all that's wonderful! And you didn't follow it out! But I'm a nice one, I am, to preach!" And then Captain Ablewhite said, playfully, "Don't you let me catch you at it again!"

"I won't," groaned Jeremiah.

"The beauty of the thing is, as I have said," continued Captain Ablewhite, "that the game's alive. It's always alive, and waiting for us. What is *one* miss? You can snap your fingers at it. All you've got to do is to increase your stake the next time. Old fellow, I give you my solemn word there's only one thing in life worth living for, and that is horse-racing and betting on it. If it was abolished, there are a thousand men in England who would put a bullet through their heads to-morrow; and I'd be one of them—I would! It isn't called a Royal sport for nothing. There never *was* anything like it, and there never *will* be anything like it. Great Scot! the fortunes I've seen lost and won! Come and have some fizz."

Jeremiah went and had some fizz, and then Captain Ablewhite asked him what his trouble was.

"I've lost all the ready money I brought with me," said Jeremiah.

"What of that? You want to go on betting?"

"Yes."

"Give me," said Captain Ablewhite, "your I O U for a thou."

What with his despair, and the mixed liquors he had imbibed, Jeremiah scarcely knew what he was doing; and under Captain Ablewhite's directions he wrote and signed an I O U for £1,000, which the gallant Captain comfortably deposited in his pocket-book.

"Come with me," said Captain Ablewhite. "By Jove! the numbers are going up."

Jeremiah went with him, and was introduced to a book-maker, to whom Captain Ablewhite whispered a few words.

"All right, Captain," said the book-maker. "The gentleman's name is good enough; but I thought he was quite a different sort of man."

Captain Ablewhite nodded, and took Jeremiah aside.

"Make your bets with him," said the Captain, in a low tone, "in the name of Farebrother. You've got Farebrother's cards about you; give him one. Before the meeting is over you will be in clover. You can bet with him without staking a shilling."

But on the Friday morning of the Doncaster Meeting Jeremiah was in anything but clover. He was tossing about on a bed of nettles.

END OF VOL. II.

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