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Robert Cleland**

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2. Pages 86-87 are missing. They do not appear to be critical to the story.

A RICH MAN'S RELATIVES

PRESS NOTICES

"INCHBRACKEN,"

A NOVEL BY R. CLELAND

Westminster Review, October, 1883.

"Inchbracken" is a clever sketch of Scottish life and manners at the time of the "Disruption," or great secession from the Established Church of Scotland, which resulted in the formation of the Free Church. The scene of the story is a remote country parish in the north of Scotland, within a few miles of the highland line. The main interest centres in the young Free Church minister and his sister and their relations, on the one hand, with the enthusiastic supporters of the Disruption movement, mostly of the peasant or small tradesmen class, with a sprinkling of the smaller landowners; and, on the other hand, with the zealous supporters of the Established Church, represented by the Drysdales of Inchbracken, the great family of the neighbourhood. The story is well and simply told, with many a quiet touch of humour, founded on no inconsiderable knowledge of human nature.

Academy, 27th October, 1883.

There is a great deal of solid writing in "Inchbracken," and they who read it will hardly do so in vain. It is a story of the Disruption; and it sets forth, with much pains and not a little spirit, the humours and scandals of one of the communities affected by the event. The main incident of the story has nothing to do with the Disruption, it is true; but its personages are those of the time, and the uses to which they are put are such as the Disruption made possible. Roderick Brown, the enthusiastic young Free Church minister, finds on the sea-shore after wreck and storm, a poor little human waif which the sea has spared. He takes the baby home, and does his best for it. One of his parishioners has lost her character, however; and as Roderick, at the instigation of his beadle, the real author of her ruin, is good enough to give her money and help, it soon becomes evident to Inchbracken that he is the villain, and that the baby of the wreck is the fruit of an illicit amour. How it ends I shall not say. I shall do no more than note that the story of the minister's trials and the portraiture--of elders and gossips, hags and maids and village notables--with which it is enriched are (especially if you are not afraid of the broadest Scotch, written with the most uncompromising regard for the national honour) amusing and natural in no mean degree.

W. E. HENLEY.

Athenæum, 17th November, 1883.

"Inchbracken" will be found amusing by those who are familiar with Scotch country life. The period chosen, the "Disruption time," is an epoch in the religious and social life of Scotland, marking a revival, in an extremely modified and not altogether genuine form, of the polemic Puritanism of the early Presbyterians, and so furnishing a subject which lends itself better to literary treatment than most sides of Scottish life in this prosaic century. The author has a good descriptive gift, and makes the most of the picturesque side of the early Free Church meetings at which declaimers against Erastian patronage posed in the attitude of the Covenanters of old. The story opens on a stormy night when Roderick Brown, the young Free Church minister of Kilrundle, is summoned on a ten-mile expedition to attend a dying woman, an expedition which involves him in all the troubles which form the subject of the book. The patient has nothing on her mind of an urgent character. "No, mem! na!" says the messenger.

"My granny's a godly auld wife, tho' maybe she's gye fraxious whiles, an' money's the sair paikin' she's gi'en me; gin there was ocht to confess she kens the road to the Throne better nor maist. But ye see there's a maggit gotten intil her heid an' she says she bent to testifee afore she gangs hence."

The example of Jenny Geddes has been too much for the poor old woman:--

"Ay, an' I'm thinkin' it's that auld carline, Jenny Geddes, 'at's raised a' the fash! My

granny gaed to hear Mester Dowlas whan he preached among the whins down by the shore, an' oh, but he was bonny! An' a graand screed o' doctrine he gae us. For twa hale hours he preached an expundet an' never drew breath for a' the wind was skirlin', an' the renn whiles skelpin' like wild. An' I'm thinkin' my granny's gotten her death o' ta'. But oh! an' he was grand on Jenny Geddes! an' hoo she up wi' the creepie am' heved it a the Erastian's heid. An' my granny was just fairly ta'en wi't a', an' she vooed she beut to be a mither in Israel tae, an' whan she gaed hame she out wi' the auld hugger 'at she keeps the bawbees in, aneath the hearthstane, for to buy a creepie o' her ain,--she thocht a new ane wad be best for the Lord's wark,--an' she coupet the chair whaur hung her grave claes,' at she airs fonent the fire ilika Saturday at e'en, 'an out there cam a lowe, an' scorched a hole i' the windin' sheet, an' noo, puir body, we'll hae to hap her in her muckle tartan plaid. An' aiblins she'll be a' the warmer e'y moulds for that. But, however, she says the sheet was weel waur'd, for the guid cause. An' syne she took til her bed, wi' a sair host, an' sma' winder, for there was a weet daub whaur she had been sittin' amang the whins. An' noo the host's settled on her that sair, she whiles canna draw her breath. Sae she says she maun let the creepie birlin' slide, but she beut to testifee afore some godly minister or she gangs hence. An' I'm fear'd, sir, ye maun hurry, for she's real far through."

The excuse for this long extract must be its excellence as a specimen of a long-winded statement, just such as a Scotch fisher boy would make when once the ice was broken. Not less idiomatic is the interview between Mrs. Boague, the shepherd's wife, and Mrs. Sangster "of Auchlippie," the great lady of the congregation, when the latter has had her painful experience of mountain climbing, till rescued by the "lug and the horn" at the hands of her spiritual pastor. Other good scenes are the meeting of the two old wives in matches an the brae side, and the final discomfiture of the hypocritical scamp Joseph Smiley by his mother-in-law, Tibbie Tirpie, who rights her daughter's wrongs and the minister's reputation by a capital *coup de main*. Of more serious interest, though full of humour, are the trials the excellent Roderick endures at the hands of his kirk session. Ebenezer Prittie and Peter Malloch are types of many an elder minister and ministers' wives have had to groan under, and the race is not extinct. But all who are interested in such specimens of human nature should refer to Mr. Cleland, who knows his countrymen as well as he can describe his country.

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TWO MEN AND A MAID.

A

RICH MAN'S RELATIVES.

BY

R. CLELAND,

AUTHOR OF "INCHBRACKEN."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A RICH MAN'S RELATIVES.

CHAPTER I.

[BANKS AND BRAYS.](#)

Ralph's satisfaction at carrying through his manœuvre with the mining company's directors amounted almost to elation. The unexpected appearance of opposition in that docile body had startled him at first, but he had been able to ride it down in so summary and highhanded a fashion that he doubted not but the spirit was quenched for ever, and congratulated himself on its having appeared at a moment when it could so easily and utterly be crushed and abolished. A meeting of the bank directors next door was now due. Glancing at his watch, he found that he was already fifteen minutes late, caught up his portfolio of bank papers in haste, and passed by way of the dressing-room into the bank, confident as an Alexander mounting his war-horse, and riding forth to new victories.

A breath of chill air blew in his face as he entered the board-room and met reserved and distant glances on every side. They had not waited for his coming, and were already deep in business. His own arm-chair, he observed--the arm-chair of pre-eminence at the end of the table, heretofore sacred to his own use, was occupied by M. Petitôt, the pork packer, vice-president of the bank, who, however, had the grace to rise apologetically, and make way, observing that they had feared Mr. Herkimer did not intend to be present, when Mr. Jowler, the bark dealer, sprang to his feet, and moved that the vice-president retain the chair for the present, M. Petipomme seconding the motion.

Ralph bit his lip, and something like a scowl passed momentarily across his face at the overt act of mutiny, which not so long before he would have quelled with a crack of the whip, and brought the unruly curs to heel with drooping neck and tail. But the moment was not opportune for the exercise of authority; his brow grew clear again, if somewhat pale, his features calm, if a trifle set, and expressionless, and he sat down in a vacant chair at the lower end of the table.

The business, however, appeared to have come to a stop; no one spoke, and each looked at his neighbour, while the vice-president moved restlessly in his chair, and twiddled his watch chain with uneasy fingers. He coughed, cleared his voice, lifted his eye-glass to his eyes, and let it drop, but still he said nothing, while Ralph looked inquiringly round the board. Several ledgers had been brought in from the bank and lay upon the table, every one open at the page headed, "Ralph Herkimer & Son;" and while he waited, a clerk entered with yet another, containing some further variety of information which he laid before the chairman, opening it and officiously pointing out the desired record, then looking up as he turned to withdraw, his eyes lighted on the president himself, when a guilty flush and a deprecatory glance betrayed that the information he had been presenting bore upon the same point as the rest.

"You appear, gentleman, to be looking into the working of my account," said Ralph, after a further period of silence; "Pray go on, don't mind me! You will find it is a profitable account,

perhaps the *most* profitable in your books. Satisfy yourselves by all means. It is your right. But permit me to say that the time and the manner are not well chosen. There is something not altogether friendly, nor quite above-board, in this way of gratifying your curiosity. Is it honourable, gentleman, or manly, to watch till you get a man's back turned before proceeding to overhaul his account?"

"Strong language, Mr. Herkimer," said several voices at once.

"Most unwarrantable," muttered Jowler.

"It is true, gentlemen, and not a bit stronger than the facts warrant."

"Indeed, Mr. President," said Petitôt blandly--he was noted for a courteous benignity which never failed, so long at least as there remained a chance of the other side's ability to make him regret being otherwise. After that--well, after those others became too weak for it to matter, the world took little heed how he behaved, and he acted accordingly, as pleased him best--brutally, the sufferers called it. "Indeed, Mr. President, you take up the matter too seriously. The accident of your absence when the question arose was a mere coincidence. We are all, I assure you, well aware of the value of your account."

"Should think so," muttered Jowler, pleased to find how quickly they were drifting to the pith of the grievance. "It amounts to half or two-thirds of the bank's capital already, and it promises to swallow up the whole before long."

"Which would not suit you, Jowler," retorted Ralph, sneering assiduously to conceal his wrath, and perhaps his dismay. "But it might be well for the country and for the bank itself, that it should not have any funds to dissipate in the bark business. I say 'dissipate' designedly, gentlemen. I know of four cargoes of cutch and gambler now on the way for this port, with more to follow. Bark prices must collapse, and the less we have to do with the article at present, the better for us. It is well for the country, I consider, that discouragement should arise to stop the reckless destruction of our hemlock forests. If Jowler and his like are allowed their way, we shall not have a hemlock left standing in ten years' time."

"And how much better off is the bank with its tons of plumbago, which cannot be brought to market?" retorted Jowler angrily. "The plumbago paper has been renewed three times already, and the amount increased without the sanction of the board."

"Are we not drifting into a wrangle, gentlemen, and wasting time to no good purpose?" said Mr. Seebright, of the *Journal*. "The bank settlements are going against us week after week, and the specie reserve is running down. What are we to do? That is the question."

"Circulation going down every day," added Petipomme, with an air of wisdom.

"And pray, gentlemen, did you ever know it otherwise at this season?" cried Ralph, eager to score any point an injudicious speaker might put in his way. "Look into the government returns for last year, look into them for any year, and you will find the circulation of the country reaches its lowest points in August and February. It has several weeks to go on diminishing yet, but it is larger than it was this time last year. Wait till September, and you will see it go up and increase steadily till it reaches its highest point in November. The thing is as regular as the seasons, and no resolution this board can pass will alter it."

"All very true, President," said Seebright; "but this drain of the reserve must be stopped somehow. How do you propose to do it? We must contract--realize. Where shall we begin to prune?"

Ralph was silent. He wanted to borrow more, and with the particulars of the account actually on the table, it seemed best not to excite ill-will by proposing to impose a reduction on any one else. Jowler had taken up a share list to cover his chagrin under Ralph's attack; he now laid it down with a loud "Hillo! St. Euphrase mining shares down four per cent since yesterday! What's up, President? Things going badly?"

"I walked down street with old Mr. Premium this morning," said Petipomme--"parted from him not half-an-hour ago. He says there's something up, he could not make out what, but some villager had been to him, eager to sell out at once, and at any price. The man was very close and would say nothing, but he was so eager that Premium grew panicky and was going to unload."

"The bank has made you an advance, President, on some of that stock," cried Jowler. "Four per cent off the security at one drop! I call on you to put up a fresh margin."

"I scarcely think you will consider that necessary, gentlemen, when I tell you that, at the meeting held this morning, the directors have agreed to declare a dividend of five per cent. It will be in all the papers to-morrow. You will find the announcement on your table, Mr. Seebright, when you get back to your office, and an advertisement for to-morrow's issue."

"Five per cent?" said Petitôt, congratulating himself on not having joined in the late attempted onslaught. "Is not that unexpected? I have heard no word of it."

"It was only decided this morning, and we agreed to declare it at once, so that *bonâ fide* shareholders should reap the advantage rather than mere speculators."

"And it is not known yet?" asked Petitôt eagerly. "But it *will* be, in an hour's time," he added, answering himself. "Gentlemen! I think there is no other business before the board. I declare the meeting adjourned to this day next week;" and, seizing his hat, Mr. Petitôt was gone, and half-way across the street to his broker's before any of his brethren could have interposed a word, which, however, none of them seemed wishful to do. Such a rush for hats and general stampede had never been seen before; the assistant cashier, who wrote the minutes, found the room deserted, when he laid down his pen, by all but the president, and the roll of bills, which should have been shared among the several gentlemen, still before him--an unprecedented circumstance.

"What is to be done with this, Mr. Herkimer?"

"You and I had better share it between us, Briggs," he chuckled. "What would they say if we did? They have all skipped off to buy St. Euphrase mining shares, and they will make so much money they will never miss this--that is, not before the shares are bought. Afterwards, when they have completed their operation, they will recollect, and come asking for it. Put it in your desk for the present, it will not be long till they relieve you of the charge."

CHAPTER II.

A CONFIDANTE.

The day came for the Misses Stanley's return to the country. Muriel's classes were over, and the streets grown hot and dusty past endurance. Life was a burden under the all-pervading glare shot from the vault overhead, and the two miles breadth of glassy river, the acres on acres of shining tin-roofs, and the heated face of limestone pavements. The breeze felt withering like breath from a furnace, hotter even than the air at rest, and cool was attainable only by ingenious contrivance, and in twilight darkness.

"Ah!" said Considine; he had been lingering in town till now, and had suddenly found out that it was time to take his yearly *villagiatúra* at St. Euphrase, his plans coinciding with those of his friends so closely, that when the ladies reached the railway station he was already on the platform to assist them about tickets and baggage as well as to join them in the parlour car; which Miss Penelope considered quite remarkable, but most fortunate and "very nice." "Ah!" said Considine, raising a window as the train rolled into the country, "what a different air to breathe! It smells and feels of the country already."

"Yes," said Miss Matilda, "I feel myself absorbing new vitality from the verdure as we pass along. Do the woods not look seductive after the baking and withering we have suffered of late? One grudges even the delay of railway speed. What will it not be this afternoon to sit among the trees, with coolness rustling softly through the foliage--just to sit and feel one's self alive--with every breath a new deliciousness, and the sense of rest and freshness making one happy and new down to the finger-tips. You will find it delightful at Podevin's to-day, so close by the river. I can imagine you will get into a boat immediately, and go out in the stream and drift, and smoke your cigar, I dare say; you gentlemen seem always doing that, though it must spoil the flavour of a day so exquisite as this, it seems to me."

"As Podevin, whose house is full, has fitted me up the room over the boat-house for my chamber, I imagine I shall have my share of any coolness stirring; yet it would, I dare say, be pleasant to make a beginning of the freshness at full strength by getting into a boat. However, I shall not stay long, and if you will permit me, when the afternoon heat grows moderate, I will walk up to your house and learn if you and Miss Stanley are still alive--and my young friend Muriel also, though indeed, the weather appears to suit her well enough."

And truly at that moment Muriel was in perfect comfort, sitting a little apart with an escort of her own--her friend Gerald who had deserted the cares of business for her sweet company. Not that he found her difficult of access at other times, for they often met; but there is a privacy in a public railway carriage when the rumbling of the wheels drowns conversation for every ear other than the one addressed, and a safety from intrusion and interruption while the journey lasts, not easily to be found elsewhere.

Muriel sat in one corner of a sofa, with Gerald in the other, listening to his purring, and purring softly back. It may have been owing to the heat of the day, but their talk seemed less

lively than at other times, and their glances drooped shyly on the ground instead of seeking and meeting each other's as they were wont. Gerald drew closer as they talked, and by-and-by his hands secured one of hers, and held it in possession. He would have slipped his hand behind her waist, perhaps, if her position in the corner of the sofa had not been beyond his reach; and as it was, she used some effort to liberate the imprisoned hand, and regained it at last. Hushing and growing pale the while in her fear of having become grouped with her companion into a *tableau* too interesting to escape notice. And then her eyes rose shyly to his face, and shining with a light they had not held before, and her lips parted tremulously to smile, and faltered out words which were lost in the roar and hubbub of the rattling wheels, and Gerald could not hear them; but the eyes which had looked in his a moment, the rosy flushing and the tremulous smile, were proof the unheard answer was not "no," and he was happy. When the train reached St. Euphrase Muriel was "engaged," while still it wanted a week of her sixteenth birthday.

It is not very remarkable, if, in view of his success, young Gerald stepped on the platform with something of the victor in his mein--his head thrown back, and his coat unbuttoned, flapping away from the expanded chest, while his eyes looked forth on the world at large, with the broad imperial gaze of a new-crowned conqueror, while Muriel leaned on his arm perhaps a shade more clingingly than she was aware. It struck Betsey Bunce, at least, who, according to her custom, was awaiting the city train, to espy the new arrivals, and pick up any fragments of news dropped by her acquaintance--it struck Betsey that summer day, that Gerald was a far finer and handsomer fellow than theretofore she had thought him. She bowed and waved her hand with much *empressement*; she even stepped forward to welcome him to St. Euphrase at that unusual hour; but Gerald did not see her. His head was in the clouds, and he inhaling that upper ether where swim the stars and the souls of the most blest, to whom the gods have granted all their desire. He was dazzled by the brightness of his own felicity--alas, that the felicity should be as fleeting as its power to dazzle--and saw little of what passed around him. Only he felt, and felt only the pressure of a slender hand resting on his arm. And so, unwittingly, he strode past Betsey Bunce; and Muriel, too, being with him, and somewhat overcome, looking down, and with her mind disturbed with new and confusing thoughts, and feelings which, if not so altogether new, were yet now first acknowledgedly to herself permitted to harbour there.

And Betsey believed herself to have been slighted, and her wrath grew hot against the young man, and her envy greener-eyed against the girl, who continued to secure so many things which in justice should have been hers; but having a "spirit," as she considered, she only tossed her head, and walked forward through the arriving passengers in search of other acquaintance.

It was the same train which carried home the directors of the mining association after their board meeting. Podevin was the first to alight. He appeared a happier man than when setting out in the morning. With him was Belmore, who had sunk through the whole gamut from confidence to despair, and whose barometer of feeling had again risen to "tranquil." His golden hopes for the future, indeed, had vanished, but he expected under Stinson's direction to sell out without loss, and by aid of the village notary to make everything snug in case of after litigation. Joe Webb alone looked troubled and oppressed. The dangers to his investment, and of his position as director, had now for the first time been disclosed to him, and he was at a loss how to act; and yet to take professional advice seemed to his scrupulous mind to be a breach of confidence towards his fellow directors, while to act with them appeared dishonest to the shareholders and the general public. It was useless to open his mind to Belmore and Podevin; they were resolved to save themselves at whatever cost to other people. He felt that he must not breathe a word among his neighbours, and at home he was a lonely bachelor with only his faithful pipe to soothe counsel and console him. It was with something akin to gratitude, therefore, that he received the friendly greeting of Betsey Bunce. Had his dog been near to lick his hand in that hour of darkness he would have been thankful; how much more when human sympathy and goodwill were offered him.

"You are back from town early to-day, Mr. Joe," cried Betsey, holding out her hand with demonstrative cordiality. She had felt snubbed before the eyes of all St. Euphrase by her "cousin Gerald," as she called him when out of hearing, not having noticed her, and she owed it to herself, she fancied, to show that she did not care, and had plenty of other young men to speak to.

"Yes," said Joe with a sigh, clasping the proffered hand as a drowning man lays hold on a straw. Anything is good to catch at when one is sinking.

"And you look tired," she added with plaintive sympathy.

"Worried, any way. Those town folks, you know. Miss Betsey, ain't like us here in the country."

"Ah! worried. I know the feeling so well; when one does not quite know, perhaps, what it is one wants, and yet is quite sure that what they would have is what we don't want. I know it, and town folks are so selfish."

It is marvellous how some big broad-shouldered fellow, with a fist of his own and the will to use it, who ruffles it among his peers and holds unabated his manly front before odds, opposition, and misfortune, will wilt and weaken into drivelling self-pity for a few soft words, spoken, mayhap, in doubtful sincerity, by some insignificant dot of a woman, and one for whom he feels no more than friendship. Is it a survival of the habit in childhood of bringing his pains and

troubles to his mother's lap? Or is it that man needs woman to complete his being?--drawing courage from her sympathy in his hour of darkness, even as she needs the protection of his strength in hers? It is a fact, at least, that the bands which knit him in his pride, soften like wax before her, and bully Bottom lays his honest ass's head contentedly upon any Titania's knee, smiling in fatuous content as she twiddles his long ears between her dainty fingers.

"Town folks are very selfish," said Betsey again.

"If they were honest one would not mind that. We country folk do the best we can for ourselves, and would have both hands under, too, every time, if only we could get it."

"You are generous, Mr. Joe. I always said it of you."

"I try to be fair," he answered, looking pleased.

"And some people don't know what fairness means," rejoined Betsey, with fervour, and a glance of appreciation into his face. She did not know what she meant or was speaking about, but her companion did, and approved her sentiments, which did just as well. She had begun the conversation merely with a general desire to be pleasant, but now she was growing interested in his evident depression, and curious to learn its cause. He was not in love, that seemed certain--love always struck our tender Betsey as the trouble most natural to a fine young man. He would not be so ready, surely, to indulge his "dumps," for some other girl in *her* company; and if it were herself, there was no ground for dumps at all; he might have her for the asking, she half suspected, though she would not demean herself in her own eyes by considering the point until the gentleman brought it properly under her notice. Wherefore Miss Betsey went a fishing, and baiting her hook with a gentle enthusiasm, she spoke again:

"There's nothing so rare, I think, as fairness. Only the manly men are ever fair, and women never."

"I *want* to do what's fair. Miss Betsey, and I guess I have managed slick enough so far; but now it's a teaser to know which way to turn. Is a man bound, think you, to harm himself to save his neighbours?"

"I guess not, Mr. Webb; leastways, you know well enough they wouldn't harm themselves to benefit you--not by a good deal, and you know it."

"But what is a fellow to do? If I hold my tongue and let them walk into a trap they will be sure to say it was me ensnared them--that I being a director knew all about it."

"Director? Mr. Webb. Surely it's not your mining company you are talking about?"

Joe looked confused. He had let his cat out of the bag without meaning it. He had begun by thinking aloud, or rather by letting the oozing of his thoughts escape into his talk. Then it had occurred to him that while "naming no names," he might be able to draw a sort of sample opinion in the abstract, and learn therefrom how his position must appear in the eyes of others; and here he found himself on the brink of a full disclosure, with an extremely compromising admission already past recall, and confided to the doubtful secrecy of a woman--the most talkative woman, perhaps, in the village.

"Oh, no. Miss Betsey, you are quite mistaken, I assure you," he faltered forth, with the shame-faced effrontery of one unused to deception, and who scarcely expects his falsehood to succeed.

"No, you don't, Mr. Joe Webb. You don't fool *me* with your assurances. I know quite well when a gentleman means what he says. You may just as well trust me with the whole story. You *know* you can depend on my discretion."

"And you will promise not to say a word to any living soul? And you will give me your hand on it? Honour bright?"

"My hand on it, Mr. Webb. Honour bright," and she looked her winningest up into his face. "Who knew?" she thought, "here she was giving a first solemn promise to handsome Joe Webb, and sharing a secret with him, who knew but that she might make him another promise yet?--and what the purport of that promise might be?"

"And I may really trust you?"

"Mr. Webb!"

"Well! It is something to have any kind of fellow bein' one may let out one's breath to. I've 'most 'bust, these last few hours, for want of a soul I could speak to; but now I feel relieved like, and think I can bear up. But I'll be round and see you. Miss Betsey, and we'll have a talk about it if ever I feel nigh busting again." In fact, Betsey's glances had been too deeply laden with expression. She had forgotten the advice of wise King Solomon, and the wary bird had descried in time the net so flagrantly spread out within his view.

"Then it's nothing at present you've been so anxious to confide to me, Mr. Webb?" cried Betsey just a little tartly. "I wondered at your precautions, and, really, they frightened me; and I am very

glad you have changed your mind and are going to keep them to yourself. So you give me back my promise and my 'honour bright?' I can breathe free again----" "What you told me," she added after a pause, and with just a suspicion of mischief twinkling under her eyelids, "about your directorship and the company's going soon to smash, don't count, of course, for that was before we said 'honour bright.'"

"How you do run on, Miss Betsey. Of course I hold you to your promise, and it covers everything we have said since we met. If I do not tell you a lot, it is only because there isn't a lot to tell. But really you must not talk about the mining company, or there will be the d---- to pay. Fact is, old Herkimer has not been acting on the square."

"I can believe that," cried Betsey eagerly. Gerald's offence was too recent to be forgotten or forgiven yet awhile.

"He made us declare a div-- at the meeting to-day, though he knows there is nothing to divide, and that most all the metal in the mine has been dug out already. He expects to get shut of his shares that way without losing money, and he don't care what becomes of the concern after that, and he is just using us directors as cats-paws to save his chestnuts."

"Quite likely. They are deep scheming men, both father and son. Just look at Gerald there, and the way he is going on with poor little Muriel! See how the little fool is hanging to his arm."

"She's a fine little girl, Miss Muriel Stanley, and I can excuse anything a fellow does to win her, if only he is good to her afterwards. You think he's after the aunts' money I guess, Miss Betsey? That *would* be mean, but he can't help liking, the sweet little thing herself all the same."

"Sweet little humbug! And she isn't a Stanley after all! and not the Stanleys' niece. She's nobody's child, that I tell you, and nobody's niece. She was found inside a paper parcel. And as for their money, it's me and my uncle should get it by right, when they are done with it, and they won't sleep easy in their graves if they leave it past us that are their proper flesh and blood; and what's more, I mean to give them a bit of my mind about it, and that right smartly. I'd after them at once, but there's that old fool Considine holding the sunshade over Matilda's head, and we'd best keep family matters at home. Just look at the old thing! Faugh! It makes me sick to see a woman of her age, that should be at home making her soul, philandering about the country with an old dandy like that! Her sunshade lined with rose-coloured silk and no less, to mend her old complexion--while young girls like me must go without--and her curls like sausages flapping about half-way down to her waist. Ha! There they go in at auntie's door to get a drink of ice-water or something. I'll to them there. Good-bye, Mr. Webb! You may depend on me, and trust me fully;" and she hastened away with the "bit of her mind" she had spoken of already on her tongue tip waiting to be launched.

The launching was scarcely a success, however, or so Joe Webb inferred, when, having claimed his horse at the stable, he rode past the rectory on his homeward way. The Misses Stanley were just then leaving the house, looking flushed and indignant, the wife following them to the door with deprecatory looks which changed into dismay as they departed without a sign of leave-taking, and Betsey in the background, too crushed and ashamed to be aware even that it was Joe as he went by.

Whatever unpleasantness occurred passed harmlessly by Muriel. She was walking with Gerald down by the river's bank--her very first walk with an acknowledged lover, for hitherto they had kept up the boy and girl traditions of their earlier friendship, and these now were discarded for the first time as the petals fall from the blossom when their work is done, and they can lend no more assistance to the forming fruit. She missed the altercation, and her aunts took care that she should not hear of it.

CHAPTER III.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

It was a fortnight later, it was August, and it was dusk. Having dined, the men had stepped forth through open windows to smoke upon their lawns, the ladies, not far off, snuffing the fragrance wafted through the gloom, or, Canadian-wise, setting out on visitations to their neighbours' precincts, or receiving uninvited raiders on their own; the middle-aged to sit and fan and gossip lazily, the young to sing or even dance, chasing the sultry oppression with active exercise, as youth alone is privileged to do.

Jordan had dined, and his shadowy figure would show now and then sharp against the sky, to be lost momentarily again on the dim background of surrounding trees. Only the red spark of his cigar was always seen, travelling back and forth fitfully across the dusky vagueness. Now it would flash out bright and travel briskly, and then anon it would dwindle and grow dim in rusty redness, creeping along or even stationary for a while, starting again into brightness and hurried movement--signs of pre-occupation, doubt, and suppressed excitement in the smoker.

"Ho! Jordan." The hail came suddenly out of the dimness; the light of another cigar drawing near gradually, like the drowsy flight of a belated beetle, being the only sign that Jordan was no longer alone. He started, pulling briskly at his cigar till it glowed and lighted up not only his own features, but those of Ralph Herkimer, who now stood before him.

"Herkimer! Most pleased to see you. Will you--will you come in?"

"No, I had rather join you here in your stroll and smoke, if you don't mind," lighting a fresh cigar as he spoke.

"Well? And are you sorry now you took my advice?" he went on when the process of lighting up was completed. "The difference between the rise we brought about and the impending collapse which you foresaw--and which would inevitably have taken place if your original block of the stock and Rouget's, which I believe you now hold, had all been offered at once. Must be a little fortune."

"Scarcely that, perhaps, but I admit it has turned out a very pretty thing, and does you the very highest credit as a financial engineer. But tell me, how long will this boom last?"

"Till the bubble is pricked, of course--provided the offerings at one time are not more than can be easily absorbed. You can choke even a hungry dog by stuffing too big pieces down his throat."

"Will the price go higher yet?"

"Naturally, if we restrict the supply."

"Fact is, I am holding, still. Never *could* bring myself to sell on a rising market. I should feel as if I paid every advance out of my own pocket. But I mean to begin to-morrow--moderately, that is."

"Right," said Ralph between two puffs. He had himself "unloaded" a week before, and had little faith in the future; but it seemed unnecessary to mention that.

"And there is no fear of the ugly rumours coming out again? If the men are seen hanging idle about the tap-rooms, for example, will it not excite inquiry?--from those blockheads with hammers, for instance, who are prowling about the neighbourhood, and trying to get at our people to treat and pump them?"

"The men speak mostly French, the prowlers English. There is safety in that. The men are good Catholics, too; M. le Curé recommended many of them, and they think the English want to tamper with their religion, so they give them a wide berth."

"But how do you keep them busy? And how long can you keep it up?"

"I am getting all who are likely to be troublesome away to Montana, engaging them for a mining concern, which, if it could be found, would no doubt employ them. The men cannot get back from Montana before Fall."

"Bright idea, that. But there are Podevin and the two others. They will blab, I fear, as soon as they succeed in selling out."

"Podevin won't. You made sure of him at the board meeting, when you told him that if it were known the directors would be indictable for fraud. Or was it that fool Webb said it? Podevin and Belmore have sold out, I know, but they are too frightened, both, to say a word. I have seen them come out of the notary's more than once, and doubt not they are conveying their property to their respective wives. I pity Belmore if he does; his wife is Catholic and a devotee, she is sure to leave it all to the church for the benefit of his heretical soul. The other fellow is your--I mean our--real danger. He is as obstinate and as stupid as a pig, and he thinks it would be *wrong* to save himself, as the rest are doing, while at the same time he bears us a grudge for leading him into the scrape. He has been to me in town several times, but I can make nothing of him, and I fear he is up to some virtuous devilment or another. The fool has honour enough to fit out a township, common cad though he be. Wish I had known sooner."

"Hm! Then I must make haste and get out of the sinking boat."

"Take care you do not founder the whole thing in your panic. Unload by degrees--only so much each day, and, if possible, a little less than is asked for. That will keep the price up, and the quotations of daily transactions will preserve confidence."

"I owe you thanks, Ralph, for your suggestions. So far they have been most valuable. I shall not soon forget how wisely you encouraged me to hold on. I only wish I could reciprocate your

favours; but that is not to be hoped. You know all the ropes so much better than I do. Take the will for the deed, old man! and if--by good fortune--if ever----

"But you can, my dear Jordan, you really can--and I am glad to know that your goodwill is equal to the test; though indeed it is nothing I am asking after all--nothing to cost you anything."

"Name it," mumbled Jordan with a good deal less effusion than he had been indulging in the minute before, though still as cordially as the staccato shock to his nerves would allow. To say truth, he felt not unlike the sportive mouse, which, in pure lightness of heart, has nibbled through the thread whose yielding liberates the spring which catches and holds as in a vice. What wonder that instinctively he should wriggle to withdraw, the moment he felt himself being held, even to a position of his own choosing? Bitten by his own teeth, he would have felt less foolish--less like the stag entangled by his own antlers in a thicket, to wait the coming of the hunter and his hounds.

Ralph noted the change in manner and tone; and the humour of it, causing inward laughter, made the smoke he was inhaling lose its way, and brought on a fit of coughing.

"I want you to pay up Gerald's fortune at once," he said at length. "It wants not much more than a year, you know, to the time fixed. He is of age, and he is my partner, so we shall both be responsible. I am Gerald's next heir, too, so it can have no bad consequences for you, besides being a great convenience to us."

The tumult in Jordan's circulation had had time to subside, and his voice had grown even again. It was more melliflously soothing now than even its professional wont. "How I wish it had been something else," he said; "something within the bounds of possibility. It distresses me to--but----

"Quite so, my friend. The usual way of the world. Anything that is not wanted you would have felt it a privilege to do. Is it not so?--even to pulling out your eyes, only you know I am not a cannibal and prefer oysters; so they would be of no use."

"Really, my dear Ralph, you must not put it in that way, you know. Indeed, you have no right to say so. Just think----

"Oh, I know--quite so--by all means, if you wish it. I know better than chop arguments with a lawyer. That would be worse than an altercation with a woman. He is not satisfied, like her, with the *last* word, he must have the best of it as well. But the facts remain."

"Is that not an admission, my friend, that you know your position will not bear examination?"

"Look out for your own position, friend Jordan! I have a presentiment it would not be impossible to knock that over like a house of cards on the Stock Exchange to-morrow morning, however easily you might overthrow me in argument to-night."

"I used the word 'position' to express your statement of the case, my dear fellow; I meant nothing offensive."

"And what sort of statement would you make of your own case if I were to dismiss all the miners to-morrow open the gates, and let the world in to see?"

"Pray do be calm, Ralph, and don't grow excited, I had almost said violent. You forget that I am only one of two. I can do nothing alone."

"I know it; but you can persuade your brother trustee, I believe, as I cannot. Besides, he will say, like you, that he is one of two; so I make sure of you before approaching him. Now, what do you say?--My Canadian interests are in a mess. I have washed my hands of those mines--I can ruin you, observe, if I like, without hurting myself--I am already deeply dipped in Pikes Peak and Montanas and I must throw in all the rest I have to save what is there already. My interests are across the lines now, and I mean to be there myself also. So you see I can have no personal interest in sparing you, and I have no doubt that Webb's fear of a criminal prosecution of the directors will come true."

"I am not a director."

"It would be proved that you attended the meetings and influenced the board in favour of every irregularity--and there are plenty of irregularities, I can tell you. The others will insist, you may depend upon it, on the pleasure of your company with them in the dock; and, for myself, I don't see why they shouldn't. I imagine that weak chest of yours will need at least six months to recuperate in Florida--but there will not be time for you to save your fortune and get away if you do not listen to reason----" "You force me to speak plainly," he added, as Jordan stopped short in his walk and dropped heavily upon a garden seat, deprived of strength to stand upright. His cigar had dropped from between his teeth, and he sat a mere black shadow in the dusk till Ralph, pulling his own smouldering spark, into brilliancy, bent near and saw how sickly pale his visage had become.

"What say you, Jordan? How are we to arrange?"

"It will take time to realize and gather in. The accounts, extending over eighteen years as they do, are voluminous and complicated; it will take time to make them up. You see it is nearly two years yet till the time for handing over the trust, so there has appeared to be no hurry so far; but it will take months to get the thing into shape."

"I see. And you know that within a week or two I shall be across the lines, and that it will be a couple of years at least before I shall care to revisit Canada. Now, really, my friend, do you take me for the sort of person it is worth while talking such slop to? Hand me the securities as they are; I am surely as well able to negotiate them as you can be."

"I could transfer you those mining shares, of course, if you wished it. Yes! That will simplify matters; part of them, I mean, the second part."

"Mining shares? Come now, that's a rum un. My uncle's estate don't hold a dollar's worth of them. You forget the transfer books lie in my office, and I could not have overlooked Considine's name either for himself or as trustee. Our company is not in his line. He knows too much and too little for that class of investment. But I see! and it is what I might have suspected from your sudden rise in the world, only that I did not think you could have got round Considine--I know *I* could not. I admire your management, Jordan. I really do, you must have finessed very cleverly to nobble old Cerberus like that! A good slice of the money has passed through your hands, we may infer; and, of course, as would happen with any one else--I don't blame you, mind--it has got a little confused and mixed up, as it were, amongst your own, which is natural; and I do not mind accommodating you as far as may be. We will take, say, half of your holding--the first half--and it to be sold before you disturb the rest. We will take it at par, and give you credit for it. What else will you give us?"

"Par? Man alive! I bought Rouget's at a premium, and I have been holding the whole ever so long, with the risk of its falling all the time. You must take it at the market value, say a hundred and seventy-six."

"Whose money is it? By your own admission? And do you not receive a pension under the will for looking after it? If the price had gone down, would you have made good the loss?"

"You have no right to insinuate that I would have done anything improper. However, I will not yield to so outrageous a demand. No man in his senses would; especially when you have no more business with it than the parish priest, for two years to come."

"You will force me, however unwillingly, to make Gerald file a petition to have your trusteeship overhauled; with the affidavit I can make in support the court cannot possibly refuse."

"I shall have an information lodged against *you* for swindling before the petition can be heard. Who will mind your affidavit after that?"

"Good for you, old man. A stale mate! It does one good to play a match against you, Jordan; it brightens one's wits. Well now, can we make a truce? If I do my best to gain you time to realize, and promise to keep Gerald quiet for the next two years, will you get me that money out of Considine's hands? How much is it, by-the-way?"

"Half. We divided the property to avoid the endless consultations, each agreeing to do his best with half, and trust the other."

"Well, get Considine to hand over, and you shall be left undisturbed."

"I don't believe he will do it."

"Will you try to persuade him?"

"Yes."

"Come, then, we will find him at Podevin's, and have it out before we sleep."

"He is not there. I saw him walk past as I sat down to dinner; gone to Miss Stanley's, I fancy, as usual."

"He will be back before long, now; let us go down and wait."

"Better wait here, there are always inquisitive loafers around there. Come in and sit down, the moon is rising. He will not leave his friends till it is high enough to light him home."

CHAPTER IV.

MOONLIGHT AND SHADOW.

Considine retired early to his chamber by the river-side. The moon was up and emerging in lucent clearness from the bands of dimming haze which joined the transparent heaven to the grosser earth. There was no wind, only a stealing deliciousness on the sweet night air, lulled by faint whispering among the aspen leaves hard by, and the lapping of the waters round the boat-house. It was far too good a time to waste in the unconsciousness of sleep: merely to exist and feel was tranquil joy. He extinguished his lamp, threw off his coat, and lighting a pipe, sat by the open window, and puffed and dreamed.

Swiftly the stream swept by beneath the casement, each swirling eddy touched with a ring of moonlight, and wavy gleaming lines threading the dusky current in its course, showing the volume and the swiftness and the might-like time, like life, like fate. And yet it was not gloomy. The flickering lustre brightened as the moon rose higher, and Considine's eye rested meditatively upon the scene. The river, it seemed to him, was not unlike the passing of his own existence, with something cold and something solitary in it, issuing from one obscurity, and hurrying onward to another--nothing but a passing, and yet not all a cheerless one.

A gentle influence, it seemed to him, was shining just then on *his* life also, one as pure and good as the beams upon the passing tide, but like that, far off, and cool, and unapproachable. The swellings of the current seemed to leap and glance up, longing and responsive, but the Lady Moon smiled back still in the same cool gentle brightness, coming never the nearer, however the waves might flicker and burn in impotent desire and longing. Matilda, too, was very far away. The sense of yearning to be near her had long been in his soul; it had germinated and grown so gradually that he had not known its presence, till at length in its spreading it grew into his thought, and he knew that he desired.

Yet to disturb the pleasant present by a word seemed far too hazardous--too like hurling a stone into the stream and breaking up the radiance. Better, perhaps, be content to bear in silence the cool reflection in his bosom, than, in leaping to catch the reality, lose even the shadow. When the pulses sober down to the steady task of living--when the turbulence, the cascades, and rainbows of the upper reaches of life are past, and the even stream has entered on the level country of middle age, love grows less confident and bold even in those better natures which alone retain the capacity of loving. Familiarity with disappointment makes man less willing to tempt his fate, and he clings more eagerly to such good as the gods vouchsafe, knowing its rarity and his own weakness to hold fast. "Better enjoy the friendship," thought Considine, "than tamper with and disturb it by futile endeavours to warm it into love;" and he drew a long breath; and somehow the air seemed to have grown dim, though in truth it was only a film of cloud stealing athwart the moon.

He rose and stretched himself, and yawned, and concluded that now it was time to turn in, when a tap at the door of his chamber surprised him.

"Who is there? Ha! Jordan? Glad to see you. And Herkimer! Let me light the lamp. How fortunate I had not gone to bed. Oh, no apology! Should have been sorry to miss you both. Smoking I see. So am I. Brandy and water? Bless my soul, the ice has nearly all melted. Enough? Glad of that--or here is soda if you prefer. Splendid night, is it not?" and so on. His visitors' flow of talk seemed blocked in a strange way for persons who had taken the trouble to visit him so late. He jerked out his disjointed sentences in answer to nods and monosyllables, doing his best to fulfil the rites of hospitality under difficulties.

Smoke, brightened by brandy and soda, however, had its perfect work at last. It dispensed, for one thing, with talk for talking sake, till its own soothing and clarifying influence had time to act; for is not the cloud blown by a fellow-smoker companionable and sufficient without a word? Then Jordan, clearing his voice with a preliminary cough, began:

"You are surprised, Considine, to see us at this hour; but Herkimer thought it our only chance of finding you alone. You popular bachelors are so run after. Fact is, Herkimer says that it would be of advantage to them to have young Gerald's fortune paid up at once, instead of waiting for the short remainder of the twenty years to run out. After talking it over, I am free to confess that much may be said in favour of his view; and, indeed, he has quite brought me round, so I agreed to come with him and assure you of my willingness to join you in acceding. Young Gerald, you will remember, is of age now, and can legally confirm his father's demand. They are partners in business, and nearest of kin to each other, and can give us a full and complete acquittance of our responsibilities, which, speaking for myself, I shall be thankful to be rid of; for candidly I am not as young as I have been, and I grow lazy, I suppose, as well as fat, and I find my own concerns require all the attention I have to bestow. It has been a long and an onerous trust, and I dare say that, like myself, you will not be sorry to be rid of it."

"I need scarcely say," observed Ralph, "that Gerald sees the importance to our affairs of winding up the trust at once, as strongly as I do. He has no desire, though, that the trustees

should be deprived of their commission for management before the expiration of the twenty years. On the contrary, he appreciates their services so highly that it is his wish to make the allowance permanent, by granting them a capital sum sufficient to represent at eight per cent their emolument from the property."

When Jordan began to speak Considine had set down his pipe and lay back in his chair, his left foot across his right knee, stroking it with his hand, while he fixed his eyes upon the speaker. When Ralph began, an incipient frown hovered about his eyebrows, the blood rose hotly to his forehead as the speaker proceeded, and he sat bolt upright, with fingers clenched and lips compressed, ere the conclusion was reached; when he answered in a voice of suppressed indignation:

"I am humiliated, Mr. Herkimer, that you should have felt at liberty to speak as you have done. Your words might be taken to imply an insinuation against Jordan's probity and my own, for which I am certain that neither I nor he have given occasion. Take back what you have said, or I, for one, must decline to say a word upon the subject of your demand."

"My dear general!" cried Ralph in amazement, not untouched with scorn for the "canting old prig" who could pretend that the mode of earning a dollar made any difference in its value. "You have completely misunderstood me, I do assure you. No idea could have been farther from my mind, or indeed from the mind of any one who knows as I do your delicate sense of honour. I really must protest against your entertaining so erroneous an impression; and it seems hard that I should be prevented from expressing my boy's sense, and my own, of your assiduous attention to our interests."

"That will be time enough after you know what we have done," answered Considine dryly. "At present you know nothing, nor can, till the accounts of the estate have been made up, and submitted to your examination. However, as you agree to take back the promise of a consideration for violating the trust reposed in us, no more need be said."

"Violating the trust!" remonstrated Jordan. "And who, pray, my dear Considine, uses unguarded language now?"

"Not I. Remember the terms of the will, if you please, Mr. Jordan."

"Technically, my dear sir, and verbally, I will not dispute your accuracy; but more than that is due to the intentions of a testator, from friends, and among friends."

"You think you know Gerald's intentions better than he did himself, then? For my part, I have thought the will a model of clearness."

"Think of the circumstances, general--the present circumstances--and all that has occurred since the will was made."

"Nothing has occurred for which the will did not provide."

"Excuse me, general. Gerald has come of age, he has gone into business, he sees a use to which he can turn his inheritance. What right have *we* to balk him, and keep him out of his own?"

"I deny that it is his own, or can be, till the time appointed has arrived."

"Literally speaking, of course, your position cannot be gainsaid; but consider the circumstances, as I say. When the will was made, there was every chance that quite another person would inherit. That person would have received the money before reaching majority. It seems therefore unfair, and contrary to the testator's wish, that Gerald should have to wait."

"I don't see it. What if that other should appear and claim the inheritance?"

"Is it likely?"

"It is possible. Again, Gerald may die within the next year-and-a-half. We should be personally liable then to the heirs."

"His father is one of them, his three aunts are the others--all our friends of long standing. From what you know of them, you can have no misgiving as to our old friend Ralph's doing what is right by those ladies. Had the testator been alive he could not but have been glad to confide them to the care of so good a fellow as his nephew Ralph."

"That is just where I must beg to differ. I knew old Gerald most intimately, and I have the best ground for being sure that he would not."

"There it is, Considine! You have always had a kind of grudge against me. You know you have," said Ralph.

"Not at all, sir. Search your memory, and I defy you to produce one token of ill-will. Did I not prove myself a useful friend at Natchez?"

"Never mind Natchez," growled Ralph sulkily.

"Did we not do business together for years after the war?--business by which *you* profited as much as I did? Have I ever made use of an unfriendly or disrespectful word in your presence?"

"You have thought and looked them; and you know it."

"Men are not held responsible for thoughts and looks. They cannot help them. But let us close all this at once. It is contrary to the letter of the will to do as you propose, gentlemen, and I will not take the responsibility. I believe, too, it will be for the young man's own interest that he should come into possession later, when his hands may be less trammelled by business engagements."

It was useless to say more. The schemers speedily took their leave, Ralph growling and muttering under his breath about pig-headed ramrods, while Jordan reflected pensively what an impracticable old Spartan he would have to reckon with, if ever his peculiar method of trusteeship should come up for discussion. "Not a business man," he muttered to himself. "Emphatically not!"

"If he were to die now, would not the whole be in your hands?" asked Ralph.

"Undoubtedly. Why?"

"It just struck me, when we were up there, and he was holding forth by the open window--and the river outside so swift and deep."

Jordan started.

"By G-- I could have pushed him out, and there would have been an end. But you're chicken-hearted, Jordan. You could not be counted on to keep quiet."

"I would rather not be present at such a transaction, certainly," and Jordan felt a creeping run up his spine. What a desperate fellow the man must be! He must speak him fair and keep out of his clutches. Considine was impracticable, he thought again, and Ralph was violent. If the two came in collision, what loss would it be to him? Either of them might some day become troublesome. The thought shot through his mind, and the sickly faintness, bred of suggested murder, tingled into a glee of terrified exultation, which made him tremble, and the very teeth rattle in his jaw.

"It would be all right? Would it not?" asked Ralph.

"Ye--ye--yes. But really, my dear friend, is it necessary to take me into your confidence? Considine bathes in the river every morning, by-the-way--you may count on my eagerness to forward your views--in any--contingency--but---"

"Quite so, Jordan. I'm to play cat, am I, to your monkey, for the chestnuts? Very well. I won't compromise you. You weren't born to be hanged--a deal more likely to die a sneak-thief's death in a penitentiary hospital! Bathes every morning, does he, in the river? Good-night. Sound sleep and pleasant dreams."

CHAPTER V.

MURDER.

It was a summer morning, between six and seven. The last thread of mist has melted in the warming air, air suffused with sunshine and crisp with a lingering freshness from the night; the banks all dewy, and the river asparkle in the slanting light.

Considine stepped into a skiff in the boat-house beneath his chamber, and shot out into the stream to take his morning plunge. Then lingeringly snuffing the sweet cool air and surveying the upward moving banks as he drifted down, with fingers idling among the intricacies of buttons, and talking aloud, he leisurely undressed himself for his swim:

"Can that be the glitter of a gunbarrel in the sun? It is--reminds one of the sharpshooters on the Rappahannock river during the war. What can the fellow be skulking for, like that, among the bushes? He remembers it's the close season for duck perhaps; but he might take courage, and stand boldly forth this morning; there is not one on the river to pop at, as far as I can see. I must give the Game Preserving Association a hint when I go to town, though. Well! here goes. One--two--three!" He dived into the river, and the bracing coolness licked his languid limbs into a new

feeling of firmness and strength.

Regaining the surface, and shaking his eyes clear of the dripping hair, he turned to survey his sportsman, now standing full in view.

"Ralph Herkimer!--and taking aim!--last night--I understand. My God!--if he aims straight--I'm done for."

The skiff had drifted on in front during his gambols, and he now struck out with all his might to gain its side and interpose it between himself and danger; but he never reached it. A flash and a puff of smoke upon the shore, a crack, and a stinging sensation in the shoulder, paralyzing the arm, and he went under water. Rising presently, he struck out anew, straining every sinew to overtake the boat, and almost reaching it, when he lifted the sound arm to lay hold--lifted it too soon. It fell short, fell back on the water, and he plunged headforemost to the bottom. His head may have struck upon a sunken rock, or--or anything. He struggled, feeling himself drowning, and then he grew drowsy, his consciousness grew vague and dreamlike, and then there was an end. The current swept onward undisturbed, and the empty boat drifted down stream towards the sedgy islands, where the river took a turn, and was lost from view.

Ralph Herkimer stood upon the shore watching with an intentness which left him deaf and impervious to every other impression. The rifle had slipped from his shoulder, the butt rested on the ground, and a thread of smoke still crept out from the barrel. His hand supported it mechanically. His perceptions were out upon the river. The victim was hit, he saw so much, and when he sank, Ralph drew a breath of infinite relief between his tight-set teeth; but still he could not turn away his eyes.

The head emerged above the tide again. What?--and he was wounded?--and yet about to escape!--and it would be known that it was he--Ralph--who had fired. He must not let him escape--and yet, to fire again? The first shot, being unlooked for, would pass unnoticed; the next, all ears along the river being now aroused, would surely be observed. He clutched the rifle, with one barrel still to fire, and watched the swimmer. How heavily he floundered through the water, yet with what desperate force; and, really, he was gaining on the boat. If he should reach it the deed would be out--everything known--and it would then be too late to shoot. A boat with a corpse--an empty boat, with blood-stains, would be enough to set the law and the detectives to work. He lifted the gun, but his heart beat far too wildly to take aim. His eyes were clouded, his hands shook; while out in the stream the swimmer could be seen in frantic effort struggling along and gaining on the boat.

And now it seems to Ralph there is no choice. He *must* fire again, or the swimmer will gain the boat, and everything be known. Why should his hand tremble now? When did he ever fail to knock a squirrel from the tree? Has he not shot a bear in his time? Is not the danger of letting this man escape worse than any mischief the bear could have done him? and yet---

Ha! The swimmer rises in the water, throwing out his arm as though to grasp the boat. It is beyond his reach. He falls forward in the tide and disappears. A foot is seen above the water for an instant, and is gone. The boat drifts onward all alone. The gun has not gone off, and Ralph sinks on the bank, panting and weak in the revulsion of excitement. His eyes follow the drifting boat and watch the even glassy flowing in its wake, but the waters part not asunder any more. No head emerges panting and struggling to disturb the mirrored lustre reflected from the morning clouds. The thing is done.

CHAPTER VI.

NEMESIS.

Ralph Herkimer was late for breakfast. He had been out with his gun; for Gerald, setting out to catch an early train for town, came on him stepping from the shrubbery to gain the verandah and his own dressing-room window--met him right in the face, to his own no small surprise, and not, apparently, to the satisfaction of his parent.

"Ducks! Father? Ain't you three weeks ahead of time?"

"Sparrows! my son. We shall not have a black cherry left, for those blasted English sparrows."

"And you took the rifle? That would have been putting a big blast with a vengeance into one of their little persons. Head, claws, feathers, would have been blown to the four winds. The rest

would be nowhere."

"Humph," grunted Ralph in surly wise, entering his open window without further parley.

"Old man must be out of sorts this morning," said the son, proceeding on his way. "Never saw him so grumpy of a morning before. And to take a rifle to the sparrows! He must have gone out half awake--taken it up without noticing, and been ashamed at being seen--stolen back, no doubt, before Solomon Sprout would arrive with his spade and barrow. Solomon isn't an early bird by any means. I suppose no gardener is. Has the whole day before him to potter about the place. Solomon would have laughed at the rifle, and told us about blowing Sepoys away from the cannon's mouth when he was soldiering in 'Indy.'"

Ralph was very late for breakfast. He had rung for his man, and sent him for sherry and bitters, and then dismissed him, peremptorily refusing to be shaved, or to be bothered in any way.

Nine o'clock. Mrs. Martha sat by her coffeepot, but her spouse did not appear. She rang for Joseph, and inquired for his master, but he could only say that he had rung for sherry and bitters, refused to be shaved, and ordered him out of the room.

"He's out of sorts," soliloquized Mrs. Martha. "Smoked too many cigars with Jordan last night, that's what's the matter! What fools the men are! Making themselves sick with nasty tobacco, just for manners to one another! I'm sure they don't really like it. I've known the time when Ralph would sit the whole evening with me and Gerald--Gerald was a baby then--and never a cigar. Just a few peaches before going to bed, and a Boston cracker. Heigh-ho! I was young then, to be sure, and better looking, but I don't suppose that signifies to Ralph. I am sure I like *him* as well, and think him as fine a man as ever I did; and why would he not think the same of me? It's just that eternal *business!* The men are that dead set on it they think of nothing else, and they make believe to like tobacco to be with one another, and keep the women away, that they may talk business. The weary, weary business! Whatever good has it done us? The richer we get, the harder Ralph seems to work, and the less I see of him. But I'll keep him at home to-day, anyhow. See if I don't."

With a cup of coffee and a piece of toast, she hastened to her husband's room.

"Well, Ralph? Still up? I fancied you must have lain down again. Drink your coffee. It will do you good. Dear me! How pale and limp you look."

"Nonsense! I'm all right."

"Not you. You must not think of going to town to-day. We'll hang a hammock on the shady side of the house and you can swing there. The river view feels cool, and there always comes a breeze up from the water. Joseph!"

"Bid him hang the hammock in the front of the house, Martha. It amuses one to see who comes and goes. Yes; I shall stay at home with you to-day. I don't feel up to much--yesterday's heat, I suppose. Bid him hang the hammock up in front."

"There's no shade worth speaking of on that side till the afternoon. You'll broil yourself with the glare off the flower beds. The west verandah is the place at this hour, and there's the pleasant outlook over the river."

"River be d---d. It makes me giddy to look at it this morning. My head seems all aswim."

"Bilious--the brandy and cigars last night. You never *could* stand much of that, Ralph. It's not for you! Leave it to the dull fellows who want brightening. You have too many nerves to agree with stimulants in quantity."

"Don't preach, Martha, my good soul. My head is splitting. Open the window wider, and close the blinds. Now leave me, please; I think I could sleep. Send Joseph with the brandy and some soda-water and ice."

"A hair of the dog that bit you, eh? My poor old man. But I think you would be better without it," and she laid her cool hand on his forehead as he lay.

It was the touch that of all things soothed and softened him the most. In the hurry of life and the scramble for its prizes he had long outgrown the early transports of the honeymoon, real though they had been at the time--as real as it was in his nature to experience. The light of her eye had less power to kindle a response within him; it shone more dimly, doubtless, than of old, and his receptive organ--heart, call it?--had toughened with the years, and was too occupied with greed to hold much else. Her bright and sensible talk, grown familiar, had ceased to interest; but the touch of that cool, soft, firm, and sympathetic hand upon his brow, had still the old power to soothe and charm away pain and care. She was so true, and strong, and faithful; and a healing virtue dwelt for him in her touch--the one truly good and holy nature he had ever believed in. And she believed so thoroughly in him--the only one, perhaps, who did, in all the world--except their boy--and he had only learnt the faith from *her*.

She believed in him, and she was good and true. His brow revelled in the cool, soft, firm touch. He could have pressed it as a dog will rub against his mistress's caressing palm, but that he was ashamed of the one still lingering softness in his nature. Remembering the chicaneries of his money-making career, how glad he was she did not know them; and yet he felt a rogue in gaining this testimony of her faith, more than in all the swervings from uprightness he had ever been guilty of. And the morning's work. For the fraction of an instant it had been less present with him in the luxury of that caress. What would she think of that, if ever she came to know? He guessed the horror she would feel, though, strictly speaking, he felt no horror in himself. Would he ever come to feel any? he wondered. It was merely a dull, stupid consciousness as yet that he was not as other men; that they would none of him if they but knew; that he was separate from the rest of his kind. And she? Her hand appeared to burn him at the thought. He felt spattered and sticky with the dead man's blood, and it was soiling her clean pure hand. If she knew it, she would renounce him. Shrinkingly he turned his head beneath her touch, and the gentle wife, pained at perceiving her caress grow irksome, stole silently from the room.

"Alas! How they had been drifting apart through all the years!" thought Martha. "The world had come between, a broadening wedge pressing them ever more and more asunder. Ralph had never been unkind, but how slowly, yet steadily, he had been growing not to care. He had so many other things to think on." She, who sat at home with her thoughts, and still cherished the old fancies of her girlhood, grew hungry at the heart with the old hunger for a perfect love; and the food had grown sparer and slighter while her mind and soul had been waxing with the years--for a woman's heart need not wither with her complexion--and now, when she sought sign of love, what got she? A roll of bank bills--a handful of Dead Sea fruit--or costly trinkets which had no value now that the eyes she would have pleased did not care to look. Still, until now, he had submitted to her caress; she had even pleased herself by fancying that he liked it, he had submitted always so calmly. Now he had shrunk from her--turned away his head. "Alas! she was growing old," she thought, "he had ceased to care for her save as his housekeeper and Gerald's mother. How hard the men were, and utterly selfish!" She wiped her eyes a little, and went about her morning occupations. At least he should never know that she had suffered this wound. He should never know that she had observed a change. But never again should he have the opportunity to spurn. She would give him his way.

Ralph spent his morning in a semi-invalid fashion strange to one of his habits. "What was the matter with him?" he asked himself, "and what was he afraid of?" To both queries he answered positively "nothing." Yet the oppression on his spirits would not lift, and there was a tremor or dismay at his heart which would not be calmed or reassured. Why would not the man roll over and have done, and let there be an end, as there was with the squirrel and the bear he recollected?

Of moral sense Ralph may be said to have had as little as any one living in the civilized state. He certainly had not enough to trouble sleep or digestion, and might have been warranted impervious to remorse. With little benevolence, and without imagination, he was insensible to pain or misery beyond the circumference of his own cherished hide, as had been shown by his pleasure in the torture and ill-usage of his uncle's slaves. He had even prided himself on being proof to such phantasies as limit other men in working out their will; and if not brave, he had at least the judgment which reduces danger to its true dimensions. He surveyed his position now, The probabilities were in his favour. Who could have seen him? Who suspect him? It was unlikely at that hour that any one had, seeing he had fired but once. In his position nobody would suspect him, even if he had been seen and were accused. He need only say he had seen a bird on the water, and, having the gun in his hand, after frightening the sparrows from his cherry trees hard by, he had let fly. Jordan could testify to his spending the previous evening amicably with the deceased, and no one could suggest a reason for the deed. Possibly, too, the body being in mid-stream would be carried down. Once in the St. Laurence it was safe to be carried over the Lachine Rapids, or rendered unrecognizable by mere lapse of time. Danger, he told himself, there was none, and yet the gloom upon his spirits would not lift. Not all the brandy and soda he could swallow availed to cheer him.

There is a social atmosphere in which we live, a subtle sense of the general sentiment of our fellows, which no obtuseness of the nerves, no clearness of the understanding, can be wholly proof against. We breathe it, and live in it, and are of it, exceptional endowment counting for but little in opposition. The sanctity of human life, and the solidarity of each member with the rest of the community as far as mere existence goes, are sentiments so derived--foregone conclusions which nobody disputes, and nobody finds it necessary to assert. They go without saying, and are in the basis of our notions. And now, as a murderer, Ralph felt himself in the position of a lurking wolf, liable to be found out at any moment, and hooted from the company of men. He was already of a different kind from his fellows--a man apart and outside of human sympathy. If it were known, whom would he have to depend on? Would not his closest intimates be ready to assist the sheriff in bringing him to punishment? The loneliness weighed on him. Brandy would not lighten it. The rush of that detestable river was in his ears, and would not be expelled, nor the swift glassy sweeping of the tide be obliterated from his view, use his eyes or close them as he might.

"Let me take you for a drive, Martha," he called out at last. "A long drive in the sun and wind, I think, will do me good."

That drive was not a happy experience for the unfortunate horse. Urged to his utmost speed, over endless miles of dusty way, in the heat and glare of an August afternoon, Ralph suffered him not to flag, though his sides were wet with foam and his ears drooped with fatigue. Heedless of all else, Ralph strove to escape or outstrip the dull oppression that had fallen on his spirit, the dismay which, like a shadow, stood by his shoulder and at his ear, whispering in the rushing river's voice, and pointing him to the shimmer of waters closing on the swimmer's head, turn his eyes whithersoever he might. Martha sat pensively and silent by his side. In his miserable pre-occupation he forgot her presence, and spoke to her not a word, bent on urging the horse forward, in feverish merciless impatience.

"Ralph!" Martha cried at last in genuine alarm. She had known him in feverish moods before, which violent motion and exertion had been able to relieve, but she never before had seen him act and look as now. She feared for his sanity, and kept silence while she could, trusting to his out-wearing the fit; but in time it seemed to her that their lives were in danger, they were liable to be thrown out at any moment, and succour was miles away. "Ralph!" and she laid her hand on his sleeve. "Where are you going? Where do you want to take us? You will break down the horse and throw us out upon the road, if you do not mind. Look at him!--he seems fit to drop."

Ralph started, and but for his wife the reins would have slipped from his hand. He was like one awakened from a horrid dream, roused to what is going on around him. He checked the horse, brought him to a walk, and shortly stopped. The relief he experienced at the moment he was disturbed was inexpressible, he could have laughed and babbled with delight; but then, too quickly, he recollected. There was something to conceal as well as to forget; he must guard his every word and movement. By-and-by unheeded incidents might be re-called, and pieced together into a web of circumstantial evidence from which it would be impossible to escape. He must command himself.

"It's the heat, Martha, the heat. My head has been turning round all day. Wonder if I can have had a slight sunstroke? It was well you spoke; I must have been asleep--sleeping with my eyes open, and driving like mad. Poor Catchfly! I've nearly killed him. What will Gerald say to me for ruining his nag? Too bad! Really I did not know what I was doing. You should have spoken an hour ago, Martha."

"How could I, Ralph? You have not spoken a word since we came out. I did not know what might be the matter. It was only when Catchfly began to look as if he must drop, and the road got stony, and I saw the gravel pits by the wayside, that I began to fear for our necks and spoke. Where are you going? Where are we?"

"I do not know where we are. As to where I am going, it can only be *back again*, if we can find the way."

"We must 'light then, and give the poor beast an hour or two's rest, at any rate. See how used up he is! It will be no wonder if he goes lame; and see, he has lost a shoe!"

"We must get out of this sun-beaten road, at any rate, into the shade. There is a grove by the road-side, a mile on the way back. See it? A sugar-bush^[1] it looks like from here. There must be a homestead not far from it. We may hire a fresh horse there, perhaps, and let them bring home Catchfly to-morrow."

In time the sugar-bush was reached, and by-and-by, the farmer's house. The way seemed long, they traversed it so slowly, for Catchfly fell lame as he began to cool; and they had to alight and lead him ere the end.

In consideration of money paid, the farmer complied with their wishes. Catchfly was liberated from the shafts, and another horse took his place--a horse which had toiled all day in the turnip field, and at his best was not remarkable for speed. They were condemned to sit up helplessly behind, while this patient beast trudged wearily along the road. The day waned into twilight, and Martha's patience died out with the light.

"Say! Ralph, you can go home and have your dinner. I've had enough of buggy-riding for one day. Let me out here, at Miss Stanley's gate, she'll give me a cup of tea. After dinner you can send up Gerald to bring me home."

"I don't feel hungry either," answered Ralph. "It will be dull without you. I'll go in, too, and bring you home myself by-and-by."

The ladies were sitting in the dusk without candles. Penelope drowsed over some knitting by the window, while Matilda and Muriel played old duets from memory; the former seemingly without much interest or attention, though she still kept on playing, notwithstanding Muriel's frequent exclamations that she had gone astray. The window was darkened for an instant, but the music still went on, hurrying just a little, perhaps, to reach its close. It was only a lady who had come and sat down by Penelope, speaking softly, as if unwilling to interrupt. And then, through the other window there entered a man, the dark outline of whose figure alone was seen against the dimly-lighted garden, and the music ceased, for Matilda had risen.

"Mr.Considine--at last. And we have been looking for you since two o'clock. The horses

harnessed, lunch baskets packed, everything ready. What an apology you have got to make us! I really do not think Penelope can bring herself to forgive you, whatever you say."

Ralph gasped and started, stopped short, looked wildly behind him, and catching hold of a chair to steady himself, dropped into it in a momentary palsy of fright.

"Mr. Herkimer!" Matilda corrected herself, "What a ridiculous mistake!" and she coloured, perhaps, but it was growing dark, and no inquisitive eye was near. "You seem quite faint with the heat. Muriel, get him some wine and water. And Martha! I did not observe you come in. Mr. Herkimer seems quite poorly."

"He has been out of sorts all day. Biliousness and the heat combined. No! You did not observe *me*. It was impossible to mistake *my* shadow for Considine's."

Ralph started and stamped his foot. That man's name again; and *he* striving so strenuously to forget!

"Are you worse? Ralph," asked Martha, noticing his movement. "I wonder, Matilda, you should mistake Ralph for Considine. They are both men, that is all the resemblance I can see between them." And Martha smiled.

"We expected Mr. Considine, that is all. We have been looking for him since two o'clock. He has not come, and he has not sent. I never knew him serve us so before. He is so very particular in general."

"I should think so. Depend upon it there is some good reason, or a message has miscarried."

Ralph writhed. Why *would* they speak of the man? It seemed as if they could speak of no one else. And yet they did not know, and they must not know. Nobody must know; and he must exert a vigorous control upon himself. How was it that control should be needed at all? What weakness was this that had fallen on him? He did not understand it. About a man already dead--done with; non-existent; wiped like a cipher from a slate--vanished and disappeared?

CHAPTER VII.

RESCUE.

The wooded islands which closed the river view from St. Euphrase, shut out from sight the homestead of Farmer Belmore lower down the stream. Only the unreclaimed outskirts of his land could be seen from the village, repeating the shaggy bush of the islands upon the farther shore, and carrying it backward and upward to the sky line. A dense umbrageous bush it was, containing much choice timber, a resort of game, and also, in the warm weather, of tramps, at times, and specimens of the rougher dwellers in the city, who sought in its leafy recesses temporary change of abode, to the loss of neighbouring gardens and hen-roosts. The farmer, however, was safe while the depredators dwelt upon his land, by tacit understanding; and therefore he made a point of closing his eyes, and never was cognizant of their presence.

At this moment a gang of gypsies^[2] were encamped in Belmore's bush. Their waggons, tents, and children had lain there for a week or two, while the men scoured the surrounding country, selling horses, and picking them up, the screws in honest trade, the others as might happen: for strays were certainly not unfrequent about the time of their visits, though none were ever traced into their hands, which is not remarkable, as who would look for a Canadian colt in New York State, or a New York one in Ohio or Kentucky?

These people, like other European products transported to America, have thriven luxuriantly. They have ceased to be tinkers, though fortune-telling is still practised by the women; their donkeys have been exchanged for waggons and horses, and they traverse the settled States from the Gulf of Mexico to the St. Lawrence, following the warm weather northward, as the red-birds and wild canaries do, and returning South again when summer is over, in time to avoid the cold. Their native love of wandering finds a wider range in their new country, and they are comparatively wealthy, though still, as ever, they live in the open air and apart from their fellow men.

The morning fires were alight in the gypsy camp near the river bank. The meal was over, but the children and the dogs still brawled and scrambled for the scraps. The women, and such young men as were not away, had dispersed themselves along the woody banks to fish or bathe;

and old Jess, the mother of the gang, sat smoking her corn-cob pipe upon a fallen pine which stretched far out, dabbing its humbled plumage in the current, and raising murmurs for its downfall in the lapping of the water among its boughs. Jess sat and smoked in the pleasant morning air, so full of warmth and sunshine and gentle sound, watching the smoke-rings vanish into air and thinking the passive unconscious thoughts of physical well-being, the thoughts which want no words because they call for no expression. The ox knows them, ruminating in his meadow; and mankind, innocent of printed lore, and under no stress to act or say, must know them too, in their harmonious vagueness, bringing the luxury and refreshment of perfect sleep, without the diminishment of sleep's unconsciousness.

The even movement of the glancing water called up in a day-dream the images of bygone things--her childhood and youth in England, her voyage across the sea, her husband and her sons; and then her husband's death, as he was fording Licken River in a freshet, riding an unruly horse. The current before her seemed to swell and darken and grow turbid as she recalled the affrighted beast plunging and floundering through the swirling flood, swerve suddenly aside, losing his footing, and roll over, disappearing in a vortex, and by-and-by emerge alone and struggle up the bank. It was a long time since it all had happened; the very recollection had ceased to be present in her daily life, with its cares and enjoyments so completely of the present--the affairs of her numerous descendants and their hangers-on, over whom she would fain retain authority as much as might be; and its equivalent, the money, in her own hands.

This morning it felt different, the long ago seemed more actual than the present as she sat and smoked, her grizzled hair hanging in wisps upon her shoulders, and her sun-bonnet of yellow gingham pushed back upon her head. A something in the water, surging up through the surface and sinking again, leaving rings upon the current coming down, caught her eye as she sat gazing up stream. It might only be a log, but yet, how it carried back her thoughts to her old man hurried down on that Licken freshet into the muddy Ohio, and rolling on and on for hundreds of miles through the yellow oozy water, till the body stuck fast in a clay-bank and was hid for ever. It might be a log; but no, it was not, for now she saw white hair, which spread and shrank again, as it sank and rose in the water. A horse, was it? or an ox, with a hide worth stripping off to sell? but no--it was a man! She could see it plainly now, as it drifted near, and she felt the thud as it struck against the branches of her tree, branches which caught it and blocked its forward course. A man! and still alive, perhaps, for there was a redness as from oozing blood around. She threw her pipe away, and shouting to those within hail, she leaped into the water and waded out with the assistance of her tree. A youth had hurried to her aid, the water did not reach above his chest, and their united efforts drew the body ashore.

"A fine clean-limbed man," sighed Jess, comparing him with her own old man, whom partial hap, alas, had carried away for ever. "A fine strapping man, but never so spry as thy own grandfer. Will. *He was* the man, but he's away; let's see to this coon. Hm----" a smothered exclamation, and a suspicious glance at Will, to see if he had observed her pull a diamond ring from the drowned man's finger; but Will's attention was drawn to something else at the moment.

"He ain't come by's end fair, granny," he said; "see to the blood on's back--running still, by gum! The man maybe ain't dead, granny."

Granny slipped the ring into her mouth for safety, till she should find leisure and privacy to conceal it elsewhere, and then resumed her interest in the drowned man.

"Runnin' sure, the blood is, Will. And shot he's been. I heard the crack of a gun up stream the now, I reckon, but I gave no heed. Lay down his head, lad, and lift his feet. Help shake the water out of him, and roll him round. There was none by to roll thy poor grandfer the day he fell in Licken River. Never fear to hurt him, lad! The man can't feel, and more's the pity. Shake him well and roll him round, keep down his head, and let the filthy water run off his stommick." There was little of that same fluid ever privileged to enter Jess's anatomy, or, indeed to come near her person, save in the inevitable form of rain or a fordable stream.

It was a rough and uncouth process of resuscitation, in which the others, as they gathered about, joined with energy, chafing the limbs, rubbing, rolling, and kneading; but fortunately for himself Considine was unconscious of the liberties which the gypsies were taking with his person; a brown skinned black-eyed rabble, pawing, and pulling, and fingering him all over, without diffidence or any respect.

The warm sun and the vigorous handling had their effect at last, a sigh escaped from the inactive chest, and by-and-by another, and then old Jess had him carried into the bush and laid on her own bed in one of the waggons, where she practised such surgery as she knew in the way of binding up his wound, poured a quantity of whisky down his throat, and left him to sleep.

Just then some of the gypsies, who had come on the boat lying grounded among the weedy shallows round the island, brought it ashore; and Considine's towels and clothing were appropriated and divided among the gang, who then pushed the boat back into the stream and let it drift. When this was done, the camp sank back into rest and leisure. The people wandered off into the bush, to spend the summer day as liked them best, some to stretch themselves in the shadow, others to bask in the sun, while the children picked berries or snared birds, a happy and unsophisticated crew, till the lengthening shadows of afternoon warned the women to prepare supper against the return of their men.

The men returned earlier than was expected. A shrill whistle rang through the bush as they appeared, which brought in the stragglers from every direction to hover round the fire and snuff in expectancy the savoury odours which issued from the bubbling pots.

Reuben, the chief man, led Jess aside, muttering to her a rambling story of his troubles during the day, which she listened to with impatience and disgust.

"As usual, Reuben, al'us getting in a row along of them strays you pick up and let join us. Thou'lt have the hull country raised agin us ere long, and we shan't know whar to go--us as were so well liked every whar a while back."

"It was yourself let him wive with Sall, mother; and you've no call to cast it up to me. A fine thing it would have been to let the pore wench go off with her lad, all alone; and her the handiest gal to tell a fortn' 'twixt here and Allegany. Needs must when the devil drives, so we let the coon stay. And there's no harm in the lad as I kin see, 'cep' that he's kind o' soft like, and not peart. He's cl'ar off the now, and he's makin' for the Lines, but, like's not, they'll be down here the morrow to look for him, and there's a many thing's round this camp as wuddn't be good for sheriff's men to see. We mun cl'ar out, mother; cl'ar out the night."

"I have a half-drownded man in the waggon wi' me, lad--I pulled him out o' th' water myself, for the love o' your old dad as is drownded and gone this many a year--and what am I to do with 'n, think you?"

"Let him slide. Put him back whar you brought 'n from. I wants no stranger wi 's this night."

"We cud not leave him here for the sheriff to find. They'd say we did for him. He has a gunshot in's body as it is, and I hain't a rag to cover him wi' when we leave him. You'd not be for givin' him your own coat, I reckon, and I know of nowt else, for I need my blanket to keep my own old bones warm o' nights. The lads have his pants, and boots, and things among them, the gals have the shirt and the towels, and I have the gold ticker for yourself, Reuben, and you wouldn't be for hanging it round's neck, I reckon, to show we didn't rob him, if we tote him to Belmore's place afore we start."

Reuben took the watch, opened it, held it to his ear, bit the chain with his teeth, tested it in such ways as occurred to him, and finally, satisfied of its value, slipped it into his pocket.

"We'll have to take him, I s'pose. Keep him quiet, and keep the duds away from him. He'll be bound to stay then, cuddn't make off ye know wi' nothin' but's own pelt on's back. He'll kin pay for's liberty and new duds afore long. And willin' too. But you'll have to keep dark."

There was no light in the gypsy camp that night. The fires had smouldered out, and the shadows of the trees excluded every glance of the moonlight. There was no sound either; no yelp of cur or cry of wakeful infant; only the hooting of a solitary owl overhead, blinking at the moon through the leaves, or the rustle of a fox stealing away through the underbush, making off with a half-picked bone. A mile away a creaking of wheels labouring through deep encumbered ruts, and the cracking of branches might have been heard in the stillness, while dusky figures shone momentarily in the moonlight as they passed from one obscurity of shadow to the next.

Ere morning the gang was encamped again in another quiet corner, twenty miles distant from Belmore's bush, and next day they resumed their retreat to the Vermont Line, journeying calmly through a neighbourhood which knew nothing of the misdoings of Sall's husband.

Old Jess rode in the waggon with her charge, nursing and caring for him with much skill, but unable to extract the bullet from his wound. That was now growing fevered and inflamed, the jolting must have caused him pain, and might have elicited a groan liable to be overheard at an inconvenient moment; but she contrived to keep him in a drowse with strange drinks of her own devising, which she administered to him, and it was a whole day from the time of his rescue before he was able to take note of his situation. Even then his head was dizzy, his shoulder ached; his body was so wretched, and his mind so confused, that he was glad to turn round and court sleep and unconsciousness again.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT WAS ALL WEBB'S FAULT.

It was a day or two before Ralph's nerves recovered their tone. It mortified him to discover

that such things formed part of his internal economy, for he had supposed himself to resemble the strong and successful men of history and finance, who march straight forward to their purpose, looking neither behind nor to either side, careless alike of the downtrodden and the overthrown who mark their onward path, conquering and to conquer. It was a day or two before he calmed down, or, as his wife expressed it, "got over that little turn, which, now it was over, she was free to confess, had made her feel real anxious." The cares of business had been too much, she thought, and she was sure he wanted a change. "Why would he not take her for a few weeks to the sea; or to the White Mountains she was so fond of? Why keep a dog and be always barking himself? Had he not made Gerald a partner? Then why not leave him in charge of the business? She was sure her boy, with his inherited smartness and fine education, could manage very well for a week or two; and at the worst there was always the telegraph, and he could recall his father if he found the responsibility too much for him. Is he not a fine young man, Ralph? Own up for once, though he is your own son."

"Yes, my dear, certainly!--Very fine indeed, and very nice--and a good lad to boot; but he knows no more of my business than you do, and I do not wish that he ever should."

Martha sighed. She had her misgivings that there were depths and recesses in her husband's thoughts and his affairs, which she had never sounded or peered into, and which might yield up skeletons and unwelcome truths to an over-inquisitive search. She had never attempted to know more than was disclosed, therein manifesting her wisdom. "Why should she, indeed?" as she asked herself. Ralph had always been kind; once upon a time, at least, he had been more, he had been really fond of her; and, for herself, she knew that she still loved him very dearly, and therefore it was wisdom to keep disturbing considerations out of sight. It is so always. There is much in life to make the moral perceptions jar. Good and evil are linked in such close relations--concurrent streams which occupy one channel amicably, and with mutual convenience, but without mingling--the wheat and tares growing up together, and both contributing to the luxuriance of the scene, however the strictly moral eye may disapprove. Still, Martha had her misgivings; or rather, if she would have heeded them, her intuitions. They started from the most trivial grounds, an inadvertent phrase, a laugh, or even a shrug of scorn, at something good or noble, which betrayed that there were things, and not so far either from the gates of speech, which, if they came forth, would raise a barrier between them which could never be pulled down; and so, as the guardian of her own happiness and peace, she resolutely turned her observation the other way, rather than see what it would cost her far too dear to know, as leading to an alienation worse than widowhood; for there could be mingled with it no tender regret, no hope, or even wish for reunion.

"Then is Gerald to have no holidays this year?" said Martha, by way of resuming the talk. "If you will not go away yourself you may surely send *him*."

"I don't think he wants to travel farther

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was finished. No, sir-ree! Not if I know it."

"But, my dear fellow, I really do not know whom you are talking about. I assure you. I have not seen or heard of him since the other evening when we called on him together."

"Who *has* seen him since then, I should like to know? But it is clear you know well enough what I'm driving at. Now, tell me, for we have little time to act in, have you taken any steps towards getting hold of his papers yet?"

"What steps would you wish me to take? or rather, what steps would be possible? Podevin--his host, remember, and the man has no one belonging to him, or more nearly interested in him, in this country--thinks he must have gone to New York by the early train the other morning; that he went straight from his room to the station without going into the hotel. You see the train stops for breakfast at that small station, fifty miles down the line. So he is no way disturbed at his guest's absence, who has taken his room for the season, and goes and comes as he likes."

"But the man is drowned! I saw him sink with my own eyes."

"If you will report that to the authorities, it will both simplify and hasten matters. Only the first question which they will ask is sure to be why you waited so many days before saying a word. The heat, no doubt, may be made to account for a good deal, but you had better have medical advice before committing yourself."

"But there is the boat. He undressed in the boat. That will tell the whole story. One of Podevin's boats, too."

"Ha! Yes; I think I remember, now you mention it, Randolph's telling us at dinner, yesterday, that Podevin's boat-house had been broken open and a boat carried off--yes, and the boat was picked up far down the river, and brought back all safe. And the old man has been fretting

himself to make out which of his servants could have given it, for he is sure the boat-house has been opened from the inside. Not a word about clothes, though, and you see there is no anxiety whatever about his disappearance. We must wait. The body may be found."

"But I am going off--off to the White Mountains with my wife, for the rest of the warm weather, and there is no saying when I shall get back."

"No; I suppose not."

"And I want to take those securities, or whatever they are--you don't seem to know yourself? a pretty trustee!--along with me. Can I depend on you to send them after me?"

"You should know. Would you do it yourself?" and Jordan, braced into self-assertion by the overbearing tone of the other, looked defiantly in his face. "In a year and ten months from now your son will have a right to dictate, if, as Considine phrased it the other evening, he shall then prove to be the heir. In the meantime, I am accountable only to my fellow-trustee, and if he does not call me to account I know of no one else in the position to do so. At the same time, your assistance in unloading my copper shares might be of vast benefit to me, and I am willing to pay for that, and pay handsomely, though it is idle to discuss at present what I may see my way to doing if ever I become sole trustee."

Ralph turned away with a shrug to buy his morning newspaper. "Brag is a good dog, but Hold-fast is a better," was all he said to himself as he seated himself in the railway carriage, and began to look over the news. It was a truism he had long been familiar with, but one which came pleasanter when he happened to own Hold-fast, instead of poor Brag. However, one must fight the dog he happens to have, there are chances, always, only one need not lament when what might have been expected comes to pass. It did seem to him, however, that he had very needlessly befouled himself with crime; he was going to make nothing out of it, that was pretty clear, and, as he cynically expressed it, the devil was picking him up a bargain, dirt cheap. His hide, however--his moral hide, that is--was tough and callous, and he congratulated himself on the circumstance. So long as the "untoward incident" was not known, it should not interfere with his appetite or his spirits. Already he had become accustomed to that ugly word "murderer" in his mind; it was bearable he found, so long as it carried no external mark; though he regretted it, undoubtedly, now that it had turned out so utterly useless. As there was every prospect of its never being known, he would survive it well enough, he felt; but he would take precious good care next time that there should be no mistake about the *quid pro quo*, before again running the risk of so many ugly possibilities.

He reached town busied with these reflections, and hurried to his office, where he soon was deep in the correspondence of the days he had been absent, with Stinson behind his chair contributing condensed verbal information by way of commentary as he went along.

"Yes, Stinson, you'll do," he said, when he had laid down the last letter. "You've been a good clerk, and an apt pupil. You have feathered your nest nicely, I make no doubt, and when the house goes up, as it must, in three weeks at the outside--I think I can keep it standing till then--you will be in a good position, no one better, to start for yourself; and, with what I have taught you, to make your fortune right off. You will be able to start at once, I say, but if you take the advice of an old friend--who has not been a bad friend to you either, though I say it--you will wait on here and wind up the business. The creditors will be only too glad to have you. In fact, there is no one else who ever will unravel things. You will, and can, make your own terms with them, I doubt not; and the only favour I have to ask of you is that you will do what you can to let that boy Gerald down easy, and get him his discharge as soon as possible. It is well for him now, that he should have been so unfit for business--financial business, I mean, or rather, perhaps, our special application of the science of finance. He would have done well in some steady, old-fashioned, respectable concern, I make no doubt, for he is not a fool; but he wants enterprise, vim, go, and he has too many scruples for a rising man. His mother, good woman, has spoiled his prospects for life in this walk; but, as he will probably be independent, perhaps it is best so. There's nothing like high-souled honour to keep a man's head up in the world--when he can afford it, that is--I never could, not till after my road was chosen, at least, when it would have been too late; so broad views in economics and morals were the only ones for me, and I fancy some of my admirers will find them to have been even broader than they thought, after I have cleared out, and they find their money scattered past picking up again. But this is digression, Stinson; never mind *me*, only keep the boy's name clean. It would break his spirit and kill his mother--the truest woman alive--if any reproach fell on him. Fling everything on me, I shall have so much to carry that a trifle more or less will make no matter. And, after all, when Pikes Peak and Montana comes up to par, I shall be back again with a pocketful of money big enough to make them all keep quiet. If anybody strong enough to carry on a lawsuit for years has a colourable claim, I can settle with him out of court; and as for the small fry, I shall snap my fingers at them, and they will think me a finer fellow than ever for being able to over-ride them. They're like dogs, they reverence the man who can hide them soundly. But I talk discursively this morning. Eh, Stinson? I hope you will impress upon the lad, what, indeed, is the fact, and what the books of the firm show conclusively, and that is, that the *firm* is solvent--almost, that is; ninety-eight cents to the dollar they show, and there would be a surplus, if the firm's funds had not been diverted to my private operations, with which he has no concern, and which it would be casting a reflection on me for him now to touch. There is the Bank, the Copper Company, and the St. Lawrence and Hudson's Bay, in which he has absolutely no interest whatever. If the creditors of these come to him with representations, and

claims of honour--I know how they will put it--asking him to promise a payment out of my uncle's fortune when he gets it, tell him from me, that I expect him as a good son to close his ears to every slanderous story, and to have nothing to do with those who tell it, and never to admit the possibility of such claims having a foundation, by attempting to settle them. It will not surprise me much if that inheritance of his turns out to be no great thing after all. It has not been in the most judicious keeping, and---But see, who is that at the door. Tell him, whoever he is, I am engaged, and can't see him. There are several drawers full of papers in the safe--the accumulation of years--I shall need your memory to help me, perhaps. We will tackle them to-day in case of accidents."

"Engaged most particularly," cried Stinson, unbolting the door and holding it ajar. "Can see nobody, Mr. Jordan. Indeed, sir--you cannot come in--no, indeed!"

"Stand back, you fool. Don't I tell you I must?" and Jordan, looking red and white in patches, hot and cold at once, his hat on his head askew, and his waistcoat torn open, struggled in, pushing Stinson aside, closing the door again, and locking it himself.

"See here! Herkimer. Have *you* been served with this?--I have got one as solicitor, but you as president should be served also, and so should each individual director, I hold, and I mean to push the point as to their being served individually; but there can be no question about the necessity of serving the president."

"What is it? Let me see. Hm! Webb v. St. Euphrase Mining Association. Motion to show cause--pay dividend. Don't know, I'm sure. It may be in the outer office. Have been busy this morning--let nobody in but you--and that was only because Stinson failed to keep you out. Ask in the office as you go out, they will tell you--if you think it of consequence."

"Consequence? If they have not served you I can certainly get the hearing postponed, and secure time to unload."

"Time to unload? Who wants to unload? *I* don't. I unloaded long ago."

"But *I* do."

"And pray, Mr. Jordan, what of that? *You* are not a director of this company--only the solicitor, its paid professional adviser. Send in your bill, it will be filed with the rest of the claims, and rank as the law prescribes when we go into liquidation."

"Good God! Ralph. It will ruin me!" Jordan had grown all white now, and beads of moisture were standing on his forehead. "We *must* stave off this argument in court. The shares will be unsaleable at a cent in the dollar. As it is, my brokers have been able to get off none for three days back--some inkling of this, no doubt. But if I can stave off the argument in court for a fortnight, there will be time for us to circulate encouraging rumours."

"*Us?* What have I to do with it? I will have no hand in circulating false reports. Understand that clearly, Mr. Jordan. I wonder what I can have done"--turning to Stinson, who stood by the door enjoying the comedy--"to give any one the right to approach me with such a proposal," and he blew his nose loudly, grinning the while under cover of his pocket-handkerchief.

"Do you want to ruin me, Herkimer? I have all the shares I ever took up still on my hands, not only those I subscribed for, but all Rouget's, and I was to have given him up his mortgage in payment of them; but I had already realized that, and bought more of your infernal shares with the money; and now, the fat's in the fire! If I can't unload I am a ruined and a dishonoured man. Everything I have will go, and then the Law Society will come down on me for irregularities, when I have lost the ability to square the benchers, and I shall be disbarred. Ralph!" and he clasped his hands, "I shall be ruined if you do not help me at this pinch. You must!"

"I don't seem to see it. I fear it is impossible. Unfortunate, of course; but just what happens constantly, when a man leaves the groove of his own profession, and ventures into fields of enterprise he does not understand, and has no experience in. You lawyers are so very superior to the rest of us. You go into court and talk so glibly of our affairs, and so much more knowingly than we can do ourselves, that by-and-by you persuade yourselves that you really understand them. Then you try a hand at them yourselves, and then you cut your fingers. It is droll, my dear fellow. Forgive my saying so, but as a man of the world you must see it yourself; and if only it had been some one else you would have appreciated the humour of the situation thoroughly."

"Keep your jesting, Mr. Herkimer, for a more seemly opportunity," cried Jordan, rallying into something like manhood under the sting of the other's gibes. "It will prove no very amusing jest for yourself if I am ruined. Your son's inheritance is involved with my fortune, and both must sink or swim together. Remember that! I have something in *my* power, too, so beware!"

"I know. You seem to have forgotten our conversation this morning very quickly. You then defined your position with a frankness which left nothing more to say. You made it perfectly clear that you would never leave hold on my uncle's fortune till we compelled you, and we cannot do that at present. If you saved your money at the present pinch, you would lose it again next opportunity; or, at least, you would make sure that we should not get at it. No! Mr. Jordan. I shall put in no rejoinder, or whatever may be the proper name for it. Mr. Webb may have his order,

and welcome, for any obstruction from me. In fact, as I am taking my wife on a tour through the White Mountains, it would be inconvenient for me to be detained watching a lawsuit. If I might suggest, change of scene will be beneficial to your own health, as a relief from the worries of share-jobbing. Meanwhile, let me wish you good-bye. No saying how long it may be before we meet again. Stinson! Let's get on with those papers. I think I may be able to get away to the White Mountains to-morrow."

The very next morning Martha, escorted by Ralph, set out on a journey of pleasure through the White Mountains; and a day or two later, Amelia Jordan, tantalized out of patience by her husband's continued procrastination as to their summer holiday, went off to Long Branch alone, and it was not many days later that Jordan himself did not appear at his office, though where he had gone nobody knew. Some said he had followed his wife to the fashionable seaside resort, others, that he had joined Herkimer in his travels. The latter view became the popular one; it kept the two names conjoined, which seemed best, they came up together so often now in the talk on 'Change; for the great house in the Rue des Borgnes--Ralph Herkimer & Son--had come down, and great was the fall of it, the Banque Sangsue Prêteuse was involved in the ruin, so was the Mining Association of St. Euphrase, and so were other important concerns. They had all tumbled together in one confusion of ruin which set the ears of the public ringing, and filled their eyes with so much dust that they could see nothing clearly; but Jordan having been heard to anathematize "that fellow Webb," it was universally held during the worst days of the excitement that he had originated or precipitated the calamity for his own base ends. In truth, Webb was one of the severest sufferers, his fellow-directors having taken the hint to save themselves in time, and even to make money out of it; while he, good man, found all his savings and all his ready money evaporated in smoke or converted into scrip fit for nothing but pipe-lights, with impending possibilities of litigation, should any victimized shareholder be tempted to throw good money after bad and relieve his indignation with a lawsuit. But then he had the high moral satisfaction of having vindicated his superior probity in his own eyes--the world's, I fear, were so busy with its own affairs that they took no heed. He lay down at night with an easy conscience and a light pocket, if sometimes a heavy heart, for it must be confessed that his neighbours' non-appreciation of his virtuous conduct was afflicting. But he was young still, and strong, and sanguine, and his farm and stock were fairly good. He would make money yet, he vowed, if only Providence would spare him in the land of the living; and that--money-making, I mean--is, as all the world knows, the whole duty of man.

Webb realized, however, that he must now have a woman in his household, to help him to make it quickly; not a hireling, as heretofore, in his days of bachelorhood and prosperity, to be courted and considered at every turn, lest she should go off and leave him, but a lawful wife; tied to his homestead by the institutions of God and man, to churn his butter, fatten his poultry, and look after his comfort; and do it, too, for life, without other wage than her keep, and the dignity of being a married woman.

He had had dreams, like other young men, of a being with golden hair and wonderful eyes, a human bird of paradise, for whom he was to build a delightful bower, and live happy with her in it for ever after; but the day for fantastic dreaming was gone by; birds of paradise are expensive, and he had no money. He must content himself with less, with a serviceable work-a-day barn-door fowl, content to roost anywhere, and for whom a nest of wholesome straw would be as meet as a gilded aviary for the other--and such a one rose before his mind's eye in the person of Betsey Bunce. "A homely girl," as he told himself, "but active and handy, able to bake and mend, and willing to do it"--for *him* at least, he flattered himself. She was "awful homely," he confessed as he mused; "and a fool about her clothes, but if he looked after the spendings, as he 'allowed' to do, he would have her dressed sensibly enough, he flattered himself, so soon as her wedding finery wore out."

He did not feel as if he could ever come to be foolishly fond of her, but he thought he had descried tokens that she was not indisposed to attach herself to *him*. So there would be a certain *modicum* of love to furnish out their board, and if it was not he who provided it, at least he would be its object, which was the next best thing, and as much, perhaps, as a man could look for, after losing his money. Wherefore he made up his mind, and the very next Sunday after church he put his resolve in practice.

CHAPTER IX.

JOE PROPOSES.

Betsey was one of the last to come out of church on a Sunday morning now. She hung behind while her aunt lingered to exchange the news with her neighbours. Since the day when she had hastened to give the Misses Stanley "a bit of her mind," relative to Muriel's parentage and rearing, a something more than coldness had sprung up. Miss Matilda's words on that occasion had been few, but scorching, and the look of withering disgust, which accompanied them, had been more than even her obtuse conceit and forwardness could bear up against. She had not dared to face the ladies since, and, they being in the heart of the group of lingerers, Betsey felt constrained to remain outside the circle, a sort of martyr to the truth, ruminating in silence on the consequences of proclaiming it, at least when the proclamation is ill-timed or ill-natured.

The circle melted away in time, beginning with Muriel and Gerald Herkimer--who, in his bankruptcy and the absence of his family, partook of many dinners and a great deal of delightful sympathy at the ladies' residence--and ending with Penelope and Matilda, the latter of whom, though she exhibited fitful outbursts of vivacity, appeared depressed, and far from in good form. It was observed by those who saw them drive from the church door that, instead of taking the reins herself, she let the servant drive, quite contrary to her usual custom; but then Mr. Considine had been in the habit of returning with the ladies from church, and his presence at Matilda's elbow may have been necessary to give her confidence.

Betsey reached the open air at last, feeling unusually meek and chastened under the lack of notice she had been experiencing; and in the revulsion of feeling which ensued when Mr. Joe Webb stepped forward, and, after ceremoniously inquiring for her health, asked if she would not favour him with her company for a buggy-ride down the road, while her dinner was "*dishing up*" at home, it is not remarkable if she "enthused a little," to cull a flower of speech from the English column of the *Journal de St. Euphrase*.

"Oh! Thank you, Squire! that will be nice"--I fear *bully* was the word she used, this sweet Western flower, but it means much the same thing, only a little more so.

"Then come along! In with you! And we'll be stepping," which was perhaps a more free-and-easy mode of address than Mr. Joe's wont, for he prided himself on his fine manners with the ladies; but he was trying to get up his courage by a little premature audacity for what was to follow.

Proposing matrimony in cold blood--did you ever try it, my reader?--is a serious matter, or so Joe Webb thought. His mind had been made up on the point, the night before; in the morning he saw no reason to change it, but he observed that the sky looked heavy. If it had drawn to rain he would not have been sorry, for he could, without loss of self-respect, have remained at home, and postponed his undertaking. The weather kept up however, and he went to church; but very few, I fear, were the prayers he joined in.

What he was intending to do would keep continually rising before his mind; not as it had done overnight in the comfortable after-phases, when My Lord Benedict should have entered on his domestic felicity, with slippers toasting inside the fender against his return from the field, pipes filled, and tobacco fetched, without his needing to leave the lounge where he reposed, but in the onerous stage of how to do it. What should he say? and how would she take it? Should he take her hand before beginning? It would be establishing a sort of hold upon her attention. But if she objected to that by an unauthorized individual?--yet the very objection would give the opening to explain, which he desired. Only--how about getting hold of the hand? It might be holding up her parasol. To snatch at it would bring down the article with a flap, which would frighten the horse! Weil, he did not mind that. He could quiet *him* well enough with a cut of the whip. But how about the lady? How to quiet *her*? The whip would not do there, yet a while; though later, he had been credibly informed that Blackstone authorizes such doings on the part of husbands, provided the stick be no thicker than their thumbs. But the lady might refuse to be reassured; she might insist on being let down, or worse, she might actually say. No. No! The word whistled through his mind like a gust of icy wind, it was so new and so unexpected an idea. He must feel tremulous, no doubt, till he should be answered "yes," but he could not bring himself to contemplate the opposite. It would be so utter a quencher to--well, if not to love for *her*, which was an eventuality he could contemplate with some tranquillity, at least to his self-love, which was too near his heart to be thought of without dismay. He would be, like a railway guard standing on the roof of a carriage, and sweeping through space at forty miles an hour, when unexpectedly there comes a bridge which he has not looked for, or bowed his head to in time, it catches him between the eyes with a blow irresistible and swift, which snuffs him out of existence, and casts him away, and leaves him a lifeless wreck upon the track.

Altogether Joe had not a happy or an edifying service of it that day in church. A man's own fancies can fret and worry him worse than the words of others, they hit all the raw places so much more surely. He hastened from the sacred fane with the very earliest to go, and stood and watched and waited till Betsey should appear among the other dispersing worshippers, she was long of appearing, and by-and-by he began to think, with a very distinct sense of relief, that she was not there and he must defer the task he had set himself to another day, when, behold! the very last to come out, she appeared; and, seizing himself by the collar, as it were, he marched himself into her presence, and solicited the honour of a drive. Betsey was gracious and compliant, and did not take long to mount into the buggy; he sprang in after, and away they went.

The pace was good; Joe kept fast cattle, and knew how to drive them; but the conversation

flagged. How can a man with a purpose--so deadly to himself, at least--be at his ease, and alive to the trifles which lead up to untrammelled talk? How can he be otherwise than distraught? There is a purpose at his breast hanging heavy as lead, and he feels, poor creature, as though cold water were running down his neck. "Had it been a dance," he thought, "to which he was leading the girl out, it would have been different." The music and the rhythm and the motion of a waltz bring on a gentle enthusiasm, and the sense of support and protection conduce to the tenderness which a man should feel at such a moment; but this was only a buggy-ride; the two were perched up together behind a horse in heat and dust, and for the life of him he could not make up his mind what he ought to say. He had heard of fellows proposing in a buggy, but now when he tried it, it was not the place it was cracked up to be; and he sat in perturbed silence.

Betsey was at her ease, however; she suspected nothing, and she was elated at being borne off in a cloud of dust before the eyes of the women who had slighted and ignored her five minutes before. Some people it seemed--men people, too--thought her worthy of notice. She felt exultant, and she prattled. She wriggled, too, just a very little, which is scarcely dignified, perhaps, but comes natural to some people in moments of exuberance. She talked of the weather till some other subject should arise, like the rest of us who are born to speak English, but he answered nothing; and then she asked him if a shower would not do good to his turnips.

He answered "yes," to that, which is not an easy rejoinder to build the next observation upon; but then he was busy with his horse at the moment, for he hit him a cross cut with the whip, and twitched his nose and eyebrows impatiently. And then there was a lull, and silence disturbed only by the steady pounding of the horse's feet, and the rasping of a wheel against an occasional stone.

"We were so sorry to hear," Betsey said at last, after the silence had lasted some time, and was beginning to grow oppressive; "so very sorry to hear that you have lost money by those Herkimers. Do you remember, I told you the very last time we met what I thought of them, and that it was not much? But that warning came too late to benefit you, I suppose. Is it not absurd the way that young Gerald goes fooling around Muriel up the way? It is just what might be expected from a girl like her, who don't belong to anybody, for all her airs; but I confess I am sorry to see his infatuation, though perhaps it only serves the Herkimers right--the stuck-up lot. I always saw through them--insincere, and all show; though of course I would not have said it, on account of their relationship to Aunt Judy; but now, really, it seems downright wrong to hold one's tongue, and looks like countenancing their on-goins," and Betsey stopped to take breath.

Joe availed himself of the stoppage to take up his parable. "Yes, Miss Betsey," he said, "it is quite true. I have lost the savings of ten years, and all the ready money my father left. Quite true."

"Ah!" sighed Betsey very softly.

"But I'm to the fore still; and you just wait and see if I don't make some more--and more than I have been *euchred* out of."

"I like to hear a man speak like that! It sounds so strong and capable."

"Do you think you could like the man himself. Miss Betsey? Mind you, it ain't all talking with me! It's going to be real, hard, downright doing--livin' off what my own farm raises, and wearin' homespun off the backs of my own sheep, like a *habitant*; freezing on to every copper cent I can scrape, and laying it all by. It will be a hard and a dull life for the first year or two; but it's a good farm, and well-stocked, and in three or four years' time, when I have bought a new reaper, and a few such tricks, and brought in another hundred acres of useless bush, with my own hard work and the hired boys, I believe things will be on the road to grow better than ever; for, though maybe you would not think it, I have thrown away a deal of money on nonsense in my time. But that's over now. What do you think of it yourself. Miss Betsey?"

Betsey turned and looked at him with opening eyes, and met a steadfast gaze more bewildering still, which made her drop them again, and look away. "Think? I think it sounds brave in you to speak like that. A man should never lose heart!"

"But it's yourself, I mean. Would you like it yourself?"

"If I were a man, that's how I'd like to be. I'd love to play the man so."

"But it ain't the *man* you'd be expected to play. Miss Betsey. It would be the *wife*."

Betsey coloured and looked a little hurt. "It's too serious a subject to play with, Mr. Webb."

"But it ain't play. It's good, downright, honest earnest I mean."

"I don't understand you."

"Could you bring yourself to marry a fellow who has lost his money, and is hard up?"

"I don't know, Mr. Webb," she laughed uncomfortably, and a little inclined to take offence at such a catechism being pressed on her, while she sat helpless in the hurrying "trap." "It would

depend altogether on who the 'fellow' was."

"It's me! Miss Betsey. Will you take me? I'm no great match for any girl now, I know that; but *will* you take me?"

"I don't like foolin' on such subjects, Mr. Webb; and it wasn't gentleman-like of you to bring me away in your buggy to talk like this." Her face was scarlet, as she said it, and looked in his; but there was no bantering smile there,--and a catch came in her throat, which sent the blood throbbing down to her finger-tips, as the idea crossed her mind that the man was in earnest. In that case, however, he would speak again, so she said no more.

"But this ain't foolin'. Miss Betsey, and I don't know what right you have to accuse me of sich. Did any one ever know me, man or boy, to tell a lie? I ask you plainly, Betsey Bunce, will you marry me?"

"Oh, laws! Joe Webb--I never--let me out here! I never--oh! you've took me all of a heap. Stop the buggy."

Joe drew rein, and stopped the equipage in the middle of the road, just where the shadow of a tall poplar by the wayside would shelter them from the sun; and there he sat, looking hot about the temples, and trying to settle his eyes on the tips of his horse's ears, because these could not return the look, while he dared not turn elsewhere for fear a mocking glance should meet him and complete his discomfiture, as he sat there awaiting his answer, feeling like a fool who has surrendered his shoulders to the smiters--a trapped animal awaiting the arrival of the hunters--the man who has put it in a girl's power to say she refused him. It was a moment of dread and suspense for Joe.

Betsey fanned herself vehemently--what a privilege a fan must be, sometimes. Since their stoppage she had become less eager to alight. She made no move, sat perfectly still, and let the perturbation of her spirits expend itself in fanning. She was coming to herself again. And, oh! so pleasantly. "What a *puss* she had been! And that--most wonderful of all--without suspecting it herself. And there he was on his knees before her! or what was just the same thing, perched at her elbow in infinite discomfort, looking all the colours of the rainbow in his misery." "And should she have him? that was the point. If she had snared him without knowing it, might there not be others sighing in secret?" She glanced at him over her fan--that precious fan!--glanced over it as the timid fawn does over a park paling, and then is off to hide its head in a bush when the keeper comes in sight. "And how handsome he was! and how foolish he looked, poor fellow, getting himself into a state about poor she! It was delightful. And he so broad-shouldered and manly! She could not find it in her heart to cause him pain--especially when he had made herself so--happy. And those old maids she had parted from at church, how she pitied them! How she should continue to pity them all the rest of her life--her married life!" She peeped over the fan again, and there was poor Joe fidgeting worse than ever--for all the world, like a bull at a bull-baiting--tied to the stake, unable to get away, amid fears and fancies at his own absurd position, like the yelping curs, which plague the noble brute. Then she glanced along the road. A cloud of dust was approaching, a waggon within it, for already she could hear the rattle of wheels and the clank of harness. Already Joe was rousing himself and gathering up his reins for a start. Time was up. If she let this opportunity pass, and allowed matters to fall back into everyday life, how would she ever bring them up again to this point? It was provoking, the dalliance was so pleasant, but she could not risk a slip; so, shutting her eyes, and shutting up her fan, she took the leap--and just in time, for the buggy was already in motion.

She said it very softly. What she said Joe could not hear for the noise of the wheels, very likely she did not know precisely herself what it was; but they both took it to mean consent, and Joe, so soon as that lumbering waggon was fairly past, stooped down and sealed it on her lips, as in duty bound.

Then there was a silence of some duration, though both were too busy with their own thoughts to notice it; till at length Joe remembered that the purpose of their expedition was fulfilled, and asked his companion if she did not think they had better return. Betsey was ready to think whatever her Joe thought, leaning up with an undesirable closeness that warm day, and softly fanning their joint countenances with a fond and lingering motion of her fan. In time she heaved a sigh, deep and full of overflowing enjoyment, and then she spoke.

"Do you know, Joe dear, you have given me a great surprise to-day?"

Joe's tight-strained feelings had run themselves down now. He felt--"tired in his inside," I fear, would have been his inelegant expression, and longed for a glass of beer. He felt incapable of conversation, and even a little grumpy, perhaps. Such strange and inconsistent creatures are the men.

Betsey's over-wroughtness was quite of another kind. Her nervous excitement, once fairly past the turn of the tide, was inclined, as Hamlet would have had his solid flesh incline, to "melt and dissolve itself into a dew"--of verbiage and watery talk. It was of a soliloquizing tendency, too, which, though prone to questionings, passed on from one to the next, indifferent to non-reply.

"This has been all a great surprise; I never thought that you really cared for me. Was it not

strange?" and she looked up in his face grown stolid, and beginning to show unmistakable signs of crossness, and fanned him fondly, smiling into dimples, like the rapturous maidens in "Patience," when they enthral their poet with garlands.

"I thought it would have been the pretty Miss Savergne, you were so attentive to----"

"She would not marry a poor man, and a poor man, could not afford to marry *her*," and then Joe stopped. He would have liked to kick himself for an unmannerly brute; for alas! the soft impeachment was all too true. He coughed and spluttered. Fortunately, Betsey was too full of her own pleasant reflections to heed anything, but he felt he must get away and calm down, or something worse might escape him which would not pass unnoticed, so he pulled up by the roadside just on the outskirts of the village.

"Would you mind if I set you down here, Betsey? It is getting late. The calves should have been watered an hour ago, and Baptiste and Laurent are both away."

"To be sure, Joe! A farmer's wife must take an interest in the calves, and I mean to do my duty," and she sprang gaily out, and stood looking after the man and outfit as they trotted off, with a sense of proprietorship which was new and very pleasant.

The rector and his wife delayed their dinner half-an-hour, and then sat down, wondering what had become of Betsey. They had nearly finished when she whirled in, a tumultuous arrangement of white muslin and enthusiasm.

"Oh, auntie! Oh, Uncle Dionysius!" She involved first one and then the other in her manifold frills and puffings by way of embrace. "Congratulate me!--do!--Just think!"

"Sit down, Betsey, and calm yourself," remonstrated the rector, "and then, perhaps, it may be possible to think. Meanwhile you take our breath away. Have you had your dinner?"

"Well, no. But I don't care--or rather, I dare say I *will* take just a morsel. What have you been having? Chickens? Well, I will take just a bone, and a good plateful of salad, and the rest of that melon. That's all I want. Such news! Only guess! But you would never think. Fact is, the squire--Squire Webb--has--what do you think?"

"Why!" cried Aunt Judy, "I saw you go for a drive with him?--Oh!--Indeed."

CHAPTER X.

AT GORHAM.

Mrs. Martha Herkimer, with her husband, travelling at their leisure in "Noo Hampshire," the country of her girlhood, was a happy woman. He was constantly with her, had few letters to write, and no men to talk business with. He seemed to have laid business aside, would read his newspaper beside her of a morning, and drive with her in the afternoon, to admire the scenery--"objects of interest," the American says, meaning everything the residents plume themselves upon, from the Falls of Niagara, should they possess them, to the new school-house at the Five-mile Cross Roads.

It felt like a renewal of the honeymoon, or those delightful "latter rains," spoken of in scripture, when the thirsty earth, long parched and chapped with drought, drinks in once more the life-restoring moisture, and clothes itself anew with grass and verdure. He told her one day that his house had suspended payment and he was bankrupt, but as they were travelling with every comfort, and there seemed no lack of money, she accepted it as one of the inscrutable phenomena of the commercial world, which she had long given up attempting to understand. Her Ralph, she told herself, could have done nothing wrong. He was fonder of money, and harder and keener about acquiring it, she feared, than was perhaps, perfectly right. Her father had been a preacher of the old Puritan school, ministering to villagers in a sequestered valley, and warning them against worldliness and the race for wealth, the world of wealth being an unknown country there about. If Ralph had lost some of his gatherings now, it might be for his greater good perhaps in other ways. She saw many around her who had failed, and yet lived comfortably and respected afterwards, and she would not be sorry if such were to be the fate of her own good man. It would wean him from the hurry and worry of business, and let him stay more at home than theretofore, to his own good, very probably, and assuredly to her greater happiness.

They travelled about, by road and rail, from one summer hotel to another--there are many of them in the White Mountains--climbing mountains, sailing on ponds, and honeymooning it delightfully all day long, and now they were arriving at Gorham by the evening train, meaning to ascend Mount Washington, already distinguished by his snow-tipped summit, on the morrow. It was a purple evening, with the eastward slopes of the valley reddening in the afterglow, while cool blue shadows stole out of hollows to the westward, forerunners of the twilight. The people on the platform stood in bright relief as the train drew up at the station, and Martha's eye took them all in as she alighted.

"What?" she cried, "General Considine! *you* here?" She felt a bump between her shoulders from the wallet of Ralph close behind her, as though he stumbled. "Ralph!" and she turned round, but Ralph was gone--gone back for something left behind no doubt. "General," and she ran up to him and took his hand, while Considine looked disturbed, and said nothing.

"What have you been about, general? Nobody has seen you, nobody knew you were away; and one of your friends--you know who--is far from pleased, I can tell you. But say!--your arm in a sling? Oh, general, you have not been fighting, at *your* time of day, I do hope. When I was a girl we always said a Southern man must have been fighting if he was tied up any way. What have you been doing? A hunting accident?"

"Madam," Considine began, clearing his throat, and looking tall and sternly in the good woman's face, who was regarding him with such friendly eyes. He coughed again, his face softened, and showed signs of discomposure. How could he speak as he felt to this good soul about her own husband, and tell her he was a murderer? He would have liked to get away from her without saying anything; but she had mentioned "a friend," the friend to whom he was at that moment hastening back to apologize for, or at least to explain, his absence. He would like to know beforehand what the friend was saying, and for that, self-control and reticence, combined if necessary with invention, were needed. He coughed again. Martha's last words, "hunting accident," still hanging on his ear, came to his tongue-tip of itself.

"Yes. Hunting accident--gun accident, that is. Thought I was killed. Insensible. A gang of tramps found me, and robbed me--they wore my own clothes before my eyes, the rascals--and saved my life. And now that they have cashed the cheque they made me give them in payment of the treatment, they have discharged me cured. But what do the Miss Stanleys say?"

"Matildy was mighty huffy at first. 'You should have called to explain, or sent a note to apologize,' she said. But when you went on doing neither, she grew down hearted like,--took it to heart serious, I do believe, though she has never owned up as much to anybody. But, if once she makes sure you are in the land of the livin', see if you don't catch it, that's all. I guess I shouldn't like to be you, when you call to explain, unless you can make the narrative real thrillin'. But how was it, general? You must come up to the hotel with us and see Ralph--I don't see where that man's run to--and tell us all about them tramps. Do, now, general, like a dear."

"Impossible, Mrs. Herkimer. I go to Montreal by this very train. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XI.

PLANTING HYACINTHS.

Desdemona listening to the Moor is a parallel not now used for the first time. The "cultured" reader has met it before. But where to find a better? Matilda sat and listened with open-eyed attention while Considine told his story.

She had received him with some slight display of coolness, when he first appeared, but without question and comment. If the men cared no more than to forget their little plan of a lunch in the woods, of what consequence could it possibly be to them? They would know better than trouble him with their little female festivities again, that was all; and if he had been indifferent or rude, at least they knew better than make themselves absurd by showing offence. It was "good morning, Mr. Considine," when he appeared. "So sorry Penelope has gone out. However, she is only down at the farm, talking to Bruneau. She will be back presently." Considine had to say everything for himself, without the assistance which even pretending to call him to account would have given; while all the time he recognized how deeply he must have offended by the severity with which he was chilled and sat upon, as Miss Matilda went on most industriously with her embroidery.

"I failed to turn up at your pic-nic, Miss Matilda."

"Oh! It was no consequence. I dare say you would have found it dull if you had come. As it was, the day was so sultry we felt sure it would thunder, and did not go."

"But I really wished to go, Miss Matilda. I was most desirous---"

Matilda lifted her face to smile a sweet incredulous smile on the visitor, and then went on with her work.

"But it is so, Miss Matilda. I beg you will believe me. And do you suppose I would not have sent you word if it had been possible?"

"We were surprised at that, now I remember. But it was not a party. It was nothing. Pray do not mention it!"

"But I must, Miss Matilda. It was most important to me!"

Miss Matilda laid her work in her lap and looked up.

"I went to bed, Miss Matilda, intending to join your expedition. I got up next morning, still intending it, at six o'clock. You were not to start till eleven. I bathe every morning in the river. I went out in a boat, as usual--one of Podevin's boats. I plunged in and swam--just as I always do--when a rascal--I will not name him--took aim at me from the shore, and shot me in the shoulder. You see my arm is in a sling."

"Oh!" cried Matilda, half rising and dropping the work; "I did not notice your poor arm, Mr. Considine. Indeed I did not. Shot you in the arm? Did it hurt much? Shot--You? Pray tell me about it. Who was the person?"

"A person we both know. But you must not mention his name. Not that he deserves any consideration from honest folks, but for his wife's sake, who is a good woman, and would be horrified if she knew. It was Ralph Herkimer."

"Ralph Herkimer! But why?"

"He called on me with Jordan the night before, asking me to give up his uncle's money, which I hold in trust. You may have heard of the uncle's curious will, which tied up the money out of Ralph's reach. Ah! he knew the rascal. I could not give up the money. It would have been a breach of trust. And so, the very next morning, he fires at me while I am swimming in the river. Fired and struck me. I tried to regain the boat, but I could not. I was crippled of an arm, and I sank, and know no more."

"Mr. Considine!" and Matilda rose and came to the sofa where he sat, her cheek blanched, and betraying an interest which made him feel glad that he had suffered, to call it forth.

"And--well, Mr. Considine, what then?"

"The next thing I knew, I was barely conscious; but I was on dry land, feeling sick and stupid, and more dead than alive. A whole crowd of people were about me, shaking me, punching me, pulling me, bumping me, while I only wished they would let me alone, and let me die; for already I had gone through all the horrors of drowning, and this seemed like an after-death. And then I found myself among blankets, and some one--a witch she looked like--was forcing whisky down my throat, and fingering my wounded shoulder. I was drowsy and miserable, and, thinking I was already dead, I wondered if all this was for my sins. And then I slept, I suppose, for when I woke next it was dark or nearly so; and there was a jolting and rumbling which set my poor shoulder aching miserably; and I tried to sit up, but some one pushed me down again and bade me keep still. When I looked, the witch was perched upon my pillow, with the moonlight slanting through her grisly hair, and a long skinny arm pressing me down. She forced more whisky into my mouth, and then I slept."

"Oh! Mr. Considine. What an experience!"

"I woke again, and it was daylight, and the old hag seated on my pillow had fallen asleep. I sat up slowly and with difficulty, for I was stiff and sore. I was in a waggon under a tree. I tried to rise, but could find nothing save my blanket to dress in. The hag opened her eyes and looked at me, and grinned, and asked me what I wanted to do. I said, 'to go home,' and then she laughed out, pointing to me, and reminding me I had no clothing; and at the sound of her voice there gathered round a whole crowd of swarthy vagabonds, grinning at me, and jeering, and when I looked at them, one rascal was wearing my coat, and another kicked up his heels and showed me my boots. A pimpled baby was rolled up in my nice clean shirt, and the captain of the gang pulling my watch out of his pocket, told me it was only five o'clock, and a heap too early for 'a swell cove' to think of rising. I was their prisoner, in short, though I must confess the old woman attended to my wounded shoulder very kindly; bathing it with cool water several times a day, and bandaging it as well as one of our surgeons could have done during the war. They kept me several days with them, in their journeyings and campings, travelling by all kinds of bye-ways and unfrequented places, and keeping me concealed whenever strangers came about the camp. They crossed the Lines, by-and-bye, and travelled into the States. I knew that by the nasal Yankee twang of the strangers' voices, though great care was taken that I should not get speech of them--

-and then, one day, the captain, the fellow, at least, who wore my watch, told me he thought I was strong enough to travel now, and if I would give them some money to buy me clothes, and pay for the care they had taken of me, I might go my ways. I was so helplessly in their power, that we did not haggle long about the price, though it was a pretty steep one. I wrote them a cheque, which they carried to a neighbouring bank, and so soon as my bankers had honoured it I was set at liberty. I put in a bad time, Miss Matilda, I promise you; but, if you will believe me, what vexed me most of all was to think how I had kept you waiting, and never been able to send a word of excuse. When I was drowning in the river, it was my very last thought, I remember, and when I came to myself it was my first."

"Oh! Mr. Considine. How very nice of you to say so. But don't! It is really too dreadful. It is horrible. I never did hear anything so frightful. And you say that Ralph Herkimer did this abominable deed? Are you sure you are not mistaken? Or it may have been an accident."

"Not a bit of it. I saw him as plain as I see you, and it was no accident. I saw him shoulder his gun to fire again, while I was struggling in the water, in case I had succeeded in gaining my boat."

"You will have him taken up, Mr. Considine? It seems wrong--and dangerous to leave such a person at large."

"I would if it were not for his wife. But you know how she would suffer. She never would be able to show face again. No! For her sake I mean to let the thing pass; and you must promise me, Miss Matilda, you will never mention it."

"How noble of you! Mr. Considine. I shall never be able to look at the ruffian again. And his son is here constantly. But we must put a stop to that. It will vex poor Muriel, I fear, but she will see the reason of the thing. You will allow me to explain to Muriel? There they go; passed the window this very minute. The assassin!"

"Nay! Miss Matilda. Let me intercede for the lad. There is no harm in my young friend Gerald. A fine manly youngster--his mother's son, every inch of him. No, no, my little Muriel--forgive the freedom--must know least of all. Young love! Miss Matilda. It is a charming sight to see. So full, and so trusting--so all-in-all, and yet so delicate and dainty. So fleeting, sometimes. Always so fragile and so irreparable if it gets a bruise. So hopeless to try and bring back its early lustre if once it grows dim. So--but--I'm a maudering old fogey, I suppose. Forgive an old bachelor's drivel, Miss Matilda."

"There's nothing to forgive, Mr. Considine. I sympa--I agree with--it's all so true! There's nothing like youth in all the world, and--love--but, there now! These are things which middle-aged people have no business with----"

"But surely, Miss Matilda. We--they--the middle-aged--have business with that? If our hearts have remained unwithered by the world--if there should still be a germ of life at the core, though hidden by the rind which time brings for a protection, like the scales on a hyacinth root in a gardener's drawer, do you not think it allowable and even fitting, that when warmth gets at them, and moisture, they may sprout forth worthily, even if out of season, each after its kind? Do you suppose a sound heart can ever grow incapable of love. Miss Matilda? Will love ever die?"

"Ah!" and Matilda looked upward. "My own feeling. So true! So comforting! Love never dies. The poets say so. Beyond the grave are we not assured that still and for ever we shall love? But yet--but yet--I fear sometimes that it shows a grovellingness in myself, that I do not cherish the thought more eagerly--as we grow older should our affections not take a higher flight? I long so for more warmth, and regret my coldness and frivolity; but I feel going to church so little helpful."

"You are lonely. Miss Matilda. Aspiring after unseen goodness is a high and abstract flight. It needs companionship. I, too, know what it means. But a man in the world is little able to withdraw his thoughts from worldliness, and I am alone. With help--a good woman's help--Matilda! May I say it? as I have long felt it?--with yours----"

He took her hand and held it, looking in her face.

She did not seem to hear him at first, her eyes were far away. And then she grew to feel the intentness of his gaze, and drew away her hands to hold before her face, where a blush was rising; for the look spoke more of a human than immortal love, and it confused her.

"We will be friends," she said.

"But friendship will not be enough for me, Matilda. You must be my wife."

Matilda was white now. She leaned back in the sofa, and her head fell forward. It seemed to Considine that she would faint, and he had risen to ring, when she recovered self-control, and looked up in his face.

Being a lady of an earlier generation, when fainting was occasionally practised as a climax to emotion, and brides sometimes wept at the altar on bidding *adieu* to the associations of their

youth, allowance must be made for Matilda by young women of the modern and robusiter school, who can ratify an engagement for life with the same outward composure as one for the next valse. The modes of emotional expression and disguise are as much a question of date as the fashions in hair-dressing. Matilda was no more a lackadaisical fool than you are, my good madam; nor are you, I do believe, one whit more hard or heartless than she, whom I take to have been a good and affectionate woman.

Penelope came in from the farm not long after, and there was much to tell her. Considine was persuaded to remain for dinner, and went away in the evening a happy man.

The hyacinths were getting their chance at last, and he promised himself that with care and shelter they would sprout yet, and bloom in the autumn, as fragrantly and gay as with other fortune they might have done in spring.

CHAPTER XII.

RANDOLPH'S BUCKLING.

There was a lacrosse match at Montreal that September, the Indians of Brautford against the Indians of Caughnawaga, at which that section of the community interested in sport, and now returned from the regattas of the coast, mustered strong. The Lacrosse Club, the getters-up of the exhibition, were there in a body, the school boys were all there, and the betting men, as well as those who are willing to go anywhere on a fine day on any pretext, and the ladies, who like to see what is the excitement which draws the latter class--the butterfly class--together.

"See how the Caughnawagas have got the ball, and are carrying it on, and on. There--there! They will win. Almost at the goal. But, ah! That little fellow! He seems only a boy. How he breaks through them--See! He has got it away--caught it on his lacrosse--throws it back over his shoulder--away back past them all. Not a Caughnawaga near it. And now Brautford has got it. They strike it again and again. Won! By Jove! Brautford has won. Who would have thought it?"

It was Randolph Jordan who spoke, springing on his chair and waving his hat in the general tumult of applause, and the cheering for "Little Brautford," who now rejoined his comrades amidst the loud plaudits in which they all shared, but which were especially for him who had earned the victory. They had won the first game.

Randolph occupied a chair in front of the grand stand, and beside him sat Adeline Rouget, dressed in cardinal red and white, tolerably conspicuous, and not objecting to be looked at; but still better pleased with the evident admiration in Randolph's eyes, and the devoted attention he was paying her, than with anything else. They were old friends, those two, now. Their friendship dated from the night of their first tobogganing together, when Randolph had discovered to his surprise that mademoiselle was "really a jolly girl, and with no nonsense in her." They had many another tobogganing after that first, and many a jolly waltz, and found that they suited each other to a nicety. Both were fairly good looking, and always well got up, and each felt the presence of the other was a credit and setoff to one's self in the eyes of the world to which both belonged. It is a strong point in a friendship when one is sure that it looks well. A friend of the other sex, with whom one groups badly, may be a delightful companion at home or in the country; but what pleasure can there be in being seen in society dancing with a guy? A certain share of the ridicule will fall on one's self. It must always show one at a disadvantage, and if it is a dance, how can even the finest figure and get-up look well, if awkwardly held or turned round, or rumbled as to flounces, and so forth?--or hung upon, or stood away from, as if people were marionettes?

These two young people realized that they looked well together. Their friends had told them so frequently; therefore it was indubitable, even if they had not known it themselves. Their relations had also told them that they should marry, and as each found the other extremely "jolly" and companionable, and saw in a joint establishment an indefinite prolongation of the gaieties of the past six months, they were nothing loth. People said they were engaged, and they supposed so themselves; in fact, they must have been, for in their conversations that was taken for granted. They were not of a "spoony" disposition, as they said themselves, however, and found many other things to talk about more interesting than an analysis of their affections; and nothing but opposition applied to their head-strong tempers could have fanned their easy-going preference into an appearance of genuine strength. That stimulus was now afforded by the lady's papa, in a way both sudden and unexpected.

Randolph had resumed his seat beside his companion, and plied the fan for her, while she

managed the parasol, so as to make a small tent, from under which they could scan their neighbours while greatly sheltered themselves. There was a tap on Randolph's shoulder, accompanied by "Pairmit me, sair."

Randolph looked round. "Mr. Rouget! Good morning, sir. I did not think we should have had the happiness to see you here--believed you were in New York. When did you arrive in Montreal?" His hand was held out while he spoke, expectant of being shaken, but it remained untouched. This might have been an oversight, though Mr. Rouget was scrupulously particular in such matters, as a rule; but on the present occasion he seemed resolved there should be no mistake. The extended hand not having been withdrawn when the speaker ceased, he drew himself up to the top notch of his stature--it was French stature, and not excessive--placing his hands behind his back with a look of lowering majesty and indignation, which made him as overhanging and colossal, if also as stagy, as was possible.

"Sair! Pairmit me to pass you."

Randolph drew half a step aside, and backward; it was all he could do, owing to his companion's close proximity.

"I wish to speak to mademoiselle, my daughtaire."

"Adéline is here, sir;" showing with his left hand how the parent might place himself on her other side.

"Mademoiselle Rouget vill dispense vit your presence, sair," with severe dignity; and he stepped, not as ushered by Randolph's left hand, but in the direction of his right, the consequence being that his foot caught between the legs of Randolph's chair, and he found himself prostrated on the turf.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Adéline, rising and taking refuge with one of her friends, a few chairs off, under the impression that a brawl in public was imminent, and screening herself from all share in it with her parasol, while she continued to watch the scene through the fringes.

"*Sac-r-r-ré,*" growled the father, passing from dignity into fury. Dignity cannot possibly survive a trip up with a chair leg, and there is no refuge from the ridicule of the thing but in anger.

"You would dare knock me down? *Coquin!*" as he regained his feet, grasping his cane, and gnawing his white moustache between his teeth.

"Pardon me, Mr. Rouget," said Professor Hammerstone, coming forward and dusting a blade of grass with his handkerchief from the angry gentleman's sleeve. "I hope you have not hurt yourself. I was standing by, and you must forgive my saying that our young friend here is really not to blame for this little accident. It is all the fault of those foolish chairs. I have bruised my own shins with them. The club would have done better to provide benches. Jordan is as innocent of the *contretemps* as I am."

Rouget bowed--what else could he do?--and thanked Professor Hammerstone, who at least had done him the kindness of giving him a cue to modulate back naturally into the ordinary manner of civilized men; but he scowled at Randolph, who, in the bewilderment caused by Rouget's unexpected address--they had parted last as any expectant father and son-in-law might, three weeks before--had nearly laughed at his sudden downfall.

"I vill rekvest you to valk aside vit me one instant, sair. Dis vay."

Randolph followed, and presently they were out of the crowd, pacing the grass in silence. Rouget cleared his throat, pushed out his chest, and strove to be grand once more.

"It surprises me, Mistaire Jordan, to observe you in ze society of Mademoiselle Rouget. I demand zat you do not intrude yourself again."

"Not speak to my promised wife, Mr. Rouget? I do not understand."

"Understand zen, sair, zat mademoiselle is no more promessed to you. You mus be fol to expect it. Ze son of your fazer mus know so much. He has vat you call 'chiselled' and 'gouged' me of my money, and my shares, and land. He has----"

"Mr. Rouget! Is it the part of a gentleman to speak of my father in such terms to me? I did not think you would have done it. I know nothing of business transactions between you and my father. I presume both are men of the world. It would be impertinent in me to inquire into your affairs. But you yourself have sanctioned my pretensions to Adéline's hand, and our engagement."

"Have ze bounty to speake of Mademoiselle Rouget by her proper title--Mademoiselle Rouget de La Hache--young sair! Ze promesse or contract is now forfeit, as you should know, by ze *chicane* of--of *monsieur voire père,*" with a shrug and a low bow. "I mus rekvest you vill not again intrude yourself on ze presence of mademoiselle my daughtaire, who is on ze point to make a retraite at ze Convent of ze Sacred Heart, and von day may have ze blessedness to become *réligieuse.* Mademoiselle Rouget vill not be at home to you in future." And thereupon the little

gentleman executed his very finest bow, exhibiting both rows of his perfectly-fitting false teeth from ear to ear, and turned away. He was surprised, a minute later, on turning his head, to observe that Randolph, at a yard or two of distance, was pursuing the same course as himself towards where his daughter was sitting.

"Mistaire Jordan! I protest! Have I not defended you from coming in presence of my daughtaire? Vould you draw *esclandre* on mademoiselle before *tout le monde*?"

"I must return Mademoiselle Rouget's fan, sir."

Rouget held forth his hand ready to become the bearer; but, disregarding the motion, Randolph only quickened his pace, Rouget following as quickly as he dared without appearing to run a race.

Randolph arrived first, and presented the fan, saying, "I shall pass your garden gate ten minutes before seven," and withdrew in time to make way for Rouget, who presented his arm with a ceremonious bow, and led his daughter from the ground.

Their walk homeward could not have been a happy one. When Randolph met Adéline, at ten minutes before seven, her face was flushed and her eyes swollen.

"Adéline! have you consented to be made a nun, then?"

"Not if I know it! Not if my Randolphe ees true."

"Are you game to run away, Adéline? It would be a sin to cut off all that splendid hair. My mother is at Long Branch. Shall we go to her? I have money enough to take us down."

"Long Branch! It vould be divine! my Randolphe. Ze saison ees not yet there passed. I vill go. But--for ze toilettes? And so many are demanded zere. But yes! I do see ze vay. I vill send ze robes to *cette chère* Mlle. Petitôt, and she vill forward by express."

"The very thing! I hate the bother of women's trunks. Besides, we could not get them out of the house. You can stroll in to Mlle. Petitôt after dinner and explain. She will do anything to oblige a friend. And then your maid can bundle the things over the wall, from the one garden to the other, and Mlle. Petitôt will do the rest. Our train leaves at half-past eleven to-night. I shall be at the corner with a cab at eleven sharp. Be sure and bring as little baggage as you can; nothing but what I can carry on the run from here to the corner, for you know we might be chased, and then it would be convent, sure--a hand-bag is the best thing."

"There is the dinner bell. *Au revoir*. I shall be ready at eleven."

Amelia Jordan was surprised rather than pleased, three days after, when the cards of her "children" were brought up to her with her morning tea. They had arrived late overnight, she was told, too late to disturb her, and they hoped to see her at breakfast about ten.

"Oh, you imprudent children!" she cried an hour later, meeting them in a broad verandah overlooking the sea. "You impetuous, inconsiderate, absurd pair of children. And to come to Long Branch, of all places. Do you know how much a day it costs to live here? And what about gowns, Adéline? You can scarcely come down to breakfast, even once, in that travelling suit, and assuredly you must not be seen in it again after half-past eleven."

"We came to you, mother, because we had no one else," said Randolph. "Adéline has run away, without a single thing, unless Mlle. Petitôt should send her some clothes, and that depends on the maid's being able to throw them over the garden wall."

"You pair of babies! Adéline, the very wisest thing that you can do is to go right back home again."

"They'd stick her into a convent, mother. Her father told me himself he meant to. Besides, she's *your* daughter now as much as his. We stopped over in New York yesterday and got married."

"Good gracious! I never heard anything so preposterous. And how do you propose to live?"

"We mean to live with *you*, mother, to comfort your failing years like dutiful children?"

"Well, now, that really is kind of you, I must say. The sooner I get back to my quiet little house at St. Euphrase, then, the better. I cannot afford to support a family of three at Long Branch. It costs a great deal too much for the mere living, not to speak of the dressing. Again, at St. Euphrase, I can make you young people work for your board, as, of course, being honest, you would like. Randolph shall dig the garden and Adéline shall milk the cows. That will save me two servants' wages."

"*Mais, madame*," whimpered Adéline, "Randolphe has me promessed to come to Long Branch for to see ze gaieties."

"My child, you have no clothes to appear in. You will have to look at the gaities from your bedroom window, and even your meals will have to be brought you. Are you aware that three new gowns every day is the smallest number in which any self-respecting woman can appear at Long Branch? You need not smile, it is no laughing matter. You will compromise me hopelessly if you come downstairs, and, I may add, that any things Mlle. Petitôt may send you will not help you here. Tailor-made gowns are *de rigueur*, and above all, they must be indubitably new, and worn for the very first time. I would recommend a bilious attack, my dear; keep your room. And, after all, a fictitious attack of bile is better than the real thing. I will arrange for our going back to Canada, and with that view, perhaps, I had better begin by writing your mother. She will be anxious to know what has become of you, and I dare say I shall be able to make your peace now, more easily than later."

"Ah! *Chère madame*, do not write. Zey will send me to ze *couvent*. I know so vell. And never to come out again. And zere I shall be made make ze *grande rétraite* for always for marrying me vidout consent. And it will be so *triste*, have *pitié, ma mere*."

"My dear child, you may trust me. I have no intention of giving you up, all the archbishops in Lower Canada shall not deprive my boy of his wife. Now, be sensible, for once! Go back to your room, and I will do my best for you."

And poor Adéline, like a naughty child, went upstairs to her room.

That day Amelia had a long letter to write. She liked letter-writing, for she imagined she had a talent for affairs, and this is what she wrote:

"Long Branch.

"MY DEAR MADAME ROUGET,

"I have been so startled this morning by the totally undreamt of appearance of your daughter in company with my boy Randolph. They informed me that they stopped over at New York and were married, and have now come on here to favour me with a visit during their honeymoon. I am powerless, therefore, to separate them, as otherwise I would. I hasten to inform you of this, judging from my own feelings that you will be thankful to learn that your daughter, on her disappearance, has fallen into good hands. At the same time, permit me to assure you, dear Madame Rouget, that this--I scarcely know how to express my feelings on the subject--this elopement is none of my devising. I neither instigated, assisted, nor approve it. The children are of different faiths, and I fear poor Adéline has no fortune, and no prospect of ever having any. She has come here claiming my maternal care, and, actually, she has not a gown fit to appear at breakfast in. I have recommended her to keep her room, and, if you are the reasonable person I have believed you, I shall see that she stays there till she has received her mother's forgiveness for this very foolish step. Indeed, it is superabundantly foolish, and you may assure M. Rouget, from me, that I deplore it far more than he possibly can. To think that my cherished son should have married a French woman, and without *dot*. It is mortifying. When there are differences of religion there ought to be compensation. M. Rouget will reply that it is owing to Randolph's father that his daughter is not suitably dowered. Perhaps so; I shall not express an opinion; but, for myself, I feel untrammelled by such a consideration. When I was married myself, my dearest father saw that I did not go to my husband penniless. He availed himself of our admirable Lower Canada law, and I was *séparée des biens*. I have my own income, which no one can touch, and my own house at St. Euphrase, bought with my own money. If La Hache--what is left of it--were settled on your daughter in the same way, it might prove a blessing some day.

"And this brings me to my purpose in writing you. Dear Madame Rouget, had we not better make a virtue of necessity and accept an accomplished fact? It would be better, surely, to have our children properly married in a church than merely for them to have been buckled together by a Yankee magistrate. My boy insists that M. Rouget shall assure him on this point before he returns to Canada. His wife, as he calls her, being under legal age, if any difficulty is made, he threatens to continue living in this country, which I am sure you would regret as much as I shall. As to their plans, the young people can live with me till some employment is found for Randolph. The Minister of Drainage and Irrigation should be able to find him something.

"As to their religion, they have already settled that question for themselves, having adopted civil marriage. Had Randolph's suit progressed, as was at one time contemplated, it is probable that, as he is no bigot, he might have acquiesced in any wishes of his *fiancée* or her family; but now they have forbidden the match, and yet it has taken place. I will not consent to any disrespect being now shown to our venerable Church of England, and, indeed, I have never been able to understand how one section of the Catholic Church can claim superiority over another. No doubt when the present difficulty shall have been arranged, the young couple, who appear devotedly attached to each other, will grow into each other's views, and both be of the same communion. Meanwhile, I am aware that in your church there are difficulties connected with mixed marriages; but his grace the archbishop, as I have been informed, holds discretionary power to grant a dispensation for sufficient reason. I am confident his grace will see such reasons in the present case, as otherwise our hapless children will be condemned to remain in this most undevout republic, and may become the prey of no one knows what pernicious sect.

"Assuring you of my entire sympathy, and begging that you will not defer your reply, for in truth the hotel bills at Lone Branch for a party of three are enough to make one shudder, believe me,

"Dear Madame Rouget,

"Yours in parallel tribulation,

"Amelia Jordan."

"Now!" cried the lady, throwing down her pen; "I defy them to pretend that *we* wanted their alliance!" Then she read the letter over, frowning at it critically the while.

"It is an impertinent letter--or insolent, rather; but what is one to do? If one shows a tittle of respect they take it as their due, and become so hoity-toity one can do nothing with them."

The letter duly reached its destination, and was fumed and growled over by magnates both of Church and State. Nothing could be done, however, and, therefore, like prudent people, they yielded--yielded, too, with a very tolerable grace; and Amelia returned to St. Euphrase triumphant, leading her children in her suite, and with a vastly heightened opinion of her own cleverness.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT CAUGHNAWAGA.

The lacrosse match proceeded all the same, though M. Rouget had withdrawn the patronage of his presence. The interest felt in the second game was greater than that in the first. Every one with money to stake was on the *qui vive*; the chances were considered even now, whereas in the first innings, every one believed in Caughnawaga, and odds had to be given to tempt the few down-hearted Upper Canadians to back Brautford. The second game ended like the first, to the general surprise, and again Brautford's success was largely due to the clever stripling, who, bounding about the field as nimbly as the ball itself, was always where he was most wanted, and calmly did the best thing to do at the time. "Who is the little one?" was asked on every hand; but no one was ready with an answer other than the obvious one, "Injun, like the rest," till a squaw--one of the many who circulated among the crowd, brown as horse chestnuts, with little beads of eyes and broad flat faces, arrayed in moccasins and blankets, yellow, red, and blue, selling bark and bead work--vouchsafed the laconic information, "name Paul."

The third game was longer and more obstinately contested than either of its predecessors. Caughnawaga braced itself for a supreme effort, under the reproaches of its backers and the taunts of the very squaws. The best of five were to take the stakes. If Brautford won this third, the match was over, and Caughnawaga "knocked into a cocked hat." The players fought their most strenuous on either side, with tight set teeth and wicked-looking eyes, which boded ill for joint or limb which should happen within the swing of a lacrosse. Caughnawaga was desperate, following up its capture of the ball with a compact rush, and interposing their wiry bodies recklessly between it and the uplifted sticks of the other side. Rushing and scuffling, they had carried it nearly to their goal, another lick, and the game were won; when, in front, there leaped the redoubtable Paul, scooped it up on his netting, and threw it back over their heads.

It was done in a moment, while yet the rush and impetus were unstemmed; an instant later and he was stumbled upon and run down by his eager opponents, trampled on and stunned, before they could stay themselves in their rush. They tripped over him and fell in a heap, while the Brautford men caught the ball in the undefended middle and had little opposition in carrying it to the other goal.

"Brautford! Hurrah for Brautford!" The Caughnawaga's heard the shout while they were still disentangling and picking themselves up, a defeated band. They picked themselves up and slunk away like cats, that, raiding a dairy, are suddenly drenched and discomfited by an ambushed milker. Only Paul was left on the ground, stunned and unable to rise.

His comrades were the first to miss him; and they, perhaps, were reminded of him by their backers in the crowd, for triumph is a self-engrossing passion, and glory so sweet a sugar-stick, that, while sucking it, we are not too likely to go in search of the comrade to whom the most of it

is due.

"Where is the young 'un?" was questioned in the crowd. "Where is Paul?" and the crowd turned to the now deserted portion of the field where he had last been seen. He was there still. A squaw in a red blanket was beside him; she had raised his head and was chafing his temples. Another squaw--a young one, this--was seen fetching water to pour on him. But now the crowd was interested, they had gathered round him, and soon carried him into the refreshment tent, where whisky, the sporting man's nostrum, was used to restore him.

The notable Indians on the ground, the elders who did not join in youthful sports, had gathered to look at the youth who had done so well, and who might yet, for anything they could know, come forth one day, a champion of their race. For who can tell what fancies may be cherished by the red man? The white does not sympathize with them, and therefore he puts them away, behind his impenetrable stolidity of bearing, which might conceal so much, but more frequently and with equal success hides nothing at all. They were once possessors of the land, in so far, at least, as being there, for they shared it with the beasts. Traditions of the physical prowess of their fathers are handed down among them, and who can tell but, in their dreams, they may look forward to a hero like those of old to arise and vindicate their place among the whites.

Our old friend, Paul, of long ago, was a leading figure among these elders, and one of evident consideration. A tall man, grown fleshy from ease and lack of exercise, the violent exercises of his youth, with his straight black hair threaded plentifully with white--a "respectable" Indian, one seemingly well to do. The token of his respectability was likewise that which deprived him of every vestige of dignity or grace, to wit, a suit of rusty black clothes. It is the queer tribute of respect which men of other races pay to our European civilization. They cast away their native braveries and picturesqueness of apparel, and accept the clothing of the white man taken at its baldest and worst. An Indian, a Japanese, or a negro, goes into full dress by putting on a chimney-pot hat and black raiment, resembling that worn by undertakers' mutes, never well-fitting, never well cared for, and harmonizing vilely with his dusky skin, while his own natural instincts can arrange combinations so suitable and becoming.

Paul stepped forward to where the lad lay, and surveyed the shapely limbs. He was conscious now, but still dull and stupid, and not averse to being a centre of interest. Paul laid his hand on his brow, and felt his chest, and thought he was as fine a man of his years as he ever beheld. The squaw in the red blanket looked up at him, while she continued to chafe the boy's hands, and seemed greatly moved; but it would have been unworthy of a "respectable" Indian of Paul's standing, to take notice of a squaw on a public occasion like the present. He moved away, and out of the throng in time, preparing to smoke a pipe in quiet. The squaw in the red blanket followed him, and when she had got him well out of notice, that his lordly superiority might not be ruffled by the familiarity in public, she laid her hand on his arm, and said, "Paul."

Paul turned his sleepy eyes that way, but it was only a squaw, a strange squaw. He had nothing to say.

"Your son!" said the squaw, touching his arm again. He stopped at that, and she pointed over her shoulder with her thumb to the crowd they had come from.

"Mine?"

"Yours, Paul."

"Who are you?"

"His mother--Fidèle--Your squaw."

"My son? Where born?"

"Brautford. You bade me go to Brautford."

"Ouff." It would have been undignified for a man like Paul to say more. It meant all he had to say, too, very likely. For, doubtless, language which is never uttered ceases to be given birth to in the mind. He turned, however, with Fidèle, and both walked back to the tent.

The lad was better now. Refreshment was going on, the people seeing him able to dispense with their care, had turned their attention to sustaining themselves. He got up and joined his mother coming in, and they went out again to a quiet place, followed by Paul, that his parental feelings might be gratified with an interview, without compromising his dignity by an exhibition before the world.

It seemed an unnecessary precaution. Paul's feelings, if he had any, were under far too good control to lead him into impropriety. He sat down with them on a deserted bench, however, questioned them both, and finally accepted his son and his long absent spouse to his heart; that is to say, he bade them follow him to Lachine, and then conducted them across the river, and to his home in Caughnawaga.

Thérèse had ruled there as mistress from the day Fidèle had gone away. That was so long ago

now, that it had never occurred to her that her sister would return, and the Père Théophile, a wise ruler, who, while his flock did their duty according to what he considered their lights, and were duly submissive, did not unnecessarily fret them with abstract questions of affinity, ignored any irregularity, collected the church dues from them, and christened the children. There were but two of these, and girls both, to the intense disappointment and mortification of Paul. Imagine his satisfaction, then, to find himself in possession of a well-grown son of fifteen years--well-grown, and such a player at lacrosse. Was it not he alone, and not the Brautford band in general, who had beaten the Caughnawagas? And now he would be of the Caughnawagas himself, and Paul would make much money, in bets and otherwise, out of his son's fine play.

He received, then, his new-found family into his home and established them there with honour. Young Paul, with the privileges of a "buck," lolled about the place, eating, sleeping, smoking all day long, like his father. Fidèle sat by the hearth in her blanket and smoked her pipe, while the household drudgery, now doubled by the addition to the household, trebled by the presence of a squaw claiming to be first wife, criticizing, ordering, and doing no work, fell on Thérèse and her girls--to cut and carry wood, draw water, dig potatoes, cook, and share the leavings, after the more considered members had eaten their fill. It was hard lines.

The village was speedily aware of the accession to its inhabitants. That same evening the crest-fallen lacrosse players were told that old Paul had recognized young Paul as his son, and brought him away from the Brautford band to themselves; and all the bucks in the Reservation came to welcome the certain winner of games, and congratulate his father. The middle-aged squaws recollected Fidèle, and came to praise her son, squatting round the hearth in their blankets with lighted pipes, while poor Thérèse, deposed from her motherhood of the house, stole out to the garden-patch to dig and bewail her fate.

It cannot be supposed that the relations of the two squaws could be cordial when they found themselves alone together. Their being sisters made it none the less intolerable to be, or to have been, supplanted. Thérèse felt injured now, and Fidèle remembered the wrongs and the jealousy of fifteen years. It was not many days before they came to blows, scolding, screaming, scratching, and pulling handfuls of each other's hair, till a crowd of squaws had gathered from the surrounding cabins; when Paul, the lord and master, appeared upon the scene, and, in the grand heroic manner of the wilderness and its uncontaminated sons, took down his cudgel from the wall, and belabouring them both with soundness and impartiality, commanded them to desist. Was it not shocking, dear lady? Yet, it was only one of those shocking things which have been going on from the foundation of the world--which are going on still, in Egypt, Russia, and elsewhere. The strong use a stick to the weak, and order, of a sort, is maintained. We know better, and have changed all that, and we go on improving, though it may still be a question how it is going to answer in the end. It is the weakest and the shrillest voiced, with us, who rule. The burly and the peaceable stop their ears, and yield to escape the din. By-and-bye we shall have all the ignorant to make our laws and instruct us. Shall we be better off, I wonder? When every one is master, who will serve? When all become commissioned officers, who will be left to fill the ranks?

There was worse yet in store for Thérèse, however. Fidèle must needs go to mass in that well-watched community. In Brant she could please herself, but in Caughnawaga there were ladies of the convent to be pleased, who were so bountiful. Fidèle's re-appearance came thus officially before the Père Théophile. Scandal must be prevented, Paul could not be permitted the luxury of two wives at once, however capable he might be of keeping them both in order. More, it was the newcomer, in this case, who was the lawful wife. Thérèse must go, and he laid his injunction on Paul accordingly. Paul was submissive; one squaw was enough to mind his comfort, and it mattered not which, though, if anything, the boy's mother would suit the best. He obeyed with promptitude, and after administering a parting beating, he turned the three forlorn ones out of doors.

When a turkey comes to grief, through sickness or accident, the rest of the flock are apt to set upon it and peck it to death. It is a Spartan regimen, and encourages the others to keep well. The spirit prevailing in Caughnawaga was in so much Spartan or turkey-ish--it is a spirit not unknown at times in more cultured circles. Nobody dreamed of coming forward out of natural kindness; and, as a matter of duty, there was too much of the improper in the whole story, for any one brazenly to claim praise from the ladies of the convent for sheltering homeless ones such as these. It seemed irreverent, even, to suppose it could be a Christian duty to succour them.

The outcasts walked down the village street, hiding their faces in their blankets, bruised and ashamed. No one spoke to them or pitied them. The squaws, their daily companions, sitting at their doors, sewing, smoking, idling, looked steadily at them as they went by; some with a wooden stolidity which showed no sign of recognition, some with a spiteful and vindictive leer. Thérèse had been better off than many of them, but who would change places with her now?

The dusk was falling, and the nights were growing chilly now; there might be frost before morning. The gleam of firelight, the twinkle of lamps, shone through cabin windows and from open doors, but no one bade them enter. There was heavy dew in the air, the herbage was soaked with moisture, and therefore they would not turn aside into the bush, to drench themselves among the dripping leaves, and be chilled to the bone with hoar frost, perchance, ere morning. They went forward to the river-side, and out upon the pier, where the water swept smoothly by, murmuring monotonously in a sombre passionless sough, black as their own desolate misery, still

and undemonstrative as themselves.

They huddled themselves together under the lee of some bales and boxes, their chins upon their knees within their blankets, and there they crouched and shivered, all through the livelong night, sleeping at times or drowsing, but always motionless, with the sound of the mighty river in their ears, promising nothing, regretting nothing, yet consoling in its changeless continuance--a life, and one in harmony with their own, a seeming sympathy, when all the world beside had cast them off.

CHAPTER XIV.

THÉRÈSE'S REVENGE.

The daylight had returned, but the sun was not yet up, and the air was cold, when a heavy hand was laid upon the sleeping squaws, and shook them roughly.

"What are yez doin' here? Stailin' is it ye're afther, eh?"

"Sleep here all night," was Thérèse's answer, as she slowly regained her feet. She was stiff with cold. "No home to go to--come here."

"A shindy at home was it? Turned out of doors is it ye are? Sarves ye right, maybe. But it's a could sleepin' place, *al* the same, and wan niver knows. The gates won't be opened these two hours, but ye can come in this way. Here's an empty luggige room, where yez cuddn't do no harm ef ye wanted."

He ushered them in, closed the door behind them, and turned the key with a knowing wink.

"Oi'm clair of yez now, me beauties. The pollisman can do as he thinks best when he comes on at sivin o'clock. Oi've caught them if they're wanted, an' that's as much as they kin expect from a night watchman."

The police sergeant arrived at his appointed time. The squaws had accepted their confinement with a contented mind, and were asleep. Under the shelter of a roof and on a wooden floor, they could stretch themselves at length, which was grateful after the cramped position of the night.

Their apathetic indifference convinced the man of authority that their tale was true; they had come on the pier while the gates were open the evening before, and fallen asleep. It was wrong, as he assured them, and he could take them up for it; but to what good end? he asked himself. He was a *virtuoso* in malefactors, and did not care to encumber himself with a capture out of which so little credit with his superiors could be got, as three squawks sleeping on a pier.

"Look out, now!" he said, shaking his finger at them. "I let you off this time, but if"--another shake of his finger--"but if ever--I--catch-you here again--you may look out for squalls."

Thérèse had lifted her head in dull indifference; but at the sound of his voice her face changed. She looked at him. It was now long ago since she had heard that voice before--when she was quite a girl, the speaker quite a young man--but the occasion was a momentous one. It was when she had been arrested by mistake instead of Fidèle. If only it had been Fidèle indeed; and if Fidèle had been punished then as she deserved, she would not have come back again, like the hungry ghosts of the long forgotten dead, to push the living from their stools and bring them to ruin.

There kindled a red coal down deep at the bottom of Thérèse's eyes and made them glow and burn, and the surging blood rose to her weather-beaten cheek and reddened it behind the scarce transparent; skin the lips parted, and the white teeth glistened, and for the moment Thérèse in her fury looked handsomer, if in an evil way, than she had ever done in her youth. It was no apathetic face now, carven in walnut wood, but rather the features of a snake-haired fury, as one may see them at times in the caverns of a red-coal fire.

She laid her hand upon the sergeant as he was turning to go, after having discharged his prisoners.

"I know you," she said, as he turned in surprise. "Remember me?"

"You? Where have I seen you? When was it?"

"Long ago--*enfante perdue*--Remember now?"

"What? You the woman that stole the child, and the nuns got off? Yes, I remember you. You should be at the *Isle aux Noix* now, I do believe. Look out, as I said a little ago, or you'll go there yet, some day. Don't you be expecting the ladies will do as much for you next time."

"*Enfante encore perdue?*"

"To be sure. Do you know where it is?"

"*Morte*," grunted Thérèse, with a wicked flash of her eye--"ze bones."

"Murder? Do you say it was murdered? Did you see it done? Did you do it yourself?"

"No. Fidèle and Paul."

"Will you swear out an information. There is a reward still out. It has not been withdrawn that ever I heard. If I get you that reward, is it a bargain that I am to draw it for you and keep half? Is it a bargain?"

"Bargain."

"And you will swear an information?"

"Vill swear."

"Where shall I find you?--to-morrow morning, say?"

Thérèse shook her head despondingly, and looked at her children. "Hungry."

"Who's your buck?"

"Paul was."

"I know Paul. Has he turned you off?"

"Got Fidèle."

"Aha! That's it, is it? And you know where those bones are? Sure?"

"Svear."

"Then you'll get even with them yet, my beauty. And, stay, here's a dollar for you. You say you're hungry, and Paul has turned you out of doors. Be on the Lachine side of the ferry this evening. I may have to lock you up, but you'll be well used."

That evening, at sunset, the police landed Paul and Fidèle, both handcuffed, on the Lachine wharf, where Thérèse joined the party of her own accord, and they all proceeded by train to Montreal. Thérèse could not refrain from uttering one cluck of triumph as she passed her late master and looked at his bonds, while he shot her a look of fury and strained at his handcuffs in a way which showed it was well that they were strong; and then all the party subsided into the stony stillness of their ordinary demeanour.

There was nothing very striking in the first examination which followed. Thérèse recollected having seen a small grave dug in the back kitchen, and an empty box laid beside it. Then Fidèle had come in and exchanged clothes with her, and then she (Thérèse) went away. Neither Fidèle nor the baby had been seen afterwards. She herself had been taken up and accused of stealing the child, but it had been shown that she had not left Caughnawaga on the day of the kidnapping, and she had been acquitted. After that Paul had taken her as his squaw, and they had lived together ever since. A fortnight ago Fidèle had returned, and since then she had suffered much ill-usage, and finally been turned out of doors.

The evidence seemed sufficient, but in court it would need as corroboration the finding of the bones; therefore, there was a remand, and two days later the prisoners were brought before the magistrate again. The persons sent to dig under the floor had found a box, which was produced, and a thrill of hushed excitement ran through the court room; the male prisoner, even, threw aside his sullen stolidity, turned to the constable in charge, and spoke a few words. The constable conveyed the message to the Crown attorney, who addressed the magistrate, and he forthwith appointed counsel for the defence, leaning back in his chair, and allowing the young *avocat* a few minutes to converse with his client. The lawyer listened to Paul, shook his head, raised his hand in remonstrance, and spoke soothingly; but the red man's anger, having once found voice, grew fiercer and more determined every moment. He shook out his long straight hair as a furious animal will toss his mane, and gnashed his teeth, while his usually dull eyes blazed like living coals. He put aside the arguments and remonstrances of his adviser with a gesture of impatience, and, looking to the magistrate, rose to his feet. The advocate, seeing that his client was impracticable, preferred to take the work upon himself, and addressed the bench.

He told "that, in spite of all which he could say, the prisoner--the male one--while disclaiming

art and part in the crime of murder, was resolved to claim from the court that he should not stand his trial alone, or in company only with the ignorant squaw who sat at his side. Whatever had taken place--and here, in tribute to his own professional credit, he must be permitted to say that it was solely against his wish and advice that he was now driven to admit that anything *had* taken place, and he would have defied the learned counsel opposite to prove that there had, and more, to bring it home to these much-injured Indians--it was but right that the instigator should be brought to stand his trial by the side of his instruments, and he claimed of the court to permit the prisoner Paul to swear an information against Ralph Herkimer, financier, broker, banker,"--"and bankrupt," some one muttered--"for conspiring with and suborning, and inciting by promise of gain, the prisoner Paul to steal, kidnap, abduct, and make away with the infant daughter of George Selby, professor of music, in the city of Montreal." He told "how the said Herkimer had continued to pay an annual stipend or pension to the said Paul during many years, till, on pressing the said Paul to make away with the said child, Paul had declared that he could not, and the said stipend or pension had ceased to be paid from that day forward."

It was with enhanced interest that, when this had been settled, and a warrant ordered to issue for Herkimer's apprehension, the box was placed on the table, and the lid ordered to be removed.

His worship, the magistrate, arranged his spectacles on his nose, the county attorney compressed his lips to steady his nerves, lest the sight of horror to be disclosed should disturb his delicate sensibilities; and, then, as the lid came away, there appeared--what might once have been a lock of hay! Time and mildew had done much to destroy it, the shaking it had undergone since it was disturbed had contributed yet more towards returning it to its primal condition of dust; but hay it was, most surely, though even as they looked it seemed crumbling away under the light and the freer air. The finders had identified the box. It was manifestly the one referred to by the chief witness. But where were the bones? Where any evidence of murder? Not a morsel was there of bone, or even a lock of hair.

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders. He was a disinterested party, and could appreciate without alloy of personal feeling the humour of his court holding inquest upon an empty box. The Crown prosecutor bit his lip, infinitely disconcerted, and the sergeant of police looked foolish. There was still the charge of kidnapping, however, that was sworn to by the chief witness, whose evidence, after all, was confirmed by the box. It was a grave, a box, and a live baby which she had seen, and she had not said that she saw the murder. The male prisoner's own statement and confession, after being warned, was also in evidence against him. His counsel turned and looked at him, as much as to say, "I told you so; but you *would* speak out, notwithstanding my advice. Now, take the consequence."

Paul was more surprised than anybody at the discovery of emptiness within the box. His jaw actually dropped in amazement, notwithstanding the natural rigidity of his facial muscles. He might have got off, it almost seemed; but then there would have been no information laid against Herkimer, and ever since the day he had been dismissed with contumely from his office before all those sniggering clerks, his fingers had been itching to be at the man's throat, and only prudence had restrained them. Fidèle's face remained unchanged, for, naturally, she was not surprised; but there came a twinkle of childish humour into her face to see how all those arrogant whites had been fooled by a poor squaw.

Thérèse was disappointed, but not more than her experiences as a squaw had long taught her to bear. The down-trodden are not much crushed when an expectation gives way. Her foes, it was true, were not to be tried for their lives, but they were still to be locked up, and punished in some sort later on, while she herself, an indispensable witness, would be well cared for till all was settled.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SELBYS.

George Selby was notified at once, of course, that the inquiry into his child's disappearance had suddenly and unexpectedly revived itself, after so many years, with the prospect of solving the mystery, if not of restoring the lost one.

It was an old wound now, that sudden evanishment of the sweetest blossom which had shone upon their lives. His wife and he, each in pity to the other, seldom spoke of it, and therefore there appeared a skinning over or partial healing to have come; but it still bled inwardly, saddening, and oppressing with unspoken grief. In the fifteen years of their bereavement his wife had been

brought down from youth and strength and beauty to premature old age. Within the last twelvemonths a change had come. As she had told him, peace and resignation had come to her, the sad peace of the mourners who resign their loved ones, believing it is well with them, though knowing they shall no more meet on earth; and her health had greatly improved. "Why, then," thought George, "should he disturb her?--revive the deadened misery and cause relapse? There would be doubt and anxiety while the inquiry was in progress, and, alas! there was little that could be called hope to look for at the conclusion." Therefore he said nothing to Mary, but he did not fail to present himself at the examination before the magistrate. It was a horrid idea that their innocent darling should have been murdered by Indians, though it was relieved by the consolatory thought that in all those years of mourning to the parents the child's troubles had long been of the past; and he said nothing when he went home after the first day's inquiry.

The next day of examination was one of the most painful George Selby had ever known. He shrank into an unnoticed corner when the box was brought into the court-room--shrank from it, but could not tear away his eyes. And then he listened to Paul's accusation of his Mary's nephew, and for the first time he divined the motive of the seemingly wanton and inexplicable crime. Oh! how deeply in his heart he cursed the detestable money of that domineering old man, who, not satisfied with having his way in life, must needs strive to impose it after death, working misery and soul destruction upon his nearest kin. He shivered and clasped his hands before his eyes when the lid was to be lifted from the box. He heard the drawing of the nails, the creak and giving way of each one in its turn, and then there was a stillness; but after that there came no sigh of horror, the air thrilled with a movement of disappointment, felt rather than to be heard, and he came forward and peered into the faces of the crowd. The one additional horror was to be spared him of being called on to recognize his child's remains in the presence of curious strangers.

He peered intently at the prisoners, one of whom had virtually confessed but a moment before. He noted Paul's amazement and confusion. He noted that the squaw by his side remained calm, save that there stole a look of mockery into her face, as she surveyed the court, and he felt sure that that woman was not a murderess. It was his heart which was on the strain, and enabled him to see and read the reality untrammelled by judgment's frequent errors, wrong deductions, and misinterpretations. He could discern that of which the professional experience of officials took no note, for the heart is clearer sighted than the head.

With them there was a juridical problem to be solved by pure reason, an indictment to be made, presentable before a judge and jury--a proposition that the prisoners at the bar were guilty of a specific offence, with evidence in proof. "Where is my child?" was the ruling thought which filled George Selby's mind. The squaw at the bar was the stealer. So much was proved by the witness under oath, and by the implied admission of her fellow prisoner. But she had not murdered the child, though perhaps it had been intended that she should; so much could be drawn from her tranquillity and the confusion of her companion. He felt that he must question that squaw forthwith, and after the prisoners had been formally committed to stand their trial, he obtained speech of her through the assistance of the police sergeant, who took care to elicit an assurance that the reward, advertised fifteen years before in a placard of which he produced a copy, would still be paid when the baby's fate was discovered.

"Mary," George said to his wife that evening when they met. "I have news."

"News, George? News of what?"

"The news we have been waiting for all these years. The squaw is found at last--the right one. She is sister of the one who was taken up at the time. The two changed clothes. That accounts for the confusion at the trial. Those who identified her recognized the clothes. Those who swore to her being in Caughnawaga that day spoke truth, too."

"Oh, George!" with a weary sigh; "Is it all to be gone through again? The misery and the pain? Yet now I feel so sure my precious one is at peace, in the arms of God, that I think I can bear it. It is well the discovery, whatever it may be, did not come earlier to embitter our grief."

"And yet, my dearest, already something which will shock you has come to light--the instigator of the wrong is named. His accomplice accuses him. That wretched fortune of your most misguided brother has been at the root of all our trouble. That men who find themselves so little wise in directing their own courses, should strive to perpetuate their folly, by imposing their will on others after they are dead!"

"You mean that it was Ralph? I have often suspected that; but it seemed so merciless and inhuman a thing to do, that I have blushed for shame at my suspicions, even when alone, and cast the thought behind me. Poor wretch! Look at him now!--shamed and dishonoured--run away to the States--afraid to show his face in Canada! Martha and the boy are to be pitied in belonging to him, for they are good; but they do not know him, and no one will be ruffian enough to enlighten them. Martha is back at St. Euphrase again. Susan had a letter from her to-day. The house there is settled on her, it seems, and she wants to give it up to the creditors, but Ralph says she must not, and that before long he will be on his feet again, and pay everybody."

"I fear Ralph meant worse than merely to set the child aside, and it is no thanks to his intentions if he has not innocent blood on his hands."

"Hush! George. It is right you should tell me the facts, but do not draw inferences. Judge not."

"My dear, I judge no one; but I have seen the squaw. She tells me she was ordered to make away--to bury. The very box, which was to have been used, was produced in court--produced as it had been dug out from under the kitchen floor, and you may fancy how my heart died within me at the sight; but when the box was opened, it was found to be empty, and the squaw has told me that when she came to look at our angel, she found it was impossible to obey the inhuman command. She buried the empty box and carried the child away. She speaks of a road with trees, and a valley with a broad river, and says that she laid the baby upon the stoop of a house before going down the hill. She says she recollects the house perfectly. A police sergeant, who seems to have charge of the case, says he believes it must be near St. Euphrase, and the sheriff has allowed me to take him and his prisoner there to-morrow. I have ordered a carriage, and we will endeavour to take her over the old ground."

"Something will come of it, George, I feel sure. Take me with you, dearest; it will be maddening to live through the interminable hours between now and your return. Let me come with you."

"There will not be room, dear. A squaw out of jail would not be pleasant company in a carriage. They are not over tidy, remember. For myself, I shall sit with the driver."

"Then I shall take the early train to St. Euphrase, and go to Judith's. Be sure you come to me as early as ever you can, I shall be faint with impatience."

CHAPTER XVI.

BETSEY AS GOOD FAIRY.

When Mary Selby and her sister Susan arrived at the Rectory of St. Euphrase, next morning, the family mind was already excited by other news; so much so, that, notwithstanding this was the first visit Judith's sisters had ever paid, and it was unexpected, they were received precisely as if they had dropped in from the next street, and their coming were an every-day occurrence. The family capacity for surprise had been forestalled.

"Only think!" cried Betsey, the irrepressible; "young Jordan has been here--Randolph, you know. *I* know him quite well; was at a party at their house, when I stayed with you last winter--knew him a little, before then, but not much. Well, he tells Uncle Dionysius here--that's not here, exactly, but in the study--that he ran away with Miss Rouget, the seignior's daughter. Stuck-up looking thing she is. No complexion to speak of; a snub nose. Yes, indeed, Aunt Judy, it is a snub. *Nez retroussé*, is it? That's because she's Miss Rouget de La Hache, and a kind of a somebody; though folks do say they've lost their money all the same--like better folks who make less moan. But, anyhow, Randolph ran away with her--fixed a fire-escape on to her bedroom window, and down she came, bag and baggage, in the dead of the night; and everybody in the house fast asleep. They went to New York, and were married before a squire, and now they have come home, and are staying with Mrs. Jordan, at The Willows. And they are going to be married all over again, from the beginning--twice over again, I should say, for he has just been speaking to Uncle Dionysius, and now he has gone to the Roman Catholic priest, with a letter from an archbishop, and no less, bidding him raise no difficulties, but just do it. Think of that! Is it not impressive? The same two people to be three times married, and always to one another! I suppose there will be no getting out of that, anyhow, as long as they live. If even they were to go to Chicago, I suppose it would take three divorce suits to separate them. They can only dissolve one marriage at a time, so I have heard. What do *you* think. Miss Susan?"

"I never was married, my dear. I have suffered too much from neuralgia for some years back to be able to think of marrying, or anything else."

"Well! That's not me, now. If I was to have neuralgy, I'd want a man to take care of me, all the more, 'pears to me. I'm 'takin' steps,' as uncle there says, to get the man right off; and then the neuralgy may come if it wants to, I can't help it."

Both visitors' eyes were fixed on the speaker. The recollections of their own youth furnished no such amazing expression of maidenly opinion. Betsey coloured a little, coughed, and began once more, while her uncle and aunt, taught by experience, sat silent, waiting till she should talk

herself out of breath.

"The fact is, Mrs. Selby, I'm to be married immediately; as soon, that is, as I can get ready, and that depends mostly on Mademoiselle Ciseau. She'll have to make my gown, and she says she's over head and ears in orders, between so many deaths and all the marriages; for you know Matildy Stanley's going to marry--more proper if she'd be making her soul, at her time of life, than thinking of sich--and that chit Muriel--set her up--she's to be married the same day as her aunt, though they ain't no kin at all, nohow, to one another, and Matildy knows it. I call it going before their Maker with a lie in their right hand--goin' to church to be married, and tellin' such a story."

"But who are the bridegrooms, Betsey?"

"Me? I'm going to marry Mr. Joe Webb--Squire Webb, I should say, it sounds more respectful--justice of the peace, and the handsomest fellow round here about. But never mind the men, just for one minute. Everybody knows there must be a man to make a wedding, and any kind does quite well; but think of a poor girl married without a gown, or the wrong kind of one. How people would talk! You bein' from the city, will be able to give me an idea. Here are a lot of *swatches* the storekeeper got me from Montreal, and every one has the price marked on to it. White satin? Oh, yes, it's pretty and stylish; but I see by 'Godey's Magazine' the upper crust ain't as partial to marryin' in white as they used to be; and white satin would not be much use afterwards for appleparing bees, and sich; that's the form our gaiety takes mostly in the country round here. Yellow? Well, I did read not long ago about a *recherché* nuptials, somewhere, and the bride was dressed to represent a sunflower--poetical fancy, wasn't it? Yes, yellow's a good colour--easily seen--but it soils just as bad as white, or worse, for one can say *écru* for dirty white, but what can be said for soiled yellow? Just nothing, for everybody sees it's gone dirty.

"Brown? and navy blue? I guess one of these would be the best. You like the blue, eh? Well, now, that's strange, for to me the brown looks a deal the best. I could be married in my travelling dress, with a bonnet trimmed with white roses and peacock's feathers--I seem to see it in my mind's eye. Sweet and rather distinguished--but it would be better with the brown, would it not, than with the blue? Now, do really give me your candid opinion, Mrs. Selby; you have everything about you at home in such good taste."

Betsey got out of breath at last, and rose to take away her *swatches*, and there was an opening for the visitors to explain the cause of their unlooked for advent. Both Judith and her husband were kind and sympathizing, and both were shocked beyond measure at the part which Ralph had played in the transaction. For Martha's sake, however, and for the credit of the family, the subject was dropped when Betsey returned to the room, she being a known blab of the most flagrant kind.

Mary succeeded in restraining her impatience for tidings of her husband's success within bounds, for several hours; but after the one o'clock dinner it grew stronger than her will, and would not be controlled.

"By which way are they most likely to reach the village, Judith? I feel myself fretting into a fever as I sit. I must be up and doing, or I shall lose my senses. Betsey, my dear, will you not come out with me? We will walk in the direction we are most likely to meet them. It will bring me the news a minute or two sooner, and it soothes me to feel I am doing. You will tell me about your own plans, too, dear. It is good for me to listen to other people's concerns, if only to distract me from my own."

Betsey was nothing loth. She was good-natured, at least, if not endowed with all the other virtues. They walked through the village, and up the turnpike road coming from the east. Mary, notwithstanding her weakness, was so urged forward by impatience that Betsey, scarce able to keep up with her, was soon out of breath, and quite unable to make the interesting confidences she had intended.

"Is not that a carriage coming this way? I see two men on the driving-box, and one of them is George. Oh! the time is come. Lend me your arm, Betsey, dear, to steady me. I am getting faint. If this is another disappointment, how shall I bear it?"

The carriage drew near. One look in George's face told all. Hopelessness had settled on it; he looked utterly cast down. He alighted as his wife drew near, and the afflicted ones embraced in silent wretchedness, as they had done many a time before. The story of the expedition did not take long to tell.

The squaw was able to point out the way she had taken all across the Reservation, with circumstantial details, which made it impossible to doubt the accuracy of her recollection, and argued a hopeful termination to their search. On gaining the public road they entered the carriage, and still the squaw went on recognizing salient objects on either hand, and finally, at a forking of the road, where there stood a house, she cried out, that there was the place. It corresponded perfectly to her previous descriptions. They alighted, and the sergeant knocked at the door. A woman opened it, and when asked by the officer how long she had lived there, answered, after many repetitions of the question and much explanation, and disavowing that she understood English, twenty years. "Then you will remember," the policeman said, "if one summer

night, many years ago, you found an infant lying at your door?" She answered that babies were never left there. She was a respectable woman, who had brought up a family of her own, and that the proper place to leave outcast children was a convent, or the priest's house.

Her hearing appeared so bad, her knowledge of English so slight, she seemed so cross, so deaf, and so stupid, that they could draw nothing from her but the disavowal of any knowledge of a child having been left there, which, however, was what they chiefly wanted to know, and they came away disappointed. The priest of the village might be able to make some inquiries, and they were now on their way to find him; but there was little to be expected after so many years.

"Where was this house with the woman?" asked Betsey, with awakened interest. "Not the first house we shall come to going up the hill?"

"Yes," said Selby, "that is the place."

"Well, then--but surely it cannot be!--that is the house Bruneau lives in--the Stanleys' man. His wife confessed to me and Aunt Judy, only last winter, that she found a baby at her door one summer night, many years ago, and carried it up to the door of the big house, where my cousins took it in and adopted it. But, from the way she spoke of Muriel's parentage, it can be no relation of yours, dear Mrs. Selby. She said it was--but I can't say what she said."

"If you please, miss," cried the sergeant, who had been listening, "will you be so kind as to walk back with us. As you know the woman, she will speak different to you from what she did to us. I feel noways sure that she was not lying when I questioned her, now you put the notion in my head."

Again there came knocking to Annette's door. Again she opened it, and looked as if she fain would have run away at sight of the policeman before her.

"Annette," said Betsey, "did you not tell me that you carried that baby you found on your stoop up to Miss Stanley's door and left it?"

"I know it," answered Annette, and covering her face with her apron, fled back into the interior of her house. They could hear her mount the little stair, and bang to a door, but they saw her no more. In truth, from the time she had unburdened her feelings to the rector's lady, a new misgiving oppressed her mind. Could English women be trusted to keep a promise, and they heretics? What would the Miss Stanleys say, first of her conduct towards themselves in foisting that particular child on them, and next in divulging the story, to the discredit of their adopted niece? And now the story was out, and there was a minister of the law come to take her.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT LAST.

Miss Stanley sat in the dining-room making up her accounts. She sat at a table by the window, with her bills and account books spread in order before her, and her pen in her hand, waiting to begin--waiting till the wandering thoughts would come back from their wool-gathering, and settle down to work. Once and again she advanced so far as to dip her pen in the ink, but the figures did not come, the page before her continued white, the ink dried up in her pen. With her elbow on the table, her cheek upon her hand, she went on thinking--thinking about her household, though not about her accounts. She had been head of the family so long, had steered and directed it so many years, and they had been so happy together; and now, it made her head whirl to think of the changes that were coming to pass. In the drawing-room, at that moment, was Muriel with her Gerald--a pair of children, and as unthinkingly happy. Their clear laughter penetrated through closed doors, and she heard it where she sat. Matilda was in the morning-room with Considine, as utterly content, if less obstreperously merry than her niece. And Penelope sat alone.

The moisture gathered in her eyes as she thought, but promptly was brushed away as a disloyalty, for if "dear Tilly" had come to love another more, she was very sure she continued to love her aging sister none the less. And yet it did seem hard to see that other come in between. Since her sister had been a very little girl, she had been to her a mother, watching over and caring for her till they grew to be companions and friends. They had been all the world to one another, and while, with a mother's inconsistency, she had wondered at the blindness of the men, who did not come and marry her sister, she knew that if they had, she would have hated them for their success. And now, after all danger seemed over, when they had settled down to grow old

together, when even their adopted daughter was old enough to marry the man, the devastating man, had come--broken in, to disturb the repose of their virginal paradise in the hour of coming twilight, and end the pensive sweetness of their lives.

Yet, and the thought constrained her to admit that it was far from being the worst thing possible which had befallen, she had extorted from her intending brother that he should not take her sister quite away. He was to live with her, and she with them. The house at St. Euphrase was to be hers--Penelope's--and they were to be her inmates. Considine would take a house in town, where she should live with them; and all three parties to the arrangement had professed they saw no reason why they should not always live together. "Yet, why would those two marry at all?" she thought; "surely the season when birds select their mates was past for them. From the things which Considine spoke of as remembering he must be positively old; and Tilly, her precious Tilly"--a new-born candour forced her to admit it now, though she had not thought of it before--"was no longer young. Why could they not live on as friends, as they had been doing? when Considine's company had really added flavour to their spinster lives. What would people say?" Penelope imagined, like the rest of us, that "people" care. It is a fancy which sticks most pertinaciously, despite its lack of reason. Why will we not judge "people" by ourselves? And is it not true that long before our neighbours have grown accustomed to their affairs themselves they have become a twice-told tale to us? We shrug our shoulders and pass on, seeking a new diversion somewhere else. Whatever we may do which pleases ourselves, "people" will cease to trouble their heads about it long before the nine days are over.

The fear of this notoriety, however, was a tonic thought to Penelope. Instinctively she bridled to think that any should presume to criticise a transaction in *her* family, and at once she ranged herself in spirit on her sister's side, and began to defend her. "'A man,'" she thought, "'is no older than he feels.' What eminent person is it who has written that? It is certainly true of Considine. See how erect he carries himself! How cheerful he is! and strong. His hair is white, but as thick as ever. He rides, and swims, and walks, like an active man of forty. And 'a woman is as young as she looks.' That is true of our Tilly. How well she wears! Who would fancy she was one age with Louisa Martindale? And yet I believe she is. What impertinence it will be if any one presumes to say a word!"

After that turn to her reflections, Penelope felt positively refreshed, and able to pull herself together. The pen was dipped in the ink once more, the bills taken up one by one, and the column of figures extended itself steadily down the page. But her industry was interrupted ere long. The parlour-maid appeared in some confusion. What was she to do? She had standing orders not do disturb her mistress when closeted in the dining-room, and she had been told an hour ago to show no one into the drawing-room or the parlour, and there were a lady and a gentleman and a policeman, and some more, asking to see Miss Stanley.

"Show them in here," Penelope said, wondering what was the matter. The mention of a policeman troubled her. Had it anything to do with the Herkimer bankruptcy?--Gerald being then in the house. The newspapers had been full of his father's doings of late, and they had had much trouble to keep them from Muriel's eyes. "Poor child," she ejaculated, "I hope it is nothing to distress her," and then the visitors walked in. Mrs. Selby and her husband--she had called on Mrs. Selby, and was glad to find in one of the visitors a person whom she knew--a policeman leading in a squaw, and Betsey Bunce--the "atrocious," as she called her in her mind. "How dared she enter there, after the passage which had taken place between them at the rectory as to Muriel's parentage?" Yet it was Betsey who came to the front now, seeing Selby look confused, and in doubt how to begin. "I can see by your face," said Betsey, "you ain't half well pleased, Cousin Penelope, to see me here, after me speaking my mind about what Aunt Judy and me fished out of your woman Annette. But it's that very same story has brought us all here to-day, and a good thing it was that I got hold of it, or goodness knows what would have come to these poor Selbys. You know from the papers all about their losing their little girl long ago. You know, too, that the squaw was taken up last week who ran away with her. Look at her! There she stands, beside the policeman, and not a bit ashamed of herself, as far as I can see. Could you believe that so much artfulness--you've read about it in the papers (the changing clothes and burying boxes, and running away, is what I allude to)--and so much wickedness--wringing two loving hearts (I'm sure that's the kind Mr. and Mrs. Selby have got, for I stayed with them last winter and found them real kind). Look at her, Miss Penelope, and say if you could have believed that so much artfulness, and wickedness, and brazen effrontery--she don't blink an eye even--could be tied up in one blanket."

"Yes, Betsey," said Penelope, opening her eyes, and looking partly offended and partly confused; "and what after that? Mr. and Mrs. Selby and the rest scarcely allowed you to bring them up here, merely to afford you the pleasure of playing showman!"

"You interrupted me, Miss Penelope, or rather I got carried away with having so much to tell all at once; and then I stuck fast. However, as I was saying, that's the squaw! The Selbys are the parents, and you've got the baby in this house! You needn't look at me, cousin, as if I was crazy, for I ain't. It's Muriel--your Muriel--that I mean. Ask Annette Bruneau--by rights she should have been here, too, to make the thing complete, and to speak for herself; but, as I have spoken for all the rest, I may say for her that she would not let herself be brought. She ran upstairs and locked herself into her room, so we had to come along without her. Why don't you send for Muriel to see her mother. Miss Penelope? and Matildy should be here, too. She spoke very harsh to me the last time we met; but she was mad, then, so I bear no grudge. She'll be better friends now. And she

should be here, too, to see the meeting of the long-lost child and her parents. It'll be real touching, and she deserves to see it, for she has been like a mother to Muriel--I'll allow that, for all that she said to me some weeks back."

Penelope fetched Muriel and Matilda, and the explanations were long and confused, mingled with embraces and many tears. Even Considine blew his nose, and the policeman passed his sleeve across his eyes; only the squaw looked on unmoved. "If all these whites were happy, as they said they were, why did they shed tears?"

The rush of words grew slower and more fitful after a while. Emotion is exhausting, whether it be grief or joy. Mary Selby sat with her arms round her daughter's waist, and her face buried in her bosom, while Matilda, half-jealous, and feeling half-bereaved, held the girl's hand.

Betsey stood up and surveyed the scene. It seemed her own handiwork, for had she not brought these people together? The emotional silence, when every one was filled with the same idea, made her think of the closing tableau in a pantomime, and to feel herself the beneficent spirit who had brought about the happy *dénouement*. She could not refrain from holding out her parasol over so many bowed heads. It seemed to her to have become a magic wand, tipped with a sparkling star. She could fancy, too, that her gown had transformed itself into tinsel and transparent draperies, and that she was being slowly carried up through the ceiling to the sound of plaintive music.

Much could have been done with Betsey, I verily believe, if she had been caught early and submitted to culture. But "Tollover's Circus" had been her only introduction to the world of plastic imagination, scenic, or pictorial art; saving always "Godey's Magazine of the Fashions," which instructed her in a variety of knowledge she would have been better without, the knowledge, not very accurately stated, of how women with ten times her fortune, if she should ever come to have any, wear their clothes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BROKER BROKE.

Ralph Herkimer sat in his New York hotel looking glum. The turn he had been expecting in Pikes Peak and Montana had come; the stock had been brought into notice at last, but it would have been better for him if it had remained unquoted on the share list, as it had been for weeks back. The turn was one for the worse. The shares had gone begging on Wall Street. Nobody would buy. He sat with his hands in his pockets, his chair tilted back, and his hat drawn over his eyes, pulling furiously at a huge cigar, and involving himself in smoke. It was a serious position of his affairs, and there was nothing he could do in the circumstances but wait--wait till he was ruined outright, which at the moment seemed likely enough, or be patient through months, if not years, till improvement came. Of the two alternatives, the former seemed at that moment the preferable, in so far as that it would be soonest over.

The Canada mail was in; his letters were brought him--an unpleasant bundle always now. "They can wait. There is no hurry." He pushes them aside. But, stay! There is one from his wife. "Martha," he says, and breaks the seal.

He was intensely sorry for himself that afternoon. The world was so hard. Nobody seemed a bit interested to know that he was on the verge of being ruined; in fact, it inclined them rather to get out of his way. "Ill-luck," one would have said, to see them, "must be infectious." His friends on Wall Street seemed busy that day whenever he wanted to discuss with them, and some had even been rather short, as to a manifest bore. If he would, he might have recollected that such are the manners and customs among money-makers, when a money-loser comes along. He had practised them himself; but that was when other people were the losers; now it was he, and that made all the difference.

But Martha was fond of him, and he turned to her letter for comfort and sympathy in his deep self-pity. He was fond of Martha, as fond, at least, as a busy man with his head full of other things can afford to be of anybody; but that Martha was fond of *him* in he never doubted, and that was the aspect of their connection, which was comfortable to dwell on at that moment. He lit a fresh cigar, and opened his letter.

It was a long letter, and began by answering all the questions which he had asked, and then it went on:

"Gerald and Muriel talk about their marriage continually, as is to be expected, poor children. I have been trying to stave it off till you shall have arranged your affairs, and are able to play the part you would wish on the occasion; but I am only Gerald's mother, and it is Muriel who has the right to say when. Besides, Gerald will not allow me to put in a word which would sound like wishing delay, and Muriel seems to think that if Gerald is there, it does not matter much about his father. I cannot altogether blame the girl; it would have been my own thought twenty-five years ago, and, to be sure, I like to see my boy valued as he deserves.

"But it is Matilda who is hurrying things forward in this railway fashion. No doubt she has the best right to arrange Muriel's affairs, she has been a mother to her; but the fact is, it is going to be a double wedding. Matilda herself and Muriel are to be married the same day; Considine has plucked up heart at last, proposed, and been accepted. He should have done it long ago, as I tell him. And now that the game is in Matilda's hands, she is more eager than the little girl of sixteen. She has had longer to wait, you will say, and that there are no fools like old fools. I know the way you men like to talk, pretending to be hard, and you as soft as the women--you, Ralph, at least, only your head is so full of business you do not give yourself leisure to think.

"And, oh! Ralph, dear, I do wish you would come back to Canada and silence the scurrilous reports that are in circulation. Only show face, and the cowards and liars who invent stories about an absent man will be silenced; for well I know there is not a syllable of truth in the whole *farrago*. The city papers are detestable just now; and really, Ralph, you ought, for your son's and your wife's sake, as much as your own, to write your solicitors at once, and get them heavily fined for their abominable calumnies. Indifferent as you are to such things, you really cannot let that story pass which appeared in the papers the other day. It is getting copied into every paper in the Dominion, Gerald says, and he feels so sore about it; he won't show face in Montreal, he says, till it is set right. I mean, of course, the vile libel of that low Indian, Paul, which his counsel repeated to the magistrate, accusing you of having conspired to carry off and make away with your own first cousin--Mary Selby's child. I wish, dear Ralph, you would come back and face them out, the foul-tongued ruffians. That would shame them out of countenance and stop their mouths. The papers say there is a writ out against you. Come back, Ralph, give yourself up, and hurry on the trial. The sooner the truth is known the better. For all my confidence in you, I feel it painful to have the people's eyes fixed on me when I walk up the village to go to church, as if I were an evildoer. Think of it, Ralph, and come.

"But I am forgetting to tell you the great news. Your daughter-in-law to be, who do you think she is? A niece of the Stanleys, you will say. Never more mistaken in your life. She is no kin to them at all--not a drop of blood. She is your Aunt Selby's long-lost daughter. Think of that! The Indian, Paul, believed his squaw had killed her, but it seems she carried her into the country and left her at Bruneau's door, and Bruneau's wife, thinking she had enough of his children already on her hands, carried it up, and left it on the Stanleys' doorstep. Everybody supposed Muriel was their niece, though latterly the Bunces have been rather free with their innuendos. And now the girl turns out to be a great heiress. Strangest of all, it is what we have been calling Gerald's fortune, which she is heir to, and Gerald, the lucky boy, will get back by marriage the very fortune he loses by law. Nobody can say either that he marries Muriel for her money; but to tell the truth, they seem a pair of children in everything that relates to that."

Ralph smoked his cigar through to the end, smoked it till the butt dropped of itself upon his letter, charring the paper before it went out. He continued to sit, rigid in every limb, with his features drawn, and grey, and set; breathing heavily, but never moving. His life seemed living itself over again before his eyes, the prizes he had striven for, the means by which he had tried to win them, the vicissitudes of his career, and the end which he had reached. "Fool," was the only word he uttered, and it escaped him in a tone of mingled misery and wonder; misery, that it was himself; wonder, that he should have done it; for now his consciousness seemed divided in two, one half judging and wondering and scorning, the other, crushed into little save memory, and a sense of being undone, and having become a burden longing to be shaken off.

It was no awakening of conscience, such as moralists describe. He had never troubled himself with questions of right and wrong, true and false, honour and baseness. Success was the honour to which he had aspired, failure the one inexorable baseness. A faculty unused in well-nigh half a century will scarcely leap into action and controlling predominance over powers and habits strengthened by constant use, all of a sudden. It was by his own poor standard that he stood condemned at last. He had so utterly and unnecessarily failed. What opportunities he had had! and how utterly they had been wasted in his hands.

He had been over-smart all through. In striving to make doubly sure, and assisting the forces that were making for his prosperity, he had defeated them. In attempting to shoulder up his fortunes he had pushed them over. And all was over now. What could he do henceforth? Even Martha, poor woman, would turn from him when she came to know. It was infinitely sad; it was beyond remedy, too altogether out of joint, ever to be set right. And then, he was so weary of it all, he had no heart even to try. Sleep, long and unbroken, sleep without dreams, sleep without a waking, that was all he yearned for, the one last good the universe held for him.

It was dusk now; the gas was alight all over the hotel, and in the streets. He staggered to his feet, and slowly went downstairs. A druggist's shop was near, and there he asked for essence of bitter almonds. The druggist observed to him that it was "dangerous in quantity," and must be used with care. "I'll take good care," Ralph answered, as he went out. They were the last words

he was ever heard to utter.

They telegraphed to Gerald from New York next day. His father was dead. It is heart disease, to which sudden deaths are attributed now-a-days. It saves many a pang to the loving hearts of survivors. It saved poor Martha an accession to her grief, and even the world began to talk pityingly of one who had seemed so rich so short a time before. For really the world is not a very bad one. With time and leisure it likes to do a good-natured thing, and does it, if it remembers in time. And then it has a most valuable code of proprieties. It holds it wanton and brutal to speak evil of the dead. And so it came to be in bad taste to mention the Herkimer story at all. The poor man was dead--gone to his own place. What more was there to say?

Even the Indians profited. Their trial came on, but no one took much interest in it. The young lady had come to no harm; she was even to marry the son of the man whose name had been dragged into the transaction. They pleaded guilty, and profited largely by the leniency of the court.

The weddings were unavoidably postponed. It was Matilda herself who proposed that they should wait six months, out of respect for Martha. Her extravagant haste and eagerness had been for Muriel's behoof. She feared that the past might get more fully canvassed, and arrange itself into some kind of barrier, which, though Muriel might ignore, Gerald might feel ashamed to overpass.

Jordan's career did not close itself so abruptly as his friend's had done, and there were times when he envied Ralph the speedy conclusion of his troubles. His affairs proved to be like an old woman's knitting; when once a stitch of it is dropped, nobody can tell how great may be the devastation. Jordan's fortune had crumbled to pieces; he was a discredited man, and worse, a pensioner on his wife's bounty; and that last, all who knew the charming Amelia--and all who knew her, voted her charming--agreed was no enviable position. About a year after Randolph was married, and settled in a government office at Ottawa, the Minister of Drainage and Irrigation exerted his influence, and got the old man--he is really old now, seventy is the next decade he will touch, and that before long--made stipendiary magistrate at Anticosti, where among the sleet storms of the gulf of St. Lawrence he dispenses justice to litigious fishermen. Amelia did not accompany him. Why should she? To be an ornament of society in Montreal or Ottawa is the role nature intended her to fill, and she works the part industriously. An old *habitante* woman makes Jordan an infinitely more efficient housekeeper in the far East, where comforts are few, and there is no society, and she writes him every week the most delightful letter, with all the chit-chat and scandal about his old friends carefully chronicled. This affords him nearly as much amusement to read as it gave her to write, and is far more persistently pleasant than he finds the writer, when he spends his annual holiday with her at St. Euphrase.

Gerald and Muriel are an old married couple now. Their boy is just the age of his mother when she was stolen away. He would spend all his time, if he had his way, with his grandmother Selby, who adores him, and often calls him Edith in forgetfulness. There is a drawer upstairs in her room, where there are little shoes, red, white and blue, and sashes of gay colours, and little lace frocks. They are all nicely washed and ironed now--the frocks, that is--and the little fellow puts them on for a lark, at times, though he is getting too big for most of them now. But there was a time when no one was permitted to touch or see those things, and when the tears of ten years and more dropping on the muslin and the lace had rumpled them and blotted them into a faded yellow. They are precious still--his mother wore them when she was his age--but the urchin himself is more precious yet by far. It amuses him to try them on, and, therefore, they have been newly done up for his lordship's greater gratification.

Muriel's fortune turned out less than it might have been. The portion in Jordan's hands having disappeared, Considine offered to make good the deficiency to the last cent he possessed as far as it would have gone. But the moiety he had manipulated himself had prospered, and made a very pretty fortune as it was; and for the rest--no one doubts that some day Muriel will fall heir to all that he, his wife, and her sister possess.

The man with the two wives, is how his acquaintance speak of Considine, for the three go everywhere together. He is as attentive to Penelope as to his wife, and she is far more adoring than her sister, who, being married, has her rights, to criticise, to have little tempers--though, indeed, Matilda's are of the smallest--and so forth.

And now there seems no more to say. Betsey Bunce is in her right place as mistress of a farm. Her poultry lay larger eggs, and her cows give more butter than those of any one else. She is busy and cheery all day long, and neither man nor maid dare ever be idle on the premises. She has proved a fortune to her husband, if she brought him none, and he owns now that the bad luck which first made him think of Betsey was the luckiest circumstance of his life. She is bound to make a rich man of him, and a legislator at Ottawa, some day soon.

FOOTNOTE

[Footnote 1](#): Sugar-bush. A grove of maple trees. The farmers tap the juice in spring, and boil it into sugar. In Lower Canada and New Hampshire, scarcely any other sugar is consumed in the country places.

[Footnote 2](#): Jennie Jeffers, queen of the gypsies in the United States, died in Greenfield, Tennessee, March 10, 1884, and was buried at Dayton, Ohio, April 16. Fifteen hundred gypsies from all parts of the country were present.--*American Paper*.

THE END.

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